The "Civil Judaism" of Communal Leaders

IN RECENT YEARS Jewish community federations and the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) have emerged as the major institutional foci for the development and expression of Jewish commitment among an important segment of American Jewish leadership. As a part of this process, the values and beliefs which underlie the work of these organizations have taken on the character of a Jewish "civil religion"—a system of symbols and meanings which relates the federation/UJA sphere of the American Jewish polity to a transcendent dimension and which provides thereby ultimate legitimation for its activities.¹

An analysis of the institutional rhetoric of these organizations (in publications and speeches by major volunteer and professional leaders) indicates that the core of this "civil Jewish faith" is a commitment to Jewish group survival as a "sacred" value and a validation of Jewish existence as the fulfillment of a "mission" or "destiny" which calls for the exemplification by Jews of the ethical values of responsibility, justice, and compassion. More specifically, "civil Judaism" affirms eight major tenets: the unity and distinctiveness of the Jewish people; the resultant responsibility of each Jew and of the Jewish community collectively for the security and welfare of all Jews; the centrality of the state of Israel as symbol of this unity and mutual responsibility; the enduring value of the Jewish tradition and the importance of its perpetuation; the persistence of threats (both internal and external) to the survival of the Jewish people and tradition; tzedakah, understood both as philanthropy and more broadly as action on behalf of social justice and welfare, as a

primary mandate of the Jewish value system; the virtue of active participation in
the broader society and the compatibility of such participation with "good Jewish-
ness"; and theological pluralism (the relative insignificance of classical theological
concerns and the affirmation of individual conscience as ultimate arbiter in matters
of religious practice, belief, and lifestyle).

This system of mutually reinforcing values, perceptions, affects, and prescriptions
also reflects a particular experience of Jewishness, best understood in terms of the
anthropologist Victor Turner's concept of "anti-structure." The experience of Jew-
ishness as "anti-structural" implies both a sense of Jewish existence as liminal,
contingent, and marginal—i.e., as standing between and at the boundaries of normal
social and historical categories—and a deep feeling of Jewish community—of a
unity of Jewish destiny and experience which binds Jews together at a level beyond
their social structural differentiations. The combination of "civil Jewish faith" and
this "anti-structural" experience of Jewishness finds expression not only in ideology,
but in the "rituals" of federation/UJA life—missions to Eastern Europe and Israel,
campaign meetings and events (dinners, walkathons, etc.), retreats—which are de-
voted to inculcating and reinforcing the sense of Jewish unity, distinctiveness, and
responsibility. As a system of Jewish affirmation, "civil Judaism's" boundaries are
established by its functional role as an umbrella belief/value system (necessitating
an avoidance of "partisan" positions on issues lying outside its areas of consensus),
and by its implicit (and often explicit) acceptance of integration into the larger
non-Jewish society and culture as a positive value alongside the promotion of Jewish
group survival.

This portrait of "civil Judaism" as an institutional meaning system, though
perhaps adequate for understanding its role in organizational life, cannot answer
another important question: does this same system also shape the personal belief and
value systems of the individuals who actively identify with community federations
and the UJA? To what extent is "civil Judaism" an identifiable form (or component)
of individual Jewish commitment? In the modern world, according to the sociologist
Peter Berger, religious commitment in general has become bifurcated: it is expressed
either in the private spheres of one's life (usually in the familial context) or at the
level of public rhetoric ("civil religion"), generally in a diluted and personally
inconsequential form. As a Jewish species of "civil religion," "civil Judaism" does
achieve consistent public articulation; but what is its reach into the "private" sphere
of personal belief and how does it relate to the Jewish attitudes and behaviors of the
individual Jews who participate in federation/UJA activities?

We can perhaps make a start toward answering these questions by examining
some of the results of an empirical study of Jewish identity and commitment among
participants in federation and UJA sponsored Leadership Development (LD)

2Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden
City, 1967), pp. 128-134.
programs which was conducted in 1978 and 1979. The focus on LD participants is based on four considerations: the fact that these individuals have experienced some formal "socialization" into the institutional system; the potential impact these individuals may have on the character of the federation/UJA sphere and its values during the next several decades; the likelihood that many of these individuals will play a leadership role in American Jewish life in general at some point in the future; and the relative ease of access to this population. The primary aim of the study was to explore the role of the institutional "civil Jewish" meaning system in relation to the personal Jewish belief/value systems of these LD participants. This involved efforts to determine whether "civil Jewish" attitudes and orientations are in fact widely and strongly affirmed by these individuals, and how these attitudes are related to other dimensions of the individuals' Jewish beliefs and behaviors.

Method of the Study

The study employed a multi-section, closed-ended questionnaire asking about the respondents' Jewish activities, attitudes, and backgrounds, and about general personal and familial characteristics in several areas. Versions of the questionnaire were administered to two groups: a preliminary version was distributed to individuals attending the opening LD session at the 1978 General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations in San Francisco (henceforth called the "GA Group"); a revised and somewhat expanded version was distributed during the spring of 1979 to members of LD groups in several communities and to individuals participating in two regional Young Leadership retreats (henceforth called the "Communities Group"). The responses to these questionnaires were compiled and analyzed separately. The GA Group yielded 97 usable responses; the Communities Group 212. These groups do not represent a statistically valid sample of all LD participants. In both groups (and especially the GA Group), more committed and involved segments of the total LD population are probably somewhat over-represented. All results should, therefore, be regarded as suggestive.

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4 The response rate for the GA Group was approximately 40 per cent, and for the Communities Group slightly under 50 per cent. The Communities Group included several sub-groups, some of whom received the questionnaire through the mail and others at retreats or meetings. The response rates for these sub-groups ranged from approximately 25 per cent to over 80 per cent. Although no follow-up questioning of non-respondents was possible, it seems reasonable to assume a general respondent bias toward more "committed" LD participants. In light of studies indicating that there are perhaps some regional differences in Jewish identity patterns, it should also be noted that no regional breakdown on the GA Group is available and that the Communities Group consisted of approximately 60 per cent Midwestern and 40 per cent Northeastern LD participants. See Bernard Lazerwitz, "The Community Variable in Jewish Identification," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, December 1977, pp. 361-369.
General Characteristics of the Survey Population

Both of the groups surveyed were composed largely of young middle and upper-middle class individuals. The median age for both groups was in the mid-thirties. Over 95 per cent of the respondents were American born, and approximately 85 per cent were married and living with a spouse. Over 85 per cent were college graduates, and more than half were employed either in business or one of the professions, with a large proportion of the remainder describing themselves either as "homemakers" or as "professional volunteers." Eighty-two per cent of the GA Group and 72 per cent of the Communities Group had at least one child living at home. Eighty per cent reported an income of greater than $25,000 a year for the household, and more than 40 per cent reported an income of greater than $50,000. In terms of political views, about a half described themselves as moderate and a third as liberal. The Communities Group had an approximately 3:2 female/male ratio, while the GA Group was nearly equally divided between men and women.

Jewish Background

The survey respondents were asked a number of questions about their Jewish backgrounds, dealing with familial Jewish identification and practice while they were growing up, Jewish educational experience, and childhood involvement in Jewish groups and activities. All but seven of the respondents in the two groups were born Jewish. Over 90 per cent reported that their families had belonged to a synagogue at some point during their childhood, and about 65 per cent indicated that their families regarded themselves as religious. Among the GA Group, 17 per cent of the families identified as Orthodox, 46 per cent as Conservative, and 35 per cent as Reform; for the Communities Group the respective percentages were 26 per cent Orthodox, 55 per cent Conservative, and 17 per cent Reform.6

The LD participants reported a number of Jewish practices as widely observed in their families during their childhood: 92 per cent attended a Seder on Passover; 90 per cent attended synagogue on the High Holidays; 89 per cent lit Hanukkah candles. Sabbath candles were lit in 59 per cent of the respondents' childhood homes; tzedakah was collected in 30 per cent; and 45 per cent of the respondents' families did not eat pork or shellfish at home. More than 80 per cent of the LD

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6One of the groups included in the Communities Group was a Women’s Division LD group which included a number of women over the age of 40 (the usual cutoff point for “Young Leadership” groups). Mean scores for those over and under 40 were compared on a number of key items. The comparison revealed almost no significant differences likely attributable to age itself. Thus it was decided to retain those over 40 in the total survey population. They constitute about 18 per cent of the Communities Group, and this should be kept in mind in interpreting the survey data.

6A comparison of these percentages with the denominational self-identifications of the respondents themselves (see Table 4) reveals a predictable decline in the percentage calling themselves “Orthodox,” and relative stability in the ratio of “Conservative” to “Reform.”
participants recalled that their parents had donated money to Jewish philanthropies or causes while they were growing up.

Over 90 per cent of those surveyed had some formal Jewish education (including 9 per cent in day schools and 71 per cent in afternoon schools). Fewer than three out of ten, however, described the quality of their Jewish education as either excellent or good. More than two-thirds of the respondents belonged to a Jewish youth group, and about half attended a summer camp with Jewish educational, religious, or cultural programming. Taken as a whole, 58 per cent of the LD participants described their upbringing as "strongly Jewish," 30 per cent as "somewhat Jewish," and only 12 per cent as "slightly Jewish" or less.

These figures cannot, of course, tell us all we might like to know about the qualitative dimensions of the Jewish commitments which the LD participants brought to their adulthood and federation/UJA involvement. They do tell us that, in the aggregate, the survey respondents come from homes and families with modest but significant levels of Jewish practice. The percentage of respondents who characterized their upbringing as strongly Jewish is well above that reported for those in the 30-49 years age group in the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) figures,’ and more than double that reported for those age 20–29. While the data suggest that those recruited into and rising through federation/UJA Leadership Development programs are by no means drawn from among individuals with marginal Jewish backgrounds, they also indicate that a considerable range of backgrounds is encompassed within the total population of survey respondents.

**Jewish Activity and Behavior**

The survey questionnaire included an extensive section on the respondents' present Jewish activities and practices. As might be expected, the LD participants surveyed were active, by and large, in a number of areas (Table 1).

When one turns from organizational involvement and communally-oriented activities to personal ritual practices and attendance at religious services, the patterns of behavior reported by the survey respondents are more complex. As Table 2 indicates, the groups of LD participants surveyed encompass individuals with widely differing levels of participation in religious services.

As was noted with regard to the respondents' Jewish backgrounds, there is clearly a minimum level of commitment which is almost universally shared and which equates here with some synagogue attendance (almost certainly on the High Holidays, see Table 3). In contrast to these figures, 27 per cent of the respondents in the NJPS reported that they never attended religious services” and 36 per cent in the 1975 Boston area Jewish population study reported never attending or attending less

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Ibid., p. 4.
TABLE 1. JEWISH ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity or Behavior</th>
<th>Percentage Engaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GA Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synagogue membership</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership in other Jewish organizations</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer or board member</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscribe to Jewish newspaper or periodical</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in formal Jewish studies in past year</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed to federation campaign in past year</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicited for campaign in past year</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in political activity on behalf of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel or Soviet Jewry in past year</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2. ATTENDANCE AT RELIGIOUS SERVICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Times Attended During Past Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GA Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than five</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five to ten</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten to twenty-five</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than twenty-five</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

often than on the High Holidays. Beyond the threshold level, however, attendance at religious services among the LD participants ranged from minimal to quite substantial.

This picture of a widely shared "floor" level of religious observance and diversity of practice beyond this level is confirmed when one examines the reported practices of the respondents on a broad range of observances (Table 3).

Again, several interesting comparisons can be made between these figures and those reported for other Jewish populations surveyed in recent years. There can be little question that, as a group, the LD participants generally maintain levels of practice greater than those of a random sample of their Jewish peers (as reported in the NJPS and Boston studies). The percentages of respondents in this survey

observing the Sabbath, Passover, Hanukkah, and dietary laws in some fashion are roughly comparable to those of synagogue Havurah members as reported by Bernard Reisman. Of the 19 practices listed, 9 were observed by more than half of both the LD groups surveyed (and more than four-fifths of the GA Group), and the average number observed was more than 10 among members of the Communities Group and 11 among the GA Group members. This amounts to a substantial consensus on minimum levels of religious observance, which among the GA Group in particular now includes not only High Holiday, Hanukkah, and Passover observance, but some form of Sabbath ritual as well. One might note in addition that, with the exception of kashrut observance (where residual practice in previous generations may have been a factor), the percentage of LD participants surveyed observing a particular ritual practice is in each instance greater (and for some rituals substantially greater) than the percentage of the respondents' families reported as observing that practice while the respondents were children.

We should not, of course, exaggerate the levels of ritual observance manifested by these LD participants. The percentage of respondents who would qualify as

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**TABLE 3. OBSERVANCES CURRENTLY PRACTICED BY RESPONDENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ritual or Observance</th>
<th>Percentage Practicing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GA Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting Sabbath candles</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciting Kiddush on Sabbath</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not riding on Sabbath</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending a Seder on Passover</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not eating bread during Passover</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using special dishes during Passover</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasting on Yom Kippur</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasting on Tisha B'Av</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting Hanukkah candles</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchanging gifts during Hanukkah</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building a Sukkah</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending synagogue on the High Holidays</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending synagogue on most Sabbaths</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praying daily</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping two sets of dishes for meat and dairy</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not eating pork or shellfish at home</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not eating non-Kosher meat outside the home</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a mezuzah on the door of the home</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting tzedakah at home</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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normatively Orthodox or even Conservative in their practice is quite small, and the patterns of observance as a whole follow the well-established lines of selection detailed by Marshall Sklare,\(^\text{10}\) emphasizing the periodic, the child-centered, and the culturally compatible and redefinable rituals. Nevertheless, the data taken as a whole do suggest that a "civil norm" of Jewish observance is widely endorsed by the LD participants which, in their personal lives, is comparable to what has emerged on the public level of federation/UJA practice. There is good reason to believe that just as federations and other polity institutions have come to adopt *kashrut* observance and some measure of Sabbath observance as normative for their public activity, so too have the LD participants come to regard a minimal level of personal ritual practice as essential to the expression and maintenance of their Jewish identification, even apart from a traditional religious motivation.\(^\text{10}\) There is also reason to believe, at least on the basis of impressionistic evidence, that this "civil norm" is expanding to embrace more of the traditional set of rituals. Some empirical evidence for this proposition may perhaps be found by comparing the levels of observance reported for the two different groups of LD participants studies. In several areas—notably Sabbath observance, building a Sukkah, and use of special Passover dishes—significantly greater numbers of the GA Group report observance. This is not due (apparently) to the presence within this group of a higher percentage of individuals identifying themselves as traditional in orientation. Indeed, in terms of denominational self-identification, the Communities Group has a somewhat larger percentage of "traditionally-minded" (Table 4). In addition, levels of parental religious practice were generally slightly higher for the Communities Group.

### TABLE 4. RESPONDENTS’ DENOMINATIONAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denominational Category</th>
<th>Percentage Identifying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GA Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox/Traditional</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative/Reconstructionist</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most plausible explanation for the higher levels of observance among the GA Group is their greater involvement in the institutional system (see Table 1), and


\(^{10}\) Cf. the observation of Daniel Elazar: "After three hundred years of secularization and assimilation there is strong evidence that a revived concern with Jewish tradition is leading to its restoration as a vital norm. While different groups will be entitled to define 'Jewish tradition' in various ways, identification with that tradition and acceptance of the responsibility for maintaining, fostering, and extending it seem to be reemerging as central norms in Jewish life, embraced by all Jewish organizations and enforced by them." *Op. cit.*, p. 335.
resultant exposure and commitment to the expanding "civil norm." We shall comment more extensively below on the possible relationships between "civil Jewish" ideology, communal involvement, and personal religious activity. At this point it is sufficient to note that the LD participants surveyed are by no means divorced from personal religious observance, and that, indeed, there is some reason to suspect that they are, as a group, embracing higher levels of practice, perhaps commensurate with their levels of communal activism. At the same time, it seems clear as well that whatever "civil norm" does exist falls well short of incorporating the full range of traditionally normative observances, and that beyond the consensual norm, considerable diversity of observance and non-observance is the rule among the survey respondents.

**Jewish Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs**

In order to explore the central question of whether the LD participants surveyed do in fact manifest in their personal Jewish attitudes and orientations the characteristic elements of "civil Judaism" as these are articulated institutionally, the respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement (using a standard five point Likert scale) with a series of statements dealing with a broad range of Jewish and religious attitudes.

Taken as a whole, their responses to the statements provide an affirmative answer; they clearly indicate that the institutional meaning system which we have termed "civil Judaism" is a part of the personal Jewish belief and value systems of a large majority of the LD participants surveyed. The key elements of that faith, as listed above, are almost without exception overwhelmingly endorsed by the survey respondents. The LD participants evidently do feel a powerful sense of Jewish unity—all express pride in the achievements of their fellow Jews, and all but a handful consider a threat against Israel a threat against all Jews. A large majority also regard Jews and Judaism as in some way distinctive: nearly 65 per cent deny that Jewish values are basically the same as those of all religions, and more than three-quarters acknowledge a "special" Jewish responsibility to work for justice in the world. This sense of Jewish unity and distinctiveness is linked (logically and emotionally) to the conviction that Jewish survival is critically important (99 per cent agree, and 96 per cent strongly agree, that there must always be a Jewish people) and that Jews are indeed responsible for one another's well-being (96 per cent endorse this proposition).

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11One other area where this norm is apparently becoming evident is in practices with regard to Jewish education. As might be expected, all but two of the respondents with children over six reported that their children had received or were receiving some form of Jewish education. What was less expected was the percentage of respondents reporting that at least one child had attended or was attending a Jewish day school: 26 per cent among the Communities Group and 43 per cent among the GA Group.
and 90 per cent say that they “feel bad” when they see Jews who do not take an interest in Jewish life).

Alongside this concern for the survival of the Jewish people and the acceptance of Jewish interdependence and mutual responsibility, the LD participants surveyed also place great value on the continuity of and engagement with the Jewish tradition: 90 per cent believe that the Jewish people could not survive without Jewish religion; a similar proportion regard Jewish education as the best means of insuring Jewish survival; nearly all feel that Jewish observance is a good way to strengthen the family; and more than three-quarters affirm that their own personal fulfillment is linked to the “Jewishness” of their patterns of living.

The commitment of the LD participants to Jewish physical and spiritual survival is matched by their sense that these remain endangered. Three-quarters of the respondents regard Jewish survival in history as in some sense a “miracle.” More than 80 per cent do not believe that the world is yet ready to permit Jews to live in peace. 85 per cent see assimilation as the greatest threat to Jewish survival today. We find, therefore, that both dimensions of the “anti-structural” experience of Jewishness referred to above are indeed manifested among a large proportion of the LD participants surveyed in this study: the bonds of Jewish unity and commonality are deeply felt, and so too is the contingency of Jewish existence.

The ethos of “civil Judaism” at the institutional level focuses on the mandate of tzedakah, of service to one’s fellows and the pursuit of justice. Here too the survey respondents generally endorse the institutional value system. As noted above, more than three-quarters affirm that Jews have a special responsibility to work for justice in the world. Among the Communities Group, nearly 80 per cent believe that Jews should always strive to be exemplary in their actions, and 75 per cent regard the measure of a Jew’s life as his/her contribution to others. Over 60 per cent of both groups see helping others as the single most important principle of Judaism. These responses not only indicate a strong commitment to ethical activism as a key Jewish value, but also provide a clue to why the LD participants regard Jewish survival as so important: they see the Jewish contribution to humanity as irreplaceable. (Nearly 60 per cent of those surveyed view the Jewish contribution to modern civilization as greater than that of any other people.) Thus, the two primary mandates of “civil Judaism”—survival and service—are linked by a single perception of a Jewish “mission” or “destiny.”

We have noted above that all of the elements of “civil Jewish” commitment are regarded as fully compatible with both active participation in the broader non-Jewish society and a considerable measure of intra-Jewish theological diversity and even agnosticism. The first of these assertions has in the past represented a cardinal tenet of “civil Jewish faith,” but there is every reason to believe that it coexists with real feelings of ambivalence about the relationship of Jewishness and Americanness,
of group survival and socio-cultural integration. The survey responses provide evidence of this ambivalence, reaching to the level of ultimate loyalties and identifications, but also of the enduring power of the classical "civil Jewish" affirmations. The LD participants surveyed clearly did not manifest a rejection of their American identities, or a sense that one cannot be both a good Jew and a good American. (Fewer than a quarter feel that it is difficult to be a good Jew living in the United States; less than 10 per cent believe that to be a good Jew one should move to Israel; and more than 70 per cent agree that by being better Jews, Jews will also be better Americans.) Yet 85 per cent, as we have seen, regard assimilation as the major current threat to Jewish survival, and responses to other questions in the survey reveal that intermarriage and the alienation of youth from Jewish life are widely regarded as among the most critical problems confronting the American Jewish community. The presence of real ambivalences regarding ultimate identifications is indicated graphically in the fact that 70 per cent of the survey respondents claim that they feel more emotion listening to Hatikvah than to the Star-Spangled Banner and that a majority reject the proposition that an American Jew owes his/her primary loyalty to the United States. Further, while all but a handful of the LD participants are glad to be Americans, only 54 per cent are strongly so, compared with 86 per cent who strongly assert that they are glad to be Jews.

It would not be useful to exaggerate the significance of these ambivalences. As we have seen, the sense of basic compatibility between "being Jewish" and "being American" remains strong among the LD participants. In part this reflects the fact that on a practical, behavioral level, the interpretation most of the respondents place upon the "demands" of Jewishness is not self-segregating or even substantially disruptive of "normal" American behavioral patterns. On an ideological level as well, the respondents do not for the most part recognize Jewish commitment as incompatible with some of the fundamental canons of modernity. An overwhelming majority of those surveyed accept individual conscience as the ultimate arbiter of the type of Jewish life one should lead (86 per cent) and believe that Judaism must be flexible in adapting itself to changing conditions (83 per cent).

Still, the awareness that Jewish survival—the "sacred" value of the "civil Jewish faith"—is endangered by the process of assimilation means that the marriage between Jewishness and Americanness must always be charged with some tension, and thus with the potential for ongoing redefinition. Such a redefinition, placing greater emphasis on particularist and survivalist activities by the Jewish organizations, seems to be underway. On a personal level, the expanding "civil Jewish" norm of ritual practice discussed above is likely part of this process. That the survey respondents do see a need for deepening their own ties to Jewish tradition (as a means of promoting Jewish survival) is indicated by the fact that approximately 80 per cent

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of those responding regard their own present levels of Jewish practice and knowledge as insufficient. (Whether this verbal acknowledgment translates into actual changes in behavior is another question, but the widespread enthusiasm with which programs emphasizing Jewish learning and practice have been greeted by LD participants provides some indication that the commitment may not be purely verbal.)

All that we have pointed to thus far constitute elements of the "civil Jewish" consensus. In one area, however, "civil Judaism" is deliberately non-consensual—with regard to theological issues and most particularly the question of the authoritativeness (as opposed to value) of the Jewish tradition. Beyond the minimal levels of practice and commitment we have noted, "civil Judaism" does not seek to impose norms on personal religious beliefs and behavior. The responses of the LD participants surveyed demonstrate why this atheologism and pluralism are sustained—there is in fact no consensus to articulate. Statements dealing with personal religious experience, divine revelation of the Torah, eternal life, the purposiveness of suffering, and even whether a good Jew must believe in God produced a wide range of responses, including substantial numbers of "not sures." This reflects not only diversity, but also a relatively low salience of such matters for many of the respondents. With respect to the authority of traditional Jewish law, there is similar disagreement. Two-fifths of those surveyed agree that Jewish law should serve as the authoritative guide for Jewish behavior and belief, but over half disagree. Likewise, while over 40 per cent believe that a Jew should try to observe even those practices whose rationales he/she does not understand, a slightly greater percentage disagree.

What all this means is not that theological or other religious orientations are unrelated to "civil Jewish" affirmations (we will briefly explore some of these relationships below), but rather that despite diversity on a number of potentially significant religious questions, these LD participants do agree substantially on another set of Jewish values and beliefs which forms a shared system of meanings validating and signifying the specific institutional activities and concerns of Jewish federations and the UJA. The question remains, however, whether this "civil Jewish" meaning system is in fact religious if it excludes so much of Judaism's "religious" content from its explicit affirmations. In this context it is important to note that there is one classical Judaic theological affirmation which does appear to enjoy wide, if not universal, support among the LD participants surveyed: the chosenness of the Jewish people. Arthur Hertzberg has discussed with great insight the central significance of this proposition—its affirmation, repudiation, and reinterpretations—for the entire course of modern Judaism, and has noted that despite the grave difficulties it has posed for theologians, the doctrine remains alive among the people as a whole, and even among many so-called Jewish "secularists."11 The central claims of "civil Judaism"—Jewish unity and distinctiveness, the importance of Jewish survival, the

Jewish "mission"—would seem almost to beg for grounding in the doctrine, or at least the sense, of "chosenness." Yet, as Hertzberg also notes, the assertion of chosenness remains at least mildly scandalous intellectually. Thus, the fact that 63 per cent of the survey respondents explicitly affirm that Jews are the chosen people (and only 18 per cent actually disagree) can be interpreted to buttress the contention that "civil Judaism" is grounded in a "religious" conviction—the conviction that Jewish existence is not only humanly, but transcendentally, significant.

**Relationships Among Various Dimensions of Jewish Commitment**

The data presented thus far suggest that the LD participants surveyed do for the most part endorse the tenets of "civil Judaism." However, they leave unanswered a series of questions about the internal coherence of this faith and the relationships between affirmation of its tenets and other Jewish orientations and behaviors. It must be noted at the outset of any attempt to answer these questions that there is no warrant for arguing that "civil Judaism’s" tenets are in any way unique to it. On the contrary, most can be well supported from within a classical Judaic religious position. Thus, we would expect a positive correlation between endorsement of the "civil Jewish faith" and other dimensions of Jewish commitment. The questions we are most interested in have to do with the nature, patterns, and strength of these relationships.

In order to explore these issues, the survey responses were used to create several indices measuring different dimensions of both attachment to "civil Judaism" and other aspects of Jewish identity and commitment. Five of these indices were attitudinal: they measured strength of affective attachment to the Jewish people (ATTA-CHIN); endorsement of the "civil Jewish" ethos (CIVJUDIN); positive orientation toward Jewish religion and practice (PRACTICIN); affirmation of transcendent reality (experiential and doctrinal) (TRANSCIN); and acceptance of the authoritativeness of traditional Jewish norms (TRADITIN). The first three measure orientations which lie within the framework of the "civil Jewish faith" as we have defined it (and indeed, the mean scores on these indices were high), while the latter two measure attitudinal and experiential dimensions which fall outside the "civil Jewish" consensus (though certainly not outside the scope of a classical Judaic commitment). In addition to these attitudinal indices, four others were developed from the questionnaire responses: they measured level of present ritual observance

14For this portion of the study, only the responses from the Communities Group were employed in the statistical analysis.

15These indices were created by factor analyzing the responses to the 50 attitudinal statements (using principal component factoring with a varimax rotation). Twenty-one variables were selected for inclusion, and these were refactored to determine the final composition of each index. The index score was created by summing the scores on each item (with sign change if necessary). The indices are unweighted and unstandardized, and should be regarded, therefore, as rough measures subject to further statistical refinement.
(OBSERVIN); degree of involvement in Jewish communal activities and organizations (COMMUNIN); Jewish knowledge (KNOWLIN); and level of Jewish ritual observance in the respondent's family while he/she was growing up (FAMILIN). Although the nine indices developed are all only rough measures and do not cover the full range of Jewish identity dimensions suggested by Himmelfarb, Lazerwitz, and others, they do provide a useful starting point for examining the questions of internal coherence and interrelationships among the dimensions of Jewish commitment raised above.

Table 5 gives the Pearson correlation coefficient matrix for all of the indices developed in the study.

The most notable conclusion to emerge from even a cursory examination of this matrix is that all dimensions of positive Jewish background, orientation, or commitment are positively correlated with one another, and many (recalling the limitations of the indices employed) at what appear to be quite significant levels statistically. Although Jewish identity is multi-dimensional, its dimensions are generally mutually reinforcing, whether they be dimensions of behavior, traditional belief, or "civil Jewish" commitment.

Beyond this reaffirmation of what a number of recent studies have indicated, several other relationships revealed in the matrix deserve comment.

The three attitudinal dimensions which were seen as tapping elements of the "civil Jewish" meaning system (ATTACHIN, CIVJUDIN, PRACTICIN) do indeed correlate highly with one another. The strength of these relationships (particularly in light of the generally high scores of the respondents on these indices) supports the claim that "civil Judaism" is a relatively coherent and systematic set of affects, values, beliefs, and norms.

The strength of adherence to "civil Jewish" attitudes—and especially a positive orientation toward Jewish religion and practice—does appear (at least at first glance) to be linked to strength of traditionalist and/or transcendentalist

"These are simple additive indices computed as follows: Scores on the indices of current and childhood familial observance (OBSERVIN and FAMILIN) are the number of rituals checked on the lists included on the survey questionnaire (see Table 3 for the current observance list; the childhood familial observance list included 13 of those items). Scores on the Jewish knowledge index (KNOWLIN) are taken from an 18-item true/false test included on the questionnaire covering Jewish history, literature, customs, and communal life. One point was given for a correct answer, one deducted for an incorrect answer, and none for a response of "don't know." The items included on the communal involvement index (COMMUNIN) are: extent of synagogue activity; membership in other Jewish organizations; service as an officer or board member; subscribing to a Jewish periodical; contributing to the local federation/UJA campaign; soliciting contributions for the campaign; political activity on behalf of Israel or Soviet Jewry; and total hours spent per week on Jewish activity. Some weighting of the items was done to reflect differential levels of commitment involved in particular activities.

orientation(s). This confirms the suspicion that "civil Judaism," though often articulated as a meaning system in its own right, cannot be entirely divorced empirically from other elements of Jewish faith and experience which are not part of its own consensual language of affirmation. Although most of the LD participants surveyed scored high in "civil Jewish" commitment, those who also scored high in transcendental and traditionalist attitudes tended to score higher.

The non-attitudinal dimensions of present Jewish identity—ritual observance, communal activism, and Jewish knowledge—are very strongly intercorrelated. Here again, the holistic character of Jewish self-expression finds confirmation. Communal involvement is far less an alternative to personal religious behavior among the respondents than it is its complement. This finding among a largely "committed" population of LD participants thus replicates on a smaller scale what Steven M. Cohen has discovered in his analysis of the Boston Jewish community: private Jewish living and public Jewish involvement go hand in hand.18

In addition to attitudes being linked to attitudes and behaviors to behaviors, there are substantial correlations between the scores on the attitudinal and the behavioral indices. Here the question can be raised of whether it is possible to postulate a set of causal relationships. The data themselves do not permit this, but impressions based on extensive contacts with LD participants would tend to indicate that for many the relationships have been reciprocal; i.e., attitudes both modify and are

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modified by behavior, and the patterns of commitment (and change in commitment) do tend to embrace both personal and communal, "civil Jewish" and "extra-consensual" dimensions of Jewish self-expression.

While the matrix of correlation coefficients presented in Table 5 is useful in establishing some of the fundamental patterns of interrelationship between "civil Jewish" and other dimensions of Jewish identity, these patterns emerge even more clearly when we are able to isolate the independent impact of one identity dimension on another (i.e., examining the relationship between scores on any two of the indices while holding those on all other indices constant). This can be approximated through the use of a series of regression equations, with each index in turn serving as the "dependent" variable of all of the others. Although the results must be treated with some caution, and are too complex to present in full, several further insights emerge from this analysis which are worth noting.

The equations confirm the close linkage among the three "civil Jewish" identity dimensions. Of all the dimensions, endorsement of the "civil Jewish" ethos is the one with the strongest independent relationship to both attachment to the Jewish people and positive orientation toward Jewish religious practice.

On the other hand, the equations also call into doubt the apparent relationship between a traditionalist orientation and both attachment to the Jewish people and endorsement of the "civil Jewish" ethos. All three of these attitudinal dimensions are independently related to a positive orientation to religious practice, and, to varying extents, scores on the three indices measuring these dimensions are related to the levels of personal and communal behavioral expression of Jewish commitment. It does appear, however, that the ethnic and ethos components of the "civil Jewish" faith are manifested virtually independently of traditionalist commitment, and can serve as an alternative motivating or rationalizing factor for Jewish self-expression.

The relationship of the other non-"civil Jewish" attitudinal dimension measured—transcendental orientation—to the "civil Jewish" dimensions is somewhat more complex. While transcendental orientation seems to have no direct correlation with attachment to the Jewish people, it is positively related to endorsement of the "civil Jewish" ethos (a point whose possible significance we shall note below).

When positive orientation toward Jewish religion and practice (PRACTICIN) is treated as the "dependent" variable, all four of the other attitudinal variables continue to show independent positive correlations with it. Observance, communal involvement, and Jewish knowledge, however, appear to have no independent correlation with such an orientation. This would seem to imply that a positive orientation toward religion and religious practice is not a generative attitudinal factor in its own right, but a by-product of a strong "civil Jewish" (ethnic attachment + activist ethos) and/or traditionalist-transcendentalist orientation.

In the regression equations, traditionalism and transcendentalism as such have low independent correlations with level of communal involvement. Ritual observance, however, remains the single strongest independent correlate of communal
activism (with level of Jewish knowledge second, and endorsement of the “civil Jewish” ethos third). Thus, attitudes in general—and especially attitudes relating to theological questions or the authoritative character of Jewish tradition—seem considerably less significant in producing or supporting a high level of communal activity than do personal patterns of religious observance and Jewish knowledge, however these are ideologically rationalized. The ideological rationale for communal involvement articulated within the “civil Jewish” ethos is not unrelated to such activity (according to the data), but a holistic pattern of behavioral expression is the primary correlate of high levels of communal participation and leadership.

The potential impact of a traditionalist/transcendentalist commitment on communal involvement would appear to lie in the fact that these orientations are linked to levels of Jewish knowledge and observance. The primary challenge, therefore, for those seeking to enhance overall Jewish commitment within a “civil Jewish” framework is to find ways to inspire greater behavioral expression of Jewish commitment. The activist ethos of “civil Judaism” (CIVJUDIN) is not itself strongly correlated with levels of personal observance (though it is with communal involvement). Strong affective attachment to and identification with the Jewish people (ATTACHIN), on the other hand, is linked to ritual observance (though less strongly than traditionalism or transcendentalism). These relationships may help to illuminate the distinction between a purely philanthropic rationale for Jewish communal activism (characteristic, perhaps, of some leaders in previous decades) and the fuller “civil Jewish” commitment more characteristic today, in which activism on both the communal and personal levels is a form of self-expression growing out of a deep sense of identification with Jewish peoplehood and destiny.

**Conclusion**

Much of what has been offered here, particularly in the final portions, must be regarded as tentative conclusions concerning the shape and dynamics of “civil Judaism” and its place within a broader taxonomy of contemporary Jewish identity and commitment. The results of the study of LD participants do appear to justify our stating with some confidence that the system of values, affects, and beliefs which serves as the institutional rationale for the activities of the federation/UJA sphere of the American Jewish polity also plays a prominent role in defining the personal Jewish commitments of many of the activists in that sphere. The tenets of “civil Judaism” command widespread support among the population surveyed. They appear to constitute a coherent and mutually reinforcing set of attitudes and sensibilities. Finally, the strength with which these tenets are held and felt is related to the levels of both communal involvement and personal religious behavior of the respondents. From the data we cannot say whether “civil Judaism” is more a motivator or a rationalizer of these behavioral commitments (it is probably both), but it is clearly not an ideology of Jewish affirmation unrelated to other forms of Jewish self-expression.
On the other hand, the study data also appear to indicate that "civil Judaism" is not merely a by-product of other attitudinal complexes. To be sure, strength of "civil Jewish" affirmation is, as we have emphasized, related to a variety of other measures of overall Jewish commitment (such as denominational self-identification). But the widespread endorsement of "civil Jewish" values and beliefs across denominational lines renders any effort to depict it as analytically indistinguishable from other expressions of Jewish identity and commitment suspect. It is certainly clear that affirmation of "civil Judaism's" tenets is not dependent upon a specific theological or religious-experiential orientation.

Hovering over this entire discussion is the question which must be addressed once more: is there anything genuinely religious about the "civil Judaism" we have discovered, anything to link it to a genuine experience and perception of transcendence? Or is "civil Judaism," after all, an amalgam of ethnic attachment and ethical concern which finds expression in nominally religious forms? On one level, we can perhaps respond by suggesting that the empirical links in the data between strength of "civil Jewish" (ethnos and ethos) affirmation and other measures of religious belief and behavior are themselves indicators of the underlying character of "civil Judaism" which ought not to be lightly dismissed. But we can go beyond this, and turn again to the more explicit (though by no means definitive) signals in the survey responses that the "civil Jewish" meaning system—and especially its ethos of mutual support and exemplary responsibility—is tied to a perception of Jewish existence as transcendentally significant. One such possible signal is the correlation noted above between endorsement of the "civil Jewish" ethos and affirmation of transcendent reality. A second is the positive correlation between assent to the proposition that Jewish survival is a "miracle" and scores on both the index of affective attachment to the Jewish people \( r = .14, p = .02 \) and that of endorsement of the "civil Jewish" ethos \( r = .13, p = .03 \). Finally, and in light of the arguments made above, most significantly, we can point to the strong correlation between acceptance of the proposition that Jews are the chosen people and affirmation of the

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19 Although denominational self-identification does correlate with all of the measures of Jewish commitment, its lowest correlation is with endorsement of the "civil Jewish" ethos \( r = .14, p = .024 \).

20 It might be argued that this question does not deserve the prominence we have given it: "civil Judaism" is what it is, regardless of how we categorize it. We would suggest, however, that whether a meaning and symbol system is genuinely "religious" in character—i.e., whether its ultimate referent is transcendental—does make a difference in its capacity to embrace the full range of human experience and aspiration, to avoid becoming idolatrous, and to respond and evolve as history unfolds. For a "Jewish" meaning system, loss of contact with the religious referents and substance of the Judaic symbol system means an impoverishment of both depth and scope. Thus, we would argue, the question of the "religious" character of "civil Judaism"—though probably unanswerable empirically—is not idle. It may well be critical in the long run in determining the vitality and direction of its evolution and its place within the framework of modern Jewish history as a whole. See Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, 1957) and Eugene Borowitz, *The Mask Jews Wear* (New York, 1973).
“civil Jewish” ethos (r = .42, p = .001), and to the slightly lower, but still strong, correlation between belief in Jewish “chosenness” and strength of attachment to the Jewish people (r = .27, p = .001). The strength of these relationships would seem to indicate that the key sentiments and norms of “civil Judaism” do reflect a validation of Jewish existence in terms of a concept which does not easily fit into a “secular” worldview, but which does resonate with millennia of Jewish religious experience.

If we are correct in identifying the concept of “Jewish chosenness” as the “theological” linchpin of the “civil Jewish” faith, there are additional potential implications worth exploring. Although “chosenness” seems to be essentially an historical-ethical concept within the “civil Jewish” meaning system, in classical Judaic theology it is linked directly to the acceptance of the discipline of Torah, i.e., to expression in the ritual-legal sphere as well.21 We may, therefore, be warranted in speculating whether the development of a “civil Jewish” norm of observance, as noted above, might also be linked—at some point in its evolution, if not presently—to the consciousness and ethos of “chosenness.” The “turn inward” which has been noted among some Jews in recent years—expressed in an intensified focus on intra-communal concerns and personal religious experience, and a de-emphasis on social activism—appears to be manifested among more than a few of the LD participants surveyed. This turn need not, however, be seen as a repudiation of the basic tenets of “civil Judaism,” but rather as a reinterpretation expressive of a different sense of what the “special destiny” of the Jewish people implies and how it is to be realized. In this variant of the “civil Jewish” faith, the ethos of responsibility and exemplification shifts its focus from (if we may borrow the terminology of the tradition) *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) to being a *goy kadosh* (holy nation).

A synthesis of these two thrusts—the traditional philanthropic-activist orientation of the federations and UJA with the newer emphasis on enhancing the Judaic quality of communal and personal life—would be welcomed by many as a further realization of the potential of the “civil Jewish” faith as a genuinely religious meaning system.

The religious character and expression of “civil Judaism” has implications in another area as well—the relationship of its adherents to the State of Israel and Israeli Jews. For the past 35 years federation and UJA activities have been dominated by concern for Israel’s creation, survival, security, and welfare—so much so that they have at times been accused of displacing God and Torah entirely from a place of prominence in Jewish life. There can be no question that the LD participants surveyed in this study have a deep commitment to Israel—financial support for Israel remains their number one communal priority, and the Arab-Israeli conflict their number one basis for communal anxiety. But the State of Israel is far from being the sum and substance of their religion or their Jewish commitment. Israel is a vital symbol, but not necessarily an irreplaceable one. Whereas over 90 per cent

of the respondents agree that the Jewish people could not survive without Jewish religion, only 56 per cent regard the State of Israel as similarly critical. We have seen, too, that despite strong emotional ties, barely one in ten of these LD participants believes that to be a good Jew one must live in Israel, and fewer than half indicate that they would be happy if their children settled there. Even more striking, perhaps, is the fact that a third of these prospective leaders agree with the claim that American Jews devote too much attention to Israel and not enough to their own community.

For the most part, then, the survey respondents could not be regarded as Zionists in any strict sense, nor is their Jewish commitment narrowly Israel-focused. Israel is important because it plays a central symbolic role within the "civil Jewish" meaning system. Observation of other federation/UJA activists suggests that Israel is important because it is seen as a link to the Jewish past; as a vehicle for the continuity of the Jewish tradition; as an expression of the revitalization and empowerment of the Jewish people in the modern world; as a testimony to the unity of all Jews; and as a progressive force in such areas as education, science and technology, and social welfare. These are, it should be noted, largely the same aspirations which these Jews hold for themselves and for the American Jewish community. The State of Israel is also, as many have recognized, the positive symbol in the myth of death and rebirth which structures the contemporary Jewish understanding of Jewish, especially recent Jewish, history. This myth, and its translation into the sense of the perpetual endangerment of the Jewish people, hanging between death and life, is central to the entire "civil Jewish" faith. Thus, what American "civil" Jews support so vigorously is a mythically potent Israel, but one which, correspondingly, acquires its powerful hold on the attentions of these Jews by virtue of a myth and meaning system which transcends its own reality.

Two possible conclusions flow from this analysis. One is that to the extent that the reality of Israel diverges from the meaning which "civil Judaism" assigns to the State and its people, and/or to the extent that other Jewish realia (e.g., ritual observance, Jewish education, or the American Jewish community itself) can assume similar symbolic functions, identification with the State of Israel may become less central for the adherents of the "civil Jewish" faith. For those disturbed by this possibility, however, another presents itself, because, though the "real" Israel may not correspond precisely to its image among American Jews, it is engaged in its own quest for self-definition in mythico-religious terms. Israel too, as Charles Liebman and others have shown, is evolving its own Jewish "civil religion" out of the data of recent history and the repertoire of traditional Jewish symbols. Should American Jews and Israeli Jews, both evolving Jewish "civil religions," succeed in bringing them into dialogue with one another, with the realities of the contemporary Jewish

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experience, and with the classical sources and substance of Judaic faith, the stage might be set for a new and deeper identification of one community with the other.

This study clearly has only begun the process of trying to locate and interpret "civil Jewish" faith as a dimension of American Jewish identity and religious commitment. The study of "civil Judaism" must go on to address other issues—the demographic and sociological characteristics of its adherents; the patterns of Jewish upbringing and experience associated with commitment to its values and beliefs; and its relationship to specific policy and program preferences. If we are correct in the assertion that "civil Judaism" has emerged as a powerful modern Jewish meaning system, and one which continues to show signs of dynamism in its evolution, then ongoing study of its character and course of development is worthwhile. The data of this study indicate that a generation of American Jewish communal leadership is being shaped by its tenets and its definition of the meaning and demands of Jewish existence. Whether "civil Judaism" will prove to be a vehicle for insuring the Jewish continuity its adherents seek, remains to be seen. Certainly, however, the efforts of those who embrace its tenets will be an important part of the Jewish history of our time.

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