The year 1990 brought a noticeable shift in the mood of the American Jewish community, as old priorities were questioned and new anxieties emerged. Despite their continuing commitment to the security of the State of Israel—strengthened toward the end of the year by the threat of an Iraqi attack on Israel—there was a growing sense that Israeli insistence on holding on to the occupied territories would, sooner or later, result in conflict with the American administration. The issue of saving Soviet Jewry, which for so many years had provided a focus for American Jewish energies, had been transformed by glasnost from an idealistic demand to “let my people go” into a less lofty search for the money to resettle the émigrés who were pouring out of the USSR.

Just at the time that the traditional issues that had mobilized American Jewry for a generation began losing their luster, Jewish intellectuals, subjecting the internal workings of their community to intensive scrutiny, questioned its long-term viability. Toward the end of the year, data from an ambitious new survey of American Jews provided hard numbers that seemed to reinforce these forebodings. And the Jewish religious movements, each in its own way, struggled to provide compelling visions of Judaism that might disprove the pessimists and inspire the next generation.

American Jews and Israel

At the beginning of the year, American Jewry confronted the first of a series of disturbances in U.S.-Israeli relations. With the peace process languishing, the administration of President George Bush making no secret of its unhappiness about the settlement of Soviet Jewish refugees in the West Bank, and Senate minority leader Robert Dole (R., Kan.) calling for a cut in American aid to the Jewish state, Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir publicly advocated, on January 14, “a bigger Israel, a strong Israel, Eretz Yisrael” to absorb the immigrants. Since “a greater Israel” was the code expression for permanent Israeli control over the territories, his words were widely taken to mean that immigrants would be channeled there. The American government’s official response was that Shamir’s remarks were “not helpful.”
American Jewry was split over how to respond. The mainstream leadership sought to contain the damage. Reporting on a phone conversation he had with Shamir, Seymour Reich, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, explained that Israel had no deliberate policy of settling Soviet Jews in the West Bank or Gaza; while admittedly the Shamir government intended to hold on to the territories, this had no connection with where the immigrants were sent.

In the eyes of some American Jews who favored Israeli withdrawal from the territories, the American Jewish establishment proved its own bankruptcy by backing the Israeli line. In Los Angeles, Tikkun magazine convened a Southern California Conference of Liberal and Progressive Intellectuals that attracted over 1,300 people. Tikkun editor Michael Lerner claimed that most American Jews opposed Israeli retention of the territories, but that "people who give big money and who have created organizations that stifle debate" created the illusion that American Jewry backed Shamir. Prof. David Biale of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley compared the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to a cancer eating away, not only at "democracy in Israel," but also at the American Jewish community. The participants resolved to place an ad in Israeli newspapers calling for negotiations that would lead to a demilitarized Palestinian state.

Questions raised about American Jewish leaders' support for Israeli policies attracted the attention of public-opinion professionals. Two surveys were completed—one done for Tel Aviv University's Israel-Diaspora Institute by Steven M. Cohen, the other for the American Jewish Committee by Jacob B. Ukeles. Both demonstrated that, far from espousing a more hawkish view than their constituents, as alleged by the "liberal and progressive intellectuals," American Jewish leaders were actually more conciliatory toward the Arabs than rank-and-file Jews. As Earl Raab noted in the pages of Commentary (June 1990), "Despite debate in the American Jewish community over some Israeli strategies, any politician who thinks that a large number of Jewish voters would now look favorably upon cuts in aid to Israel, or other forms of diminished support, will soon discover that he has been misled by a false and tendentious reading of American Jewish opinion." Yet the Cohen study also contained findings that could only disturb supporters of the official Israeli line: many of the American Jewish leaders expressing public solidarity with the Shamir government privately agreed with the more flexible stand of the Labor opposition.

DIFFERENCES AT NJCRAC CONFERENCE

When the annual plenary of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC) convened in Phoenix on February 20, the vexed issue of the settlement of Soviet Jews in the territories split the assembled delegates down the middle. NJCRAC—an umbrella organization that coordinates the activities of Jewish national and local community relations bodies—debated a resolution critical of
Israeli policies. It expressed concern that “the construction of new housing in the administered territories will have the direct effect of encouraging settlement there,” a result that allegedly would “detract from the aliya potential and our fund raising” and “increase tensions between Israelis and Palestinians living there, possibly disrupting delicate negotiations.”

Theodore Mann, a former president of the American Jewish Congress, defended this language on the ground that the prospect of Soviet olim settling in the West Bank might dampen the enthusiasm of philanthropists and discourage the Soviet Union from initiating direct flights to Israel. But Seymour Reich expressed opposition to what he saw as an “inappropriate and mischievous” resolution. Since, he said, Israel had no plans for large-scale construction projects in the West Bank, it made no sense to allude to such a possibility.

A motion to remove the controversial clauses resulted in a tie vote, 199–199, so the language stayed in. The resolution then passed 216–207—though NJCRAC officials pointed out that it was not yet official policy, but only a recommendation to the organization’s Israel Task Force. (Two months later, that body rejected the resolution.)

The next day, February 21, found NJCRAC divided again over Israeli policy. When a statement on the Middle East was proposed, representatives of the American Jewish Congress circulated two amendments affirming that “many within the Jewish community” favored a “two-state solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that American Jewry “expressed concern” that Prime Minister Shamir, by rejecting “the concept of land for peace,” seemed to “rule out sovereignty of any kind” for the Palestinians, in alleged violation of Security Council Resolution 242.

When AJCongress withdrew the amendments to avoid an acrimonious debate, Maynard Wishner, who chaired the NJCRAC Israel Task Force, praised the decision. “There is not argument,” he said, “that there is diversity of opinion. But umbrella organizations which are tempted to separate on bare majorities can stop being umbrellas very soon.” Those who favored the amendments felt that the publicity attending their efforts could not fail to have an impact. David Saperstein of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations expressed his confidence “that the concerns of the American Jewish public are being heard in Israel.”

PRESIDENTS CONFERENCE

During the annual Israel seminar in Jerusalem in late February of the Presidents Conference, chairman Seymour Reich—always careful not to criticize Israeli policy in public—did suggest to reporters that Israel might move faster to implement the peace initiative that it had proposed in 1989. And for the first time, the seminar program included a session with Peace Now activists.

In private meetings with Yitzhak Shamir, the 75 delegates explained how important it was in terms of American public opinion for the prime minister to dispel the
notion that there was a concerted effort to settle Soviet Jews in the territories. Shamir acquiesced, stating at the closing dinner of the seminar that "it is not the policy of the government of Israel to direct the olim to the areas of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. Nor are there special incentives for those that do go there." The Americans responded with loud applause. In striking contrast was their hostile reaction to a presentation by Housing Minister Ariel Sharon, who had threatened to quit the cabinet in protest over Shamir's alleged willingness to negotiate with the Palestinians. Howard Squadron, a former chairman of the Presidents Conference, found Sharon's hard-line ideas "extraordinarily unrealistic." "They will happen when the Messiah comes," he said.

Organized American Jewry barely had time to savor Yitzhak Shamir's disavowal of any plan to direct immigrants to the territories when, on March 3, President Bush implied during a news conference that Jews should not settle in East Jerusalem. Even dovish Jewish leaders who could envisage an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank were appalled at the idea that any part of the Holy City could be off limits to Jews. One such dove, Rabbi Alexander Schindler of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), wrote to Bush requesting that he "articulate our government's policy regarding Jerusalem clearly and consistently, so that there is no room for doubt or fear that this administration considers East Jerusalem a part of the West Bank."

Attempts to clarify the administration's position were not successful, and Seymour Reich declared on March 11 that "mixed signals" on Jerusalem undermined Israeli confidence in the peace process. Indeed, fallout from the president's statement was a contributing factor in the fall, two days later, of Israel's Likud-Labor coalition.

When Labor party leader Shimon Peres, with his positive position on peace talks, was given the first opportunity to form a new coalition, mainstream Jewish leaders in the United States made no secret of their preference for him over the Likud's Shamir. And they reacted with fury when Peres failed to garner a majority because two Orthodox Knesset members followed the guidelines of the Brooklyn-based Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the Rebbe of Lubavitch, who opposed giving up any of the occupied territories. Seymour Reich declared that it was "reprehensible for anyone in the Diaspora to interfere with the Israeli political system." Alexander Schindler attacked Schneerson directly: "How can a religious leader in good conscience reject the idea of moving toward peace when the young men in his own movement are exempted from military service so they can pursue their yeshiva studies?" There were calls for federations to retaliate by cutting off funding to Lubavitch institutions, until it was learned that no federation money went to Lubavitch headquarters.
CONFLICT OVER JERUSALEM

Meanwhile, to counter the impression left by President Bush that Jewish sovereignty over East Jerusalem was uncertain, the Senate passed a nonbinding resolution affirming that united Jerusalem was the capital of Israel. American Jewish gratification quickly turned to apprehension, however, when Senator Dole, on April 15, announced his intention to get the Senate to rescind its vote—adding, for good measure, that American Jewish leaders were so greedy in their quest for American aid to Israel that "they wouldn't give a penny to anyone else." Seymour Reich characterized Dole's remarks as "ill-advised, without foundation, and not becoming a leader of the U.S. Senate," and he cited the Jewish community's consistent support for aid to other countries in need. After several leading Republicans dissociated themselves from his views, Dole backed down.

But a much more serious crisis in American-Israeli relations loomed. On April 11—during the Christian holy day season leading up to Easter—150 Jews occupied a building in the Christian Quarter of East Jerusalem, claiming that they had purchased the lease. The local Greek Orthodox Church, however, said it was the rightful owner and the transaction was illegal. And on April 23, Israel's Housing Ministry admitted that it had financed the purchase.

Fearing that the incident would further damage Israel's image in the United States and endanger the passage of $400 million in loan guarantees to Israel then pending in Congress, American Jewish organizations—the same ones that had recently insisted that Jews had every right to move into East Jerusalem—denounced the move. The American Jewish Congress said it was "appalled" that the Israeli regime involved itself in "a clandestine effort to settle Jews in the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem." Alexander Schindler called the government's role "unconscionable and self-destructive." Even the Anti-Defamation League, which usually backed Israeli policies to the hilt, expressed "deep concern" that the settlers had received government help. Both Seymour Reich and officials of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) warned Prime Minister Shamir over the telephone of adverse political consequences in the United States.

Time magazine, in its May 7 issue, carried a report—"The Agony Over Israel: American Jews face a dilemma: how to criticize the Jewish state without seeming disloyal"—written by the star investigative journalist Carl Bernstein. In his assessment, based on extensive interviews, the Jewish takeover of the East Jerusalem building had been the last straw. It was not only AIPAC, but "leaders of the Reform and Conservative branches of Judaism and scores of men and women who have held leadership positions in organizations ranging from B'nai B'rith to Hadassah" who were disenchanted with a whole series of Israeli policies. Israel's dealings with South Africa, its alleged role in the Iran-Contra affair, the Pollard spy case, and the disproportionate power of the ultra-Orthodox—added to "Israel's provocative settlement policies and intransigence toward the Palestinians," wrote Bernstein, provided the recipe for American Jewish "agony."
Yet even so, when Prime Minister Shamir succeeded, on June 11, in forming a right-wing government explicitly committed to "strengthen, expand, and develop" West Bank and Gaza settlements, the organized American Jewish community closed ranks. Alexander Schindler, longtime critic of Likud’s approach, expressed the consensus, saying that "whatever differences some of us may have with specific policies, American Jews stand as one with Israel." Of the major organizations, only AJCongress dissented; Robert Lifton, its president, predicted that the new government coalition would "split American Jews as well as Israelis" and announced that his organization felt free now, as in the past, to criticize the policies of Israel’s government. Nine days later American Jewish leaders expressed considerable satisfaction when the Bush administration announced a suspension of its dialogue with the PLO, after the latter refused to renounce a May 30 terrorist attack on Israel.

In light of the common perception of growing strain between Israel and the United States, American Jews were understandably sensitive to the results of public-opinion surveys that gauged American attitudes about the Middle East. On July 9, the release of a new New York Times/CBS News poll showing a decline in support for Israel and a rise in support for the Palestinians provided cause for concern. Jewish spokespersons sought to control the damage by attributing the changes to short-term problems rather than a permanent erosion. Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League felt that "if relations between the U.S. and Israeli officials were to improve and Israel were to get its act together, including some progress in the peace process, then the fundamentals that have led the American people to support Israel overwhelmingly will reassert themselves." That polling is far from an exact science was demonstrated two weeks later when the American Jewish Committee released a Roper poll it had commissioned which showed a rise in American sympathy for Israel. "We find most heartening that most Americans remain steadfast in their regard for Israel," said AJCommittee executive vice-president Ira Silverman.

GULF CRISIS; TEMPLE MOUNT

In August, however, such matters were relegated to the back burner by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. American Jewry solidly backed American economic sanctions against Iraq, as Seymour Reich put it, to restrain Saddam Hussein "from striking at some other Arab oil-producing state and to prevent him from carrying out his threats against Israel." Jewish organizations also noted that this crisis showed how important it was for the United States to have a strong and trustworthy ally—Israel—in the region. As the administration pushed legislation through Congress providing Saudi Arabia with advanced weaponry to repel a potential Iraqi invasion, Jewish leaders sought new American aid for Israel to preserve the Jewish state’s military superiority in the region. On September 28, the day after administration officials met with a 50-member delegation of the Conference of Presidents, the State
Department issued a public pledge to respond swiftly to any Iraqi attack on Israel. Just as organized American Jewry began getting used to the welcome notion of Israel and the United States as allied against the common Iraqi threat, new violence in Jerusalem threatened the newfound harmony. On October 8, during the Sukkot holiday, Arabs on the Temple Mount hurled rocks on Jews praying at the Western Wall. In dispersing the Arabs, Israeli police killed 17 of them. The United States then helped draft a UN Security Council resolution condemning Israel for responding with excessive force. The Presidents Conference called the resolution “harsh and hypocritical” for failing even to mention the attack on the Jewish worshipers. NJCRAC charged the United States with “joining with those forces at the UN which routinely use that forum to isolate Israel diplomatically.” Several Orthodox organizations declared Saturday, October 20, a “Sabbath of Protest.” And the next day there were several well-attended rallies in New York City protesting the UN action.

A crack in the wall of American Jewish unanimity did develop over whether Israel should cooperate with a UN team sent to investigate the incident. A broad spectrum of Jewish organizations supported Israel’s decision not to cooperate, citing the UN’s historic hostility to the Jewish state and the threat to Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem that a UN investigation would represent. Alexander Schindler, however, advised the Israelis that from a public-relations point of view there was much to gain from working with the UN group.

On November 8, five Jewish leaders—Seymour Reich, Abraham Foxman, Presidents Conference executive director Malcolm Hoenlein, AIPAC president Mayer Mitchell, and AIPAC executive director Thomas Dine—met for an hour with President Bush in the White House. The five expressed concern that administration interest in piecing together an anti-Iraq coalition had led to a neglect of Israel’s interests, and they cited as an example American support for the UN condemnation of Israel over the Temple Mount violence. Bush assured them that there had been no change in American policy toward the Jewish state—a position he repeated publicly at a news conference minutes later—and that the United States was coordinating its strategy regarding Iraq together with Israel. The president also suggested that Israel cooperate with the UN team investigating the Temple Mount deaths, a message that the Jewish leaders quickly conveyed to Israel.

On November 28, another anti-Israel resolution was proposed in the Security Council, this one calling for a UN observer to be stationed in the West Bank, urging Israel to accept the application of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the territories, and supporting the idea of an international peace conference on the Middle East. The Presidents Conference, arguing that this amounted to interference in Israel’s internal affairs, urged the United States to exercise its veto. It did not; the final version of the resolution, which also condemned Israel for deporting Palestinians from the West Bank, passed the Security Council unanimously on December 20. The Presidents Conference expressed the American Jewish consensus: “By failing to exercise its right of veto, the Bush Administration has seriously wounded our one staunch and democratic ally in the region.”
Ironically, a week later it was Seymour Reich himself, the outgoing chairman of the Presidents Conference, who publicly criticized Israeli policy. After Israeli housing minister Ariel Sharon announced plans to construct 2,500 new homes for Jews in the West Bank—possibly endangering $400 million in loan guarantees from the United States—Reich said there was "no good reason to place Israel in the position to be a target of additional criticism from the United States and others." Thus, the year ended on a sour note for American Jewish-Israeli relations.

American Jews and Soviet Jewry

On January 2, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ) announced that over 71,000 Jews had left the USSR in 1989, four times as many as the previous year. Proclaiming 1989 "the record year to date for Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union," NCSJ chairwoman Shoshana Cardin expressed the hope "that 1990 will also prove to be a milestone year." It was. Over 181,000 Soviet Jews emigrated, more than had left the country in the previous 21 years combined. At year's end Cardin announced: "The Soviet Union continues to live up to its international commitment to provide for free emigration for its citizens, including its still sizable Jewish population."

After years of exerting pressure on the Soviets to let the Jews leave, the American Jewish community now faced the challenge of raising the money to help Israel absorb the immigrants. On January 20, the United Jewish Appeal announced Operation Exodus, a special $420-million campaign for the resettlement of Soviet Jews. UJA expected to solicit pledges for this huge amount over one year, while the money could be paid out over three years. By earmarking the entire sum for Israel, the organizers hoped to avoid the frictions that marred the 1989 Passage to Freedom campaign, which set aside some of the money for resettlement costs in the United States. Reports of rising anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union made accelerated immigration to Israel more likely, inducing leaders of local federations not to insist on receiving any of the proceeds of Operation Exodus.

To help finance the absorption of Soviet Jews in American communities, Jewish social-service agencies sought $70 million from the State Department's refugee budget. Yet even this amount, if forthcoming, would be a mere drop in the bucket for the 40,000 Jews expected to arrive in the United States during 1990.

The Council of Jewish Federations convened a special general assembly in Miami on February 6 to deal with the problem. There was widespread agreement that the federations would share the resettlement costs, and not simply leave individual Jewish communities to cope with the refugees who ended up coming to them. Underlying this consensus was the sense that saving Soviet Jewry was a one-time historic opportunity that must not be missed.

Controversy developed over just how to apportion resettlement costs among the communities. Smaller communities objected to a formula based on money raised in the 1988 campaign, arguing that it penalized the most successful fund-raisers. These federations suggested, instead, that only half the assessment be based on the 1988
campaign, with the other half allocated according to the size of the Jewish community. The larger communities with weaker fund-raising records, however, doubted they could reach such ambitious goals. A compromise was reached: 85 percent of each community's "fair share" would be based on the 1988 campaign, 15 percent on size. Ultimately, 121 of the 141 eligible communities participated in this arrangement.

Meanwhile, congressional legislation providing Israel with $400 million in loan guarantees to pay for housing Soviet emigrants ran into an unexpected snag. On March 1, Secretary of State Baker said that the administration would only approve the bill if none of the funds from these loans were used for settlements in the territories. After discussions with Vice-President Dan Quayle, Jewish leaders expressed confidence that this did not mean that the loan guarantees depended on an end to Jewish settlement in Gaza and the West Bank. Such settlement could continue, so long as the loan money did not finance it.

OPERATION EXODUS

Operation Exodus opened strongly. A "millionaires' meeting" hosted on February 28 by businessman Leslie Wexner raised $58 million from 16 individuals. On April 4, a congressional seder to promote Operation Exodus took place in Washington. It attracted 500 people and featured an address by Vice-President Quayle. Marvin Lender, chairman of Operation Exodus, announced that $109 million had already been raised. By early May, several of the federations—those with very wealthy givers—were well on their way toward their assigned goals; indeed, Baltimore had already topped it, and San Francisco had decided to raise double the original projection. Leaders in such communities reported tremendous enthusiasm. Yet two-thirds of the federations, still busy with their regular campaigns, had not even started on Operation Exodus.

On June 3, American Jews were taken aback by Soviet threats to restore limits on the emigration of Jews. Responding to complaints by Arabs—echoed in more subdued tones by the U.S. administration—that Israel was settling Soviet Jews in the territories, President Mikhail Gorbachev, who was in the United States for a summit meeting with President Bush, raised the possibility of cutting off the emigration unless Israel guaranteed that no Soviet Jews would be steered to the West Bank or Gaza. (Ironically, this was two days after Rabbi Arthur Schneier of the Appeal for Conscience Foundation presented Gorbachev with an award for "changing the course of world events in our time.") American Jewish organizations denounced any linkage between the humanitarian question of emigration and the territorial issue, and denied, in any case, that Israel was settling immigrants in the disputed territories. Efforts by the NCSJ to reach the Soviet president before his return to Moscow were unsuccessful. But the crisis blew over quickly. On June 6, the Associated Press reported that Gorbachev had "retracted" his threat.
In late June, the annual Jewish Agency Assembly in Jerusalem discussed the progress of Operation Exodus. "In less than four months," announced chairman Marvin Lender, "we have raised $311 million," three-quarters of the projected target figure. Forty-two individuals had donated over a million dollars apiece. But more than twice as many Soviet Jews were entering Israel than had been projected when Operation Exodus began, creating what the chairman of the United Israel Appeal termed a "substantial emergency." To help meet the unanticipated costs, UJA officials resolved to urge their Operation Exodus donors to pay off their pledges in two years rather than three, and began talking of a new special drive for 1991.

In September, however, they decided to hold off on a new campaign. With pledges for Operation Exodus just $20 million shy of the $420 million goal, the UJA and the federations decided to concentrate on collection of pledges so that the money could be put to use quickly in Israel, rather than on any immediate "Exodus II" drive. And with other causes seriously underfunded—Ethiopian Jewish relief as well as American Jewish social-service and educational institutions—the fund-raisers were eager to devote more attention to their regular campaigns, which they hoped would benefit from the sense of excitement generated by Operation Exodus. In November, when the Jewish Agency Board of Governors called on world Jewry to raise another $1.3 billion for resettlement of Soviet Jews in Israel, board chairman Mendel Kaplan acknowledged that only a portion would come from philanthropy of the traditional kind. "We are now looking for other financial instruments to be provided by Diaspora Jews," he said, probably referring to loans and investments.

On November 30, President Bush told a news conference that he was considering waiving the provisions of the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment restricting trade with the Soviet Union. Jackson-Vanik, which predicated the granting of trade benefits upon Soviet adherence to a policy of free emigration, had long been a symbol to Jews of American determination to fight for human rights in the USSR. American Jewish organizations had till now insisted that no waiver be issued without firm guarantees, written into law, that the Soviets would maintain an open-door policy. The Union of Councils for Soviet Jews immediately announced opposition to a waiver, but the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, in a shift of position, supported a one-year waiver. In the light of high levels of emigration, it reasoned, Soviet adherence to the conditions previously demanded could be left to private conversations between the administration and the USSR. Shoshana Cardin, chairwoman of the NCSJ, explained that Jackson-Vanik had previously been "used as a stick"; now it could be "used as a carrot."

On December 11, President Bush announced that he was waiving certain restrictions of Jackson-Vanik through the following July, so that the Soviet Union could receive up to $1 billion in credits to buy American food products. This was acceptable even to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, since the waiver did not cover the provision barring the Soviets from most-favored-nation trade benefits. The president's decision drew a chorus of praise from American Jewish organizations. While the future of the Soviet Union and its Jews was unpredictable, the American
Soviet Jewry movement, in the form in which it had captured the imagination of a generation of American Jews, was essentially over.

The Kahane Assassination

The successful culmination of the Soviet Jewry movement coincided almost exactly with the violent death of Meir Kahane, the man most associated in the public mind with the campaign to save Soviet Jews. Kahane was a highly controversial figure. Born in Brooklyn in 1932, he worked as an Orthodox rabbi, journalist, and FBI informant until 1968, when, outraged by a rise in anti-Semitic incidents in New York City, he founded the Jewish Defense League. Kahane’s JDL did not shrink from the use of force to defend Jews against attacks and sought to instill a greater sense of Jewish pride in the Jewish community. Kahane regularly raised the charge that American Jewry had failed to rescue European Jews from the Nazi Holocaust and that only his form of militance could prevent a recurrence. He was contemptuous of the mainstream Jewish leadership which, he charged, failed to stand up for Jewish rights. Kahane’s slogan “Never Again!” voiced the sentiments of many Jews who, stirred by the Six Day War and the early writings of Elie Wiesel, were starting to come to grips with the annihilation of six million of their brothers and sisters a generation earlier.

American Jews had organized to call attention to the plight of Soviet Jews several years before Kahane seized upon the issue. Yet he was the first to sanction violence to further the cause. After several shootings and bomb attacks directed at Soviets and Soviet institutions that were traced to the JDL, Kahane was convicted in federal court in 1971, but fled the country while out on bail. He was imprisoned for a year when he returned to the United States in 1974. Kahane shifted his base of operations to Israel after his release. He founded the Kach party, advocating the removal of Arabs from Israel, and sat in the Knesset from 1984 to 1988 as the party’s sole representative. Kach was barred from participation in the 1988 election on the grounds that it was racist and undemocratic.

On November 5, Kahane was shot to death after making a speech in a Manhattan hotel. Egyptian-born El Sayyid A Nosair, who was seen holding the murder weapon immediately before the shots rang out, and who then fled the scene, was arrested and charged with the crime.

Kahane’s death and the funeral that was held in a Brooklyn synagogue evoked mixed emotions from American Jews. Many of his hard-core supporters—stunned, distraught, outraged—called for vengeance against Arabs. A few anti-Kahane Jews, generally secular intellectuals, wasted no tears: Leon Wieseltier, for example, the literary editor of the New Republic, dismissed Kahane as “a great fear artist.” Orthodox Jews were ambivalent. On the one hand, the late rabbi had been a proud Orthodox Jew—eulogist Rabbi Moses Tendler went so far as to say that the deceased had “talked with God”—and had expressed contempt for any other form of Judaism. Furthermore, his bitter attacks on the secular leadership of American
Jewry resonated well in the Orthodox world. Yet Kahane's advocacy of violence was quite foreign to the politically quietistic tradition of Orthodoxy. A common Orthodox response, then, was to praise him as an exemplary Jew while at the same time disagreeing with his tactics.

Most intriguing was the reaction of the mainstream leaders of American Jewry. Seymour Reich, chairman of the Presidents Conference, and Abraham Foxman, executive director of the Anti-Defamation League, attended the funeral, though both told reporters that they did not agree with Kahane's approach to Jewish issues. The American Jewish Committee, which was not represented at the funeral, nevertheless stated in a press release: "Despite our considerable differences, Meir Kahane must always be remembered for the slogan 'Never Again,' which for so many became the battle-cry of post-Holocaust Jewry." The markedly polite tone of these organizations that had considered Kahane, when alive, beneath contempt, could be interpreted in either of two ways. Kahane loyalists suggested that the new note of respect marked a belated recognition of Kahane's influence on the American Jewish masses. Others denied that the Jewish establishment had changed its stance. Rather, it was responding sympathetically to the tragic fact that a Jew—it could have been any Jew—was gunned down by an Arab. Had Kahane died of a heart attack, the argument ran, there would have been no such outpouring of sympathy.

**Shifting Organizational Patterns**

Just as Israel and Soviet Jewry showed signs of losing their priority status on the American Jewish agenda, the ramified organizational structure of American Jews that traditionally dealt with these issues faced new problems. The tribulations experienced by Jewish organizations in 1990 stemmed at least in part from problems in the American economy that cut deeply into the level of charitable giving. The lack of money—in itself probably a short-term problem—forced the community to confront certain long-term questions it had previously managed to avoid.

One of these was the changing role of women. The largest Jewish women's organization—indeed, the largest American Jewish organization of any kind—was Hadassah, the women's Zionist organization. As the other American Zionist groups declined in the years of Israel's statehood, Hadassah thrived by avoiding ideological debates and focusing on concrete, high-quality health-care projects in Israel. But in 1990, for the first time, Hadassah leadership noted that membership had leveled off at around 385,000, and that income from dues was down.

The reason was simple. In the words of national vice-president Deborah Kaplan, "Women are working. They don't have time to volunteer." Furthermore, young career women, even if they were interested in giving of their spare time to a Jewish cause, tended not to be attracted to Hadassah, which was popularly viewed as an organization for older women. And in keeping with the interests of an older generation of women, Hadassah programming stressed Israel, not the "women's issues" like child care and abortion rights that were important to younger Jewish women.
While several of the sessions at Hadassah’s July convention were geared to the interests of younger career women, it remained unclear whether the organization would succeed in capturing their loyalty.

The shifting role of women in organized Jewry caused problems of a different sort for B’nai B’rith International. For years, B’nai B’rith Women had functioned as an auxiliary of the main body, participating in service projects and meeting for social purposes. But by the late 1980s the women’s group began, independently from the men, to take positions on policy matters that concerned them, and in 1988 it declared itself an independent organization. In January 1990, B’nai B’rith International sent out a mailing to the members of the women’s organization offering them membership in a reorganized B’nai B’rith, and threatening to cut off the insurance policies they had purchased through B’nai B’rith if they did not pay dues. B’nai B’rith Women, in turn, charged that the men’s organization, suffering from a sharp decline in membership, was desperate for money.

Months of tense negotiations followed. A resolution was finally reached in late August. B’nai B’rith International amended its constitution to make women full and equal members. It also reached agreement with the women’s organization, each group recognizing the other as an independent and self-governing body.

One dramatic illustration of the changing role of women in Jewish life was the election of Shoshana Cardin, on December 18, as the first woman to chair the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. The unanimous choice of the 46 member organizations, Cardin had won extraordinary respect as head of several Jewish organizations—most recently, the National Conference on Soviet Jewry.

A second long-term trend in Jewish organizational life was less obvious but clearly discernible: a growing intolerance of ambiguity in organizational program focus on the part of potential members and donors. Many Jews preferred to target their energies and money to specific causes that excited their commitment rather than support more general programs.

The first national organization to try to come to grips with the new situation was the American Jewish Committee, which worried that its broad spectrum of programs gave it an unclear identity in the public mind. Faced with a growing deficit, the AJC board of governors decided, on February 7, to take drastic action. It voted a 25-percent budget cut for 1991 and eliminated entire program areas—such as urban affairs, education, and women’s issues—that were deemed no longer central to the AJC’s mission. “We took a look at what we were doing and what other organizations are doing,” explained Mimi Alperin, chairwoman of the AJC’s national executive council. “We kept what we felt we did better than other organizations and the things that no other organizations are doing.” Some months later, AJC’s new executive vice-president, David A. Harris, expressed the same realization that the agency had to narrow its focus to survive. Under his stewardship, he said, the agency would pursue “issues of core concern to American Jewry.”

The tendency of donors to target gifts to concrete causes brought increased
attention in 1990 to relatively new, grass-roots organizations that raised money for needs of Jews and non-Jews not addressed by larger, multipurpose agencies. Examples were the New Israel Fund, which supported civil-rights, Arab-Jewish, and other "socially conscious" programs in Israel; Mazon, which sought to counter hunger and homelessness in the United States; American Jewish World Service, whose grants helped grass-roots organizations around the world; and the Jewish Fund for Justice, which funded community-action projects in the United States. A volunteer for one of these groups explained their appeal: unlike the established organizations, the new charities enabled donors to "see a direct impact in terms of peoples' lives" (Baltimore Jewish Times, May 11, 1990).

Prof. Jacob Neusner of the University of South Florida—a prolific scholar and longtime critic of American Jewish life—suggested that changes in organizational patterns marked the beginning of a new era for American Jewry. The mainstream agencies, he argued, "all of them suited three generations that wanted to be Jewish (and had to be Jewish)—but didn't want to be too Jewish." Jews of the new generation, in contrast, "celebrate the now-porous boundaries that separate group from group... walking in off the streets for a moment of Jewish experience when they want, walking out of organized Jewry altogether when they want.... The middle has not held, the vital center has lost its vitality, and the extremes—assimilated Jews... or segregated Jews... these outline the road into the future" (Forward, November 16, 1990).

Pessimism About the Future

Although Neusner pointedly refused to declare the newly emerging form of Jewish identity any better or worse than the old, the great majority of Jewish intellectuals in 1990 were less than sanguine about American Jewish life. Their mood contrasted sharply with the optimism about the possibilities of Jewish renewal popularized just five years before in Charles Silberman's best-selling A Certain People. The pessimists differed among themselves over what was wrong, but agreed that the celebratory rhetoric of the mid-1980s had been inappropriate.

The shrillest critique of American Jewry came from the historian and rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, who had served the community for decades both in the pulpit and as a communal spokesperson. In The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter, Hertzberg characterized the history of 20th-century American Jewry as a long, desperate series of attempts to come up with substitute Jewish identities to replace a lost religious faith. There had been Jewish ethnicity, the political liberalism of the 1960s, the focus on Israel, and the preoccupation with the Nazi Holocaust. All these ersatz Judaisms had petered out, argued Hertzberg, and "the momentum of Jewish experience in America is essentially spent." Without a "spiritual revival... American Jewish history will soon end, and become a part of American history as a whole."

Reform theologian Eugene Borowitz took a similar approach, though he avoided
Hertzberg's apocalyptic tone. Borowitz recalled the "spontaneous re-Judaization" that swept American Jewry when Israel's survival was endangered in 1967. Now, though, he wrote, "I think I am only reporting the Emperor's nakedness when I say that Israelocentrism no longer can be the engine driving American Jewish life." He felt that the reality of Israel had disillusioned American Jews, and that, as the importance of ethnicity declined in American society, Jews would be increasingly affected by "the pluralism and democracy and equality which let them be like everyone else" (Sh'ma, September 21, 1990).

The same skepticism about American Judaism came across in On Being a Jew: What Does It Mean to Be a Jew? A Conversation About Judaism and Its Practice in Today's World, by Harvard professor James Kugel. This book, an argument for traditional Judaism written as a dialogue, was modeled on the medieval work Kuzari by the Spanish Jewish poet Yehuda Halevi. Yet significantly, whereas Halevi's dialogue was between a Jewish sage and the king of the Khazars, who was searching for the true religion, Kugel's starts as a dialogue between a religiously observant Jew and the son of a business associate who needs help finding a rabbi—to perform the "breaking the glass" ceremony at his upcoming wedding to a Christian.

In the dialogue, Kugel's traditional Jew disapproves of American Jewish concentration on "Israel and the Holocaust." "They are both," he notes, "conveniently perhaps, elsewhere. And so American Judaism in general has an 'elsewhere' quality to it: it is 'there,' in Israel or back in the Old Country, that Jews could be said to be really Jews, and it is 'there' that the significant Jewish events of our age have happened or are happening." American Jewish institutions, "concerned only with what is called 'Jewish survival,'" were, for Professor Kugel's protagonist, "sterile and unappealing."

If Hertzberg, Borowitz, and Kugel, each in his own way, considered American Jewish reliance on Israel for Jewish identity a weakness, there were others offering an opposite diagnosis: American Jewry's fatal flaw was its detachment from the Jewish state. Jerrold S. Auerbach, a history professor at Wellesley, wrote Rabbis and Lawyers: The Journey from Torah to Constitution from an unabashedly Zionist, indeed, religiously Zionist, point of view. For him, Jewish law and the Promised Land were basic to Judaism, and therefore "the synthesis of Judaism and Americanism"—which he saw as a mere code phrase for "the Jewish legitimacy of individual preferences"—was "a historical fiction." Thus American Jews supported the State of Israel only so long as it was liberal and secular. But with the rise of the Likud, Israel grew more authentically Jewish and less liberal, and American Jews "found reason to distance themselves from it." From Auerbach's perspective, an American Judaism that "had come to mean little but personal taste" and "excluded anything that differentiated them from other Americans" was doomed.

Another variant of the Zionist critique of American Jewry, this time without the religious ingredient—was that of David Vital of Tel Aviv University, perhaps the most eminent historian of the Zionist movement. In The Future of the Jews: A People at the Crossroads? Vital stressed the fundamental distinction between a Jewish
community that has the political authority to take responsibility for its fate—Israel—and voluntary Jewish communities without political authority, such as the Jews in the United States. Acknowledging the relative success of American Jews in sustaining a collective identity, he nevertheless wondered, “Can there really be developed by them and among them a secular, indigenous (i.e., English-language) variety or version of Jewish life . . . which is not . . . a mere (necessarily pale) imitation of life, cultural life at all events, in Hebrew-speaking Israel?” He pointed out the irony that those American Jews most conscious of their Jewishness were inevitably drawn toward Israeli themes and concerns and away from American Jewish life, a process that could only weaken the American Jewish community.

Social scientists Charles Liebman of Bar-Ilan University and Steven Cohen of Queens College offered yet another permutation of the pessimistic scenario in their book *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experiences*. Liebman and Cohen, as critical as any Zionists of the diluted Jewishness of American Jews, did not see an increasingly inward-looking and intolerant Israel as much of an alternative. “Most Jews in America,” they claimed, “have reinterpreted the tradition in overly universalistic and cosmopolitan terms, leaving too little of what is especially Jewish. . . . On the other hand, the Israeli conception is too particularistic and parochial for our tastes.” The approach of Liebman and Cohen raised the possibility, not only of American Jewish assimilation, but, perhaps just as tragic, the gradual emergence of two very different understandings of Judaism, one American, the other Israeli, sharing little common ground.

**STATISTICAL SURVEYS**

For those Jews familiar with the mood among the community’s intellectuals, there was little that was surprising in the results of several statistical studies of the American Jewish community that appeared in 1990. On September 17, the Jewish Outreach Institute—a new, privately funded think tank dealing with intermarriage—announced the findings of a study of Jewish attitudes toward intermarriage. Fully 74 percent of the over 2,000 American Jewish leaders surveyed said they would not oppose the marriage of their 35-year-old daughter to a non-Jew, and only 21 percent would insist that he convert to Judaism. Clearly, the fear of not having grandchildren overrode the taboo against intermarriage. Over half of these leaders had at least one child who was married to someone not born Jewish. Prof. Egon Mayer of the City University of New York, who conducted the study, argued that hopeless resignation was not the only possible response to these figures. “I don’t see despair and fatigue,” he said. “We fought this battle one way and we haven’t achieved our goal, so let’s take a different approach, by reaching out to these families and bringing them into the community.”

In October, the Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University issued a study of intermarriage in eight American Jewish
communities. While intermarriage rates varied widely among the communities, there was a common pattern of sharply rising rates among the younger age cohorts. According to the Brandeis survey, mixed-married families—where the non-Jewish partner did not convert—were far less likely to identify Jewishly than families where the non-Jew converted. The latter, in fact, behaved in many respects like inmarried Jewish families. Unfortunately, conversion rates had dropped just as intermarriage rates were rising. Like Egon Mayer, the Brandeis researchers called for greater stress on outreach. Gary Tobin, who directed the study, called on the community "to make conversion more accessible."\(^1\)

On November 15, the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) issued a summary of the findings of a far more extensive study, its new national Jewish population survey.\(^2\) The immediate response of the community was confusion, largely because the research team that conducted the study utilized several different categories to identify Jews and estimate the size of the Jewish population: Jews by birth or by choice, whether religious or secular; people raised as Jews or having Jewish parents but who now follow a different religion; and a category for non-Jews living in households that contain at least one Jew. CJF research director Barry Kosmin acknowledged that interpreting the survey would not be easy: "You can take out of this net whatever fish you're after," he noted. Thus, the CJF press-release headline optimistically announced "Increase in U.S. Jewish Population"; the headline in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin (November 16) read, more soberly, "Slight Growth, But Downward Trend"; and a full-page ad in the New York Jewish Week, sponsored by an Orthodox outreach organization (December 21), warned ominously of "600,000 American Jews Lost to Other Religions."

Since many American Jews considered Jewish education an important element of a strong Jewish identity, considerable interest surrounded the release, in November, of the report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America that had been organized in 1988 and funded by Cleveland businessman Morton Mandel. The picture emerging from the report was bleak, showing that almost 60 percent of Jewish children received no Jewish education, and that the educational programs that did exist suffered from "deficiencies in educational content; an underdeveloped profession of Jewish education; inadequate community support; and the absence of a research function to monitor results, allocate resources, and plan improvements." None of this came as any surprise. "I don't think it required two years and this much money to get to this point," commented one educational specialist.

Amid this mood of pessimism—and just before the release of the 1990 CJF Jewish population survey—the eminent Harvard sociologist Nathan Glazer noted that all branches of Judaism, even the Orthodox, hardly spoke of faith or theology. He wrote that "the Jewish religion, Judaism, has become the religion of survival," little more

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\(^1\)See "Jewish Identity in Conversionary and Mixed Marriages," elsewhere in this volume.  
than a mechanism to guarantee the continuity of the Jewish people. And he warned that "religion has to be believed, for its own sake, to serve instrumentally" (Society, November-December 1990). If Glazer was right, the efforts of the Jewish religious denominations to build and sustain a believable Jewish spirituality held the key to the American Jewish future.

**Denominational Developments**

**REFORM**

Reform Judaism in the United States continued to develop on two separate tracks. In the sphere of ritual and liturgy, the movement back to tradition accelerated. Yet on family and personal life-style issues, the movement continued to depart ever further from tradition.

Adherents of classical Reform, which had downgraded the importance of ritual practice in Judaism and emphasized ethical monotheism and prophetic teachings instead, were, by 1990, an embattled minority within American Reform. While Reform Jews were far from accepting Orthodox strictures about the binding nature of Jewish law, they were becoming more and more interested in the experiential dimension of Judaism.

In an attempt to supplement anecdotal evidence of this trend with hard data, the UAHC-CCAR Commission on Religious Living commissioned a study of worship and ritual patterns in Reform congregations. The findings, released in December, confirmed popular impressions. While 77 percent of the congregations reported that Friday night services were their primary form of worship, over half of the synagogues held Saturday morning services. Almost all recited the traditional blessing over bread before communal meals, almost 70 percent said the grace after meals at least sometimes on these occasions, and 59 percent provided worshipers with kippot (28 congregations required them to be worn).

Rabbi Sanford Seltzer, director of the commission, suggested that these statistics were "expressions of a post-Holocaust generation of Reform Jews in search of spirituality." "These have not been easy times for Reform congregants whose orientation has been that of Classical Reform," he noted, predicting that the survey "will merely add to their discomfort."

The report of a 17-member CCAR Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate, made public in May, expressed the innovative spirit of American Reform Judaism. The culmination of four years of discussion and debate, this report recommended that otherwise qualified gay and lesbian rabbis be recognized as bona fide members of the Reform rabbinate. Noting that congregations would remain free to use their own criteria in hiring rabbis, the report stated that, regardless of their sexual orientation, as "role models and exemplars," rabbis should conduct their private lives "with discretion and with full regard to the mores and sensibilities of
their communities.” Although the “centrality of monogamous, heterosexual, pro-
creative marriage in the Jewish tradition” made the committee stop short of endors-
ing gay and lesbian marriage ceremonies, it did declare that “all Jews are religiously
equal, regardless of their sexual orientation.”

The CCAR membership adopted the committee report at its convention in June,
as Reform became only the third American denomination—after Unitarian Univer-
salists and Reconstructionist Jews—to officially accept gay clergy. Orthodox leaders
denounced the move as a further sign of Reform estrangement from tradition, while
officials of the Conservative movement, which had just given its approval to equality
in synagogue life for gays and lesbians, neither condemned nor approved the Reform
innovation. Within Reform there were rabbis with deep misgivings. Prof. Leonard
Kravitz of the Hebrew Union College noted that, unlike previous Reform depart-
tures from tradition, where sources existed to support change, the biblical and
talmudic abhorrence of homosexuality was unequivocal. And Rabbi Philmore
Berger of Oceanside, New York, commented: “For the life of me, I cannot see how
homosexual rabbis can be the role models our people need and want.”

RECONSTRUCTIONISM

Reconstructionist Judaism, building upon the new prayerbook it issued in 1989,
continued working toward a distinctive set of principles at the same time that it
championed the unity of the Jewish people and welcomed signs of rapprochement
between it and the other liberal branch of Judaism, Reform.

In Reconstructionism, more so than in the other versions of American Judaism,
the president of the rabbinical college set the theological agenda. Rabbi Arthur
Green, who held that position, published two articles in 1990 that charted the
movement’s direction. In one, entitled “Where We Stand: Theory and Practice of
Contemporary Reconstructionism” (Reconstructionist, Autumn 1990), Green deline-
ated the unique aspects of Reconstructionism. It considers itself a religious move-
ment, even though its God is the power “who makes us more generous, sensitive,
and caring people,” rather than a supernatural force that intervenes in history. Unlike the Orthodox, Reconstructionists believe that Judaism evolved historically,
and that free choice rather than legal obligation is the basis for observance of
mitzvah. Green wrote that his movement differs from Conservatism as well, since,
rather than seeking to change specific halakhic norms, it frankly acknowledges that
the Jewish people is now living in a post-halakhic age. Yet unlike Reform, Green’s
interpretation of Reconstructionism stressed the value of traditional religious prac-
tices, even those that have no obvious rational basis.

In “Twin Centers: Sacred Time and Sacred Space” (Reconstructionist, May-June
1990), Green demonstrated how a Reconstructionist might reappropriate the tradi-
tional Sabbath in a non-halakhic but rigorous way. This is done by spending time
at home with friends and family, reading “something that will edify, challenge, or
make you grow," and avoiding business, handling money, "commercial or canned video entertainment," and "encounters in which people are likely to tell you to 'Have a nice day!'

Elaborating on a central theme of its new prayerbook, the Reconstructionist movement singled out environmentalism as an especially important religious ideal. "Replenish the Earth: Ecology and Jewish Tradition" was the theme of the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot when it met in the Rocky Mountains in June. Shomrei Adama (Guardians of the Earth), founded by Reconstructionists in 1988, was the only identifiably Jewish group to take part in Earth Day, 1990. And in December, the Reconstructionists sponsored a family camp in Michigan with the theme "In God's Image and Nature's Embrace."

Reconstructionists applauded developments in American Reform which, they felt, drew the two movements closer. They saw both the evidence of growing Reform interest in religious ritual and the Reform decision to accept gays and lesbians as rabbis—something Reconstructionists had done for years—as positive signs. And in 1990 Reconstructionism became the first non-Reform movement to be granted observer status in the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the international umbrella organization of Reform groups.

CONSERVATISM

Conservative Judaism continued to feel the impact of the disaffection of its most traditionalist element. While the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism had emerged in 1983 specifically in opposition to the movement's decision to ordain women, its founding also reflected a more general dissatisfaction with what was seen as Conservatism's insufficient emphasis on Halakah. Considered an insignificant force by the Conservative leadership, the union struck root nevertheless, and by this year claimed the allegiance of about 5,000 families and over 400 rabbis. In February it announced the establishment of its own rabbinical seminary, which opened in Mt. Vernon, New York, in September. With one million dollars in private funding, the new school attracted prominent personalities (including Elie Wiesel) to its advisory board and named the eminent talmudist David Weiss Halivni as its academic head.

Establishment of the seminary evoked considerable speculation over where it and its backers would ultimately locate themselves on the Jewish denominational spectrum. The proposed curriculum for rabbinical ordination included the critical study of religious texts that characterized the Conservative approach, but also stressed traditional rabbinic methods associated with Orthodox modes of study. Significantly, a number of prominent rabbis and scholars previously associated with the modernist wing of Orthodoxy agreed to serve on the seminary board. And in May, the group officially voted to drop the word "Conservative" from its name, becoming the Union for Traditional Judaism (UTJ). The organization clearly hoped to expand its base beyond traditionalist Conservatives to encompass also those Orthodox Jews
uneasy over the increasing influence of extremists within Orthodoxy.

Mainstream Conservatism still hoped to hold its traditionalist wing. Even after the UTJ dropped the denominational identification from its name, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice-president of the United Synagogue of America, wrote to Conservative rabbis: "I do not believe it is inevitable that the Union for Traditional Judaism members will leave our movement. I hope rather that they will learn to express their disagreement with what they find objectionable without demanding a monolithic approach as the price for their future involvement."

Two official decisions by the Conservative movement in 1990—one on the issue of gay rights, the other on women's rights—reduced the likelihood of such a scenario. While unwilling to go as far as their Reform counterparts in endorsing homosexual rabbis, the Conservatives rabbis voted overwhelmingly, at their national convention in May, to welcome homosexuals into their congregations and to "increase awareness, understanding and concern for our fellow Jews who are gay and lesbian." And although the movement's Cantors Assembly turned down, for the third consecutive year, a motion to admit women to its ranks, the group's executive council subsequently voted to approve the proposal and admit the female cantors. Several of the traditionalist cantors immediately announced plans to leave the Cantors Assembly and form their own association.

Just as in Reform the impulse for change in matters of gender and sexual life-style was accompanied by a felt need to return to tradition in the area of ritual, so in Conservatism there was a strong attraction to more traditional forms of spirituality. At the same Rabbinical Assembly convention that approved a Conservative welcome to gays and lesbians, rabbis complained that Conservative services were too cold and formal, a situation that alienated Jews seeking emotional warmth and spiritual depth. The rabbis took a concrete step to remedy the problem, voting to "reexamine" the late Friday night service—a pre-World War II innovation that, for many, cut short or even eliminated the Sabbath eve family meal at home—and revive "worship services closer to the traditional time of sunset," allowing families once again to enjoy in their homes the festive ritual Sabbath meal. The Jewish Theological Seminary also saw the need for rabbis to leaven their scholarly training with a greater sensitivity to spirituality. It announced that rabbinical students would now be required to write position papers and diary entries on their personal religious quests, to be shared with and commented upon by their classmates.

But the question of what role Halakhah had within the Conservative movement, highlighted by the creation of a rival seminary, remained. JTS professor Joel Roth, who chaired the movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, complained to the biennial convention of the United Synagogue that "in too many synagogues, observant Conservative Jews are told in no uncertain terms that they are not really Conservative, but Orthodox." And Rabbi Irwin Groner, the newly elected president of the Rabbinical Assembly, told his colleagues with remarkable candor: "We are challenged by an assertive and triumphalist Orthodoxy on our right and by a vigorous, growing Reform movement on our left. We are dissatisfied with the state of our movement, we fall short in our own eyes, we are pessimistic about our future."
ORTHODOXY

On the evening of April 26, 20,000 Orthodox Jews packed Madison Square Garden in New York City for the ninth Siyum Hashas (completion of the study of the Talmud), sponsored by Agudath Israel. This event grew out of a practice that the Agudah initiated in Poland in 1923 of encouraging Jews to study one page of the Talmud each day, so that the entire Talmud would be completed every seven-and-a-half years. Synchronizing the study cycle would, it was hoped, underline the importance of Talmud study in the life of the Jew and also serve as a unifying force for observant Jews around the world.

The well-publicized and extremely moving ceremonies at Madison Square Garden made many non-Orthodox Jews—and non-Jews—aware, for the first time, of the growing influence of the sectarian Orthodox, for whom proficiency in Talmud was more important than integration in American society. Agudah publicists relished the irony that the growth of their form of Judaism came against a background of pessimism over the future of the rest of American Jewry. "It is true," asserted the Jewish Observer (September 1990), "secular-based Judaism and compromise-aimed Judaism are going down the tubes. . . . The American Jewish Committee. . . would be hard pressed to fill the main arena of Madison Square Garden with its entire membership. Yet that very arena overflowed with Orthodox Jews last April—not gathered in protest of any terrible wrong, but convened by Agudath Israel to celebrate the completion of the Talmud. . . ."

But even the rigorous Orthodox were—appearances notwithstanding—hardly monolithic. In 1990, the messianic speculations—some would say, pretensions—of the Lubavitch Hassidic sect, based in Brooklyn, New York, were received coolly by Orthodox Jews of a more rationalist bent. Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, stated on numerous occasions that the crisis in the Persian Gulf fulfilled ancient prophecies of a worldwide military conflict that would lead the way to the coming of the messiah. And he made no attempt to contradict the statements of his disciples that the Rebbe himself was the man most qualified to fulfill the role.

The modern or centrist wing of Orthodoxy, which believed in working together with non-Orthodox groups and accommodating, to some extent, to the realities of contemporary society, maintained a defensive posture in the face of the resurgence of the uncompromising Orthodox. The clearest expression of this defensiveness was Rabbi Norman Lamm's book Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition. Lamm was the president of Yeshiva University, the modern Orthodox educational institution that stood for a combined Jewish and secular education. His book assumed that the ideology of the university's Orthodox opponents—that Jewish males should spend all their time in traditional Jewish learning—was undoubtedly legitimate, and that YU's approach was also acceptable, but only if secular subjects were studied for the greater glory of God.

Another measure of the decline in moderate Orthodoxy was that critiques of its positions previously made by the sectarian Orthodox were now being voiced within what had been modern Orthodox institutions and by individuals of modern Ortho-
dox background. The Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), at both its midwinter conference in January and its annual convention in June, was seriously divided over both the question of official discussions with other religions and cooperative action with non-Orthodox branches of Judaism, both of which had been accepted for years by the overwhelming majority of modern Orthodox rabbis.

Extremists within the RCA even went so far as to seek the expulsion of some rabbis who were deemed too liberal, either because of their statements and actions or because they had also taken out membership in the Fellowship of Traditional Orthodox Rabbis, an organization initiated in 1988 by Orthodox rabbis, most of whose synagogues did not have a separation between men and women, who felt that the RCA had moved too far to the right. Largely as a result of unfavorable publicity, the attempt to exclude the Orthodox liberal rabbis failed. One of the threatened rabbis, Irving Greenberg, felt that this episode contained a lesson: "Modern Orthodoxy . . . must renew its own soul and vision. Only thus can it make a major contribution to linking the whole Jewish people and the Torah. . . . In yielding its unique voice and 'going along,' it has weakened itself and its role as one of the key bridges of unity in Judaism."

LAWRENCE GROSSMAN