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Rabbi Calls Jews Endangered Species, Urges Couples To Have Four To Five Children

By BEN GALLOB
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A leading Orthodox rabbi, describing Jews as an endangered species, has proposed that Jewish couple have between four and five children "not only to maintain our numbers but to increase our numbers."

The proposal was made by Rabbi Norman Lamm of New York in an address to an institute on the changing Jewish family sponsored by the Jewish Family and Children's Service in Milwaukee. Rabbi Lamm has proposed steps he says are needed for "the restabilization and reintegration of the shaky, fractured Jewish family."

Noting that demographers generally place at 2.1 children per family the number needed to maintain a group, he says Jewish couples should have between two and three children to maintain the Jewish population and another one or two children to assure its increase.

At the present time, he declared, American Jews have reached not only zero population growth but a demographic attrition "which places our future under a question mark." He said some young Jews have argued that "if we preach population control to the rest of the world, then we are morally bound to set an example by limiting our own families."

He rejects that argument, asserting it ignores "another ethical imperative of far more compelling urgency," the buffalo and the American eagle, he said, why not "to important groups in the human species?"

Even from "a purely universal humanistic perspective," he asserted, "we are under a tremendous obligation to preserve the Jewish people for civilization that can be done only by increasing our population growth."

Rabbi Lamm told the Federation luncheon that "in the effort to restore family life among American Jews to what it once was, or to what we would like it to be," there must be the elements of love, a commitment "to a transcendental ideal"; a "reassertion of the teaching role by parents"; and grandparents "who will be honored and cherished."

He said the American Jewish family "desperately needs" grandparents as part of the family to serve as "living models of continuity." He called unfortunate the fact that, in present-day society, grandparents generally live far from children and grandchildren.

"Growing up in the presence of grandparents does something subconsciously but powerfully for young people," he asserted. "It gives them a sense of continuity. They are unconsciously impressed with the awareness that the world was not created with their parents or with them, but that they are only the latest link in a long chain extended way back into history."

The Orthodox scholar said a home in which grandparents are loved, honored and respected is one in which, "more likely than not, parents will succeed in winning the respect and love of their own children." The stability of the American family, he said, "calls for expanding it beyond a two-generation home into at least a three-generation home."

In the traditional Jewish family, he declared, it is Judaism which provides the set of "goals, values and ideals that transcends the individual members of the family," and which inculcates in Jews "priority of duties over rights and self-restraint over self fulfillment."

Rabbi Lamm declared that Judaism has never, "neither theoretically nor historically, demanded the obliteration of the ego," but it has "summoned Jews to the ideal of finding the greatest personal satisfaction in service."

Rabbi Lamm contended that "unless we can succeed in re-introducing this particular orientation in our homes, family will not be a source of reinforcement and warmth, but an arena of conflicting claims by uninhibited and unrelated egos."

Rabbi Lamm