

Good News: The New Activism

by the editors
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It is common these days to bemoan the state of Jewish activism in America. Our organizations are out of touch with the Jewish rank and file, some complain; young people are drifting away from affiliation and involvement; the Jewish community has lost its focus on social justice, long seen as a pillar of Jewish security in America.

This week, in a special supplement entitled “*The New Activism*,” the Jewish Week looks at trends that belie these dire assumptions

There is an outpouring of Jewish creativity around the country that is giving rise to new organizations, reinvigorating old ones and forging modern modes of activism that both benefit our own community and strengthen the Jewish commitment to the welfare of the society in which we live.

Groups within every stream of Judaism are combining serious Jewish learning with social justice activism. “Synagogue-based” organizing has taken root in the Reform movement and Conservative leaders are becoming more outspoken about political issues with a strong moral component, such as paying workers a “living wage.”

The Jewish Funds for Justice is incubating creative new programs wherever you look and using its Jspot Web site as a hub for new modes of Jewish social justice activism that connect with younger Jews. The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) is almost a year into a major anti-poverty push.

Soup kitchens and clothing drives for the homeless are worthy pursuits, but as these groups note, the Jewish community should also be front and center in the effort to attack the root causes of rising poverty in our affluent society.

Nobody is arguing that social justice activism should supplant support for Israel as a top communal priority. Fighting to protect Israel is more important than ever as it faces grave new threats and a rising tide of indifference around the world.

But social justice is also an important part of who we are as a people, and our history of *tikkun olam*, or repairing the world, is a factor in the comfort and security we enjoy in America. These groups are doing important work in fanning that spark. And while social justice activism is hardly a panacea, they may also be doing their part to help stem the tide of noninvolvement by so many of our young people.