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Foreword

With the sweeping changes in the social, political, scientific, and religious structures of society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we are perhaps witness to the beginning of a new era in Jewish history. Although many aspects of Jewish communal life have been thought of as unchanging and traditional, the reality is that the Jewish community has been profoundly influenced by and in turn has influenced the recent changes in society.

The revolutionary changes in travel, communications, information technology, and urbanization of our society, for example, have rendered everyday life almost unrecognizable from what it was only two hundred years ago. We drive elaborate technological marvels along a vast interconnected highway system and we fly across continents in our normal routine. We have begun to harness the potential of silicon and electricity to carry our voices and ideas to people across the world in a matter of seconds.

The shrinking of both the physical and figurative distances that separate people from one another has undeniably altered our perception of our place in the global community. Furthermore, the migration of human populations from dispersed rural lands to crowded cities has created our modern society with diverse demographics and complex needs.

The collective implications of these modernizations are no less relevant to the present and future of Judaism. As both a parent and an educator, I would argue that never before have we been so uninformed about the world in which our children will live. How then can we hope to prepare them adequately to prosper both financially and spiritually in a future we know so little about?

The following chapters of *Contention, Controversy, and Change: Evolutions and Revolutions in the Jewish Experience* will attempt to address those questions by analyzing the important people and movements of the recent past in the hope of better informing us about what to expect in the near future. They will also explore the intersection between Jewish religious, communal, and social movements, along with their leaders, that has defined Judaism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Since the Diaspora began over twenty centuries ago, Jewish communal life has centered on the synagogue. The synagogue has formed the fundamental basis of religious observance in the Jewish community and in many cases served as a nexus for social action as well. Jewish communal organizations, apart from religious ones such as synagogues and schools, serve a variety of functions, including those that are internal to the Jewish community as well as functions that address external relationships with other people and communities.

A number of compelling models are available for analyzing the structure and function of the contemporary Jewish community. The works of the late Daniel Elazar, Steven Windmueller, and others come to mind as providing necessary tools and perspectives for studying our ever-evolving community. In my estimation, there are certain characteristics of community that are particularly useful and central and I will focus on these factors in this essay. More specifically, one can examine the actions of Jewish communal life as potentially organized into two “ideal type” analytic categories: first, whether the focus is internal or external to the Jewish community, and second, whether the goals can be accomplished through advocacy or direct service, i.e., social and communal services. These two characteristics create a schematic for four different classes of Jewish initiatives: internally focused direct service and advocacy organizations, and externally focused direct service and advocacy organizations.

An example of an internally focused social service organization, whose primary function is to provide care, shelter, and food for impoverished Jewish people, is the Ark in Chicago. This organization’s mission is primarily focused

on helping the poor and is a paradigm of an organization that does very little to lobby, either internally or externally, or create a philosophical position. It produces indirectly positive public relations, both inside and outside the Jewish community, because of its help for the poor. It also promotes a positive social interaction among its volunteers and donors through a number of means, all of which combine to coalesce into a direct service organization for the internal community.

The American Jewish World Service is an example of a primarily externally focused direct service organization. Their mission includes working to realize human rights and end poverty in the developing world. They provide financial support to both local grassroots and global organizations serving Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. While they do this by mobilizing both Jewish and non-Jewish American communities, they proudly identify as a Jewish organization with a primarily Jewish leadership.

The Anti-Defamation League is an example of an externally directed advocacy organization. Advocacy, in the sense intended here, refers to action taken to influence public opinion and to build support for a particular cause or policy. Typical expressions include lobbying, letter writing and petition campaigns, rallies, public meetings, and similar actions. The ADL's primary function is to look outside the Jewish community for evidence of prejudice and to use its communal organization to advocate for the Jewish people as a whole. The movement discussed later in this text, to save Soviet Jewry, is an example where the Jewish community looked externally to advocate for Jews living in the oppressive USSR.

An example of an internally focused advocacy organization, discussed in several chapters in this book, was the World Zionist Organization founded at the first Zionist Congress under the influence of Theodore Herzl. This organization crossed political borders and was designed both to create an internal group that could advocate for Zionism, as well as provide positive public relations outside the community. However, its primary function was to organize the Jewish community to support *Aliyah* and the eventual establishment of the State of Israel.

Almost all Jewish organizations, like the ones named above, have a component of intra-institutional social interaction that constitutes a segment of their experience. Even though the primary purpose of the organization may be

social or community service, bringing Jewish or like-minded people together for a common cause is an ancillary goal. For many, the sense of community and shared purpose is a powerful binding force created by collaboration within these organizations.

It is not surprising, considering the ubiquity of Jewish organizations devoted to service and advocacy, that the impetus for the Jewish social imperative, in addition to the more easily understandable ritual imperative, stems from the Bible. In Genesis 2:15, God tells Adam in the Garden of Eden that his role is to work the land and to guard it. This early commandment to build, maintain, and improve our surroundings as a primary responsibility of humankind has left a strong impression on the Jewish people.

This goal of global social improvement has been a prominent theme throughout Jewish writings and history. While ritual has been rejected by some Jews as an unnecessary component of that paradigm, the altruistic desire has remained a core component of Jewish thought and action. In addition, concern for the future of the Jewish people has fueled organizational life and activism. Some of the major movements described in this volume are focused on initiatives driven by these forces. Zionism arose out of a philosophical and practical response to anti-Semitism and discrimination. At its core, it was the establishment of a framework to enhance the future of the Jewish people.

Notwithstanding the Enlightenment and emancipation of many peoples in the past two centuries, racial and religious discrimination has sadly remained a component of most modern societies until recently. Although allowed to vote and in some cases accepted as citizens, Jews had continued to be viewed as the “other” in many societies. Even in the United States, until the early 1960s, restricted covenants prevented Jews from living in many neighborhoods. Sports clubs excluded them from membership and certain professions and schools had strong quotas limiting Jewish inclusion. These discriminatory practices played a role in shaping the structure of Jewish life by both uniting the various Jewish communities and by serving as an impetus for Jews to establish their own organizations, in which moral, social, religious, and recreational activities could thrive.

The subsequent creation and expansion of the State of Israel, of course, represents the most extreme response to discrimination and is the most profound change in Jewish communal life since the exile in 70 CE.

Controversy within the Jewish community has surrounded the concept of Zionism since its creation. For both religious and social reasons, a schism developed within the European Jewish community, shortly after Theodore Herzl engaged in activism and began building the political structure that produced modern Zionism. Some religious groups believed that human action without a revealed mandate from heaven should not replace divine intervention in the return of Jewish sovereignty to Israel. Others were more concerned about perpetuating the controlled environment that existed in some places in Europe, rather than risking religious observance and the communal structure by a move to Israel. Those early concerns persist among small elements of the Jewish community even today, but have been replaced on a moral and philosophical basis by a worldwide questioning of Zionism's implications. The social and philosophical upheaval produced by Zionism's emergence has exposed and provided insight into the core religious and social issues facing the Jewish people in the modern world.

Furthermore, Jewish history provides many examples of divided communities struggling to determine the best course for the Jewish future, in addition to the Zionist and anti-Zionist groups, active in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Similarly, we can use the same lens to understand the issues facing the Jewish people in biblical and historical events. The Bible describes Korach's band, who challenged establishment values through communal organization. At the time of the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE, factions for and against surrender to Rome were present and disagreed with each other. The Israeli War of Independence featured disagreements, not only between Jews and Arabs, but between different factions of pre-state resistance that were often violently opposed to each other, resulting in events such as the sinking of the *Altalena*.

Thus, Jewish communal and organizational life, apart from direct religious observance, has been both important and essential to the creation of modern Judaism in all of its nuances. Despite decreasing occurrences of discrimination and the existence of many outlets for Jewish expression and participation in society, the strongest argument for the continued existence of Jewish communal organizations and activism is the unique success and accomplishment they continue to contribute to our global society.

The roles of many Jewish organizations have evolved in the past few years to include audiences and services outside their original objectives. This expansion and diversification of individual organizations can be cited as one way in which our Jewish community is changing in this new era of Jewish history. This change can point to, among other things, the growing sense in the global Jewish community of confidence and an expanded role in the global society. This would allow us to see the old communal borders as more permeable than ever before.

As one reads through this volume, one cannot help but admire the achievements of Jewish organizations and hope that they continue to thrive well into the future. Regardless of origin, purpose, and accomplishment, one might wonder what explains the powerful impulse to engage in the organizational development and participation highlighted in this book. I believe that there are two important factors that explain the richness of Jewish organizational life—goal oriented causes and externally or internally imposed isolation. In light of increasing anti-Semitism in Europe now, and the rising cost of education worldwide, our communal dependence on Jewish advocacy and service initiatives must continue to grow. As long as we work together to recognize and discuss the effects of our isolation in a meaningful way and continue to apply ourselves to our socially and ritually inspired goals, we can ensure a bright future both for our people and for all humanity.

Alan Kadish, MD

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Acknowledgments

The editors, Simcha Fishbane and Eric Levine, would like to thank Dr. Alan Kadish, president and CEO of the Touro College and University System, for his support of this project, Dr. Michael Shmidman, editor of the Touro College Press, for his wisdom and guidance, and the gifted authors who contributed their scholarship in order to make this volume a reality.

Simcha Fishbane would like to express gratitude to the Touro College Library Director and staff for their devoted assistance in conducting research and obtaining materials essential to making much of this book a reality. We both extend our thanks to Miriam Gutherc Shajnfeld and Yael Simon for their editorial expertise and assistance.

We would like to dedicate the book to the memory of Dr. Anthony Polemeni, treasured, respected and beloved colleague and friend. May he rest in peace.

Eric Levine would also like to dedicate the book to the memory of his mother Gloria Levine, who passed away just prior to its publication. He would especially like to extend deep thanks to his wife Roxanne and daughter Tamar Levine, the next two generations of the Levine family, for their enduring love and support.

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of International and Security Studies (CEJISS) 2(1): 9–35. Reprinted with the permission of the Central European Journal of International and Security Studies and the author. First appeared at <http://www.cejiss.org/issue-detail/between-militarism-and-pacifism-conscientious-objection-and-draft-resistance-in-israel>.

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