

ONE

COALESCING AMERICAN AND JEWISH VALUES

American Jews are typified by a mostly liberal package of attitudes, which they often articulate as traditional “Jewish” values; indeed, American Jews have been associated with activities on behalf of social justice and with liberal political attitudes for much of the twentieth century. Jewish liberalism may to some extent be self-protective and linked to Jewish feelings of vulnerability, and it is surely connected to the involvement of Jews in socialist and union movements, but it is also nonetheless related to a coalesced American-Jewish tendency toward altruistic spiritual ideals. As historian Stephen Whitfield comments, “the historical record and the data of political science disclose that Jews are more susceptible than other voters to a vision of human brotherhood, to ideologies and programs that can be packaged in ethical terms, and to politicians who can present themselves as apostles of social justice. More so than other Americans, Jewish voters are inspired by ideals that can be contrived to echo the prophetic assault upon complacency and comfort.”¹

Jews from every wing of the Jewish denominational spectrum tend to be more politically liberal than Christians who occupy the same place on their own religious continuums. While a numerically small neoconservative trend has emerged among a group of Jewish intellectuals, their cause has not attracted a nationwide, grassroots following among Jews. Additionally, some traditionalist Jews have exhibited politically conservative leanings in recent years, especially in recent New York elections; however, they seem to be responding to specific local factors.

Decades ago Marshall Sklare noted that liberal American Jews “locate the source of their ethic in Judaism,” although the “motive power for their making such an identification comes from the general culture.”² Contemporary American Jews continue to articulate the belief that their liberal American values are ultimately traceable to the “essence” of prophetic Judaism. As one participant in a 1995 American Jewish Committee educational program commented:

My personal identity generally has been as an American, rather than as a Jew. I have always considered religion as a strictly personal matter. The values of fair play, justice and hard work have been foremost in my mind. About ten years ago I got “religion” and realized that Jewish teachings were the basis for my so-called American values. Furthermore, I became impressed with the humanity of Reform Judaism.

The liberal attitudes of the majority of American Jews emerge in a variety of venues, not least in national presidential election results, which consistently place Jews

overwhelmingly in the Democratic camp. Thus, an analysis of national elections from 1972 through 1996 showed that Jewish voting patterns were idiosyncratically liberal and distinctly different from other white Americans, as seen in Table 1.1.

Beyond allegiance to the Democratic party, Jewish coalesced notions of free will, individual choice, and commitment to social justice at times emerge in liberalisms that seem to go far beyond their original components. Thus, according to a *Los Angeles Times* survey immediately after elections in 1996, California Jews overwhelmingly supported Proposition 215, the California ballot measure that would legalize marijuana for medical use. Three-quarters of Jewish voters supported Proposition 215, compared to 54 percent of Catholics and 44 percent of Protestants. Even more revealing were statements by the leadership supporting the proposition. Bill Zimmerman, the Los Angeles-based campaign manager of the proposition, explained the Jewish vote by saying "Jews are always in the forefront of struggles for social justice." Marsha Rosenbaum, a former drug researcher who has written two books on the subject and now heads the West Coast branch of the Lindesmith Center, a policy institute promoting alternatives to America's "zero tolerance" drug policies, asserts that two-thirds of the leaders in the drug reform movement are Jews. Rosenbaum feels that Jews characteristically try to provide "a voice for people who aren't spoken for."³

Relocated Boundaries and Contemporary Social Trends

Many coalesced beliefs are already well established in American Jewish society. However, contemporary liberal movements, such as ecologically correct Judaism and Jewish feminism, provide ideal windows through which to view the actual processes first of conscious adaptation and eventually of unconscious coalescence. An adaptation-in-progress and potential arena for coalescence is found within the work of a small but passionately committed group of Jewish thinkers who are forging a form of environmentally sensitive Judaism. Formulations of eco-kashruth bespeak concerns about oppressed farm workers, unwholesome herbicides, the ravaging of the land, and cruelty to animals.

Of particular interest is the organization *Shomrei Adamah* (Keepers of the Earth), which has close ties to the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Calling themselves "the first eco-Jewish organization," its leaders publish curricula and run summer trips to make mainstream Jewish Americans more aware of biblical and rabbinic texts that can be construed as "deep ecology in Judaism—really!"⁴ While the ideological foundations of eco-Judaism are often linked to the universalist, social activist pronouncements of the Hebrew prophets, the authors of eco-Judaism are also influenced by their American cultural milieu. They are continuing the process of creating a Judaism that harmonizes with liberal American values. They may consciously seek to avoid elements dissonant to American values, such as those exhibited by some "traditionalist religious groups" who harbor what Arthur Green characterizes as "attitudes harmful to the social order" and "protracted antagonism toward others." Such dissonant Jews cause "embarrassment over the nationalism and Israelocentrism of their own tradition and of their compatriots, the Jewish traditionalists."⁵

Similar blending is found in some segments of the “Jewish renewal” movement, which is especially prominent in some coastal California communities. As Jack Wertheimer notes, the Jewish renewal movement “is part of a larger movement that since the 1960s has sought to merge Eastern religion, the self-actualization movement, and the counterculture outlook with Jewish religious traditions, particularly with Jewish mysticism.”⁶ Jewish renewal groups try to incorporate joy and spontaneity into their ceremonies and services. Where tradition conflicts with particular creative aspects of religious expression, expressivity is considered paramount and traditional behavior is viewed as less compelling than the desired spiritual atmosphere. Significantly, such communities often assert that their activities are “authentic” because they foster the spiritual values of movements such as Hasidism. Spiritual authenticity, rather than revolutionary change, seems to be the desideratum when such movements discuss their own rationales.

While the Jewish renewal movement is often perceived as emanating from the Reconstructionist movement, it has had a significant impact on Conservative and Reform Jewish communities. Temples affiliated with each wing of American Judaism sometimes incorporate spiritual melodies derived from the Hasidic world into their worship services. Devotees of the more austere “classic” Reform mode of worship are not always happy with these innovations, claiming, perhaps with unconscious irony, that such melodies are not part of their “tradition.”⁷ Similarly, previously sedate Conservative congregations sometimes develop new institutional personalities, blending equal parts of exuberant prayer styles and communitarian good works projects—and attracting larger numbers of previously unaffiliated young adults in the process.⁸ Zionism also is affected by ecological issues, as evidenced by advertisements for a Jewish National Fund and World Zionist Organization sponsored conference, the Fourth Annual Eco-Zionism Conference at the University of Texas, March 1999.

Within some Orthodox communities as well, the concepts of eco-Judaism have made significant inroads, especially among young people who have been influenced by American ecological movements. Such communities are likely to emphasize the biblical and rabbinic sources for ecological concerns in order to legitimate their attitudes and activities. Some reject the eating of kosher meats, such as veal, which putatively are produced through methods that involve cruelty to animals. Many opt for vegetarianism, calling on those texts in Jewish tradition that hail vegetarianism as a higher form of *kashrut*.

Thus, eco-Judaism and renewal interpretive communities are involved in the work of boundary relocation and “inventing tradition,” which Eric Hobsbawm suggests is a critical activity in transitional societies. Tradition “invention” does not imply that its authors are fabricating attitudes and behaviors that have no foundation in the group’s past, rather that the ways in which the innovative values and actions are conceptualized and emphasized differ significantly from past modes. Ironically, in order to be successful, the enterprise of inventing tradition often demands that ancient precedents, rather than innovativeness, be emphasized in the “spin” or public packaging of ideas and behaviors. Ordinarily, such new/old traditions more effectively achieve legitimacy, widespread approval, and permanence when they can be routinized, so they acquire the status of “invariance.”⁹ For thinkers within liberal Amer-

ican religious movements, however, such routinization may in itself be problematic, since it conflicts with the American-Jewish ideal of free choice and rejection of coercive dogma.

Incorporating Egalitarianism into American Judaism

Far more overtly sweeping changes have been effected by Jewish feminists. In terms of family life and personal decisions, American-Jewish attitudes toward women have already undergone a culturewide, coalescing transformation. Jews have become the most predictably liberal group vis-à-vis women. American Jews, for example, are overwhelmingly committed to equal educational and occupational opportunity for women, and to reproductive choice.

In the religious realm as well, American-Jewish life has been transformed by American feminist goals. The Jewish community has been struggling for the past three decades to make American Judaism more feminist in its structure and liturgy. Reformers aim to juxtapose Jewish and feminist values in order to improve Judaism, which is perceived as wanting in this regard. As women move into positions of power and public prominence in worship services or synagogue politics, or as reformers work to change Jewish liturgy so that it incorporates references to biblical women, or reflects women's unique experiences, or uses gender-neutral language, they are quite conscious of the fact that they are drawing from two distinct belief systems. Wherever they can, they try to find precedents to lend traditional legitimation to their activities, but even in the absence of such traditional precedents most of them see the egalitarian moral imperative as being so compelling that they must and should proceed with change.

For the majority of American Jews today, egalitarianism is an accepted moral value—even a sacred or religious value. *Halakhah* and egalitarianism actually comprise parallel and often competing continuums of moral behavior for American Jews, as indicated in the model of Normative Religious Groups below in Figure 1.1.

As Figure 1.1 illustrates, for those Jews on the radical right, who reject the ideals of pluralism and consider only certain kinds of Orthodox Jews to be authentic, only *halakhah* is sacred, and egalitarianism has no moral hold. Many among this group espouse such antiegalitarian ideals as rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem and reinstating the Priestly class, and reenforcing gender role distinctions far beyond the mandates of rabbinic law. Right wing Jewish groups often make a show of ostentatiously rejecting gender equality, as though to perform a symbolic exorcism of modernity by eliminating the principle of gender equality from their midst.

In contrast, for those Jews on the radical left, who wish to remake Judaism as a completely egalitarian belief system and to reincorporate female deities and woman-centered liturgies rejected by early monotheistic Jewish thinkers, only egalitarianism is sacred and *halakhah* has no moral hold: a vision of Judaism as a woman-friendly, species-friendly, earth-friendly, nonhierarchical belief system completely takes the place of traditional, patriarchal Jewish values and behaviors.

It should be noted that egalitarianism can refer to issues that are not related to gender. Socioeconomic status and professional or lay status may also affect egalitari-

L	Normative Religious Groups				R
	<i>Radical Left</i>	<i>Normative Reconstructionist</i>	<i>Reform</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Normative Orthodox</i>
	Remake Judaism as completely egalitarian belief system. Reject hierarchies of gender, status, socioeconomic factors. Remake Judaism as woman-friendly, species-friendly, earth-friendly religion. Re-incorporate woman-centered elements rejected by patriarchal, monotheistic, hierarchical Judaism.	Egalitarianism sacred principle. Reject most hierarchies: status, gender, religious functionaries. Regard Halakhah as system created by men with considerable historic & inspirational interest, but not binding. Reject outright paganism & witchcraft.	Egalitarianism of gender accepted, but status differences exist for institutional needs. Marked differentiation between religious functionaries and congregants. Socio-economic status can make difference. Halakhah object of study, can provide choices, but not binding.	Egalitarianism of gender accepted by most, but not all. Women may be required to live up to higher standards to “qualify.” Hierarchies of religious functionaries, congregants. Most do not distinguish between priestly class and the <i>Yisrael</i> remainder of congregants. Socio-economic hierarchies matter institutionally. Halakhah cherished guideline for religious life, however seen as organically developing, responsive to changing social conditions.	Accept many halakhic hierarchies: priestly class distinctions part of regular worship service. Separation of men and women in worship & some other environments. Religious functionaries respected but often share values & lifestyles with congregants. Socio-economic hierarchies matter, but learning may provide alternative status. Halakhic system developed by rabbinic Judaism binding. Liberalization of gender roles achieved only by finding legal precedents.
					<i>Radical Right</i> Rebuild Temple, reinstate priestly class. Re-enforce gender role distinctions. Reject idea of expanding women’s roles even with rabbinic guidelines. Women urged into silence, modesty, symbolic exorcism of modernity. Halakhah only guideline; little incursion of outside standards. Reject pluralism; draw lines between different grades of Orthodox Jews.

Figure 1.1 A CONTINUUM OF TWO SACRED PRINCIPLES IN AMERICAN JEWISH RELIGIOUS LIFE: RABBINIC LAW—HALAKHAH—AND EGALITARIANISM

anism: for example, a fully gender egalitarian Reform congregation may function via dramatic differences in participation between the professional Jews—rabbi and cantor—and the congregants, whereas a gender nonegalitarian Orthodox congregation may be very egalitarian in terms of religious functioning, with male congregants leading services, reading from the Torah, and giving sermons. Similarly, a gender-egalitarian Conservative or Reform congregation may accord very high status to wealthy philanthropists, and may not treat less affluent congregants in a truly egalitarian mode.

As this chapter will show, the great majority of American Jews fall into normative religious groupings which comprise the mainstream continuum: normative Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative, Traditional, and modern Orthodox Jews. For these normative religious groups, the sacred notions of both *halakhah* and egalitarianism are often in conflict and require ongoing negotiation.

Egalitarian Visions of Orthodox Life

Evidence that American values are being coalesced not only into liberal environments but into Orthodox communities as well is particularly significant, since Orthodoxy has been presumed by many eminent Jewish sociologists to be the great stronghold of compartmentalizing behavior. Heilman and Cohen, for example, conclude their study of modern Orthodox Jews by stating, “Most American Orthodox Jews have had to live with contradiction. They have done this, as we have said, by compartmentalizing their lives.”¹⁰ However, in contrast to this assumption, observing the behavior of American modern Orthodox Jews quickly ratifies the suggestion that American Orthodoxy is far from untouched by coalescence.

While compartmentalization certainly continues among Orthodox Jews, many modern Orthodox Jews have coalesced far more American values and behaviors into their version of Judaism than either they or non-Orthodox Jews frequently realize. It is possible that modern Orthodox Jews are ideologically disposed toward coalescence because of a neo-Orthodox foundational commitment to a version of synthesis that differed greatly from that espoused by American reformers, as Sir Immanuel Jakobovits, former Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth explains:

Torah im Derekh Erets [dual excellence: Judaic learning combined with secular refinement and knowledge] was indigenous to the West in Germany and the Anglo-Saxon communities. . . . I regard modern Orthodoxy as a philosophy of synthesis rather than of compromise, authentically in the tradition of the Rambam, followed by a long line of philosopher—or *Wissenschaft*—savants down to Hirsch, Hoffman, Epstein and J. B. Soloveitchik in the modern period.¹¹

Unlike coalescence, the concept of synthesis that was espoused by many classical Judaic thinkers was based on the assumption of a deep knowledge and understanding of two great world traditions—Judaism and Western humanism—and an ability to bring these ways of understanding the human condition and humane re-

sponsibility into fruitful interaction within a vibrant, unflinchingly Jewish interpretive framework. Within coalescence, in contrast, the interpretive framework through which Judaism is evaluated is primarily derived from contemporary secularized Protestant American culture.

In some modern Orthodox institutions today, compelling commitments to egalitarian organizational principles, group consensus, self-determination, individualism, and feminism have made observable inroads, as practitioners struggle with two competing modes of conformity and with their own desires for autonomy as individuals and as a group. This confrontation is very American. As Alexis de Tocqueville noticed 150 years ago, Americans are powerfully motivated by both individualism and conformity, and tend to turn ideas and beliefs in upon themselves, wanting at the same time to be in harmony with the group, and yet to be inner directed. De Tocqueville noted that democracy and social equality lead to individualism, because they allow people to “imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands.”¹²

Across the normative denominational spectrum, on the right as well as on the left (but often struggling with differing issues), Jews try to incorporate and accommodate American and Jewish ideals. Writing in the black-hat Orthodox educational *Torah Umesorah* publication, *Jewish Parent Connection*, headmaster Rabbi Berel Wein asserts that “there is much in Americanization that can be good for Jewish society in the United States and Israel”:

The fatal error of the first generation of immigrant Jews to this country was in not being choosy and selective about “Americanization.” The acceptance of “Americanization” whole, of being absorbed in the “melting pot” of American society has cost us dearly. . . . That painful lesson of history should now be apparent to us all. Therefore, our generation of American Jews must be choosy in accepting “Americanization.” . . . We cannot hide from “Americanization,” and all its ramifications. But our ability to be selective, the necessity of encouraging holiness, of teaching our children how to say no . . . will preserve Torah values and life within our midst. Americanization per se is not the problem.”¹³

Rabbi Wein’s balanced view of juggling American and Jewish values places him firmly on the normative American-Jewish continuum of values, and demonstrates the validity of Walter Wurzberger’s analysis of the “two opposite approaches” represented by contemporary Orthodoxy:

On the one extreme we have the position of the Hatam Sofer that *hadash asur min ha-Torah*. Any form of innovation, any concession to modernity, any deviation from the traditional life-style is the very antithesis of Torah. On the other extreme, we have the position of Rav Kook who maintained that *he-hadash yitkadesh*. Embrace the new by all means, but do so selectively. Make sure that the *hadash* [new] can be integrated within our religious perspective, not only without doing violence to that perspective but actually contributing to its enhancement.¹⁴

Like other American Jews, modern Orthodox Jews are pulled between individualism and conformity, but they have two systems that demand their conformity: contemporary culture and rabbinic law.

Symptomatic of coalescence within Orthodox life is the proliferation of women's prayer groups (*tefillah* groups) in and around Orthodox congregations in many American communities. *Tefillah* groups are the embodiment of a consciousness that has coalesced Jewish and American values in complicated ways. From traditional Judaism comes the value of daily prayer (Maimonides, Nachmanides, and other religious authorities prescribe private daily prayer for women);¹⁵ however, traditional Judaism does not envision women as members of a congregation or as needing participatory group settings for prayer. The consciousness of women as a spiritual group, rather than spiritual individuals, is drawn from contemporary American feminist cultural values, and the desire of women to work together to change their own destiny is derived from the most cherished American beliefs in self-sufficiency and the responsiveness of fate to individual courage and resourcefulness.

The coalesced nature of women's *tefillah* groups, and the attitudes and behaviors they exhibit, is underscored by the fact that the Orthodox religious framework is also nonegalitarian in ways that are not directly connected to gender.¹⁶ The protocols of traditional rabbinic decision making are hierarchical, and in their unameliorated form fly in the face not only of feminism but also of such democratic, egalitarian principles as the rule of the majority or consensus building. When Orthodox women began to organize women's prayer meetings, from the early 1970s forward through the 1990s, although they have been perceived by many outsiders as being "feminist" in their behaviors and motivations, most of them have depended on a male rabbinic adjudicator (*Posek*) to give them "permission" (*heter*) to pursue their group agendas by creating religious rulings in their favor.

This tension between feminist and Orthodox norms continues, although, in true coalescing style, it is often unrecognized. Amongst themselves, in decisions not halakhic in nature, women's *tefillah* groups operate according to feminist principles of consensus building and egalitarian empowerment. Where halakhic decisions are concerned, however, they accept the normative hierarchies of Orthodox life.¹⁷

Responding to the issue of women conducting their own Torah service, as well as to the perceived feminist influence in the evolution of prayer groups, for nearly three decades Orthodox rabbis as individuals and in groups have issued statements prohibiting or permitting participation of women in *tefillah* groups.¹⁸ Contemporary rabbinic prohibitions often have a sociological rather than an halakhic basis: prayer group participants have been accused of lacking appropriately pure motivation, of looking for power rather than for spiritual expression, of rejecting their foremothers or traditional Jewish notions of femininity, and of having been influenced by the "licentiousness of feminism." In their sociologically based castigation of women's group prayer, right-wing rabbis display their own forms of coalescence. Ironically, in contrast, rabbinic defenders of women's *tefillah* groups usually eschew ideological arguments and set forth the halakhic precedents for each element of the prayer groups' activities.

Egalitarianism and Coalescence within Conservative Judaism

While coalescence in the Orthodox world is striking particularly because it is so unexpected, it is within Conservative Judaism that the tension between the sacred principles of egalitarianism and *halakhah* is often most poignant. The American Conservative movement at various junctures in its development has consistently reiterated the principle that rabbinic law has an “authority” unmatched by “social, ethical, and cultural” trends.¹⁹ At the same time, Conservative Judaism has also frequently articulated the principle that Judaism develops “organically,” that it has always responded to profound social changes, and must continue to respond. The prominent Conservative rabbi and scholar Robert Gordis traced this Conservative ideological balancing act back to the “positive-historical Judaism” of the nineteenth-century German liberal-yet-traditional rabbi Zacharias Frankel, whose conservationist ideas Gordis expressed as follows:

Judaism within the ages was not static and unchanged, but, on the contrary, the product of historical development. This complex of values, practices and ideals, however, was not to be lightly surrendered, for the sake of convenience, conformity or material advantage, masquerading as love of progress. A positive attitude of reverence and understanding toward traditional Judaism was essential. Changes would and should occur, but they should be part of a gradual, organic growth.²⁰

It is thus the legacy of Conservative rabbinic leaders to find themselves excruciatingly pulled between juxtaposed modern Western and historical Jewish values. The struggle within the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in moving during the 1970s toward Conservative ordination of women, finally accomplished in 1985, brought to the forefront the conflict between American and traditional Jewish standards of evaluating appropriate behavior. When women who wanted to become Conservative rabbis wrote to the JTS faculty urging the ordination of women, they declared themselves “seriously committed to Jewish scholarship and to the study of Jewish texts” and “committed to the halachic system.” They emphasized practical communal reasons for ordination of women: “there are many communities where we would be fully accepted and could accomplish much toward furthering a greater commitment to Jewish life.”²¹

In the great controversy which rocked leaders and scholars at JTS, some rabbis insisted on retaining *halakhah* as the unwavering standard against which all demands must be evaluated. Some of these rabbis eventually left the seminary in protest. The attitude that prevailed allowed women to be ordained, provided they pledged themselves to a standard of halakhic near-perfection, thus showing themselves to be exceptional women. Within this formulation, the halakhic status of women as a class of Jews remained unaffected. In contrast, Gordis took the intellectual giant step of using egalitarianism as a moral standard against which *halakhah* itself must be measured:

For many, if not for most people today, the principle of the exclusion of women as witnesses is morally questionable. In a society where women were

sheltered and had little experience or contact with the world at large, there might perhaps have been some basis for regarding their testimony as inexperienced and therefore inadmissible. To defend such a principle today is, for most people, morally repugnant and sexist.²²

Gordis insisted that rabbinic law must be brought "into conformity" with the ethical demands of egalitarianism, and resistance to this effort was "inconscionable."²³

Only time will tell whether Judaism and feminism will truly become coalesced in religious spheres as they have in the familial realm, whether an awareness of their existence as distinctive belief systems will be erased and feminism will be perceived as being "part of" Jewish religious thought and behavior. The signs seem to indicate that Conservative Jews, both elites and folk practitioners, may be well on the way toward coalescing Judaism and feminism. For example, a Conservative academic speaking at a conference on gender and Judaism remarked that he believes that worship services that separate men and women are not only "immoral" but are also "nonhalakhic," antithetical to Jewish law. His assertion—resting on a reinterpretation of *halakhah* and contradicting as it does extensive Jewish law which prescribes just such separations—is a clear coalescing of secular and Jewish norms of moral behavior. According to such coalesced "Jewish" belief systems, egalitarianism is not only a sacred moral principle but a sacred moral Jewish principle. Among the papers presented was one that urged feminists not to retreat from an intellectual and spiritual confrontation with the halakhic system:

... the halakhic system, even during its centuries as an exclusively male domain, functioned along two parallel trajectories, as a system designed to serve a functioning community, and as system designed to point to and actualize an ideal of unity. For many centuries rabbinic Judaism worked well within that tension for its men. The challenge before us now is to see if a transformed rabbinic system can work both for women and men. . . . However much women may have been excluded from positions of power in law historically, this historical exclusion has ironically led to self-exclusion in our contemporary moment. . . . Halakhah, like American law, still requires feminist revision.²⁴

Free Choice and Reform Coalescence

The incorporation of the values of individualism into American Jewish life has often proceeded in an unselfconscious mode. Living in a culture that privileges individual choice over family or community, American Jews quickly absorbed the individualistic ethos, but frequently did not perceive it as being in ideological conflict with their Jewish ties. American Jews often articulate their attachment to a Judaized America and an Americanized Judaism in personal terms: America gave them the right to break free of familial ties, to pursue their own education and occupational dreams, to postpone marriage, to choose romantic partners according to their own preferences and orientation. American individualism has been thoroughly coalesced into the value systems

of many American Jews. Free choice, that birthright of individualism, is not perceived as being in conflict with Judaism. On the contrary, it is often perceived as being an intrinsic axiom of Judaism itself.

Among Reform Jews, free choice was a frequently invoked Jewish value by participants in the 1994 National Commission on Jewish Women focus-group discussions, as many women who spoke of "Judaism" ascribed to Judaism attitudes and activities that were primarily American rather than Judaic in origin. They stressed the values of individualism and freedom of choice, and felt that they had learned these values from Judaism. Egalitarianism and feminist issues were often on the front burner of their Jewish consciousness. Women talked about how much more receptive Jewish environments are to women now than they were years ago. One commented, "My mother never felt comfortable going to synagogue; there was no place for her." In contrast, she said, "I feel now I can do things that were not allowed before. They now have equivalent services for girls."

Reform women felt proud and happy about the leadership role that Reform Judaism has played in promoting egalitarianism within Judaism. The coalescence of traditional Jewish values—the importance of worship and text study—with American feminist values giving women equal access to these activities, was clear in their words:

In the present moment I am involved in synagogue membership and working as an adult and belonging to a group of Jewish women who get together informally to study. Initially, two years ago, our goal was to do a women's Seder. After that we spent six months planning for a weekend Shabbat which has to be, without a doubt, the highlight of my experience as a Jewish woman. From that point on, we have embarked upon a course of study which includes meeting once a month reading the Torah and realizing we don't have to be Torah scholars to read Torah. . . . one person brings in material from a psychological point of view. I am a media specialist at the Reform day school here and so I bring in that kind of material because that is what interests me. Someone else may bring in something from a historical point of view. It is the act of women studying and worshipping together."

In keeping with the Reform movement's concentration on social action as a religious activity, many women commented on civic activities as an important aspect of their Jewish lives. For some, the universalist ethic was paramount: a substantial proportion of Reform participants felt that many Jews worked too hard for Jewish causes and not enough for non-Jewish causes, for what one woman called the "whole world and global group." Typically, this type of Reform participant seemed totally unaware that statistically Jews today are much more likely to work for nonsectarian causes than for Jewish causes. Some Reform women said that they felt that the Jewish communal world is narrow and self-absorbed, and they pictured themselves as rebels because they were more interested in working for broader civic groups. In reality, the rejection of Jewish voluntarism in favor of nonsectarian voluntarism is currently not a rebellion from Jewish norms but a mainstream American Jewish behavior.

Many Reform women mentioned personal, spiritual issues or communal activ-

ities as the most salient vehicles for their relationship to Jewishness. They spoke about the warm, supportive feeling they have when they associate with other Jews. One woman said that Judaism provided her with “a womb-like state.” Some Reform participants spoke about God and morality; others were actively involved in expanding their Jewish intellectual and spiritual lives. They differed, however, in their assessment of how much classical Jewish education might have to say to them. The Atlanta focus-group participants genuinely believed that the concept of “free choice” is an intrinsic part of classical, historic Judaism—far more intrinsic, in their minds, than ritual observance or rabbinic scholarship. Indeed, a “Judaic” belief system that incorporates the sacred American values of individualism and free choice is one that is shared by numerous elite Reform Jewish leaders and a broad spectrum of Reform congregants. Reform elites are more likely than congregants and lay persons to have a sense of how the messages of secular Western humanism, American dedication to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” and Judaic values of social activism and *tikkun olam* have been blended in Reform ideology. Congregants are more likely to believe that all of these are written in the Torah somewhere, and to be innocent of more rigid biblical references to the onerous minutia of the “yoke of the kingdom of heaven.”

While Reform participants generally agreed that they felt more comfortable with Jewish women, many were quite concerned that they not sound chauvinistic. More than one declared, “I don’t see Judaism as superior to other religions. All religions have the same vitality.” Many Reform participants said they did not want to raise their children in a ghettoized or parochial environment. They were concerned that their children should have non-Jewish friends and should be able to get along with everyone. Many were more worried about their children becoming too narrow than they were about their children assimilating.

Reaction, Boundary Resealing—and Hidden Coalescence

This discussion has, thus far, focused on increased permeability of boundaries. However, not all movement in American Jewish life is in the direction of making boundaries more permeable. For traditional Jews, boundary resealing between the secular and Jewish worlds is an important, perennial task requiring forceful, even militant vigilance. Such boundary resealing activity is entered into far more confidently and deliberately now than it was three or four decades ago. Many choose to live in densely populated urban neighborhoods, or in isolated suburbs inhabited exclusively by their own sectarian group, so that they can maintain physical separation from persons who do not share the specifics of their lifestyles. Some have their own bus systems to transport them from those neighborhoods to their places of employment. Some groups discourage television viewing or reading of general newspapers, utilizing newspapers circulated by approved Orthodox publishers instead. Schooling is provided within specialized sectarian day schools. From reclaiming the East European insistence that leafy vegetables be officially examined to insure that no insects lurk in their green recesses (*bodek*) to declaring that all tuna fish lacking certification should be assumed to

contain fragments of mammalian dolphins, the purveyors of resealed boundaries have found in the kosher food industry enthusiastic, entrepreneurial allies. Their behavior is quite conscious and deliberate, and results in a very effective reinsulation of Orthodox Jews who subscribe to their findings.

It is significant that such activities represent an exaggerated rediscovery and retrieval of stringencies, rather than an ongoing boundary maintenance. They thus go beyond mere insulation, the "lack of adoption of new cultural values and practices, in favor of maintaining a lifestyle based on the standards and norms of the original culture."²⁵ Jews involved in resealing the boundaries and reinsulating Orthodox communities become ever more acutely conscious of the differences between themselves and their neighbors, even in areas previously thought benign. Like the proponents of eco-kashrut who rediscover ancient Hebraic earth-friendly precepts and present them as the ultimate in authentic Judaism, some of the activists promoting creative rediscoveries—and eschewing—of nonkosher foods and activities might be considered to be working in the realm of Hobsbawm's "invented tradition," albeit with very different goals from their more liberal brothers. Some have suggested that escalating dependence on the authority of coedified texts and a preoccupation with ritual minutia is being accompanied by a decline in intellectualism. The right-wing Orthodox world, galvanized by perceived erosion on its left flank, searches frantically for invincible and inviolable authority, while rejecting more relaxed parental patterns and familiar folkways.²⁶ For Orthodox Jews who are motivated to locate ever more stringent food restrictions, the goal is not to make the concept of kashrut more relevant and meaningful to American life, as it is to the eco-kashrut thinkers, but instead to reinforce social cohesion and to legitimate the status of rabbinic authority figures.²⁷

This boundary resealing is a critical activity for a group that requires fairly impermeable boundaries, living in a country whose openness constantly threatens to erode boundaries and to render them permeable. However, practitioners seldom understand their behavior as a sociological phenomenon, but perceive their efforts, instead, to be halakhically mandated. This belief itself is linked to the second important task of ethnic groups, that of providing meaning to group members. At least in official written communications, Orthodox practitioners perceive and discuss their own boundary resealing behavior as a religious imperative.

Orthodox Jews are the group most likely to have arrived at the dissonant point that Charles Liebman prescribes for all American Jews who wish to survive as a meaningful group: "Any strategy of Jewish survival, I believe, has to be built around mechanisms that make deviations from contemporary standards of behavior tolerable to the Jew. This is even true for Reform Jews with their minimal level of ritual observance, given the evidence . . . that Jewish commitment of all kinds is associated with religious performance."²⁸

To nontraditional Jews, however, the resealed boundaries of the traditional Jewish world are often perceived as an isolationist stance, an un-American and highly distasteful posture with which they do not wish to be connected. One suburban woman, who expressed her Judaism through political social action and has worked hard for decades on separation of church and state issues, spoke bitterly about the habit of Hasidic Jews in a neighboring town to construct apartments so that large family group-

ings can live side by side: "They build apartment house fortresses, and then they fill them with their parents and their sisters and their children." What might have seemed to her admirable family feeling in another religious/ethnic culture was offensive evidence of Orthodox clannishness among Jews. The great majority of American Jews have internalized the American message of "pluralism" and "tolerance," which approves pride in one's own ethnic and religious heritage, but views as bigotry or racism associating too exclusively with persons who share that heritage. Some non-Orthodox Voices for Change respondents stated they would prefer that their children marry well-educated Episcopalians rather than persons who are clearly visible as Orthodox Jews, such as Hasidim.

It should be noted that coalescing behavior permeates even the resealed American Orthodox world. American Orthodox Jews, as much as they may labor to be not like all the nations, also feel it is their birthright to enjoy pleasures that the nations offer, provided they can be supplied in an externally kosher and socially insulated package. Discussing "Sushi and Other Jewish Foods" with knowing irony, Alan Mintz comments on "the spectacle of sushi-eating Hasidim" and "the still-regnant 'fusion cookery' that is a byproduct of the acculturated status of American Jews."²⁹ Gourmet international culinary styles, exotic (and expensive) dry wines from far flung locales, and international group vacation opportunities are now available to and enjoyed by pious Orthodox practitioners. Weddings at which men and women eat and dance separately on opposite sides of the room are punctuated by rock music set to Hebrew or Yiddish lyrics. The wigs and clothing of many ultra-Orthodox American women are extraordinarily stylish and au courant. On a less visible level, therapists who work with Orthodox individuals have testified that contemporary American individualistic values and a variety of social dysfunctions have also been incorporated into Orthodox life, albeit perhaps not on as widespread a level as in society at large.

Coalescence within the most secluded American Jewish societies emerges, perhaps unconsciously, in their own words. According to a *New York Times* report on civil disobedience in the Satmar Hasidic suburban community, Kiryas Joel, one rebellious leader explains his vocal dissidence from the community's official policy by saying, "Here we have to fight just to freely express our views and educate our children the way we want and practice our religion the way the old Rabbi Joel wanted. This is a fight for our democracy."³⁰

Signaling New Trends

Vivid illustrations of contemporary coping strategies such as compartmentalization and coalescence by American Jews are found in literature, film, and popular culture. The continuing American-Jewish tendency to reduce cognitive dissonance by compartmentalizing, for example, can be seen in the rather dramatic forms of internal division, ambivalent feelings, and compartmentalization in characters created by many Jewish artists.³¹ At the same time, American-Jewish fiction has signalled contemporary tendencies of American Jews to move beyond compartmentalization,³² and has

indicated, significantly, that coalescence is a phenomenon that affects traditional as well as liberal Jews.

Writing from within a national ethos that promotes multiculturalism rather than the melting pot and in which many boundaries have been dramatically weakened, American Jewish writers have recently depicted contemporary Jews who seem to access texts from two cultures and merge them into a single document. One young writer who is fascinated by this merging is Allegra Goodman, whose short story, "Variant Text," humorously illustrates the process of coalescence. In Goodman's "Variant Text," Jewish day school principal Kineret Goodman, an Orthodox pedagogue who covers her hair with a kerchief in consonance with rabbinical prescriptions for female modesty, articulates the day school's guidelines in the language of coalescence: "This school is governed by the standards of Kohlberg, Piaget, the Rav Soloveichik . . ." She continues by urging a young father to dress his little girl in skirts, rather than dungarees, in an impassioned diatribe that coalesces religious rabbinic, psychological Freudian, and educational Kohlbergian prescriptions:

The gan is working to teach Yiddishkeit, and that's a complete world picture which includes tsnuiistic clothes. Attalia has to wear dresses and skirts now if she is to have a healthy sexual and social identity later. Psychologically this is crucial; if she dresses like a boy, she'll never find her place within the peer group and interact normally. That's what we're working for here. We want every child at Kohlberg stage three by the end of the term.³³

In Goodman's "Variant Text," the protagonist is a self-styled modern Orthodox Jewish man, a voracious reader and rigorous intellectual. One Saturday morning, the story tells us, Cecil, as usual, walks his children to the synagogue:

Cecil sports an ABORTION RIGHTS button pinned to the lapel of the suit he bought after his wedding. . . . "This is very bad," he says when they reach the shul. Someone is pushing strollers on Shabbat. It's shocking, really, and isn't any different than driving a vehicle or carrying, when you think about it. In fact, there are two strollers on the steps of the building.³⁴

Cecil is doubly offended: first more than one congregant has wheeled a baby carriage to the synagogue despite the absence of an *eruv* (a ritual device that renders an entire community private property according to Jewish law and thus an appropriate space in which to carry or wheel objects on the Sabbath). Second, the husband of one woman who pushed a stroller to the synagogue is called up to make a blessing over the weekly reading of the Torah portion. According to the strictest interpretation of Jewish law, a person who participates in any violation of the Sabbath should not receive such an honor; however, this prohibition is subject to much interpretation and is often neglected even in Orthodox congregations. Wearing his "Abortion Rights" pin, Cecil strides forward and vehemently protests what he considers to be a flagrant violation of Jewish law.

By wearing an "Abortion Rights" button in a place of Orthodox public Jewish worship Cecil has surely offended many more people than the husband of the carriage pushing woman who blesses the Torah. Rabbinic law, while notably different than the dogma of the "Right to Life" proponents, also works with different axioms than those of the "Right to Choice" proponents, assuming that neither men nor women own their bodies in quite the mode that is commonly assumed in contemporary liberal circles. The categories and considerations of Jewish law vis-à-vis reproductive rights do not easily match the current debate.

The reader understands this situation to be humorous because it is so incongruous. The reader may well feel that Cecil is spiritually tone deaf—an interpretation that is quite consonant with the story, because Cecil is obtuse as a father, husband, son-in-law, and colleague. He imagines himself to be a feminist, when he is merely equally insensitive to men and women. However, one thing that Cecil is not doing is compartmentalizing the Jewish and secular values that he holds dear. On the contrary, the learned, observant, and politically liberal Cecil is coalescing two value systems. He does not compartmentalize his political liberalism and his Orthodox rigor, as he advertises his pro-choice attitudes in an Orthodox worship setting. Like the vast majority of American Jews (although perhaps not the majority of contemporary Orthodox Jews), Cecil is firmly in the liberal camp. More than any other ethnic or religious group, American Jews are sweepingly committed to reproductive rights, both as individuals and in their organizational statements.³⁵

Thus, Cecil's coalesced belief system is very much in the American Jewish mainstream. On the computer screen of life, Cecil accesses American and Jewish values simultaneously and merges their messages.

A similar coalescence is found in Joan Micklin Silver's 1980s film "Crossing Delancey." In one memorable scene, one of the protagonist's Jewish female friends has decided to have a baby even though she is "not yet" living with the child's father. As the baby is a boy, she invites a large group of family and friends to a traditional *brit milah* (ritual circumcision ceremony) in her apartment, complete with refreshment-laden tables and a young rabbi-mohel who gently teaches those attending about Jewish laws and customs. In inviting her friends and family to this traditional ceremony, the young mother coalesces several values from diverging sources: (1) the Jewish ritual requirement for an appropriate circumcision ceremony; (2) the traditional Jewish personal bias toward reproduction; (3) the Jewish communal value of sharing circumcision ceremonies with the community; (4) and the very secular American value of sexual and reproductive choice even for single women. In contrast, the baby's grandmother is not ready or willing to merge these value systems. Presumably more comfortable with the compartmentalization of secular and Jewish values, she refuses to come to the ceremony. Instead, her sister, the baby's great-aunt, comes to and participates in the ceremony, bemoaning both her sister's narrow-mindedness and her niece's daring.

For some viewers, the ultimate symbols of coalescence are found on the television screen. The popular, long-running dramatic series "Northern Exposure," for example, featured several episodes in which frequent protagonist Joel Fleishman, a New York-born Jewish physician, explores his relationship to Jews and Judaism in isolation

in the town of Sicily, Alaska. In one episode, Fleishman goes through a great deal of effort to assemble a *minyan* (prayer quorum) of ten Jews with whom to recite the *kaddish* prayer for the dead. However, Fleishman resolves his arduous search by concluding that Jewishness is not an appropriate criterion to determine the persons who comprise his community. Fleishman decides that his community of faith is based on caring, supportiveness, shared feeling and experience, and is comprised of his good, non-Jewish friends in Sicily—not strangers who happen to be born Jews. Gathering Sicily's quirky and lovable characters, Fleishman, with great fervor, recites the *kaddish* prayer, which they respond to with deep, supportive feeling. The desire to recite *kaddish* with a *minyan* is, of course, a time-honored Jewish tradition. The episode's resolution that something as arbitrary as the religion one is born into should not limit religious interaction is pure Americana—and is presented as an appropriate alternative to Jewish law.

The "Northern Exposure" episode should not be presumed to be mere artistic exaggeration; the extent to which television programs reflect coalescence in American Jewish life and values is frequently corroborated by other types of evidence. For example, in a recent op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, a reporter from the *Journal*'s Boston bureau reports attending a "Cambridge-style Passover Seder, BYOP, Bring Your Own Place Setting." Participants soon discovered "we were missing something else: Jews. There were only three" among the thirteen attending:

We used modern Haggadot, which describe the exodus from Egypt, but they were not modern enough. Someone complained that references to "lightness and darkness" carried negative connotations for people of color. Susan, an Episcopalian, was complimented for her skillful reading of Hebrew. "I went to divinity school," she explained. . . . We improvised on other matters. A Passover song, "The Ballad of the Four Children," was sung to the tune of "My Darling Clementine" and "La Cucaracha." A new-age prayer was read decrying alienation, anomie, and "the pharaohs of technology." Individuals read special poems or literary passages. We heard a selection from e.e. cummings and a few words from "Candide." A friend suggested I read "the Midnight Ride of Paul Revere," as it combines the theme of exodus with a New England twist."³⁶

Qualitative and quantitative research, literature, film and popular culture, and anecdotal materials all indicate that American Jews today inhabit a universe that is substantively different from the contexts of Jewish lives in earlier periods of Jewish history. This transformed cultural context of Jewish existence has had a profound impact on Jewish lifestyles. The coming chapters focus on the details of contemporary Jewish lifestyles and societies in specific areas: secular education and occupational profiles, Jewish education, households and family formation, Jewish behaviors of households, and organizational activities. By focusing on each of these areas and then considering the overall picture they comprise, we can gain insights into the changed equations of American-Jewish life. Perhaps most important, we can increase our understanding of those aspects of coalescence which threaten and those which can contribute positively to a vital American-Jewish future.

Table 1.1 Jewish Voting Patterns in Recent American Presidential Elections
Percentages of Jews Voting for Each Candidate

<i>Religion</i>	<i>1972</i>		<i>1976</i>		<i>1980</i>		
	<i>Nixon/McGovern</i>		<i>Carter/Ford</i>		<i>Reagan/Carter/Anderson</i>		
WASP	76	22	41	58	63	31	6
CATHOLIC	54	44	54	44	50	42	7
JEW	34	64	64	34	39	45	15

<i>1984</i>		<i>1988</i>		<i>1992</i>			<i>1996</i>		
<i>Reagan/Mondale</i>		<i>Bush/Dukakis</i>		<i>Clinton/Bush/Perot</i>			<i>Clinton/Dole/Perot</i>		
72	27	66	33	33	47	21	36	53	10
54	45	52	47	44	35	20	53	37	9
31	67	35	64	80	11	9	78	16	3

Source: Exit poll data, adapted from *The New York Times* Nov. 10, 1996. p. 28.