FROM CHALLENGE TO OPPORTUNITY
To Build Inspired Communities

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Federations can respond most effectively to the challenge of continuity by providing greater resources to enable the transformation of local institutions into compelling Jewish communities. Only such inspired communities will engage marginal Jews and motivate them to begin the journey of Jewish living and learning. Synagogues, JCCs, Hillels, and Jewish summer camps are of particular significance in the creation of compelling communities.

Since the publication of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), the organized Jewish community has increasingly focused on the issue of Jewish continuity. In fact, affirmations about Jewish continuity have become one of the statements of public catechism of the organized Jewish community at the end of the twentieth century. One rarely attends a public Jewish meeting or reads an Anglo-Jewish paper without encountering the term. This is particularly remarkable in the absence of a widely shared understanding of it.

This article seeks to help identify how federations might respond most effectively to the challenge and growing focus on continuity. It begins by clarifying how the term "Jewish continuity" is used in communal discourse and proceeds to place it in its broader American context. After noting the primary Jewish continuity strategies that have emerged, it advocates for federations to place higher priority on, and provide greater resources toward, strengthening local institutions as compelling Jewish communities, inspired institutions for Jewish living and learning. Calling attention to the first initiatives that have emerged, it concludes with a series of questions and issues raised by this agenda.

COMMUNAL FOCUS ON JEWISH CONTINUITY

As every reader of this journal knows, the 1990 NJPS revealed that 52% of Jews who married between 1985 and 1990 married non-Jews. Contrasting with figures of 3% for the years 1900–1940, 7% for 1940–1960, and 32% for the years 1965–1985, the 52% figure sent a shock wave through the leadership of the American Jewish community. If we are to understand how the term "Jewish continuity" is used in communal discourse, the first element is a recognition of demographic challenge.

The 1990 NJPS also revealed what some observers refer to as the good news: the correlation between positive Jewish identification in any way that one understands it—synagogue membership, contributing to federations, marrying within, having a high percentage of Jewish friends, support for Israel—and having experienced intensive Jewish education. The 1990 NJPS and subsequent studies by Stephen M. Cohen (1993), Bethamie Horowitz (1993), Sylvia Barack Fishman and Alice Goldstein (1993), and others identified day schools, Jewish summer camps, youth groups and Israel experience trips as having abiding, some call it "transformational," impact on the development of positive Jewish identity. Although drawing conclusions about causality from correlation analysis is acknowledged to be precarious, the second element in unpacking the term "Jewish continuity" is widespread recognition that the means to respond to the demographic challenge is to strengthen Jewish education—formal and informal, cognitive and experiential.

Beyond the number and the conclusions drawn from them, the focus on continuity also reflects communal anxiety that, but decades after the Holocaust, American Jewry seems to be threatened. There is widespread anxiety that our grandchildren might not be Jewish. The third element of the communal focus on continuity emerges from profound anxiety and expresses itself as a resolve to act. The intermarriage rates from the 1990 NJPS served as the wake-up call. Jewish education seemed to be the needed response. Stimulated by acute communal and personal anxiety, American Jews sought action.

Following the publication of the 1990 NJPS, numerous conferences and articles sought to explain the meteoric increase in the intermarriage rate among American Jews. Most analysts emphasized factors internal to the American Jewish community: demise of the Jewish neighborhood, the breakdown of the traditional Jewish family (real or romanticized?), inadequate Jewish education, and the like.

Acknowledging that each of these factors was a contributing factor, Jonathan Sarna (1991) places the subject in the far broader context of sociocultural changes in America. In his monograph, *Interreligious Marriage in America,* Sarna suggests that changes in American marital norms were a far more decisive, contributing factor. Using extensive data, Sarna demonstrates that, until the 1970s, norms among America's major religious and ethnic groups favored in-marriage. Catholics and Protestants, as well as Germans, Swedes, and Italians, overwhelmingly married within. This norm was particularly well suited for American Jewry. In ever increasing numbers, American Jews could attend the best universities and gain employment in the upper strata of American corporate life. Although educational and occupational barriers had eroded substantially by the 1960s, invisible barriers remained at the marital canopy. Successfully acculturating, American Jews were still a "kept community" insofar as marriage was concerned. Even in the late 1950s, Protestant and Catholic parents were no more interested in having their children marry Jews than Jewish parents were in having their children bring home a Christian mate.

However, by the 1970s, American marital norms had changed dramatically. Inmarriage was no longer the American marital norm. To cite but two sets of data aggregated by Sarna (1991), 8% of Japanese-American women in Seattle married outside their community in 1960; that figure jumped to 43% by 1975 and is estimated to be 70% today. Attitudes toward intermarriage also shifted. In a 1950 Gallop Poll, 57% of all respondents said they "would definitely not marry a Jew." By 1962, that number had dropped to 37%, and in a 1983 Gallop Poll, only 23% provided that response.

The high rate of intermarriage among American Jews reflects an extraordinary success story. Contemporary American Jews live in the most accepting and generous society in Jewish history. To continue to be seriously concerned with preserving Jewish identity, and preventing intermarriage, places American Jews against the grain of the new American culture, notwithstanding affirmations about diversity and pluralism. To maintain such a position may be quite natural for the "insular Orthodox" in Boro Park, New City, and in similar communities that have consciously distanced themselves from the influences of America's secular culture. For the far larger segments of American Jews who embrace American culture, the new sociocultural context is more challenging. The ideal of "living in two civilizations" may have been far easier when we were a kept community. With the borders and boundaries now virtually removed between the Jewish and non-Jewish community, American Jews, as they approach the twenty-first century, confront the full challenge of the Enlightenment and will be required to test the possibility of living as identified and engaged Jews in the open society. Reversing

intermarriage rates is not likely. Raising the probability of positive Jewish identification and affiliation is a far more realistic communal goal.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING POSITIVE JEWISH IDENTIFICATION

With the breakdown of the sociocultural barriers that enabled effective socialization of American Jews until three and four decades ago, multiple efforts will be required to raise the probability of positive Jewish identification in this new Jewish America.[1] Several strategies deserve maximum attention. First, building on the recognition of the abiding power of day schools, summer camps, and Israel experience programs, cost barriers must be reduced and other efforts undertaken, including strengthened marketing, enhanced staff training, communal mobilization, and product diversification, so far larger segments of American Jewry can participate in these "soul-searing" experiences.

Second, efforts must be undertaken to strengthen American Jewry's ability to recruit, prepare, and retain "the best and the brightest" as rabbis, teachers, educators, and Jewish communal professionals.

Third, every institution must be strengthened if not transformed in its capacity to be a powerful Jewish community, a vital setting for Jewish living and Jewish learning.

Although each of these directions must be pursued vigorously, this article focuses on the third of these strategies—the need to create compelling communities for Jewish living and learning. Communal leadership is increasingly recognizing the import of the first two strategies. During the past decade significant first efforts have been launched to strengthen lay and professional leadership and to mobilize community resources for the Israel experience and day school education. Although each requires far greater focused energy and resources, important first steps are taking place.[2] Strengthening and revitalizing community has received far less attention to date.

COMMUNITY IS A REQUISITE FOR EDUCATION

As the community focused on continuity, it mobilized to strengthen formal and informal Jewish education. This was understandable. Various studies correlate Jewish education with positive Jewish identity, including in-marriage. There was also agreement that Jewish education and Jewish educators had not been provided sufficient support and resources. Hence, the focus on Jewish continuity became widely identified with strengthening Jewish education.

However, this focus on Jewish education avoids several thorny issues. Narrowly understood, education provides students with structured opportunities to gain the skills necessary to participate in a given society—for example, in America, reading, writing, and math are requisite skills for participation in the society—and socializes individuals to community norms, such as modes of social interaction, civic norms, and cultural values. What are the requisite skills needed to participate in the contemporary American Jewish community?

Emphasis on the Marginally Affiliated

Works by Daniel Elazar and Stephen M. Cohen (1993) offer a framework for understanding American Jewry using three con-

[1]The final report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America, *A Time to Act* (1990), identified 23 potential strategies.

[2]I refer here to the ongoing work and new initiatives undertaken by JESNA and JCCNA; the efforts of CLAL and the Wexner Heritage Foundation in Lay Leadership Education; the Wexner Foundation, the Council on Initiatives in Jewish Education, the ongoing essential work of the major rabbinic training institutions and other academic institutions in professional development; the effort to mobilize resources for the Israel experience led by the CRB Foundation; and the growth of communal support for day schools. Jewish summer camps, while acknowledged to be of enormous significance, still lack equivalent major philanthropic or continental initiatives.

centric circles. The inner circle, containing the most committed/affiliated Jews, constitutes approximately 25% of the community. For this group, Jewish life is an important, possibly essential component of their lives. As active members of synagogues, contributors to communal campaigns and other Jewish causes, and having strong ties to Israel, they are viewed as less at risk and more likely to be secure regarding Jewish identity. On the whole, this group tends to value Jewish education for it provides essential skills for participation in the life lived by the family or community.

There is also the outer circle, the 25% of the community who are unaffiliated. For this group, Jewish concerns seem to be of little consequence. They are not members of Jewish organizations or ongoing supporters of Jewish enterprises. Some members of this group may even be hostile to Jewish concerns.

Finally, there is the middle group, estimated to be 40 to 50%, who have been described as marginal or intermittent Jews. Although often members of synagogues (70 to 80% of American Jews are members of synagogues at one point in their lives) or Jewish Community Centers (JCCs), Jewish living and communal issues seem to be of episodic import and far less central than other personal and professional concerns.

To the extent to which recent community deliberations about continuity have produced a shared consensus, there is broad agreement that the community should focus additional resources on this middle group of marginal or intermittent Jews. In a sense, the challenge facing the community is to determine the most effective means by which Jewish living can become a more important component of the lives of individual marginal Jews. However, focusing on this middle group prompts a concern: Will Jewish education, as we know it, be adequate? For those not raised in a committed Jewish home or in an active Jewish community, for whom Jewish concerns are of marginal significance, what Jewish skills are essential? From where will the motivation to learn be derived? Said differently, if a Jew has not experienced the power and beauty of Shabbat and his or her family does not observe Shabbat, why should he or she learn how to recite Kiddish? Or study about the origins of Shabbat in Genesis or the laws and traditions of Shabbat? Why will the marginal Jew be motivated to participate in the Jewish education that American Jewry has decided they need?

Characteristics of "Transformational" Experiences

At this point, it is useful to recall that day schools, Jewish summer camps, Israel experiences, and youth groups have been identified as being particularly effective and influential. Are there similarities among these "transformational" life-changing experiences that can inform effective planning for the marginally affiliated?

First, the synagogue has a relationship to each. It sponsors most youth groups and is the primary gateway for the largest numbers of those who attend Jewish summer camps, Israel trips, and day schools. Few who attend the Ramah or Eisner Camps or participate in most Israel experience programs or youth groups do so without a synagogue connection.

Unlike most synagogues, however, day schools, youth groups, Israel trips, and Jewish summer camps are total environments. Each creates an intensive mini-community, some might say an "inspired community," in which Judaism is lived. The skills and behavioral norms needed to participate in this community become evident. Being a participant in these vibrant Jewish environments, being exposed to Judaism as it is lived, seems to produce the motivation for people to learn how they can become fuller participants in these mini-Jewish worlds.

For Jewish education to be effective, there must be Jewish community, in which what is being taught is visible and valued. Paraphrasing sociologist Peter Berger, for Jewish identity to be plausible in the open

society, there must be plausible (read compelling or inspired) Jewish communities. If communal policy seeks to strengthen Jewish identity for marginal Jews, then creating compelling, engaging, inspired communities and institutions is necessary and must become a more significant communal strategy.[3]

Synagogues, JCCs, Hillels, and Jewish summer camps are of particular significance in the creation of compelling communities. For it is precisely in these institutions that marginal Jews encounter Jewish life. And of these institutions, the synagogue is of particular import because more Jews cross its portals than any other institution. At any one point in time, 35 to 40% of America's Jews are members of synagogues and 35 to 40% are former members, although a significant percentage of synagogue members are consumers of a specific product, Bar and Bat Mitzvah, a rite of passage that has achieved the status of a social norm in contemporary American Jewish life. Yet, still, 70 to 80% of American Jews are synagogue members at one point in their lives. This represents an extraordinary opportunity.

Federation-Synagogue Initiatives

Federations and synagogues have been separated by institutional structure, priorities, and values. Although decades of distance if not distrust will not be overcome quickly, the focus on continuity points toward increased collaboration and cooperation between synagogues and federations. The challenges facing North American Jewry and the broad recognition of the critical role of the synagogue are stimulating collaborative planning and the development of new funding streams to strengthen the synagogue. Federations in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Palm Beach, and elsewhere are undertaking new initiatives, often conceptualized collaboratively with synagogue and denominational leadership, in such diverse areas as Jewish family education, adult Jewish learning, strategic planning, synagogue transformation, and the Israel experience.

Recognizing the need for significant change, the leaders of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the congregational arms of the Reform and Conservative movements, call for "synagogue transformation." At the 1994 General Assembly in Denver, Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, recently elected president of Hebrew Union College, stated: "So just as the synagogue transforms Jews, we must transform the synagogue. That means restructuring it, changing its staff, training and retraining its staff....It means empowering our people to drive the institution from within...it will require revisioning and reimagining who we are."

To transform our institutions, to create compelling and inspired synagogues, JCCs, Hillel, and camps is an awesome new agenda, one for which there is little prior experience or expertise. Federations and the American Jewish community have focused their energy and resources on the historic imperatives facing world Jewry this century—serving as a philanthropic and political partner in building the Jewish State, rescuing Jews from throughout the world, combating anti-Semitism, and building a network of human service agencies to serve those in need. In each of these areas, the record of the American Jewish community

[3]Strengthening community, creating inspiring and compelling Jewish communities, can also be understood as related to Jewish education if broadly conceptualized. Jonathan Woocher's (1995) article, "Toward a Unified Theory of Jewish Continuity," provides a brilliant and insightful exposition of this broad subject and outlines the theoretical case for institutional transformation. It is essential reading for all involved with continuity planning. In the article Woocher writes, "The challenge for the Jewish educator is to curricularize the socialization and enculturation over time." Writing about congregational schools, Isa Aron (1989) suggests that "we need to focus on "enculturation" rather than "instruction." Certainly, the field of informal Jewish educators has long recognized this perspective.

is stellar and is envied by every other ethnic and religious group in America.

These challenges were primarily national and international and required national and international instrumentalities. The challenge of continuity, in contrast, is decidedly local. It requires the strengthening and transformation of local institutions—synagogues, JCCs, camps, and Hillels—the primary institutions where marginal Jews encounter Jewish life. It also calls on every Jewish agency—hospitals, vocational services, Jewish family agencies, and federations themselves—to utilize their respective resources and setting to enhance Jewish identity. Efforts are underway in New York, for example, to engage human service agencies as resources for local institutions in their efforts to become more comprehensive communities. The broad subject of relocating human services agencies or components to synagogues, JCCs, and Hillels is also being explored with an eye toward determining if it is possible to return community services to the local settings where Jews congregate and interact with Jewish life.

To Strengthen Community: The Outlines of a New York Initiative

American Jewry is but at the beginning of this effort to create inspired institutions and compelling communities that can engage intensively larger segments of our community. In 1994, New York UJA-Federation's Jewish Continuity Commission created a new Grants Program, offering grants of up to $75,000 annually for three years. Instead of providing funds "top down" for discrete programs, institutions were invited to prepare proposals to transform themselves into "compelling settings for Jewish living and learning." The grant application called on institutions to develop their own programs for institutional change. To assist institutional leadership, the Commission sponsored briefings on the purposes of the grants process, institutional change, and evaluation. A collaborative lay and professional planning process was required acknowledging the institution's point of departure, its strengths and weaknesses in the area of Jewish identity development, a vision of what it seeks to become, and a plan of how to achieve it. Many agency and synagogue leaders commented that the process of bringing together lay, professional, and rabbinic leadership to assess where the institution is at and what it seeks to become was exhilarating. In scores of institutions, for the first time in decades, questions of institutional values, mission, priorities, and culture were discussed and clarified openly. Two hundred and fifty proposals were submitted. Forty-one institutions were awarded grants in the first two grants cycles.[4]

In addition to the proposals received, some institutions indicated they were not submitting proposals because they were engaged in serious long-term institutional planning. One senior synagogue lay leader indicated that, although his congregation did not receive a grant, developing the proposal "was widely recognized as one of the most positive developments in the institution in years!" Although the first 41 grants have only recently concluded their first year, the "first fruits" are exceedingly encouraging.

Consider these few examples of the Jewish Continuity Grants. With a $75,000 grant, Congregation Beth Elohim, a Reform congregation in Brooklyn Heights has opened its doors to a new liberal day school in Brownstone, Brooklyn. With a $75,000 grant, the Samuel Field Y, a Northeast Queens JCC that is highly regarded for its social service programs, established a multifaceted center for Jewish family education that includes a regional supplemental Hebrew High school established in collaboration with neighborhood congregations.

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[4]Descriptions of the forty-one initiatives funded by New York's Jewish Continuity Commission in its first two grants cycles (1993–4 and 1994–5) can be obtained by writing the Jewish Continuity Commission, UJA-Federation, 130 East 59th Street, New York, NY 10022 or calling (212) 836-1324.

With a $35,000 grant, Camp Isabella Freedman, a respected senior adult camp, established the Jewish Retreat Center, which has been fully occupied throughout its first year by hosting Shabbat retreats for congregations and by sponsoring Shabbat retreats for single-parent families, training programs for Jewish educators, and Pesach programs, among others. With a $50,000 grant, Hofstra Hillel hired four part-time staff—with specializations in the arts, Jewish text study, *tikkun olam,* and outreach—to provide more points of entry and connections for Hofstra college students. Although space constraints preclude extensive descriptions of the above and of other funded initiatives, these programs provide early evidence that the institutions are now undertaking wide-ranging initiatives to substantially strengthen their settings as contexts for Jewish engagement.

From the outset, the Commission acknowledged that it must learn from both successes and disappointments. This was important because the Grants Program was undertaken publicly so it might also demonstrate to philanthropic leadership how additive funds can bring about significant change. The Commission retained Ukeles Associates Inc. to undertake a performance assessment for all funded Commission initiatives. Participation in the performance assessment program is a condition for accepting a Commission grant.

In its first interim report of April 1995, Ukeles Associates reported that the Grants Program had itself generated "a culture of continuity" throughout much of the community—by requiring change and placing before institutional leadership questions of long-term vision, community building, and educational priorities; that virtually all funded institutions were successfully implementing their initiatives; and the quality of staff recruited to these efforts is surprisingly high (supporting the hypothesis that when there is institutional vision and commitment, high-quality staff can be identified and recruited).

On a parallel track, UJA-Federation's Religious Affairs Department and Management Assistance Program, in cooperation with the consulting firm of McKinsey & Co. conducted a year-long (1994–1995) process of structured strategic planning for lay and rabbinic leadership from twelve congregations. (Pro-bono McKinsey consultant services were estimated to be tens of thousands of dollars monthly!). UJA-Federation's Shared Service and Joint Purchasing programs are also being offered to the congregational and day school communities.

Similar efforts are ongoing in other communities. Hebrew Union College's Rhea Hirsch School of Jewish Education in Los Angeles is now concluding the third year of its Experiment in Congregational Education (ECE), working intensively with seven congregations to reconceptualize congregational education. Combined Jewish Philanthropies in Boston, after extensive collaborative planning with synagogue and denominational leadership, forged and funded innovative initiatives with congregations in Jewish family education and adult Jewish learning. The Washington Federation has launched IsraelQuest, collaboratively conceptualized with congregational leadership to both expand teen participation in the Israel experience and develop new means of engaging adolescents over time.

A New Set of Questions

The early results from these and other efforts, while tentative, are encouraging. However, with the growing focus on institutional strengthening and transformation, new questions present themselves that will require study and planning in the years ahead.

- What additional resources—technical, programmatic, educational, financial, and personnel—will local institutions need to undertake these efforts? Can outside intervention(s) assist institutions in becoming inspired and compelling communities?

- Can federations, the regional and national congregational movements, and the seminaries, individually and in some cases collaboratively, become significant resources for institutional transformation on the local level, and if so, how? Similarly, can national and regional Hillel organizations, and the Jewish Community Center Association become significant resources to enable local JCCs and Hillels to become inspired institutions?
- What additional pre-service and in-service programs will be needed to prepare Jewish communal professionals, rabbis, and educators to become builders of sacred community? Are these professionals prepared to reconceptualize their roles to include this new dimension?
- And finally, will an institution need to have an as yet ill-defined critical number of members who previously attended day schools, Jewish summer camps, or Israel experience programs in order to create such communities? In other words, to what extent will having previously experienced powerful community be a requisite for being able to contribute actively to the creation of a vision of an alternative institutional future?

Hence, the recognition of the linkage among initiatives to increase participation in day schools, Jewish summer camps, and Israel experience programs and efforts to create compelling communities. There are no silver bullets. While strengthening local institutions, we will need to simultaneously increase the number of youth who participate in day schools, Jewish summer camps, and Israel experience programs, so they can experience inspired community and therefore become potential future builders in creating such institutions.

In this context, New York UJA-Federation's Jewish Continuity Commission has also launched a multifaceted Israel experience initiative that seeks to increase the number of teenagers and college students who participate in Israel experience programs. Merit and need-based scholarships have been increased dramatically. The "Gift of Israel Program" is being introduced to 49 partner congregations. In 1994–1995, the Commission provided significant funding for New York Hillel to launch ISRAELBREAK, offering up to 275 college students who had never been to Israel free round-trip airfares based on the condition that they enroll in an Israel experience program for no less than four weeks (the tickets were fully used during the program's first year). A newly created Israel Experience Center Hotline provided information, counsel, and referral to over 1,300 callers during its first year. UJA-Federation expenditures in support of Israel experience programs increased from $55,000 in the 1992–1993 year to over $1.1 million in the 1995–1996 year. This refers only to funds used to support Israel experience efforts in North America. UJA-Federation has also been a major supporter of such innovative programs as Livnot V'libanot, Pardes, WUJS ARAD, and OTZMA for many years. That independent stream of funding continues and is not included above.

The North American Jewish community is at the first stages of seriously addressing these issues. Does the community have the will to stay with this agenda? There will be few visible near-term successes like those experienced in the community's previous work in rescue and resettlement. This agenda is both exhilarating and daunting. It contains within it the possibility of strengthening and renewing the fabric of the American Jewish community. However, unlike prior endeavors, continuity is not about helping others. This will require every Jew, certainly every Jewish leader, to be engaged in creating powerful community for themselves and their family and in this way for the wider community.

Lay leadership will need to be empowered (or empower themselves?) to create such communities. The role of "lead actor" has often been assigned to rabbis, educators, and professionals. Professionals were the

actors, laity were the spectators. Gifted and inspired rabbis, educators, professionals, and academics will continue to be essential as teachers, resources, and communal leaders. However, institutions and communities will only be renewed if lay leaders become lead actors, builders of sacred community that can sear the soul to provide contexts to live engaged Jewish lives.

To this point, the content around which inspired communities can coalesce has been noticeable by its absence. Label Fein wrote recently (1994) that focusing on continuity or "identity as obligation" is obviously inadequate and bound to fail to gain anyone's allegiance. Fein proposes that each of us complete the sentence: "It is important that the Jews survive and, by extension, that I survive as a Jew in order to..." Some might complete the sentence with "to repair the world (*tikkun olam*);" others might say "to fulfill and observe God's commandments (the *mitzvot*);" or to serve as a "light unto the nations (*or l'goyim*);" whereas others might say to enhance one's life. In two decades, the present communal focus on continuity might be considered successful if far larger numbers of American Jews are able to complete this sentence.

There are many acceptable ways to complete such a sentence, but answer it one must. Given the ideological diversity of American Jewry, federations cannot and should not seek to do so explicitly. There are many "paths to God" within the American Jewish community; there are multiple definitions of excellence and commitment. Federations must respect the rich ideological diversity within North American Jewry. They are positioned to provide support, resources, and incentives for local institutions to undertake programs to become more effective in realizing a vision based on the values and ideology that their leadership and membership consider most significant.

As do all Americans, American Jews find themselves on a wide-open playing field, attracted and engaged by inspired institutions and indifferent to the mediocre. In this new America, only inspired Jewish institutions will engage marginal Jews over time and be able to provide the introduction to compelling community that can ignite the motivation for learning.

Examples of Inspired Communities

The term "inspired community" has been used rather liberally throughout this essay, also without definition. In the absence of qualitative research that discerns the qualities of the institutions and experiences that engage Jews and of those that repel them, providing a definitive profile of inspired institutions is difficult.[5] With this qualification, acknowledging that rigorous analysis of high-quality institutions ("the success stories") is needed, I attempt below to illustrate inspired communities by briefly outlining three institutions drawn from my personal experience.

A Conservative synagogue in Manhattan, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, virtually moribund in 1985 with twenty members, has experienced a renaissance under the leadership of Rabbis Marshal Meyer z'l' and Rolando Matalon. During the past decade, congregational membership has grown to 1,500 membership units. Of greater import, over 1,000 Jews attend Friday evening services weekly. What is it about Congregation B'nai Jeshurun that seems to be so attractive and compelling? Several factors suggest themselves:

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[5]New York UJA-Federation's Jewish Continuity Commission recently authorized a two year research project to study this issue. Focusing on Jews in their twenties, thirties, and forties, the study will use both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the nature of contemporary Jews' connections to Jewishness today, the meaning of being Jewish in their lives, and the role played by key institutions and experiences in Jewish identity development. The research project is called "Connections and Journeys" and will seek to deepen our understanding of the nature of contemporary Jewish identity development. Dr. Bethamie Horowitz, Director of Research at UJA-Federation, is the principal investigator. For more information, Dr. Horowitz can be reached at (212) 836-1865.

- It is an *inclusive/welcoming* congregation—for singles, families, and senior adults; for straight and gay Jews; for inmarried and the intermarried; for the knowledgeable Jew and the Jew beginning his or her Jewish journey. The congregation has multiple ways to manifest this stance of *acceptance:* welcoming ushers, the availability of transliteration in every *siddur,* comments from the pulpit, programs for each subgroup.
- The congregation manifests a profound commitment to *tikkun olam* (repairing the world), and *gemilut hasidim* (acts of lovingkindness) and provides multiple opportunities for members to become involved in this work. Social issues are a significant component of the public culture of the congregation. There are active *chevra kedisha* and *bikur cholim* groups. Caring for others is a significant component of the congregational culture.
- The congregation's rabbinic and cantorial leadership is drawn to the authentic, embodies the congregation's values, appreciates the pageantry in religious services, and infuses the community with a sense of greater purpose.
- Music and liturgy are used to forge a sacred community. Many observers note that it is the gifted use of music and liturgy that creates the widely shared sense of sacred community at B'nai Jeshurun.

The Usdan Center for the Creative and Performing Arts of Long Island is also often described as an "inspired institution." A federation-sponsored day camp and summer school for the performing and visual arts located on a 250-acre woodland campus 60 miles from New York City, Usdan attracts over 1,500 students every summer to its five major programs: music, art, dance, theatre arts, and the language arts. With a faculty drawn from leading arts organizations, Usdan resembles Tanglewood and Interlocken. Although Jewish content is not central, most observers are instantly aware that Usdan is an institution inspired to achieve excellence, embodied with reverence for the arts and a shared commitment among campers, faculty, and administration to these ends.

Third, I cite Camp Ramah, the summer camp of the Conservative movement, which had such profound significance for me. Raised in a marginal Jewish family, indifferent to the content of my Hebrew school experience, it was at Ramah that I was introduced to the rhythm of the Jewish week and the beauty and glory of Shabbat, participatory prayer, and serious Jewish study. For the first time, I participated in a vibrant Jewish community. An initial list of the qualities of Ramah in the mid-1960s that were decisive include:

- a clear vision informed by ideology, i.e., a commitment to a halachic lifestyle, the Hebrew language, and Jewish study made accessible and joyful in the camp environment
- a strong educational philosophy that energized staff; staff believed that they were on the cutting edge of informal Jewish and religious education, which communicated a sense of a "greater mission" to campers
- standards adhered to by all; everyone studied—campers, counselors, administration, and kitchen staff
- an articulated expectation of modeling interpersonal relations by fully respecting the uniqueness of "the other" (we read a great deal of Buber in those days), which raised consciousness and sensitivity to an art form
- Judaism lived fully, naturally, and authentically, without pretense

Drawing on these examples, additional insights culled from the fields of organizational and educational change, and the first initiatives now underway, we can begin to discern the required elements for creating inspired communities. It seems that institutional vision, drawn from the organization's mission and animating values, developed

collaboratively by lay and professional leadership, and pursued diligently is essential. Implementing such a vision requires the institutional capacity to aggregate talented and focused lay and professional leadership, funding, time, and energy. The first initiatives being undertaken to create compelling community for Jewish living and learning need to be monitored and studied extensively to clarify the elements of inspired community and the processes required to achieve it. However, one thing is clear: such institutions cannot be replicated or parachuted into communities. The leadership of every institution will have to undertake such a process while drawing from the experiences of other institutions and from the fields of organizational development and educational change.

CONCLUSION

North American Jewry is on the precipice of a new and exciting era: to test whether it is possible for American Jews, now living in the most accepting and generous society in Jewish history, to create dynamic compelling inspired communities. This is a prodigious challenge that will require both individual institutional initiatives and communal systems of support and incentives. It provides an opportunity for the federation system to reposition itself as essential for North American Jewry in its encounter with modernity as we begin the twenty-first century. The opportunity to focus on this agenda and to bring resources to it is an ironic consequence of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, which sent such shock waves through the leadership of American Jewry. Rabbi Joy Levitt (1991) of the Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore in Roslyn, New York captures the poignancy of this moment in a recent article in this *Journal:*

> Forgive the analogy, but the successful dieter gets on the scale, looks down, gulps, and then acknowledges the need to diet. Those of us who have dedicated our lives to the growth and development of the Jewish people have now gotten on the scale, looked down and gulped. We have reached that wonderful moment when we have begun to face ourselves honestly, with full awareness of what some of the new realities are and what some of the challenges will be.

Formal and informal Jewish education must be strengthened. Efforts must be undertaken to strengthen lay and professional leadership, who will be indispensable to the success of Jewish continuity efforts. We must design multifaceted initiatives to increase the numbers who participate in Israel experience programs, Jewish summer camps, day schools, and youth camps.

However, we must also transform our institutions to create inspired communities, compelling contexts for Jewish living and learning. Those not raised in highly identified families and communities will be introduced to Jewish life in synagogues, JCCs, Hillels on campus, and Jewish summer camps. Most participants in Jewish summer camps, Israel trips, and youth groups will be recruited from these institutions, and it is to them that participants will return. Only by being exposed to Judaism that is lived, visible, and valued in a vibrant Jewish community will such Jews experience the power of our people and our tradition to enhance life and thus be motivated to begin the journey of Jewish living and learning that can be so exhilarating.

The present communal focus on continuity represents a challenge and an historic opportunity to renew and revitalize the very fabric of American Jewish life. The American Jewish community responded heroically to the previous historical imperatives of this century. Although the outcome of the present challenge is far from certain, the communal focus on continuity provides North American Jewry with the opportunity to create inspired communities for ourselves and the broader community.

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