TOWARD A "GRAND UNIFIED THEORY" OF JEWISH CONTINUITY[1]
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Physics and the Jewish condition

It may be wise to begin with a word about the title of this paper. The phrase "grand unified theory" is, of course, borrowed from physics, where it identifies the long-sought, but not as yet found, mega-theory that will relate all of nature's primary forces (gravity, electro-magnetism, and the strong and weak nuclear forces) to one another. A grand unified theory will thereby enable us to tie what occurs at the subatomic level to what happens at the cosmic level -- all of nature will be comprehensible as a seamless, integrated whole.

I borrow this term with tongue in cheek, but also with a serious intent. The Jewish continuity agenda is the most complex and far-reaching that the North American Jewish community has ever taken on. By its very nature, the effort to promote Jewish continuity touches the innermost recesses of the individual psyche, where that mysterious phenomenon we call "Jewish identity" ostensibly resides, and, at the same time, the collective historical, social, and political passage of the Jewish people in the modern world. Success in this effort will almost certainly require that, on the one hand, we find and employ powerful new techniques for changing individuals and, on the other, transform and

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[1] This paper owes much to many. Only at great risk do I list some of those who, in conversations and in writing, have influenced my thinking greatly: first, because I will forget to thank some who deserve it; second, because I have undoubtedly distorted their ideas in the course of appropriating them. Still, credit, though no blame, must be given to: Arnie Eisen, Barry Chazan, Deborah Lipstadt, Carl Sheingold, Norbert Fruehauf, Art Vernon, John Ruskay, Jack Ukeles, Jim Meier, David Elcott, Irwin Kula, Steven M. Cohen, Steven Bayme, Riv Ellen Prell, Isa Aron, Sara Lee, Adrianne Bank, Susan Shevitz, Bernie Reisman, Joe Reimer, Richard Joel, Barry Shrage, and others unremembered.

reconfigure our communal institutional system to an extent and with a rapidity unprecedented in our modern organizational experience.

The endeavor which we are now beginning -- attempting in a planful, systematic way to mitigate or even reverse historical trends that are deeply rooted and largely welcomed by the very population (including ourselves) we are seeking to impact upon -- is, at the very least, audacious. To launch such an endeavor without a guiding theory of what we are doing, without a conceptual roadmap which alerts us to the difficulty of the journey, highlights the critical junctures along the way, and suggests the directions along which we must move, is foolhardy, and perhaps even irresponsible.

In principle, this guiding theory must indeed be both "grand" and "unified." The contemporary Jewish condition cannot be described, much less transformed, within the framework of a single discipline. Psychology, sociology, history, anthropology, religious studies, political science -- all must be called upon to begin to make sense of who we are and where we are as Jews today. In fact, each discipline has made contributions to the efforts to promote Jewish continuity that have been mounted thus far. But we have not yet drawn our partial insights together and conceptualized the connections between the microscopic -- the lived experience of individual Jews -- and the macroscopic -- communal policy making -- in ways that promote confidence that our endeavors in the latter arena will really make a difference in the former. For this we need a holistic understanding of the dynamics of contemporary Jewish life at the individual and collective levels that goes beyond demography or survey research (illuminating as these may be). There is, to be sure, no full agreement among either historians or analysts of contemporary society and culture about these dynamics and their implications. But we need to work from some conceptual base, or we run the danger of simply skimming the surface of the challenges we face and finding, two or ten or twenty years down the road, that our responses were hopelessly inadequate.

This paper most assuredly is *not* a "grand unified theory" of Jewish continuity. Rather, it should be read as an attempt to articulate the challenge and initiate the discussion that will be required if such a theory is to emerge. Almost nothing in it is new. Indeed, what I have tried to do is to weave together a large number of ideas and initiatives already in circulation and to set them in an overarching context. As with the search for a grand unified theory in physics, this effort focuses not on rewriting the individual theories, but on finding the connections among them in the hope that our drive for Jewish continuity will not founder on an inability to appreciate the complexity and singularity of what must be done.

Modernity and post-modernity: the impact on identity and community

The conventional starting point for understanding the American Jewish condition today is the two century process of "modernization," of which we are perhaps the quintessential exemplars and beneficiaries. Modernization, as it has impacted Jewish life, includes at least three key elements:

1) The breakdown of traditional (organic) communities and the belief systems and cultures which characterized these communities;
2) The rise of individualism (free choice) and rationality as the bases for action and knowledge; and
3) The ascendance of the nation-state as the dominant form of political organization, demanding primary behavioral loyalty.

For Jews, modernization has had profound specific effects on what we call "Jewish identity." These effects are the result of the complex processes, social, behavioral, and intellectual, by which Jews negotiated, and continue to negotiate, their entrance into and participation in the modern world, its societies, states, and cultures. Only at times were the changes in Jewish thinking and behavior the

products of well-formulated and formally articulated programs (though it is these programs which we tend to know best). Often, they were simply the accumulated result of numerous ad hoc adjustments made in the course of responding to new environments, opportunities, and challenges. Nevertheless, and especially over time, modernity put a distinctive stamp on Jewish identity which forms the backdrop for nearly every discussion of Jewish continuity today (understanding always that generalizations are just that, and not necessarily descriptive of any particular individual's situation).

Typically, Jewish identity in the modern world has become:

- hyphenated, i.e., existing alongside other group identities in an individual's self-definition
- fragmented, i.e., broken up into components affecting specific areas of an individual's cognitive, affective, and behavioral life-space, but without integrating these as a whole
- truncated, i.e., *not* impacting certain areas of the life-space which are, therefore, effectively devoid of Jewish influence
- episodic, i.e., salient only intermittently in the course of one's daily life or life-cycle
- pluralized, i.e., found in many variations which may or may not be or regard themselves as compatible with other variations
- marginalized, i.e., operative primarily in areas distant from the core of self-definition
- homogenized, i.e., blended with elements of other identities so as to reduce its distinctiveness.

Empirically, it seems that for most Jews in contemporary America, being Jewish, while neither shameful nor distasteful, is simply not a prime feature or determinant of "selfhood." Jewishness no longer provides the meaning for significant segments of the individual's life; it no longer integrates other roles and identities; nor does it induce the individual to commit to sets of norms that guide behavior (whether ritual or general) on a daily basis. For many Jews, Jewish identity is residual, a

self-attribution with minimal practical consequences, and one whose expression is confined at best to

clearly demarcated times and places, rather than being operative throughout one's life-space.[2]

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[2] If we wish to be more technical, we can distinguish between the "salience" and the "centrality" of Jewishness in one's identity. The former refers to the importance one attributes to one's Jewishness; the latter to whether it occupies a significant portion of one's life-space. There are people who claim that being Jewish is very important to them, even though it does not impact many aspects of their lives. This may well be true. E.g., one may view one's Jewishness as highly significant in shaping one's social and political consciousness and behavior, but engage in almost no explicitly Jewish activity. (Another example might be parents whose Jewish observance and involvement was minimal, but who become highly distressed when a child chooses a non-Jewish spouse.) From the perspective of Jewish continuity the question is whether salience
alone, without centrality, is sufficient for a transmissible Jewish identity. I am doubtful, for reasons which will become apparent.

What is more, the *content* of Jewish identity is frequently meager as compared with the fullness of the Jewish cultural system to which it is linked.[3] The typical Jew chooses only selected elements of the Jewish cultural system (itself often only vaguely and amorphously understood by the individual) to adopt as the substance of his/her Jewish identity -- some choose more, but many choose very little to fill whatever Jewish "space" they carve out in their lives. Further, what is chosen as being "Jewish" may represent secondary associations rather than primary cultural contents. In its most vulgar form, the process whereby primary content is replaced by secondary associations is epitomized in the gastronomic Jew whose Jewish identity revolves around certain foods and may involve little more. But this process operates more subtly as well. The oft-made observation that political liberalism has become the content of Jewishness for many American Jews is an historically significant manifestation of the same dynamic.

The displacement of some Jewish cultural contents and the addition of new ones is not in itself a negative process. Indeed, Judaism could not evolve without it. In assessing the state of Jewish identity we may, as Steven M. Cohen has pointed out, unduly neglect or dismiss new manifestations of Jewish behavior, e.g., political action for Jewish causes, and focus only on more traditional ritual indicators of Jewishness. Still, in the contemporary environment, the combination of widespread Jewish cultural illiteracy and essentially unlimited choice, leads many Jews to construct versions of

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[3] Though I follow the convention of speaking about "identity" as an individual phenomenon, identity is, as I understand it, constituted in large measure through the relationship to social and cultural realities outside the self, i.e., to groups and to bodies of knowledge, customs, norms, and symbols that provide the content that defines the "self" and its characteristic ways of appropriating, understanding, and responding to reality.

Jewishness that lack substantial traditional content. The resulting Jewish identity is often, therefore, not only intermittently relevant, but shallow and idiosyncratic.

From the standpoint of a concern for Jewish continuity, the "voluntarization" of Jewish identity -- the fact that the meaning and expression of one's "Jewishness" has in fact taken on the character of a choice, not a fate or destiny -- is perhaps the most critical element in its overall attenuation. The unwillingness or incapacity of many Jews to accept norms of communally-sanctioned behavior as necessary correlates of the fact of their Jewishness not only takes them outside the realm of *halakhah*, it renders all forms of Jewish collective action, social structures, and shared culture -- without which it is hard to envision "continuity" --problematic. Obviously, it is not the case that these have disappeared from North American Jewish life, any more than that *halakhic* living has disappeared. However, the maintenance of reasonably stable Jewish social and behavioral structures certainly is more difficult when Jews must be "persuaded" repeatedly to give these their loyalty and commitment than when that commitment is seen as the inevitable and appropriate consequence of one's Jewishness. The voluntaristic and highly selective model of Jewish identity that is dominant in American Jewish life, especially the extreme psychologization of identity that is often seen ("I feel Jewish; isn't that enough?"), is problematic as a basis for continuity because it places the locus of Jewish meaning in the individual, rather than in the collective enterprise of the Jewish community where it must reside if "continuity" is to be a persuasive value in the first place.

It may seem that in making this argument, we are placing the "blame" for the changes that have rendered continuity problematic on individual Jews who have valued their freedom more than their Jewishness. In fact, however, locating the problem of continuity solely in the choices that individuals have made and continue to make is itself problematic, both as analysis and as strategy. From an historical and sociological perspective, it does not do justice to the social and political dimensions of modernization which strongly influenced the responses that Jews manifested. When the Jewish community lost both its organic and its authoritative character, most Jews, whether willingly or not,

were thrust into a vastly different social environment, which made the individualizing of Jewish identity almost inevitable.[4]

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[4] As Arnie Eisen has commented to me, we should not let individuals entirely off the hook for the choices they make. Some people do, after all, choose to struggle harder to carve out Jewish space in their lives; others are content to "go with the flow." Nevertheless, the point remains that berating people for not deciding to be more Jewish (what Steven M. Cohen calls the "language of reproach") is neither entirely fair, nor likely to work.

If we accept the insights of social psychology and the sociology of knowledge, both of which argue that beliefs and behavior are powerfully shaped by the character of the social realities and relationships in which individuals live, then we must regard the attenuation of Jewishness as a life-shaping force for most Jews as a *social* phenomenon, as much as an *individual* one. We need not deny the reality of free will in order to acknowledge at the same time that the social and cultural settings in which individuals live and work strongly influence how they think, feel, and act. Much of life is lived in a realm of unconscious "choices," where taken-for-granted patterns of action and meaning hold sway. These patterns acquire their power not primarily because they are rationally persuasive, but because they are omnipresent, continually reinforced by social structures and environments, what Peter Berger calls "plausibility structures."[5] For individual actors these social

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[5] In *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger describes the operation of plausibility structures as follows: "Worlds are socially constructed and socially maintained. Their continuing reality, both objective (as common, taken-for-granted facticity) and subjective (as facticity imposing itself on individual consciousness), depends upon *specific* social processes, namely those processes that ongoingly reconstruct and maintain the particular worlds in question. Conversely, the interruption of these social processes threatens the (objective and subjective) reality of the worlds in question. Thus each world requires a social `base' for its continuing existence as a world that

forces and the behavioral patterns they sustain become almost literally "natural," i.e., part of nature itself.

In fact, of course, they are not natural, as we discover when social realities change, communities break down, and ideologies and behavioral norms once thought unassailable lose their potency. Even in times of social stability, individuals retain the ability to transcend their social environments and to choose values and patterns of behavior that lie outside the socially-sanctioned norm. But such choices require both an awareness of attractive alternatives and the motivation to act on this awareness, which in turn are rendered more likely when there are alternative "plausibility structures" available as well.

Thus, from a strategic as well as an historical perspective, we would do well to focus not just on individual choices and actions, but on the existence or absence of Jewish social realities that are likely to affect the cognitive, affective, and behavioral systems of Jewish individuals. Most Jews live, work, spend their time in and derive their knowledge and values from settings which are not Jewish -- certainly in their cultural content. To expect these Jews to muster the psychic energy to make their Jewishness a determinative force guiding their life-decisions (i.e., a source of norms, and not merely intermittent goods), is to ask more than is reasonable. Being actively Jewish is no longer "natural" today, and we cannot make it natural through intellectual or even emotional appeals alone.

What would be needed, according to this analysis, in order to counter the attenuation of Jewish identity, would be more powerful Jewish plausibility structures in the contemporary world -- effective surrogates for the organic, encompassing, authoritative Jewish community that is no longer. What we

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is real to actual human beings. This `base' may be called its plausibility structure." (p. 45)

call "the Jewish community" today is really a set of institutions designed to meet specific individual needs, in no one of which are Jews likely to spend a substantial amount of time. On the continuum of engagement running from "participant," to "member," to "consumer," Jews increasingly find themselves relating to these institutions, and hence to "the community" as a whole, in the latter role. Because "the community" is highly pluralized and delimited, it lacks sufficient weight and coherence to function in its totality as a powerful plausibility structure to support Jewish identity. As a set of voluntary institutions, each making partial and sometimes competing claims for attention, the contemporary community may in fact actually reinforce the individualizing and marginalizing of Jewish identity.

For most Jews today it requires serendipity or a special act of will to become part of a Jewish social reality sufficiently encompassing and engaging to shape one's life space in a significant and substantial way. The natural collective settings and processes (family, neighborhood) in and through which Jews were enculturated into a semi-organic community no longer function effectively, except for a minority, and the institutional substitutes we have devised have proven inadequate in performing this role, except, again for a small minority of Jews.[6]

In sum, the historical dynamic governing North American Jewish life has been one of a gradual dissipation of Jewish identity, culture and community together. Almost as if entropy were at work,

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[6] In placing primary emphasis on the role of collective social realities (plausibility structures) in shaping and sustaining individual identity, I do not mean to dismiss altogether the impact that a single important individual can have as role model and mentor. Social worlds are mediated through specific individuals as well as institutions, and experience provides many examples of how a parent, teacher, youth leader or peer can, through an especially powerful primary relationship, have a profound influence on the course of an individual's Jewish development. Institutions whose professed ideals do *not* find expression in the behavior of real individuals lose their power to socialize and enculturate effectively. Nevertheless, the impact of particular role models and mentors rarely if ever takes place outside the context of social processes, plausibility structures, which they, in effect, embody and represent. In fact, it is often this capacity to exemplify a whole social world in their person, I would suggest, that accounts for their influence.

Jewishness in all its key aspects has moved from being well-structured to diffuse. As a result, the gap between the social, cognitive, and experiential bases for serious, committed Jewish living and what most contemporary Jews have access to is enormous.   This gap, not the presumed indifference of individual Jews, should be the starting point for our strategizing about Jewish continuity. Indeed, given the weaknesses of the Jewish plausibility structure, the miracle is that as many retain some sense of attachment to Jewish life as they do!

This is, perhaps, a rather bleak picture (which some might view as an appropriate gloss on the rather bleak statistics from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey that stimulated the recent wave of concern for Jewish continuity).[7] However, in the last few years, commentators have drawn attention to the possibility that the dynamic of modernization described above in its particular Jewish version, may no longer be the guiding force of contemporary history. Some are claiming that we live now in a "post-modern" world with a different dynamic. To be sure, post-modernity has simply accentuated many of the trends already noted as characteristic of modernity (in this sense, we might better speak of a "hyper-modern" world).   Talk about the "saturated self" overwhelmed with choice, without any fixed identity anchor, and about a relativistic world, without fixed "truths," hardly sounds conducive to supporting the re-emergence of strong Jewish communities and individuals prepared to commit to stable, collectively defined life patterns.

But recent years have also seen the emergence of socio-cultural, or at least intellectual, directions that do provide the basis for a critique of modernity and perhaps even a counter-movement. The evident

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[7] Actually, I read the statistics less uniformly negatively than do some others. There are elements of real strength in North American Jewish life that we should not ignore -- a core of committed Jews constituting perhaps a fourth of the Jewish population, numerous pockets of energy and cultural creativity, a residual attachment to Jewishness even on the part of many whom we include among the "Jews at risk," and capable, resourceful institutions. Were this strength not present, no continuity strategy could hope to succeed, include the one I urge in this paper.

dysfunctions of hyper-individualism expose a need for community which has already found expression at various places within the Jewish world. The post-modern critique of rationalism and universalism as unassailable master values allows room for the re-emergence of spirituality and particularity (cf. the rapid spread of multi-culturalism). Systems approaches that are beginning to dominate thinking in areas ranging from the natural sciences to business management emphasize linkages and relationships as the keys both to understanding and changing the world. Communications technology is perhaps the most powerful symbol (both literally and figuratively) of post-modernity's accentuation and counterbalancing of the dynamics of modernity. The promise of contemporary technology embraces both vastly expanded individual choice and control over the information flow we receive, and the possibility of immediate access to virtual time, space, and communities that will permit connections far beyond those allowed by physical reality alone.

There is no question that post-modern trends and values carry their own dangers: fundamentalism, tribalism, and authoritarianism in the guise of community; moral and intellectual relativism in the guise of challenging a homogenizing universalism. But these trends also point to openings for a reconstruction of Jewish life that allow us to hope that at least some of the impacts of modernization can be mitigated, if not altogether reversed.

Toward a strategic vision for Jewish continuity

With this analysis as our starting point, the question is how to frame the basic strategy for promoting the continuity of Jewish life. Where shall we begin? What shall we emphasize?

One possibility is to tackle the problem head on, to try to convince Jews that there are good reasons for them to be "more Jewish." It is not difficult to find such reasons, ranging from the benefits Jewish practice can bring to lives often lacking in intimacy, structure, and dignity, to the moral values which

a Jewish community embodies in a world that appears desperately in need of an ethical compass. However, for the reasons cited above, it is not clear that such a strategy can work on a large scale. The process of dissipation of Jewish identity which has brought us to our current situation was and is, largely an unconscious one, and a concomitant of other processes generally valued by Jews (i.e., modernization and social integration). In this context, direct efforts to convince people to be "more Jewish" are likely to appeal only to a few who are actively seeking to change their lives unless these efforts involve drawing Jews into new social settings and relationships at the same time. "Why be Jewish?" is an important question, but not necessarily one that is being asked by many of those whose Jewish identity is already attenuated.

We should also recognize at the outset that for many of these individuals, no strategy will produce radical change. For many Jews, we can hope at best to reposition Jewish identity to give it a bit more "life-space" in which to operate and to move it somewhat closer to the center of self-definition. Seeking to accentuate the "value-added" dimension of Jewishness for these Jews, without fundamentally disturbing their other identities, is a worthwhile goal in its own right. However, from the standpoint of a concern for Jewish continuity, even success in this effort will probably not be decisive. Out of the ranks of these "consumer" Jews will come some of the "members" and "participants" needed to sustain a collective Jewish social and cultural enterprise, but it is the strength and quality of this enterprise itself that will ultimately be determinative of our continuity. This means that at least equal attention from a policy and programmatic view should be given to the question of how we increase to a critical mass the number of Jews for whom Jewishness will serve as a primary identity, integrating other identities, and expressing itself across large segments of the individual's life-space.

The burden of my argument thus far is that this can be done only by reconstructing social / experiential / cognitive realities -- communities and cultures -- that can nurture and sustain strong

Jewish identities. If *Jewish identity* is the cart we wish to move along the path of growth, *Jewish community* is the horse that will pull that cart. Focusing on individual identity solely at the programmatic level, in isolation from the larger task of community- and culture-building, is likely to prove frustrating. Community provides the context and culture the content for Jewish identity.

Ideally, the Jewish family should be the cornerstone of this effort to reconstruct Jewish community and culture. Family is the place where the initial experiences and attachments of Jewishness take root. When the family does provide a positive Jewish environment, when it is the microcosm of a Jewish community, it can have a major impact in shaping Jewish identity.

In the modern / post-modern world, though, many Jewish families are ineffective in this role. They do not provide strong Jewish environments; they are themselves weak in experiential, social, and cognitive resources to transmit. The response in recent years to this reality has been an explosion of interest in Jewish family education. From a strategic point of view, this is an entirely reasonable response, and the continued growth and qualitative improvement of family education must be encouraged.

However, trying to reinforce and re-empower the Jewish family as a Jewish social-cultural system is not a sufficient response. Even under the best of circumstances today, many other influences, especially mass culture, dilute the impact of the family in shaping identity. Further, we are coming to recognize increasingly that identity development is a lifelong process, that early family influence is often neither sufficient nor decisive. Both for this reason and because, in practical terms, neither the individual nor the family is accessible to those seeking change without a mediating agent, "the community" must be regarded as the social reality and mediator of experiences, knowledge, values, and behaviors (i.e., the culture) that is most likely to serve as the engine of reconstruction in Jewish life.

Of course, a strategic focus on the community (rather than the individual or family) is not without its own difficulties. After all, the breakdown of community is no small piece of the problem we are trying to address. In fact, one could argue that it is far easier to change individual lives, using tools that we know are available and do work, than to imagine that we can transform a fragmented, but highly institutionalized community, best known for its "culture of organizations," into an effective plausibility structure for dramatically enhanced Jewish identity and commitment.

Nevertheless, without such a transformation, I believe that it is unlikely that our efforts to change individuals can produce more than marginal gains in the prospect for Jewish continuity. In order to retain and create the critical mass of committed Jews needed to sustain a significant collective enterprise over time, the community must, in effect, become a self-reproducing system. The demographic studies indicate that this is not happening today. Successes in helping even a fairly substantial number of Jews become a little more Jewish -- a result by no means yet within our grasp -- will not be enough. What is required is the creation of many more intensely Jewish Jews, and this, in turn will require the development of significantly stronger plausibility structures suited to nurturing and sustaining this level of commitment.[8]

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[8] This is an arena where all of us have much to learn from the Orthodox. They have succeeded in

creating communities rich in inducements and reinforcements at the practical and social levels
supporting the beliefs and behaviors they advocate. Creating similarly powerful social contexts for
other modes of Jewish living is the great challenge that non-Orthodox varieties of Judaism face.

This means that for some substantial segment of the Jewish populace, the Jewish community will function as the "home" community from which individuals go out to participate in other social / cultural contexts and to which they return for their primary connections.[9] In light of the diversity of the Jewish population in life circumstance, background, temperament, and interests, we will need

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[9] I'm suggesting that though most of us tend to move through a number of social worlds in the course of our activities, we can and do feel differently about our rootedness in these worlds. Some we visit; some we feel we are coming home to. A "home" community, I think, is one that we feel especially comfortable in, one that we care about deeply, and one that we look to for both nurturance and guidance. The "home" community does not have an exclusive hold on the minds and hearts of its members, but it is recognized as being "special" and "closer" to the individual in some important ways than other social contexts in which he/she lives and works.

multiple realities (multiple communities) that will engage different individuals and even the same individual at different times. But, in order to form an overarching plausibility structure for Jewish life, these "sub-communities" will also need to recognize and seek to realize a substantial measure of commonality and connectedness to one another.[10]

In practical terms, the shift in emphasis from the individual to the community means focusing less on the ideological bases for Jewish identity than on the social and behavioral bases for Jewish involvement and commitment. We must try to create sites and settings in the collective life-space that we call the Jewish community which invite attachment and can subsequently provide ideological legitimation for that attachment. The strategic paradigm is to engage the individual in a community which has identifiable Jewish characteristics (in both material culture and behavioral patterns), and using the social influence of such communities, to build a sense of commitment to the community and its culture.

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[10] The dynamics of competition in a pluralized context are complex. On the one hand, failure to tout one's wares and to differentiate oneself in the marketplace is crippling; on the other, unbridled competition ultimately undermines the credibility of all the competitors. Too much parochialism and denigration of other Jewish institutions, movements, etc., renders the claims of all suspect.

This will not be, of course, a uni-directional process. The relationship of individual and community is always dialectical: once the individual becomes a participant in a community's social and cultural reality, (s)he helps to shape that reality as well. But, as proponents of "in-reach" to marginally involved Jews have reminded us, it is primarily the intensity, character, and quality of the community they encounter that determine whether individual Jews who do enter Jewish institutions become strongly attached to them (and hence likely to give something back) or remain "consumers" who eventually turn elsewhere to buy a different product.

How, then, do we make our Jewish community more "community-like," more effective in providing a social / experiential / cognitive reality which will attract engagement and build commitment? Here, we must turn back to the individual and reconsider the ways in which traditional communities effectively anchor and embrace individual's lives so as to cement the bonds between and among them and with the collective as a whole. There are several points where the community can try to give structure and content to individual's lives that will reinforce attachment by responding to some of the problematics of post-modern life.

One is by providing nurturance, warmth, and security which are often missing in a highly individualized and institutionalized society. Cults should teach us how powerful these experiences can be in creating not only intense personal bonds, but in securing commitment to what in their case are often highly unbelievable ideologies. We need more emphasis on the community's role in caring for its members before we can ask more of them.

In practical terms, this argues for the importance of organizing our institutions for the *mitzvot* of *gemilut hassadim* in ways that emphasize their personal, concrete, participatory aspects. Again, making an ideological claim about the worthwhileness of Jewish values certainly can follow, but probably cannot precede, presenting these values at the level of lived experience. (This applies both

to performers and beneficiaries of the *mitzvot*.) The objective of being a visibly and palpably warm and nurturing community has relevance for thinking about how we have organized our social services, one of the jewels in the crown of organized Jewish life. Is it possible that these have become too professionalized, too divorced from the larger matrix of collective Jewish living? Perhaps these services will speak more powerfully if delivered in the context of multi-dimensional Jewish communities, synagogues and centers, rather than in the offices or treatment rooms of "agencies," no matter how Jewishly committed and sensitive the personnel?

A second way in which our institutions can address the need for structure and content in individual's lives, and thereby take on more of the aspects of traditional community, is in guiding the use of time. This is more than a matter of filling leisure time with activities. Post-modern life is often perceived as an endless "rush" of events. People are looking for the proverbial "quality time," time which is measured, purposeful and shared. (Research on Jewish family education indicates that the promise of such time for parents and children is one of family education's strongest attractions.)

Ritual life is, of course, in large measure about just this, rendering the passage of time meaningful by giving it both structure and attention. For most Jews today, infusing time with "Jewishness" will not recreate the traditional Jewish experience of time, where the day, the calendar and the life-cycle are tightly organized and experienced entirely in Jewish terms. But we can try to add Jewish markers to these domains. Making Shabbat a focal point for intensified familial and congregational Jewish activity, as is now almost universally urged, is a worthy centerpiece to such efforts. The development of new non-traditional life-cycle rituals, such as a trip to Israel as an adolescent "rite of passage," makes eminent sense in this context as well.

The aim in these efforts should be to create "Jewish regularities" in the experience and use of time to counteract the regularities imposed by the dominant non-Jewish culture. There is a principle in

education which seems valid here as well: the more time on task, the more learning. Research on Jewish youth programs conducted by Hanan Alexander indicates that these are most effective when they engage young people over extended periods and in intensive, concentrated ways, i.e., when they occupy significant amounts of time and when they fill that time fully. (Partisans of Jewish camping have long recognized this same principle.) Quite simply, this would argue for whatever strategies we can devise that will capture more time for "Jewish" activity in any form and in any setting. Not only quality, but sheer quantity matters.

Efforts to "re-ritualize" the calendar and the life-cycle for Jews will be more effective if at the same time Jewish institutions are helping individuals cope with the real issues posed by the pressured rhythms of daily life and life's critical passages. There is a connection, I would suggest, between the credibility of a call for Shabbat observance and the ability of those making that call to help families deal in real terms with the perceived difficulties of managing multiple careers, providing quality education and child-care, and having time available for self-enrichment and fellowship. Similarly, as individuals face major life transitions, e.g., divorce, being able to provide both real assistance in negotiating difficult passages -- emotionally, financially, socially -- and meaningful contexts in which to connect these experiences to Jewish symbols and values is likely to establish a more powerful sense of being part of a real community than either component of response alone.

A third way in which Jewish communities can draw individuals into a Jewish social reality by addressing typical post-modern needs is by providing explicit opportunities for personal meaning-making in a Jewish key: The question, what is my life about?, though not always at the forefront of consciousness, is for most humans one that resurfaces repeatedly in the face of our mortality, begging for serious answers that contemporary culture is hard-pressed to provide. Judaism and Jewish life have traditionally excelled in answering this question, offering Jews an opportunity to attach their personal histories to the destiny of a messianic people serving the one God of the universe. The life

of Torah, around which the community organized its daily existence, assured that this answer would be felt and enacted, not merely believed in the abstract.[11]

Can contemporary Judaism and the Jewish community provide similarly effective answers today for any substantial number of Jews? If so, it will likely come through the same vehicle that traditional Judaism (and many other religious traditions) employ so well: the power of stories to confer and express meaning.[12] In a period when propositional theology holds little appeal, narrative as a way of making sense of the world and of one's life seems to be faring far better. The human ability to understand our experience as an unfolding story, and to link this experience to other, more encompassing stories, may represent our best hope for snatching meaning from a chaotic world. Certainly, the enduring power of myth in human experience is well-attested, whether the narrative emanates from sacred texts or Hollywood studios.

The key question from the standpoint of Jewish continuity is whether non-traditional Jews can be brought to see their personal stories as connected to traditional and historical Jewish narratives ("master stories") and to a living community which tells and enacts these stories, and views them as norm-giving. For this to occur, three things must happen: First, Jews must be encouraged to become story-tellers and to share the narratives of their lives with other Jews. Second, these Jews must have

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[11] Recall Clifford Geertz's assertion that this linkage of ethos and world view so that each supports the other is the unique, defining characteristic of religion as a cultural system.

[12] I am particularly indebted to my friends at CLAL, especially Irwin Kula and David Elcott, for the ideas in this section.

opportunities to hear and grapple with the master stories, not as dicta to which they must conform, but as templates to try out as aids in giving their personal stories increased scope and resonance. (These "master stories" include not only textual narratives, but the stories emanating from Jewish history as well. Understanding the ways in which Jews have lived in the past provides additional templates for our own efforts to construct meaningful Jewish lives in vibrant Jewish communities.)

Third, the community must continue to struggle with how to *enact* its master stories, how to realize and call attention to the behavioral implications implicit within them. Just as ritual lends potency to myth, so too our Jewish master stories will be more persuasive if they are seen as generative of collective behavior. The American Jewish community has done this superbly with the story of "Holocaust to rebirth." Regardless of whether one feels that the Holocaust and the State of Israel (separately or together) have come to play too prominent, too exclusive a role in the contemporary Jewish consciousness, one must acknowledge that few, if any, other Jewish stories have had a similar ability to inspire 20th century American Jews to individual and collective action. There are other Jewish stories, e.g., the call to be a "holy community," whose contemporary behavioral parameters have been far less fully explored, and the challenge for the community is to seek to translate these stories as well into programs of action.

The Jewish community must, in effect, become one in which large numbers of stories, traditional, historical, and personal, are exchanged. Gradually, we may hope, the configurations of shared stories (and shared meanings) will emerge, and out of these stories, which are likely to contain many traditional elements, mutual commitments to live in accordance with the stories will likely emerge as well.

These are but three ways in which the contemporary Jewish community might strengthen its capacity to serve as a plausibility structure for intensified Jewishness. We may rightly question, however, whether efforts along these lines could possibly have sufficient impact to outweigh the fact that for

most Jews, American society and culture are and will remain the primary context for and influence on the shaping of their beliefs, values, and behaviors. This recognition opens up an additional strategic direction for consideration: seeking to infuse public space and time with Jewish presences to the extent possible.

Although North America represents the most benign and supportive diaspora environment in which Jews have ever lived, the public arena remains by and large neutral-to-negative in its impact on Jewishness because it provides relatively few positive cues or reinforcements for Jewish behavior. But this arena is also accessible to efforts designed to provide positive Jewish images and messages. Increasing attention has been given in the past few years to the possibilities for employing a variety of media -- from television to computer networks -- in ways that will foster Jewish pride, supply Jewish knowledge, or build Jewish connections, especially for many who are not drawn to Jewish institutions.[13] (In the world of telecommunications today, people speak of "virtual communities" of individuals who interact, sometimes quite intimately and over long periods, only electronically. As anyone who has checked out the Internet lately can confirm, there are thriving Jewish "virtual communities" dealing with almost every imaginable concern and interest throughout today's cyberspace.) Some have urged that the tools of modern marketing and advertising be similarly mobilized to foster Jewish consciousness. Even traditional American Jewish opposition to the placement of religious symbols in public spaces has been called into question, as groups like the Lubavitcher Hasidim have erected large *hanukkiot* in parks and in front of city halls.

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[13] Some would argue that there is already much more available in the public arena that could be employed to heighten Jewish consciousness than we may recognize and take advantage of. Certainly on one level, the disproportionate attention that the media give to Israel and to Jews and Jewish life in general (itself the product of many complex factors) creates a public presence for Jewishness that is greater than one might expect, albeit not always an entirely positive one. Jews and Jewish issues often show up in unexpected places (e.g., the question of whether to sit *shiva* for one's estranged father was a central plot element in a recent TV science fiction series set in the 23rd century!). The Revson Foundation's work to create the Jewish Heritage Video Collection from extensive commercial film and broadcast material illustrates graphically the potential for mobilizing the media for Jewish identity-building purposes.

In this context, we must address the question of the impact, both actual and potential, of what is unquestionably the most powerful Jewish plausibility structure of our era: the State of Israel. Israel has and continues to play many different roles with respect to North American Jewish identity.[14] For most American Jews it is a multi-vocal symbol -- of Jewish tradition, post-Holocaust revival, continuing vulnerability, mutual responsibility, social justice, heroism, etc. Yet some of these symbolic resonances appear to be fading or becoming muddy, and thus Israel's position as the symbolic center of American Jewish life, what some have regarded as a pseudo-religion in its own right, appears to be weakening.

But Israel is not just a symbol. It is a real place, and unquestionably a Jewish one, soon to be the largest Jewish community in the world. In Israel not only are Jews a majority, but public life and popular culture are thoroughly infused with Jewish referents and dimensions in a way that these can never be in North America. At its best, Israel offers Jews the opportunity to connect their Jewishness to every aspect of their and society's life. Israel as Jewish plausibility structure may play a more powerful role in the future than Israel as symbol in shaping North American Jewish identity.

Yet inevitably, this will be a highly paradoxical role. Israel's power lies precisely in its being what the Jewish Diaspora is not. Like other experiences of intensive Jewish communality where Jewish plausibility structures dominate -- Jewish summer camps and retreats -- Israel can inspire an intensification in Jewish consciousness and commitment, but unless one chooses to remain in this

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[14] See the paper by Arnold Eisen, "A New Role for Israel in American Jewish Identity," published by the American Jewish Committee.

environment through *aliya*, one faces the challenge of transferring and sustaining this level of identity in one's "normal" environment where Jewish plausibility structures are weak.

Certainly, those (and I am among them) who are urging today that as many Jewish young people as possible spend extended periods of time in Israel must be aware of this problematic.[15] Israel can serve the vital role of exposing Diaspora Jews to the possibilities (and challenges) of creating and living in a Jewish society, and thereby expand the horizons of one's Jewish identity in manifold ways. It is, as some educators have claimed, a laboratory of Jewishness. But it cannot by itself solve the problems of Jewish identity and continuity for those who will live the bulk of their lives in North America. The challenge of creating viable, attractive Jewish plausibility structures here remains.

It is not yet clear whether it is in fact possible to add to the plausibility structure for Jewish living in North America by using the public arena as a supplementary source of Jewish messages. Even if media and marketing can create a more hospitable climate for explicit community- and identity-building endeavors, it is doubtful that they can serve as substitutes for the latter. (We should

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[15] The problematic is heightened by the fact that the language of Israel's social and cultural discourse is Hebrew, a language which most American Jews do not speak. In general, the fact that North American Jews do not by and large share a distinctive Jewish language weakens their ability to maintain an integral community. The way in which we speak to one another, including the language itself, helps to create the plausibility structure for the meanings we express. Much of Judaism may be translatable (though imperfectly). But from a social constructivist perspective, the generally poor state of Hebrew in America is a barrier both to creating a solid link to the Israeli plausibility structure and to erecting such a structure on this continent.

recognize also that opening up public space carries the risk that Jewish messages will be overwhelmed by others inimical to our concerns.) The best rationale for marketing efforts and the use of media is, therefore, not that these are likely to transform behavior in their own right, but that they may enhance the receptivity of Jews to intensive efforts to involve them in uniquely Jewish environments and settings.

The attempt to carve out "Jewish space" within the larger "public space" of American life points to a broader question: How should we seek to position our community-building efforts in relationship to the surrounding society and its prevailing culture? If the plausibility structure we are seeking to erect is to be both attractive and enduring, it seems that we must walk a thin line between linking these contexts / communities (and the Jewish cultures they embody) closely to the general society and culture, and establishing areas of uniqueness, and even dissent. Without presenting some familiar elements, without being conversant with the idioms of contemporary culture and addressing issues that emanate from it, our Jewish settings are unlikely to be attractive or relevant to more than a handful of those whom we seek to engage. Indeed, one can take the argument a step further: Unless Jewish community and culture are in dialogue with the full range of contemporary art, literature, science, professions, and politics, we are impoverishing their ability to respond to ultimate questions by cutting them off from possible sources of insight and creative self-expression.[16]

Yet in such a dialogue, the Jewish partner must have something to say as well. Without speaking in a unique voice, without offering additions or alternatives to some of the norms and meanings of the larger culture, there is little chance that Jewish communities can embody a world view and ethos

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[16] The challenge is whether we can create a sense of dynamic connectedness between our Jewishness and all of the aspects of our personal and collective experience through a process of inclusion and engagement with contemporary society, rather than exclusion and disengagement that leaves us in psycho-social "ghetto." Riv Ellen Prell has put this nicely in saying that what we need is a richer dialogue with modernity, not a more powerful monologue to push out modernity.

sufficiently distinctive and powerful to motivate any serious reconsideration by Jews of how they live their lives.[17] Without embodying a "no" -- or at least a "yes, and . . ." -- and not simply a "yes" to contemporary society, Jewish identity is unlikely to be able to resist the pull toward homogenization and marginalization, the kind of purely symbolic ethnicity that Herbert Gans describes.

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[17] Issues of sexuality and politics present paradigmatic cases with respect to this dilemma. The challenge is both to have something unique and significant to say about AIDS, homosexuality, or conflict in the Balkans, and to be able to say it in ways that will induce Jews to listen.

Designing attractive and Jewishly authentic communities is challenge enough. But we must also provide individuals with both the opportunities and incentives to utilize these contexts. Issues of visibility, cost, and accessibility are not irrelevant. Requiring Jews to be highly aware and committed *before* they are likely to enter or utilize our most potent contexts for Jewish experiences (e.g., day schools, Jewish summer camps, Israel trips -- all comparatively expensive) immediately reduces our prospects for success. Nor is this only an issue of funding. Jewish settings that may function reasonably effectively as communities for their active members often find it difficult to be genuinely welcoming to those who do not share the insiders' codes.[18]

I have not yet spoken explicitly about what is probably the most widely touted weapon in the arsenal of Jewish continuity: Jewish education. My delay in doing so is in no way intended to cast doubt on the critical importance of education, conceived as a deliberately structured process of socialization and enculturation, in shaping and strengthening Jewish identity. But all that I have said thus far leads toward a particular view of how Jewish education's potential impact can best be realized. *For*

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[18] Of course, institutions are not powerless to address this problem. Hillels that are reaching out to involve students beyond their committed core, synagogues that are instituting learners' *minyanim* to acculturate those who find regular services intimidating and exclusivist, federations that are designing human resource management systems to smooth the way for new leaders to ascend to positions of influence -- these are examples of institutions struggling to extend the communality experienced by a few to larger numbers who frequently find these same institutions alienating and uninviting.

education to be maximally effective, there must be a living Jewish community in which what is being taught and learned is already visible and valued.

This principle explains why, on the one hand, the most effective programs for Jewish identity development are those that create (or expose participants to) functioning Jewish communities, and, on the other, why temporally brief and isolated experiences (even so-called transformational ones) are not in themselves sufficient to guarantee success in changing identity. Day schools, summer camps, youth group programs, trips to Israel, learning in havurot -- all these are (or at least can be) especially potent because they typically place Jews in the company of other Jews for more than just the formal learning experience itself and in environments where lived Jewish behavior is modeled and practiced over a period of time. That the experience of community and the development of behavioral norms are important elements in the educational process apart from whatever content is transmitted, is suggested by research that shows that the impact of such educational experiences often declines fairly rapidly once the individual is removed from the supportive social environment created. The growing support for what Isa Aron has called an "enculturation," rather than "instructional," model for elementary Jewish education in general also reflects acceptance of the proposition that it is difficult if not impossible to teach what hasn't been experienced.

This is not an argument for a purely "experiential" Jewish education. Communities and cultural systems are not built on shared experiences alone. Experiences without a language through which to interpret and connect them remain mute. This language involves highly sophisticated cognitive and symbolic components which must be encountered and mastered if the experiences are to yield their full potential of meaning. Performing Friday night rituals without knowing some measure of the historical, theological, literary, and halakhic dimensions and resonances of Shabbat is rote behaviorism, not Jewish observance. The challenge for education is to curricularize the socialization / enculturation process over time and for various target groups in all its dimensions: cognitive,

affective, social, and behavioral. A holistic Jewish education, anchored in the life of real Jewish communities, and capable of interpreting and communicating the depth and complexity of that life, is the only kind of Jewish education likely to have a decisive impact on Jewish identity development.

The Content of community

There is, then, a consistent bottom line to my analysis of the potential strategies for promoting Jewish continuity: To be significantly more successful than we are today, we need to create many more and richer contexts in which Jewish culture is the prevailing, socially operative, framework within which activities are being undertaken and interpreted. That is to say, we need more Jewish *community*, not just more *programs*.[19]

To stop here, however, begs a critical question: what shall the content, the culture, of these communities be like? Communities are defined by more than the relationships among their members.

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[19] Programs are, of course, needed to create community. What I am arguing against is a tendency sometimes seen in recent years to view programs as ends in themselves, rather than as means. I am also suggesting the program goals should be framed not only in terms of their desired impact on individuals, but in terms of their potential for community-building. In thinking about the latter, we will enhance the likelihood of achieving the former.

 Martin Buber emphasized that a true community has a Center -- a shared vision, purpose, commitment -- to which its members are linked like the spokes to the hub of a wheel. It is this common relation to the Center which serves to bind the members together. Any social reality communicates meaning implicitly through its structure, the norms of behavior it sanctions, and the codes of communication that govern day to day relationships within it. But communities also provide meaning explicitly, by articulating ideologies and world views, by telling and interpreting the kinds of master stories referred to above that lend meaning to the individual lives of their members.

These explicit meanings are not the same from community to community. Not all societies and cultures share the same world views, the same values, the same moral or aesthetic sensibility. Earlier, we suggested that Jewish communities must, if they are to constitute viable plausibility bases for a distinctive Jewish identity, themselves embody distinctive cultural contents at some level. But what can these contents be in the contemporary, post-modern world, and what truth claims can be made on their behalf? What version (or versions) of Judaism will work today and be transmissible across generational boundaries so as to ensure continuity?

Clearly, the cultural contents of Jewish communities will and must be diverse. If there ever was an era when Jewish culture was unitary and monolithic, it is long since past. Yet, the pure existentialist position which claims that Jewish is as Jewish does (i.e., whatever Jews may choose to do in the name of Jewishness has equal validity) also cannot be accepted as a framework for designing serious Jewish communities. The framing of the key questions, if not the answers themselves, must come out of a common storehouse of cultural categories that, for better or worse, we call "Jewish tradition." What Shabbat may mean and how it will be celebrated in various Jewish communities may differ; that there must be Shabbat (and that it must be on Saturday) seems inescapable if a community is to call itself Jewish.

This means that we will need major efforts to acquaint a largely unlearned Jewish population with the contents of classical Jewish culture. As noted above, Jewish education, conceived as both socialization and enculturation, is rightly regarded as central to Jewish continuity. In fact, in a profound sense, education is itself the content of both Jewish community and culture. We are a Torah-centered people who ultimately refuse to separate study and action into means and end. In a more practical sense, all the characteristics that would enable a Jewish setting to take on the attributes of a Jewish *community* are tied into the traditional vocabulary of Jewish life. Without the ability to understand, use, and perhaps even add to this vocabulary, an individual can hardly be expected to be an active and satisfied participant in the life of the community. And this facility cannot be achieved without learning -- textual, historical, and experiential.

By identifying the cultural storehouse for Jewish communities with Jewish tradition, we raise the question of whether contemporary Jewish communities and cultures must be religious, in the ways we have conventionally understood this term. Many are arguing today that genuine and transmissible Jewish commitment can only be nurtured in explicitly religious contexts and in religious language. And indeed, attempts to construct alternative secular Jewish ideological and value systems in the modern period have largely failed.

Yet, the issue is a difficult one for several reasons: First, there is the empirical question of whether the religious ideologies operative among Jews today, at least outside Orthodox and elite circles, in fact play any significant role in shaping behavior. We have argued that the development and expression of Jewish identity probably owes more to the presence or absence of Jewish plausibility structures in which particular Jewish behaviors are manifest than to the communication of rationales for Jewish identification and commitment. (If this were not so, many of our current efforts to nurture Jewish identity should be more effective than they apparently are.) Community must have a content, but it

may be that this content needs to be made explicit primarily at the behavioral level, not through ideology, religious or secular.

Still, it is hard to dismiss the role of articulated ideologies and values altogether, given the fact that humans are rationalizing creatures who, at a minimum, seek to give their behavior legitimation in ideational and moral terms, and who may well be motivated to act by these same considerations. It may be fairer to say that there *is* a connection between Jewish ideology and behavior in which each in some way reinforces the other, though the precise dynamics of the relationship may vary and are difficult to pin down. However, this does not resolve the question of whether Jewish ideologies must be religious in order to exert a significant impact.

Historically, an important element in the power of religious ideologies has been the experiences (individual or collective) of the sacred that they can invoke to legitimate their claims. When Jews are asked to accept behavioral norms (i.e., *mitzvot*) traditionally perceived and promulgated as reflecting the will of a Sacred Power, their ability to experience that Power in their lives is surely one (though not the only) determinant of the persuasiveness of this call. (That is to say, Torah without Sinai, without the experience of its revelation, is not quite as authoritative.) The ability to invoke powerful spiritual experiences is one of the advantages that religion has over purely secular meaning systems in asserting its influence, one which secular authority frequently seeks to mimic through theatrics and other means.

Most surveys, however, show that American Jews are highly secularized, perhaps the most secularized segment of American society. Some would argue that this secularity is experiential even more than it is ideological. Many Jews simply don't experience the sacred in their lives, or if they do, don't recognize and name it as such.

What is certainly true is that many American Jews don't experience the sacred in the ways and places they have been told to expect to find it: in explicitly religious institutions. If it is true that Jewish identity detached from a religious base is inherently tenuous (at least from the point of view of transmissibility -- as seems to be the case); and that religious ideology has difficulty sustaining itself as impactful without religious experience to support it; but that the religious institutions which have serious ideologies often fail to be effective mediators of religious experience (on this score, statistics on synagogue attendance are chastening); then a major priority must be not the repeated reiteration of the ideological claims (which are likely to be falling on deaf ears), but the reinvigoration of religious experience itself.

Religious institutions must look carefully at which elements of religious life and language resonate for Jews today as pathways to the experience of the sacred and the acceptance of behavioral commitments (*mitzvot*), and which do not. Theology and large group prayer (the typical worship experience in many synagogues) may be ineffectual, while Judaic text study, family ritual, personal participation in acts of *tzedakah* and *gemilut hassadim*, and more intimate "havurah-style" worship may be quite potent. These institutions must also acknowledge that religious experience, and hence even some measure of ideological validity, can be found in settings that are not conventionally religious. What I have called the "civil religious" settings and institutions of the contemporary Jewish community -- among which, preeminently, I would list the land and State of Israel -- are also sources of sacred experience for many Jews, with or without religious ideological interpretation.

For most American Jews, Jewishness remains a complex, poorly conceptualized mixture of ethnic, cultural, and religious components. We must use all these elements in seeking to create social / cultural frameworks within which the sense of commitment can be nurtured. We will need systems of meaning to undergird Jewish behavior, but these may well be, as Riv Ellen Prell has suggested, dialogic and partial, rather than comprehensive and systematic, and lead to Jewish practice without

constituting full-fledged systems of obligation.[20] "Signals of transcendence" (in Berger's phrase) can be found for different individuals in different places. In fact, there is a serious theological current in modern Judaism, exemplified in such diverse figures as Kaplan, Buber, Borowitz, and Greenberg, which argues that this era is characterized by a blurring of the boundaries between the sacred and secular realms. Some go even further and contend that the goal of instilling a sense of "holy secularity" -- of effecting the interpenetration of these two ostensibly distinct sensibilities -- may be read out of (or into) the texts and ideologies of classical Judaism as far back as the Bible itself.

Does this "opening up" of the sacred accentuate or diminish the importance and impact of explicit religious institutions and ideologies? The answer is not clear. It may be that we will have and need a variety of language-frames in which to express this sensibility -- some traditional, some not. It is probable that as the purely ethnic components of Jewishness recede, and as Jewish popular culture grows less familiar (what does that Yiddish phrase mean?) and/or distinctive ("you don't have to be Jewish to . . ."), religious symbols and behaviors *will* grow more important as the elements of a shared Jewish culture. Religious language does represent our richest and most widely shared vocabulary for explicating Jewish life. For all of its problematics, other languages are even less potent. However, religious language itself is increasingly likely to appear as hybrid meaning-constructions with

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[20] We have a better chance, I think, to get significant numbers of Jews to accept the concept of *mitzvah*, of being "commanded" or "committed" to doing *specific* acts, both ethical and ritual, than to accept *halakhah* as a personally binding comprehensive *system* of obligations. Indeed, all Jewish religious movements today, even those that understand themselves as non- or post-Halakhic, are seeking to instill in their adherents the sense of *mitzvah* as a necessary component of their spiritual lives.

intertwined religious and secular elements. These "messy" constructs, and not movement ideologies per se, may well be the primary cognitive and value frameworks for most Jews, even those who "affiliate" with religious institutions.

It is thus even more essential that religious vocabulary and symbols do not become formulaic and objectified, but rather remain actively in use for shared meaning-making. This is the challenge which religious institutions face: Having won the ideological battle with secularism, can they prevent their victory from becoming pyrrhic? Religious institutions make a grave error if they believe that the decline of secularism is ipso facto a sign of their own strength. Nor do the indicators of a spiritual / religious revival in Jewish life (whose dimensions are unclear) constitute an unreserved vote of confidence in the ideologies of our major religious movements. Only by ensuring that religious ideology and values are tied -- and exposed -- to the life of real Jewish communities, where they will be measured against individual and collective experience and their power to help shape Jewish life-space tested, can these elements of Jewish culture achieve significant impact. Content as culture cannot precede community; it can only emerge along with it, even if its roots are in the most ancient texts and traditions.

I conclude once again, therefore, that the linchpin of our continuity efforts must be the construction of Jewish communities (social / cognitive / experiential realities), some of which will be explicitly and conventionally religious and some of which may experience and articulate their center, their unifying vision, in non-traditional ways.

From strategy to tactics: How do we build communities?

We come now to the *tachlis*. It's fine to speak about the need for creating Jewish communities, but just how shall we do this, especially in light of the analysis suggesting that the loss of community is

one of the characteristic features of modern Jewish life? The only practical answer, it seems to me, is to work with what community we do have, namely, the elaborate set of existing institutions that constitute the public domain of American Jewish life.

We may hope that new forms of community will emerge from time to time to challenge, catalyze, supplement, or fill the spaces between existing organizations. We need experiments in community-building and new types of institutions. Indeed, there are many Jews for whom the current institutional infra-structure of American Jewry is at best irrelevant and at worst repelling. Some of these Jews have found or formed their own Jewish communities, often nearly invisible to the dominant structures and their leadership. Others are still seeking (or may have despaired of finding) connections to Jews who share their particular interests or dispositions.

There is no loss and much potential gain for Jewish life in welcoming and even seeking to assist such nascent or counter-cultural communities. Helping them to grow and to establish linkages with other like-minded Jews adds to the sum total of community in Jewish life. Some may worry that such communities will foster highly idiosyncratic, "marginal" forms of Jewishness, not only further fragmenting the weak Jewish plausibility structure, but blurring the boundaries between Jewish and non-Jewish cultural contents. Yet, in an already highly pluralistic, at times fractured, Jewish world, it is unlikely that these communities represent the real threat to communal and cultural integrity. It is far more likely that without such communities, some not insignificant portion of the Jewish populace will simply be lost to Jewish life.

Having said this, I still believe that the primary arena in which the efforts to strengthen community and to build a powerful Jewish plausibility structure must take hold is that of our current institutional infrastructure -- especially the synagogues and their associated institutions, and the federated system of agencies. (Most new institutions will probably be absorbed into this infra-structure in some

fashion, either directly as organizations alongside those at work today, or by becoming attached to existing institutions, much as has happened with the havurah movement. And, though one day perhaps, "virtual communities" will diminish the role of institutions altogether, and allow unmediated connections through electronic interfacing, this is neither an immediate nor, for many, an entirely encouraging prospect.)

Today's institutions, however, fall short, often far short, of what is needed to be effective identity-nurturing and -sustaining communities. Increasingly, the realization is spreading that the core of the continuity agenda is an agenda of profound institutional strengthening and transformation, both internally and in relation to one another. Institutions must be capable of offering a menu of high quality programs to educate, socialize, and enculturate, but, equally important, they must be capable of binding participants into real groups in whose relationships, behavior, and conversations the educational content is anchored.

In recent years, many Jewish institutions have been induced to adopt a consumer orientation in their activities, emphasizing programs and services that will be attractive to prospective participants. To some extent, this approach is driven by economic necessity. However, it can also reflect a healthy openness to continual self-assessment, and a desire to be responsive to genuine needs, rather than to impose institutional objectives that may be divorced from reality. In this sense, a "marketing mentality" can be an important prerequisite to creating an engaged constituency that will give an institution the opportunity to have an impact on their life-choices. But "customer service" must ultimately be transcended as a definition of institutional *purpose* and as the content of an institution's culture, because it too easily accepts an ethos that regards Jewishness as entirely voluntaristic and selective. Attracting consumers of Jewish programs and services is the beginning of community, but not its full realization.

Indeed, one can argue further that what is most likely to attract new participants to Jewish institutional life is precisely the likelihood of their experiencing there an attachment to a community that is active and authentic. This seems to be one of the lessons we can learn from those in the Jewish world who have enjoyed the greatest success in "outreach." There is a delicate dialectic that links the principle of "meeting people where they are" with the need to "be what you are." One must reach out from a place that is itself rich, vibrant, and content-ful, as well as open, sensitive, and adaptive, else when the invitation to join in has been accepted, there may be no "there there" to sustain the engagement.

In the effort to transform institutions into true communities, the synagogue is the institution most directly on the firing line because more Jews look to it for primary Jewish community than to any other institution. The classical ideal of the synagogue, at once a *beit kenesset* (house of assembly), *beit tefilah* (house of prayer) and *beit midrash* (house of study), is almost a paradigm for what a contemporary Jewish community should seek to be. Few synagogues today realize this paradigm for more than a handful of their congregants. But the fact that a wide variety of Jewish activities of every type can take place under one roof, and that multiple sub-communities can pursue their own Jewish needs and interests and still come together and feel the power of being a single *kahal* (congregation), give the synagogue an enormous potential as the cornerstone of a revitalized Jewish plausibility structure. This is the stake that every Jewish institution has in the success of synagogue renewal efforts. There are already a few model congregations worth emulating.[21] But the bottom line is that the challenge to the synagogue is monumental, and the evident weaknesses of other institutions in Jewish communal life today should not be cause for complacency or triumphalism among synagogue leaders.

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[21] Some of these exceptional congregations are well known; others are undoubtedly waiting to be discovered. But interest in remaking the synagogue as a community is clearly growing, as recent conferences and projects underway in several movements attest.

What these weaknesses do indicate, is the need for the transformation of these institutions as well. No one would seriously argue, I believe, that we do not need a multiplicity of institutions of different types to meet effectively the needs of our tremendously diverse Jewish populace and to fulfill the multiple purposes of collective Jewish existence. (Whether we need quite as many as we have is another question.) But if these institutions are to add substantially to the sum total of Jewish community available to Jews, they must be sensitive to the same issues of how to forge genuine connections among Jews and how to develop norms of shared behavior, linked to Jewish experiences, language, and meanings, that synagogues should be preoccupied with.

All Jewish institutions can, and some are beginning to, address this mandate. The Judaization of some federations through the incorporation of study, ritual, and intensive experiences of fellowship in retreats and on missions is one example of what can be done. The Hillel system is embarked on a major effort to reshape itself as a more open, encompassing structure capable of serving both as a visible, attractive and relevant Jewish presence on campus and as a nurturer of Jewish growth along a wider spectrum of dimensions and for a broader array of students. But there is still a long way to go to engage the full ensemble of organizations that could transform themselves into more effective Jewish community-building instruments -- membership organizations, social service agencies, community relations bodies -- with this agenda.

Alongside the synagogue, the institution that probably has the best chance to make a substantial contribution to the expansion of Jewish community is the Jewish Community Center (JCC). Historically, the JCC has been a primary institution of Jewish acculturation to American life. However, for at least the past decade the dominant thrust among the leadership of the Center movement has been to refashion the JCC as a Jewish identity-building and educational instrument. Significant changes have already taken place: the hiring of Jewish educational specialists for JCCs; Judaic training of staff and lay leadership (especially in Israel); expanded Jewish content in Center

programming in such areas as adult education, early childhood education, family education, and summer camping; Jewish holiday celebrations and increased efforts to create a Jewish ambience in Center buildings.

The challenge Centers now face is whether they can consolidate and extend these changes in order to transform the fundamental culture of the JCC. Certainly, the Center has unique capabilities as a potential Jewish plausibility structure. It does reach and engage broad spectra of Jews, across both age and ideological lines. There is evidence that JCCs are especially effective as gateways into Jewish experience, association, and even learning for populations that are reluctant or not ready to participate in synagogues. The large and diverse membership of Centers, their wide variety of activities, and their often impressive physical plants constitute a Jewish plausibility structure in their own right. Center leaders speak today of aspiring to become a "new Jewish neighborhood," replete with the sights, smells, and sounds of Jews and Jewishness in action. Centers also have superior abilities to mobilize modes of expression such as the arts that are often neglected as vehicles for building engaging Jewish communities and culture.

JCCs do face significant challenges, however, if they are to become powerful mediators of Jewish community for substantial numbers of Jews. Perhaps more than any other Jewish institution they are bound to a consumer ethos and a market-oriented strategy of engagement. This is both a strength and a potential weakness for the building of communities of commitment, as I have noted above. People come to Centers for many reasons and with many expectations. Often these have nothing to do with a desire for Jewish experiences. For some JCCs this fact motivates efforts to become more creative in introducing Jewish elements into all aspects of their work and for larger numbers of their "customers." But this is rarely easy, and amidst the competition for attention and resources (and with staff often limited in their Judaic knowledge and skills), the Jewish component is frequently minimal.

Centers must also grapple with the question of the content of the Jewishness they sponsor. Some still look to the JCC movement as the potential generator and transmitter of a non-denominational, secular Jewish ideology and culture.[22] Others doubt that such a form of Judaism can today have an impact outside institutional settings and that it is transmissible. It may not in fact be necessary (or desirable) for JCCs to develop a unique, integral Jewish culture in their own right in order to make a contribution to the sum total of Jewish community, especially if their role is primarily that of gateway and adjunct to other Jewish settings. But, as Center leaders themselves are increasingly recognizing, neither can Centers be satisfied to be the sponsors of a minimalist, least common denominator version of Jewishness that is largely associational, expressed only within the walls of the institution (and then primarily in symbolic form), and inconsequential in terms of its impact on individual behavior and commitments.

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[22] I use "secular" here in the "soft" sense of not being explicitly tied to a particular religious ideology. "Soft secularism" is compatible with affirming much traditional Judaic religious content, even with using a language of "spirituality," but shies away from explicit theological discourse, denominationalism, or dealing with issues of religious authority. The "civil Judaism" I described in my book *Sacred Survival* embodies a "soft secularism."

A third major complicating factor faced by JCCs is that their very efforts to become more Jewishly substantive often cause tension with synagogues and with other educational institutions. I know of no evidence that as Centers become more Jewishly vigorous and (presumably) thereby strengthen the Jewish plausibility structure for their members, synagogues are weakened. But turf and the perception of destructive competition are realities in Jewish organizational life, and Centers must develop strategies (hopefully with the cooperation of synagogues) to minimize the perception that their efforts at institutional transformation may negatively impact on others. The most desirable way to do this, on both practical and theoretical grounds, is to develop positive collaborations in which the community-building, culture-transmitting endeavors of multiple institutions are actually advanced. Happily, a growing number of examples of this type of collaboration can be found.[23]

This highlights the fact that it is not only *within* institutions that transformation must take place, but *between* them as well. Mordecai Kaplan imagined (and urged) that American Jewish life be organized as a "communities of communities." New institutional relationships are an indispensable element of the community-building agenda. Pragmatically, we will need not just the involvement of multiple institutions, but their collaboration and mutual support, if we are to have a sufficient number

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[23] Examples include combined adult education programs, expert youth workers from Centers training synagogue youth group advisors, using Center arts facilities and staff to enrich congregational education programs, JCC programs run in synagogues, combined synagogue-JCC memberships for young singles and families, etc.

of high quality contexts and programs for identity development and expression. In order to rebuild a powerful plausibility base for Jewishness, the face we present to Jews cannot be one with gaping fissures. Synergies and smooth transitions between institutions and programs are a requisite if Jews are to feel that they are part of an overarching community, one that places priority on their welfare and growth, not on preserving institutional interests. When multiple options and entry points become unconnected, not to say jealous, suitors for the allegiance of individual Jews, all of the claimants eventually suffer. This is why individual institutions who view Jewish affiliation as a zero sum game are not only wrong (the rule in Jewish identity is "the more, the more"), but self-defeating.

This does not mean that institutions should abandon their particularity or that one size can fit all. On the ideological level, we face the challenge of developing a non-relativistic pluralism of multiple, but aligned, Jewish cultures.[24] (We face a similar challenge vis a vis the outside world -- can we locate ourselves in the emerging multi-cultural framework of American life as strong supporters of both pluralism and an overarching value framework, and at the same time assert the truth claims of Jewish values and norms, at least for Jews?) On the practical level, the challenge is to coordinate our respective institutional efforts to enculturate and socialize so that we take maximum advantage of the full (though limited) array of resources, do together those things that can best be done in concert, and still give each institution the freedom to pursue its own vision of what Jewish community can and should be.[25]

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[24] By "non-relativistic pluralism" I mean a situation in which alternative versions of Judaism recognize their familial resemblance and respect the authenticity of each version as a good-faith effort to interpret and apply the religio-cultural legacy they share, while nevertheless feeling free to assert their belief in the superior "truthfulness" of their own interpretation. This seems to me the only way to accommodate the variety of Jewish meaning systems in the contemporary world in a mutually respectful manner without asking each sub-community to give up its own claims to primary validity. I recognize that establishing a universally persuasive philosophical grounding for this position may not, in fact, be possible, and I have (I will readily confess) not attempted to do so.

[25] There are already *de facto* divisions of labor in Jewish life today, with different groups

This is a formidable challenge indeed, amounting to a cultural revolution in Jewish life. Change on this scale will require combination of individual institutional initiative and community-wide systems of support. We have learned from educational reform efforts in the general society in recent years (in some ways a less ambitious initiative than being urged here), that neither bottom-up nor top-down models of change work alone; both thrusts are needed. We are seeking to affect the inner life and deepest structural regularities of institutions that developed with different self-understandings, populations, vocabularies, and survival strategies. If change at this level is to take place, institutions need to build up their capacities for envisioning, managing, implementing, and interpreting such change.

This capacity-building must encompass:

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seeking to appeal to different constituencies with different messages. This is true, e.g., with respect to the complex issues surrounding the Jewish community's response to the rise in intermarriage. Different movements and organizations have focused on different dimensions of what together may constitute the only viable collective response: intensified efforts at prevention, an increased emphasis on the desirability of conversion, *and* outreach aimed at building some level of connection to intermarried families.

- Leadership education -- leaders must be willing to change and know how to overcome the inevitable roadblocks to doing so

- Personnel development -- there must be a sufficient number of professionals capable of guiding and facilitating community life

- Knowledge dissemination -- successes and failures must be understood and shared

- Match-making with external resources -- institutions must be guided and given access to sources of assistance in the complex process of change

- Incentivizing change -- there must be rewards and recognition for those willing to take the risks of seeking fundamental transformations and effecting new institutional relationships

Each of these tools and supports for helping institutions transform themselves requires a design and implementation system in its own right. This means that in addition to specific interventions at the institutional level, we need to create a supportive and to some extent demanding climate at the trans-institutional level which can alternately guide, assist, and drive the individual efforts. Communities will need change agents at the institutional level, change facilitators at the trans-institutional level, and change coalitions to establish the environment in which self-improvement and cooperation become the accepted norm for institutional behavior. None of this can take place without major infusions of human and financial resources, directed not only at individual institutions, but at the development of high quality support systems as well. (The need for the latter is still often overlooked or dismissed by some change advocates today. I do not see, e.g., how it is possible to produce major improvements in the scope and quality of educational programming, sure to be one of the centerpieces of any continuity effort, without a strong and capable central educational body to serve as a change facilitator and resource.)

This is the primary arena of challenge and opportunity for federations with respect to the Jewish continuity agenda. The concept of "community" has been central to the federation movement's self-

understanding as it has evolved from a league of local charities to what Daniel Elazar termed the "framing institution" of the contemporary Jewish polity. At times, the federated system has seen itself as the heir to the traditional *kehillah*, and, indeed, no other institutional framework can claim to represent and serve *all* of the Jews residing in a given locality.

At a time when the amount of genuine community in Jewish life is not great, federation's ability to embody at least one important dimension of Jewish communality -- the sense of being connected to and responsible for Jews across time and space -- should not be taken lightly. By bringing large numbers of Jews together for collective action, linked to the worldwide community of *clal yisrael*, the federated system (i.e., federations, their associated local agencies, and the national and international organizations tied directly to them) constitutes a public, visible plausibility base for Jewishness that no institution or movement in Jewish life other than State of Israel (with which it is closely linked) can match. As such, its potential as a skeleton around which to construct the "community of communities" we should be seeking is substantial.

But for this potential to be realized, federations will need to rethink their fundamental character, commitments, and style of operation. On the one hand, they will need to take even more seriously than they have their role as mediators of Jewish community and meaning. What I described a decade ago as a federation-centered and sponsored American Jewish civil religion, a set of beliefs, norms, myths, and rituals embodied in the federated system's rhetoric and activities, has enabled a substantial number of American Jews to tie their personal life stories to a larger drama being played out on the world historical stage, and to find a social reality, the federated system itself, whose activity enacts this drama. But, as I argued in my work a decade ago, the meanings provided by the civil religion are at best partial, touching only selected spheres of personal existence, and the "community" which embodies and transmits these meanings is in many respects and for most Jews a fictive one (one which does not really engage them at a personal level). If federations are to capitalize on the potential

for building community and for communicating Jewish meaning that they have discovered in their work, they must link themselves to more encompassing forms of community and holistic frameworks of Jewish meaning. Their appropriation of Jewish language must become fuller, their appreciation and support for the multiple dimensions of community life (learning, ritual, spiritual sharing, direct interpersonal contact, as well as activism) stronger.

This will not be easy for a system that has thought of itself as non-ideological, if not altogether secular, and in which the drive for consensus often seems to lead to "least common denominator" approaches to difficult issues. But the days are past when a Jewish activism rooted primarily in emotional responses to the Holocaust and Israel, explicated in a few catchphrases with little substantive Jewish content, and implemented through an organizational structure focused largely on financial concerns, could by itself reproduce serious Jewish commitment. Many federations and the national leadership of the federation system have recognized this, and the embrace of the Jewish continuity agenda by federations has begun to lead to a serious soul-searching within the system itself.

This reassessment, however, must extend beyond efforts to communalize and Judaize the federation, or to strengthen its own potential as a plausibility base. The critical role for federations in the continuity agenda remains the classical one of "community organization," though now in a new key. No other agency in American Jewish life can undertake the capacity and coalition building, the orchestration of the interplay of various institutional actors so that the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts, that is central to forging a "community of communities." Many federations have already made this the hallmark of their continuity efforts.

The question is whether they will follow the implications of taking on this demanding role to the end. Traditional federation community organization activity has reached beyond the immediate boundaries of the federated system only occasionally and tentatively. Rarely, has it embraced an explicit agenda of institutional transformation. The traditional assumptions and modalities of federation planning

seem to many ill-suited to an endeavor which will require decades, cannot be focused on a single problem or target-population, will involve multiple actors with diverse cultures and ideological commitments, will require massive investment of resources, and challenges some of the very achievements of the American institutional system itself. Those federations which approach the continuity agenda in terms of seeding a handful of new programs aimed at promoting identification or affiliation -- no matter how sound the programs themselves -- are doomed to frustration and disappointment. Unfortunately, those which see the implications in their full dimensions may well encounter even greater discouragement as they contemplate the magnitude and complexity of the task they have set themselves.[26]

Some federations, faced with this challenge, may try to do too much themselves; others may shy away from the toughest issues (how do we really get institutions to change themselves, not simply add new programs?). The best counsel I can muster is that federations must develop a clear vision of the desired end, an understanding of the paths that are likely to lead toward it, and a readiness to invest

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[26] The apparently "simple" task of forging new relationships between federation and synagogue, a sine qua non for any serious progress in building a "community of communities," is itself fraught with difficulties that can be overcome (if at all) only with enormous patience, flexibility,
and perseverance on both sides.

the time and energy (and eventually money) required to pursue the difficult path of capacity building and systemic transformation. Federations will have to model this process on themselves and use their technical skills, moral influence, and what leverage their financial resources can provide to subtly and respectfully guide other institutions to join the endeavor. Some will be more than ready, possibly way ahead of the federations; others may never be prepared to enter in wholeheartedly. But if federations focus consistently on the theme of building living Jewish communities and building mutually supportive relationships among these communities, they will at least be pointing themselves and others in the right direction.

Once more, there are federations which have sought to embody some or all of these principles in their continuity initiatives.[27] Their progress should be monitored closely, because evidence of success on their part in promoting fundamental transformations will inspire and buttress other change efforts.

And in the end, the question "why?"

As I cautioned at the outset, the framework I have laid out above is not and is not intended to be dramatically new. Rather, I have tried, necessarily in a somewhat superficial way, to restate what we are about in today's Jewish continuity endeavor. I have argued that it is important that we set our work in the context of an historical, social scientific understanding of the dynamics of Jewish identity development and of a model of institutional and cultural change. The theory I offer is straightforward: the transformation of Jewish individuals will require the transformation of Jewish

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[27] Without seeking to elaborate or analyze these initiatives here, I would cite at least Cleveland, Boston, New York, and Hartford as communities that have sought explicitly to foster institutional and communal transformation through some of the strategies suggested here. The North American Commission on Jewish Identity and Continuity is seeking to incorporate this approach in its work at the continental level.

institutions, which will in turn require transformations in the relationships among institutions, all aimed at creating a "community of communities."

Some elements that will need to be part of an eventual "grand unified theory" have been dealt with cursorily or not at all. The psycho-dynamics of Jewish identity and identity development; the complex role of the family in relation to the individual and the community; the challenges of engaging marginal Jews in the lives of the communities we are struggling to create; the details of capacity-building; the question of how to pay for all this -- these issues will all need to be addressed far more fully and adequately, not primarily, of course, for the sake of a theory, but because they are critical to any successful implementation of a continuity agenda.

Despite these obvious lacunae, I am prepared to argue that the direction for what must be done *is* clear, and that if it is not precisely as I have described it, it cannot be dramatically different.

There is one final issue I wish to address, though of a different character. Why do we wish to make the effort at all? The continuity endeavor is being driven by those of us on the inside, by Jews whose own Jewish identity is relatively secure and whose commitment to the future of the community is manifest. In urging action to promote Jewish identity and continuity we insiders find ourselves in the somewhat odd position of telling a patient (s)he is in dire need of medical intervention when the patient often complains of no problem and may even argue that the difficulty must lie in our heads! The vast majority of Jews seem not to be exercised by what bothers us, which makes it all the more difficult to imagine how they will be induced to take the medicine we prescribe.

Why do we persist? Perhaps because of a stubbornness (arrogance?) that simply will not accept that the indifferent Jews truly know what is best for themselves. Perhaps because we are sure we know

what the others are missing; perhaps because we cannot stand to see indifference to what we value so highly.

There is, of course, another way to look at this question. Perhaps our concern is not really for our contemporaries, but for our children or grandchildren. This, after all, is what continuity is about for many Jews. Certainly the question, "will our grandchildren be Jewish?" has proven to be a powerful rallying cry for continuity efforts, and not only in North America. But this concern only defers the question of why being Jewish matters, it does not answer it. And, frankly, there is some room for doubt as to whether posing the continuity issue in this fashion as a concern for the Jewishness of future generations does not subtly reinforce the sense that the whole issue is about "others," not about "ourselves." As a rallying cry, "will our grandchildren be Jewish?" seems more likely to provoke policy prescriptions than personal change. Thus, though concern for the future is undoubtedly a powerful motivating force for today's efforts, it is not, I would argue, a sufficient basis on which to ground them and may, in fact, lead us somewhat astray.

I believe that there is another basis for our determination to take action whose more explicit acknowledgement may be critical to our ultimate success. I suggest that we care about others' Jewishness, including that of our progeny, because we still believe that being Jewish makes a difference in some larger scheme, and not only personally. We do connect our own life narratives in some way with the master story of the Jewish people's covenantal character and mission, with the belief that we carry distinctive values and responsibility in the world. And we intuit correctly not only, as Arthur Hertzberg has suggested we do, that the disappearance of the Jewish people would be an unutterable tragedy, but that only a community that is strong, self-confident, and reasonably populous -- not a remnant community -- can effect our mission today. It is not mere pride or perversity that drives our current anxiety and efforts. It is the conviction that Jewish continuity is *not* a self-interested conceit; it is a vital contribution to the welfare of humanity.

Only this conviction that what Jews do as Jews has ultimate significance can validate a readiness and willingness to struggle for our distinctiveness when external reasons for doing so have faded. If Jews are to be prepared to say "no" to some aspects of contemporary culture, without which it is hard to imagine Jewish identity enduring, they must have a very good reason to do so. We cannot compel or convince those unsure of their commitment to accept our reasons; we can only share these reasons and seek to open a dialogue -- an honest dialogue in which we grapple openly with the compelling, often troubling, implications of this kind of faith in the contemporary world.

Even a "grand unified theory" of Jewish continuity will, then, lead not to definitive answers about our fate, but to a confrontation with the mystery of Jewish existence. Without facing this mystery, for ourselves first of all, the Jewish continuity agenda may be neither feasible nor worth pursuing. But this is not so different from what many physicists and cosmologists expect from their "grand unified theory" as well: an appreciation of the unity of the universe that leads beyond knowledge to wonder and appreciation.