

*Nitzotzot Min HaNer*  
*Volume #5, October 2002*

# USA JEWISH DEMOGRAPHY

The UJC (United Jewish Communities) National Jewish Population Survey<sup>1</sup> (NJPS) of 2000-1 is finally out, though only part of it has been released<sup>2</sup>. This comes after a series of studies over the past two years, some of which we summarize together with the UJC study below. In particular, we bring findings from the Hillel report on Jewish students<sup>3</sup> and from a study done by Barry Kosmin with Egon Mayer and Ariela Keysar of the Graduate Center of the City University of NY, based on the American Religious Identification Survey 2001 (ARIS) and its associated American Jewish Identifications Survey (AJIS), which we will call the ARIS/AJIS study. We also note a recent study by Gary Tobin. Finally, we bring from the American Jewish Year Book, whose figures are based on local community counts. All studies include

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<sup>1</sup> Approximately 4,500 Jewish respondents were interviewed, more than double the comparable group interviewed in 1990. Participants qualified on the basis of Jewish religion, parentage, upbringing and self-identification.

In addition, over 4,000 non-Jewish respondents were interviewed involving more than 5 million phone calls to 1.3 million telephone numbers. Approximately 1,300 dialings and 8 conversations were made to locate and then complete an interview with each Jewish respondent.

<sup>2</sup> The last time it was out it was called the JCF – Council of Jewish Federations study. However, the Federations combined with the United Jewish Appeal and the United Israel Appeal.

<sup>3</sup> More than 10 million students at more than 1,600 higher education institutions have completed the CIRP (*The Cooperative Institutional Research Program*) Freshman Survey since 1966, including over 200,000 college students who have identified themselves as Jewish. (The study is *sponsored by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute*) Results specifically for Jewish students have not been reported in over twenty years, and have never been analyzed in terms of the long-term trends exhibited by this group. The Hillel study used the data generated by the Frishman study for its report. Only students who self-identify as “Jewish” are considered Jewish for the purposes of this study. However, the study also examined a separate category of students: those who indicate “none” as their religious preference but who have at least one parent who is Jewish. It should be noted that the study is recording attitudes of students prior to significant exposure to campus life.

The full study can be found at [www.hillel.org](http://www.hillel.org). (In the *search* box enter *ajf\_web.doc* to get to the article. This is readable only through Adobe Reader).

Reform and Conservative conversions as well as other “Jews by Choice”.

The studies are not always consistent or complimentary, as will be obvious to the reader in several places.

The UJC study shows a U.S. Jewish population of 5.2 million, slightly below the 5.5 million found in 1990, a decline of 5%. During this time the number of Americans soared by 33 million to a total of 288 million, according to the US Census Bureau. Jews now constitute just 2% of the US population.

Hundred of thousands of Jewish immigrants entered the United States in the 1990's. a development that should have driven up the number of Jews to 5.7 million. This means that at least 500,000 Jews have gone missing. One possibility is that the study, which cost \$6 million was flawed and failed to locate all American Jews. This would be confirmed by other studies which show a much higher figure. However, it is quite possible that falling birth rates and numbers of Jews who have decided to join another religion are behind the drop.

More than 600 other Americans with varying levels of Jewish background were also surveyed. When all of these people are considered, including those practicing another religion, the total number of Americans with Jewish backgrounds rises to 6.9 million people. They live in 3.6 million households, which have a total of 9 million people, both Jews and non-Jews.

The UJC figure of 5.2 million is much lower than the figure of 6.7 million Jews given by Dr. Gary Tobin, of The Institute for Jewish and Community Research in San Francisco and the figure of 6.1 million produced by the Glennmary Research Center, which is based on reports from Jewish communities and leaders around the country. A lot of the difference has to do with who one counts as a Jew, and the figure for Halachik Jews is probably lower than any of the above figures. But Dr. Tobin also factored in people who decline to say they are Jewish, possibly from fear of anti-Semitism, as well as Jews who were practicing other religions. He also has much higher figures for the West Coast and immigrant Jews.

He also counted those who gave no religion but said they were ethnically or culturally Jewish; and those who gave no religion but said they had been raised as Jews, had a Jewish parent or formerly practiced Judaism. Of these categories the UJC study only counted those who said they had no religion but had a Jewish parent or a Jewish upbringing.

The lowest figures of all came from the ARIS/AJIS study, through which 50,000 American adults were asked a simple question: “What is your religion, if any?” only about half of the people who said they had a Jewish parent identified themselves as a “Jew by religion.” Extrapolating from this, the study estimated the population of “Jews by religion” in American, including children, at just under 4 million. Finally, the Year Book suggests a figure of 6.1 million Jews.

## Age

- Disturbingly, the UJC study showed an aging Jewish population and young Jews waiting longer to have fewer children. The median age of American Jews increased from 37 in 1990 to 41 in 2000. This is substantially older than that of the total U.S. population, whose median age is 35.
- Children 17 and younger are 19% of population, down from 21% a decade ago. This contrasts with 26% in the broader U.S. population.
- Similarly, adults 65 and older increased from 15% in 1990 to 19% today in contrast to 12% for the total U.S. population.

## Family

- 46% of Jews over 18 are unmarried. 26% never married. 13% are divorced or separated and 7% widowed. This is comparable to the broader population.
- There are more single Jewish men than women (30% vs. 22%).
- Jewish women who are now approaching the end of their childbearing years, ages 40-44, have had approximately 1.8 children, which is below the replacement level of 2.1.
- 52% of Jewish women ages 30-34 have not had any children compared to 27% of all American women.
- The Hillel study reported that raising a family has become a top personal goal for both Jewish and non-Jewish freshmen over the past three decades. Jewish students are interested in defining and exploring the Jewish people as family. In addition, family life education in a Jewish context, including issues of dating, sexuality, gender communication, commitment and parenting are also likely to engage significant numbers of Jewish college students.
- The American Jewish Year Book reports that births and deaths were in balance in the late 1990's but that Jewish immigration, contributed to a slight growth in the Jewish population. (According to them the Jewish population showed a steady increase throughout the 20th Century. In 1990 the figure was 5,981,000 whereas in 2000 it was 6,136,000.)

## National Origin

- 15% of adult Jews were born outside of the U.S. Of these, 44% are from the former Soviet Union (44%), 10% come from Israel and Germany each.

## Distribution and City Size

- 43% of Jews live in the Northeast. However, 16% of those born in Northeast have moved out and 4% moved out of the Midwest (and the Midwest is now 11% of the total). The South gained 13% (and is now 21%) and the West 8% (to 22%), not factoring in immigration from overseas. (Figures in parentheses are from the Year Book).
- Communities which showed the most growth in 2000 were Las Vegas, up 19,400 to 75,000 and the suburbs of LA and Seattle (7,900 increase). Rockland County, Denver, Atlanta, Austin and Palm Springs, CA showed between three to six thousand increase. (Year Book)
- The largest decline was Miami-Dade (10,000) and Buffalo (6,000).
- The states with the largest populations in 2000 are:

New York	1,653,000
California:	994,000
Florida:	628,000
New Jersey	468,000
Pennsylvania	283,000
Massachusetts	275,000
Illinois	270,000
Maryland	216,000
- Texas, Ohio, Michigan and Georgia all have over 100,000 Jews
- Largest counties or metropolitan areas:

½ million and up:	NY, LA
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200,000 - 499,00: San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, Nassau County, Boward County, Philadelphia  
 100,000 – 199,000: Miami-Dade County, Suffolk County  
 80,000 - 99,000: Boca Raton-Delray Beach, Atlanta, Detroit, Bergen County, Westchester County, Rockland County, Cleveland, Baltimore  
 60,000 – 79,000: Phoenix, Denver, Palm Beach County, Las Vegas, Monmouth County, Essex County,

## Jewish Identity

The ARIS/AJIS study asked correspondents the following question: “Would you describe your outlook as religious, somewhat religious, somewhat secular, or secular?” Only 3 percent of those who identified their religion as Churches of Christ and Assemblies of God said that they were “secular” or “somewhat secular” (see chart below). For Methodists, it was 6 percent. For Baptists and Seventh-Day Adventists, 7 percent. Jehovah’s Witnesses, 8 percent. Congregationalists and Mormons, 9 percent; Lutherans, 10 percent. Catholics, 13 percent. Episcopalians, 15 percent, and Muslims 18 percent.

But for Jews the figure is 44 percent. Because the results were so pronounced, the authors checked them against the results of a July 2001 survey of 1,500 Jews in Leeds, England. They found the same thing in the U.K.

### Secular vs. Religious – Outlook Among U.S. Religious Groups (2001)

Religious Group	Secular/Somewhat Secular (%)	Religious/Somewhat Religious (%)
Assemblies of God	3	92
Churches of Christ	3	95
Methodist	6	93
Baptist	7	91
Seventh-Day Adventist	7	92
Jehovah’s Witness	8	91
Mormon	9	89
UCC/Congregationalist	9	89
Lutheran	10	89
Catholic	13	83
Episcopalian	15	84
US TOTAL POPULATION	16	75
<b>JEWS BY RELIGION</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>53</b>
Leeds UK Jews	47	53
No Religion	53	36

*Totals do not add to 100 percent as they exclude refusals and “don’t knows”.*

In an article for Moment Magazine, (7 June, 2002), one of the authors, Barry Kosmin, writes as follows:

*Perhaps another question can focus our attention on religiosity as a matter of faith or belief, rather than of ritual observance. Here Christians and Jews may be more likely to be talking about the same thing. One of the questions in our survey seems to fit the bill: “Do you agree (strongly or somewhat) or disagree (strongly or somewhat) that God performs miracles?”*

*A vast majority of Americans seem to subscribe to a belief in divine miracles. Secularism and atheism are far from normative among the American public. Here again, however, Jews are different. They rank among the most skeptical. Even Buddhists – whose religion is nontheistic – are not as skeptical as Jews. Twenty percent of Buddhists strongly or somewhat disagree that God performs miracles. For Jews, its 28 percent. For Christian denominations, the figure varies from 1 percent to 13 percent, a far cry from the Jewish number of 28 percent. Even for those who said they had no religion, the figure was only 18 percent.*

*In reality, the majority of American Jews should be understood as deists: They define themselves as members of a religious group yet they possess a distinctly secular outlook.*

*In short, most Jewish hearts and minds are not part of white-bread, Main Street America. Rather, the well-educated Jewish masses appear to emulate the secular elite of Europe. It is interesting that the proportion of Americans stating they have “no religion” doubled from 14 to 29 million between 1990 and 2001.*

*Since the 1970’s the U.S. political environment has witnessed the rise of movements like the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition, and leaders like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Pat Buchanan. They’ve helped refocus the main on political issues on social, moral, and cultural values – not economics. The Republican Party appears to have increasingly become the natural home of religious America.*

Truly assimilated American Jews – those whose religious and cultural affinities have led them to leave the fold completely and adopt other faiths – assume a political profile mirroring that of Christian America. They favor the Republican Party of the Democrats by 41 percent to 29 percent – a 12 point preference gap that places them alongside moderate Protestants such as Lutherans on the survey scale. In another post-modernist paradox, the hareidim and the Jews for Jesus have similar political loyalties.

The Hillel study was a little (only a little) more encouraging on this issue. They found that whereas 92.6 percent of students with two Jewish parents identify themselves as Jewish, this figure drops to 37.8 percent when only the mother is Jewish. Significantly, 15.3 percent of those who have a Jewish father but not a Jewish mother (and who presumably have not, in the main, converted) considered themselves Jewish.

Those students who claim no religious preference but have at least one Jewish parent also exhibit by far the lowest levels of commitment to raising a family; are the most likely to have parents who are divorced or separated; are the most politically liberal; and display the lowest levels of physical and emotional self-confidence.

## **Religiosity**

According to the Hillel study, Jewish freshmen show a high interest in discussing (as opposed to practicing) religion. Use of the term “spirituality” fails to resonate with Jewish survey participants. Jewish learning built on discussion groups, textual analysis and *chevruta* (paired) learning styles are more interesting than straight shiurim.

As compared to non-Jews, Jewish students report less frequent attendance at religious services, fewer hours per week devoted to praying/meditating, and lower levels of “spirituality” (although it is unclear whether Jews and non-Jews interpret spirituality in the same ways). Both groups appear to be discussing religion with greater frequency now than they have in the past. Both groups also have become increasingly committed to financial well-being but less strongly committed to

developing a meaningful philosophy of life, reflecting one of the most dramatic shifts in the history of the survey.

Only 13.3 percent of Jewish freshmen report “frequent” attendance at religious services during the year prior to entering college, compared to nearly half (46.6 percent) among non-Jews. 70.0 percent of Jewish students report “occasional” attendance at religious services. While the survey does not specify what constitutes “occasional”, we can assume that students who attended services only during the high holidays (Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur) would consider that “occasional” attendance.

27.6 percent of Jewish students discussed religion frequently, 59.0 percent occasionally, and 13.4 percent not at all.

The survey also asks students how many hours they typically spent in “prayer/mediation” during their last year in high school. More than half of Jewish students (57.5 percent) report spending zero hours per week in prayer or meditation, with an additional 26.6 percent having engaged in prayer less than one hour per week. Only 15.9 percent of Jewish students report spending one or more hours per week in prayer or meditation, compared to 33.8 percent among non-Jewish students.

Jewish students are less likely than non-Jewish students to rate themselves highly on spirituality (as compared to their peers) and are far less committed than non-Jews to integrating spirituality into their lives.

## Education

- A quarter (24%) of Jewish adults 18 years of age and older have received a graduate degree, and 55% have earned at least a bachelor's degree. The current comparable numbers for non-Jews are 5% and 28%.
- The Hillel study showed that 34.8% of Jewish students are at private universities, followed by 30.5% public universities and 25.2% at private nonsectarian or non-religiously-affiliated four-year colleges. Only a small minority of Jewish students in the sample attend public four-year colleges (5.4 percent), Protestant colleges (3.2 percent) and Catholic colleges (0.8 percent). In addition, well over half of the Jewish students in this sample (59.4 percent) attend institutions located in the East.
- The Hillel study reported that high school grades have been on the rise for both Jewish and non-Jewish students, particularly throughout the 1990's. Over the past three decades, grades have remained significantly higher for Jews than non-Jews. Jewish students also report higher levels of academic self-confidence, and rate higher than non-Jews on many measures of academic “engagement” in high school, such as time spent studying, talking with teachers, and getting involved in clubs and groups. Although aspirations for master's degrees are comparable between the two groups, Jewish students are more likely than are non-Jews to aspire to doctoral degrees and, most notably, law degrees.

## Employment

- 68% of Jewish men and 56% of Jewish women are employed. 21% are retired, an increase since 1990 (16%) and a higher proportion than that of non-Jews (16%).
- The majority of employed Jews (59%) work in management, business and professional/technical positions, compared to fewer non-Jews (46%).

## Household Income

- The median household income of the Jewish population is about \$50,000, which is higher than the approximately \$42,000 median for all U.S. households reported by the Census Bureau.
- A fifth (19%) of all Jewish households are low income, defined as \$25,000 or less per year, compared to 29% among all U.S. households.

## Other important findings from the Hillel study

### *Volunteerism.*

Jewish freshmen display high levels of volunteer intent. Any kiruv initiative which simply comes to impose programming on the students, instead of nurturing and empowering them to run their own programs, is bound to be limited.

### *Sense of Community.*

One of the most successful people involved with campus outreach, Rabbi Charles Lebow, has long maintained that providing a sense of campus community is vital to any kiruv effort on campus. The study confirms this by showing that Jewish students display disproportionate interest in both the Greek system of fraternities and sororities.

### *Political and Social Activism.*

Over the past three decades, interest in politics has declined dramatically for both Jewish and non-Jewish freshmen. Nevertheless, Jewish freshmen remain more politically active than do their non-Jewish counterparts. Jewish students also view themselves as more politically liberal than do non-Jewish students, as evidenced by their more progressive attitudes regarding sex, drugs, abortion, gender roles, and homosexuality. Jewish students show a high interest in promoting racial harmony.

A heightened sense of wanting to correct society, coupled with recent anti-Semitism on campus, is a successful formula for campus activism.

### *Away From Home*

Over time, Jewish students have become more likely to travel long distances to attend college, a trend not observed for non-Jewish students. (Jewish students also are more likely than are non-Jews to report “getting away from home” as a very important reason for attending college.) The fact that most students are living in dormitory type situations in and around their campus is a tremendous plus in terms of being able to do outreach. In most other countries, Canada, South America and South Africa included, the majority of students are living at home or off campus, greatly complicating the outreach being done. England is comparable to the States in this regard.

### *Emotional Health*

Today's Jewish and non-Jewish students enter college with higher levels of stress and lower levels of emotional health than did students in the past. Rates of stress, depression, and emotional insecurity remain fairly comparable between the two groups. Many of the differences between Jewish and non-Jewish students are minimized when one examines these two groups within the same colleges.