



As of 2001, the three largest Jewish population centers in North America were—by far—the New York metropolitan area (2,051,000), Greater Los Angeles (668,000), and southern Florida (498,000).

Today, it is not unusual for bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies to be conducted for adults who did not have them when they were younger, many couples include personalized rituals in their Jewish wedding ceremonies, and some families now weave their own life experiences with the retelling of the Passover story at the seder. In addition, many American Jews strongly support Israel and are influential in matters of American and world politics, and synagogue adult and family education programs are evermore popular.

Yet there are still challenges. Increased rates of intermarriage and total assimilation, decreased birthrates among Jews, and decreased rates of conversion of non-Jews to Judaism cause some people to wonder whether Judaism will continue to thrive. Indeed, the American Jewish population is becoming an ever-smaller percentage of the American population.

The commitment to Jewish peoplehood—the traditional idea that all Jews, wherever they live, are related to one another and responsible for one another—has declined as assimilation



This portrait of bat mitzvah celebrant Eden Fried and her brothers, sisters, and cousins is a reminder that the Jewish future will be written by you and your generation, in all your diversity and through your many actions.

and intermarriage rise. A survey in 1998 found that only 52 percent of American Jews agreed with the statement, “I look at the entire Jewish community as my extended family,” and only 47 percent agreed that “I have a special responsibility to take care of Jews in need around the world.”

The modern Jewish community of North America brings enormous resources to help meet these challenges. Its members are diversely talented, holding positions of accomplishment in business, government, education, the arts, and sciences—in fact, throughout society. It has achieved much and surely will achieve more.

But despite our many resources, questions still remain. For example, which innovations in Jewish practice will be accepted into Jewish tradition? What levels and styles of participation in Jewish communal life will become most common? How will the ties among the various communities of the Diaspora be strengthened and challenged, and what relationship will Diaspora Jews have with the Jews of Israel?

The answers are not for this book to tell, for they are not yet known. You will learn them day by day as you and your generation both watch them unfold and make them happen.

May you go from strength to strength.