On Resilience



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I am usually able to focus on a particular issue or theme when I write these columns. At present, there are so many concerns wrestling in my all-too-limited-of-late brain to narrow down to one. So, I am glad to share this column from a colleague, Steven Windmueller, that was written for Rosh Hashana but sums up much of the angst and challenges we face as a Jewish community now and likely for the foreseeable future.

As always, your Jewish Federation is here to meet these challenges in the smartest possible way, leveraging what each of us can contribute to help make our Jewish community in Ocean County a better place, in terms of Jewish life, security, and the impact we can have in the world.

Thank you for your support.
Keith

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sh households earned under $50,000. A 2025 JFNA analysis found that financially vulnerable Jews remained highly interested in Jewish life but were constrained by fees and donation expectations; six in ten were unable to engage in all the ways they wished. Affordability is thus not ancillary to continuity. Sliding scales, discreet aid, accessible housing and mental-health services, and a culture that separates belonging from purchasing power represent interventions essential to Jewish religious and communal life.

Fifth, if individual Jews are facing economic challenges, the *institutions of the community that were charged to support Jewish identity are under economic pressure*. Synagogues, schools, camps, community centers, and social-service agencies face new economic challenges in all areas of their operations. Security now competes directly with programming: JFNA estimated that Jewish institutions spend more than $765 million annually on security, about 14 percent of a typical organization's budget. Leaders and employees already reported understaffing before the post-October 7 surge in demands. The likely answer is not simply more fundraising but shared services, stronger governance, public security support, endowments, and strategic decisions about which institutions should merge, specialize, or collaborate.

Sixth is *the challenge of making communal life accessible across generations and family circumstance*s. High tuition, membership models, geography, disability, and assumptions about marriage or observance can put Jewish education and community beyond reach. Yet demand remains strong. Jewish camps engaged a record 198,730 campers and young-adult staff in 2025, even as families requested $56 million in aid and camps distributed $47.2 million. This combination – record participation and record need – points the way forward: people seek intensive Jewish experiences when institutions lower barriers and make participation meaningful.

Seventh is leadership! *Jewish women now lead prominent congregations, advocacy groups, foundations, educational networks, and cultural institutions, bringing a wider range of experience and authority into public Judaism*. That rise is real, but it is not completed. Leading Edge found that women were 80 percent of employees in participating Jewish nonprofits in 2023 but only 51 percent of CEOs and 47 percent of board chairs. Yet, studies note that racial, disability, and other inequities persist within the Jewish community. 5787 affords an opportunity to convert these exceptional appointments into equitable pay, family-supportive workplaces, mentorship, succession planning, and genuine authority for women and other historically underrepresented Jews.

Eighth, *American Jewish creativity must become more than a bright counterpoint to crisi*s. Artists, rabbis, teachers, writers, entrepreneurs, scholars, organizers, and volunteers continue to remake prayer, music, food, learning, comedy, mutual aid, and digital community. This creativity contributes to America far beyond Jewish institutions. Such public achievements serve to sustain the community's inner resilience.

At the Threshold of 5787: Eight Tests of Resilience



A Rosh Hashanah Reflection
By Steven Windmueller
September 9, 2026

The Jewish New Year arrives at a moment of paradox for American Jews. One finds our community deeply divided politically but feeling uniformly under attack. Eight challenges stand out. None can be met by nostalgia for a consensus that no longer exists. The focus for 5787 will be to turn disagreement into democratic practice, vulnerability into mutual responsibility, creativity into durable belonging, and the sense of common concern into collective action.

First is *the widening argument over Israel, Zionism, and the war in Gaza*. A July 2026 AP-NORC Study found that 52 percent of religious Jews, but only 21 percent of secular Jews, regarded Israel's ongoing Gaza operation as justified. Thirty-seven percent of Jews under 45 said Israel had committed genocide, compared with 23 percent of older Jews. About four in ten had blocked, unfollowed, or argued with relatives over Israel, and three in ten had stopped speaking to someone. Yet only about one in ten religious or secular Jews called themselves anti-Zionist.
The communal task is therefore not to force a binary choice between loyalty and dissent but to make room for attachment, grief, Israeli security, Palestinian rights, and moral criticism without treating every disagreement as betrayal. Understanding in the process, that the Jewish political divide is generating a new and different political realignment of American Jews around Israel, antisemitism, and this nation's domestic agenda and direction.

Second, *American politics increasingly pulls Jewish life into rival partisan camps*. Israel has lost much of its former bipartisan standing, while debates over antisemitism, universities, immigration, democracy, and religious liberty are routinely weaponized. Jewish institutions risk alienating liberals if they appear to excuse illiberal policies in Israel or America, and angering conservatives if they minimize threats emerging from anti-Zionist movements. Resilience requires intellectual consistency: oppose antisemitism from the right and left; defend civil liberties even for opponents; and refuse to let either party claim ownership over the welfare of the Jewish community.

Third *is antisemitism*. The danger is measurable. ADL recorded an average of 17 antisemitic incidents a day in 2025; although harassment and vandalism declined from the record highs of 2023 and 2024, by contrast assaults reached a record level. AJC's 2025 survey found that 31 percent of American Jews had personally encountered antisemitism in person or online and 91 percent expressed concerns about it, But the definitions and measures for defining antisemitism are being contested. The IHRA definition, the Jerusalem Declaration, and the Nexus Document draw the boundary between anti-Jewish prejudice and criticism of Israel differently. Institutions should judge context and conduct, protect open debate, and collect transparent data. Antisemitism must no longer be employed as a partisan tool.

Fourth is the *hidden economic diversity behind the stereotype of universal Jewish affluence*. Pew found that 23 percent of Jewish adults lived in households earning at least $200,000, but 10 percent earned under $30,000; younger adults, seniors, and people without college degrees were especially likely to have low incomes. In the 2023 New York Jewish Community Study, 22 percent of Jewi-

American Jewish resilience has rarely been the absence of fracture but rather the art of building a future in the midst of adversity and uncertainty. ~ Steven Windmueller

What, then, might 5787 bring? Hope should not mean a belief that danger or division will vanish. Jewish hope must be translated into disciplined action, while experiencing conditions of uncertainty. It will be visible when a synagogue makes security welcoming rather than forbidding; when a school treats aid as inclusion rather than charity; when Jews who disagree over Israel remain in relationship; when women and emerging leaders receive appropriate recognition and compensation as well as titles; and when institutions measure vitality not by unanimity or wealth but by the number of people able to enter, create, serve, and belong. American Jewish resilience has rarely been the absence of fracture but rather the art of building a future in the midst of adversity and uncertainty.

Steven Windmueller is an Emeritus Professor of Jewish Communal Studies at the Jack H. Skirball Campus of HUC in Los Angeles. His writings can be found on his website, www.thewindreport.com.