

Envisioning the Future: Philanthropic Support for the Jewish Future

By Rabbi Irving Greenberg

Submitted to the Board of Directors of The Jim Joseph Foundation

1. EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGE OF CHOICE: Jews and Judaism are undergoing one of the great metamorphoses of Jewish history; simply defined: from powerlessness to power, from dependence to freedom. This new era emerged in the context of one of the most extraordinary transformations in world history: the arrival of the society of choice. In contrast to the past, almost nothing is fixed for life: not social or economic status, not religion, not gender or gender roles. Furthermore, due to the extraordinary communication proliferation and media saturation, almost all people are exposed to the messages of every type of life style and value system – so values and cultural identities are extremely fluid. For American Jewry, the dizzying pace of change and choice is compounded by the surge in acceptance of Jews to heights unprecedented in Diaspora history. Individual Jews feel at home, wanted and able to choose/create their own identity. Given the removal of the two major anchors of Jewish identity in the past – the exclusion/segregation of Jews by anti-Semitism and the sense that religion is election, defined for life by birth – education (broadly defined), mediated through family, community, becomes the only way to motivate people to choose Jewish identity. This is a breakthrough for Jewish and human dignity but the stakes are very high. People can choose to become (more) Jewish and people can choose to become ‘universal American’ or any other available religious and secular identity. The process is well underway, and Jewish renaissance and dissolution are both real possibilities. Therefore, for the sake of the Jewish future, the Jim Joseph Foundation wisely is focused on Jewish education.

Keep in mind that a lot of education takes place outside of educational settings and through the mass media and other social channels of communication. In the open environment, all messages must be credible in the presence of other people, other values and other cultures. Our primary focus must be on creating institutions and ideas/values that can function as *integrated yet distinctively Jewish*. Investing in approaches based on withdrawal and creating permanently sheltered communities offers little long term possibility of success. We need to create and expand institutions where we can communicate and internalize Jewishly enriched values, common messages and special lifestyles. Judaism must learn to broadcast its messages to every person in every form in a way that is at once open, yet inviting and distinctive.

2. FUNDS: \$20 million a year in new money is a tremendous accession to strengthen the Jewish education field – but it must be said that \$20 million does not go very far. Example: Day schools are recognized as the most effective, powerful educational form but one that only reaches a fraction of the community. Reducing tuition has been touted as a way of increasing registration. However, a \$1,000 universal tuition reduction would cost \$200 million a year for the existing 200,000 students in day schools alone – yet a multiple of \$1,000 reduction would probably be needed to attract new people since tuitions generally range between \$6,000-\$19,000 annually. The needed amounts of money dwarf the funds that the Jim Joseph Foundation is putting into the field. Therefore, it would be *wise for the Foundation to enter into partnerships in its projects, to seek out leverage and joint ventures with other institutions and foundations*. A second tactic that the Foundation might pursue is to increase its input of money to \$25 million annually. (I will lay out one model below.)

3. THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF FREEDOM: That people's identity is no longer fixed by birth nor by outside definition/exclusion is a blessing generated by freedom. American Jewry should accept this blessing wholeheartedly. Then it must set as its goal the creation of a community which can communicate its values in the free marketplace of ideas and sustain Jewish identity in a voluntary community, formed out of conviction and choice. The key to this creation is to offer individuals and families a series of experiences that enrich lives, so that being and living Jewish adds value and meaning to existence. As people go through life, the net outcome sought is that, given the choice, the individual will freely choose to be Jewish.

To achieve this outcome, the community must create a comprehensive web of institutions offering transformative experiences that nurture and sustain Jewish identity. I call this network: *the* (communal) *infrastructure of freedom*. Especially to reach the unaffiliated, these experiences must be extended up and down the life cycle by powerful offerings and contacts – particularly at moments when people are receptive to such a connection (examples: at marriage, at the birth of a child, at illness and family upheavals, at crisis points in the national and international scene, and in periods of death and dying). *A primary focus of the Foundation should be to build this infrastructure of freedom.*

Over the past few decades, five programs have proven to have transformative ability, i.e., to generate and upgrade Jewish identity in the open society. This means that their participants emerge with an intensified loyalty to Judaism and the Jewish people and a more anchored identity. These programs are: day schools, camps, youth movements and Hillel (when effectively done), Israel travel and study and intensive adult education. By contrast, the synagogues, Federations and Jewish organizations mostly live off the existing Jewish identity of their participants who 'spend' their loyalties in the process of participation. Outstanding synagogues or special Federation programs (such as young leadership or missions to Israel) have shown the ability to generate more intense loyalties. Still, in routine, day-to-day contact (which is the bulk of the contacts which the public has with these organizations) the existing loyalties are mostly spent rather than increased.

Therefore, priority investment in education should go to the five transformative areas. In a recent paper for Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation (as yet unpublished), Steven M. Cohen has tried to quantify some of their positive impacts. For example, the net effect of day schools, i.e., *net of all other forms of Jewish education and that of the parents' levels of commitment and observance*) is a reduction of 14 percentage points in intermarriage. The impact of more than once a week supplementary Hebrew schools is 2 points if continued for more than six years. As a result of participating in informal education experiences (such as camping, youth groups, Israel travel) intermarriage declines in adulthood by four percentage points for each type of experience. (These effects are cumulative; the more educational experiences the lower one's chances of intermarriage.)

The goal of the Foundation then should be *to expand participation in these five programs by making them more widely or universally available*. Ideally we should connect these programs to each other so that people will participate in multiple programs for their add-on cumulative impact. (It should be noted that Jim Joseph, of blessed memory, worked in all these areas, although least in intensive adult education.)

These five programs can be considerably extended. In the past generation, day schools moved from being exclusively sponsored by Orthodox (Orthodox rates of participation are up to 94%) into a wider band of appeal. In particular in the Conservative movement, the participation level has gone from 10% to 26% in the past twenty years. Making day schools more widely available is an expensive proposition but there are potential partners in this process. The most important initiatives to expand participation would include: creating new and more open models of day schools – ranging from Reform to community and secular models. In addition, the Foundation should strengthen the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education, so that PEJE can expand its leadership, enabling day schools to upgrade their fund raising capacity and improve educational quality so that they can widen their appeal.

Another example: Youth movements are highly effective but they have declined in the past decade or so. Part of that decline is due to social change in teenagers' behavior and the increasing self-centered nature of teen culture. Part of the decline, however, reflects financial stunting and organizational neglect. A significant investment in this area can make a powerful difference.

Birthright Israel is another example. It is currently struggling to send 20,000 participants a year. Ideally, Birthright Israel should send 40,000 – or if one dares to dream, 60,000, which is essentially the entire annual cohort. If the private sector increased its investment significantly, the worldwide Jewish community and the government of Israel would increase their investment as well. (See below for my concluding proposals.)

4. EDUCATION AND CONNECTION THROUGH THE LIFE CYCLE: These types of effective programs should be extended up and down the life cycle; the special goal is to reach out to the unaffiliated and alienated Jews at particular moments in life when they are receptive to a Jewish connection. There is strong evidence that less committed parents are more open to early Jewish childhood education and there is unmet demand in that area. A project to increase the quality of the offerings in this area is now underway. (This is the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative.) Besides creating standards for personal development and Jewish growth, JECEI guides schools to involve families more so they become Jewishly active alongside their young children. JECEI schools also expose families to day schools and ongoing Jewish education so they consider more seriously continuing education beyond early childhood. Similarly, there are projects now beginning to reach out to first-time parents of children through a newborn gift as well as the nascent PJ Library program, which sends books, music and films for parents to read to their young children so they become involved Jewishly themselves.

There is some evidence that teenage and young adult Jews are disproportionately interested in service and volunteering to help others. Moreover, high schools are increasingly requiring service to others as an academic requirement. Service learning (e.g. studying meaning and values sources in conjunction with actual service work) adds to the impact. Such learning is growing as are the number of colleges recognizing such learning for academic credit. Providing more service together with learning opportunities – both in non-sectarian (Teach for America, Peace Corps, etc.) and in Jewish communities world wide settings – can be a powerful way of deepening the Jewish identity and connection of both affiliated and unaffiliated Jews at a critical identity-shaping moment in their lives.

The single most innovative, broad scale program to connect to the life cycle at a point where people are receptive would be: an equivalent to birthright israel for young couples. One possibility is a ten-day trip to Israel as a gift of the community. The other (which may be more realistic because young couples are not as open to a ten-day trip so far from home) would be a four- to five-day retreat in their region. The retreat, given as a gift, would communicate the narrative of the Jewish history as well as core values and practices of Jewish living. Equally important, the retreat gives the experience of bonding with peers and strong experiential and celebratory moments that give a sense of community. Participants would be paired with a life coach who would serve as the intermediary to lead them to further Jewish experiences and community life.

The five transformative programs and the life cycle initiatives have a positive impact. As they become cumulative they have begun to show serious and powerful effects. Cohen's unpublished paper shows that in the 45% of the community who are Jewishly in-married, the numbers and frequency of participation in transformative programs is going up. Among these participants, observance rates and affiliation rates are going up and disaffiliation and intermarriage rates are going down.

The implication is exciting. In this universe, by expanding availability (ideally, by making universal) these transformative programs, we may be reaching a tipping point. At that level, the Jewish community – integrated and fully exposed to the open society – would have a dynamic infrastructure and culture able to maintain itself and grow. Moreover, the programs and initiatives and the needed content already exist so that increased philanthropy and focused policy priorities can make “victory” over assimilation possible. *This validates a new foundation like the Jim Joseph Foundation giving priority to funding in these “proven” areas.*

5. THE URGENT CHALLENGE OF THE INTERMARRIED: However, Cohen's research review shows that there is a universe of 40% of Jews who are intermarried where we have, as yet, not developed transformative programs. In many cases the intermarried are not that different from the inmarried; the choice of a Jewish or non-Jewish mate reflects serendipity in their social setting or particular social contact at the moment when they were open to marriage. However, in the Jewish intermarried universe, the participation numbers are troublingly low. Children of families with non-converted spouses are growing up and defining themselves as Jewish at very low rates. If they in turn intermarry with a non-converting spouse (76% do) only 7% of them raise their children exclusively in Judaism. This threatens a demographic disaster. No community can afford to lose 40% of its body. Therefore, we need urgent attention to try to find programs that work in this sub-community.

Thus far there is little evidence of large scale outreach programs to intermarried with a measurable success. Most of the existing outreach initiatives have focused on getting the Jewish community to become more hospitable to the intermarried. This is very desirable. However, perhaps as a result of fear of driving people away, many outreach programs are reluctant to offer too rich a Jewish menu or to raise too many expectations for the intermarried to become more Jewish. We need both research and experimentation in this area. For example, we should give urgent consideration to the equivalent of a birthright israel for intermarried couples. Another possibility would be the creation

of peer outreach organizations. The impact of peers who have gone on a similar journey but have become more committed or involved in the community (including conversion) could have a higher feedback effect than a standard outreach activity. Steven Cohen has proposed creating a network of community rabbis especially available to increase conversion by making access easy, inviting and at no cost. The Foundation should give serious consideration to putting up a special fund for innovation in this entire field.

6. AN ALLOCATION MODEL A) Day schools: I would argue that this area should get disproportionate help because it was the center of Jim Joseph's focus and concern. 1) \$1 million annually to PEJE to intensify its coaching work, its building of the infrastructure of fundraising and development to a higher level and its general push to raise standards in the day school field. 2) \$3 million annually should be set aside to offer serious start up money or to upgrade quality of individual day schools with special emphasis on the high school years which are still underdeveloped, particularly among non-Orthodox Jews. The Reform movement has unused capacity to generate some new schools but is lacking in startup funds and organizational underwriting to build on existing local pockets of interest. The investment would need to be larger than the classic PEJE grants for startup schools because there is more resistance and less infrastructure. Properly invested these larger sums can yield important increases in Reform and secular Jews' participation in day schools. 3) \$1 million for curricular work. I am convinced that we can develop high gloss, inspiring science and humanities courses with the basic development costs underwritten by the Foundation. The courses then could be replicated at relatively low cost in all the schools. These curricula would communicate to parents that day schools have the types of courses that only the really high gloss private prep schools offer. Such courses could enrich education and simultaneously represent a major marketing breakthrough for the movement. 4) \$1 million annually should be put into personnel development and enrichment programs. There is a shortage of heads of school and this money could be used to recruit and train people from public education or other fields. There is also a need to invest in recruitment and enrichment of teaching personnel for day schools.

NOTE: In all these areas the Foundation itself can initiate programs and serve as a catalyst for upgrading the field. Alternatively, it can use PEJE to do the hands-on work.

B) Camping: \$2 million annually to be spent through the Foundation for Jewish Camping to help enrich the field. The present top priority needs are: startup money for specialty camps which have particular attraction currently to young people; marketing and special underwriting for tuition that would bring in more unaffiliated participants; strategic investment in selected infrastructure improvements in long established camps. Programs that increase Jewish programming capacity and impact are also needed as are programs for recruiting or training personnel to be more powerful Jewish role models.

C) birthright israel: \$2 million annually to increase the trips and another \$1 million annually for post-birthright israel follow-up programming. birthright israel continues to have matchless impact on the participants so we need to increase the numbers going. The participants come back turned on but we have not yet cashed in on this enthusiasm and turned it maximally into further study or

further involvement in Jewish living during the 20s-30s age period. A strategic investment could enable significant expansion of follow-up programming for a neglected age cohort which is underrepresented in the Jewish community.

D) Hillel: \$1 million on a budget of \$50 million can easily be lost in the shuffle. Therefore, I would recommend that \$1 million annually be given for a specialized program. Example: the new Hillel leadership has talked about developing a cohort of master outreach workers. These could be rabbis with great spiritual force or professional role models with extraordinary charisma. They can work with more than one campus. Possibly they could be used as magnets for the large percentage of the college population that is not currently reached by Hillel.

E) Youth Movements: \$2 million annually. Youth movements have a proven record of high impact on youth and in shaping their values for life. However, these programs have suffered from organizational neglect and financial short changing for the past decade and a half. This neglect has been compounded by social trends – teenagers spend more time on self and more time on internet, etc. Thus youth movements have lost ground since the 1980s. A substantial investment here could turn this field around with important results for the future. Since this is a neglected area, I am recommending a disproportionate investment in the field. However, the Foundation should take care that its money be used strategically and effectively and not used to let the movements evade their fundamental fiscal responsibilities to the existing youth programs.

F) Adult Intensive Education: Most Jewish communal experiences are routine. A core retreat done with spiritual and intellectual power and emotional impacts could be a “great” experience that would redirect lives. A \$2 million annual fund could underwrite core retreat experience for 1,500 families. Assuming that one could get matching funds (which I think likely) this priority could generate up to 3,000 families annually. (The 3,000 number is proposed because at the present time marketing resources are weak and the most difficult aspect of this program is recruiting young couples who are not affiliated. As this program builds up and as it develops strong word of mouth there will be room for further expansion and extension of the initiative.)

G) Two other programs for neglected life cycle moments can leap forward with Foundation investment: 1) Early childhood education: \$1 million annually could be well spent, particularly as JECEI ramps up. Once the basic model is established then with annual grants, training for directors and faculty, etc. the system could spread widely using a brand name as an attraction to parents to pick these schools. JECEI’s current partnerships are \$150,000 a year for three years. However, as JECEI ramps up the possibility of investing the extra money to extend the numbers of schools will be significant. Hence the \$1 million number. 2) Newborn Initiative: this is a concept to reach out to parents when a first child is born and offer them a voucher for early childhood education and a package of immediate services and contacts. This program offers the promise of reaching people when they are at a particularly receptive moment. i.e., they have a deep feeling of continuity and interest in joining a community and/or obtaining peer support. While this project does not exist yet, it is in development. Foundation money of \$1 million annually could play a strategic role in launching such a project.

NOTE: Present trends in philanthropy – especially the emergence of entrepreneurial philanthropists – suggest that for all the programs strengthening the infrastructure of freedom, the Jim Joseph Foundation can elicit major matching funds or could join in matching funds. This would be another expression of leadership.

H) INTERMARRIED: If effective programs that impact intermarried can be developed, the Foundation should be open to investing \$1-2 million annually. Here too, I am confident that matching funds can be elicited to further leverage the Foundation's catalyst funds – because the community desperately needs breakthroughs in this area.

I) RESEARCH AND EVALUATION: \$1-\$2 million in this area would be well spent. The entire field of Jewish education continues to suffer from a paucity of research and evaluation. As a result we do not know adequately what programs work and what do not. A major investment in research and evaluation either in a central institution or through an RFP grant making process could have a significant impact in generating needed hard data. This important information could be used to strengthen standards and to guide policy development. Data and evaluation will also help attract funds from the newer breed of entrepreneurial philanthropists.

Of the all the programs listed above, I still believe that the one that has the most potential revolutionary impact – comparable to birthright israel – would be a birthright israel for young couples. I think the most effective version would be the core retreat of four to five days with intensive community building, bonding with peers, exposure to powerful role models and charismatic teachers and creating a sense of community; all this would be intermixed with peak experiences including Jewish joy, dancing, and friendship, etc. If we can get the rank and file of American Jewry to undergo these experiences, we would have made enormous strides to assure that the next generation will get involved in community and apply what they have learned about Jewishness and Judaism to their personal lives.

J) EXPERIMENTAL FLAGSHIP MEGA-PROGRAMS FOR A JEWISH RENAISSANCE: One of the main drawbacks of the above menu is that the Jim Joseph Foundation would be participating in many areas but would not necessarily have a flagship program in its own name. The other drawback may be that the program menu is focused on the known and the proven initiatives. Therefore, the Foundation may want to consider setting set aside some \$5 million annually in addition to the \$20 million fund that would be available for individual grants, projects, local institutions, etc. The new Mega-Programs could blaze trails in new areas of transformation as well as carry the Jim Joseph Foundation name and serve as flagship projects to confirm its status as catalyst and leader in renaissance through Jewish education.

Herewith are four possible models of \$5,000,000 annual programs that can be transformative and highly visible in their impact.

1. *To stimulate a Jewish renaissance in culture, media, arts and bring it fully into the mainstream culture especially through the new technologies (podcasting, videocasting, blogging, etc.) and the internet – which appeal especially to the younger Jewish generation.* This could take the form of

making available the full extent of Judaism and Jewish learning on the internet. This could take the form of McArthur-type fellowships to nurture positive Jewish creativity in the arts, music, media and mainstream culture. This could take the form of strategic investment(s) in some of these areas. This could even take the form of investment in startups in the Jewish young, hip culture in various forms.

2. Since the above areas altogether may be too massive and beyond the creativity of one foundation, *the Foundation could choose to focus on film*. The Foundation could enable a project comparable to *Civilization and the Jews* as done by the Revson Foundation. Even more gutsy: the Foundation could invest in commercial or broader appeal film(s) that carry a positive Jewish message. The funding needs for commercial films tend to be much larger, but for-profit investors may come in. Conceivably a box office success could generate significant funds for the Foundation and for future work in the media.

3. *To articulate and establish service on the part of Jewish young people as a universal norm for Jews*, especially service combined with service learning, using classic Jewish sources and values. To accomplish this goal would require co-opting the full range of Jewish schools, religious movements and organizations to adopt this value; to create powerful learning materials and seminars and other shared experiences for study; and to spread this value through the Jewish culture. It may require subsidizing some of the actual service opportunities or the organizations that would offer them. Imagine if there were a Jewish counterpart to the Mormon mission requirement that young Mormons give two years of service to spread the faith. The Jewish version would be shorter (six months? one year?) and more focused on social action, social justice and ways to help others.

4. *To create a trans-denominational movement for Jewish renewal*. This could take the form of an international Jewish Outreach Corps. This might be described as a kind of non-Chabad Chabad, e.g., the corps members would be as dedicated and warm as Chabad but would be made up of people living a lifestyle that shares the full integration in modern culture, immersion in arts and media, equality of men and women, university education, etc., that characterize the life of the bulk of modern Jewry. The corps members would be recruited from all backgrounds, trained and nurtured, staked to a startup until they can raise their own funds (estimate: up to two years); the corps will offer an ongoing support network. Another possibility is creating a network of spiritual center(s) for leadership development of philanthropists, professionals, rabbis and educators dedicated to the renewal of the Jewish people.