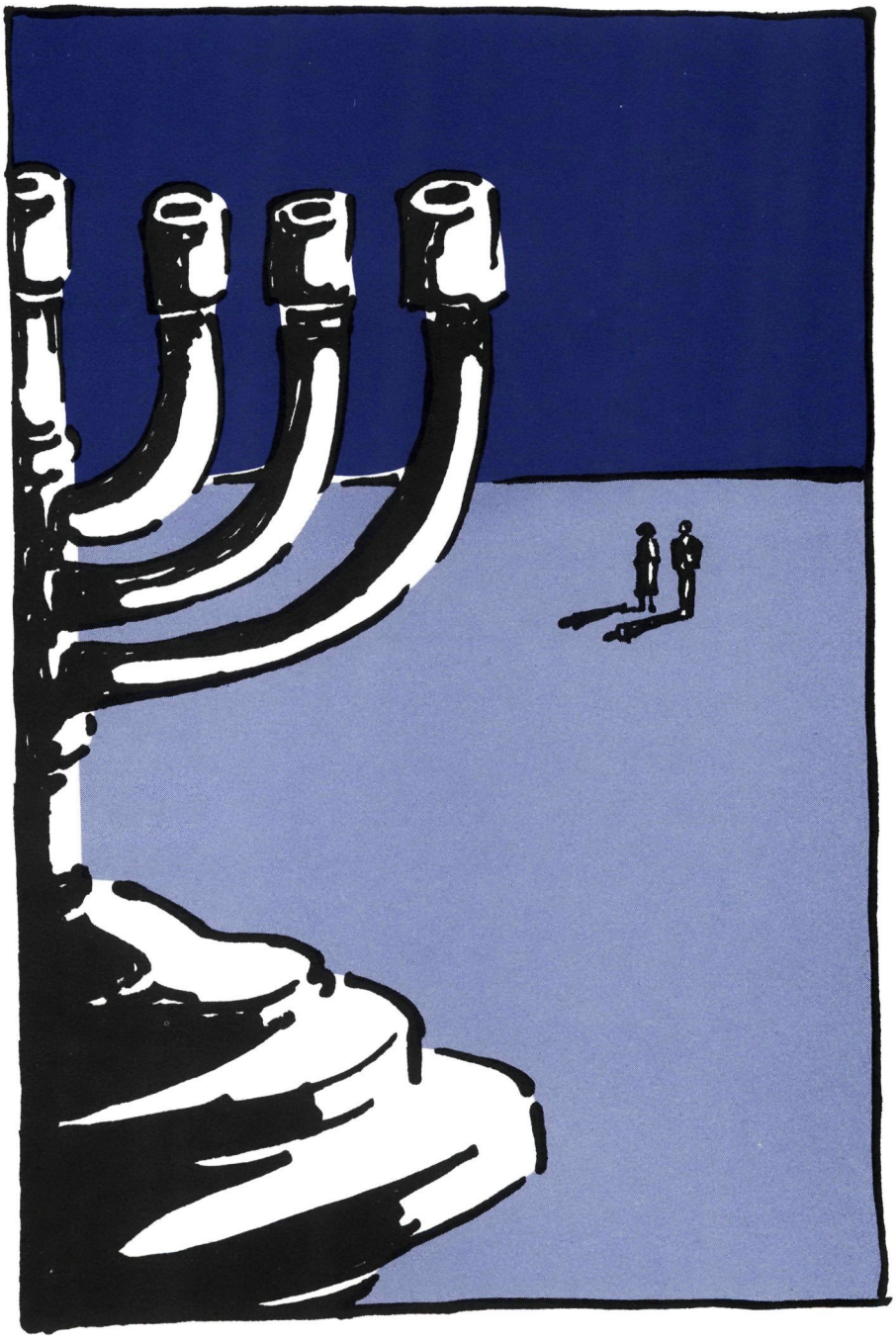
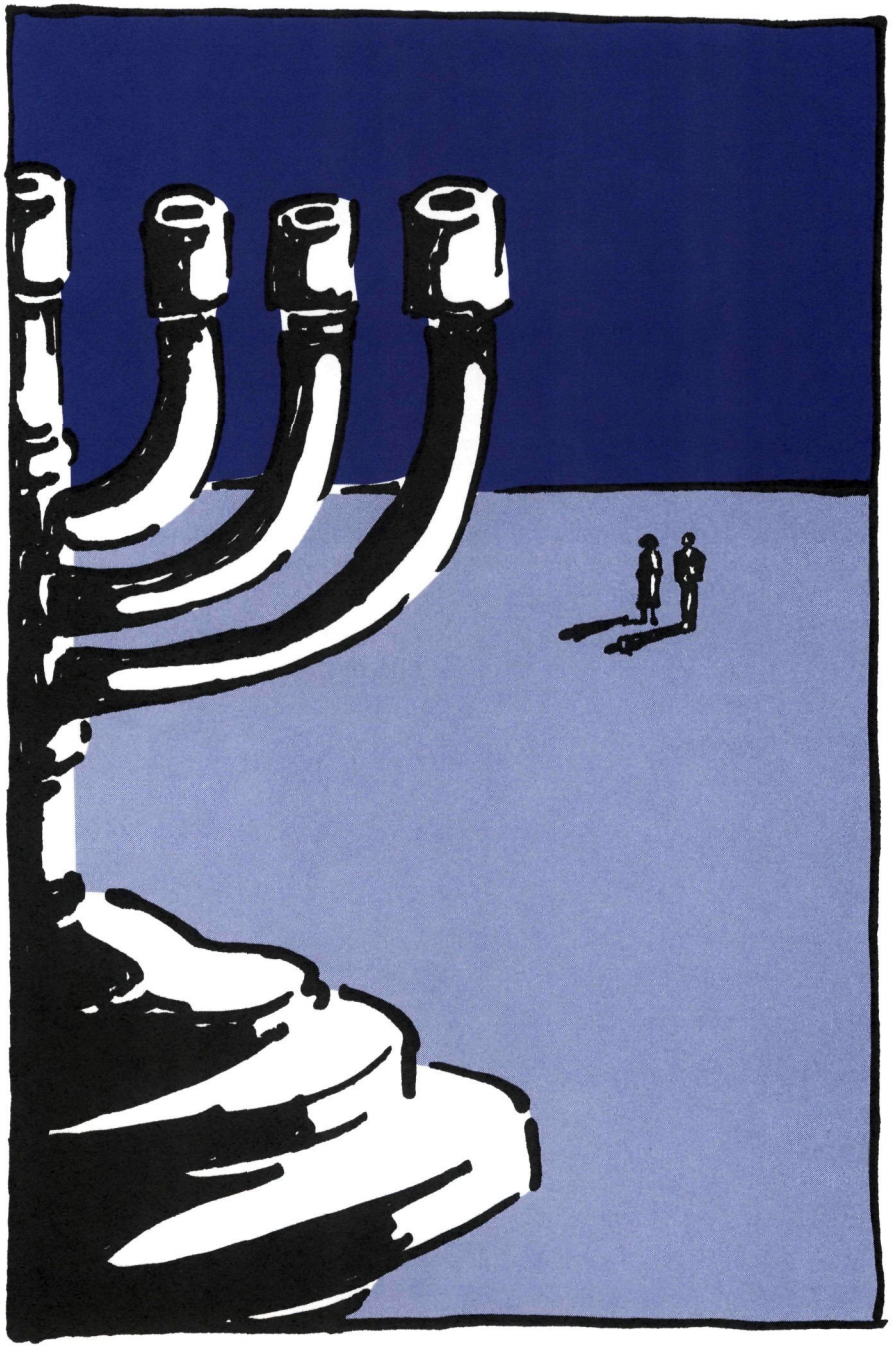


JEWISH OUTREACH

Strategies and Opportunities

Steven M. Cohen

The American Jewish Committee and The Nathan Cummings Foundation



JEWISH OUTREACH

Strategies and Opportunities

Formerly a professor of sociology at Queens College of the City University of New York, Steven M. Cohen now teaches Jewish sociology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. His books include American Modernity and Jewish Identity *(1983) and* American Assimilation or Jewish Revival? *(1988).*

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FOREWORD

For American Jews, "continuity" has become the watchword of the day. The findings of the National Jewish Population Survey have identified Jewish assimilation, illiteracy, and declining Judaic commitments as the critical threats to the American Jewish future. As a result, Jewish communities across North America are struggling to find ways to strengthen Jewish identity and are placing issues of affiliation and Jewish education at the very top of communal agendas. The Council of Jewish Federations recently established a broadly based Commission on Jewish Continuity and task forces on intermarriage and on college students. Such initiatives symbolize the high priority Jewish continuity is receiving on the Jewish communal agenda.

Unfortunately, Jewish continuity is somewhat akin to the weather—everyone talks about it; few know what to do about it. To facilitate meaningful action by the community to enhance continuity, four questions in particular must be addressed. First is the question of target group: Should we focus primarily on those who are completely unaffiliated in the hope of drawing them in, or is there more to be gained by targeting the "middles" of Jewish life, those who have expressed interest in leading a Jewish life but have not yet joined the core group whose daily lives are governed by traditional Jewish norms? This question highlights the differences between advocates of "outreach," who seek to enlarge communal numbers by reaching out, and advocates of "in-reach," who feel priority should be given to creating a Jewish community so attractive that others will wish to join it.

Related to this policy question is the question of principle and ideology: How can the Jewish community preserve norms concerning in-marriage and conversion and effectively target outreach to mixed-married couples and their children? Outreach proponents fear that rhetoric that encourages Jews to marry other Jews or advocates conversion to Judaism will be off-putting to mixed-marrieds for whom conversion is not an immediate prospect. In-reach advocates fear creating a climate in which mixed-marriage becomes simply one option among others, and Jewish communal preferences for in-marriage and conversion become "politically incorrect." To be sure, considerable agreement exists here over the desirability of in-marriage, conversion, and continued outreach to mixed-married homes, but the community must find ways to balance these differing imperatives that are often in tension with one another.

Thirdly, the Jewish continuity agenda is larger than any one sector or set of institutions within the community. Ways must be found to build new coalitions across the lines of the respective religious movements and between the various communal institu-

tions—federations, synagogues, schools, and community centers—all of which have critical interests in addressing Jewish continuity. No one set of Jewish institutions can do the job alone. Rather, we must find ways to enable the different movements and institutions within the community to work together in new and creative ways toward shared goals and objectives.

Finally, to formulate a continuity agenda, the community needs to know which programs are actually working and which are not. The communal landscape is dotted with programs that claim success. Rarely if ever is a program deemed to have failed. Every program can marshal eloquent defenders and advocates who claim that their activities are ensuring Jewish continuity. Any serious communal policy will have to overcome our collective reluctance to acknowledge failure, learn from past mistakes, and be willing to engage in critical evaluation of what have in fact been successful programs to determine their replicability.

The Nathan Cummings Foundation originally commissioned the following paper by Steven M. Cohen to help formulate a philanthropic strategy for funding outreach initiatives. The paper addresses many of the key policy issues that form the core of these communal debates. We present it here as a joint publication of the Nathan Cummings Foundation and the American Jewish Committee to advance communal thinking about how best to pursue a Jewish continuity agenda within the community. It is our hope that communal leaders and policy makers will find it helpful in addressing these critical and often divisive issues of identity and affiliation.

Steven Bayme, Ph.D.
National Director,
Jewish Communal Affairs,
American Jewish Committee

Rabbi Rachel Cowan
Director, Life Affairs,
Nathan Cummings Foundation

SUMMARY

The surging incidence of Jewish-Gentile intermarriage has been a prime factor in promoting the Jewish outreach phenomenon. Jewish outreach refers to a wide variety of efforts aimed at enriching the Jewish lives of "unaffiliated" or "underinvolved" Jews.

In contrast with prevailing attitudes among most conventional Jewish institutions, the outreach approach embodies a readiness to welcome the mixed-married and others who are remote from Jewish life. It is also marked by a more aggressive promotion of Judaism amid the wider American marketplace of competing cultural currents and affiliations.

This report aims to help both potential philanthropists and the outreach field to understand this relatively new phenomenon in American Jewish life. The report describes how outreach works, highlights major controversies within the field, examines why many Jews feel remote from prevailing currents of American Judaism, and suggests some areas where philanthropic intervention can be most effective.

Outreach specialists are at odds over which groups to target. Some focus their work primarily upon interfaith couples. Others engage in a form of "inreach." They try to upgrade the involvement, enthusiasm, and education of the "moderately affiliated," those who belong to (or are likely to join) synagogues and other Jewish agencies but who are not much involved in Jewish life. Although these differences are not crucial for understanding how outreach operates, they lie at the heart of a divisive and potentially counterproductive debate within the field.

Those who want to target interfaith families argue that this population is growing enormously and that, as a result, hundreds of thousands of grandchildren of today's American Jews will not identify as Jews. They also note that many such families, owing to their internal religious differences, are open to interaction with outreach professionals, though possibly only for the next five to ten years. They accuse those who want to focus primarily on the affiliated as, in effect, writing off the huge number of mixed-married young parents.

Those who want to focus primarily on the moderately affiliated believe that this group is easier to identify and reach, and that it is more open to elevating their involvement in Jewish life. Moreover, the more traditional members of this camp believe that most of the outreach efforts to the mixed-married have the undesirable effect of legitimating intermarriage, undermining the traditional Jewish ideal of in-marriage, and raising the intermarriage rate even higher.

Outreach workers from both camps level a trenchant critique against their colleagues in the established Jewish community. They claim that many rabbis, educators, social workers, and lay leaders lack the interest or motivation to search out and welcome less

". . . they criticize the Jewish community's inability to present Judaism in ways that address underinvolved Jews' most keenly felt problems."

involved Jews. They also claim that most of their colleagues lack the requisite "people skills." Last, they criticize the Jewish community's inability to present Judaism in ways that address underinvolved Jews' most keenly felt spiritual and personal problems.

Outreach programs vary widely. They include courses in basic Judaism, workshops for interfaith couples, beginners' worship services, Jewish family activities, how-to holiday instructional sessions, and, most broadly, whole communities that make special efforts to recruit and welcome underinvolved Jews. The major "players" in outreach efforts include: Lubavitcher Hasidim, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (of Reform Judaism), Jewish Community Centers, scores of extraordinary congregations from all denominations, specialized services that are marketed to synagogues and JCCs, feminist communities, spiritually oriented communities, the *havurah* movement, and, from a philanthropic perspective, the Avi-Hai Foundation of New York.

The major targets of outreach efforts are parents of preschool children, interfaith families, and unmarried younger adults. Why and how are these (and others) remote from Jewish life? The answers include the following: simple indifference to being Jewish; disappointment with the spiritual quality of most congregations; anxiety of feeling incompetent in Jewish settings; fear of reproach for not "measuring up" Jewishly; fear of rejection; political remoteness; financial concerns; and assorted unhappy personal circumstances.

Good outreach programs are noted for their warm and caring communities. They also tend to focus on some higher Jewish purpose such as Jewish learning, prayer, or social-justice activities. Other features of successful outreach programs and professionals include: low entry barriers; a suspension of judgment; empathetic, exuberant, and engaged teachers; a Judaic ideology coupled with a qualified pluralism; a presentation of Judaism as relevant to existential personal problems; a commitment to egalitarian treatment of men and women; and empowerment of lay people (not just volunteers) to undertake Jewish activities. These features, both singly and in combination, distinguish outreach programs from their conventional counterparts.

The research points to four areas of philanthropic opportunity:

1. Address the debate between advocates of outreach to the intermarried and of inreach to the moderately affiliated. The report suggests a consultation process of key advocates.

2. Build the outreach field as a recognized and cohesive professional community. A national conference with provision for follow-up is recommended.

3. Attempt to reshape the ethos of mainstream Judaism by teaching and applying the outreach critique. Recommended here is the designation of four or five existing centers of Jewish outreach excellence that could influence key constituencies in Jewish life.

4. Selectively encourage alternative Judaic movements; that is, support pilot projects and replication capabilities for selected projects of Jewish feminists, environmentalists, and spiritually oriented communities.

WHY OUTREACH?

The outreach approach is driven by a heightened concern among communal professionals and lay leaders over the very survival of organized American Jewry. In contrast with the prevailing posture heretofore, the outreach ethos embodies a readiness among Jewish leaders and institutions to promote Jewish involvement aggressively in the wider American marketplace of competing cultural currents and communal affiliations.

Some outreach programs serve, in effect, as recruitment mechanisms for synagogues, Jewish Community Centers (JCCs), and other mainstream institutions. Others, in contrast, sharply differentiate themselves from conventional Jewish life so as to especially appeal to those who find established Jewish institutions unattractive. But whatever their relationship with mainstream Jewish institutions, outreach programs in their entirety exhibit something new and distinctive in Jewish communal life, a significant departure from the standard operating procedures of organized Jewish life.

This study aims to help shape philanthropic policy in the area of Jewish outreach. It also seeks to contribute more broadly to a better understanding of this area of Jewish communal endeavor.

To be clear at the outset, our objective here is not to identify specific projects for possible funding. Rather, the goal is to provide the knowledge base essential to the intelligent formulation of philanthropic policy to enhance Jewish outreach efforts in the United States.

The outreach subspecialty is just now beginning to emerge as a distinct arena of professional endeavor. Few outreach professionals are aware of one another, let alone maintain regular collegial relations. By assembling the professional lore and wisdom and by highlighting areas of need, this report aims to help crystallize the outreach specialty and help advance the outreach specialists' efforts to gain recognition and tangible support.

The research undertaken for this report relied primarily upon extensive conversations with outreach-oriented professionals in the New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles metropolitan areas. These included pulpit rabbis, Jewish Community Center workers, educators, social scientists, seminarians, social workers, agency executives, and volunteers (see Sources). I also examined the research literature, grant proposals, meeting minutes, promotional materials, and training manuals.

The report begins by developing a working definition of Jewish outreach. It then describes the major obstacles to Jewish involvement experienced by "underinvolved" Jews (be they in-married, out-married, or unmarried). The report proceeds to identify the key characteristics, objectives, and techniques that distinguish good outreach programs. Last, it lays out questions and

issues that can help shape philanthropic policy designed to strengthen efforts to enhance the Jewish involvement of large numbers of underinvolved American Jews. In short, this report asks and answers four questions: (1) What is outreach? (2) What is the nature of the problems it addresses? (3) How does outreach work? (4) How can philanthropic agencies help?

A note on terminology: Practitioners in the world of Jewish outreach refer to the targets of their efforts in a variety of ways, calling them "unaffiliated," "peripheral," or "marginal" Jews. This terminology derives from a conception of American Jewry as divided between a core community of active Jews and a periphery of unaffiliated Jews. Most activists believe that their peripheral counterparts ought to be more involved in conventional Jewish life both for their own good and for that of organized Jewry. No convenient terminology avoids these presumptive images and norms. For want of a more neutral and felicitous term, then, this report refers to those constituting the principal target audience of outreach efforts as "underinvolved" Jews, perhaps only slightly more neutral than "unaffiliated," "peripheral," or "marginal." The term "underinvolved" will be used in this report to embrace two key subpopulations: the mixed-married (or interfaith families) and the marginally affiliated (Jews who are not mixed-married but are regarded as maintaining only perfunctory affiliation with the Jewish community, if any at all).

A WORKING DEFINITION

Jewish outreach is a vague and evolving term that takes on somewhat different meanings in different contexts.

To the Reform movement, outreach refers primarily to efforts to involve interfaith families (both Jewish and Gentile spouses) in temple activities and to engage them in Jewish life more broadly. In contrast, for several Orthodox outreach agencies, the key objective is to bring about the "return" to Judaism of bona fide Jews who are seen as alienated from traditional Jewish life. To many synagogue leaders, outreach connotes efforts to recruit new synagogue members, or to activate and retain current members. To leaders of philanthropic campaigns, outreach means seeking out new donors. To some Jewish educators, outreach refers to efforts to upgrade the Judaic knowledge, liturgical skills, or leadership capabilities of those who are already somewhat committed to conventional Jewish involvement.

To make matters more complicated, outreach need not be explicitly labeled as such. The Jewish Community Center field sees itself as constituting a vast outreach vehicle. JCCs believe they provide accessible and nonthreatening ports of entry to Jewish life for many who would not readily affiliate with

synagogues and other more demanding institutions. Jewish feminists and environmentalists, as well as those in certain spiritually oriented Jewish communities, also lay claim to the outreach mantle. These movements see themselves as providing distinctive alternatives to conventional Jewish life for those who find Jewish mainstream institutions unappealing for whatever reason.

Outreach, in the broadest of terms, can even be said to characterize most synagogues, schools, Jewish organizations, and charitable drives. To assure their continuity, all Jewish institutions must at some time and in some way recruit new members or supporters, and invigorate them with commitment to Judaism and the institution. However they go about doing so could, theoretically, be termed outreach. To be sure, this usage may take us too far afield. Most outreach professionals would reject a definition of outreach so broad as to encompass the normal recruitment operations of conventional Jewish agencies. Instead, they would argue, outreach should refer exclusively to programs and activities that target those who would not otherwise be active in Jewish life.

For purposes of this report, then, "outreach" will encompass all efforts to recruit, educate, and activate underinvolved Jews, regardless of whether they are intermarried, but excluding the normal recruitment and mobilization activities of conventional Jewish organizations. This definition goes beyond the Reform movement's usage, which focuses on activities directed at the intermarried. Rather, it includes what some call "inreach," that is, enrichment efforts aimed at inactive but affiliated Jews.

The debate over which population to target—the mixed-married or otherwise underinvolved Jews—is crucial to policy-makers, and it is a topic that we explore immediately below in some detail. But, at least for purposes of much of the research presented subsequently, we need not distinguish between outreach programs aimed at the mixed-married and those aimed at other underinvolved Jews.

"The debate over which population to target—the mixed-married or otherwise underinvolved Jews—is crucial to policy-makers . . ."

OUTREACH VS INREACH

Outreach professionals are divided over the efficacy of targeting two major Jewish population groups—mixed-married families or Jews who are only "moderately affiliated" with conventional Jewish life (for analysis of the "moderately affiliated," see Cohen 1986 and 1991b).

Those who advocate investing heavily in reaching Jews who have married non-Jews (as well as their children and Gentile spouses) note that the number of mixed-married Jews is large and growing. Almost half of Jews who have married recently have married Gentiles who have not converted to Judaism, and that rate figures to grow. Forcefully advocating in-marriage, according to this camp, will do little to lower the intermarriage rate:

> The dramatic rise in the rate of Jewish intermarriage raised with new urgency the question of what should the community do about it. The conventional response of most Jewish parents, rabbis, and other community leaders of admonishing young Jews not to marry Gentiles, and castigating them when they did so, had clearly not prevented intermarriage rates from rising to unprecedented heights. (Mayer 1991:44)

Many mixed-married Jews are on the verge of leaving the Jewish people or are creating "dual-identity" households marked by both Jewish and Christian customs and ceremonies (Medding et al. 1992). Outreach efforts may have the effect of retaining their connection to Jewishness or even of winning over Gentile-born newcomers through conversion. Thus outreach to the mixed-married pertains both to the quality of Jewish involvement and to the sheer number of identifying Jews.

Outreach advocates contend that not only is reaching the mixed-married urgent; it is also quite feasible. Some interfaith marriages provoke a heightened interest in exploring the partners' religious identities and patterns of family relationships (Cowan and Cowan 1987; Mayer 1985a). Perhaps paradoxically, intermarriage may open a window of opportunity for intervention by outreach workers.

Finally, time is of the essence. The tens of thousands of mixed-married Jewish couples who have wed only in the last five or ten years may not be accessible to organized Jewry at all in just a few more years.

The counterargument that stresses working primarily with the moderately affiliated starts with the supposition that this group is so much easier (and cheaper) to identify and reach than are the mixed-married. About 80 percent of Jews eventually join a synagogue (if only to provide bar/bat mitzvah lessons for their children). It follows that a very large number of Jews are now (or have been) affiliated, but most of these have done so without much passion, enthusiasm, involvement, or knowledge. It is

fair to say that the moderately affiliated make up the bulk of members of Conservative and Reform synagogues.

Richard Israel (1985) writes:

> Outreach is only one aspect of a two-sided problem, inreach being the other. In many respects one of the very best places for us to fish is right in our private ponds, among our own memberships. Right now, we already have more people than we know how to utilize well, people whose energies we have not figured out how to engage. If these people are truly enriched by their Jewish institutional experiences, they will inevitably convey a powerful recruiting message for others who will also want similarly to enrich their own lives.
>
> One of the curious features of an energetic outreach program is that it works in several directions. The best way to do outreach is to build up an inner community and one of the best ways to build up an inner community is to do outreach.

In stark contrast with the moderately affiliated, mixed-married Jews encounter a major obstacle to increasing their Jewish involvement or that of their children. By definition, they are married to non-Jews, many of whom maintain their own religious or ethnic commitments. The Gentile partners, especially those with strong ties to other religions, may well resist introducing Jewish customs and ceremonies into their homes.

Moreover, advocates of focusing upon the moderately affiliated claim, stronger Jewish communities will indirectly help curtail the mixed-marriage rate and encourage conversion. The thinking here is that more attractive Jewish communities will give Jews a reason and a context to meet and marry fellow Jews, and that only an attractive community stands a good chance of prompting the born-Gentile spouses of mixed-married Jews to consider converting.

In short, both sides claim that their target population is large and pivotal; both claim that their respective population is accessible and malleable; and both claim that outreach efforts with their segment will have ramifications beyond the specific group in question.

The debate between the two camps extends beyond the narrow question of how best to allocate scarce resources. The advocates of reaching interfaith families believe that members of the opposing camp want to totally abandon the mixed-married as unworthy of communal efforts. Advocates of reaching the moderately affiliated, in turn, think that their counterparts are undermining the historic Jewish prohibition against intermarriage by dissolving the heretofore clearly defined boundary between Jews and Gentiles.

This camp opposes what they regard as overly accommodating the mixed-married if only because, in their view, some outreach activities undermine the traditional prohibition against intermarriage. Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee has argued:

> We cannot afford a climate in which rabbis and communal leaders—to say nothing of parents—are incapable of articulating a preference for in-marriage lest they offend those already intermarried. There is a natural tension

". . . abandoning the historic norm against marrying non-Jews violates a dearly held principle of Jewish life . . . "

between outreach and efforts at intermarriage prevention. (1992a:5)

Elsewhere he writes:

> Does outreach [to mixed-marrieds], 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? (1992b:8)

Whether, in fact, welcoming the mixed-married undermines the endogamy norm and whether, in fact, this norm actually discourages intermarriage remain open questions. But, it should be noted, the competing camps ultimately base their positions on considerations of moral principle rather than on considerations of potential effectiveness in stemming intermarriage or reaching the intermarried. For the traditionally minded, abandoning (or undermining) the historic norm against marrying non-Jews violates a dearly held principle of Jewish life that is a critical precondition for a healthy Jewish community. For the less traditionally minded, disapproving of intermarriage in clear and loud terms presents an insurmountable obstacle to their efforts to reach the mixed-married and preserve their connections with their Jewish families and the Jewish people. In fact, maintaining high "standards" is, in their view, part of the problem that will inhibit the success of outreach efforts:

> Now that the Jewish community is going public to stave off the corrosive effects of assimilation through outreach, a danger arises that the terms for participation will be set by Jews—rabbis, Jewish communal professionals, lay leaders—whose Jewish lives have always been highly public. Admirable though they are, the example of these Jewish leaders is likely to set standards so high that large numbers of the potential target prospects will be prevented from participating. . . . [Mixed-married] couples need low risk opportunities for Jewish involvement: opportunities that hold out the promise of warmth, connectedness and affirmation of self-worth without the immediate specter of overwhelming obligations like saving the Jewish people, defending Israel against her enemies and becoming holy. (Mayer 1992:40)

Deeply held moral convictions clearly are operating on both sides. The most vigorous advocates in each camp think their approach is ethically necessary even if the factual predictions of their opponents prove accurate. Advocates of inreach would resist many forms of outreach to the intermarried even if thousands of mixed-married families would come to participate in Jewish life. The infiltration into the Jewish population of what they regard as Gentiles posing as Jews is a frightening prospect for the more traditional opponents of outreach to the mixed-married. Similarly, advocates of outreach to interfaith families would hold fast to their position even if they were convinced that their activities helped erode the endogamy norm and elevated the intermarriage rate. For them, the large number of Jews married to Gentiles demands a welcoming response on the part of the Jewish community.

Ultimately, the dispute derives from conflicting visions of Judaism. The inreach camp speaks of tradition, stan-

dards, and authenticity. The outreach camp talks of adaptation, compassion, and inclusiveness. The two schools have very different ideas of who is a Jew, who can become a Jew (and how), and what constitutes a worthwhile Jewish community.

The debate is further clouded by our collective ignorance of several crucial pieces of information. We have had no rigorous assessments of the effectiveness of outreach programs. We know neither the number of individuals who are affected by outreach programs nor the extent to which they are influenced to enhance their Jewish involvement. We have only a vague idea of how many dollars it costs to affect one individual. And even if this information were at our disposal, how are we to assess the relative value of different kinds of impact?

Suppose, for example, that a particular outreach program succeeds with a particular mixed-married family. This family—who otherwise would have departed entirely from the Jewish people —decides to start celebrating several Jewish holidays and to send their children to Jewish supplementary schools, actions they would not have taken in the absence of outreach efforts. Now, suppose that another program succeeds with yet another hypothetical family. This family, headed by an in-married Jewish couple, had been situated on the inactive periphery of a congregation. As a result of the successful inreach program, this family becomes highly active in prayer, study, and volunteer activities, and decides to send their children to Jewish day school.

Putting aside the question of which scenario is more likely, which of these sorts of changes is more important, valuable, or consequential? Is it more important to preserve a very fragile connection to the Jewish people from unraveling altogether, or is it more important to elevate the level of involvement of affiliated but inactive Jews? The answer to this question rests ultimately upon Jewish values rather than social-scientific evidence.

For many policy-makers the decision as to which population to serve (the mixed-married or the moderately affiliated) is heavily influenced by personal inclinations and family circumstances. No matter what the research would tell them, it would be hard to imagine Orthodox supporters of outreach suddenly investing heavily in working with interfaith couples; and it would be equally hard to imagine Reform temple leadership choosing to virtually ignore interfaith families in favor of a near-exclusive focus on the marginally affiliated members of Reform congregations.

At this point, we can only suppose that both outreach efforts directed at the mixed-married and those aimed at the moderately affiliated have some merit. We lack the information necessary to make a sound rational judgment as to which is more effective, and even were such information available, most policy-makers in the field would ignore the so-called "hard evidence" and rely on their own values and inclinations.

"Deeply held moral convictions clearly are operating on both sides. The most vigorous advocates in each camp think their approach is ethically necessary even if the factual predictions of their opponents prove accurate."

THE OUTREACH CRITIQUE

Outreach practitioners—whether those who work with interfaith couples or those who work with the moderately affiliated—are a varied lot. They differ in terms of ideology, region, target audience, and institutional setting. They may be congregational rabbis, Jewish Community Center workers, Hillel directors, adult educators, family-service workers, or volunteers. But despite ideological, geographic, and professional diversity, outreach practitioners agree on a set of propositions that together constitute what may be called the outreach critique.

Fundamental to this perspective is a great sense of urgency about the prospect of the Jewish population losing hundreds of thousands if not millions of members in the not too distant future. The following remarks by Jerry Witkowsky of the JCC of Chicago illustrate this sentiment:

> I believe we have a window of opportunity of only 30-40 years in which to deal with the Jewish identity issues of Jewish Americans. I fear, along with some scholars in the field, that if we don't address these issues, the only Jews left in America will be the Orthodox.

But outreach professionals are not just gravely concerned about the American Jewish future; they are also deeply disappointed in the response of mainstream organized Jewry to the looming crisis in American Jewish identity. Almost universally, outreach workers assign some, if not much, of the blame for the breadth of Jewish alienation to the general run of Jewish educators, rabbis, social workers, and lay leaders.

To elaborate, outreach workers often feel that many of their colleagues lack the sheer interest to reach out to underinvolved Jews, many of whom seem hopelessly alienated from Jewish life. Mainstream Jewish professionals, it is alleged, often find little fulfillment in working with Jews who seem to know little and care little about being Jewish. Some in the outreach field go so far as to accuse their counterparts of "bias" in their dealings with interfaith couples, a major segment of the underinvolved population.

Beyond questioning the motivations of their conventional colleagues, outreach workers also claim that many Jewish professionals, especially congregational rabbis, are deficient in "people skills." The claim here is that pulpit rabbis' training and personalities may make them well-suited for the roles of formal educator or administrator or public figure, to take just three of the many demands placed upon the American congregational rabbi. But, the critique alleges, many rabbis are neither predisposed nor extensively trained in how to touch, reach, and motivate the underinvolved to become more Jewishly active.

Outreach professionals cite one further alleged shortcoming among their col-

leagues: the lack of a conceptualization of Judaism and Jewish identity that is appropriate for engaging the underinvolved. With respect to social workers, the outreach professionals claim that they often lack sufficient grounding in a normative Jewish way of life, and as a corollary, they lack the skills and background to make Jewish life appealing to the Jews with whom they work. The complaint against the rabbis and the educators takes on a different coloration. Here, many outreach professionals argue, these potential Judaic role models fail to address spiritual concerns and questions. Moreover, the critique claims, rabbis and educators overlook opportunities to relate the virtues of Judaism to the private emotional needs of individuals as they encounter some of life's more difficult moments.

This report cannot gauge precisely the validity of this critique. It cannot determine the extent to which Jewish professionals lack interest in the underinvolved, or skills in relating to people, or the ability to address Judaism to people's most urgent existential problems. Suffice it to say that even professional training institutions, professional societies, and organizations of lay leaders have at least rhetorically recognized these issues. Some of the rabbinical seminaries have instituted changes in the curriculum to enhance the future rabbis' sensitivity to spiritual issues, to help them contend with the problematics of frequent intermarriage, and to strengthen their skills as pastors and educators. Some rabbinical associations have undertaken in-service training sessions with similar goals in mind. The Jewish Community Center movement has been placing a higher premium on skills in Judaic programming and has sought to enrich the Jewish background of its workers. The very behavior of these and other mainstream institutions suggests that they themselves concur at least in part with the outreach critique outlined above.

Outreach workers believe that they succeed where others have failed—or not even tried. Outreach professionals are convinced that many underinvolved Jews can be "reached" with the proper message and techniques. At the same time, they readily acknowledge that their approaches are more appropriate for the many underinvolved Jews than for the already active minority. The classes, workshops, retreats, rabbis, educators, and synagogues that are most attractive to those most remote from Jewish life are often, at the same time, decidedly uninteresting to those already very involved in the Jewish community. Those who are Judaically knowledgeable, committed to Jewish values, and active in Jewish institutions are, almost by definition, more satisfied with the available options for Jewish involvement and often view outreach programs as too elementary, "glitzy," or "touchy-feely."

In short, outreach is not meant for everybody; but in an age where the underinvolved are sharply increasing, the outreach field is arguing that conventional institutions need to rethink the way they relate to the huge number of inactive Jews, be they formally affiliated (or not) or out-married (or not).

SOME OUTREACH PROGRAMS

How have outreach professionals responded to the large number of underinvolved Jews? The answer defies simple categories. It includes such programs as courses in basic Judaism, workshops for interfaith couples, beginners' worship services, Jewish family activities, how-to holiday instructional sessions, and whole communities that make special efforts to recruit the underinvolved. These and related programs, policies, and activities constitute the emerging field of Jewish outreach (see Mayer 1991; Mayer and Dragonne 1992).

Among the more significant "players" in this field are the Lubavitcher Hasidim with their network of Habad houses, public-relations campaigns, mitzvah mobiles, and itinerant seminarians; the Jewish Community Centers with their growing number of Judaic culture specialists, basic Judaism courses, family events, and holiday workshops; and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the congregational arm of Reform Judaism that has been vigorously urging its congregations to address interfaith couples and their children.

In addition, one must also note the efforts of several widely scattered rabbis and congregations of all denominations (Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist); the entire campus Hillel movement (which must be seen as primarily a massive outreach enterprise); outreach "wholesalers" such as the Orthodox-oriented National Jewish Outreach Project, which supplies congregations with ready-made instructions for outreach programming, or the Florence Melton Mini-School, which provides a similar service for sponsors of elementary Jewish adult learning; and the variety of alternative Jewish movements that especially appeal to Jews who are "turned off" to mainstream Jewish institutions. Included under this latter rubric are various Jewish feminist endeavors, spiritually oriented communities and teachers, the nascent Jewish environmentalist movement, and the phenomenon of *havurot*, the intimate prayer-and-study communities found in many non-Orthodox synagogues.

To date, the major single philanthropic force in this field has been the Avi-Hai Foundation. The New York-based philanthropy lists three top priorities in its brochure: networking of outreach professionals; training programs for outreach professionals; and outreach to parents of children in Jewish schools.

Consistent with these aims, the Foundation recently provided several hundred thousand dollars to the Association for Jewish Outreach Professionals, a network of Orthodox educators established in 1988. In addition, the Foundation supports programs at the major Reform and Orthodox rabbinical seminaries in outreach training. Most recently, the Foundation made grants totaling $1,370,000 to "24 Conservative, Orthodox and Reform organizations, primarily

synagogues and day schools" to help "make both outreach to the unaffiliated and inreach to the affiliated high priorities of their institutional missions." Most of the twenty-four projects focus on some version of adult education, and most are directed at groups described as "younger adult" and at "unaffiliated" populations. Just a few target the mixed-married explicitly.

The diversity of the outreach field makes it difficult for the lay policy-maker to make sense of the huge variety of endeavors. To help in the construction of a "mental map" of the outreach field, each program can be characterized by four key dimensions:

1. *Distance from the client*: To what extent does this program deal directly with the underinvolved rather than provide backup or preparatory service?
2. *Audience*: Who are the underinvolved Jews to whom this program is directed?
3. *Auspice*: Who sponsors the program and where does it take place?
4. *Activity*: What does the program do?

With respect to *distance from the client*, we observe several possibilities. The most frequent is direct service, wherein outreach workers deal directly with the underinvolved. One step removed from the front line are the "wholesale programs" (e.g., the National Jewish Outreach Project or the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School). As noted, these programs have been fully designed by some central agency and are, in effect, "franchised" to local purveyors such as synagogues and Jewish Community Centers. Next, we can think of various sorts of leadership training programs designed to improve the skills, interests, and connections among outreach personnel. Programs run by the rabbinical seminaries and professional societies qualify under this rubric. Last, we can think of endeavors that aim broadly at changing the public perception of Jewish involvement. Publicity campaigns by the congregational movements and the efforts by the Lubavitcher Hasidim fall under this rubric.

Most outreach programs specialize in a specific *audience*. The primary target groups are interfaith couples; unaffiliated Jews (regardless of marital status); the inactive affiliated (efforts to reach this group are often called "inreach"); single adults; younger adults; feminists; the spiritually oriented; Soviet Jewish immigrants; gays; the disabled; and college students.

Next, we need to consider the issue of *auspice* or location. The choices here include: synagogues (of all denominations), JCCs, Jewish schools, or some alternative location (e.g., a *havurah*, a Jewish feminist center, or a private home).

Last, we need to be aware of the range of *activities*. Most activities concentrate on building well-functioning communities or social settings whose principal stated raison d'être entails some combination of learning, worship, and social action.

The four dimensions of distance, audience, auspice, and activity produce a huge number of possible configurations of outreach programs. Fortunately for the philanthropist (and, perhaps unfortunately for the field), not every theoretical possibility is represented.

WHO ARE THE UNDER-INVOLVED?

Who are the "underinvolved" Jews, and why are they underinvolved? Not surprisingly, members of this critical population group are fairly diverse, both in terms of their social background and in their attitudes toward Jewish involvement:

> If we ought to have learned anything from the marketing people, it is to recognize that our Jewish outreach market is segmented and that we cannot assume that all people are equally promising prospects every moment of their lives. They are not. (Israel 1985)

Most outreach institutions focus on three population segments, either singly or in combination: parents of preschool children, interfaith families, and unmarried younger adults. The *parents of preschool children* are often rethinking their Jewish involvement as a consequence of having children. As one outreach worker put it in a recent study: "You get to the mothers because of the children, and you get to the fathers because of the mothers" (Heilman 1991:9). The *interfaith families* are seen as especially at risk of severing all connections to the Jewish people. Moreover, for some, interfaith marriage provokes a ferment, curiosity, and openness that make them ideal candidates for outreach programs. Last, *unmarried younger adults* are seen as at risk of intermarrying and are often said to feel unwelcome in Jewish institutions. This concern underlies a large number of singles-oriented programs in synagogues and JCCs. (Although these programs were not included in this research, they do constitute a form of outreach nonetheless.)

To be sure, several outreach programs target other constituencies: e.g., college students, gays and lesbians, the physically disabled, and recent immigrants from the Soviet Union. However, the bulk of outreach efforts focus upon the three groups noted above.

Why do younger parents, the mixed-married, single adults, and others exhibit relatively low levels of Jewish involvement? Part of the answer is found in the sorts of beliefs and attitudes that diminish interest and obstruct participation in Jewish life. Together, these views constitute a psychographic profile of the underinvolved young-adult Jewish population, the most prominent elements of which follow.

Apparent Indifference to Judaism

Many underinvolved Jews certainly recognize their Jewish ancestry and identity, but for them their Jewishness—such as it is—holds little emotional import, positive or negative, and little substantive meaning. They see few, if any, ways in which Judaism can enrich their lives or address their most deeply felt existential questions. In short, they can appear as Jewish as President Nixon was a Quaker.

Egon Mayer (1985b:6) offers the following portrait of Jews who may be

regarded by some as indifferent or nearly so:

> In fact, we all know them very well. They are our cousins whom we have not seen since our Bar Mitzvah. They are our brothers and sisters who have not set foot inside the synagogue since theirs. Or they may be an aunt, uncle or brother-in-law who married a Christian and now finds it uncomfortable to join the rest of the family in celebrating the Jewish holidays . . . .
>
> Upon direct scrutiny, none of these people may feel particularly "alienated" from or "alien" to the Jewish community. Indeed, most will say, "Look, nearly all my friends are Jewish. We think Jewish thoughts, we laugh at Jewish jokes, and we certainly eat Jewish foods — we even like the same Chinese restaurants. We're just not religious. But we are probably in the majority among American Jews. We're not alienated. We feel perfectly at home among all the others."

A recent study of these sorts of Jews suggests that they are not totally indifferent to their Jewish background. Rather, their Jewishness is recalled in certain social contexts. Jewish identity for the unaffiliated or underinvolved may be situational, as it is for others. However, for the unaffiliated, Jewishly meaningful situations are more episodic, less frequent than they are for more Jewishly involved or active individuals:

> Most of the unaffiliated were aware of being Jewish [only] when they were with other Jews (family, holidays, life-cycle events) and felt positively connected, or when they were with non-Jews and felt different. (Padva 1991:21)

The claim by many underinvolved Jews that "we're just not religious," as suggested by Mayer above, may well signify not an antagonism to Judaism as such. Rather, like many Americans and West Europeans, this view may derive from an aversion to organized religion, particularly synagogues, rabbis, and observant Jews. Outreach professionals argue that those who say they are not religious include many who harbor spiritual concerns and interests.

Spiritually Disappointed

Jews with strong spiritual interests who are disappointed with conventional synagogues, rabbis, and congregants may turn to religious, cultural, and political movements outside of Jewish life. This phenomenon underlies the overrepresentation of Jews in Eastern religious movements, New Age groups, meditative communities, and others. As one such Jew is quoted as saying:

> Non-Jews are more stimulating and *I like to share my religious convictions with them*. They are often so spiritual. My Jewish friends will say things like, "How many boxes of matzohs did you buy?" (Padva 1991:22-23; emphasis added).

The paucity of spiritually oriented Jewish communities is a frequently voiced theme among outreach professionals:

> There is a strong need for a community in which it is the norm and not the exception to raise and to discuss both personal and more general religious issues; people want to be able to talk about their doubts, their progress or their lack of it, their ability or inability to pray, to express their angers, and to receive both support and reproof from their fellows. Such a community, of which many examples exist outside the Jewish world today, enhances one's ability to become a religious person. . . . The Jewish community is experienced by

"They see few, if any, ways in which Judaism can enrich their lives or address their most deeply felt existential questions. In short, they can appear as Jewish as President Nixon was a Quaker."

> many as primarily social, and not religious in its nature. (Omer-Man 1984:15)

The Anxiety of Incompetence

American Jews—one of this society's most highly educated and highly professionalized ethnic groups—are particularly unaccustomed to dealing with incompetence in any sphere of life. Owing in part to their high level of achievement, the customary sense of anxiety associated with not knowing what to do in social situations may well be magnified for American Jews. Indeed, underinvolved Jews commonly report that they are reluctant to venture into synagogue services (or other arenas of Jewish activity) for fear of violating some obscure norm, or simply for fear of feeling lost in an unfamiliar activity amid a group of strangers, all of whom seem to know each other.

As Rabbi Harvey Fields of Los Angeles writes:

> This target population is uncomfortable, uneasy in a synagogue or other Jewish settings where they may be called upon to participate. Having seldom or never been exposed to the etiquette, or cues, or language of Jewish institutional life, they fear embarrassment . . . and ridicule. Better to stay away from synagogue . . . than to have their illiteracy exposed.

Entering synagogues and other Jewish institutions, then, can provoke anxieties—or worse—among those who think that their lack of familiarity and lack of competence will be matters of public display.

Fear of Reproach

Some Jews are reluctant to engage in Jewish life in part because they believe they will be subject to repeated reproach ("guilt-tripping") by rabbis, active lay leaders, parents, and others for not measuring up to communal expectations. In an article on the "moderately affiliated," I once observed:

> One of the common experiences of affiliated American Jews is the encounter with official Jews speaking the language of reproach, evaluation, and ultimately accusation. Rabbis chastise their congregants for failing to attend services, to observe ritual practices, to send their children to Jewish schools, or to marry within the faith. Fundraisers exhort the real and metaphoric survivors of the Holocaust to contribute to needy, endangered or embattled Jews in Israel and elsewhere.
>
> . . . The language of Jewish life is overwhelmingly a language of demand and chastisement. Such chastisement makes the listener—who more often than not fails to meet the expectations implicit in the remarks—feel as if he or she is being called a "bad Jew."
>
> In point of fact, the vast majority of Jews—even those who intermarry and in other ways fall short of some of the expectations enunciated above—feel they are "good Jews," and resent being labeled otherwise. (Cohen 1985:254-5)

The key difficulty with replacing a language of reproach with a language of resource is that Judaism, especially for the more traditionally oriented, is a normative system. The corpus of ancient Jewish law is replete with numerous detailed demands, in the areas of both ritual behavior and ethical

conduct. All the major denominations of Judaism have to some extent adopted the modern principle that individual Jews are free to make their own decisions as to how to live their Jewish lives. But even those with the strongest emphasis on autonomy and individualism maintain some notions of Jewish standards, that is, ideas as to what values and behavior are appropriate from a Jewish point of view. And all—even the most liberal denominations—maintain a normative opposition to intermarriage and at least discourage their rabbis from officiating at weddings between Jews and Gentiles.

In other words, no Western religion, including American Judaism, can authentically see itself as presenting a cultural resource that can be voluntarily adopted, abandoned, or ignored by its adherents. In fact, actual or potential adherents of a religious faith are attracted to religious involvement precisely because the community and philosophy provide a set of values, standards, and challenges to the conduct of their everyday life.

The outreach-minded Jewish professional, then, is confronted with a difficult task of balancing the traditional language of standards and reproach with the modern language of benefits and resource.

Fear of Rejection

The growing rates of intermarriage and conversion have markedly increased the number of Jews who feel they are unwelcome in Jewish life. Mixed-married Jews understand that they have violated a passionately held traditional norm of Jewish life. Rabbi Harvey Fields writes:

> The intermarried . . . carry the presumption that no rabbi or synagogue will ever welcome them, that they and their children are pariahs. From their point of view, other Jews, including segments of their families, view them as traitors, and rather than face the hostility they believe waits for them at the door of the synagogue they stay away — far away.

Converts, for their part, are well aware of the strong tribal bonds that characterize the Jewish people. Accordingly, they are sensitive to any slight, real or imagined, that would signify their rejection by born-Jews as ethnically unworthy of full inclusion in the Jewish community. To varying degrees, similar perceptions are held by gays and lesbians, single mothers, and the less affluent.

Political Remoteness

Jews remain the most politically liberal ethnic group in the United States (Cohen 1989). The rank-and-file maintain liberal views on major public issues. Jews are dramatically overrepresented as activists and supporters of liberal social-justice causes.

To liberal Jews, Jewish institutions often appear hopelessly conservative. Some significant number of disaffected, social-justice-oriented Jews regard the conventional Jewish community as out of touch with the major social issues of the day. As such, these underinvolved Jews see few, if any, opportunities for expressing their social-justice commitments in a Jewish institutional context.

The Financial Barrier

Although, in the aggregate, American Jews constitute the most affluent major

"Jews are dramatically overrepresented as activists and supporters of liberal social-justice causes."

ethnic group in the United States, large numbers of Jews perceive Jewish involvement as overly costly (Meir and Hostein 1992). One reason for this perception is that some simply see little benefit in joining Jewish institutions. If synagogues, Jewish schools, JCCs, and other organizations are unappealing, then one can hardly expect that individuals will be eager to support them at any price. But even for those for whom Jewish institutions do hold some attraction, the sheer cost of involvement in the full panoply of organized Jewish life (synagogue, Jewish school for one's children, charitable giving, JCC membership, and occasional trips to Israel, to name just the most common features of Jewish communal affiliation) outstrips the available disposable income of many Jewish families. As one Reform rabbi writes:

> What factors discouraged these Jews from joining or remaining in a synagogue? Many cited the expense: "$1,000 plus $1,500 building fund plus Hebrew school fees. They charge you for everything. It's a business, not a religion."
>
> For others, the costs were secondary to a fundamental lack of interest: "I have other priorities in my life. My spare money goes to vacations. I'm still Jewish whether I belong to a synagogue or not." (Salkin 1991:5)

In point of fact, most Jewish institutions typically make provision for people with limited incomes. Nevertheless, the process of applying for scholarships or fee reductions make many would-be members uncomfortable.

Open Wounds

Some underinvolved Jews bear deep hurts associated with Judaism. They may have been deeply disappointed by a rabbi or other official representative of Judaism; they may have bitter memories of their Hebrew school experience; they may have been hurt in a romantic relationship or marriage in which their Jewish identity or that of their partner figured prominently; they may have suffered anti-Semitic slurs or discrimination; or they may have ill feelings toward their parents for trying to impose a type of Jewish involvement that they rejected. The sorts of hurtful incidents are too numerous and idiosyncratic to allow for a neat categorization. Suffice it to say that some earlier deep, personal anguish connected with being Jewish is sometimes at the root of estrangement from Jewish life.

Recruitment, Initiation, Enrichment

As should be clear, not all the obstacles noted above are equally characteristic of all underinvolved Jews. More pointedly, not all the underinvolved are equally underinvolved, unaffiliated, or in other ways remote from Jewish life. The principal targets of outreach efforts can be usefully segmented into at least three stages of development: outsiders, novices, and apprentices (my terminology). It is noteworthy that most outreach programs specialize, drawing primarily upon individuals in just one of these stages of Judaic development.

Outsiders, Novices, Apprentices

Outsiders are those who are not even sure about whether they have any interest at all in Jewish involvement. They may be members of mixed-married couples who are wary of any delicate or potentially provocative issue, or they may be individuals who are simply very remote from Jewish life. The appropriate outreach encounter for these people will address their hesitations, anxieties, and concerns about whether they want to even entertain some involvement in Judaism. Workshops with interfaith couples are typical of such a program.

Novices are those who have a confirmed interest in Jewish involvement, albeit possibly hesitant or transitory. This group includes possible candidates for conversion as well as parents who feel ignorant of the fundamentals of Judaism. For this group, programs that combine Jewish experience (e.g., holiday celebrations) with formal learning are among the most appropriate.

Apprentices are those who are committed to Jewish involvement, know what might be considered the fundamentals of Judaism, but now are interested in expanding their involvement or improving their Judaic skills. The programs here are more advanced than those offered to novices, yet they are not so advanced as to constitute advanced Jewish learning for the experienced member of the congregation or community.

Herein lies the fuzzy outer boundary of Jewish outreach. After all, courses in Basic Judaism for what I call apprentices may be seen as the normal functioning of a synagogue community. The very same courses conducted by the Melton Mini-School, or in some other context that promises to make newcomers feel welcome and comfortable, lie just within the definition of outreach used in this study. What qualifies a Melton course or a JCC program for young parents or a synagogue social event for singles as an outreach program? The answer may lie in the ethos of these activities. As contrasted with a standard congregational course in basic Jewish skills, the outreach-oriented program will be characterized by openness, questioning, personal engagement, personal struggle, attention to relationships, and other attributes of

"Newcomers to active Jewish life follow a 'career path' to increased Jewish involvement, moving from one stage to the next."

the good outreach program described more fully in the next section of this report.

Stagnation or Transition?

As may well be most appropriate and effective, many outreach programs specialize in just one of these stages: they may primarily recruit, or they initiate, or they enrich. Few seem to encompass all three stages. Although the targeting of particular audiences may make eminent sense from an educational point of view, the practice does raise the problem of transition. To illustrate, in the words of one outreach professional, programs for converts often "leave them dripping at the mikvah." Apparently, programs of preconversion study and intense interaction with rabbis terminate at the moment of conversion.

Newcomers to active Jewish life follow a "career path" to increased Jewish involvement, moving from one stage to the next. Currently, synagogues and JCCs are not well equipped to attend closely to individuals at all phases of development. It is no small challenge to build a Jewish community that simultaneously serves the needs of outsiders, novices, apprentices, and the active leadership core. A few extraordinary outreach communities do manage to keep newcomers moving along to higher levels of involvement even as they sustain the highly knowledgeable and active members of the community. But, to say the least, these are rare communities indeed.

Institutions that are capable of specializing in only one stage need to recognize their limitations and work with institutions that focus on individuals at adjacent levels of involvement. To be concrete, we may take the case of the JCCs and synagogues. JCCs pride themselves at reaching those less involved in Jewish life, at engaging in what this report has called recruitment and initiation. In contrast, synagogues tend to appeal to a more Jewishly involved population segment. (Jewish population studies demonstrate convincingly that, as compared with JCC members, synagogue members observe more ritual practices, have more ties to other Jewish organizations, contribute more to Jewish philanthropic causes, have more Jewish friends, and are more often in-married.) Ideally, JCCs and synagogues can complement one another, yet in few locales do these mutually suspicious institutions work together effectively.

Indeed, the factors underlying the tensions between JCCs and synagogues are paradigmatic of the sorts of barriers that inhibit interagency or interdenominational cooperation. One reason for the friction is that the two see themselves in competition, not only over money but over leadership, an even more precious resource. In addition, synagogues believe that the JCCs want to host weddings and bar/bat mitzvahs, an eventuality that will undercut the congregations' revenue; JCCs, for their part, see the synagogues' objections to Jewish programming at the JCCs as a matter of protecting the congregations' historic "turf."

Currently, the normal operation of most JCCs, synagogues, and adult-education programs neglect to include planning for transition. Few rabbis, educators, JCC workers, or outreach

professionals make it their business to guide the individuals and families whom they serve to search out other institutions appropriate to their changing Jewish needs and interests. The institutional and ideological impediments to transition-planning are understandable. After all, helping a member decide what synagogue or school to patronize next does little if anything to augment the budget of the current institution; and one can hardly expect an Orthodox (or Conservative or Reform) outreach practitioner to generate much enthusiasm for directing underinvolved Jews to a local Reform (or Orthodox or Conservative) supplementary school. Nevertheless, effective outreach efforts certainly demand attention to introducing individuals to the variety of opportunities for involvement and affiliation.

LEARNING, WORSHIP, SOCIAL JUSTICE

Notwithstanding the considerable diversity in both the underinvolved and the activities designed to reach them, outreach programs are characterized by certain thematic uniformities. Understanding these uniformities is important to understanding how outreach programs succeed—or fail.

The most fundamental characteristic recalls these ancient rabbinic adages:

Don't separate yourself from the [Jewish] community.

On three things the world stands: on Torah [study], on worship, and on deeds of loving-kindness. (Ethics of the Fathers)

Community-Building and More

As is clear to any observer of these programs, community-building is central and essential to good outreach. All successful programs exhibit elements of warm, supportive, and well-functioning communities. The successful programs serve to provide individuals in need of companionship, family-like relations, romance, and friendship with a place where they can address their social needs. As one observer writes:

> Community is a critical ingredient in successful outreach, enabling the returnees to join a warm and welcoming community of like-minded Jews, who encourage further behavior modification through subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) expressed communal norms and standards. (Bayme 1992b:4)

The outreach process seeks to convince the outreach target of the virtue and value of attachment to other Jews and other Jewish communities in other places and in other times (both past and future). Successful outreach programs improve the image of Jewish community life. To the underinvolved, they convey the message that fuller immersion in Jewish life can address some of the most deeply felt human needs for companionship and that Jewish communities are the one place where one can express emerging Jewish interests and skills.

Moreover, participation in outreach communities specifically and Jewish life generally conveys the sense that one is connected across time and space to Jews of different places, or of previous times, or of future generations. When Jewish educators speak of "transcendent meaning" of Jewish involvement, they are often referring to this sense of connection with Jews in other eras or locations.

Although outreach programs clearly recognize the centrality of providing community, few make this objective their principal goal. Rather, outreach programs avow a commitment to some higher purpose, generally some combination of study, worship, and social-justice activities. Recognizing the major areas of interest on the part of the underinvolved, some outreach practitioners divide the underinvolved into three major personality types that correspond to the Rabbis' three categories noted above: those who are primarily oriented to intellectual growth, those committed to social action, and those open to spiritual search.

The more successful outreach communities seem to be able to offer attractive possibilities in all three spheres. For example, a study of five outreach communities concludes with the observation that community was central, but not the only key ingredient:

> Before [the formerly uninvolved joined these communities], the sense that worship or religious practice was "not for me" had characterized their alienation. Being able to enjoy their participation in religious services was a major symbolic breakthrough, as was their involvement in a Jewish group, a Jewish community. For those who had no family ties, this was particularly significant, but the others, too, relished their newfound communal bond. (American Jewish Committee 1982: 21).

The report then goes on to explain how spirituality and learning are intertwined with community:

> On a practical level, the place of worship imparted to the participants a Jewish knowledge they had lacked — the ability to read Hebrew, a familiarity with the structure and content of the prayer service, and for some, a proficiency in intricate questions of Halakha [Jewish law].
>
> The worship groups also provided their members with a social ambience made up of individuals very much like themselves, with whom they could identify and who at the same time served as models of Jewish involvement. (American Jewish Committee 1982: 21)

In the communities the researchers

observed, the formerly uninvolved came ostensibly to pray, but also in search of surrogate family members. There they made new friends and, in time, acquired new Judaic skills and concepts.

After Outreach — Radiant Centers

Outreach makes little sense (and may even prove counterproductive) if the Jewish community has little to offer on an ongoing basis to those who have been reached. Outreach-oriented congregations that succeed in recruiting newcomers eventually need to develop the sorts of activities and relationships that characterize more stable and more conventional communities. In fact, many congregations that were once outreach-oriented arrive at a point where they must turn inward to maintain their vitality. Increasingly they move to address their now veteran members' needs as involved Jews rather than devote so much effort to welcoming, teaching, and including newcomers. Congregations, like all communities, evolve; even those marked in their early stages by an essential commitment to lowering barriers and reaching out to the underinvolved undergo enormous pressure to raise the barriers that fence active members in, even as they fence potential newcomers out.

The congregations that manage to grow and hold the newcomers tend to develop subcommunities of specialized activity, what some have called "radiant centers." This concept refers to vital networks of congregants who focus on such activities as study, prayer, and social action. Typically radiant networks appeal to those who have become deeply committed to the congregation rather than to newcomers.

In brief, truly successful outreach efforts manage to address individuals at different stages of development. They provide communities that satisfy the Jewish and human needs of newcomers beyond their period of initiation to Jewish life and the community.

"Outreach makes little sense (and may even prove counterproductive) if the Jewish community has little to offer on an ongoing basis to those who have been reached."

PROGRAMS & PRACTITIONERS

The attributes of programs and personnel that are most critical for successful outreach are outlined below. Most of these may be seen as direct responses to the obstacles to Jewish involvement described earlier. In addition, most cannot be said to typify the stance of conventional synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, and other Jewish organizations. Part of what outreach is the conventional Jewish community is not.

Low Entry Barriers

Good outreach programs work to lower the entry barriers, real or perceived, to participation in Jewish life. As noted earlier, would-be participants in Jewish communities are often put off by the perception that they are expected to demonstrate, up front, adherence to a normative Jewish lifestyle or Judaic competence or financial support for the community. Good outreach programs make participants feel that these expectations are relaxed, if not suspended entirely. One study reports:

> Central to the outreach program's philosophy was the concept that no demands or expectations be placed on the participants. They were not being recruited to join the synagogues and organizations in their respective communities. Rather, the goal was to assist unaffiliated and marginally-affiliated Jews in relating to their Jewish identity in their own homes, at their own pace and in accordance with their own perceptions and needs. (Kurz and Ukeles 1992:7)

Newcomers to Jewish life, who are otherwise wary of joining Jewish communities, feel they can enter, experiment, and grow, as this study reports:

> More importantly, H. feels it [the Harvard worship and study service] is a comfortable setting for "people [like me] with pathetic or non-existent Jewish background . . . to get their feet wet." It does not push people to take positions they are not yet comfortable with, or to confront theological issues for which they are not yet ready. (American Jewish Committee 1982:4)

Outreach workers try not to obscure their programs' expectations. Rather, their understanding with the potential newcomers is that these expectations will be held in abeyance until (and if) the newcomer decides to accept them.

Suspension of Judgment

Underinvolved Jews are keenly sensitive to the possibility that they will be judged unworthy by their more active counterparts. Good outreach workers and communities strive to avoid the aura of judgment and reproach that seems to characterize many conventional Jewish settings:

> The general ambience of the places of worship [that appeal to the underinvolved] was usually described as "open," "tolerant" and "understand-

ing." The meaning of such references varied. [In one case] . . . such terms imply an absence of fixed standards of "proper" Jewish behavior, . . . a place where one did not have to pretend to know more than one did or be more certain than one was. . . . [In another case] they interpreted "open" to mean lack of pressure to mask their doubts and simulate a Jewishness they did not truly feel. (American Jewish Committee 1982:22)

The claim to a "nonjudgmental" posture appears explicitly and repeatedly in promotional and training materials. Writing to potential Orthodox outreach workers, the manual of Aish HaTorah offers this strongly worded advice:

> Believing that Orthodox Judaism is an infinitely superior ideology does not qualify one to judge *individuals* who are not observant. Always remember that human beings can only judge specific actions or opinions, not people. A person who has no knowledge of Judaism could possibly be a better person in G-d's eyes than an observant Jew. (Aish HaTorah 1992:12)

Empathy and Exuberance

Good outreach workers are distinguished by a genuine empathy for the Judaic newcomer. For committed Jews, warm feelings for the uninvolved and the uninitiated are not always easy to come by. If one believes that there is something intellectually, spiritually, and morally superior about a committed Jewish life, then one is bound to harbor some sort of negative feelings about Jews who lack Judaic commitment and knowledge. Committed Jews who work with the underinvolved often need to suppress the tendency to patronize or disparage the underinvolved. Steven Shaw and David Szonyi (1984:12) put matters aptly when they observe:

> An effective outreach worker will combine some of the qualities of a good teacher, personal counselor and referral service. He or she should: . . . understand others' Jewish dilemmas in part because of the outreach worker's own Jewish struggles and ambivalence, and be willing to share insights from his or her own Jewish quest.

Another highly desirable characteristic in the outreach practitioner is unflagging enthusiasm for the task and a tangible excitement about the outreach program or activity:

> An outreach worker must be a lively, enthusiastic, interesting person — someone people like being around. The sort of folks who are wonderful once you get to know them, won't do. In outreach, you seldom get a second chance. Either a relationship starts right away or it never happens. (Israel 1984:13)

Total Personal Engagement

Good outreach work depends ultimately upon the outreach worker, that is, the rabbi, educator, teacher, Hillel director, or concerned lay person. When they function best, these outreach workers broaden the relationship with outreach targets beyond the narrow confines of the immediate activity at hand. Writing about the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School, Betsy Katz, its North American coordinator, makes observations that would be echoed by educators in other outreach programs:

> The teachers . . . do more than convey information. Extracurricular activities, emphasis on interpersonal relationships, the sharing of respon-

". . . outreach work is not appropiate for the Jewishly faint of heart. Ambiguity, challenges, and frustration make a strong sense of personal Jewish gravity a sine qua non . . . "

> sibilities with students, and constant concern with each individual's reactions to the program are among the factors that make the Mini-School unique. (Katz 1991:31-2)

Judaically Centered

Outreach workers need a strong grounding in Judaism to clearly project a version of Jewish authenticity, and also to be able to maintain their morale. A strong Jewish belief system is essential for the worker to sustain periods of successive failure:

> Outreach workers must have the . . . patience between sales if they are to sustain themselves. It is very hard. . . . It helps if they are religious. The ones with strong belief systems don't watch the clocks. Their survival is contingent upon the depth of their commitment to their work. (Israel 1984:13)

Clearly, outreach work, with all its rewards and sources of fulfillment, is not appropriate for the Jewishly faint of heart. Ambiguity, challenges, and frustration make a strong sense of personal Jewish gravity a sine qua non for working with the Jewishly underinvolved.

Pluralism — Sort Of

All outreach professionals have a personal commitment to a particular ideology. In their heart of hearts, most would want the participants in their programs to adopt their own Jewish commitments and pattern of involvement. Yet they also recognize that such a goal would be unrealistic. It is unlikely that any part-time program will have an enduring transformative impact on most participants. The outreach professionals themselves recognize that the type of Jewish involvement they are advocating as ideal may, in their terms, entail too much of a "stretch" for the constituency they encounter. My conversation with one Orthodox outreach worker is informative on this point:

Q: "So what's wrong with Lubavitch?"

A: "They demand too much."

Q: "And what's wrong with non-Orthodox outreach programs?"

A: "They demand too little."

(To be clear, outreach workers with other ideological commitments—e.g., Lubavitch, Reform, Conservative—would undoubtedly have their own ideas as to who demands too much and who demands too little.)

Effective outreach professionals maintain an internal set of standards of success which include attainable goals. They are satisfied if the outreach participants relate to their programs in a serious fashion, genuinely reflect in new ways on the meaning of Judaism, and undertake some sorts of changes in behavior and attitude that represent a deepening of Jewish commitment—in any of a variety of ways.

Participants in outreach programs, for their part, tend to be wary of heavy-handed attempts to push them in one direction or another. To be effective (as well as realistic), outreach professionals need to be prepared to behave in at least a somewhat pluralistic fashion, to project acceptance for several alternative expressions of Jewish identity, be they religious or secular, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist. Outreach professionals do claim to sincerely support Jewish intensification along any of several lines, even those which may differ from their own ideo-

logical preference. At the same time, there is no denying the fact that most regard movement toward their own brand of Judaism as the most desirable for the participant and most personally rewarding for the outreach worker.

The "Contract" — A Commitment to Process, Not to an End

The outreach program and the potential newcomer negotiate a "contract" that governs their relationship. Sometimes this agreement is conveyed in writing such as in a brochure. It may be laid out in the first session of the class or workshop. It can be reaffirmed by the rabbi, teacher, social worker, or group leader in periodic sessions. And sometimes it is established in a one-on-one interview prior to the newcomer's decision to join the class, prayer group, workshop, or community.

The "soft" portion of the contract allays the anticipated anxieties of the newcomer. He or she will not be expected to immediately adopt the normative structure of Judaism that the teacher or community represent.

The contract's "hard" segment makes an explicit demand. While the newcomer makes no commitment to arrive at an explicit Judaic destination, outreach programs do require participants to take the learning and initiation process seriously. These programs offer tolerance of the potential newcomer (and his or her freely chosen eventual Jewish destination) in exchange for the newcomer's openness to seriously considering the message embodied in the outreach program or community. The experience of a newcomer to an Orthodox outreach community illustrates this bargain in action:

> He describes Lincoln Square [Synagogue] as a place which not only emphasizes learning, but in which there is an openness about learning. In most of the Orthodox shuls to which M. had been exposed, the tone and content of public discussion presumed that everyone was observant and knew how to be observant. . . . As a result, people who had questions — and they were far from being a small group — were made to feel like outsiders. At Lincoln Square Synagogue, questions are not only expected, but encouraged and treated as evidence of a desire to learn. (American Jewish Committee 1982:7)

Relevance to Existential Questions

Rabbi Harold Schulweis urges organized Jewry to address individuals' private agendas before expecting that they will become involved in the community's public agenda. Successful outreach programs manage to demonstrate how the particular community and how Judaism in general have something valuable to offer the individual. Jonathan Omer-Man (1984:15) observes:

> Religion should have something to say about our lives outside the formal side of religion and community. It is strange that Judaism . . . should come to be regarded as having no relationship to day-to-day life . . . [Those] with whom I worked felt strongly that Judaism seemed to focus all its attention on communal and national issues, and left little for the individual. . . . One must ask "What does it mean to be a Jew?" and "What is the meaning of Jewish existence?" But the answers to these

"While the newcomer makes no commitment to arrive at an explicit Judaic commitment, outreach programs do require participants to take the learning and initiation process seriously."

questions may mean little if we do not relate to another: "What is the meaning of my life?"

In sum, if outreach communities work well, they ought to live up to the ideals professed by this Manhattan congregation:

> Congregation B'nai Jeshurun believes that a community synagogue which responds to the authentic questions of life, death, love, anxiety, longing, and the search for meaning can, once again, attract Jews — families and individuals — if it is willing to grapple with the great issues of life and not limit itself to the liturgical experience alone. ("A Philosophy for the New Community of B'nai Jeshurun")

Critical Distance

Underinvolved Jews, almost by definition, regard most Jewish institutions as unattractive, to say the least. Outreach-oriented institutions tend to differentiate themselves from most other institutions as the following promotional piece illustrates:

> The synagogue itself has, unfortunately, not been that successful in maintaining Jews within its ranks and, according to many critics, is frequently irrelevant, boring, unaesthetic, and often fosters a type of "religious behaviorism." ("A Philosophy for the New Community of B'nai Jeshurun")

As noted earlier, outreach professionals harbor a very profound critique of their conventional colleagues. Their grave disappointment with much of organized Jewish life is part of what gives outreach workers access to underinvolved Jews. Their critical distance from conventional Jewish professionals and institutions establishes something of a common ground with alienated American Jews, those who find much to be desired in most synagogues, schools, Jewish Community Centers, membership organizations, and philanthropic activities.

Egalitarianism

Outreach communities are almost always characterized by egalitarian treatment of men and women, and, in many instances, by explicit invitations to such socially marginal groups as singles, gays, lesbians, mixed-marrieds, and converts. The egalitarian principle is so powerful that even Orthodox outreach groups feel compelled to come to grips with the feminist critique of traditional Judaism.

This discussion of the egalitarian norm raises an intriguing question: If the norm is indeed so powerful, how is it that several Orthodox movements have been able to attract large numbers of formerly nontraditional newcomers, both male and female? Notably, the Orthodox succeed in doing so despite their commitment to preserving distinctive roles for men and women, a stance many non-Orthodox feminists regard as inherently oppressive (see Davidman 1991; Kaufman 1991).

In her ethnographic study of Israeli yeshivas that transform newcomers to Judaism, Janet Aviad may provide an answer to our question. She concludes that the nonegalitarian position of the Orthodox is not inherently attractive to the newcomers. Rather the traditional definition of male and female roles in Judaism is accepted as part of the total package of intensified commitment to traditional Judaism:

> The commitment is total. It is a commitment to a tradition, not to selected parts of it. . . . The structure is not something that can be unpacked and reassembled by the individual. Rather, it is a full spiritual, ethical, and ritual system totally interwoven with a community. . . . Those who make the choice [of Orthodoxy] would not destroy their relationship to the total system because they find parts of the whole disturbing or unpleasant. (Aviad 1983:124)

At best, the nonegalitarian stance of Orthodoxy is emblematic of a faithfulness to tradition that connotes authenticity (certainly a selling point to the underinvolved). At worst, as Aviad seems to suggest, it represents an obstacle that Orthodox outreach professionals sometimes manage to overcome.

Aside from the Orthodox world, Jewish feminism seems to lend support to the outreach movement on several levels. Jewishly underinvolved women (and some men) may be drawn to outreach communities precisely because they are seeking an egalitarian or feminist Jewish experience. More broadly, the Jewish feminist movement has contributed to a questioning stance toward prevailing understandings of Judaism and of the nature of Jewish communal life. This critical and skeptical stance constitutes an important intellectual underpinning to the outreach enterprise.

Empowering the Laity

Outreach professionals emphasize the importance of mobilizing and empowering the laity to engage in outreach activities. One reason to do so is simply a matter of logistics. There are simply not enough rabbis, Jewish educators, social workers, and other professionals to reach out to every underinvolved Jew. In various ways, outreach-oriented rabbis stress the importance of training and recruiting lay people to perform such quasi-rabbinic functions as leading services, delivering sermons, teaching classes, visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, and counseling troubled families. Such involvement not only expands the ability of the congregation to serve its members beyond the limited resources of the rabbi; it also provides congregants who perform these duties with an additional investment in their community. As Rabbi Schulweis, who has pioneered the concept of "para-rabbis," remarked, "If the rabbi does all the mitzvot, then none are left for the laity."

On a broader scale, the principle of involving lay people in outreach work is crucial to its success. Outreach that remains principally in the hands of paid professionals must of financial necessity remain very constricted in scope. It also serves as a visible indictment of the quality of Jewish life. For if the only people who work on recruiting other Jews to Jewish community life are the ones who are paid to do so, then how can that life be seen as genuinely invigorating and attractive? Fortunately, there are models of lay involvement in outreach work in the Jewish community and other religious communities as well. The ancient imperative of *hachnasat orchim* (welcoming guests) wherein Jews throw open their homes to travelers and newcomers (especially on the Sabbath and holidays) is, in its own way, a very powerful outreach activity. It is not at all

"Outreach that remains principally in the hands of paid professionals . . . serves as a visible indictment of the quality of Jewish life."

surprising that many outreach professionals regularly invite their students to their homes to dine, study, or celebrate the holidays together. It is fair to say that among American Jews today, only a small number customarily welcome newcomers to their homes. Of those who do, probably most are Orthodox or Jewish communal professionals. One task of outreach work, therefore, might include expanding the practice of *hachnasat orchim* to the less traditional Jewish communities, where it may well prove to be an effective instrument of outreach conducted by the laity.

A PHILANTHROPIC STRATEGY

A philanthropic strategy to enhance Jewish outreach efforts will need to take into account several considerations. First, funds are limited. Second, the outreach field offers many genuine areas of need. Third, any donor—be it an individual or a foundation—would do well to carve out a particular focus of intervention or "market niche" in the domain of philanthropic assistance. Fourth, the mission, values, ethos, and institutional history of the donor all should be brought to bear upon the selection of that niche and of specific projects.

In each of the instances below, I present a problem area and then offer a plausible solution. Since, as these things go, the statement of the problem may be more compelling than the proposed solution, I urge readers not to ignore the problem even if the solution is less than ideal.

Address the Debate over Whom to Target

The debate between advocates of outreach to interfaith couples and of inreach to the moderately affiliated highlights a problem whose negative ramifications may extend beyond the realm of intellectual conflict and wounded egos. The

possibility certainly exists that the most damaging claims of both sides in the debate are actually accurate. Thus it may well be that the "hard-line" advocates of inreach are in effect sending a message to intermarried couples to stay far away from organized Jewish life; and it may well be that the "soft-line" advocates of outreach are telling marriageable-age Jews that out-marriage is now acceptable.

Most inreach advocates would prefer not to totally alienate the mixed-marrieds and most outreach advocates would prefer that more Jews marry Jews. Thus the potential for finding something of a common ground is very real. Moreover, the debate is not now (yet?) sharply polarized. Though vigorous proponents of extreme points of view are certainly outspoken and well known, several prominent practitioners and thinkers occupy a moderate middle ground.

The outreach field clearly needs to identify and advance areas of agreement so as to avoid the worst abuses each side fears. Such an eventuality would strengthen relations within the field and increase the chances that outreach work produces the most widely desired results: more extensive inclusion of underinvolved Jews and their families accompanied by reaffirmation of the desirability of endogamy.

One way of moderating this debate is to stimulate a consultation and publication by advocates of both outreach and inreach. This project would encourage members of the more extreme camps to express their views in writing and to consult in an appropriate setting so as to identify areas of agreement and disagreement. (The use of a mediator with views intermediate between the outreach hawks and inreach hawks could be very helpful here.) Following the consultation, we would look toward the publication of articles, papers, and memoranda that would articulate the common ground that unites the proponents of outreach to the mixed-married and of inreach to the moderately affiliated in-married. The publications would also provide practical guidelines to minimize some of the worst plausible drawbacks of inreach and outreach.

Build Outreach as a Distinctive Field of Professional Practice

The outreach field is a cottage industry. Each professional, each program, each community operates independently with few connections with their counterparts and with little awareness, if any, of parallel work being undertaken in other places or institutions.

Outreach professionals have much to offer one another, not the least being the fundamental notion that collectively they constitute and advocate a distinctive approach to Jewish education and community organizing. The emergence of a defined outreach field, with a self-awareness of its distinctiveness, will further its ability to advocate its interests within the Jewish community.

One simple way to advance the coalescence of the outreach field is a North American Conference of Outreach Professionals from different movements, institutions, disciplines, and areas (including Canada). As an aside, for reasons of accessibility alone, Chicago suggests itself as an ideal site for such a conference.

"Each professional, each program, each community operates independently with little awareness of work being undertaken in other places or institutions."

The conference would focus upon many of the observations and issues raised in this report:

Why are so many Jews underinvolved?

What are the most suitable characteristics of the outreach professional, and how can they be recruited, trained, developed, nurtured, and supervised?

How can the outreach message influence the ethos of conventional Jewish life?

Who are the most appropriate target constituencies?

What is the ideal "curriculum" for potential newcomers?

How can outreach programs and the community more generally effect more rapid and smoother transitions of Jewish families and individuals from one program or institution to another?

How can feminism, environmentalism, and other alternative communities appeal to the underinvolved?

A successful conference ought to result in plans for follow-up and ongoing communication. In this context, the sponsoring philantropists should anticipate (and encourage) requests for support for a newsletter or a part-time contact person or other such mechanisms.

Influence the Ethos of Mainstream Judaism

Outreach practice contains within it a trenchant critique of conventional American Jewish institutions. It claims that there is a better, more effective way of reaching alienated Jews, be they outmarried or not. It contends that Jewish communal leaders need tofurther develop their people skills. It urges lay and professional Jewish educators to present Jewish life in a way that is accessible to the uninitiated. Moreover, outreach practice offers a model for Jewish institutions, urging them to combine radiant centers with effective outreach programs and to empower the laity to take control of both sorts of activities. Perhaps most critically, outreach practice offers some hope, and some reason for hope, to a Jewish communal world frightened and depressed by what it views as alarming rates of intermarriage and disaffiliation.

Another critical objective of philanthropic strategy would be to seek to articulate, disseminate, and advocate the outreach critique so as to transform the ethos of mainstream Jewry. The outreach message would seek to change the way in which rabbis, Center workers, Jewish educators, and lay leaders approach their respective tasks. Indeed, several outreach programs have demonstrated that, as a rule, Jewish professionals and volunteers are open to acquiring the skills and orientations that are distinctive to the outreach field.

Reshaping the ethos of the Jewish leadership may not be as ambitious and unattainable as it might first appear. It would consist of the following elements:

(1) Augmenting the training of rabbis, Jewish educators, and Center workers before they enter the field.

(2) In-service education of these Jewish professionals active in the field. The techniques here would include mentoring relationships, field-workers, regional institutes, special sessions at professional conferences, and videocas-

sette instructional materials.

(3) Teaching lay leaders to open up their communities to penetration by newcomers and to work well with their professionals.

Now, it turns out that the resources in terms of expert and experienced personnel to address these objectives are already extant within American Jewish life. These pockets of proven outreach wisdom are found in certain key agencies of American Jewish life (some of the seminaries; national congregational bodies; associations of rabbis, educators, and Center workers, etc.). All four denominational movements (Orthodoxy, Conservatism, Reform, and Reconstructionism) have produced individuals and programs noted for their records of achievement in reaching underinvolved Jews. So too have some JCCs and the central institution that serves them.

A wise intervention strategy would recognize and accommodate the ideological and institutional divisions in Jewish life rather than try to override them. In other words, the institutional and ideological boundaries that divide American Jewry need not hamper attempts to alter the ethos of American Jewry with respect to outreach. There are adequate sources of inspiration and expertise scattered across the institutional and ideological map to provide an appropriate teacher for almost every important constituency. The task for sponsoring philanthropists is to match the right teachers with the right audiences, and in the right fashion.

The idea here would be to designate (and support) four or five projects that are geographically, denominationally, and institutionally diversified. Each center of Jewish outreach excellence would be given the financial resources to penetrate its own natural constituency in ways that are most appropriate for that center and that constituency.

Selectively Encourage Alternative Judaic Movements

Several foundations have been significant supporters of "alternative Judaic movements," particularly feminist endeavors and activities that focus on the spiritual side of Judaism. Jewish environmentalism may yet constitute a third alternative under this rubric. Aside from their intrinsic merit, the principal advantage of these movements for outreach purposes is that they offer a locus for Jewish engagement to those who would otherwise never be attracted to the Jewish community. To be clear, these endeavors are valuable on their own terms; they are simply less valuable in the context of a philanthropic emphasis on outreach per se.

If there is a justification for supporting these activities under the outreach rubric, it lies in locating obvious gaps in service (of which there are many). One example may suffice to make the general point. The Los Angeles-based Jewish Feminist Center has apparently reached out to scores of women (and some men) who generally have no other Jewish home. Obviously, its success owes much to its principal organizers; but it also demonstrates a clearly felt need that is surely felt elsewhere as well. There is no good reason why a Feminist Center ought not prove equally successful in New York, the world's largest Jewish population center and, arguably, the world's largest

"A wise intervention strategy would recognize and accommodate the ideological and institutional divisions in Jewish life rather than try to override them."

center of active feminists. Donors in other major metropolitan areas of Jewish settlement may well be tempted to support local Feminist Centers.

In sum, philanthropists could consider expanded support for feminist, environmentalist, and spiritually oriented Judaic programs, but—recognizing the limited resources available—only in ways that are compelling and urgent. (To reiterate, this conclusion assumes that the central goal of this particular philanthropic strategy is the expansion of outreach. Jewish feminism, environmentalism, and spirituality may be inherently valuable ethical imperatives, but supporting these movements is probably not the most efficient way of achieving the goals of the Jewish outreach movement.)

Think Strategically

Supporting outreach programming that will have a significant impact on Jewish life in any given community is a philanthropic challenge. Foundations need to think strategically, in ways that will enable their dollars to create change, as well as to support worthwhile activities. As in other areas, one must decide if the particular program has the potential for developing important ideas, if it can be replicated elsewhere, if a vehicle exists for facilitating replication, if fees for service, or other funders or community agencies will be able to meet the costs of the program after an initial period of incubation. Likewise, if a new program is being developed by a community agency, it is important to consider the support it enjoys within the institution, and the likelihood that the agency will be able to integrate it in its on-going budget if it is successful. Shared thinking by foundations would facilitate the development of this field.

Any wise philanthropic policy needs to look for ways to produce systemic change in American Jewish communal life, rather than rely on a regular flow of sizable grants to innovative programs. In short, a thoughtful approach demands recognition of a semipermanent condition of austerity in Jewish life. Supporting five, ten, or even dozens of individual outreach programs makes little sense for a foundation with limited resources. The only exceptions to this generalization are the very rare demonstration programs that are apt to produce deep-seated systemic changes in the very nature of Jewish communal life.

Conclusion

Jewish outreach responds to genuinely felt individual and communal needs. Its apparently successful distinctive approaches and techniques constitute a challenging critique of conventional Jewish leaders and institutions. It is a field characterized by provocative internal debates, in particular, the question of how (or even whether) to reach out to interfaith couples. It is a field just beyond its infancy but not yet fully established, accepted, and supported by established institutions. For all these reasons and more, the field of Jewish outreach represents an excellent philanthropic opportunity for forward-thinking potential donors.

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Rabbi Rennie Altman, Union of American Hebrew Congregations

Dr. Steven Bayme, American Jewish Committee

Harriet Blumberg, JCCs of Chicago

Rabbi Nachum Braverman, Aish Hatorah, Los Angeles

Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, National Jewish Outreach Project

Rabbi Lavey Derby, Council on Jewish Life, Los Angeles

Dr. David Elcott, CLAL

Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, Jewish Feminist Center, Los Angeles

Rabbi Harvey Fields, Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Los Angeles

Rabbi Laura Geller, American Jewish Congress, Los Angeles

Judith Ginsburg, Covenant Foundation

Rabbi Julie Greenberg, Jewish Renewal Center, Philadelphia

Prof. Samuel Heilman, Queens College, CUNY

Dr. Betsy Dolgin Katz, Florence Melton Adult Mini-School, Chicago

Rabbi Daniel Landes, Los Angeles

Prof. Herbert Levine, National Havurah Committee, Philadelphia

Dr. Fran Markowitz, Chicago

Prof. Egon Mayer, Brooklyn College, CUNY

Rabbi Rolando Matalon, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, New York

Rabbi Jonathan Omer-Man, Los Angeles

Jane Perman, Jewish Community Centers Association

Rabbi Yehiel Poupko, JCCs of Chicago

Fradya Rembaum, Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles

Lenny Rubin, Jewish Community Centers Association

Susan Saxe, P'nai Or Religious Fellowship, Philadelphia

Havi Scheindlin, Americans for Peace Now, Los Angeles

Rabbi Harold Schulweis, Valley Beth Shalom, Encino, California

Rabbi Steven Shaw, Jewish Theological Seminary of America

Dr. Jacob Staub, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Philadelphia

Dr. David Teutsch, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Philadelphia

Dr. Jacob Ukeles, UAI, Inc., N.Y.

Rivka Walton, National Havurah Committee, Philadelphia

Sally Weber, Jewish Family Service, Los Angeles

Jerry Witkowsky, JCCs of Chicago

Dr. Ron Wolfson, University of Judaism, Los Angeles

Rabbi David Woznica, 92nd Street Y, New York

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