



for an easy drive, even one in a park, for those who might find the experience very spiritual. If we want to maintain and grow our numbers, we must be mindful of people's needs.

❑ **Fran Krimston, 60+, Temple Ahavat Shalom, Northridge, California:** The synagogue should be *the* center of Jewish life, offering lifelong learning and a safe place for everyone from preschool to old age. It should be the center of our religious, social, and ethical lives. Let's really offer everything under one roof. Just imagine!

❑ **Mark, 40-59, URJ congregant, Texas:** I have seen married children of members leave the congregation because they no longer feel connected to it. Such a lack of loyalty is not a problem, but an opportunity to consider a new paradigm of belonging. In a time of transition, it is hard to know what that paradigm should be; however, those congregations that embrace change and try new ideas are more likely to find the answer. Successful organizations do not stand on past successes. Success comes from trusting the new leadership to make good choices and, most importantly, to learn from failures so that the organization as a whole moves forward.

❑ **Anonymous, 40-59, URJ congregant, Ohio:** We need to be creative to make membership and participation affordable. What if people volunteered time and expertise in lieu of paying full dues?

❑ **Leslie, 21-39, Arkansas:** While in college my peers and I ran worship services, educated each other, and provided social interaction (usually revolving around the promise of free food). Because I felt like I was contributing to my community, I was at services every Friday night, often Saturday during the day, and almost every Sunday for bagel brunch. Now, as a young adult, I don't feel like there is anything for me to contribute to a synagogue or Jewish community; therefore, I have not affiliated. I miss it supremely. And I know many other young Jewish adults like myself.

❑ **Jordan Friedman, 13-20, Illinois, Beloit College Hill:** People need to believe in something (or, excuse me, Something) bigger than themselves. In the absence of

such a belief, they often succumb to narcissism. If we were to more strongly affirm God's place in Reform Judaism, perhaps people would be more motivated to care for their fellow human beings, in whom resides a Divine Spark which must be respected.

❑ **S. Taub, 40-59, Temple Emanuel, Greensboro, North Carolina:** We need to explain to people, especially young people, why affiliation makes sense. Having avoided being evangelical for so long, we are no longer in the habit of pitching our own religion. Now we have no choice but to tell others why Judaism and the Reform Movement are worth preserving.

When younger Jews ask, "What does Judaism stand for that would make me want to affiliate?" we need to answer their questions: We stand for empathy, for identifying with the oppressed. We stand for conduct trumping faith. We stand for life being more important than afterlife. We stand for viewing religious law through a prism that elevates compassion above everything else. We stand for not condemning others for their religious beliefs. We stand for valuing moral truth over literal truth. We stand for examining morality thoroughly, because it is important enough to warrant our close attention. We stand for studying what's important seriously and honestly.

As for the question, "If I want to be a humanist, why do I need to be Jewish to do it?" we can respond: Judaism has proven to be a more effective mechanism for producing large numbers of humanists than any other mechanism in history. And this connection is not erroneous; Judaism was designed to produce humanists. Consider what being a "light unto the nations" and *tikkun olam* mean.

And as for questions concerning the strictness of Jewish law, we can say: When our rabbinic lens entails makes violating the Sabbath mandatory in order to save a life, or commands those who are ill to eat and not fast on Yom Kippur, it's clear that Judaism is, first and foremost, not about the law itself, but about how we approach the law.

*"While the Reform Movement incorporates many diverse theological perspectives and practices, it seems to have nothing for Jews like me who are atheists and do not want to be religious. This growing trend needs to be addressed."*

#3 *Do you agree that one of the best ways to make the Reform synagogues and the Reform Movement less vulnerable to economic downturns is to stop depending on membership dues and religious school fees? What are the best alternatives?*

❑ **Gloria Becker, 40-59, Congregation Rodeph Shalom, Philadelphia:** A congregation is not a building. It is a group of people with a common goal and purpose. There are so many models of congregations without buildings. We should see what we can learn from them.

