



## **GETTING IN TOUCH**

18-35 Research Project Report

**Report and Analysis by Justin Wise  
With Responses from Prof Steven M Cohen and Philip Boxer**

**Research Conducted by Rabbi Greg Alexander  
Head of Research Project Judith Williams**



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Lastly, sincere thanks has to go to each of those interviewees that gave their time, shared their personal journeys and allowed us to develop a clearer picture of Jewish life for 18-35 Reform Jews in Britain. We hope that the research led work under taken by the Reform Movement in the future will address the challenges you have set.

June 2006, Sivan 5766



# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1993 the Reform Movement established a working group to look into the experiences of young adults in the 18-35 age group “in recognition of the conspicuous absence of young adults from all aspects of synagogue life”. Some twelve years later, we are returning to the question, against the background of significant changes in both the Reform Movement and the wider community. In the Reform Movement the 2020 Vision has been created to highlight the priority of working with individuals to help them meet their deepest Jewish needs, rather than perpetuating institutional concerns. In wider society, we have seen the dawn of the internet age, huge changes in the ways in which people are able to communicate, an increase in career fluidity and instability, and an ongoing shift towards people getting married, if they marry at all, in their thirties rather than in their twenties. In this report we aim to more fully appreciate the issues, experiences and thinking that characterise this age group with a clear objective: to gain a deeper understanding that will help us to use our resources more effectively.

Some thirty in-depth interviews were carried out with people aged 18-35 who had been involved in Reform communities at key points in their lives, and a number of participative focus-groups were run to explore some of the key questions raised. An analysis of the thousands of pages of interview notes which were produced highlighted a number of recurring themes:

Identifying with, and connecting to, the Jewish world

- Being Jewish is an important continuing part of the identity of the majority of interviewees.
- Jewish involvement centres around informal networks much more than around institutions.
- Connections with Judaism and Jewish life are highly personal and fluid.

The impact of Jewish leaders, educators, and institutions:

- Rabbis are role models only for some life stages, and inspiring alternatives are hard to find.
- There is a demand for high-quality Jewish experiences that value people as individuals.
- Many are confused about what living a Reform Jewish lifestyle would mean for them

The impact of programmes and activities currently on offer:

- Issues considered important are not often reflected in the established community.
- Synagogue services are not considered interesting and so interviewees mostly don't attend.
- Jewish learning is of interest as long as it is a high-quality experience.

The report presents each of these themes in detail, exploring the underlying ideas, attitudes, and stories that emerge from the

interviews and some conclusions. Following that we have invited Prof. Steven M. Cohen and Philip Boxer, who have been with the research project from the early stages, to respond and help enhance the conversation. Taken together, there is rich material for framing our thinking about the nature of Jewish community today, and where we might focus attention in sustaining the community of the future.

The intention is that this report will lead to the development of specific programmes, supporting the ongoing renewal of sustained Jewish life and involvement. We draw attention to the continued and central importance of synagogues as the cornerstone around which the Jewish community organises itself structurally, financially, and spiritually. Over the past few years synagogues have put resources into reaching out to 18-35 year olds by organising events, services, reduced membership rates and some have employed professionals to specifically connect with them. These have been good ventures that continue to be worthwhile, and we commend the forward thinking

initiatives. We also suggest that synagogues cannot reach everybody, at every point in their lives. The research found that even those who have been very involved in the past frequently find themselves 'outside' and without a clear feeling that they want to be back 'inside', certainly for now. What is defining about this generation as opposed to past generations is that this period tends to be much longer, and there is no guarantee that people will return unless there is non-synagogical intervention. So the Reform Movement has to work in partnership with the synagogues and engage them where they are, with the objective of eventual reconnection for as many as possible.

So we return, in the conclusions, to the three thematic areas described above, asking how we might (1) approach flexible membership that reflects how people in the research live their lives; (2) support inspirational leaders who have the ability and resources to be catalysts for renewal; and (3) sustain quality programmes that connect deeply with real interests and concerns.

<sup>1</sup> *Beyond the Synagogue – Report of the Working Group on the "Missing Generation", May 1995, p6*

## 2. D'VAR TORAH - INDIVIDUALITY AND COMMUNITY

*"When a human being mints many coins with the same stamp, all come out identical. Yet the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be God, minted all people in the image of Adam, yet not one of them resembles another."*

Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:5, commenting on Bereishit/Genesis 2:7

There are two stories of the creation of humanity in Bereishit. In the first, man and woman are created together, and in the second – the story of Adam & Chava (Eve) – Adam is created alone, to be joined by Chava when it becomes clear that there is no fitting partner from among the other creatures that inhabit the world. The description of the creation of Adam is breathtaking: God breathes life into the nostrils of this first human being, formed from the earth, in an act of infinite tenderness and beauty. Like so many of the foundational stories of the Torah, it is filled with rich possibilities for interpretation and imagination.

The Rabbis of the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE in the land of Israel, responsible for writing much of the midrash that interprets these texts, were fascinated by the creation stories. They noted the linguistic connection between earth (adamah) and the first human (adam), and in some of the midrashim 'Adam' becomes much more the first 'earthling' than the first man, an extraordinary back-to-back being with both male and female characteristics who will be split in two to make partners who can face each other at last. In others adam is

clearly a man, with woman to follow later. But whichever way it is read, the first human being is created very much alone, and the quote above from the Mishnah tries to understand what we might learn from this about ourselves, our relationships with each other, and our relationship to the universe which we inhabit.

It is here that we find an interpretation which is directly relevant to how we organise as a community, where we place our attention, what we listen and look out for. The Mishnah recognises from the creation story that we hold, simultaneously, deep connections and likeness with one another, and also irreducible uniqueness and individuality. We are all in the image of that first adam, and hence in the image of God, and we all have our own special stories, talents, hopes, and aspirations. Concentrate on one without the other and we miss something fundamentally important about what it is to be fully human. The unique individual without others is bereft of the web of life-giving connections, relationships and community around which Jewish life centres itself. The community, without the diversity and creativity that each person brings, is dry and without soul. The goal of this research report is to hear both perspectives and to treat them as complimentary parts of an indivisible whole. In doing so, I hope that we can find ways of deepening, enlivening, and creating vibrant communities both now and in the future.



### 3. INTRODUCTION

The Reform Movement has long been interested in the experience of “young adults” – often defined as those between the ages of 18-35. The last time that any substantive research was carried out into this question was in 1993, when the RSGB, as was, commissioned a working group to look into the experiences of young adults. A total of 451 people, from all parts of the Jewish community, were interviewed by questionnaire. The group published their findings and recommendations in May 1995 with the results confirming that the majority of people in this age range are not involved in the established programmes, activities, services, and synagogues of the movement. It is perhaps not surprising then that young adults have frequently been labelled in the past as “The Missing Generation”, leading naturally to a question of the form “how can we get such people back involved, to engage them in everything that Reform Judaism has to offer?”

There have been significant changes in both the Jewish community and wider society since we last addressed the question. Already underway in 1995 but now much more marked was a move from people getting married in their early twenties to getting married in their thirties, with a significant number not getting married at all. People now meet their partners at work more than at university, with major implications for social networks since few work in a predominantly Jewish environment. Women are postponing, and more frequently opting out of, marriage and having children much more than in earlier

decades. All of these have significant impact on the experiences, priorities, and lifestyles of young adults as well as those now older than thirty-five who have grown up in recent decades.

Ten years ago the focus of the RSGB was very much on the centrality of informed leadership and organisations – it was leaders who were seen to have the answers rather than the people who make up our wider community. Since then the RSGB has become The Movement for Reform Judaism, with a much greater awareness that we need to start where people are, listen to them, help them to uncover for themselves what they are really thinking and saying and what is important to them. This fundamental shift in priorities and thinking, from organisations first to people first, is articulated in the movement’s 2020 Vision, which highlights the need to engage with the struggle for meaning and purpose, to focus on the individual rather than just institutions, to live with uncertainty and contradictions, to recognise the multiple and varied Jewish journeys travelled, and to reach out to wherever people are on their journey. The range and scope of change requires that we look afresh at the issues, with new questions and through new eyes.

The “missing” label included a fundamental assumption about the life-journey of young adults – that the “natural” cycle of events, for most, is to disengage from community during the years of study, single-hood, and early career development, to be followed by a return later on as people build families

*"We need to start where people are, listen to them, help them to uncover for themselves what they are really thinking and saying and what is important to them"*

and have children of their own. That this age group is "missing" was understood in the context that those who are younger or older are by and large engaged and involved in the community. In this model, the question that was being asked was essentially this: how do we keep people connected and involved in the "missing" years, and ensure that the greatest number possible return to take up involvement in communities when the time finally arrives?

Now, however, the question makes assumptions which may be neither appropriate to the experience of people in this age range, nor perhaps in the best interests of Reform Judaism in the future. What if it is the case that many young adults are not "missing" at all – in the sense of choosing disengagement – but are searching for new, varied, and highly personal ways of engaging with their Jewish identities throughout the period of early adulthood and into later adulthood? What if they are not finding these possibilities anywhere? What if the three to five year gap in involvement has grown to be much

longer, or indeed is not a gap at all but the establishment of the ongoing models which people are using for their Jewish engagement? If this is the case, it would no longer be appropriate to focus our efforts on holding out for an eventual return into our communities. Instead we would need to think about taking the ideas, passions, beliefs, commitments and potential of the Reform Movement out to where people really are, to join them in their journeys.

And so in 2004 a qualitative study was initiated, reflecting the shifts in thinking that have taken place with the aim of engaging a broad cross-section of people from the Reform community and hearing their stories. This report explores the thinking behind the work, analyses the findings, and makes recommendations. The objective is clear - to help us to gain a deeper understanding that will assist in using our available resources more effectively, and to make the case for the deployment of new resources, where appropriate, that will allow us to make a relevant and lasting difference.

## Background Thinking Informing the Research Analysis

This section explores the background trends and thinking which underpin the analysis of the interviews.

### a. Trend-watching in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The past ten to fifteen years have been a time of significant social change in this country, affecting the experiences, priorities and paths chosen by young people as they grow into adulthood. Understanding the nature of these is critical in interpreting the research findings. Some of the themes and ideas underlying and connected with this change, which have been used to inform the analysis of the research which follows, are discussed below.

### b. Technology, Communication, and Highly-Personalised Services

Young people are, as a group, avid consumers of new communications technologies. The massive and ever changing growth of highly personalised experiences, products, information, and services made possible by the explosion in internet access and technology (think amazon.com, the iPod, Google, email, online shopping, mobile phones, text messaging, wireless technology). This reflects a huge growth in the demand for meeting of individual needs, rather than a one-size-fits all imposed structure, as well as experiences of the time poverty of modern life. These latter trends are reflected in a general decline in the membership of formal communal organisations - clubs, political parties, and voluntary organisations in the UK.

### c. New Thinking About Emerging Adulthood

Recent research thinking<sup>1</sup> about the perception and experience of the paths from childhood into adulthood describes an extended period of "emerging adulthood" beginning in the early 20s in which we try out various life possibilities - job, partners, community, friends, living arrangements - with no guarantee of what the outcome might be. It is a period of "trying out various life possibilities and gradually moving towards making enduring decisions"<sup>2</sup>.

Unlike their parents' generation, who were largely born in the post World-War II baby boom, those born in the last 30 years or so have grown up in a society which has increasingly challenged norms and has encouraged the assertion of difference. In a culture of increasing fragmentation, diversity, and competing and disconnected pieces, young adults have developed the skills and attitudes needed to negotiate uncertainty, cultivating a desire to associate and the will to bring about change.<sup>3</sup> Themes which we can identify in this change in thinking and experience include shifts from a sense of known future to a feeling that the future is mostly uncertain; from an early commitment to a specific path through life towards continued experimentation with possibilities; from a job for life to multiple role and career changes; from the strong influence of external forces, tradition, and expectations towards the stronger influence of peers and personal choice. Young adults also increasingly expect services, products, and experience to meet their personal, individual needs.

*"A sense, from many, of not-knowing what they need or want right now, how they expect their lives to unfold, or how they will engage Jewishly at different stages of their lives"*

Some striking themes that connect with the above emerge repeatedly from the research:

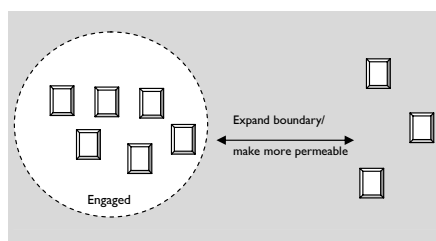
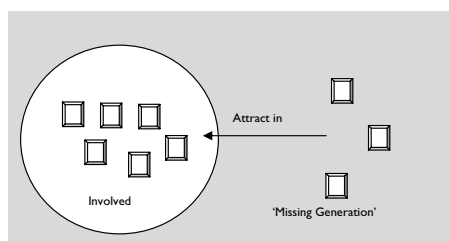
- The importance of social connections – a chosen informal community of family and friends
- The varied choices involved in people’s journeys, thinking and visions for the future
- A sense, from many, of not-knowing – what they need or want right now, how

they expect their lives to unfold, or how they will engage Jewishly at different stages of their lives

Perhaps these should prompt some shifts in the ways in which we think about questions relating to Jewish involvement, community, and identity:

### d. Community-Watching in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Old models	New models
People leave synagogue communities in young adulthood and come back later.	Some journeys will bring people back to established Reform synagogue communities. For others the journey will take them elsewhere – to other established Jewish communities, to no community, or to far more informal, fluid modes of Jewish involvement involving communities-of-choice (family, networks of friends, Limmud, etc) and post-denominational picking-and-choosing among formal communities.
It’s a matter of marketing: The key question is how to market what Reform synagogues do in a way which brings young adults in and keeps them involved	It’s a matter of engagement: being involved in the story of people’s journeys and lives, supporting the emergence of meaning, connection, community, and engagement in ways which reflect the individual and their questions, networks, commitments, concerns, ideals, beliefs.
The life journeys followed by young Jewish adults are mostly very similar in character, as are the journeys of Jewish involvement and engagement.	People forge their identities in emerging adulthood in diverse ways which reflect the huge range of options available to them.
We define and work with people according to the boundaries of existing community. People are either inside the community or are outside it (“missing”) and need to be brought in.	We work wherever people are on their journey, leaning towards them. We recognise that boundaries are necessary, but that they are not absolute or fixed. We meet people where they are and engage with them Jewishly. We cannot know for sure what this will mean until we engage.



<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Jensen Arnett; *Emerging Adulthood – A Theory of Development from Late Teens Through the Twenties*; *American Psychologist*, May 2000 pp 469-480

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p473

<sup>3</sup> Neil Howe and Williams Strauss; *Millennials The Next Great Generation*; *Vintage New York* 2000

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Background

The research project was based on a qualitative, interview-centred approach in order both to balance the quantitative methods employed in the “Missing Generation” report of 1995, and to reflect the emphasis on talking with people in a way that would really help them – and us – to understand their experiences, values, and priorities.

While wanting to interview as broad a cross-section of people as possible, it was important to ensure that meaningful conclusions could be drawn at the end of the project. The research team, led by Rabbi Greg Alexander, worked with sociologist and demographer Professor Steven M. Cohen to determine the research methodology and frame. They also worked with Philip Boxer to design the interview technique to assess the right number and range of interviews to make the results significant.

It was decided to interview thirty people in the 18-35 age group face-to-face, with a further 15-20 in focus groups. In all, some eighty people were spoken to in telephone screening interviews before settling on the final interviewees. All the participants except for one became Bar- or Bat Mitzvah in a Reform synagogue, or were a member at Bar- or Bat-Mitzvah age. This allowed the team to explore the experiences of people connected with the Reform community over the last fifteen to twenty years, to understand what had happened, what was considered important, and why.

The research team was well aware of the effect of the “Observer’s Paradox” – that it is not possible to know how speakers would talk about these issues when they are not being observed. All of the interviewees knew that they were being interviewed by a Jewish interviewer for a Reform Movement project, and this will inevitably have influenced the ways in which people talked about their experiences. This was seen as an opportunity rather than a disadvantage: a significant hope for the research was that it should not be simply an academic exercise. It was assumed that the interviews were themselves a form of outreach – that offering a person a period of time with the right listener, to discuss some of their core values and beliefs, would result in a transforming experience with regards to Jewish meaning and identity. The research team aimed to offer support for the interviewee as well as the interviewer, so that whatever should arise during the course of the interview could be dealt with in a positive and nurturing manner.

### The Interviewees

Of the thirty interviewees, four were aged from 18-22, seven from 23-26, thirteen from 27-30, and four from 31-36. Two were married, four engaged to their partners, five in relationships, and sixteen were single. There were fifteen women and fifteen men, all of whom lived in London: in the April 2001 National Census 259,927 people responded to the voluntary question on religion by ticking the “Jewish” box, 149,789

of these were from London.<sup>1</sup> The intention was, however, that the project could be repeated as needed in any region or synagogue.

The interviewees were chosen, through a telephone screening interview (see Appendix A) to ensure a range of levels of involvement in the Jewish community. Occupations included, among others: under- and post-graduate students, a civil servant, an electrician, a speech and language therapist, an investment banker, a solicitor, some teachers, a web designer, a charity worker, a PA and an office assistant.

The synagogues where interviewees became bar- or bat-mitzvah included North Western (Alyth Gardens), Southgate & District, Wimbledon, Middlesex New, Finchley, Hendon, two smaller communities outside of London, and an Orthodox community.

## The Research Team

The research team of nine people was recruited from the target age group. All had some connection with the Reform movement's youth or young adults work.

None were professional researchers – it was very much in the ethos of the project to use this as an opportunity to engage outstanding individuals who would, at the close of the project, be some of the most informed people in the movement on this age group. They all underwent training and had continued support from the head of research as well as professional research consultants.

The research was conducted by Rabbi Greg Alexander and headed by Judith Williams. Consultative support came from a variety of professionals and leaders, including Philip Boxer, Professor Steven M Cohen, The Assembly of Rabbis, Pete Maginn, Roy Graham, and Angela Gluck-Wood.

## The Interviews

Each interviewee was interviewed twice – the first focussing on the Jewish journey from growing up to the present, while the second asked them to explore their Jewish identity, beliefs, and values, and where they stood on specific social and political issues. See Appendix C for the interview guide.

<sup>1</sup> 2001 National Census Results, Key Statistics KS07

## 5. ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research process produced thousands of pages of interview transcripts and notes, far too much to include in their entirety in this report. This section aims to draw out the common threads, experiences, and thinking which characterise the interview sample – describing what people are actually saying while at the same time preserving as much of the nuance, complexity, and depth as possible.

The nine themes can be grouped together in three main areas:

### A. Identifying with, and connecting to, the Jewish world

1. Being Jewish is an important continuing part of the identity of the majority of interviewees.
2. Jewish involvement centres around informal networks much more than around institutions.
3. Connections with Judaism and Jewish life are highly personal and fluid.

### B. The impact of Jewish leaders, educators, and institutions

4. Rabbis are role models only for some life stages, and inspiring alternatives are hard to find.
5. There is a demand for high-quality Jewish experiences that value people as individuals.
6. Many are confused about what living a Reform Jewish lifestyle would mean for them.

### C. The impact of programmes and activities currently on offer

7. Issues considered important are not often reflected in the established community.
8. Synagogue services are not considered interesting and so interviewees mostly don't attend.
9. Jewish learning is of interest, as long as it is a high-quality experience.

A detailed exploration of the themes follows.

### 1. Being Jewish Is An Important Continuing Part Of My Identity

The stories that unfold through the 30 interviews are striking for the high levels of attachment and positive feeling towards Judaism, Jewish life, community, and Jewish engagement that they show.

*"I think [Judaism] is about what you are. I think even if I was never to go to synagogue again I'd still feel very much Jewish."*  
'Sarah', 27

The interview sample contains people directly reachable by the Reform Movement – those who have been involved at some point in their lives - so we might reasonably expect a bias towards this. It is noticeable however that almost all the interviewees clearly relate to their Judaism with great affection and consider it to be very important in their lives. It is a core component of identity that shapes

*"Almost all the interviewees clearly relate to their Judaism with great affection and consider it to be very important in their lives."*

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questions, responses, personal relationships, and attitudes.

For the vast majority of the interviewees this positive feeling translates directly into some kind of Jewish practice or involvement with others, most commonly around a network of friends or family, often including some kind of Shabbat experience, with occasional visits to synagogues, mostly on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur.

There is a strong sense from many that family experiences, childhood, Bar- and Bat-mitzvah, and a sense of heritage and continuity are pivotal in their feeling of Jewish identity:

*"I like knowing where I come from. I like knowing about my roots. I like the fact that I come from a tradition which is long and rich"* Asher', 35

*"I like the tradition and the rhythm of the week and the month and the year, and the being involved in the past and being connected to other people."* Abigail', 36

The importance of personal experiences and history is a constantly repeating theme in the interviews.

*"When it comes down to it, it's about your family and how your family have taught you, what are the obligations and what are the suggestions or extra parts, and then it comes down to you and are there obligations to being Jewish. It depends on what you feel."* Rachel', 24

## 2. My Jewish Involvement Centres Around Informal Networks

*"[My synagogue]'s not my community any more, I guess, is the easy way to answer that. My community is other people in other ways, like my friends and family."* Rachel', 24

Almost all of the interviewees stress the ongoing importance and centrality of Jewish social and family networks in both their Jewish identity and Jewish practice. For many this involves one or more of a search for a Jewish partner and friends; spending time with like-minded people with shared interests, who happen to be Jewish; or some kind of festival or Shabbat home observance with parents or partners.

*"[Judaism] is very much intertwined with my family and how we do things. So being Jewish and my family are so enmeshed that I don't think I'd be able to separate the other parts."* Jane', 27

*"I still go to my friends', Jewish friends' homes and quite often on a Friday night. They and we in a way still do, have Friday night service."* Josh', 28

The majority of the interviewees make reference to the significance of Jewish friends, and many talk about the importance to them of meeting other people who are Jewish. Only a few of the interviewees report that the majority of their friends are not Jewish.

The importance of family and friends can be seen even more clearly in discussions



*"I think there's something really fascinating about the fact that we are as a generation voluntarily shul hopping."*

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around festivals and Shabbat, particularly Friday nights, which are one area in which Jewish identity is expressed in a way which fits in with the often-reported time constraints of life.

*"It's nice to have a kind of...well, it's nice to be with the family, I think, for everyone and it's a kind of a good time to take a step back from the week and get people you care about around and just kind of enjoy having that and having the tradition of having that, you know, whatever going's on the Friday night, that's when you just take a break and do something proper."* Julian', 23

Those with a non-Jewish partner stress the importance of a shared Shabbat experience as an important focus for their Jewish expression.

*"I enjoy doing it and it makes me, it's about spending time with family, it's making time out from your usual lives, that I know every Friday I'll see my family, even if the week's too busy."* Sarah', 27

*"With [my fiancé] because she's not Jewish I'm thoroughly aware of my religion and so we do do Kiddush, we are involved with the family, we do Friday night dinners for everyone over here, it's a big part of our life and it's almost been forced by the fact that she isn't Jewish."* Michael', 32

### 3. My Connections With Jewish Life Are Highly Personalised And Fluid

In the main, interviewees are looking for modes and types of Jewish engagement that

fit their personal priorities, individual questions, fluid and changing personal situation and very busy life – and they do not frequently find what they are looking for in the offerings of established institutions. They are often quite mobile in their affiliations to communal organisations.

*"My parents paid up [my synagogue membership]. I think they knew that left to my own devices I probably wouldn't join a shul and would be dipping in and out of all kinds and, so they just I think, they just paid it."* Leah', 25

*"Last year we did a shul crawl, about four or five shuls... We were trying to find somewhere that we quite liked, could mess around in, don't get too bored in, felt at home in... [What was important] was the journey rather than arriving."* Male participant in Focus Group 1

*"I think there's something really fascinating about the fact that we are as a generation voluntarily shul hopping. We who been given everything are kind of ditching it and darting around and becoming quite promiscuous in our Jewish identity"* Female participant in Focus Group 2

*"Yeah, it's more conscious now... I feel I can really make decisions and also engage with the kind of the little details, not just the kind of big labels that am I Orthodox or Reform or Masorti"* Leah', 25

Time pressures are a huge factor in decisions about how to engage:

*"But you know I've got a job... I work from 9, I get home about 7.30. Even if I wanted*

*"Many of the interviewees describe deeply meaningful, positive, and influential contact with their Rabbis."*

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*to go to Shul I wouldn't be able to get there on a Friday night until half way through the service ... I can't think of anything that would make me come home from work and want to go out again."* Andrew', 29

*"There's not much time for anything literally, apart from seeing my friends and that type of thing, but not for any sort of specific set thing."* Rachel', 24

For the majority there is little sense that they currently see themselves moving back into organised long-term synagogue communities – they find their community among friends and family.

*"It's too expensive really. I suppose I could afford it if I wanted to but I just don't prioritise it"* Matthew', 24

*"I think communities have a lifespan... once a community hits middle age it stops growing. When you go back... you act in a slightly different way because you regress a little... Sometimes you just need to start afresh and get involved and excited in a place where you're not known as the kid who picked his nose at cheder."* Male participant in Focus Group 2

A minority of interviewees are members of synagogues, some because they needed to have membership in order to get married, with a handful who are actively involved.

*"I've not been a member very long, just a month or two. It feels... it's nice to know that it's my community now. It feels good to belong"* Noah', 27

*"I like [name of Reform shul] at the moment because it's familiar and it's maybe what*

*I've missed in not being a member of a Synagogue, but I can imagine in a couple of years time I'll start getting bored with the same old shul stuff, and I'll want something different."* Noah', 27

Others are involved because of connection with a community of friends or with a secure "vertical" community of different ages:

*"When we go to shul on a Saturday morning, more often than not it's because we're going back to somebody for lunch afterwards or somebody's coming back to us for lunch afterwards."* Abigail', 36, now a member of a non-Reform synagogue

*"It feels, there's something about having a service in a Synagogue that feels secure, that you don't necessarily get in a Reform Chavurah service, which has a kind of, I don't, a temporary feeling about it. It's sort of a group of people that have got together to have a really nice service and then will disappear and having nothing to do with your life afterwards."* Noah', 27

#### 4. Reform Rabbis Are Role Models At Certain Points On My Life Journey

Many of the interviewees describe deeply meaningful, positive, and influential contact with their Rabbis in connection with major life events – childhood, bar- and bat-mitzvah, weddings, bereavement:

*"He was very kind and supportive and interested in me, us. And a friend. He had kids who were my age. ... a very good role*

*"I think the whole young adult thing is so weird. It's like, we're adults, we're people too..."*

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*model, a nice person to feel was leading the community. He was challenging, as well... I didn't always necessarily agree with him, but I always was interested to hear what he had to say and liked to be challenged by him."* Alison', 28

*"I mean, I liked going to shul for my bar mitzvah. I loved our rabbi."* Susannah', 29

*"I felt like he [her Rabbi] knew me because I did feel like, that I'd grown up and that he'd known me since I was little, so he sort of, he had that kind of personal interest in what I was doing and how I was doing it. So there was a nice feeling about that."* Deborah', 23

*"He was the one who told me my dad died, he married my sister, he bat mitzvah'd me, he bat mitzvah'd my sister, did he baby bless me? Quite possibly... Yeah he's my Rabbi."* Jane', 27

*"He was a great. Like he was around but I never sort of discussed it but when it came to like the funeral and the shivah, it was really good to have him around, I think."* Rachel', 24

A number of interviewees talk very positively about the effect of the personal contact from a particular Reform chaplain when students – a real sense of positive connection and support. Others feel a positive connection to what they see as a younger, innovative type of Rabbi now graduating from Leo Baeck College:

*"In terms of people who were a Jewish influence on me, the first one who came to mind was [name] who's now in fact a Rabbi,*

*ordained about eight months ago now. And he was an interesting person because he was probably the first religious Reform Jew who I had any contact with... So it was very interesting to have a role model who was Reform in that he questioned his practices but religious in that he took it very seriously and tried to keep as many practices and commandments as he could, insofar as they were meaningful to him."* Asher', 35

*"I'm kind of excited about the new Rabbis that are coming through the college and what's going to happen in ten or fifteen years"* Female participant in Focus Group 1

Most had, and expect, little regular contact with synagogue rabbis as adults. Very few would feel comfortable to meet their Rabbi to discuss a major issue, or questions about God:

*"I would probably speak, to be honest, to somebody who's a bit more frum"* [regarding questions about God] Michael', 32

*"I mean now what I look for in a Rabbi in terms of, would be somebody who I felt sympathetic to and who I frankly liked listening to when they spoke. So somebody who I felt intellectually stimulating"* Asher', 35

*"[In America] a Rabbi isn't just somebody that leads the community in Shabbat services, but is somebody who is really a partner and a teacher there."* Participant in Focus Group 1

*"what I'm trying to say is that I think we've got a dearth of inspirational Rabbis at the moment I don't think that I'm particularly*

*inspired by either Rabbi at the two shuls that I belong to and I can't remember the last time that I was wowed by one."* 'Andrew', 29

*"I really appreciate having people who are warmer... the fact that Rabbis might make an effort with you and actually get to know you. Quite a revolutionary idea. I've only ever been phoned up by my [Reform] community Rabbi twice. I once got home from work after my birthday and on the answer-phone [my former Rabbi of an Orthodox community] had sung happy birthday... It's a personal touch... and it really makes a difference."* Female participant in Focus Group 2

*"I want to talk to someone about it all. I've got questions that need answering, I've got things that I want to talk to people that I like to think I can look up to as a spiritual role model and I don't have that in my life. That's what is missing right now, to tell you the truth, right there you don't have someone like that Greg bloke, wicked guy, people like that you could just sit down and they've got all of that knowledge and experience and can talk with you."* 'Saul', 24

## 5. I Want High-Quality Jewish Experiences That Don't Treat Me As A Statistic

A number of interviewees report a strong dislike of generalised labels and the tendency to lump people together in this way as if they all had the same needs:

*"this sort of obsession with young people and what's the cut off for young people and there needs to be something directly at*

*whatever, 18 to 30 or 18 to 40 year olds, I think might be sort of leading people in the wrong direction a bit."* 'Alison', 28

*"I think the whole young adult thing is so weird. It's like, we're adults, we're people too..."* Female participant in Focus Group 1

There is strong a resistance to simplistic packaged solutions:

*"I sometimes find the kind of stuff that Reform does to try and appeal to me and draw me in distracting and slightly irritating".* Female participant in Focus Group 2

*"If I want to go to a bar, I will go to a bar with friends. I'm old enough. I don't need to be tricked into thinking ooh it's a cool bar in London, that's really cool."* Male participant in Focus Group 1

*"There's been a lot of faddishness, lots of... how can we market this and sell it and get young people to come along... Instead of the constant re-branding of things and 'here's a new logo' because it looks cool... It's a religion, a tradition, not a marketing exercise".* Female participant in Focus Group 1

A number of interviewees talk about not knowing exactly what they want from their involvement in the community:

*"I'm probably less religious than I was about 5 years ago and I think that's a lot to do with ... having to make more choices about my time and doing things and stuff which I'm sad about. ... just find it really difficult to make decisions as to how I spend my time. One half of me is really connected and thinks a Jewish book group – brilliant, amazing. I would like to do it, whatever.*

*"If it's really good, I'll drive there. If it's rubbish I'm not going to bother even if it's next door"*

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*But the other half thinks, what, that evening? What am I going to have to give up – what am I going to miss?" Jane', 27*

Where clear ideas about forms of involvement are expressed they are very often connected to the communities-of-choice described previously – meaningful experiences that authentically engage with the network of Jewish connections among which people are finding their place and Jewish meaning:

*"[My successful Jewish film club] was something different because at least it was an actual genuine activity that people were doing and it was an activity that had intrinsic value... The way that it was kept relatively interesting was that we did it with friends of friends, it was never advertised, it was always done by word of mouth..." Asher', 35*

*"[discussing a possible weekend trip for young adults] You want to be going with a couple of friends... It's not that I'm not open to meet new people but... to be honest, time is precious really. Weekends are precious." Female participant in Focus Group 1*

*"If you want to take time off you probably want to take time off with friends, family, boyfriends, husbands, or whatever it is. You don't, you might not want to go off on a trip with people you don't know". Female participant in Focus Group 2*

*"The good thing about the Reform Chavurah was that it was a mixture of people that were asked to come... and a bunch of people that were there because they knew each other. Lots of people had spent so much time in that room that it felt like their lounge*

*anyway, so you know you felt comfortable in the space." Female participant in Focus Group 1*

Many had powerful and hugely influential experiences in RSY-Netzer, and do not find any way of engaging in the community that resonates with or builds on this

*"I think there are a lot of people our age who... are burnt out. They did RSY, they did all the leadership stuff, and then there's no support for them after they did that then it just goes pow... They have their little circle of Jewish friends and become leaders in that, but that's it". Female participant in Focus Group 1*

The common themes expressed about desired forms of engagement include activities which are 'genuine' with an intrinsic meaning and value beyond simply getting together.

*"I hear 'social action' and I just think of something that's been created specially for people to feel like they're doing something, like clearing a path of leaves – that sort of thing... I'd do social action if I felt I was having an impact, not just to feel good" Female participant in Focus Group 1*

*"obviously it would be social as well, but it's got real purpose to it – not just for the hell of it" Female participant in Focus Group 1*

*"It's good that the RSGB is supporting people in this Jewish theme to go up to Edinburgh for the [G8 demonstration] on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. There are times in people's lives when you really want to do something... I think that's the kind of stuff that people want." Female participant in Focus Group 1*

*"Reform Judaism seems to be ... an attitude of caring about tradition whilst trying to be honest about what's relevant and meaningful to people today..."*

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... that engage with 'who I am, not who you think I am', with my struggle and paradoxes

*"I think people [in the Reform Movement] are listening to the wrong things... People who go out and do focus groups will go and ask young adults what they think and then they come away and make up what they think young adults want."* Female participant in Focus Group 1

... and that are of high quality, which compete effectively with the many other high quality options available.

*"[It's got to be] good, and it's high calibre, and it's guaranteed some kind of quality experience... and that would reinforce me going – it's much more likely to happen. I think the more professional things are the more you take them seriously."* Female participant in Focus Group 1

*"It's what it is in the end. If it's really good, I'll drive there. If it's rubbish I'm not going to bother even if it's next door".* Female participant in Focus Group 2

There were a wide range of possibilities that interviewees described as interesting as long as they are high quality enough to compete with other activities on offer, including film, theatre, learning, Limmud, lunchtime events in central London, meals, travel in Europe and Israel, social networking, chavurot, books, music, clubbing, discussions, panel debates, and top-class speakers.

One interviewee captured a sense of frustration that efforts to engage young adults so often fail:

*"It just seems like we haven't crossed the brink of our generation being considered important enough... It's a risk, it's a big risk, because you might invest in it and we don't take up... But if you don't take the chance then the older generation are going to be very happy seeing their 1880's German tunes in English liturgy... and the Reform movement will last as long as they do".* Male participant in Focus Group 2

## 6. I Am Confused About What Living A Reform Jewish Lifestyle Would Mean For Me

Some interviewees connect themselves to "Reform" because they're passionate about what they feel it stands for – particularly around issues of ethical responsibility, egalitarianism, quality of intent and observance rather than quantity, and finding a way to be Jewish in the modern world.

*"I like the fact that it's much more inclusive.... I like the progressive nature of it... the studying and learning and questioning and that kind of thing and that's what appeals to me."* Aaron', 24

*"Reform Judaism seems to be ... an attitude of caring about tradition whilst trying to be honest about what's relevant and meaningful to people today... Within the Reform movement there are people who I would describe as religious and there are certainly quite a number of Reform Jews who are much, much more religious than certain or many nominally Orthodox Jews."* Asher', 35

Many are, however, confused about what "Reform" means, and define themselves in this way because of their family history, or

*"I think that there needs to be something deeper, kind of connecting people to their Judaism."*

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because they are not orthodox. A number called on the Reform Movement to taking a firm stand on religious issues:

*"I think my fear is that within the Reform movement that there's a sort of tendency to go to the lowest common denominator, rather than to try and raise expectations and to sort of push people. ...I understand that you don't want to alienate people and you certainly wouldn't want people to feel that they weren't accepted...But at the same time to just say that everything is okay and that it's all fine, to me is a bit of a cop out..."`Alison', 28*

*"A lot of the people that I know who've moved away, actually would like more intensity to their Judaism for them to want to stay within the Reform movement."`Abigail', 36*

*"Non-Orthodox Rabbis from my experience are very wary of pushing anything, and in a way I want to be pushed a bit... My old Orthodox Rabbi has recently come back into my life. He was like, 'Right, we're going to have a non-denominational service in your house to put up your mezuzahs'" and he was really happy to invite your Reform Rabbi, whoever you want. He was really pushing me... I love it, it's fantastic, and he's so nice and it's exactly what I want".*  
Group 1

Many look for, and don't find, "authenticity" among leaders of the movement – finding instead avoidance of important issues, avoidance of tough questions about God, avoidance of questions of meaning . A number describe their experience of Reform Judaism as "fuzzy thinking":

*"What I was looking for, wasn't there, it's not to be a junior member of a synagogue council, it's not to continue kind of hanging on to the remains of the youth movement ... I don't know where there is the Jewish community within the Reform movement that even now would fulfil my needs. I'd love to think that the Reform movement could flourish and develop and become more challenging" `Abigail', 36*

*"The Reform thing was always... a bit woolly and a bit unclear."`Abigail', 36*

*"I think that there needs to be something deeper, kind of connecting people to their Judaism. I think this is a bit, I think it's superficial at the moment and I think that if the Reform community wants to grow or at least maintain and to engage, then they need to give people something deeper to connect to."`Leah', 25*

*"I think it's confused, I think the Reform movements confused about where it wants to go. Consequently, I'm confused about where I want to go."`Matthew', 24*

## **7. I Feel Strongly About Issues That Aren't Reflected Or Explored By The Established Community**

Interviewees were asked their opinions on Rabbis conducting same-sex marriages or blessings, interfaith marriages or blessings, and on Israel. Their responses often show striking differences from the "official" positions of the established community.

*"Most of the interviewees feel a significant level of interest and emotional attachment to Israel, along with a deepening confusion about the complexities, paradoxes, morality, and outcomes of the current conflict and violence."*

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### Same Sex Marriages or Blessings

Twenty-one of the interviewees were asked if they would support Rabbis carrying out same-sex marriages or blessings. 17 said yes (80%), 4 said no (20%).

*"I definitely think so. I really, really do. It's a Jewish home, it's a couple who want to commit themselves, openly commit themselves to each other. If there are going to be children then they will be Jewish children. No, I really don't have a problem with that. I think quite the opposite I think. That should be very much encouraged. I wouldn't call it a marriage but a sort of commitment ceremony or whatever you want to call it, then yes definitely"* Alison', 28

*"I think if two people love each other and show commitment to each other, I don't see any reason why they shouldn't be able to marry. I'm not quite sure how that can be accommodated within Jewish tradition but, if it can, it should be"* Asher', 35

*"When there are issues around homosexuality and things, I think 'oh come on'. 'Jane', 27*

### Interfaith Marriages and Blessings

Eighteen of the interviewees were asked if Rabbis should perform interfaith marriages or blessings. Nine people said yes (50%), nine said no (50%)

*"[Synagogues] are hitting their heads against brick walls trying to get everyone back into synagogues and yet they turn away people who genuinely want to be involved. They might not be Jewish but they've decided to bring up their kids Jewish because the other one is, and yet they're*

*not encouraging them which is ridiculous"*  
Female participant in Focus Group 2

There are not necessarily opportunities for open discussions of attitudes and beliefs around these issues:

*"Reform Communities are not open to marginal members such as inter-married couples, same sex partners, single members – of which we have quite a few, or you can add on single parents, whatever."*  
participant in Focus Group 1

*"one of my most unsettling experiences was at my synagogue, they were having a discussion on whether there should be some kind of commitment ceremony for...this was, I suppose I must have been about seventeen or eighteen, and I do remember some really depressing views by some people there, which surprised me. I didn't expect it from some people who were giving it and from that."* Aaron', 24

### Israel

Most of the interviewees feel a significant level of interest and emotional attachment to Israel, along with a deepening confusion about the complexities, paradoxes, morality, and outcomes of the current conflict and violence.

*"I'd really like it if ... my branch of Judaism took a kind of strong stand on Israel and Zionism... in terms of justice and modern values and not necessarily the values that we had when people were thinking about inventing states a hundred years ago but what it means now. And to really reclaim that whole ideology so that it becomes the kind of modern progressive idea that it was in the first place, and that now seems out*



*"It sounds awful, but I do switch off when I go to synagogue. And that's probably because I can't read Hebrew and I find it very difficult to follow the service."*

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*dated and imperialist and whatever. I'd like that. But I also think if we did it it would alienate a lot of people in my community, in my family, because they don't see the world the same way I do."* Noah', 27

*"I can't talk about it without getting quite sort of worked up and upset about it... I don't really know what to think about it and what is the right solution and what will work in the long term and who to trust and who to believe."* Alison', 28

*"I'm deeply annoyed at the bad press it gets and the pro-Arabist press that it gets here. I'm also frustrated at the belligerence of some of the secular policies. It is a secular society that also happens to be the Jewish state. I think that it has mistreated, to a certain extent, the Palestinians. But equally, I think that the surrounding Arab nations have. I think they're in a really horrible predicament. And I think that this is deeply divisive."* Tony', 28

*"I've become very defensive all of a sudden. I've always, since, I mean the trouble's been going on ever since I can remember and I've always been very much on – I've never been pro Israel or pro – you know I've always thought that both sides were as bad as each other. And actually I've now just thought that was me just saying the right thing and now I think I'm quite pro Israel. I'm not saying that they haven't done no wrong, because they quite obviously have done a lot wrong. But I'm quite angry about the way that they've been treated... so I'm quite pro Israel now and I will speak out quite passionately"* Sarah', 27

There is a recurring theme around the need for, and the lack of, safe space in the

organised community to really engage with and discuss the complexities and discomfort in an open way:

*"you sometimes feel that you need to kind of toe a certain line, you need to prove your credentials as a real supporter of Israel, the slightest word against Israel is kind of very dangerous and risky for you to do that."* Richard', 23

*"when I used to live at home and read the JC and I was so disgusted by, you I used to throw it away. So I don't try to do it any more, raise my blood pressure too much. And the thing about the JC, if I can continue I mean apparently everyone in the world is trying to kill us, and Israel apparently is beyond reproach and you can read that in every article in the JC. Which is, neither are true so"* Matthew', 24

### God, Meaning, and Purpose

The desire to engage and explore deep questions of meaning and spirituality is frequently expressed by interviewees. Many might appear to be primarily "ethnic" Jews from their observable practice, but they often have big questions about their purpose as Jews.

*"I think we do have a purpose. To keep the traditions going from generation to generation as a set of beliefs and values that I see have stemmed from my Judaism, you know, everything from, I give tzedakah, tikkun olam, improving the world. And I do charity work. I go and help the homeless. I'd be kind to my neighbour. You know, all, everything I live by and I think it's important that we live by that and set an example to people."* Natasha', 27

... and about religion, God and meaning:

*"sermons and stuff, [were] very much more on a human level or about human things that were going on, or about doing things or about... never really about G-d's role in that. What a shame. I kind of get the sense that they're a bit worried to mention it if in case it scares anyone off."* Jane', 27

*"I know that God is all around, and he or she or whatever God is, does hear us, and I definitely believe in God, I think there is a God, yes."* Gabrielle', 24

*"I'm not really sure that prayer is really, was ever really meant to be about to God. I think it's about the individual and about, about the kind of finding something within themselves, finding the divine within themselves, kind of a personal thing. I don't really think God needs our prayers, so something different. But I believe in God."* Leah', 25

*"I do pray outside of Synagogue and always every Friday night when we do the Shabbat candles but it's something that I wish our Shul had done. Like we say the Shabbat candles and then we have a personal prayer before we say Amen"* Jane', 27

*"I question it a lot, but I will still pray to G-d even at the points where I'm questioning which makes me think that there's some part of me always that believes in G-d, and I wish I could entirely believe in G-d but at times I feel a bit lost..."* Rachel', 24

## 8. I Don't Find Synagogue Services Interesting And I Mostly Don't Attend

As discussed in Theme 1, most of the people interviewed do make an appearance at a synagogue at some point in the year, usually for Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, which is considered an important yearly experience. A handful report going to synagogue more often than this.

The rest of the interviewees, a significant majority, generally have a positive attitude towards synagogue services, but this is often nostalgic rather than reflecting active current involvement:

*"Yeah, it's amazing to walk into the Synagogue and everyone knows who you are. To be a key player. When I go now, people know who I am historically, apart from the few younger families who wouldn't know who I was. But at one point, I was a key figure. Where has it gone, and why has it gone?"* Jane', 27

Regarding more regular involvement, however, there is for many a strong sense of guilt – I should go rather than I want to go – which rarely motivates attendance:

*"Sometimes I feel like I want to be more involved in wanting to go to synagogue rather than feeling that I have to get up on a Saturday morning and why is it such a chore to go to synagogue?"* Lisa', 26

The reasons, for most, that they do not come to shul are simple – either they don't know enough to feel engaged:

*"it sounds awful, but I do switch off when I go to, when I sit in synagogue. I do tend to switch off. And that's probably because I can't read Hebrew and I find it very difficult to follow the service."* Gabrielle', 24

*"Many interviewees have a sense that their Jewish learning is frozen at bar/bat-mitzvah age, so they do not know enough about Jewish observance or thinking to make informed choices."*

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Or they don't find them interesting, inspiring, vibrant, egalitarian, accessible, relevant or varied enough:

*"With Reform Jews, the Synagogue really is the focal point. And if that focal point doesn't work out, you're not quite sure how to get back in again."* Michael, 32

*"I'm starting to find the service in Reform, in my particular shul, quite stale, a bit soulless, a bit dead."* Female participant in Focus Group 1

*"[In the Reform experience I want] everything is egalitarian, things are engaging and vibrant, everybody wants to be part of the community on exactly the same level... I don't feel the shul I grew up in gave me a Reform experience. It was called a Reform Synagogue... but it's stale, uninspiring".* Female participant in Focus Group 1

*"But the synagogue services, sorry, don't even get me started. I just, it's not for me. It's not, it's not personal. I can't relate to it, I can't get involved in it, I can't, can't relate to it."* Natasha, 27

*"Well, just like much more open, much more flexible and open to change. As I said before, there's just nothing there that feels like they would let you be involved in it and make a difference in terms of the way a service is conducted. It's all just kind of stuck in one kind of structure at the moment."* Elaine, 27

*"The issues we face, about [services] being stuff and old and not changing is very much*

*a generational thing... The older generation doesn't seem to be letting go any more.. they just don't seem to be letting [new] things come in."* Female participant in Focus Group 2

*"I am definitely looking for somewhere I feel more of a community. In Israel their shuls are just completely different – everybody's singing and even in New York... it's the most amazing shuls, you go there and you think why haven't we got it?"* Female participant in Focus Group 1

## 9. I'm Interested In Learning As Long As It Is A High Quality Experience

Many interviewees – even those who have had significant involvement in the organised community - have a sense that their Jewish learning is frozen at bar/bat-mitzvah age, so they do not know enough about Jewish observance or thinking to make informed choices.

*"I have a very poor level of Hebrew reading and a very poor level of ability to participate in services, and I think I have now a fair amount of frustration towards the Reform education that I received... the end product is that I can't participate in a service that I now want to be able to participate in, which now strikes me as wrong"* Abigail, 36

Some would like the opportunity to learn now – a range of options from "catch up on your Judaism" through to more advanced learning are discussed. Quality is the key theme – regardless of whether we are talking about basic or more advanced

learning. Great teachers, people known in the wider world, teachers from different denominations within the Jewish community, engaging speakers, rigour and high-quality programmes all make a difference to the attractiveness and relevance of learning opportunities.

Limmud is mentioned by some, and always in unreservedly positive terms. With its wide range of options, and the ability for attendees to fluidly move among sessions, denominations, and issues that interest them, it fits very naturally the themes of fluidity, choice, and desire to engage in multiple ways that are discussed in the earlier themes.

*"Limmud clearly works because it's a quality product which appeals"* Male participant in Focus Group 1

*"I think it offers a huge amount... It gave me the opportunities to kind of look beyond*

*what I knew and to challenge what I'd experienced ... It gave me new insight in figuring what I loved about Judaism so I think there is something very interesting... about what choices you make at Limmud because it's so based on choices... Going and listening to very Orthodox Rabbis talking about controversial issues that maybe I've already had a very strong opinion on but being prepared to challenge my opinions."* 'Abigail', 36

## 6. CONCLUSION

We know from the research sample that people who have had some ongoing connection with Jewish life since Bar- or Bat- Mitzvah tend to value their Jewishness; that they organise themselves in shifting networks of friends and family, within which many of their significant experiences, both Jewish and not, happen; that many don't find what they are looking for, if they are even able to articulate what this is, within our formal institutions; and that they are wary of packaged solutions to "pull them back in".

We can make a reasonable assumption, based upon other research and thinking which are referenced in this report, that people who have not had so much ongoing Jewish involvement still share many characteristics that relate to life in this country – in particular the experience of self-organising networks of friends and family, rather than formal institutions, through which their significant experiences take place. These people will, of course, have a lower level of Jewish content, or none at all, in their lives and may not have expressed a desire for more.

For some people in both groups, the struggle to find and explore questions of meaning and purpose in their lives will be of increasing importance. For others the most important theme is that of social connection with others. Anecdotal evidence suggests that fluidity, uncertainty, and changing networks is becoming an experience shared increasingly by people in other age groups in the community as

well – so any assumptions that we 'know' that young people will choose in the future to re-join organised community institutions in great numbers are open to question.

We know that our formal institutions are vitally important – synagogues and organised communities carry out very much needed and valuable work, and they are the cornerstone around which the Jewish community as a whole has organised itself structurally, financially, and spiritually. This continues to be important both now and in the future. We also know that they cannot reach everybody – our research indicates clearly that many of those who have a positive attitude towards synagogues in principle find themselves 'outside' without a clear feeling that they want to be back 'inside', certainly for now.

The research directs us towards understanding a model of community that is made up of emerging and shifting connections which arise and fade to meet the needs, concerns, and aspirations of the people involved. Instead of community simply as formal, structured institutions, this becomes community as a living system which responds to and is created by those within it. It reflects the way in which many people now experience their lives, particularly in big cities, and draws resources from it.

In this kind of living community networks shift and change, some lasting for many years and others only a few days. Most importantly, where connections are made

*"It involves listening, learning, and co-creating what happens with people, rather than directing them to particular solutions, programmes, and packages."*

between Jewish people, and between smaller networks and the wider community, these combine to make up a whole that touches many more than a formally-organised set of institutions can do alone. We are mindful that a self-sustaining community must be one that, as well as being vibrant, is one which can support itself financially in the long term. This is one of the many reasons why connecting up formal institutions in the network is so important.

One interesting and relevant feature of living systems, made up of many interconnections in which connections can arise as needed, is that they can become self-organising and self-sustaining. In the right conditions they exhibit a property known as emergence, in which they are able to take on new, novel, and vibrant forms to respond to the needs of those within them and the wider context in which they find themselves. Richard Pascale describes some of the steps needed to enable this in *Surfing the Edge of Chaos*<sup>6</sup> which examines how these principles have been successfully used to foster significant growth, change, and sustainability in both voluntary and community organisations and in huge corporations. In contrast to knowing all the answers, leading from the centre, and attempting to social-engineer people into involvement in programmes, Pascale argues that living systems can be sustained and enriched in three key ways that allow changes to emerge. It is interesting to note how these suggestions fit in with the goals and aspirations for the

community which were described previously:

**1. Giving real choice to individuals** – in our case the people who we want to engage with. It involves listening, learning, and co-creating what happens with people, rather than directing them to particular solutions, programmes, and packages. This resonates most closely with themes identified in the research around how people identify with, and connect to, the Jewish world.

**2. Encouraging rich communications between people to form connected networks** – richer connections enable new possibilities and ways of organising to emerge from those within the networks. This involves focusing our attention on supporting, creating, and facilitating social and other connections between people, groups, families, and existing institutions. This connects with themes identified in the research around the impact of Jewish leaders and educators.

**3. Enriching people and their connections to spark further evolution** – in our case through facilitators, educators, activity, and learning, working with people where they are. What is 'enriching' is determined both by the aspirations we have for the communities we want to sustain, and by what people need - it encompasses the full range of possibilities from social to

*"We are, here, committing to putting our resources and energy into supporting forms of Jewish community that can take on a life and an energy of their own."*

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learning to Jewish practice to engaging with big questions. This connects with themes from the research around the impact of programmes and activities that might be created.

Central to Pascale's idea of emergence are the twin roles of discomfort – which motivates the search for change – and vision, which provides an overall direction as well as the energy for connection and change. The discomfort here comes from the individual struggle to find meaning, connection, purpose and relationship in a shifting and fragmented world. The vision – that of a vibrant, self-sustaining and self-renewing Jewish community that addresses these questions.

It is the intention that this research report should lead to concrete, practical programmes of action which support and sustain the kind of growth, change, and sustainability of community described above. It may be useful, in such programmes, to consider the three thematic areas described by the research. We might ask (1) how might we enable people in choosing to identify with, and

connect to, their Jewish identity and the Jewish community? Are there models of flexible membership to consider, in conjunction with the synagogues, which might be appropriate? (2) How do we support inspirational leaders, facilitators and educators who have the ability and resources to connect people together, deepen those connections, and act as catalysts for renewal? (3) What kinds of approaches and programmes will 'spark further evolution' by connecting deeply with the real interests and concerns of the people we work with?

We are, here, committing to putting our resources and energy into supporting forms of Jewish community that can take on a life and an energy of their own. We cannot know precisely what form this will take but we do know that we want a vibrant Jewish community to be. The Movement for Reform Judaism is in a unique position to make a difference here – without dogma, and with openness, flexibility, and a commitment to the Jewish journey.

<sup>6</sup> Pascale, R., Milleman M., Gioja L.; *Surfing the Edge of Chaos*; Three Rivers Press, New York; 2000

**RESPONSES**



## RESPONSE - PROF. STEVEN M. COHEN

The Sh'ma, the prayer which is often described as the central credo of Judaism, contains the following lines from Deuteronomy in its first paragraph: "Let these matters that I command you today be upon your heart. *Teach them thoroughly to your children.*" For about as long as Judaism has been around, Jews (and God Himself, it appears) have been concerned about the commitment of the next generation. In our own time as well, middle-aged Jews all over the world — whether in the UK, the US, Israel, or elsewhere — share this concern. To be sure, worrying about whether – and how – the next generation will be engaged in Jewish life is neither ill-founded nor ill-advised. It may, in fact constitute an effective defense mechanism, what some might call, a "self-denying prophesy." That is, as long as older Jews worry about the Jewish commitment of their young adult children, we can be assured of Jewish continuity from one generation to the next.

It in this historic and contemporary context that we can understand the genesis of this report on Jews under 35 raised in the UK Reform movement. Its findings can also be placed in context. Specifically, the sentiments and beliefs of those Jews studied in this report can be seen and illuminated by comparing this research with other policy-oriented research elsewhere, particularly the United States which enjoys a fairly extensive social science research tradition in the study of contemporary Jewry. One of the striking features of this research in the UK is that many of the findings here resemble those reported for Jews in the US and other countries, a

circumstance that enhances our understanding of these findings and augments their credibility. At the same time, more subtle distinctions between young adult British Jews and their counterparts elsewhere suggest implications for policies aimed at targeting this particular generation of British youth.

I. In parallel with the Jews of the United States and elsewhere, these Jewish young people in the UK vigorously attest to the importance that being Jewish holds for them. They claim high levels of attachment and commitment, even when not buttressed by significant visible and active involvement. They recognise that they are navigating personal Jewish journeys over their life course, no matter how involved or uninvolved they are with Jewish activities at the moment.

What are we to make of these claims? On the one hand, these Jews are unencumbered by much of the ambivalence and discomfort that characterized their parents' or grandparents' generations. It seems that young Jews are no longer uneasy with their Jewish identity, and they no longer feel the need to hide it from their non-Jewish associates. On the other hand, these Jews' undeniable claims that their Jewish identity is salient, important or deeply felt are no guarantee that they as individuals do or will act upon it. After all, large numbers of Jews with only tangential connections to other Jews or to Jewish communal institutions, even inter-married Jews, maintain strong, positive feelings about being Jewish. Yet their actions contribute neither to Jewish

*"These Jews' undeniable claims that their Jewish identity is salient, important or deeply felt are no guarantee that they as individuals do or will act upon it."*

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communal life nor to the perpetuation of Judaism by way of raising or educating Jewish children. And thus, these reports of widespread and deeply felt subjective engagement with being Jewish must be seen by policymakers only as an opportunity for action, and not as a warrant for complacency.

II. This study also reveals that young adult Jews are not particularly attached to synagogues, Reform Judaism or rabbis (that is, now, as opposed to their childhood years). This finding, though expected, is nevertheless quite possibly portentous. The lack of enthusiasm for Jewish institutions and their leaders is also part of a wider global phenomenon characterizing Jews and non-Jews alike. Jews in Israel, for example, have become both less fully encompassed by and attached to political parties. Jews in the United States have grown less enthusiastic about their denominational identities (as Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox) and about their once-regnant institutions, be they Jewish federations or such fraternal organisations as B'nai B'rith. These trends parallel those in the larger society. As Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* documents, Americans have been withdrawing from all sorts of institutions – from labour unions to churches to political parties – for decades, in trends reflecting those found elsewhere in the West as well.

The retreat from institutional involvement is a phenomenon deserving of serious attention. Perhaps more than other religious groups, Judaism has historically relied upon a complex variety of institutions to build and express community and to shape and transmit identity. The anti-institutional forces among the larger society, among Jews in general, and among younger Jews in

particular, are therefore particularly worrisome. It's one thing for Jews to shift allegiances from one institution to another, as they have for time immemorial. It is quite another matter if they leave institutions altogether in favour of informal networks and fluid circles of family members and friends.

Now, to some extent, this pattern is to be entirely anticipated in this age group. Part of the reason for the aversion to institutions, Jewish and otherwise, among young adults, Jewish and otherwise, is that institutional involvement most strongly appeals to married people with children. In particular, Jewish institutions primarily attract in-married Jewish parents with children 8-13 years old (the pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah years). Accordingly, the aversion of young, largely unmarried Jews to institutions may reflect a transient life-cycle phase destined to evaporate in time. The growth in number of unmarried young adults, and the longer years they are remaining unmarried means that many more Jews are spending time detached from Jewish institutions. Patterns of detachment always have the potential to become more enduring, and they undoubtedly impede efforts to encourage in-marriage. But this anti-institutionalism may also portend a deeper, long-lasting cultural shift that will result in weaker patterns of affiliation and support for Jewish institutions in the years ahead. In any event, organised Jewry would be well-advised to invest in building connections, experiences, and institutions with this age group to avoid these undesirable consequences.

Notwithstanding their reservations about Jewish institutions, denominations, and ideologies, young Jewish adults — be they in the UK as we learn here, or in the US as

we learn elsewhere – nevertheless continue to seek out, or at least be receptive to, engaging Jewish experiences. Some of the key ingredients of how to appeal to them have been noted in this report. They include:

- High-quality — an ambiguous term to be sure, but still important in an age where Jewish programming enjoys a dubious reputation; and
- Customised recruitment – personal invitations to exercise one’s personal talents, in a personally meaningful way; and,
- Jewish learning – a way to further one’s growth as a Jew and pursue one’s individualized “Jewish journey” in a communal context.

With this said, the report also contains evidence of other particular opportunities – and obstacles – that might well be apparent only to a sympathetic outsider. For example, these Jews remain extraordinarily embedded in Jewish family and friendship circles. As we know from other research, they live in relatively close proximity to other Jews. These informal ties among young adult Jews are an asset that can be drawn upon, but they also need nurturing and attention. Policies, programs, or practices that serve to bring these informally connected Jews together more often and more widely have intrinsic merit. They also have intrinsic appeal, in that Jewish young adults like socialising with their Jewish friends, and they can be targeted and recruited on the basis of those pre-existing and long-standing associations.

It is safe to say, even if this investigation did not directly assess such matters, that these young adults, like their contemporaries all over the world, are attuned to both music and the Internet. Both areas represent

domains of extraordinary Jewish creativity, coming out of Israel and the United States, if not elsewhere. A community strategy to engage Jewish young adults in London and Manchester (where so many of them reside) would focus on the staging of Jewish cultural events, largely of a musical nature, so as to provide a basis for frequent episodic, voluntary, and entertaining ways for Jews of this demographic to come together. A strategy aimed at Jews throughout the UK (and indeed, throughout the world) would seek to advance both the creativity apparent in Jewish websites, journalism, blogs, videos and other Internet venues, and to improve their reach and their “stickiness” (ability to inspire repeat visits).

III. This study suggests that Reform-raised young adults are confused about the meaning and implications of Reform Judaism. Again, this trend is not limited to British Jews or to Reform Jews. Around the world, outside of Orthodoxy, Jews believe they are confused about their available denominations (e.g., Masorti/Conservative, Reform) and Jewish ideologies (e.g., Zionism or political liberalism). They are also more tentative than were their parents or grandparents about ideological, denominational, and partisan attachments and loyalty. Not surprisingly, as this report notes, “connections with Judaism and Jewish life are highly personal and change frequently.” This observation is true not only for young adult Reform Jews in the UK, but for the vast majority of non-Orthodox Jews around the world.

The confusion about Zionism and Israel is particularly deserving of attention. British Jewry enjoys a deserved reputation for extraordinary involvement with Israel, and

these young Jews are no exception to that generalization. As Reform Jews integrated into the larger society, they became passionately pro-Israel (for the most part) but also unsettled with regard to Israeli policies. A wise community strategy would seek ways to provide “safe places” for young adult Jews to engage with and about Israel, where they need not feel that they are aiding and abetting Israel’s enemies (who might overhear their doubts and concerns) nor violating some communal taboos against departing from official Israeli government interpretations – either to the left or the right.

IV. Finally, from an outsider’s perspective, one is impressed with the loyalty and deference toward received Judaism that one finds in these interviews. In this tendency, British Jewry contrasts with the higher levels of voluntarism, anti-traditionalism, and the penchant for novelty that characterizes American Jewry. On balance, it may be said that this more traditional posture constitutes a source of strength and endurance for British Jewry. At the same time, it presents a downside, in that Jews dissatisfied with their options (such as many of these young Jewish adults) may feel they enjoy only two semi-satisfying alternatives: They can keep their Jewish interests personal and private; or they can join a Jewish community with little real passion or enthusiasm. Few consider a third option that has become so popular across the ocean: reform existing possibilities and invent something entirely new.

Recognising the limited license for institutional or ideological innovation in Judaism, leaders would do well to encourage whatever potential Jewish cultural innovations or innovators that may emerge in the young adult population. By multiplying options for engagement beyond those currently available, and by relying upon the critical population of young Jewish adults themselves to lead in the development of such options, the organised, established community can not only help enhance Jewish involvement among younger Jews, but can also contribute to the richness and diversity of Jewish life. While such advice is appropriate for all segments of British Jewry, it is particularly suited to Reform Jewry, with its penchant for openness, variety, and innovation.

Efforts such as this research project undertaken by the Reform Movement represent a commitment to think critically about the present, and to look openly into the future. This research into British Jewry bespeaks a confident and self-reflective culture, one that has the strength to scrutinize current policies and to establish new and more effective directions for the future.

## RESPONSE - PHILIP BOXER

The report admirably summarises three thematic areas that emerge from the in-depth interviews which address how the Reform Movement might approach flexible membership, support inspirational leaders and sustain quality programmes. While commending the forward thinking initiatives taken over the past few years by synagogues in reaching out to 18-35 year olds, it goes on to suggest that synagogues cannot reach everybody at every point in their lives. Thus:

“even those who have been very involved in the past frequently find themselves ‘outside’ and without a clear feeling that they want to be back ‘inside’, certainly for now. What is defining about this generation as opposed to past generations is that this period tends to be much longer, and there is no guarantee that people will return unless there is non-synagogical intervention.”

The Reform Movement has to work in partnership with the synagogues, and has to go where the synagogues can’t go, with the objective of eventual reconnection for as many as possible. The question remains: how is the Reform Movement to act on the basis of this report?

Something of the challenge facing the Reform Movement is outlined in the account given in the report of the changing nature of the relationship between individual and community. Community has to be considered not as something already-there, to be joined, but as something continuously ‘re-membered’ in the spaces/places

between individuals’ shared struggles for meaning and purpose. The conclusion returns to this challenge in identifying three key ways in which changes can be allowed to emerge: giving real choice to individuals, encouraging rich communication between people, and enriching people and their connections. The three thematic areas identify the necessary conditions for the Reform Movement to become a living community beyond the borders of the synagogues. But how is this to come to pass?

### The thinking behind the design

We learnt from Professor Cohen’s work about the need to understand the mode of individuals’ religious engagement, and the degree of their community engagement. However there was a third implicit dimension that also needed attending to that indicated the degree to which the available forms of personal, familial or communal involvement with the community were open to the sense of religious meaning and purpose emerging from individuals’ struggles. Thus, of the ‘moderately engaged’ interviewees in Professor Cohen’s research, 82% were bothered “when people tell me there is a right way to be Jewish”; and 78% agreed that “it is important for me to practise Judaism in a way that I find meaningful, even if I have to depart from the way things are done in the past.” (Cohen and Kahn-Harris, 2004, p61). This third dimension was about the extent to which an interviewee’s experience of community was one that made them feel the

*"Community has to be considered not as something already-there, to be joined, but as something continuously 're-membered'."*

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community was open to what they might bring to it.

When we started this work together, we did not think of it as doing research so much as beginning to open up a dialogue with individuals who might or might not be members of a community. To that end, the people who would be engaging individuals in dialogue were key, even though at the end of the process, we were still not sure how the role of the interviewers in this process would be recognised and built upon. They were key because it was they who were making contact with individuals' struggles for meaning and purpose in their lives. Also it was they, and others like them, who were needed to continue this work not only of bearing witness to those struggles, but also of bearing to witness those struggles.

### What we learnt from the interviewers

We learnt that there were indeed two ways in which the questions of meaning and purpose arose. Firstly through the notion of *community*, being the sense of social context and/or situated-ness within which an individual's sense of meaning and purpose could be shared with others; and secondly through the notion of *journey*, being the sense of movement through life in the form of a succession of moments/life events/crises in which the individual encountered successive challenges to their sense of meaning and purpose. Each one of these moments was experienced as a demand to go beyond what they already knew/could understand, while at the same time finding some form of personal, familial or communal expression of it. This was

not always so easy, particularly in the part of the journey between leaving childhood and becoming a parent.

The ways in which it was possible for the interviewees to 'connect' with the struggle for meaning and purpose was more easily characterised within the context of community (everyone has a family...) than in terms of journey (what is it about this moment that particularly challenges me...). So the interviewers had to struggle with their response to interviewees who felt themselves to be more bound up with 'journey' than with 'community'. Those individuals were not saying "I am happy where I am, thank you", but rather, "I do not see how trained rabbis, educators, synagogue professionals etc, are able to connect with where I am right now in my struggle for meaning and purpose."

This was difficult to hear, and it demanded much of the interviewers in questioning their own understanding of their own relation to Judaism. One of the points that emerged from the material was that, insofar as Reform Judaism did appear to be more organised/prepared to engage with community than with journey, this was an imbalance that was becoming increasingly critical for it to redress if it was to engage with the growing divergence/dispersion of journeys amongst 18-35 year olds.

### Learning about the 'how'

We learnt from the research just how particular to individuals' lives was their struggle for meaning and purpose. It was not a matter of the interviewers researching how the rabbi, educator or synagogue

professional etc could offer what they were familiar with more effectively. It was at least as much a matter of needing to encounter the individual from a position of not-knowing, out of which something familiar might emerge, but so too might something not yet fully known.

When such moments arose they presented particular challenges to the interviewers'

sense of vocation. How could this not be as true of their encounters with others' struggles as it was with their own? It was an honour to witness Rabbi Greg and his team of interviewers engage individuals in dialogue with just that sense of vocation. They showed that it is only possible to work with another person's struggles by working with their own.

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THE 18-35 RESEARCH PROJECT

**Rabbi Greg Alexander** grew up as a third generation Reform Jew in South Africa and became heavily involved in informal Jewish education through the Reform youth movement, Netzer South Africa as a teenager and beyond. With now more than 15 years of experience in Jewish education, he is a graduate of the University of Cape Town, the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Leo Baeck College - Centre for Jewish Studies, London. It was while a rabbinic student at the College that he co-founded the Reform Chavurah as a response to the needs of young Reform Jews in the North London area for a t'fillah experience that addressed them. At the time of the 18-35 Research Project, he was based in London working for the Movement for Reform Judaism and he now works for the Auerbach Central Agency for Jewish Education in Philadelphia as the Consultant for Reform Education, supporting the 13 Reform synagogues in the Greater Philadelphia area. In 5767, he and his family are due to move to Cape Town, South Africa to help build up the Progressive community there.

**Philip Boxer**, B.Sc. (Eng.), M.Sc. (Bus. Admin.), CMC, works with leadership teams facilitating change in organisations and their supporting infrastructures. His focus is on the challenges organisations face from unfamiliar forms of demand and the risks associated with delivering the behaviours needed to satisfy them, helping his clients to develop the through-life relationships they need with their customers and clients.

Philip's research company has developed tools and methods that support these collaborative forms of working ([www.asymmetricdesign.com](http://www.asymmetricdesign.com)), applying them across many different industry sectors, including public, private, and government agencies. He is a Member of the Institute of Management Consultants, and a Council Member of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations.

**Prof Steven M. Cohen**, a sociologist of American Jewry, is Research Professor of Jewish Social Policy at HUC-JIR, and on sabbatical leave from the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has written or edited a dozen books and scores of scholarly articles and reports on such issues as Jewish community, Jewish identity, and Jewish education. With Arnold Eisen, he wrote, *The Jew Within: Self, Family and Community in America*. He recently co-authored a book on the Florence Melton Adult Mini-School, and a monograph on Jewish identities of Great Britain *Beyond Belonging*. His current research interests extend to emerging forms of Jewish community organising among younger Jews in the United States. Prof Cohen holds several research positions including: Director of the Florence G. Heller – JCCA Research Center, Academic Chair of the research unit of the Jewish Agency's Department of Jewish Education, and research consultant to the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies. Before moving to Israel in 1992, he was a professor of sociology at Queens College in New York, and held Visiting Professorships at Brandeis



University, Yale University, and the Jewish Theological Seminary.

**Judith Williams** grew up in the progressive movement and made aliyah in 1994. During her time in Israel she worked as a Jewish educator in a variety of informal educational settings with different audiences, especially those in their teens and twenties. She received her M.A in Contemporary Jewry from Hebrew University and studied on the Mandel Foundation's Jerusalem Fellows programme before taking the position of Director of Youth, Students and Young Adults for the Movement for Reform Judaism.

**Justin Wise** grew up a member of a Reform community in North London and was centrally involved RSY-Netzer, the youth movement of the Reform Movement, from 1985 to 1993, for the last year of which he was full-time mazkir (National Secretary). Over the past ten years he has worked as

the founder director of an innovative graphics-software company, in which he was instrumental in winning the Queen's Award for Innovation in 2004. Justin has an ongoing role as a Jewish educator for adults on the highly regarded Melton Mini School and Torah L'am (Torah for Everyone) programmes as well as at Limmud and in various Jewish communities. He now works as an Organisational Development consultant, facilitator, and trainer, working with both commercial and community organisations to help them learn, develop, and change. He holds degrees in Computer Science from Cambridge University and University College London, and is currently completing an MSc in People and Organisational Development at Roffey Park Institute / University of Sussex.

## APPENDIX A - SCREENING INTERVIEW AND SCORING MECHANISM

	Jewish communal involvement	Jewish practice	RSGB affiliation
Did you stay involved in some way in Jewish activity after your bar/bat mitzvah?	[1] Y [0] N		
Did you stay involved in a Reform synagogue?			[1] Y [0] N
Have you set foot in a synagogue in the last year?	[1] Y [0] N		
In an RSGB synagogue?			[1] Y [0] N
Did you fast on Yom Kippur last year?		[1] Y [0] N	
Did you attend a Pesach seder last year?		[1] Y [0] N	
Do you go to High Holy Day services every year?	[2] Y [0] N		
In a Reform synagogue?			[2] Y [0] N
Have you been to Israel in the last five years?		[2] Y [0] N	
Was it as part of an organised trip?	[2] Y [0] N		
Do you regularly participate as a volunteer in synagogue activities?	[2] Y [0] N		
In an RSGB synagogue?			[2] Y [0] N
Have you read a book on a Jewish subject in the last year? Have you been to a Jewish adult education programme/lecture in the past year?	[2] Y [0] N	[1] Y [0] N	
In an RSGB synagogue/the Sternberg Centre?			[2] Y [0] N
Do you or your family light candles every Shabbat?		[3] Y [0] N	
Are you a synagogue member?	[3] Y [0] N		
An RSGB synagogue?			[3] Y [0] N
Do you attend a synagogue at least once a month?	[3] Y [0] N		
An RSGB synagogue?			[3] Y [0] N
Do you pray regularly by yourself?		[3] Y [0] N	
Are you a regular volunteer for a Jewish organisation other than your synagogue?			
For an RSGB organisation			[3] Y [0] N

## APPENDIX B – QUESTIONNAIRE SHEETS I AND II

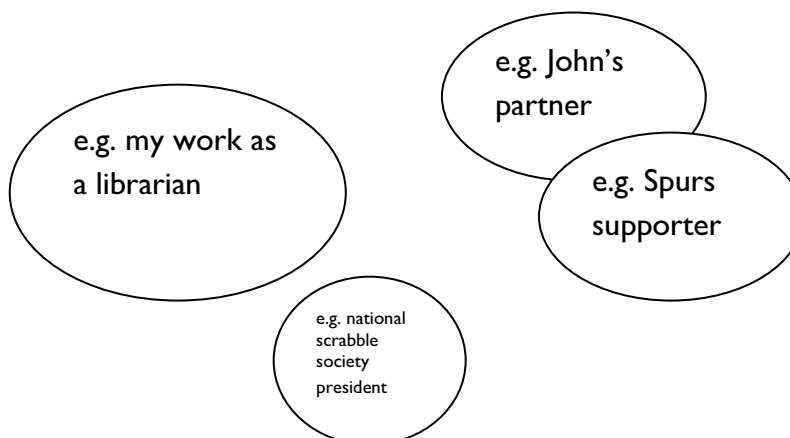
Before each interview the following sheets were sent to interviewees to fill out and bring to the interview for discussion

### Questionnaire Sheet I

Thank you for agreeing to participate in Project 18-39. As preparation for our first interview, could you please take 20-30 minutes to work through this questionnaire. We will use it as a starting point when we meet.

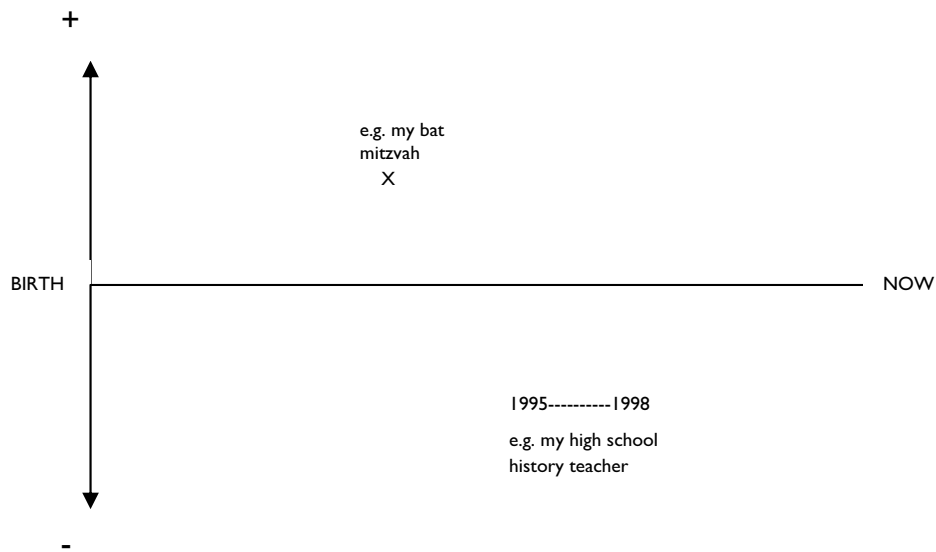
1. Please draw a family tree in the space provided. Can you include immediate and extended family as far back as you feel relevant (just the people that you know or know of – no need to research it).

2. Now please draw a bubble diagram with each bubble being a role that you feel you take on in your life today or an activity or interest that takes up a regular amount of your time. Make the bubble bigger if the role or activity is more important or takes a bigger part of your time.



## Questionnaire Sheet II

Can you please mark on the timeline below some of the major events (3-5 events) that have taken place in your life and any people (1-5 people) who have had a major influence on you at any point from your birth to today. You can include both Jewish people and events and those that you don't regard as Jewish. It will also help if you mark the event or person as a positive (the top half of the chart) or negative (bottom half) influence.



## APPENDIX C – INTERVIEW GUIDE I AND II

### Interview Guide – Interview I

<p>Answering questions or concerns</p> <p>Anonymity</p>	<p><b>- Intro</b></p> <p>Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Re-Search Project. Before we start, if you have any questions about the interview process that I cannot answer or would like some more information about the Project the project director, Greg Alexander would be happy to talk to you. [His details are on the letter we sent you.]</p> <p>I will be recording our interviews and they will be transcribed. We guarantee your anonymity. We will not use your name in any publication and when we use your words we will completely disguise your identity.</p> <p>Do you have any questions before we begin?</p>
<p>Family connections</p> <p>Reform entry point</p> <p>Grandparents</p> <p>Extended family</p> <p>Parents’</p> <p>Marriage</p> <p>Siblings – same or different?</p>	<p>Let’s begin by looking at the family tree that you prepared. Can you talk me through who everyone is. [extract any reform connections – how did parents/ grandparents get involved in Reform, how did they end up having a b/mitzvah in a Reform synagogue?]</p> <p>[SAMPLE QUESTIONS, NEED TO MAKE YOUR OWN HERE:]</p> <p>Why did your grandparents decide to leave the United synagogue and join Reform?</p> <p>So this half of the family are all Reform and this half are all Orthodox... did that ever lead to any tensions?</p> <p>So where did your parents meet?</p> <p>Did they have a Reform wedding?</p> <p>So your mom remarried...did they have a chuppah?</p> <p>Was it in a Reform shul?So your older brother had his bar mitzvah first – did he stay involved afterwards?</p> <p>Your sister is now strictly Orthodox – how has that affected you/ your family?</p>
<p>Jewish activities in the home</p> <p>Jewish educ.</p> <p>Any other Jewish memories</p>	<p><b>- Growing up (pre-b/mitzvah) and Jewish activities in the home</b></p> <p>What types of Jewish things did your family do? [Shabbat, holidays, kashrut etc]</p> <p>What kind of Jewish education did you get as a child?</p> <p>Did you attend a Reform religion school?</p> <p>Do you remember that as a positive or negative experience?</p> <p>Did you attend a Jewish day school? What was that like?</p> <p>Besides family memories are there any Jewish things from your childhood that stick in your mind? [prompt: summer camp, youth movement, Jewish holidays, religion school, Israel, anti-Semitism etc]</p>

<p>RSY and club</p> <p>Why No?</p> <p>Why yes?</p> <p>People who influenced</p> <p>Finishing</p> <p>What did you gain?</p>	<p>- RSY-Netzer or club</p> <p>Did you go to RSY-Netzer or to a reform club? [If yes] What was that like? [if no]</p> <p>Did you know about them? Was there a specific reason for not going? Did you join a parallel Jewish activity?</p> <p>[if yes] [probe for involvement, as a chanich, camper, madrich, tours etc.] What kept you involved? Was there a person who particularly influenced your involvement? Do you remember when you left/moved on? What motivated you to stop your involvement? What do you feel you gained from your involvement? Is there anything you wished might have been there that wasn't?</p>
<p>The b/mitzvah Prep People Ceremony Reform</p> <p>Importance</p>	<p>- <b>Bar/bat mitzvah</b></p> <p>Let's talk about your bar/bat mitzvah. What was that like? Was there a person or some people who were particularly influential in helping you prepare? [can elicit more about the lead up/preparations, what was most important for them (family, the ceremony, the presents etc)] Were you aware at the time of differences between a Reform bar/bat mitzvah and those in other denominations?</p> <p>Looking back, does it seem like it was an important event in your life? If you could have it over, what would you change? What could have made it more meaningful for you?</p> <p>Did you stay involved after the b/mitzvah?</p>
<p>Later involvement</p>	
<p>Gap year Gains Jewish practise</p> <p>Why not in Israel?</p>	<p>- <b>Gap year</b></p> <p>Did you take a gap year after school? What did you do? What did you gain from the year? Do you feel that your Jewish practise changed during the year?</p> <p>[if the year was not in Israel:] Did you know about the options of gap years in Israel? Was there a reason you didn't choose one of those?</p>

<p>Uni</p> <p>UJS or JSoc?</p> <p>Reform involvement and support</p>	<p>- University/College</p> <p>[if attended university/college]Let's jump now to university. Did you join UJS or JSoc? Did it feel like there was a Reform presence on campus? Were you involved in the local Reform shul while you were away from home? Did anyone invite you for Shabbat meals? Did you stay connected in any way to your home shul? How? Did you feel that the Reform movement supported you at all? What support would you have welcomed while you were a student?</p>
<p>Options in N.London What do you look for?</p> <p>List of options to ask</p>	<p><b>- Young Adults</b></p> <p>Do you find that there are Jewish options for you as a 20-30 something in North London? Have you tried any? What are you looking for in these [prompt: partner, study, cultural interest, friends etc]</p> <p>[prompt (just the names – the definitions are there if you need):] Have you tried:</p> <p>Limmud – <i>Annual festival of Jewish learning, as well as one day Limmuds, limmudfest in the summer and the Melton study programme</i>  JLE – <i>Jewish Learning Exchange – Orthodox text study and discussion</i>  Tent – <i>Liberal Judaism's young adult programme</i>  Tribe – <i>United Synagogue's young adult programme</i>  Marom Masorti – <i>Masorti young adult programme</i>  Assif – <i>Masorti Shabbat morning service</i>  Shacharit Sheli at Finchley Progressive – <i>Shabbat morning service</i>  Eish/ohr somayach – <i>Orthodox outreach organisations</i>  Yakar – <i>Modern Orthodox synagogue</i>  Saatchi – <i>Modern Orthodox synagogue</i>  Yad Arts – <i>Jewish cultural events</i>  Speed dating or J-date – <i>dating</i>  Jewish charity events for young adults – <i>UJIA, young Jewish Care etc etc.</i></p> <p>How did you find them? Did you stay for a time? What did they offer and what didn't they?</p> <p>Are there any Reform options for you? [if no, prompt] Have you heard of the Reform Chavurah? Have you ever been? Do you get their e-newsletter?</p> <p>Are you interested in Jewish study? What kind? How often?</p> <p>Are you interested in Jewish cultural activities? What kind? How often?</p> <p>Is there anything that you feel the Reform movement should be offering you that they don't?</p>

<p>Partner?</p> <p>Jewish or Non-Jewish?</p> <p>[not-married] How did you meet?</p> <p>Mixed faith relationship</p> <p>Marriage</p> <p>Home Support Family Connection with J.Comm</p> <p>Jewish Partners Wedding Rel to Jud.</p> <p>Home</p>	<p><b>- Partner</b></p> <p>[If not clear from the family tree] Are you currently seeing a partner?</p> <p>[If no:] Would you/have you dated a non-Jewish person? [If yes] Does it work? Would you marry a non-Jewish person?</p> <p>[If yes but NOT married:] Is your partner Jewish? How did you meet?</p> <p>[If not Jewish] How does your being Jewish affect your relationship? Are you thinking about marriage? Is a Jewish wedding important? [If living together] How did you agree on the Jewishness of your home? Was anyone particularly helpful or supportive with your decision to live with a non-Jewish partner? How was your family? Have you maintained a connection with the Jewish community?</p> <p>[If Jewish] Is it important for you that they are Jewish? If you were to get married, is a Jewish wedding important? Do you feel that you and your partner have a different relationship to Judaism? Does that affect your relationship in any way?</p> <p>Are you living together? How did you agree on the Jewishness of your home?</p>
<p>Marriage [skip if not married]</p> <p>[Jewish spouse] Important? Rel to Jud.</p> <p>The Wedding</p> <p>The Rabbi Reform?</p> <p>Most NB?</p> <p>What else? Home</p> <p>[non-Jewish Spouse]</p> <p>Issues Conversion? Home Help/support Family Community</p>	<p><b>- Marriage [skip if not married]</b></p> <p>Is your husband/wife Jewish? [If married to a Jewish partner:] Is it important for you that they are Jewish? Do you feel that you and your partner have a different relationship to Judaism? Does that affect your relationship in any way? Tell me about the wedding...what was that like? [can elicit more about the lead up/preparations, what was most important for them (family, the ceremony, the presents etc)] What was the Rabbi like? Was it a Reform Rabbi who married you? Why/why not?</p> <p>What was the most important thing you got from your wedding? What could have made it more meaningful for you? Did your life feel different after the wedding? [prompt: In what ways?] How did you agree on the Jewishness of your home? [If married to a non-Jewish partner:] What issues did you and your husband/wife discuss around getting married to someone from a different faith? Was it an option for your partner to convert? How did you agree on the Jewishness of your home? Was anyone particularly helpful or supportive with your decision to live with a non-Jewish partner? How was your family? Have you maintained a connection with the Jewish community? How?</p>



<p><b>BUBBLE DIAG</b> Roles/activities in your life</p> <p>How do you spend your time?</p> <p>Reading</p> <p>Organisational involvement</p>	<p><b>- BUBBLE DIAGRAM</b> Now let's have a look at the Bubble Diagram that you prepared. [Concentrate on Jewish – what's there and what's not – and size of bubbles]</p> <p>[If not clear from the Bubble diagram] What do you do professionally?</p> <p>What interests/activities do you have outside of work? What kinds of newspapers, magazines, books do you find you read mostly? Are you involved in any organisations? [prompt: political or social action, charities? Do you sit on any committees, do any volunteer work?] [If yes:] How did you get involved?</p>
<p>Synagogue member?</p> <p>[yes] Same one Reform? Relationship with syn.</p> <p>[no] Do you go? Why not a member? Where else do you go?</p> <p>Why would you join? Rabbi?</p> <p>Involvement changed?</p> <p>Services</p> <p>Regular attender?</p> <p>Other denominations</p> <p>Other programmes</p>	<p><b>- Synagogue</b></p> <p>Are you a member of a synagogue? [Check whether it was included in the bubble diag – how big?]</p> <p>[If yes:] Is it the same one you belonged to when you had your b/mitzvah? [explore why/why not? Still reform or not?] What is your relationship like with your synagogue? Are you involved in the synagogue beyond just attending?</p> <p>[If no:] Do you attend a synagogue/s? Is your non-membership because you are dissatisfied or for some other reason? Do you get your "Judaism" somewhere else that isn't a synagogue?</p> <p>[Continue here:] What would you say is the major factor that might influence you to join a synagogue? [if not mentioned] Would you say that a Rabbi is a major influence?</p> <p>Have you found that your synagogue involvement has changed over the years?</p> <p>What do you think about synagogue services? What do you get out of them? Would you describe yourself as a regular attender? How often do you usually go? Do you use the synagogue for anything other than the services?</p> <p>Would you feel equally comfortable in a synagogue of another denomination if it were nearer/more convenient?</p> <p>Is there some sort of activity/programme that you wish were available to you that is not? [prompt: either because it doesn't exist, is too far away or is too expensive?]</p>

<p>Meaningful holidays and lifecycle</p> <p>Shabbat observance</p> <p>Festivals</p>	<p><b>- Jewish holidays and practise</b></p> <p>Are there Jewish rituals or events or days that you particularly find meaningful? [prompt: lifecycle events, jewish holidays, etc]</p> <p>What about Shabbat? Do you find that you have a regular practise surrounding Shabbat?</p> <p>If we have a look at a calendar, which of the Jewish festivals do you usually celebrate? [Show festival calendar – DON'T go through the whole list one by one though] What do you do on your own and what with your family?</p>
<p>Community</p> <p>Other involvement</p> <p>Non-Jewish friends</p> <p>Tzedakah</p>	<p><b>- Community</b></p> <p>Besides the synagogue, what other Jewish communal involvement do you have? Are you a member of any organisations? [details, why joined, dropped out etc.]</p> <p>At the moment, would you say that you have more Jewish or non-Jewish friends? Is your relationship with them different in any way?</p> <p>If/when you give Tzedakah/charity, do you tend to give to Jewish or general causes? Are there causes that you would give your time to if you could?</p>
<p>Finishing off and setting homework</p>	<p><b>- Finishing off</b></p> <p>We're getting to the end of the interview. Before we finish is there anything that you've thought of that you would like to add? Is there anything that you expected us to discuss that we didn't? Thank you, that is the end of the first interview.</p> <p>Please feel free to keep your family tree and bubble diagram. For the next time we meet [confirm date and time] there is another short exercise to fill in. [give over the TIMELINE]</p>

## Interview Guide – Interview II

Intro	<p>- Intro</p> <p>Before we begin, I wanted to ask if you had had any thoughts since the last time we met that you would like to share now.</p>
<p>Points that have shaped Jewish rel</p> <p>What made People/events +ve or -ve</p> <p>Moving to beliefs and values</p>	<p>Using Timeline</p> <p>Let's have a look at the timeline. Can you talk me through it?</p> <p>Are there any points on the line (people or events) that you think have particularly shaped your relationship to Judaism today?</p> <p>EVENTS[establish what made the event a positive or negative one. What support might they have wanted at the time. Did they get it?]</p> <p>PEOPLE[establish what the effect is that they person had]Looking back, what do you think was the key thing about the person that affected you at the time</p> <p>?We are going to move now to some questions about belief and values. If there are any you don't want to answer, just say so.</p>
<p>Like about Jud.</p> <p>Frustrating</p> <p>Embarrassed</p> <p>Kashrut</p> <p>Jews different?</p> <p>Religions and minorities</p> <p>Do or think?</p> <p>Good Jew</p> <p>Obligation</p> <p>Purpose</p> <p>Stream of Jud.</p> <p>Level of observance</p> <p>Reform stand on an issue</p> <p>Interfaith marriage</p> <p>Same sex marriage</p>	<p>- Jewishness</p> <p>What are some of the things that you like about being Jewish?</p> <p>What do you find frustrating or disappointing?</p> <p>Have you ever found situations where you have downplayed your being Jewish? Or that you have felt embarrassed about your Jewishness or some Jews?</p> <p>What do you feel about kashrut? [prompt – do you keep kosher? What does that mean? Do you think its important/irrelevant/irritating?]</p> <p>Are Jews different to other people living in Britain? How?</p> <p>Do you feel much in common with members of other religions? Or ethnic minorities?</p> <p>Is being Jewish more about what you do or about what you think?</p> <p>What do you think makes a "good Jew"?</p> <p>Does being Jewish "obligate" you to be or do anything? Do Jews have a particular purpose in the world?</p> <p>[If not revealed earlier]</p> <p>Do you at the moment follow a particular stream of Judaism? [Reform, Orthodox, Masorti, Liberal] Is the adjective before Judaism important?</p> <p>Do you feel that there is a difference in the level of observance between Reform jews and other jews? How would you describe that difference?</p> <p>If the leadership of the Reform movement were to take a stand on an issue, what issue/s should they fight for?</p> <p>Do you think that Reform Rabbis should perform marriages between Jews and non-Jews? And between people of the same sex?</p>

<p>God Spiritual? Relationship? Pray?</p> <p>Why practise?</p> <p>Time when you were close? Feelings changed?</p> <p>Teachers/Rabbis and God</p>	<p>- God</p> <p>How do you feel about God? Would you call yourself a "spiritual" person? Do you feel you have a personal relationship with God? Do you communicate/pray to God?</p> <p>When you said last time that you [INSERT OBSERVANCE FROM INTERVIEW ONE, p6: eg. sometimes attend services/fast on Yom Kippur/light Shabbat candles]... why do you do that/those things?</p> <p>Have you ever felt a time that you were especially close to God? [details] Have your feelings about God changed over the years?</p> <p>If you have questions about God, is there a person that you can ask? In your experience do our synagogues, Rabbis, or the Jewish teachers that you have met encourage thinking about God?</p>
<p>Connection to Israel Been?</p> <p>Changes in attitude?</p> <p>Israel's rel. with Palestinians</p>	<p>- Israel</p> <p>What about Israel? Do you feel particularly connected? Have you ever been? [explore why/not, would they go back?]</p> <p>Over the years have you noticed any changes in your attitude? Was there a time that you felt a particularly strong reaction?</p> <p>What do you feel about Israel's handling of the situation with the Palestinians?</p>
<p>Hol. affected your rel. to Jud Lessons</p>	<p>- Shoah/Holocaust</p> <p>Do you think the Holocaust has affected the way you relate to being a Jew? What lessons do you think we should learn from the Holocaust?</p>
<p>Attitude to Judaism changed?</p> <p>In 20 years time...</p>	<p>- Attitude to Judaism</p> <p>Do you think your attitude towards Judaism has changed over the past 10 years? In what ways?</p> <p>How would you like the Jewish community to be different in 20 years time?</p>
	<p>- FINISHING UP</p>
<p>Why did you participate?</p>	<p>Can you tell me why you agreed to participate in this Project?</p>
<p>Anything else</p> <p>Greg A</p>	<p>Before we finish, are there any thoughts that you would like to add about anything that we have discussed? Is there anything that we haven't covered that we should have?</p> <p>As I mentioned at the beginning, the director of the Project, Rabbi Greg Alexander is happy to answer any questions you have about the Project. Thank you very much for your participation. When the interview is transcribed, would you like a copy e-mailed to you?</p>





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