

## ***Inclusiveness and Community: Embracing All of Our Souls***



**W**e have all had time now to absorb the recent Presidential election, and draw our conclusion about the result.

The recurrent theme among all commentators, partisans of all sides, or neutral to the core, is that the electorate is changing with the shifting demography of the country. The electorate looks different racially, ethnically, and religiously from what it did in the past.

Attitudes have changed correspondingly. As one commentator put it, the electorate is looking less like the world of the TV show *Mad Men* and more like *Modern Family*.

We are, as a nation, more inclusive, more accepting of diversity, and more respectful of the right to make our own choices. This is true on reproductive freedom, marriage equality, and immigration.

We are a nation in which the “minorities” are becoming the “majority,” in which the “white, male, patriarchal figure,” the archetype of political authority, will hold less resonance than ever before.

Just as this is true in the general community, it is also true in the Jewish community. The Jewish community today does not look like it did fifty years ago. There has been a revolution in the place of women in our communities. We have fought the battles over women’s inclusion in the *minyan*, whether they can wear *tallit* and *tefillin*, become rabbis and cantors. That’s all over now. The matriarchs are now invoked in the same breath as the patriarchs.

We have embraced the legitimacy of the LGBTQ community, finally declaring that sexual orientation is not a determinant of a person’s qualifications to be a rabbi or cantor or other Jewish professional. Marriage equality is a reality in Conservative Judaism.

We welcome those who have chosen to marry someone who is not Jewish. But we have much work left to do here. Institutionally, we need to find trail-blazing procedures to recognize the spiritual legitimacy of the intermarried as members of the Jewish community, and embrace without qualification as Jews, children of patrilineal descent.

Inclusiveness is the key to contemporary Judaism. Recognizing the legitimacy of each individual’s choice, and embracing those choices without negative stereotyping or judging will be the necessary hallmarks of our religious culture.

There are those in the Jewish community, as in the secular community, who oppose inclusiveness as an ideal. They will take refuge in law and standards in an effort not just to live the lives they believe in, but dictate and coerce others to be just like them. Those efforts are not only inimical to the social and religious fabric, they are doomed to failure.

We may disagree about the demands of tradition and change, about whether Judaism teaches conservative values or liberal ones, but, as Jay Michaelson wrote in *The Forward*, if we survey the scope of Jewish history, and the evolution of Jewish thought, one tendency is very clear. Judaism trends toward more compassion, more understanding, more inclusiveness, and more “truthfulness with the experience of all people.”

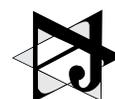
In the sermon I gave on the first day of *Rosh HaShanah*, which can be downloaded at the AJ website, I spoke of how “we are at a regenerative moment in Jewish history.” It is a time not of retrenchment, but expansion; not of exclusion, but inclusion.

Though some see this moment as threatening, I “have faith that Judaism will always inspire enough passionate commitment to sustain a diverse, energized, vibrant and vital Jewish community.”

Our challenge is to liberate ourselves “from the constraining obligation of trying to sustain the forms of a by-gone past” so that we can “create models for the Jewish future that liberate and nurture our souls.”

All of our souls.

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