



OUTREACH TO THE UNAFFILIATED Communal Context and Policy Direction

Steven Bayme

Writing nearly a century ago, Jewish philosopher and theologian Franz Rosenzweig identified the primary requisite of the community as the raising of Jews. "Books are not the order of the day," wrote Rosenzweig. "But what we need more than ever . . . are human beings -- Jewish human beings." Much contemporary outreach work is indebted to Rosenzweig's programmatic prescription -- renew Jewish life by building upon the *pintele yid* within each Jew to create Jewishly sensitive human beings who can integrate the best of Western culture with the enduring values of Judaism. Judaism, Rosenzweig believed, could provide answers to the ultimate questions of the meaning and purpose of life.

Rosenzweig's concept of Jewish renewal through Jewish learning provides an ideological basis for outreach. Contemporary demographic facts make outreach imperative.

Recent data from the Council of Jewish Federations 1990 National Jewish Population Survey confirm a picture of Jewish life that many have long suspected: Although some Jews are intensifying their Jewish commitments, the major trends within the community are widespread disaffiliation, increasing intermarriage, and ongoing secularization. Jewish renewal is real, for many have enriched their personal and family lives by turning to Judaism. Erosion and assimilation are equally real, for Jews are marrying out in record numbers, and the overwhelming majority of mixed-marrieds fail to raise their children in the Jewish faith, let alone provide a meaningful Jewish identity.

This picture has been obscured in recent years by certain sanguine sociologists who see no erosion and even predict gain to the Jewish community through the conversion of gentile spouses. Equally misleading have been the dire predictions of other observers who see no prospect of a Jewish future in the Diaspora.

In large measure, these contradictory views derive from different expectations for the weakly committed "middles" of Jewish life. Many of these "middles" sincerely desire Jewish continuity -- usually defined as Jewish grandchildren -- but their own lives lack the Jewish content on which continuity depends. They represent the central challenge to outreach: Intensify the Jewish commitments of the weakly committed "middles" by demonstrating to them the beauties and joys of Jewish living.

Analysis and Recommendations

The Target Population

Much communal confusion exists as to appropriate target populations for outreach initiatives. The popular slogan "outreach to the unaffiliated" means little, for it assumes a large population that can be targeted and affected by communal initiatives. Similarly, the term "outreach to mixed-marrieds" presupposes that those who have married out are waiting for and are receptive to contact from the Jewish community.

Actual affiliation rates vary widely by both community size and geography. Small communities often enjoy very high affiliation rates -- e.g., Flint, Michigan, has a rate of 87 percent. Conversely, Los Angeles, the second largest Jewish community in the country, has only a 25 percent affiliation rate. Areas of new settlement have low rates -- e.g., central Florida, to which many Jews have only recently migrated. Affiliation will also vary by life-cycle stages, reaching its peak when children are just prior to bar-mitzvah age. Thus the widely cited statistic that 50 percent of Jews are unaffiliated with a synagogue actually means that at any one moment in time half the community is unaffiliated. Most will become members at some stage of their life cycle. The numbers that are truly unaffiliated over their lifetimes are much smaller -- perhaps 10-15 percent of the community. The challenge then becomes more to work with the large numbers who have demonstrated some minimal commitment or attachment -- enrollment in Jewish education, contribution to Jewish philanthropy, subscription to a Jewish newspaper, or synagogue membership -- rather than chasing the truly unaffiliated who have shown no desire to be chased.

Again, the implication is focusing on the "middles" of Jewish life, those who express a commitment to continuity but are unable to express the content of that commitment. Jewish identity for them is often instinctual -- responses to anti-Semitism or threats to Israel's existence. Often they are parents of young children enrolled in religious schools who themselves rarely appear in the synagogue. Although most identify with the traditional denominational labels of Judaism, the number claiming to be "just Jewish" has been increasing in recent years. Most express comfort at being in the company of other Jews -- a somewhat vague feeling of tribalism devoid of ideological commitment. Their reasons for noninvolvement in the Jewish community range from personal circumstances such as just beginning a family, cost of affiliation, and recent geographic mobility ("I don't know anyone in the community") to psychological alienation from the community -- negative memories of Hebrew school, marginality associated with intermarriage, and simple ineptitude with matters Jewish.

What the marginally affiliated or underaffiliated Jews have in common is a vague but expressed desire that they and their children remain Jewish. The decline in Jewish religiosity coupled with acceptance by the general society suggests that these are people who may drop out of the community completely. The communal challenge is to enrich these "middles" of Jewish life Jewishly, creating a population that is intensely rather than marginally committed to leading a Jewish life.

Who precisely are these middles? Generally, they observe the major holidays as family

events and opportunities to reenact positive childhood memories. Occasionally they support Federation campaigns. They articulate the belief in a watchmaker deity who plays little role in human events. Most important, they are a Jewishly illiterate population, lacking a knowledge and vocabulary of what it means to be Jewish. They express little opposition to intermarriage and therefore are likely to marry out of the faith, as many have already done.

In short, this is a population that is aware of its Jewishness but is unsure what that connotes. They have not experienced the joys of living Jewishly, often perceiving the content of Jewish identity in sorrowful rather than jubilant terms. For some, being Jewish equates with a vague sense that social-justice concerns spring from Jewish roots. Most perceive themselves as Jewishly committed but are not rooted in any particular Jewish institution.

Finally, this target population often expresses significant grievances with organized Jewish life. Synagogues are regarded as large and distant, unable to serve the inner existential needs of those not firmly rooted in its communities. Serious questions are raised concerning Israel and whether it is practicing Jewish social values in its public policies. Israel's particularism runs against the universalist ethic of many Jews, and Israel's central position on the Jewish communal agenda communicates little but irrelevance to those for whom being Jewish is far more private and personal. Lastly, many report that costs are a barrier to Jewish communal affiliation. The Jews they see involved in Federation and synagogue are often individuals with whom they cannot identify for reasons of social and economic class, and they resent the glitz associated with these public Jewish institutions.

Communal policy initiatives designed to enhance the Jewishness of this target population have many opportunities for success. Communal interventions may tip the scales in favor of Jewish identification and subsequent communal affiliation. Parents with young children are particularly receptive to programs that enhance the overall quality of family life. Recent migrants to new communities are eager to make new friends and establish connections. Singles generally welcome opportunities to meet and socialize with other Jews. Mixed-marrieds are also unsure as to the religious identity of their homes and will join settings that enable them to explore the Jewish dimension and what it may offer their personal and family lives.

To be sure, the process is time-consuming and presents many frustrations to the outreach worker. Individuals who have not been involved in the Jewish community for quite some time may have created a pattern of nonaffiliation that can be very difficult to break. Although outreach may be an imperative for human and demographic reasons, it requires, as we shall see, enormous follow-up efforts with few guarantees of success. Conversely, where successful, outreach holds out the promise of enriching personal lives and strengthening the Jewish community.

What Is Outreach?

Outreach may be defined as initiatives targeted to Jews far removed from the core community and designed to effect behavioral changes bringing the target population closer to the communal core. Often, but not exclusively, outreach initiatives are addressed to the spiritual hunger of individuals for transcendental meaning beyond their daily concerns and

their work and family responsibilities. Thus outreach must be differentiated sharply from adult education, which aims simply to make Jews more knowledgeable with no goal of effecting behavioral changes. The ultimate success of outreach is the *baal teshuva*, the adult returnee to Judaism. The term is often used to characterize Orthodox returnees but it should not be used exclusively in that sense. Returnees to Judaism under Conservative or Reform auspices are no less evidence of the success of outreach. As we shall see, community is a critical ingredient in successful outreach, enabling the returnee to join a warm and welcoming community of like-minded Jews, who encourage further behavioral modification through subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) expressed communal norms and standards.

A further distinction should be made with respect to in-reach programs. Leadership-education programs are designed to strengthen communal activists who comprise the community's core. Some of the more notable leadership-education programs -- e.g., those under the auspices of CLAL and the Wexner Heritage Foundation -- have sought to enhance Jewish leaders by empowering them to make choices informed by Jewish knowledge, share Jewish values and rituals with their families, and create a community of Jewish leaders inspired by visions of Judaism and Jewish life. Outreach itself often has an in-reach component in terms of its transforming effects upon outreach staff and the institutions in which they work. Yet outreach often stumbles over the failures of in-reach, namely, the absence of enough Jews sufficiently secure in their Jewishness to create the type of community so attractive that others will wish to join it. This last issue relates closely to policy issues of concern to outreach initiatives -- the importance of role-modeling by Jews in the public arena and whether outreach conflicts with initiatives to enhance the core community in terms of cost and priority. Many will argue that all outreach is a form of in-reach because of its effect upon those already inside the community. The dichotomy is one of form vs. content. Outreach initiatives, with some exceptions, will try to bring Jews into contact with other Jews and strengthen the community structurally. In-reach initiatives tend to be much stronger on content, seeking to address the ideological and ideational weaknesses of the community rather than its numbers or forms.

Programmatically, the critical distinctions in outreach are between Orthodox and non-Orthodox initiatives. First, there is significant difference in what is meant by outreach. Orthodox outreach aims to have Jews "return" to Judaism. Outreach under non-Orthodox auspices, in contrast, often is aimed at gentiles involved in family relationships with Jews.

Second, Orthodox outreach focuses heavily on the content of Jewish life. Outreach workers, frequently rabbis, are convinced that people will respond to a message of ideological coherence that makes significant and even radical demands for changes in thought and deed. Particularly when articulated by Orthodoxy's Right, this "maximal" approach declares a fundamental distinction between Judaism and the broader culture, which is often denigrated as pagan and hedonistic. Modern Orthodox outreach, to be sure, seeks to articulate Judaism's salience in the modern world. Yet it is a point of considerable sensitivity within Orthodoxy that its most notable outreach programs exist under rightist or haredi rather than Modern or centrist auspices. The "modern" components of this outreach are formal rather than intellectual -- e.g., use of modern technology, including radio spots, and modern country or rock music as vehicles to articulate the message of return.

For example, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, founder and president of CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, has long criticized Modern Orthodoxy generally for its failure to articulate a distinctive synthesis between tradition and modernity. Greenberg bemoans the excessive concentration on outreach within Orthodoxy on the extreme right and claims there is no need for such a radical break with contemporary culture. Rather, outreach initiatives should offer multiple models aiming to create more Jewish Jews along an entire spectrum of identity. Moreover, Greenberg argues, the more drastic the change, the less stable it will be. In other words, it is preferable to facilitate individual Jewish growth in which different people will find different avenues and entry points to Jewish tradition. Greenberg therefore articulates a "principled pluralism" in which Jews can learn from one another and respect the validity of alternative expressions of Judaism.

Orthodox outreach workers define themselves as "countercultural" in the sense of offering a criticism of prevailing cultural norms. They target their message to those who express disillusionment with the world around them. Phrases such as "American society is fundamentally sick" reflect their rejection of the excesses of contemporary mores -- e.g., the promiscuity accompanying America's sexual revolution. They use popular music to transmit their message that ultimate meaning is to be found in Torah alone. The chorus of one popular outreach lyric goes:

*Come on home ...
What you are looking for
Is right there by your door.*

Critics assail this approach on two grounds: First, they quarrel with its content -- its abandonment of any distinctive synthesis, once the hallmark of Modern Orthodoxy, between Judaism and Western culture. Others question the neutrality or even ambivalence within haredi outreach toward Zionism and the State of Israel. Methodologically, critics claim that the maximalist approach implies an "all or nothing" attitude in which most will opt for nothing. They note that most American Jews do not consider themselves "bad Jews" and will resist a language of outreach that they perceive as a language of reproach. Orthodox outreach professionals concede that more leave than stay but argue that the dropouts are likely to find their way into Conservative or Reform synagogues, thereby benefiting the community as a whole. Thus the "maximalist" program allows for fallback positions even while its exponents criticize those positions as weakened or watered-down and possibly heretical versions of Judaism. Even Yeshiva University failed, in this view, for lowering standards in an abortive attempt at "synthesis" with Western culture.

To be sure, Orthodox outreach workers are quite sophisticated in understanding where their target population is coming from and will not ask that they publicly renounce home or university. Rather the aim is to subtly undermine the potential *baal teshuva's* background by exposing the excesses of moral relativism, materialism, and spiritual emptiness. Thus the *baalei teshuva* yeshivas in Israel, for example, seek to engage in gradual "people-changing." The capstone of this approach is the marriage of the *baal teshuva* and integration into the haredi community of which the yeshiva is representative.

Israeli observers comment that haredi outreach activities have generated a backlash. So

negative have been the perceptions of haredi Orthodoxy within Israel that programs that might otherwise have proven attractive to those seeking to satisfy their spiritual needs never, in fact, reach their target population. In other words, Israeli secularists may never give traditional Judaism a fair hearing because of haredi political activities, especially their efforts to strengthen religious legislation in the Jewish state. Indeed, as we shall see, alternative nonharedi programs -- e.g., those of Gesher -- were initiated, to some extent, as countermeasures to the virtual haredi monopoly on outreach activities within Israel.

Orthodox outreach in North America is similarly largely under haredi auspices. Significant exceptions have been the Torah outreach programs of Yeshiva University and the Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York City and its recent outgrowth, the National Jewish Outreach Project. The former, university-based outreach, seeks to emphasize Judaism's intellectual depth and its capacity to provide ultimate values. Lincoln Square Synagogue similarly emphasizes the intellectual dimension and the permissibility and even desirability of constant questioning. These programs constitute the distinctive tenor of "Centrist Orthodox" outreach.

Analysis

Several points of commonality emerge from an examination of existing programs. Programs succeed to the extent that they combine social, intellectual, and communal elements. People enjoy the group dynamics and interaction with others; they seek a supportive community that will nurture their growth Jewishly. Yet structural and institutional forms do not suffice. The content of outreach programming and the Judaic knowledge it imparts are equally critical to its success. Here the recurring themes appear to be Judaism's relevance to the personal situation of individuals -- including major life crises, human loneliness and alienation, and the limits of modern science and secular values. Israel addresses a part of this personal and existential direction by communicating a sense of homecoming and national pride as well as the group dimension of Jewish family and friends. That may be one factor underlying the success of trips to Israel in outreach initiatives. In Israel various themes of history, meaning, and transcendence are joined with community and social interaction among Jews.

A second point of commonality relates to staff and staff effectiveness. Virtually all program directors underscore the need to meet people where they are -- not where the Jewish community expects them to be. Therefore, staff has to be open and nonjudgmental -- although clearly committed to Judaism -- rather than threatening. Their message and role-modeling ought to signal that the Jewish community cares about the person as an individual.

An important exception is Orthodox outreach, which appears far more confrontational with the target population. However, Orthodox staff must also be intellectually sophisticated, committed to outreach, receptive to doubt, and personally open-minded and tolerant. Generally, Orthodox outreach workers are "people persons," who make themselves available literally at all hours of the day and can tolerate widespread failure. Their strong belief system enables them to withstand the constant frustration of outreach work.

Conversely, Orthodox returnees to Judaism are by no means "home free." Many report

continued difficulties with their families, difficulty integrating with the Orthodox community, and continued ambivalence regarding various aspects of Orthodoxy. One key to their success is familial: Secure marriages make for easy acceptance into the community. Perhaps more overriding, however, is their capacity to integrate radical changes in attitude and behavior with their past lives and sense of self. Too radical a clash with other values and life-styles will lead to dysfunction and cultural dissonance rather than wholesome integration.

This dissonance often extends to the Jewish community generally. Jewish communal life all too often revolves around politics and fund-raising. But unaffiliated or marginally affiliated Jews are looking to their private and personal identities, searching for meaning and transcendence. Serious outreach to these people requires translation of the Jewish communal agenda into language they can hear. It also requires greater focus on the spiritual components of Jewish identity. The current public agenda of American Jews, in failing to address the real personal and existential needs of individuals, may not form a sufficient basis on which outreach may be undertaken. The State of Israel, for example, which dominates so much of Jewish communal discussion, may be virtually irrelevant to the private needs and spiritual hunger of those on the margins of the community.

Finally, the concept of pluralism is critical to the success of outreach initiatives. Different individuals require different points of entry and connectedness to Jewish tradition and community. Holidays, family, and foods are entry points; so are Jewish history and Jewish music. Outreach workers' ideological approaches will differ; no one ideology can address the needs of all Jews.

This pluralism distinguishes the non-Orthodox from the Orthodox outreach programs. Orthodox outreach staff describe their programs as maximalist and express enormous conviction that theirs is the appropriate way. They aim to replace the "sickness" of contemporary society with the values of Torah. Orthodox successes in this area are notable and have captured widespread media attention. According to the Council of Jewish Federations' 1990 Population Study, some 12 percent of currently Orthodox Jews were *not* born into Orthodox families. Michael Medved, the author and film critic who is perhaps the best known example of this *teshuvah* phenomenon, has written eloquently of the absence of values in contemporary culture generally. Yet most unaffiliated Jews are by no means disenchanted with Western society. They are far from willing to jettison their Western values for Judaism. Here lies the weakness of the so-called maximalist programs and the need for plural models that can reach people where they are.

The non-Orthodox programs also have a problem with ideology. If Orthodox outreach is too "maximalist" for some, non-Orthodox outreach must ask how it can be as inclusive as possible without dilution of distinctive Jewish identity. For example, can we reach out to mixed-marrieds without abandoning the ideals of the Jewish family and its values of endogamy? Here, outreach staff ought constantly to recall that their initiatives make sense only if they are part of a broader commitment to preserve the vitality of Judaism as a distinctive value system. Continuity for its own sake amounts to little more than tribalism.

For this reason, outreach programs to mixed-married couples have caused some concern within the community. Mindful of the human and demographic imperatives of outreach to

mixed-marrieds, synagogues, family-service agencies, and Jewish community centers have begun support groups and special workshops for mixed-marrieds to explore the nature of their marriages and their religious identities. The objective, obviously, is to bring the couples closer to the Jewish heritage, secure the conversion of the non-Jewish spouses, or, when that is not possible, try to maintain the Jewishness of the children.

Advocates of outreach to mixed-marrieds perceive these programs as constructive steps to adopt in the face of an ever-increasing intermarriage rate. The successes here of the Reform movement are particularly noteworthy. Yet critical voices have been heard. First, they ask what messages we are sending to the broader Jewish community. Does outreach, where successful, make it difficult to discourage interfaith dating and marriage? Can Jewish professionals embrace interfaith couples and simultaneously urge teenagers to date only Jews? May rabbis advocate in-marriage when so many congregants are themselves intermarried?

A second question relates to the durability of outreach successes. Can Jewish identity be maintained in a home where one parent is a gentile? Research thus far indicates that Jewish identity has generally disappeared among the grandchildren of a mixed-married couple. Whether increased outreach activities can change this result is an unanswered question.

Funds for outreach to mixed-marrieds must be diverted from other programs. Allocation committees have to make difficult decisions in identifying which populations hold the greatest promise for the Jewish communal future. Many question whether there is more to be gained by working with mixed-marrieds rather than with those currently active and involved Jewishly.

These questions have no easy answers. Outreach to mixed-marrieds is a new program area and merits some experimentation. The need is obvious, but whether the Jewish community will increase and sustain such programs will be determined only by our answers to these questions and by our experiences.

Research Agenda

To plan for the future, the community should consider various types of research to determine which outreach programs are working and where communal investment should be targeted for maximum results. A research agenda might comprise the following elements:

1. Evaluation research. In most cases, our experience with outreach dates back a decade. Various claims are made for program successes ranging from the modest to the messianic. It is necessary to look at particular programs and track participants over an extended period to determine what proved effective and what failed. This will require some consensus on how to define success.

2. Participant research. Who are today's unaffiliated Jews? How do they differ from affiliated Jews in terms of their images of Judaism? Are they receptive to communal intervention and, if so, under what circumstances and of what sort? Is age a factor in their receptivity?

3. Method research. Who have been the charismatic teachers who have successfully

transmitted Jewish identity and why have they been successful? Are there institutional contexts of outreach that have been noticeably successful? If so, why, and under what circumstances?

These questions by no means exhaust the research agenda. But research is necessary if we are to avoid mistakes and channel limited resources effectively.

The Outreach Experience

Lincoln Square Synagogue

The Lincoln Square Synagogue has become internationally renowned for its capacity to attract Manhattan's affluent Jewish professionals. Its founding rabbi, Shlomo Riskin, identified the goal of its outreach program as raising consciousness among those currently uninterested in being Jewish. Today, nearly a decade after Riskin's aliyah, the synagogue houses an extensive adult-education program, a weekly beginners' minyan, and twice-yearly "Turn Friday Night into Shabbos" programs. Together these programs have garnered great support from their target population -- often in reaction to Manhattan's "yuppie" culture with its emphasis upon career and with its hectic pace. The synagogue corroborates the theme of the movie *Baby Boom* that there is more to life than Manhattan's "rat race." Women professionals in particular are attracted by the centrality of family life, a supportive community, and a sense of connectedness to roots, history, and tradition -- all themes that *Baby Boom* finds lacking in Manhattan's professional culture.

National Jewish Outreach Project

The National Jewish Outreach Project has extended the Lincoln Square Synagogue program across the country with the goal of providing every Jew an opportunity to acquire basic Jewish knowledge. It sponsors Hebrew literacy courses, a crash course in basic Judaism, Turn-Friday-Night-into-Shabbos programs, and beginners' minyans. Approximately 30,000 have enrolled in the basic Hebrew course, 8,000 in the basic Judaism course, and 20,000 have participated in the Turn-Friday-Night-into-Shabbos program. Additionally, 65 synagogues conducted beginners' minyans. NJOP organizers concede that approximately one-third of the registrants do not complete the basic Hebrew course. Of the 500 synagogues participating, 40 percent are non-Orthodox. NJOP organizers provide these non-Orthodox synagogues with materials, but they will not place them on their list of referrals where Jews can receive additional information or guidance.

In becoming a national network, NJOP turned to modern electronic media to market its message. Some fifty one-minute radio spots have been aired across the country advertising the basic Hebrew and Judaism courses. A national newsletter has been developed carrying information of beginners' services and Turn-Friday-Night-into-Shabbos programs. The mailing list of the newsletter has been carefully developed from respondents to the twice-yearly ad campaigns.

Again, borrowing from Lincoln Square Synagogue, NJOP identified the teacher as critical to the success of outreach. It works with the local synagogue to create volunteer

teachers -- a lay outreach worker who is warm, outgoing, and eager to engage in personal follow-up. For it is follow-up which is critical to outreach and which distinguishes it from adult education, in which the primary requirement is only that the teacher be knowledgeable and articulate rather than willing to engage in personal follow-up with students.

The Basic Judaism courses consist of five ninety-minute lectures on God, prayer, sexuality, Shabbat, and Jewish observance. The emphasis is on the salience of these concepts to twentieth-century men and women, communicating an understanding of the divine order in creation, prayer as self-expression, sexual restraint as enhancing relationships, Shabbat as an antidote to the workaday world, and the efficacy of Jewish ritual in creating ethical human beings. The common denominator underlying these themes, as noted earlier, is Judaism as a counterculture to the prevailing norms of modern society. Turn-Friday-Night-into-Shabbos, again an outgrowth of Lincoln Square Synagogue, has grown to over thirty participating synagogues in the past four years. These programs feature an abridged Friday night service followed by a dinner matching observant families with newcomers. There are usually subsequent invitations to the homes of these families, a reunion of participants one month after the event, and follow-up mailings to participants. The involvement of host families from within the synagogue in turn creates a virtual "lay outreach committee," who will build and develop the synagogue's outreach programming.

For all of its successes, NJOP leadership remains convinced that American Jewry is suffering irreparable losses and erosion. It perceives its program as necessary to counteract these trends but admits that it is fighting a losing battle. Ultimately NJOP calls for a change of priorities within the Jewish community so that Jews may be saved for Judaism. Absent the change in communal priorities, NJOP regards all the expressed concern about Jewish continuity as largely lip service.

Lubavitch

Perhaps best known -- not only in America but internationally -- are the outreach initiatives of Chabad Lubavitch, whose exponents feel most comfortable in the role of missionaries of Judaism. In the 1960s, under the leadership of Shlomo Carlebach and Zalman Schachter, who utilized the teaching of mysticism and Jewish music to reach Jewish souls, Chabad was the first to recruit on college campuses. In turn, this led to the creation of Chabad houses across the country, at times even on campuses with few Jewish students. In more recent years, Chabad efforts have featured an aggressive and visible approach. Their "mitzvah mobiles" operate very publicly, trying to encourage Jews to perform rituals. The addresses of the Rebbe have been carried via radio and cable television. Huge Chabad menorahs may be found at public sites in most cities around Hanukkah. Recently, Chabad has purchased ads in major newspapers proclaiming to Jews the imminent arrival of the messiah.

The strategy appears to be an attempt to capture Jewish attention through highly visible and public statements and symbols. To be sure, this approach has drawn considerable criticism. Some claim that religious symbols on public property violate traditional church-state separation. Others criticize Lubavitch intellectually, particularly its difficulty with modern science and evolutionary theory. Gerson Cohen and Arthur Lelyveld each attacked the "cult-

like" atmosphere of Lubavitch, although neither could document evidence of snatching or mind-control, nor a turning against one's parents for their lack of Jewish observance. Finally, Lubavitch messianism has drawn considerable political opposition as, at best, a waste of valuable resources and, at worst, as arousing a wave of messianic hysteria that could lead to disappointment should the messiah fail to arrive.

Despite these criticisms, Lubavitch remains intent upon its mission. Its mood, informed by traditional Kabbalism and articulated by the Rebbe, looks upon the world with benevolent optimism. Every Jew is a soul ready to be saved by igniting Jewish sparks of good within it. Despite an enormous dropout rate, Lubavitch remains intent on its aggressive missionary approach.

Havurot

The attractiveness of Orthodoxy has often been its sense of community -- closely knit networks of families and individuals who share similar values and experiences. That type of Jewish community is rarely found outside of Orthodoxy. An important exception in recent years has been the growth of *havurot*, surrogate extended families of Jews connecting to one another through the Jewish tradition without a commitment to halakhah. *Havurot* hold out the promise to non-Orthodox Jews of enriching personal and family life through experiencing the intellectual and emotional treasures of the Jewish heritage.

As *havurot* have matured, they have become increasingly family oriented. Children are nurtured in the Jewish heritage by participation in *havurah* family events and rituals. In essence, the message becomes Judaism fosters family, and the *havurot* strengthen the family by providing a supportive external structure in some ways analogous to contemporary Orthodox communities.

For some, *havurot* form an alternative Jewish community. Its members criticize the spiritual emptiness of suburban synagogues. The countercultural *Jewish Catalogue* series has become their guidebook -- a do-it-yourself Judaism rather than reliance on rabbinical authority. The significance of *havurot* to outreach is considerable. In celebrating Jewish life, *havurot* provide multiple points of entry or return for many uninvolved with Jewish life. Although their members may not be numerous, *havurot* constitute a dimension of outreach that is working and strengthening Jewish life.

Project Link

The principal outreach initiative of the Conservative movement was a four-year initiative entitled Project Link. Funded by a pilot grant from the Leonard and Phyllis Greenberg Foundation, Project Link was unable to secure permanent funding from either the Conservative movement or from outside sources subsequent to 1989. Nevertheless, it did reach out to over 100 mixed-marrieds in the northern New Jersey area during its four-year existence.

Project Link began as a rather intensive course of twenty-five sessions over a twelve-month period. By its final year, the number of sessions had been reduced to thirteen, a

decision regretted by its director, Rabbi Alan Silverstein, as diminishing content without expanding enrollment. Significantly, the project did not utilize the term "outreach" for fear that it connoted too great an acceptance of the life-style of the target population, namely, intermarriage, which was Judaically unacceptable. Rather, it employed the term *kiruv*, implying an effort to bring those who had strayed closer to the community rather than transform the community in ideologically unacceptable directions.

The course dealt with Jewish holidays, life-cycle events, theology, and contemporary Jewish identity with particular emphasis on the Holocaust and modern Israel. Where conversion did not appear feasible, Project Link aimed to have couples commit themselves to raise their children as Jews -- a goal that, retrospectively, appears to have been realized universally. Following the course, the project focused on bringing these people into synagogues. Apart from these goals, the project provided Conservative rabbis with an opportunity for dialogue with mixed-marrieds. Nevertheless, the project failed to inspire sufficient support among communal leaders to win the resources necessary for its continuation.

According to its director, Project Link did succeed in uncovering a process mixed-marrieds could pursue if already linked to a synagogue. In other words, it provided a critical final step for those who had already indicated some commitment to leading a Jewish life. Where the project failed was with those who were completely unaffiliated and who had simply responded to ads placed in newspapers. For them, Project Link was, at most, a tentative first step on a lengthy journey whose outcome was most uncertain. In this regard, at least according to this single evaluation, more should be done to reach those marginally affiliated with the community rather than expend limited resources pursuing the totally unaffiliated.

Reform Jewish Outreach

The core component of Reform Judaism's outreach program is the "Introduction to Judaism" course held in synagogues in virtually every community in the country. The overall goal of the course is conversion, but that goal is not likely to be attained in most cases. Rather, the hope is to enhance the Jewish identity of the home and preserve the Jewishness of Jewish family members, especially children. Thus outreach to gentiles functions as in-reach to the Jewish partner.

This program, originally proclaimed by Rabbi Alexander Schindler in a landmark 1978 address, actually took root in the mid-1980s under the aegis of the UAHCCAR Joint Commission on Outreach. To be sure, there was some ambivalence regarding a conversionary posture -- "converting the unchurched" -- rather than an exclusive focus on mixed-marrieds. Others were concerned over diversion of energies and resources from those within the synagogue to those outside it. Those for whom conversion is not the primary stimulus may simply not be ready to make the commitment; for these individuals the courses are doors of entry into Judaism. Program staff note that the courses include many born Jews exploring what it is to be Jewish.

The course curriculum is affective rather than academic. It encourages people to lead a Jewish life by teaching them how to observe Shabbat, holidays, and life-cycle events.

Throughout the course, averaging eighteen weeks but with considerable variations among communities, participants keep personal journals of their experiences and Jewish growth.

Much as Orthodox outreach raises questions about its transforming effects upon a community -- namely, the tendency toward isolation and rejection of outside culture -- so Reform outreach raises philosophical and policy questions. Reform outreach expects to have a transforming effect upon the community as well as upon the target population. Ideally, it will compel the community to examine its own Jewishness and make Judaism attractive in a world of free choices. However, its outcomes remain unknowable. We do not know if this degree of Jewishness can be sustained, what losses will ensue, and whether the cultural impact upon the community will translate as the dilution of Jewish identity. Finally, it is unclear what are the boundaries of outreach. Rabbinic officiation at mixed marriages was once considered unacceptable. Today it is too often a litmus test for the employment of Reform rabbis. Similarly, many couples today practice varying forms of religious syncretism and dual-faith scenarios for their households. Guidelines are necessary to determine what within outreach is Judaically acceptable and what is not.

Project Connect

Project Connect of New York's 92nd Street YM-YWHA defines its target population as those who do not belong to a synagogue, who do not give to Federation, and who do not enroll their children in Hebrew schools. Thus it seeks to reach a population completely unaffiliated with Jewish communal life.

The project originated in the mid-1980s with a Shabbat retreat followed by the creation of mini-*havurot* at the Y. These met twice monthly and included holiday workshops, classes, Shabbat dinners, and parallel children's programs. Throughout these meetings some confusion existed as to whether the program was religious or secular, highlighting the difficulty American Jews have in formulating a distinctive Jewish identity that is not particularly religious. Moreover, it was difficult to form a common culture among people of varied backgrounds. As a result, in more recent years the emphasis has been on monthly events rather than on a Shabbat retreat. Today, Project Connect functions as an umbrella for a variety of programs targeted to unaffiliated Jews, including after-school programs for children, workshops for interfaith couples, and Derech Torah, a thirty-week introduction to Judaism involving nine classes of sixteen students each.

Project Connect claims its greatest successes in Derech Torah. Over a four-year period 575 people have enrolled. Retention rates have been quite high; in 1990-91 there were only three dropouts out of 150 enrolled. Instructors present Judaism as holding existential meaning, posing questions of personal existence.

The director of the program, Rabbi David Woznicka, argues that the program's success depends on its excellent faculty, its nondenominational content, and its emphasis upon people meeting other people in a Jewish context. He perceives a spiritual thirst existing in the community which Jewish institutions should try to satisfy. Moreover, by definition, Derech Torah can meet the needs of only a small number of people -- larger classes would be far too impersonal.

The curriculum of Derech Torah includes the existence of God, suffering and evil, death and mourning, and the relevance of Jewish teaching to such major contemporary issues as marriage, abortion, and euthanasia. The course also covers Judaism's sacred texts, holidays, dietary laws, and Shabbat, as well as life-cycle events. The experiential component includes two Shabbat dinners during the year, and every holiday is preceded by a special workshop. Some instructors take their students to local synagogues and perform a havdallah service together with them.

The staff dedication just alluded to is critical to the success of the program. Staff are encouraged to act as role models, displaying a passion for Judaism in many ways similar to outreach conducted under right-wing Orthodox auspices. Even though there are non-Jews in the classes, the instructors do not disguise their commitment to Judaism. They perceive themselves as Jewish educators seeking to instill a love for Jewish learning, values, and peoplehood.

Following the program, Derech Torah directs alumni to existing synagogues. Bnai Jeshurun, a prominent Conservative congregation on New York's West Side, today has approximately seventy-five Derech Torah alumni as members.

Jewish Community Centers

Nationwide, Jewish community centers increasingly define themselves as outreach agencies. Professional staff see themselves as a sales force for the Jewish heritage, and, in recent years, significant efforts have been mounted to enhance the Judaic literacy of center staff. The objective is to create a Jewish environment within the center, reflected in associations with other Jews, with Jewish foods and customs, and ultimately with Judaic ideas. Thus the center aims to replace the much-vaunted Jewish neighborhood as a force for Jewish cohesiveness and continuity.

Much of JCC outreach programming focuses on the uses of leisure time and on the services people require during nonleisure hours. Thus the centers, historically, have focused on sports and, more recently, on child care. The assumption is that these are programs that people want and need. If the community can offer these programs in a Jewish context, it will bring Jews into contact with other Jews and ultimately enhance them Jewishly.

For similar reasons, the number of infant day-care centers under JCC auspices has been expanding despite some ambivalence about taking infants out of the home. The operating assumption has been that Jews, at certain stages of their life cycle, will require specific types of services. If these services are provided under Jewish auspices, they provide opportunities for enhancing communal connectedness.

A third type of outreach program under JCC auspices has been the Shalom Newcomers Network. Reacting to studies documenting the increased mobility of Jews and their disaffiliation with the community, JCCs began sharing information as to who is moving into which town and then welcoming them in their new place of residence. Thus the JCC can serve as a place for communal institutional contact in the new environments.

Most recently, JCCs have been experimenting with pilot programs of outreach to mixed-marrieds. These have been informed by a vision of meeting people where they are and ultimately mainstreaming them into synagogues and other communal institutions. Moreover, by providing other services -- sports, infant care, etc. -- the JCC hopes to attract mixed-marrieds among its broader target population and clientele and thereby provide them with greater Jewish associations.

Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture

The Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture has piloted two outreach programs -- one in St. Louis, Missouri, and one in Metro-West, New Jersey. Each program -- termed "Connections" or "Contact" by its respective sponsor -- services 300 unaffiliated or underaffiliated families, to which it provides opportunities to network, celebrate holidays together, and exchange ideas and experiences about parenting and Jewish concerns. A special project coordinator was engaged in each area to locate potential recruits, discover what programming would appeal to them, and present Jewish materials in an open-minded and nonjudgmental fashion.

The experience indicated that parents with young children were the most receptive to this outreach -- that parenting, indeed, is a gateway to Jewish life. Synagogue and Jewish education may or may not lie within these families' futures. Therefore Jewish communal outreach may well tip the scales toward greater identification and affiliation with the community by communicating to the participants that the organized Jewish community cares about them as individuals.

For these reasons, central to the program's philosophy was the idea that no communal or institutional demands or expectations would be placed on participants. The program aimed strictly to demonstrate how Judaism could enrich their personal and family lives, empowering them to introduce Jewish components in their homes. Shabbat dinner, holiday workshops, and family *havurot* were all designed to enable families to place Jewish concerns upon their personal agendas. Organizational agendas, in contrast, were deemed irrelevant. Only at a later point will they, on their own initiative, move on to other Jewish institutions.

In short, the Memorial Foundation programs aim not at communal enhancement but at personal enhancement. Its directors believe that Judaism can and should speak to the human existential condition. All too often, however, Judaism fails to say anything meaningful to these groups, for the language of the Jewish community places communal interests and concerns above personal development.

European Outreach

The Strassbourg-based Yechiva des Etudiants de France prides itself on being the pioneering outreach institution to secularized French Jews. By broadening its activities to serve entire families rather than just full-time students, the institution claims to reach 250 families and over 800 individuals, particularly through sponsorship of lectures and public events.

Given initial successes with families of students, the Yechiva hopes to triple its enrollment in the next five years, in turn having a multiplier effect upon the entire community. Its female students are expected to become teachers in the French Jewish educational system. In this way, the Yechiva hopes to alter a picture of increasing assimilation and defection from the world's fourth largest Jewish community.

To be sure, the Yechiva is intellectually indebted to the Gateshead Yeshiva in England, to which it turns for spiritual leadership and guidance. As a result, its ambience and ethos are distinctly haredi, with all of the concerns raised by haredi outreach institutions in both Israel and North America.

In pronounced contrast, the Yakar outreach program in England emphasizes the presence of an open-minded faculty prepared to learn as well as to teach. As a result, Yakar boasts of the diversity of its target population, which includes Reform and Hasidic Jews. Yakar eschews the "people-changing" model of haredi outreach, aiming instead to enhance informed decision-making. Its goal is the creation of an educated laity prepared to enter serious dialogue rather than the provision of personal comfort to alienated individuals. For this reason, Yakar has attracted overwhelmingly favorable press comment and currently services 200 people weekly through evening classes and 80-100 individuals in Shabbat study sessions.

Leading Yakar is Rabbi Michael Rosen, a young and dynamic rabbi who, for the past twelve years, has been conducting weekend groups of Shabbat observance and traditional study. Rosen prides himself and his faculty on intellectual openness and absence of missionary zeal. Moreover, he has infused his program with social consciousness, raising questions of Jewish responses to issues like apartheid and poverty. Through encounters with figures such as Archbishop Tutu, Rosen seeks to break the image of traditional Judaism as parochial, broaden the community outlook, and demonstrate the salience of Judaism to the modern world.

Israeli Outreach

Most Israeli outreach takes place within a variety of Israeli yeshivot -- almost exclusively under haredi auspices -- with a clientele consisting of Israeli secularists as well as several hundred visiting American students. Contrary to popular opinion, these yeshivot are not flooded with hippies. Most enter out of curiosity and leave quickly. Those who stay gradually modify their life-styles to accommodate that of the yeshivot. Wide variation exists among these settings. The Yeshiva of the Diaspora began as a refuge for hippies near the Western Wall. In direct contrast is Yeshivat Hamivtar, whose director, Rabbi Chaim Brovender, eschews "people-changing" in favor of study. Ohr Someach takes a middle approach. Its original goal was to make everyone religiously observant. Recently it has focused primarily on a campaign against Western culture in an effort to counteract intermarriage.

Aish HaTorah began as an Israeli institution but has, in recent years, invested heavily on the American scene. Its approach is unapologetically "I am all right, you are all wrong." The Discovery Program in the States rails against the bankruptcy of American society. The approach is frankly confrontational, challenging students as to why they know so little and

supplying them with appropriate intellectual tools to counteract the evils of secularism. It offers intellectual proofs of God's existence, eliminating doubt and confusion about human purpose. Aish HaTorah takes its name literally, aiming to create firebrands and revolutionaries for the cause of Torah.

Although Aish HaTorah has numerous critics who dismiss its approach, many of their criticisms are unfair. There is no cult of personality, nor are brainwashing techniques utilized. The freedom of the individual to leave at any time is absolute. Gurus are absent, as is physical force. The institution's presence in Jerusalem leaves students with the constant prospect of city life and its relative openness. To be sure, Aish HaTorah is far from a modern institution. The rejection of modernity extends even to great ambivalence about Zionism, which it sees as fortifying the bankrupt secular values of modern Jews.

IsraelLight constitutes a liberal offshoot of Aish HaTorah. Founded in 1986 by David Aarons, IsraelLight offers a three-week co-ed seminar in Jerusalem designed to portray Judaism in positive terms. This program is meant to lead to a regular yeshiva program focusing on study of texts in a single-sex context. Approximately 350 students have gone through the program. Program officials claim the overwhelming majority have taken steps toward greater Jewish communal involvement.

Gesher, meaning "bridge," aims to bring together religious and secular Israelis. Over the past two decades, Gesher has sought to create mutual understanding between these two groups by demonstrating what they have in common and shattering their stereotypes of one another.

Gesher was established by Rabbi Daniel Tropper, an American-born rabbi who was concerned that the ultimate threat to Israel lay in the serious divisions and conflicts over religion within Israeli society. Tropper assumed that the religious right in Israel had erred in thinking that further religious legislation would inspire Israelis to become more Jewish. Conversely, he felt all Jews ought to be concerned about the future Jewish identity of Israelis, which was not adequately addressed in existing Israeli curricula.

As a result, Gesher sought to develop encounter groups involving secular and religious Israeli high-school students. The program aimed to nurture common values among them as Jews and to demonstrate for secular Israelis the importance of Jewish identity. Through dialogues and retreats, study days in high schools, films and curricula on Jewish history, Gesher utilized informal education techniques simultaneously to nurture pluralism and understanding and to combat assimilation among Israelis. To date, over 44,000 Israelis have participated in the seminars and 85,000 in the study programs.

Gesher is frankly confrontational about Jewish identity, but it eschews the "people-changing" techniques popular in right-wing yeshivot. Rather, Gesher's premise is that secular Israelis can be exposed to the beauties of the Jewish tradition, its claims upon us as modern Jews, and the interdependence of Jews everywhere. For example, Gesher developed a high quality television program for Hanukkah emphasizing the right to be different as a vehicle for combating assimilation.

Although Gesher is well known for the excellence of its materials and the open environment it nurtures, Gesher leaders concede that they have had little real impact on Israeli society, which continues to be polarized between religious and secular. Some inroads have been made within the public school system, and Gesher is now developing a curriculum for the system. By and large, however, Gesher sees itself as impacting primarily upon individuals in Israeli society but as accomplishing little change in society generally.

Both right and left within Israel have criticized Gesher vigorously. The haredi world opposes the co-ed nature of Gesher activities and the utilization of secular Israeli counselors in the study programs. The left claims that Gesher is a camouflaged missionary movement, one that is not truly pluralist in terms of recognizing Reform and Conservative rabbis. Gesher leaders reject the latter charge, pointing to the participation of non-Orthodox rabbis in Gesher programs. Rather, they see the primary intellectual leadership as emanating from the *hesder* yeshiva world with its more open, intellectual, and religious Zionist outlook. Tropper himself refuses to permit Gesher to be drawn into the controversy surrounding religious pluralism in Israel. He argues that religious pluralism will result naturally from the immigration of more Conservative and Reform Jews to Israel. The critique of Gesher from both right and left, in fact, affirms Tropper's centrist position and enables Gesher to define itself as walking a tightrope between the religious movements and passions within Israel.

Nevertheless, the outreach activities of Gesher clearly do serve as a counterweight to the better known outreach efforts of the haredi yeshivot. By nurturing pluralism and open intellectual questioning, Gesher's message to secular Israelis is clear: Deepening one's attachments to tradition need not result in fanaticism and intolerance.

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