


ing social closeness with non-Jews, up to and including intermarriage.

My current research, however, shows that these general trends can be deceptive if we consider the salience of Jewish identity. To the extent that Jewish identity depends on the development and maintenance of Jewish cultural capital, those who live in small Jewish communities are at a tremendous disadvantage. But why, then, does Jewish identity become of primary importance to a considerable minority of Jews living in small Jewish communities, even without substantial Jewish education? And, though living in centers of Jewish culture, why are so many Jews content to assimilate so fully into the surrounding non-Jewish culture?

As token “others” in a predominantly non-Jewish environment, Jews in small communities often become hyperaware of being *different*. If that difference is particularly salient to their personal identities, they participate more readily in their Jewish communities. They fear that if they fail to do so — for example, fail to ensure a minyan — the opportunity will disappear. Because they feel a responsibility to other members of the community to perpetuate the availability of various Jewish activities, those activities supersede secular activities in importance. And with fewer educated Jews, the perceived bar for leadership is somewhat lower.

If being Jewish is so effortless, salience may be hard to develop. Regardless of the size of one’s Jewish community, identity still depends on one’s willingness to take advantage of opportunities as they are presented. 

Discussion Guide

Bringing together myriad voices and experiences provides Sh'ma readers with an opportunity in a few very full pages to explore a topic of Jewish interest from a variety of perspectives. To facilitate a fuller discussion of the ideas, we offer the following questions:

1. What impact does the size of a Jewish community have on the nature of Jewish community and does it influence Jewish identity?
2. How is Jewish culture determined by the urban or suburban setting?
3. What are some of the enduring influences of the move of Jews into suburbs?

Sh'ma—a journal that invites a plurality of voices to thoughtfully engage matters critical to contemporary Judaism.

Who are Sh'ma Readers?

“They are deeply committed to Jewish tradition and Jewish continuity; spiritually curious and at times adventurous; at home, at least to some extent, with the world of Jewish texts and the texture of Jewish rituals; appreciative of the many genuine intellectual, ethical, and political benefits of secular modernity though not unaware of its fraught relationship with Jewish life; people for whom their Jewish identity is a vital component in an ongoing process of self-creation and expression by the light of their understanding of morals, community, and spirituality, a process they share with other families of humanity, and with concerned individuals everywhere.”

Yehudah Mirsky, PhD candidate at Harvard University, Fellow at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, and member of the Sh'ma Advisory Board

Our Vision

Each month, *Sh'ma* creates a “conversation-in-print” — that is, it brings together an array of voices that cross the spectrum of Judaism: secular and religious, communal and nonpartisan, engaged and dispassionately scholarly. We raise relevant questions thoughtfully and wrestle lovingly with Jewish concerns as we attempt to navigate the intellectual, communal, and spiritual challenges of contemporary Judaism. Our focus is on ideas — their complexity, their range, and their power. *Sh'ma* is a vibrant intellectual arena that hosts intelligent and creative conversations about ideas that reside outside of any particular institution. Our readers open *Sh'ma* to find what they cannot find elsewhere — concise, accessible, informative, and intelligent discussion of Jewish issues. Sometimes focusing on personal belief, other times on communal policy issues, we look to *Sh'ma* for incisive articles that illuminate a range of opinions.

Are You One of Our Readers?

Join a growing number of informed Jews — rabbis, philanthropists, federation directors, educators, lay leaders, students — who read *Sh'ma* each month to view the world through a Jewish lens that is **inclusive, expansive, and thought-provoking**.

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