

Thickening our Jewish peoplehood

I was at a conference the other week where the speaker discussed a concept he called “the diminishing thickness of Jewish peoplehood.”

It’s a dire prophecy. American Jews are paying less and less to our institutions and our flagship programs. Fewer and fewer of us are paying to be synagogue members, or JCC members, or Federation supporters. The knowledge, belief, arts, morals, customs and habits – which always shaped us and our behavior – have moved away in ways we’re only just beginning to understand. Societies and communities that face this “thinning out” eventually decline and disintegrate.

And yet ...

An astonishing 94 percent of Jews in the U.S. say that they’re proud to be Jewish. Three-quarters of us have a “strong sense of belonging to the Jewish People.”* We know that people in our community love what our Federation offers ... the challenge is how we show them **what** we do, and (more importantly) **why** we do it. A lot of what we do is hard to tell but easy to show. So we need to do more showing — more missions, more storytelling, more face-to-face parlor meetings and events, and more touching, tasting, smelling.

Our job, right now, is to create an exciting and compelling narrative to speak meaningfully to everyone in the community, allow each individual to shape their sense of community for themselves. I believe that we’ve started to see some of these narratives come to the fore in the past year. And I’m optimistic because they represent real values and the thickening of identity.

It’s been a rough couple of months for the community. We’re facing political divisions and security threats. It’s been heartbreaking to see our kids evacuated from JCC’s, our seniors scared by threats, our cemeteries attacked. And our people discouraged.



So guess what?

No one builds community except for you.

No one will step forward if everyone waits for someone else to do it.

You are the “someone else.”

Go to one of our awesome Jewish community centers this week. We have three – [the JCC of Central NJ](#), the [JCC MetroWest](#), and the [YM-YWHA of Union County](#). All three are rooted in our community, with programs and activities and events that give meaning to the words “Jewish community.”

Go.

Start or renew your membership. Make a donation there in someone’s name. Join a class. Work out. Go for a swim.

[Join a shul](#) or go on a [mission](#). Come to [some awesome activities and programs](#) with Federation. Communities thicken. They build resilience and fight terror by showing up. They thrive by not being intimidated. They get stronger by teaching their kids what makes them proud. Blogs and social media, even the best of them, won’t build and strengthen our community.

But you can.

*It’s a good read: <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/>