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Jewish The Lost Generation?

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From the Editor



In the sixties, the popular mantra among American youth was “Don’t trust anyone over thirty!” Those who were older and in positions of authority and leadership were viewed—at best—with suspicion and treated—at worst—as spiritually bankrupt, having sold out their ideals for the sake of acquiring fancier cars and bigger homes. Interestingly, many of the key figures of that period were young Jews, such as Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and others. Now some of those same individuals, the Baby Boomers, are the ones who hold power, who own the cars and the homes, and a new generation of

young people have turned their backs on their practices and institutions.

With some notable exceptions, Jews in their twenties and thirties are largely absent from the pews of America’s synagogues and the programs of its Jewish organizations. Why? Is it the fault of American Jewry for having created a Judaism that is dull, uninspiring and Holocaust-obsessed? Or is it the fault of young Jews *themselves*, so caught up in their own narcissism and the trappings of consumer culture that they have no real sense of personal responsibility or communal obligation? Whatever the reason and whoever (if anyone) is to blame, are Jews in their twenties and thirties today’s new Lost Generation—lost to their historical memory, lost to their religious traditions, lost to their spiritual inheritance?

Seeking the Lost Generation:

The Partnership for Jewish Life Creates Peer-Driven Jewish Programming

by Rabbi David Gedzelman

Two Superbowls ago, Pepsi launched an advertising campaign targeting 20-something’s with the language, “Generation Next.” That play on words attempted to appeal to Americans in their 20s who may have felt resentment about being grouped together into a single category, “Generation X.” Pepsi positioned itself as an ally of those who would resist somebody else’s definition of themselves. Certainly, Pepsi has only one goal in this enterprise: to move as much product as possible. The amazing thing is that this seems to work. This population responds to packaging that says “buy me if you want to make a statement about your independence, if you are unwilling to allow anyone else to set the agenda for your life.”

As we work to reach out to Jews in their 20s and 30s who have not been connected meaningfully to Jewish life and the Jewish community, we need to learn from the com-

mercial culture which seem to successfully capture their attention, time and pocketbooks. At the same time, we have a product which can never be completely market-driven. This particular product — Jewish connection and exploration — can entail self-affirmation, self-definition, and a statement of creative independence on the part of the “consumer.” And, importantly, *it can provide the*



opportunity to participate in its production. Unengaged Jews can play a role in re-defining and re-imagining Judaism. But will those who want to feel independent in their choices spend the time and energy needed to be a partner in the process, or do they merely want to feel as if they’ve created something without actually putting in the time, energy and risk of personal



change?

For the past three years, Jewish Life Network and The Partnership for Jewish Life have been engaged in creating an innovative social and cultural center, which will be a different kind of entry point into Jewish life for close to 100,000 Manhattanites age 22 to 35. Most of the people we want to reach do not walk into synagogues or other Jewish institutions. Consequently, our programming combines entertainment and leisure time preferences with an innovative agenda for bringing Jewish learning to a population that all too often assumes that Judaism is limited to the experiences remembered from childhood.

Since November 1995, through two parallel series of focus groups (one facilitated by professional market researchers and the other by our own program and outreach staff), we have been asking questions ranging from how individuals prefer to spend their leisure time to how comfortable they feel in Jewish contexts. Out of our initial information gathering process, a core community of 2000 New Yorkers in their 20s and 30s has been developed comprising about 250

The articles in this winter issue of *Contact* try to address some of these questions. Rabbi David Gedzelman offers a contemporary strategy and institution for attracting young Jews back to Jewish life, while Rabbi Andrew Bachman highlights some of the dangers of a “market” approach to Judaism. Felicia Herman analyzes the inherent and historical ambivalence of the young generation toward its religious traditions and identity and explains how American Jewry might nevertheless attempt to reach it. Rachel Landsberg discusses her relationship to traditional Judaism, and why, despite some personal struggles with it, it is where she has cast her religious lot as a young Jew. Finally, Rabbi Hara Person describes her website for

activists, with the rest attending and participating in a full range of programmatic offerings.

To paint all unengaged Jews in this age range with one brush would be a mistake. There is a wide variety of inclinations and propensities among this pop-



Rabbi David Gedzelman, left, with Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, President of Jewish Life Network, and J.J. Greenberg, Executive Director of Jewish Life Network.

ulation. There are those who can be characterized as living through an extended adolescence and those who take responsibility for themselves in extraordinary ways. There are those who value being connected intergenerationally and those who look only to what Robert Bly calls the “Sibling Society” — the world of generational peers — for that which is culturally authoritative. There are those who are open to Jewish exploration and connection and those who feel hostile towards Judaism and the Jewish community. What has been clear to us is that the Jews we seek to reach are sophisticated, creative and interesting people who deeply appreciate variety and flexibility in the options before them. Some want to

Jews in their twenties and thirties, and how the Internet can serve as a gateway for the unaffiliated and disconnected. We hope you find this issue of interest and encourage you to give us your feedback.

May your winter be warmed by the light of our faith,

Rabbi Niles E. Goldstein

October 3, 1998

Congratulations on your recent [September] issue. I found it interesting and well-written.

While I completely concur with the views in the various articles, I believe there is another area which must be addressed in strengthening the Jewish community (both quantity and quality). If we are to remain a force in the world arena, our size matters. I do not believe the programs mentioned in CONTACT will be sufficient. I think we need to “bite the bullet” and open Judaism to the world’s population. Isn’t it time for us to say Jewish Life is something to be valued and promoted not just to the limited number of people born into the religion but to the greater population of the world?

I think programs improving the quality of the existing Jewish population are wonderful, but it’s time to take the blinders off and recognize that if Judaism is to remain an important force, it must be made available to the masses of the world.

Barry Podolsky
Boca Raton, FL

sit back and be engaged Jewishly in the same ways they are engaged by entertainment in the dominant culture, while others want to play a role in shaping the life of the community that empowers them.

In any case, we have found that there is little tolerance for programming that reflects somebody else’s convictions about what is good for Jews in their 20s and 30s. While many of the Jews we seek to engage aren’t interested in sitting on committees in order to enjoy interesting Jewish programs, they

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Finding God At Tower Records

Elliot Smith and the Decoding of Sacred Texts

by Rabbi Andrew N. Bachman

*...they say that god makes problems
just to see what you can stand
before you do as the devil pleases
and give up the thing that you love...*

— Elliot Smith, “pitseleh”

Critics compare his sound to his historical musical mentors, the Beatles. One can also hear the phrasing of Bob Dylan, the playfulness of Elvis Costello, and the urgent plainness of Lou Reed. As if the company he keeps is not good enough, one of the songs from Elliot Smith’s first major record was nominated for an Academy Award for the movie “Good Will Hunting,” a coming of age story about the search for life’s meaning starring Hollywood’s current heartthrob, Matt Damon.

Last year, my wife, far hipper than I could ever be, sent me to Tower Records for Smith’s first major record, “Either/Or,” and when news struck that a second album, “X/O,” was to be released, I was dispatched again on the sacred mission of obtaining the latest message from the rock world’s most brilliant young composer. Of course, being a rabbi with an intellectual regard for the patterns of history, I thought, “Who is this gnostic, forever dividing his world into dichotomies?”

No, I didn’t really think that. But I did wonder if his first album was a reference to Kierkegaard’s work of the same name, and further, if Smith *had* read the Danish philosopher, had he encountered “Fear and Trembling,” Kierkegaard’s pained exploration of God’s call to Abraham for the sacrifice of Isaac. And then I did what most Jews do: I wondered if Elliot Smith was Jewish. His name

didn’t sound Jewish, but at that stage of the analysis, that meant little. With news in late October 1998 that sociologist Steven M. Cohen had determined that ethnic identity means less to young Jews today than ever before, names can rarely be counted on to signify Jewishness.

Smith’s darkness as a writer, his seeming nods to Dylan and Lou Reed — both Jews — his cleverness as a composer: I was on his trail! And then when I overheard my wife playing his record and heard the song “Pitseleh” I thought, “Ha! Yiddish!” Caught in the net of my making was this Oregon songwriter with a plain name who had revealed his identity not only by writing a song with a Yiddish title and *not* by being a member of the New Wave Klezmer camp, but by making a reference to Job along the way. I had found another Jew in pop culture doing everything to successfully pass, virtually unknown, as a Jew.

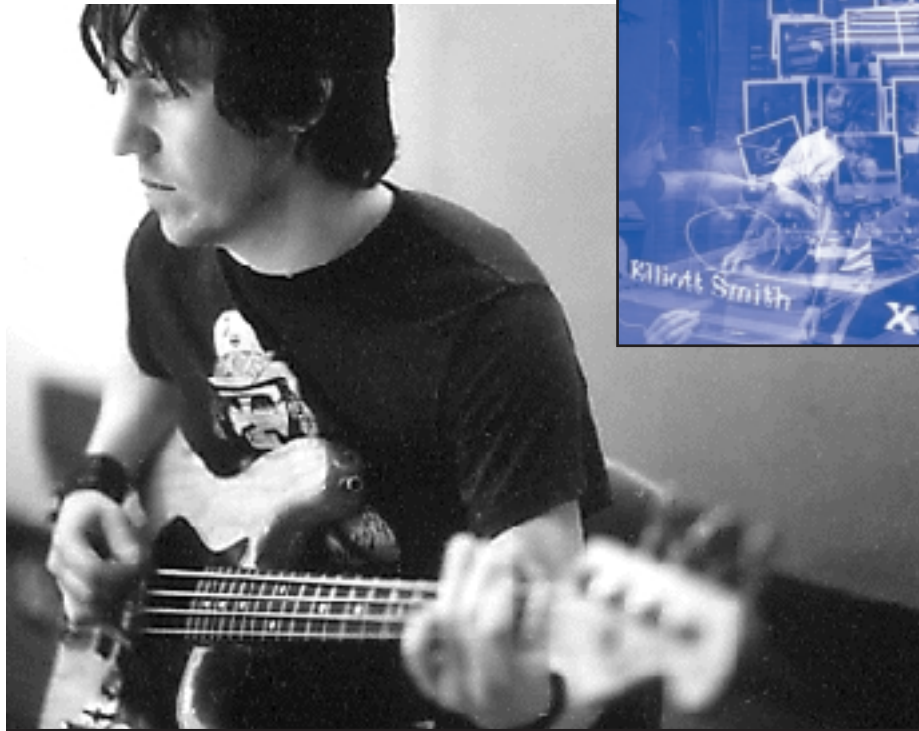
Without being able to determine *in fact* if this artist was a Jew, I had applied a Jewish *hermeneutic* to the quest for the discovery of his identity. His lyrics deconstructed and his language laid bare, it mattered little whether Smith really was a Jew; what mattered more was the translation game I was playing—one within the rules of American Jewish identity construction and a rudimentary awareness of Jewish language and Scripture. The Yiddish term *pitseleh* (or little piece) was uncovered and the biblical tradition’s greatest



Jews are translators, the anonymous heroes of tradition, uncovering and conveying the Jewish message. And this should be done with the conviction of our own beliefs, not by the cult of personality...

tale of suffering and its meaning—the trial of Job—was brought to light. Suddenly one known for *his* relevance was standing in the shadows of a literary and Scriptural tradition far greater than any one person. His song hinted at a profound legacy and, as it should be, one artist’s acknowledgment to a Source of wisdom beyond the self.

This is the game that rabbis and Jewish professionals are obliged to play in order to reach a generation of Jews in their twenties and thirties: to extract the biblical and the sacred from the popular, not to make popular the religious by slick marketing,



Elliot Smith’s Jewishness is not immediately evident in his music.

punchy advertising, and for God’s sake, not by another study with depressing statistical conclusions about how Judaism needs to be made relevant if we are to keep people Jewish. Can anyone truly imagine earlier generations of Jewish leadership devising methods for reaching the unaffiliated by simply taking what the dominant culture does and making it Jewish? Two thousand years ago, when Jewish laws of kashrut were competing with the lure of Greco-Roman gluttony, rabbis didn’t create culinary innovations to mimic that style – a Jewish vomitorium, for example – so that people would continue to eat Jewish foods. Indeed, the validity of Judaism’s eternal message to a young generation of seekers does not need to be made hipper than hip in order to emanate

relevance. In this regard, Jews are translators, the anonymous heroes of tradition, uncovering and conveying the Jewish message. And this should be done with the conviction of our own beliefs, not by the cult of personality one finds in neo-Hasidic expression or the groovy uniqueness of the Upper West Side’s minyan/dating scene.

Translators, in many ways, are the humble heroes of a language not originally their own. They stand in the shadows of the art of others but bring that expression to an audience ordinarily out of reach. But in a culture that predominates with the ethic of individuality like American culture does, what is truly unique and suffused with the potential to provide depth and meaning is often lost in the clamor of voices screaming to be heard. The translator’s job is to find what the prophet Elijah called the “still, small voice,” the hidden source of Judaism’s power—God. And to find that voice in everything. Having the boldness to bring the sacred out of the shadows of expression will save more Jews than any fancy programming could ever dream of doing precisely by daring them to do what the Jewish tradition demands: making their selves the living embodiment of the Divine Image bequeathed to every individual in the Garden of Eden. In the translation from the popular to the sacred, we bear witness to a Jewish self, uniquely constructed and rooted in Eternity. ❁

*I’ll tell you why I don’t want to know
where you are*

*I got a joke I been dying to tell you
a silent kid is looking down the barrel
to make the noise that I kept so quiet
I kept it from you, pitseleh...*

— Elliot Smith

Rabbi Andrew Bachman is Skirball Director of the Edgar M. Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life at New York University.

THE (CONTINUING) QUEST FOR CONTINUITY

by Felicia Herman

“Are the Jews Losing Their Religion?” “Where Are Our Youth?” Topics of recent sermons in American synagogues? Perhaps. But these are also titles of articles written by American Jewish leaders in the 1890s, 1910s and 1930s.

They are hardly new questions, and perhaps the very constancy of their presence in American Jewish life can offer a small measure of relief to American Jewish leaders confronting such issues today. Because despite all the worry, American Judaism *has* survived. The community’s disaffected “youth” have always grown into the next generation of adults concerned about the community’s survival—though, to be sure, the numbers of active, involved American Jews has dwindled with each passing generation.

The persistence of concern over American Jewish survival yields an even more important insight into the lack of religious affiliation among today’s twentysomething and thirtysomething Jews: that, to a considerable extent, the phenomenon may spring from a natural life-cycle process, rather than from a sudden, broad-based decline of the Jewish community. I can speak only about the segment of this cohort with which I am most familiar (that which includes myself and many of my friends): a Hebrew school-educated, been-to-Israel crowd which nevertheless remains relatively uninvolved Jewishly. In general, this group could hardly be described as “settled”: few of its members are married, fewer still have children. Yet many of these Jews refrain from joining synagogues *not* because they view it as an institution geared solely toward the religious education of the children they have yet to raise (as many sociologists have argued), but rather because they are reluctant to put down roots *for themselves* in this transient stage of their lives. They exist in a state of life-cycle limbo: between, on the one hand, the “community” they created in their school years—particularly in college—and, on the other, the family they will create and the community they will join when they marry

and have children. Housing circumstances, occupations and locations constantly change. Thus, during major holidays and festivals, most young Jews I know naturally gravitate to the only established “home” available to them: their parents’ houses and congregations. They don’t affiliate in their geographic locale because they don’t consider it their “home”—at least not from a Jewish perspective.

This age cohort’s transience and rootlessness leads many of its members to “put off” religious observance or Jewish affiliation until the next stage of their lives, when they will make the decisions to marry and have children, when they are more confident of remaining in the same community for an extended period of time, and when the decision to become more religious or to create a Jewishly-identified home seems both easier and more appropriate to their stage of life. Because the age at which society expects one to be “mature” has increased in recent

decades, and because single people—particularly women—in their 30s no longer represent the anomalies they once did, we can acceptably postpone these decisions much longer than our parents could have.

In addition to the life-cycle issues, which may be relatively independent of historical context, there are also factors in young Jews’ lack of affiliation which are more specific to the final years of the twentieth century.

This present generation of young Jewish adults is, for example, yet another step removed from the immigrant generations, or, more generally, from any generation which



This age cohort's transience and rootlessness leads many of its members to "put off" religious observance or Jewish affiliation until the next stage of their lives...



might have experienced Jewish life as an intrinsic part of their lives. Our grandparents, perhaps, but more likely, our great-grandparents, were the ones who experienced Jewish observance or “Jewishness” as an integral facet of their identities, a force which informed their daily lives, their choices of friends, their knowledge of and the lens through which they viewed

the world. “Jewish” was something which, in an organic sense, they simply *were*—they absorbed it at home and from their neighbors (be they in Bialystok or in Brooklyn). My cohort, on the other hand, having grown up largely in suburban America, amidst Gentiles, and generations removed from a predominantly Jewish cultural and religious sphere, have experienced Jewish identity as something *extra*: extra holidays, extra school, a life and identity external and appended to that of our “mainstream,” daily American lives. As such, many of us experienced our Jewishness as an extra *burden* (except, of course, at Hanukkah): fasting when few of our friends and neighbors were doing so; eating *matzah* when everyone else in school could enjoy bread, going to religious services more often than most of our peers.

Jews my age already know much about how the Jews died; what we're missing is a real sense of how the Jews lived.

And I'm not sure whether the advent of multiculturalism has made it easier or more difficult to take on Jewish responsibilities as one matures. Yes, multiculturalism affirms our right to be different and to have that difference respected by our fellow citizens. But there's also a moral relativism (“all points of view are valid”) and a universalism (“we're all basically the same”) inherent in multiculturalism which fundamentally undermine some of the critical underpinnings of the decision to become an affiliated or observant Jew. Such a decision requires a certain degree of absolutism—a belief, at some level, that being Jewish is somehow *better*, even if only for oneself and, especially, a belief that it is *better* to seek a Jewish spouse and to exclude potential Gentile mates. Can we appreciate how bigoted those decisions appear,

when examined in the light of our received wisdom concerning Americanism and multiculturalism? Or how hard it is to choose to be a particularist when the societal norm is to be universalist? What does Judaism have to offer if all ways of looking at the world appear equally valid?

To answer this question effectively, American Jewish leaders must first abandon the use of the Holocaust (or, more generally, antisemitism) and Israel as the strongest arguments in favor of Jewish affiliation. Arguments for “refusing to give Hitler a posthumous victory,” or those which draw upon the romance of Israel's rebirth and the need to oppose those who are bent on the State's destruction, fail to address the unique problems or even the unique joys of being a Jew in America. I don't think it minimizes the tragedy of the Holocaust or the importance of remembering it to say that a focus on such destruction is hardly a place to begin a strong and positive identification with Judaism and Jewish life. Jews my age already know much about how the Jews died; what we're missing is a real sense of how the Jews *lived*. And Israel has become an increasingly problematic source of positive identity for American Jews, as studies of Jewish philanthropic activities and political proclivities have amply demonstrated. American Jewish leaders simply can't expect to raise a thoughtful, committed community if they continue to focus on these two events as the building blocks of Jewish identity.

We need, instead, to be grappling with the issues of how to live as American Jews. A lack of reflection on the meaning of being Jewish in America leads almost inevitably to a lack of involvement as American Jews. Focusing American Jewish youth (and adults as well) on the issues most relevant to them, in their proper context, would do much to increase their Jewish involvement and affiliation at *all* stages of life. Providing these Jews with a sense that, perhaps especially today, choosing to affiliate as a Jew in America is a weighty, complicated, but ultimately positive and rewarding decision, and then equipping them with the intellectual tools to make such a choice—a sense of *their own* history and an analysis of current issues in American society—might be the solution to the questions American Jewish leaders have been asking for so long.



Felicia Herman is a Ph.D. student in American Jewish history at Brandeis University, currently working on her dissertation about American Jewish identity between the World Wars. She has taught courses in American Jewish history and culture to middle school, high school, and college students, as well as to adult education classes.

A Lost Generation?

(continued from page 3)

do want those programs to feel like they were designed with their own tastes, styles and predilections in mind. (For example, one does not need to have been on some kind of planning committee for Sony theaters in order to feel comfortable with and addressed by the atmosphere that Sony creates. One need not be included in a film curatorial committee at the Museum of Modern Art in order to find MOMA's film program compelling.) It is essential that this population be engaged by programming that speaks with the voice of their peers and not that of their parents.

In contrast to the authority given to program staff at many Jewish organizations, the artistic and creative staff at most fine arts and performing arts institutions assume a high degree of curatorial authority and are trusted by lay volunteer leadership to have professional expertise in the planning of artistic programming. Curatorial authority — the prerogative on the part of professional staff to make decisions about programmatic content — must also be informed by a strong sensibility as to what is appealing to the target audience.

Our challenge in reaching out to a population in an “entertainment consumption mode” is to know when it is appropriate to design programming as consumable entertainment, and when it is appropriate to empower participants in the planning of our offerings in order to build a sense of community and Jewish intimacy. As Richard Joel has been teaching the Hillel world for the past decade, these

represent two different modes of addressing the needs of American Jews and they are both necessary in any outreach and community building initiative.

Consequently, in planning *Makor, a place for New Yorkers in their 20s and 30s*, which will open this Spring at 35 West 67th street in



The Makor building, on West 67th Street in New York City.

Manhattan, we have designed a building that juxtaposes food and beverage, arts and entertainment spaces with Jewish educational and programmatic spaces. Seventy percent of our program is planned by professional staff with full curatorial authority. That curatorial authority, however, is balanced by a strong sensitivity to the market. Thirty percent of our programming is participant planned in

a way that not only gives our activists opportunities for Jewish self-expression, but charges them with the mission of positively engaging the Jewishly ambivalent with the possibility of feeling comfortable in a Jewish place and context.

A significant segment of those we seek to empower in our programming are young Jewish artists.

Filmmakers, actors, playwrights, poets, novelists, musicians and painters are given a range of opportunities for showcasing their work, being involved in the development of collaborative initiatives, and participating in conversations that explore the relationship between their work and their Jewish identity.

Empowered artists not only gain a sense of Jewish home through our programming, but also provide quality entertainment that engages others.

When Makor opens this spring it will include a live music cafe, bar, and gathering place, programmed in partnership with one of the most creative downtown commercial music clubs in New York. Films will be viewed in a state-of-the-art screening room. Theater, fine art, and literary offerings will be featured in a variety of spaces. The opportunities in these areas will reflect the kinds of entertainment options available in the dominant culture, while in the same building a full Jewish learning program offering about 15 classes a week will be accessible simultaneously.

Our range of courses will feature instructors from all of the movements in Judaism. We have learned that a significant segment of our population feels suspicious of Jewish educational contexts that have a particular theological agenda. We hope the pluralistic tone of our learning opportunities contributes to an overall atmosphere in which participants do not feel that anyone else is making decisions for them; that just entering our building is a statement of their own autonomy and independence. For Jews who may have all kinds of ambivalent feelings about their Jewishness, being in a Jewish place which speaks in the voice of peers and allies — designed so that the very furniture says, “I’m making my own choices” — represents a completely new way of coming home. 🌸



Rabbi David Gedzelman is the Creative and Rabbinic Director of *Makor: A Place for New Yorkers in their 20s and 30s*.

A Modern Woman Confronts Traditional Judaism

by Rachel Landsberg

Growing up within a small Reform congregation, I was instilled with a positive Jewish identity and a feeling of belonging to a community. During college, although I felt good about being Jewish, I also felt that my Jewish education was only rudimentary. I actively sought out to learn more about Judaism and to find a place for myself within the Jewish world. After spending time in Israel, immersed in learning, community, and Shabbat observance, I found what I was looking for within traditional Judaism: the opportunity to grow from a passive recipient to an active seeker of Jewish learning and a “doer” of Judaism.

Jewish learning has consistently played a central role in my life. Being engaged in Torah study, particularly through the model of *chevruta*, or partnership learning, has offered me the means with which to struggle to find meaning as well as relevance within the text, to build my own relationship to the text, and to find my own voice within our tradition. Being a part of a community of learners, where ideas are exchanged, discussed, and challenged, brings me closer to others and helps me to clarify my own beliefs. It is within the more traditional models of Jewish learning that I have found intellectual seriousness as well as a high level of study. I have encountered learners who are firmly committed to Judaism, yet also struggle in a deep way to understand the texts.

Being part of a *davening* community has also profoundly deepened my connection to Judaism and to God. I am part of what I consider to be an extraordinary *minyán*, where we not only come together to pray, but we participate in community service programs, learn together, have Shabbat meals together and spend time with each other socially. Our *tefila* itself is participatory, spirited, and serious. Although one person is leading the *davening*, we all participate by *davening* on our own, singing together and listening intently during Torah reading, which allows for both personal and communal prayer. We reach out to the new faces within our community, offering hospitality for meals and encouraging everyone’s involvement in our activi-



ties. And we reach out beyond our own community through our community service projects. Being observant within a community offers a framework within which to mark life-cycle events; it is remarkable to watch the ways in which my community has supported and nurtured mourners as well as celebrated with unmitigated happiness births and marriages.

As a feminist, it has been critical for me to find an expression of Judaism that seeks to find places for women within Jewish ritual and learning. I struggle consistently with ways to reconcile my feminist values with a *halachic* approach to Judaism; I only remain within traditional Judaism because I feel that there are ways to reconcile those differences. I have been fortunate to study at places that have offered women equal opportunity to study texts. I have been inspired by my female teachers and peers and by their seriousness with which they engage in the study of Torah, Talmud, and *halacha*. Similarly, I have found that my *davening* community struggles in a meaningful and committed way to find opportunities to include women in rituals within the framework of *halacha*.

I am drawn to *halacha* for several reasons. I feel compelled to see *halacha* as binding based on my understanding of the Torah. I am consistently fascinated by the way *halacha* functions and the way it has evolved. Lastly, *halacha* offers me ways to bring Judaism, God, and spirituality into every aspect of my life — saying blessings before I eat, seeing Shabbat as the culmination of my week, finding the time on a daily basis to pray to God. ❁

As a feminist, it has been critical for me to find an expression of Judaism that seeks to find places for women within Jewish ritual and learning.

Rachel Landsberg is co-president of *Kehilat Orach Eliezer*, a *minyán* on the Upper West Side of New York, and a participant in *Ha Sha’ar*, a program for future day school educators co-sponsored by Drisha Institute and the Beit Rabban Center for Research in Jewish Education. She studied for two years at the Pardes Institute in Jerusalem.



A Website for Young Adult Jews

by Rabbi Hara E. Person

There is a generation gap in Jewish communal life. Most Jews in their 20's and early 30's are not involved with synagogues or other Jewish organizations.

That there is a whole generation missing, a generation that not only does not take advantage of what Judaism has to offer, but even more, that is not contributing its own unique talents, perspectives and energy, is seen as a unique challenge by the Reform movement.

One way to address this generation gap would be to begin innovative young adult programming in synagogues, Jewish community centers, and other Jewish institutions, programming that clearly addresses the needs, priorities and realities of young adult Jews. And that is in fact being done at various places around the country.

But it is also important to

ask where young adult Jews are. They may not be in synagogues, but they are at graduate schools, at the office, the gym, the laundromat, the bookstore, and the coffee bar. And they're on the Internet.

In 1997, the Reform Movement's Commission on Synagogue Affiliation, part of

its Outreach Department, began to think about creating a website that was specifically geared to Jews in their 20's and 30's.

This is, after all, the generation that has come of age with computers, e-mail, and the Internet. A website seemed like the obvious place to meet young adult Jews on their home turf. It was out of this vision that Clickon-

Judaism.org was born.

The aim of clickon-Judaism.org is to create doorways into Judaism for young adult Jews. Clickon-Judaism.org assumes that the audience is media savvy, technologically sophisticated, and has a high level of secular education. It is meant to be a welcoming, content-rich site that allows for dialogue and thought about Jewish identity and making Jewish choices. The site features essays by young Jews, as well as material by rabbis, cantors and Jewish educators. The essays, which are grouped according to categories like "Contemporary Issues," "Why Be Jewish," "Finding A Place," "Tikkun Olam," "Healing," and "Godtalk," change monthly. Some recent titles include "Confessions of a Hebrew School Dropout," "Gay Justice/Jewish Justice," "To Give or Not to Give," and "A Feminist Look at Brit Milah." There is an FAQ (Frequently Asked Question) section with questions that

The aim of clickonJudaism.org is to create doorways into Judaism for young adult Jews.

Want to Contact *C O N T A C T* ?

Contact is an open forum for Jewish dialogue, and your opinion matters. Was there an article you strongly liked or disliked? Agreed or disagreed with? We would love to hear from you.

Mail correspondences to:

**CONTACT, c/o Jewish Life Network
6 East 39th Street, 10th Fl.
New York, NY, 10016**

Or, e-mail us at: info@jewishlife.org

range from Reform perspectives on abortion or homosexuality to questions about theology, life cycles, holiday observances, intermarriage and conversion. There is an Ask Us section, in which viewers are invited to send in their own questions. In addition, viewers are invited to submit essays for consideration.

ClickonJudaism.org is

not ready to physically enter a Jewish institution, the website provides a non-threatening welcome mat. Baggage left over from negative religious school experiences or unresolved childhood encounters with Judaism can be checked at the door. Visitors to the site can

learn about Jewish possibilities without being made to feel Jewishly undereducated or worrying about fitting in, all from the comfort of their own homes or offices. And because the medium of the Internet so easily lends itself to change, the website can

be responsive to feedback and the needs of its audience. Of course, ultimately a website does not a real community make, and being Jewish means being involved in a real, not virtual, community. But clickon-

meant to stimulate the asking of questions. It aims to be a place where seekers can find direction, journeys can begin, connections can be made, and struggles can be informed. Through its variety of essays and features, the website is designed to be a springboard for the creation of Jewish meaning. And the Internet is the perfect medium for this endeavor. For those who are



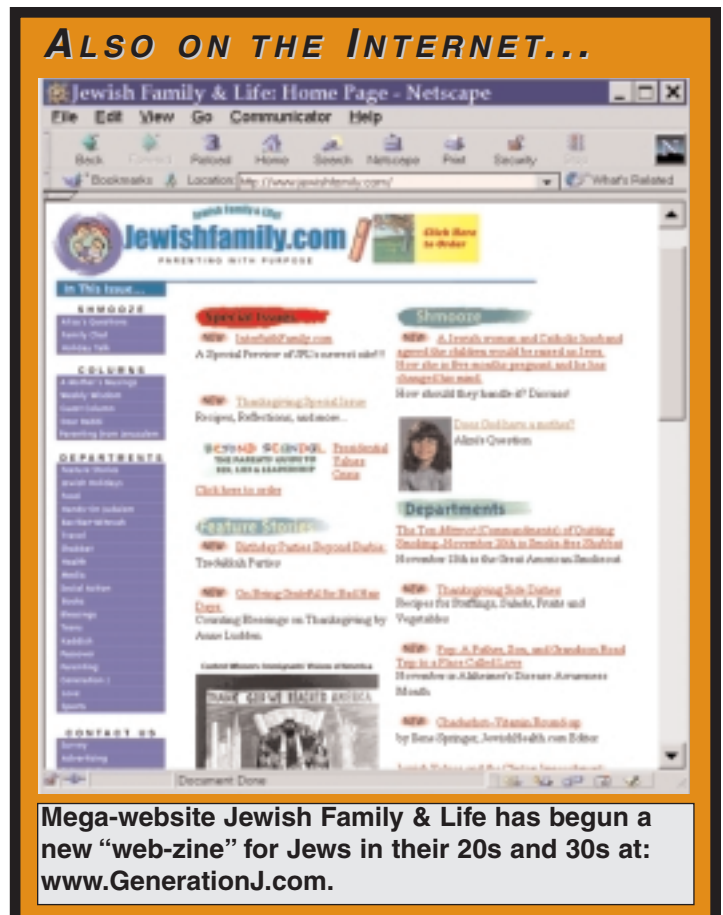
The home page at www.clickonJudaism.org.

Judaism.org can help open doorways into real communities for young Jewish adults.

Rabbi Hara E. Person was ordained by Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. She is Editor of clickonJudaism.org and Editor of the UAHC Press.



Articles on the 'Doing Jewish' page are about "making choices from within that affect your relationship with the world outside of yourself."



Mega-website Jewish Family & Life has begun a new "web-zine" for Jews in their 20s and 30s at: www.GenerationJ.com.

כל ישראל/חברים/Jewish Life Network

A Judy and Michael Steinhardt Foundation

Jewish Life Network is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewry to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational, religious and cultural initiatives that are designed to reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life.

Since the onset of modernity, Jews have struggled with the competing claims of tradition and the open society. Today, Jews are likewise engaged in this struggle but may not connect to the Jewish culture and values which used to unite the Jewish community and keep its members committed.

We believe, however, that it is possible and desirable to transmit the values we cherish while continuing to contribute to American society.

Our aim is the creation of a thriving, dynamic and creative Jewish community within a pluralistic American culture.



חברים כל ישראל

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