Editor's Introduction

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I am pleased to introduce our latest issue of *Contemporary Jewry* and the first issue of volume 32. It continues the debate about American Jewish attachments to Israel, which occupied issues 2 & 3 of volume 30 and has since become an increasingly fascinating matter of discussion, aided in part by the recent work of Peter Beinart, whose article, “The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment” (May, 2010) in the *New York Review of Books* and subsequent book have focused broad attention in the popular media and intelligentsia on this subject. In this issue we offer two more papers that look at the phenomenon from new perspectives: Ira Sheskin’s view from the study of local communities, and Ted Sasson et. al who have considered it from the perspective of life cycle and generation, paying particular attention to so-called ‘young adults.’ While I will let the articles speak for themselves, the unmistakable message here is that anyone who believes there is a simple answer to the question of how American Jews are connected to Israel, and who has concluded either with a pessimistic or optimistic judgment, needs to submit his or her thinking to revision or at the very least second thoughts. Moreover, whatever the answer or answers, the data we find these days was collected at a time when Israel’s existence has become a taken-for-granted fact of global politics and reality. As the talk of war and existential threats to that existence now fill the air, one suspects that people may reassess whatever conclusions readers may draw from these two articles and the research upon which they report. Whatever the future brings on the political front will undoubtedly add yet another complicating element to this question, leading me to suspect that our readers will once again be exposed to further research on the matter.

Another paper in this issue, Yael Israel-Cohen’s lead article on Jewish Modern Orthodox women and their expressions of feminist concerns, touches on a subject no less a matter of debate. While Orthodox Judaism has been relatively late in

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finding a place for women and for their desire to change the status quo in religious and ritual life, Israel-Cohen's research argues that even in Israel, where the conservative or even reactionary forces of Orthodoxy appear particularly regnant, a segment of Orthodoxy resists and challenges these forces. Her study of the *Shira Hadasha* congregation, a group whose approach and organization has come to serve as a paradigm of resistance and change within Orthodoxy, marks pioneering research on new topics. We are proud to be the journal that, once again, serves as the place to find such important and socially significant work.

Finally, as is our custom, we are publishing the annual Sklare Memorial Lecture and responses to it. This year, our lecture comes from awardee Steven M. Cohen, one of the best known surveyors and analysts of contemporary Jewry. Cohen's work is required reading for anyone who claims to know about the character and trends among American Jews. He provocatively analyzes the demise of what he calls the 'Good Jew,' someone who is truly tied to Jewry and Judaism through a variety of networks. That decline, accompanied by what he provocatively refers to as a "population meltdown" among non-Orthodox American Jews, of course portends the threat of assimilation and cultural decline. The responses to Cohen's lecture by Kelner, Benor and Kelman are only a small part of the reactions that I am certain will come from our readers.

Ahead in the forthcoming issue will be more interesting and engaging work, both academically and culturally significant. Subscribers will see some "online first," and that is, I hope sufficient incentive for all of you to both think about submitting your work for consideration and encouraging your institutions and friends to add themselves to our subscriber list.

With this issue we bid a fond adieu to our managing editor, Dr. Yoel Finkelman, who moves on to other challenges. Yoel has been an invaluable part of our journal, and anyone who reviews the issues under his management will see his sure hand and intelligent eye informing so many of these pages. For me it has been a special privilege and pleasure to work with him and I wish him great good luck in all his future plans. I also take this opportunity to welcome Deborah Grant of Brandeis University who takes over as our new managing editor and look forward to working with her and continuing the excellence of our journal in the years ahead.