

Jonathan D. Sarna



NOBODY in 1945 would have predicted that, 70 years hence, the State of Israel would become a significant economic and military power home to more than 6.2 million Jews; that well over 90 percent of the world's Jews would live in just five First World countries; that the Jewish population of Eastern Europe would drop significantly below 400,000; and that the fastest-growing Jewish religious movement in the world would be Chabad. Prophecies about Jews, 70 years ago and throughout history, have been notoriously prone to failure. In looking ahead, there is therefore every reason to be prudent. "Prophecy," an old adage wisely warns, "is very difficult, especially about the future."

With that in mind, what do I think will be the condition of the Jewish community 50 years from now?

First, the Jewish community will continue to consolidate at an unprecedented rate, so that instead of being a worldwide people, an *am olam*, spread "from one end of the world even unto the other," Jews will become an overwhelmingly First World people, living primarily in Israel and North America. Already, some 93 percent of world Jewry lives in First World countries—those with advanced economies, worldwide influence, high standards of living, and abundant technology. Half of world Jewry actually lives in just five metropolitan areas: Tel Aviv, New York, Jerusalem, Los Angeles, and Haifa. By 2065, I expect that almost all Jews will live in the First World, and as many as three-quarters of them will live close to one another, in a few sprawling metropolises.

The upside of consolidation is that Jews will be physically safer (there is security in numbers), and that it will be easier than ever for them to interact, learn from one another, and help one another. First World people, in addition, tend to share both common values and elements of a common culture. The downside is that Judaism will no longer be a world religion on par with Christianity and Islam. It will, at best, be a regional or First World religion. Those in the rest of the world—especially in Third World or so-called majority-world countries—will have no direct knowledge of Jews and Judaism at all. They will conjure up instead a mythical Judaism, and there will be no "Jews next-door" to set them aright.

Second, in 50 years, Judaism may well be experiencing a totally unexpected religious awakening. Ev-

ery religious downturn since the 18th century, at least in America, has been followed by a "great awakening." These cycles, historian William G. McLoughlin has explained, reflect the ebb and flow of culture: Periods of disruption ("crises of beliefs and values") are followed by periods of reorientation and renewal. In our day, disruptive forces—new technologies, incendiary ideas, changing social mores, and the like—have plunged religion into a period of recession. Fifty years from now, if not sooner, the descendants of those who have intermarried and drifted off may be seeking to rediscover the spiritual heritage that their parents cast away. They will look to a renewed Judaism to provide them with meaning, order, and direction.

Jews in 2065, whatever their condition, will not likely be sanguine concerning the future of the Jewish community. Like so many before them, they will worry that theirs will be the last generation of Jews, that the Jewish community will disappear unless it changes. Paradoxically, the fear that Judaism might not survive will help ensure that it does.

JONATHAN D. SARNA is the Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University and chief historian of the National Museum of American Jewish History. His most recent book, with Benjamin Shapell, is *Lincoln and the Jews: A History*.

Jacob J. Schacter



THE PROMINENT Danish physicist Niels Bohr once said (or was it Yogi Berra or Casey Stengel?), "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future." But, having been honored to receive an invitation to share my views about the Jewish future, I will proceed to do so, albeit with due diffidence and humility.

First, we should not under-appreciate the fact that there will be a Jewish community in 50 years. In spite of the fact that, throughout history, we have repeatedly faced demographic dispersion, political disintegration, economic dislocation, social alienation, psychological oppression, subtle as well as crude discrimination, and, at worst, brute physical annihilation, we have survived, and even flourished. This almost incomprehensible fact has confounded many throughout the centuries, some of whom have sought explanations for it. In the words of the 20th-century Russian political and religious writer Nikolai Berdyaev: "Indeed,

according to the materialistic and positivist criterion, this people ought long ago to have perished. Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination.” Exactly what that is was made clear by Maimonides, who wrote: “We are in possession of the divine assurance that Israel is indestructible and imperishable, and will always continue to be a preeminent community.” And, in a most striking assertion, he continues: “As it is impossible for God to cease to exist, so is Israel’s destruction and disappearance from the world unthinkable.” We cannot take the survival of the Jewish people for granted. It defies logic. It is, simply, a gift from God.

But it is not for *Klal Yisrael*, the nation of Israel, that I am concerned. It is for “Reb Yisrael,” the individual Jew, that I am concerned, very concerned. What will that individual Jew who will still identify as a Jew in 50 years look like? I believe that only those for whom Jewishness is a central—if not the central—defining value of their lives will withstand the challenges of the most welcome and blessed freedom that Jews experience in America. Only those who are prepared to sacrifice for their Jewish identity—to pay (a lot) for day school and yeshiva education, to pay (a lot) to support schools, synagogues, mikvahs, and to live by the values they represent—will constitute the majority of Jews at the end of the next half-century.

The Torah (Exodus 34:29–30) informs us that when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai carrying the second set of tablets, he was endowed with a special radiance. In seeking the source for Moses’s radiance—and in providing for us a source for our own personal and national “radiance”—the Midrash (*Yalkut Shim’oni, Ki Tisa* #406, end) writes that the tablets were six cubits long, roughly 21 inches. God, it continues, grasped on to the top two cubits and Moses grasped on to the bottom two cubits, and the radiance that emanated from Moses came from the middle two cubits. I understand this as follows: “Radiance,” or fulfillment, or optimism, for Moses—and for us—cannot come from the top two cubits held by God. They are too holy, too transcendent, too suffused with pure divinity, too otherworldly. It will also not come from the bottom two cubits; they are too earthly, too physical, and too mundane. Radiance and meaning for our lives will come from the middle two cubits only, the cubits that are neither heaven nor earth, that are, in fact, both heaven and earth. It will come from a sincere and serious effort to bring earth a bit closer to heaven and heaven a bit closer to earth, to extract ourselves from our physicality and strive to elevate ourselves to reach meaningful levels of spirituality and to grasp on to a

piece of the divine and bring it a bit closer to us. For me this means living meaningful, serious Jewish lives, in practice and in spirit; this means deep and robust engagement with Torah and mitzvot and *hesed*. Judaism will not survive for those who consider it a vague ethnic identity; it will survive for those who embrace it fully and passionately.

In the second half of his poem “Tourists,” the late Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai wrote:

Once I sat on the stairs at the gate of David’s Tower and put two heavy baskets next to me. A group of tourists stood there around their guide and I served as their orientation point. “You see that man with the baskets? A bit to the right of his head, there’s an arch from the Roman period. A bit to the right of his head.” But he moves, he moves!! I said to myself: redemption will come only when they are told: You see over there the arch from the Roman period? Never mind: but next to it, a bit to the left and lower, sits a man who bought fruit and vegetables for his home.

There is much wisdom here, of course, but I suggest that Amichai is wrong. At the end of the day, those who will constitute the Jewish people in 2065 will be those who recognize that both the “arch from the Roman period” (the tradition) *and* the “man who bought fruit and vegetables for his home” (the contemporary) need to be celebrated and affirmed.

JACOB J. SCHACTER is *University Professor of Jewish History and Jewish Thought at Yeshiva University, where he is also a senior scholar at the Center for the Jewish Future.*

Lynn Schusterman



THE JEWISH COMMUNITY is indeed experiencing the best of times and worst of times.

On one hand, the 2013 Pew study paints a picture of an American Jewish community in the throes of transformation: Jewish religious observance is on the decline, young Jews’ interest in traditional institutions is waning, and Israel’s standing within the Jewish community and on the world stage con-