



**THE TIKVAH FUND**  
165 E. 56th Street  
New York, New York 10022

**The Condition of American Judaism:  
The Denominations and Beyond**  
May 15–17, 2015

Dean: Alan Rubenstein  
Instructor: Jack Wertheimer

**I. What is the Tikvah Fund?**

The Tikvah Fund is a philanthropic foundation and ideas institution committed to supporting the intellectual, religious, and political leaders of the Jewish people and the Jewish State. Tikvah runs and invests in a wide range of initiatives in Israel, the United States, and around the world, including educational programs, publications, and fellowships.

Tikvah is politically Zionist, economically free-market oriented, culturally traditional, and theologically open-minded. Yet in all issues and subjects, we welcome vigorous debate and big arguments. Our institutes, programs, and publications all reflect this spirit of bringing forward the serious alternatives for what the Jewish future should look like, and bringing Jewish thinking and leaders into conversation with Western political, moral, and economic thought.

**II. Description of American Judaism Workshop, “The Condition of American Judaism:  
The Denominations and Beyond”**

In October 2013, the Pew Research Center released its “Portrait of Jewish Americans.” Data collected by Pew indicate a rise in the proportions of Jews who do not identify as Jewish by religion, a decline in religious observance among younger Jews, and in varying degrees the difficulties the religious movements have in retaining the allegiance of their younger cohorts. Pew also measured major differences between the movements in how their adherents understand and participate in Jewish life.

This workshop will go beyond the Pew report to ask about Jewish religious life in the trenches, on the local scene: What are congregations doing to draw Jews to attend and partake of synagogue life? What are the latest trends in prayer services? Which aspects of Judaism seem to resonate with Jews and which do not? Looking beyond the synagogue, the workshop will also examine other settings where religious life is on display—learning groups, independent minyanim, Orthodox outreach centers, healing and spirituality programs, and programs to engage in *hesed* and *tikkun olam*. In short, the workshop will look for Judaism in conventional places, but note how unconventional some of them have become; and it will look at unconventional places that may in fact offer variations on conventional Jewish practices.

Jack Wertheimer of the Jewish Theological Seminary has been studying the habits and beliefs of American Jewry with peerless depth for decades. With the aid of his wisdom and experience, we will examine the current American Jewish moment. What are our core challenges? Which religious institutions seem to attract Jews and why? What are the new strategies for making Judaism meaningful for America's Jews? And how does American Judaism fit into the larger landscape of American religion in our time?

### III. Workshop Schedule (subject to minor changes)

Friday, May 15		
<i>Time</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Reading</i>
12:00–1:00	Opening Lunch and Introductions	
1:15–4:00	<i>Seminar Session with Jack Wertheimer: "The Mid-Century Revival: Its Scope and Limitations"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will Herberg, <i>Protestant, Catholic, Jew</i> (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), chaps. 1–4</li> <li>• Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen, <i>The Jew Within</i> (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), chaps. 4 and 7</li> </ul>
4:15–5:45	<i>Discussion of Participants' "American Ideas Papers," Part 1</i>	
7:00	Optional Minyan and Dinner (Candle Lighting at 7:47)	

Saturday, May 16		
<i>Time</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Reading</i>
8:30	Breakfast	
9:00–11:15	Optional Minyan (followed by Kiddush at 11:15)	
11:30–1:15	<i>Discussion of Participants' "American Ideas Papers," Part 2</i>	
1:15–2:30	Lunch	
3:00–6:00	<i>Seminar Session with Jack Wertheimer: "The Contemporary Scene"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jack Wertheimer and Steven M. Cohen, "The Pew Study Reanalyzed," <i>Mosaic</i> (November 2014), and the responses</li> </ul>
6:45	Optional Minchah Minyan	
7:05	Dinner (Shabbat ends at 8:53, followed by an optional Maariv Minyan)	

Sunday, May 17		
<i>Time</i>	<i>Session</i>	<i>Reading</i>
7:00	Optional Minyan	
7:30	Breakfast	
8:15–11:00	<i>Seminar Session with Jack Wertheimer: "Looking for American Judaism in Unconventional Places"</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jack Wertheimer, "The Outreach Revolution," <i>Commentary</i> (April 2013)</li> <li>• Jack Wertheimer, "Can Modern Orthodoxy Survive?" <i>Mosaic</i> (August 2014)</li> </ul>
11:00–12:00	Lunch	
12:15–2:00	<i>Discussion of Participants' "American Ideas Papers," Part 3</i>	

#### IV. American Ideas Papers

The American Judaism Workshops are meant to generate practical ideas to strengthen American Jewry, with the workshop participants leading the way. What can be done to increase the moral, intellectual, spiritual, political, religious, or demographic vitality of the Jewish people in America?

Each workshop participant will prepare in writing his or her best concrete idea (or ideas) to improve American Jewish life or America's contribution to the Jewish State. This written presentation—the American Ideas Paper—should present a particular problem or opportunity, and propose a set of actions or initiatives. For instance, we are *not* looking for a paper that urges the need to invest in Jewish education in America. That is true, as far as it goes, but too vague and imprecise. If you believe that Jewish education is the key to a healthy Judaism in the United States, a better paper might propose a novel way for the three largest synagogues in Philadelphia to work together with two under-enrolled day schools, in order to bring tuition costs down. Another might regard curricular reform within Jewish day schools as the most important strategic initiative; an excellent paper will lay out particular reform proposals, attending as appropriate to pedagogy, texts, the allocation of time to different disciplines, and the scope and aim of day school education. Your proposal can focus on local, national, or international questions, but whatever the focus, keep the following guidelines in mind.

- **Subject:** The American Ideas Paper should clearly describe the nature and significance of a problem or opportunity that affects the American Jewish community. How did it arise, why does it matter, and what can be done?
- **Significance:** The American Ideas Paper should note why this particular problem should be prioritized above other serious problems we face. If you had limited resources to do something, why is *this* the foundational issue that you would address?
- **Strategy:** What is your plan to mobilize American Jewish leaders into action? Who must be persuaded? What coalitions must be formed? What steps must be taken? What obstacles stand in the way, and how can they be overcome? What is the budget, and where will the funding come from?

Each workshop participant will submit their American Ideas Paper two weeks before our workshop convenes, no later than Monday, April 27, 2015. Approximately one week before the workshop convenes, we will assemble and distribute the papers from each participant to the group as a whole, so that each participant will read all of the submissions. As you can see from the schedule, the workshop will feature sessions dedicated to discussing the American Ideas Papers that you submit.

To what practical ends should the energies of American Jews be dedicated, and what is the grand strategy of American Jewish leaders? This is your chance to make your best case—and to take part in

a new movement of American Jews who are unafraid to question stale ideas, are willing to ask hard questions of the American Jewish community, and are prepared to chart a new course. What is *your* best idea?

**Guideline on Length:** We expect papers to be three to six single-spaced pages.

**Submission Deadline:** Monday, April 27, 2015

**Submission Address:** [AJW2015@tikvahfund.org](mailto:AJW2015@tikvahfund.org). Please write your name on your document (e.g., jindoAJW2015AIP.doc)

## V. Faculty Biographies

### Instructor

#### **Jack Wertheimer**

Jack Wertheimer is the Joseph and Martha Mendelson Professor of American Jewish History at the Jewish Theological Seminary. His area of specialization is modern Jewish history, with a particular focus on trends in the religious, educational, and organizational sectors of American Jewish life since World War II. Dr. Wertheimer is the author or editor of more than a dozen volumes, including *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (Oxford, 1987); *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Cambridge, 1987); *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era* (JTS and Harvard, 1993); and *The Modern Jewish Experience—a Reader's Guide* (NYU, 1993). From 1997 through 2007 he served as provost of JTS, the Seminary's chief academic officer. He also served from 1987 through 2008 as the founding director of the Joseph and Miriam Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism, which preserves the records of rabbis, synagogues, and organizations affiliated with the Conservative movement and promotes research on its history and contemporary condition.

### Dean

#### **Alan Rubenstein**

Alan Rubenstein was educated in Liberal Arts at St. John's College in Annapolis, MD and also at Georgetown University. He was a senior consultant for the President's Council on Bioethics and currently serves as *Hanson Scholar of Ethics* at Carleton College in Northfield, MN. At Carleton, he teaches ethical thought through close reading of great literature of the West—in particular, Plato, the Hebrew Bible, and Shakespeare. He has served, for Tikvah, as Co-Director of the program *Jewish Thought and Enduring Human Questions* and as Co-Convener of a working group on the life and thought of philosopher Hans Jonas. He is married and father of three children.

## **VI. Location**

The workshop will take place at the Glen Cove Mansion, Long Island Hotel and Conference Center (200 Dosoris Lane, Glen Cove, NY 11542), 30 minutes from New York City by car and rail (Long Island Railroad, Oyster Bay line, Glen Cove Station). All participants will be housed at the Glen Cove Mansion, and the Tikvah Fund will assume the costs of housing. You will receive more detailed information from us related to housing shortly before the workshop begins. More information about Glen Cove can be found on their website (<http://www.glencovemansion.com>).

As a reminder, you are responsible for booking your own travel. The Tikvah Fund expects participants to be present at all of the workshop sessions, including and especially the opening lunch on Friday noon, and the closing session on Sunday afternoon. Please make your travel arrangements with this schedule in mind.

## **VII. Our Mutual Commitment**

Our pledge to you is that the program will be excellent and that the teachers are, in every case, among the best people in the world teaching the subjects they are teaching. Your pledge to us is that you will invest yourselves in the texts and the seminars, and do the work to the fullest extent of your talents. You have put your everyday work on hold to join us, so we know you come to us with great interest and commitment. We will insist that you continue that commitment—a commitment to attending each and every session, a commitment to coming to class on time, a commitment to doing all the readings—throughout the duration of the workshop. If anyone fails to honor his or her commitment, he or she will be dismissed from the workshop.