

VT-986 Transcription

Wexner Heritage Foundation. Panel Discussion. 20 October 1996.

M1:

OK, we've had the opportunity over the course of the weekend to hear four of the finest minds in the American Jewish scene. (applause) Thank you. (inaudible) American Judaism. So I know you're all full of questions, and we want to give you the opportunity to ask our presenters what is weighing on your minds, and what is concerning you as you sit here a couple hours before having to go home to the real world, [00:01:00] and taking everything that you've learned and making it real. So we've got microphones on either side of the auditorium, and what I'd like you all to do, those of you who are interested in asking the panelists questions, to line up on the sides. We're going to take groups of questions, four or five at a time. I'd like you to limit each question -- listen carefully -- to 30 seconds. At that... (laughter and applause) Thirty seconds. (inaudible) right here. No speeches, please, just sharp, succinct questions, and then we'll have the panelists respond in kind. If your question is directed to a specific person, please designate that person. OK? We're going to start on that side (inaudible).

Q:

This isn't directed to any specific panel members, and so anyone wants to (inaudible). It's really kind of three questions.

[00:02:00] A number of you have talked about the need for us to engage (inaudible), to teach, to inspire the others in our community. One of the things that I would like to do is to sort of take (inaudible) that have inspired me, and try, OK, try to put together some sort of primer or something that I could use with my friends, my acquaintances, or people in my shul. And I was wondering -- what I'd like to see from the panel, from Wexler, from whoever, is some sort of guide that I can use, MacGuffin's Wexler primer. (laughter and applause)

M1:

OK, let's try to get one quick question here. (inaudible)?

Q:

This is actually a question that came up (inaudible). I was really impressed with your description of Judaism as sort of being [00:03:00] a radical departure from the rest of the world. And with regard to the theme of this weekend, the alienated Jews, if I can get into their minds, are people who have a foot,

maybe standing mainly in a culture outside of Judaism, where they also have, perhaps, a nostalgic or, at least, some relationship (inaudible) we wouldn't be counting (inaudible). And I wonder what the ethics of our relationship is to the wider world outside of the Jewish world. And perhaps I can even recast that using the words the problem of chosen-ness, and what does it mean, and how alienating is it to Jews who are in this alienated position to think of us as having a supremacist view, a radically different view, that we are so much better, that [00:04:00] Judaism is not part of mankind's struggle to achieve holiness --

M:

OK --

Q:

-- only --

M:

-- I think we get the question. OK? (laughter) (inaudible).

Take the mic.

Q:

I'm not sure what the question was, but it might've been similar to what mine (inaudible). (laughter and applause) We can take lessons from (inaudible). (laughter) The question is: I wonder if we don't need to reengineer the definition of why be Jewish. That's the whole issue as we all know about, that we've all been trained on. If everybody understands the definition of why being Jewish, I know Dennis Prager's definition by heart. It's the most succinct one I've ever heard. But I'm not sure that it's being usurped by other Christian and ethical people that do good work, and I think we maybe need to sharpen the focus on [00:05:00] the definition of why be Jewish.

F:

(inaudible) [Christian?].

M1:

Do you want panelists to respond to that, like what is their definition of why be Jewish? Is that what you're really saying?

Q:

Yeah, and whether it needs to be redefined in any way, or sharpened in (inaudible). It goes with, in about two or three sentences, why be Jewish, that Jewish people have a holy mission

to repair the world in God's image, and we're commanded to do so, and living life as a Jew gives one a richness and spiritualness and holiness that you can't have without being Jewish.

M1:

They're all OK with that. (laughter and applause) Rick?

Rick:

We've heard five people give extraordinarily wonderful teachings this weekend. I'd like to hear from each of the [00:06:00] speakers what was the one thing they most learned, what was the thing they learned from one of the other speakers in this weekend. (applause)

M1:

OK, folks, (inaudible) the other side.

Q:

Given that the great number of our fellow Jews who need to be reached have neither the time nor the opportunity to do what we've done this weekend, and in our past, I would like to ask each of the teachers what is your one most cutting edge idea, as far out as you can, although it needs to be -- (laughter) it

needs to be accessible and doable, to mark it, [00:07:00] the ideas that you are putting forth here? And to use the current technology, and the current means of communication that we have available to put across the ideas to help us reach the mass number of Jews.

M1 :

OK, one more question, and then we'll have a (inaudible).

Q :

This is a terribly mundane and practical question: Rabbi [Hamen?], yesterday, when you said the synagogue should become the center of our American Jewish life again, and move away from, perhaps, the Federation, in our communities we have invested (inaudible) energy in bringing some of the inefficiencies of the synagogue back to communal efficiencies, such as in higher education, or educational programming, which at the synagogue level is pretty low down there, and when you bring together more people in the community we hire. How do you practically put those together to get quality, but yes, let the synagogue be the focus? [00:08:00]

M1 :

(inaudible) with that question?

M:

I didn't quite get it? Put together what two things? Put together the efficiency...?

Q:

The synagogues are an inefficient place to administer adult education, because you have too few people --

M:

So how do you put together the efficiency is one thing, and the other one was...?

Q:

Keep the synagogue as the center, which means just for education, as well, but also keep the quality up.

M:

I understand.

M1:

OK. All right, I think we have one more guy standing. We'll do that, and then (inaudible).

Q:

(inaudible). (laughter) I'm going to ask you all -- just assume three things I really want to do because I took something from each of you, and then I really would like to have (inaudible).

M1:

Thirty seconds.

Q:

Yes. Let's assume this: let's assume that over the last 100 years and the rush to modernity we've lost a lot of Jews along the way because they wanted to be the fourth types of (inaudible) that Rabbi [Berman?] talked about, and just -- [00:09:00] it wasn't sexy, and now we have their grandchildren or their great-grandchildren or them themselves, and they're scared. They're scared shitless, because the last thing they want to do is feel uncomfortable as an 18-year-old, 20-year-old, or 25-year-old. And so we talk about all this wonderful stuff, you bring them in, they have no idea what we're talking about. What are the first pegs to get 'em in, what are the second pegs,

and what are the third pegs? And I'd like you to sort of give us a how to do, to go back to the community, how do we get the unreachables that have something there? And that's really what I want to hear.

M1:

OK, gentlemen, (inaudible). (laughter) Who wants to start?

Larry:

Well, I'll start with the synagogue question, [00:10:00] since that was directed, I think, really to me. The goal here is to give quick responses, as well as quick questions, so our apologies for all of us if we don't answer each of these great problems with depths they deserve. But I'm talking not just about tinkering with the synagogue; I'm talking about entirely new conceptualization of what the synagogue is. The synagogue is not seen anymore as simply a consumerist mentality, which is what it is now. We've organized the synagogue, so everyone assumes that you go there to get your money's worth, which means that each synagogue sees itself as marketing Judaism, and they discover how much market share they have at the end of the year in terms of members and members' dollars, and that's how they're measured in terms of success. The board, meanwhile, judges the

rabbi by how well the rabbi does in that regard, and the rabbi fights the board to try and prove that at the end of the year you've got a great success story.

Now, if we change all of that and make the synagogue into a spiritual entity, and a center of the spiritual energy of the community, where people envision [00:11:00] their lives differently and put their thoughts together, if Federation could help engineer a network of synagogues, all of which see themselves as doing that particular creative and necessary endeavor in the community, where you could then prevent synagogues from being in competition with one another, and when you would then prevent the entire mentality by which we have to prove that you've got the market share. If that were the way, we could then have a communal-wide use of efficiency within the synagogue system, without synagogues competing, and without the inefficiencies which are used, by and large, because they see themselves right now in the consumer mentality. So I'm talking about a whole new model of synagogue life where we could retain the efficiencies, have the synagogues fit perfectly into their entire community, and that's, I think, what we have to work towards.

M1:

Do you think (inaudible) -- do you think that that's a realistic vision, that the Federation's going to organize all the synagogues so that the people [00:12:00] share, or is that, like, some socialist vision?

Larry:

No one ever accused me of having a socialist vision in my life, (laughter) except my kids, who wish I did, and my grandfather, probably, too, who probably is very happy right now. (laughter) It will not start with the Federation. It will start with certain synagogues who lead the way, and the synagogues (inaudible) discover the success that is entailed, and then two or three synagogues will band together, and the success story -- and they will be supported by the Federation that says, "You know, that's the model to work towards, and it'll pick up speed." So you have to start not on the grand level, by mandating. You have to start by going back to your local synagogue and saying, "I've got a better idea. Let me work with you and see what we can do, and prove it on the particularly local level, and it'll take off." Again, look at the mega churches. Somebody had a vision. We can go back and have a mega synagogue, [00:13:00] not necessarily in terms of 7,000

people; that may not be your goal. But in terms of mega success in a different kind of way.

Dan:

OK, but another side to that -- I agree with Larry completely. This thing working? I don't know. It's not only a matter of re-envisioning the synagogue, although it is definitely that. It's also a matter of re-envisioning the rabbi, and it's a matter of re-envisioning... (applause) And I'm already elected, so... (laughter) No, it is a matter of re-envisioning what it means to run a rabbinical school, and it's a matter of what it means to -- rethinking who ought to be rabbis, and how rabbis ought to be trained, and the visions that they ought to have. It also means, by the way, reimagining how you hire a rabbi, what questions you ask a rabbi when she or he is sitting in front of you, and you're trying to figure out are they person for us. It may not matter are they the most scintillating speaker in the world. It may not matter are they the best this or the best that. It may matter very simply, you can ask them the following question: do you have a vision for what is supposed to happen to me as a member of your shul over the next five years? [00:14:00] If they can't answer that, don't hire them. They have nothing to offer you. It's that simple. So

it's a matter of reimagining the synagogue. It's a matter of reimagining the rabbinical school. It's a matter of reimagining the rabbis. Federations that don't follow that won't make it.

M1:

OK, [Irwin?]?

Irwin:

I'll follow up because... I have no voice left, anyhow. This allows me to say kind of where I actually agree with Larry is that I think he diagnoses the American condition incredibly, incredibly well, with tremendous respect for the projects of other generations. You have to understand how radical that is in Jewish life to say that. If you remember nothing else, the project of the generation, which is a project of [Mosher?], a project of [Jeshua?], or a project of the founders, or a project... This (inaudible), the judging meritoriously the previous generation so that you're building on the positive, is such a profound paradigm change in the way we deal in America, in which we say that generation fucked up, that generation [00:15:00] screwed up, that generation gave us assimilation. That changed the nature of the way we approach the problem. So that's what I learned.

Where I'd like to extend Larry is that as much as America's a church place, and so you have to have the church working right, for a variety of reasons we have a host of other institutions that almost the same process has to happen in, whether it's the Federation, whether it's the [JC?], whether it's a whole set of new institutions that we don't have yet. And that flows right out of the implications of [Saul?]. Once you say you have embodied spirituality, then the pool has to be as much a place where the ethical moment, where the life moment, where the spiritual moment is happening as the synagogue, and you will not reach peripheral Jews -- so that's the peripheral Jew answer -- you will not reach peripheral Jews. If God appeared in the synagogue, peripheral Jews wouldn't walk in there. (laughter)

The real issue is if you really appreciate the *kedushah* of the self, if you doctor it, if you appreciate the *kedushah* of the self [00:16:00] that Saul talks about, right, the sacredness of the self, right, not the excesses, which is a foil anyhow, but the *kedushah* of the self, then you recognize where people are, that there's tremendous possibilities there, that they see things, right? And you've got to go to the pool, and the health club, and the bedroom, and they'll get you places on the golf

courses, in the shopping malls, in the workplaces, and those potentially become where the temple gets located. He did an unbelievable, magnificent job with the home. But that was very radical at the time. Right? What you have to do now is imagine that it's in a lot of other places, of which the synagogue is one.

M1:

Saul, do you want to chime in on that, or move on? We had a specific question to you about, I think, to the wider world and to alienated Jews.

Saul:

I don't see election as a problem, [00:17:00] and that's sort of the philosophical problem that I realize that I have, that I don't see election as a problem. I believe that God chose to enter into a relationship with the Jewish people, and transmitted to us vehicles which are accessible to the entire world, right? He didn't tell us to hide it from the entire world. I believe that he desired that we bring these messages to the entire world, and to the extent that they are accessible to the entire world, I don't have a philosophical problem with the notion of election. I believe that there is a struggle in

every circle of persons for what level of ethical responsibility one has to the circles beyond the self, right? So we all understand that we have a level of ethical responsibility to the family, to our immediate family, that is greater than to the circle of friends and neighbors, and that we have a greater responsibility to friends and neighbors than we have to the total community, and a greater responsibility to our local community than to a distant community, [00:18:00] and so on. The more distant people come, the more attenuated our sense of responsibility is.

At the same time, you know, so what Torah tends to do in that situation, I believe, is to say that there are certain absolute responsibilities that we have to all of mankind, and then there are certain slices of responsibility that we have in greater degree, to more intimate persons, and that we have to be able to meet the challenge of balancing those, without ever denying our responsibility to others. So it seems to me that our -- you know, the relationship to sort of the non-Jewish world is not problematic. On the contrary, I think we have messages to bring to the non-Jewish world that are still extraordinary, and, you know, if we simply bring the messages.

In relation to the issue of alienated Jews, I think, you know, we have not yet developed the necessary mechanisms for communicating the values that we really have. You know, we don't have enough confidence in [00:19:00] the content of our message. So I think what we need is a period of time where we really work on convincing ourselves, where we sort of strengthen our core to the point where we really understand what it means to be Jewish and to lead a Jewish life, and why that is of such infinite value to us and to everybody else. Then we will be in a much stronger position to bring that to the rest of the Jewish community.

M1:

Irwin, you want to address the question of (inaudible), and the Larry, (inaudible)?

Irwin:

I'm not sure that question and that answer, it was in the same language, even though I think they both (inaudible). I'm going to ask you: you made the point that we have a lot to teach the world. Can you elaborate (inaudible)? There's Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Western, Eastern religions. They have a lot to teach us.

Saul:

I don't know. (laughter)

Irwin:

I think that here's where [00:20:00] there is a very sharp distinction that's fault-lined in Jewish (inaudible), and that is that (inaudible) -- everybody thinks we're chosen. I don't care where you are on the thing. I don't care where you are on the spectrum; you agree you're chosen. Even Reconstructionists agree they're chosen; it's just what they mean by chosen. And the fault line is: is the distinctivist in some sense a kind of metaphysical, an inherent -- inherent, because I can't find a better word now -- inherent thing that shifts the power relations in terms of knowledge, implications, openness, in which, yes, the tolerant, you will find ways to be as loving as possible, because you want them to become like you. Or, is there a multiple set of chosen-nesses, and for a variety of reasons we've articulated (inaudible) doesn't feel ours, because we feel our parents' love the most, but it doesn't mean that parents don't love all the children. [00:21:00] And the children of the world get loved by the parent, but we love our parent, our parent loves us in a very, very unique and special

way. And that multiple -- that particularism is excellent, right? It's very important. You can't function as a human being without it. But at the same time, you can imagine that other people, other children are loved with the same kind of infinite love, and are playing out their particularities in different ways, because (inaudible) is such a complicated thing that you thank God every day, right? (inaudible) I thank God every day that I'm Jewish. I thank God every day that all the chips are on my shoulders to bring redemption and salvation to the world. And I think that is a very -- in policy implications regarding gentiles, the policy implications in how you speak about gentiles, policy implications about the openness of your institutions, policy implications about the kind of media you use to get your message out, the policy implications about how you understand the outside culture and can grow, I think it's a radical, radical, different take.

M1:

OK, Larry, you wanted to [00:22:00] respond to that?

Irwin:

I want literally 30 seconds more. (laughter) (inaudible). Both moves are in our story: the heavy-duty, particular (inaudible)

is in our story, and the other move is in the story, and the choice at different moments in history is which strand to valence. Moses meets the burning bush, but the verse before is that he spends his whole previous part of his life with Jethro, the (inaudible) Midian. And Midian priest, Midian priest gets repeated -- I mean, that's (inaudible) favorite thing -- five, six, seven times in a two-verse sentence, which makes you say, oh my God, why are you telling me (inaudible) was raised in a Midianite priest home? Because he must've learned something from that Midianite priest that allowed access to the moment of the burning bush. Now, that we (inaudible) come at the twentieth century, I fully understand that, because it gets valence, [00:23:00] because I need gentiles who I can learn from. So it validates the experience and makes (inaudible).

Dan:

That is the quick response, because I think the question that you're asking is important, and I think that it actually -- it focuses on some of the fault lines between some of the fault lines between some of the positions that are here that we haven't focused on yet. Just a couple things: I think you are right that there's a point at which chosen-ness has tended to be supremacist, but chosen-ness does not need to be supremacist.

My conception of chosen-ness -- and Irwin alluded to this, but I'll say it very explicitly -- does not include the possibility that God has engaged in other covenants with other peoples. Put it flat out there. I don't believe that. I really do believe that we are the chosen people, and that we should think about ourselves as the chosen people. But I don't believe for one moment that precludes the possibility of God having an important relationship with Christianity. It's not my faith structure, but it's not worth a lot of time to me also to rail against it, and I'm open to the possibility that my parents have an equally compelling relationship with my brothers where they have with me. I can't understand why, (laughter) but I... [00:24:00] Absolutely. But in all seriousness, I understand they do, and that relationship with me does not preclude an equally intensive relationship with them.

Here's the rub: we will always tend towards a supremacist conception of chosen-ness, intentionally or by default, if we don't know enough to fill our conception of chosen-ness with context. If we don't know enough about Jewish life to be able to say this is what we have to offer the world, because we know *Mishnah*, and we know (inaudible), and we know (inaudible), and we know [*Musar?*], and we know (inaudible), and we don't know any

of that stuff, then I've got to be chosen because I must be just innately smarter or innately better, and that's just racism, right? So let's understand, just one quick second, that the word *shegetz* is a racist word. It means abomination.

Q:

Shiksa, too.

Dan:

Well, it's just a feminine version, right? But *shiksa* is a word that means abomination. So if you mean to say that non-Jews were abominations, then use that word, and if you don't mean to say that, then don't use that word anymore. [00:25:00] Right? If we have objections to people marrying certain other people on the basis of self-preservation or shared values, but a lot of the basis of in hearing abomination or in hearing supremacist, I think we've got to be very careful about the issue of Jewish racism in our own community, and we have to be aware that very often that racism is the result of the ignorance to which I was trying to speak yesterday. (applause)

Larry:

I would agree with what Dan just said, and I won't repeat it, therefore. He said it better than I would, but I accord with it entirely. This, though, does raise two other questions that are related. One was the question of why be Jewish, and the other one is what marketing strategy, or how do you reach out to other people, and what do you do about the unaffiliated. Clearly, the more we know about why we have a covenant, and the positive part that fills our covenant with God, the better. We have to be able to speak to that. We have to be able to tell people. If we can't tell people, then they will not know why be Jewish, [00:26:00] and we will not know why we're chosen, and we will not be able to reach out to other people. But there is something more than that. We have exercised -- this is a hard thing to say to people who work so hard for the Jewish community, as you all do -- we have become expert at saving the world, but we don't know anything about saving ourselves. We have spent generations now inviting people in to work hard and save other Jews, save Israel, save these people, save that. And you know what? I'm glad we did, and I wish more people had done it, and I'm going to keep on doing it. There's nothing wrong with that. But at a given point, someone looks at us and says, "Yeah, but what are you doing to save yourself? I mean, can you in your own life demonstrate that this positive content of

Judaism, all this knowledge you have, all this work you do, gives you a more -- a fuller life? Are you connecting your dots in a way that I'd like to."

The ultimate question, therefore, I think is a spiritual question, and though I don't disagree [00:27:00] with Saul with regard to *kedushah* as the Jewish word for spirituality, particularly working through Torah, all the way through. I do think that when I speak of spirituality, I mean not an objective quality of *kedushah* -- he may agree with this, I don't know -- I mean the way in which our own personal lives touch the spiritual-- touch our tradition, and when we embody and when we completely feel that our lives are modeled after tradition, and we now can draw the picture of our dots because we know what tradition has to say to us. At that point, all of a sudden it all comes home. We say, "I know who I am," and we go home happier, and we get up happier, and we can handle our problems easier, and there's something about us, and we become the best advertisements for what we're all about.

In our age, the one thing I know for sure -- and Irwin talks about this a great deal -- Rick says what did we learn: one of the things I learn from Irwin regularly is the value of

experience. One thing I know: in our time, people are looking to personalize the many traditions. [00:28:00] If we don't personalize it in our lives, it doesn't much matter how much we work; we won't be able to get other people to follow us.

Dan:

One more point on that. (inaudible) who asked the question about the reaching out to those people who are really totally disconnected, and I say the following with no sense of joy: that I do believe that there are masses of Jews out there who we're not going to reach. I really do believe that. There's a large debate, as you know, about the Federation role, on money spent with in-reach versus outreach, and the degree to which outreach money has been effective or not effective. Nobody ought to have anything other than a tremendous sense of sadness about the possibility that we've made mistakes, or that just the transformation of the life in which we lived and the culture in which we've found ourselves to be so awesome (inaudible) hold on to everybody.

But here would be my warning about that: we ought to try to reach as many people as we possibly can. We ought to make as many bridges into the Jewish community as we can, as many gates

as we possibly can. We ought to be as open and as welcoming and as [00:29:00] compelling in many ways as we possibly --

"compelling" in the best sense of that word -- as we possibly can. But we ought not diminish the product in the attempt to reach out to so many people that for those of us who are still in the core that the product can no longer speak passionately.

(applause)

Saul:

I would really like just to reinforce, add slightly, to what was just said on both sides of me, and that is that I think that the reason that the focus on the synagogue is so essential right now, and the reason that the synagogue needs to be transformed, does need to be transformed as an institution is precisely because that's where we have the hugest body of Jews who are open and accessible to being transformed in their personal lives. And if we expend our energies [00:30:00] in achieving that transformation, then it will bring others in. What are the statistics? Apparently 80% of American Jews at one point or another are members of synagogues, but they are members for very short duration, right? So they're members for a couple of years around the bar mitzvah, you know, because they're required to become a member in order to have a wedding there, or, you know,

whatever it is that moves them in, but that short period of time that they spend in the synagogue is apparently not sufficiently powerful to keep them in. If we can restructure the synagogue in such a way as to make it have a powerful impact on the lives of the people who are there, then we've got a much better chance of reaching a much broader percentage of the total Jewish population.

M1:

OK, we're going to take a group of additional questions, and we will continue to answer some of the previous ones that haven't been answered, as well, (inaudible).

Q:

This is not a question, it's just a note. [00:31:00] The note is that -- I speak to Saul's response to either know about learning from the non-Jewish world. You know as well as I do that there's a statement in (inaudible) that says that there is nothing that is prohibited to a gentile that is permitted to a Jew. So there are times that we look out to the gentile community, things that they are prohibiting to themselves as a matter of ethical or moral consciousness, and we say our obligation is to rise to that particular level. So if there's

an issue about Jewish chosen-ness, one of the issues about Jewish chosen-ness would be that part of the chosen-ness responsibility was always to be grabbing for the highest possible ethical level, wherever we may find it. Sometimes we find it within our own tradition, and in our own revelation, and sometimes we find it revealed to us via the instrument of other peoples.

M1:

[Kevin?]

Kevin:

Thank you. We need to look at some of the successes of [Abat?], [00:32:00] and also I think we should take our Judaism that we've learned in the synagogue and make it portable, more of like a grassroots, in your neighborhood and on your street and on your home.

M1:

What do you mean by that? Could you be more specific about that?

Kevin:

I mean, talking about, you know, taking it on your street, inviting your neighbors, your friends, making it more of a grassroots type of environment, as opposed to having to schlep 15 or 20 minutes to a synagogue. We should be looking more towards that, making more of a grassroots (inaudible).

M:

Well, what does that mean?

Kevin:

Well, I mean, having study groups, you know, within your home, on your street, in your neighborhood, as opposed to, you know, going to (inaudible). For a lot of people, they won't go. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

M1:

Is that a rhetorical question, or is that a real question? Do you think that anybody here will say that you shouldn't do any grassroots work, you should only work in institutions?

Kevin:

Well, I also wanted to comment about (inaudible), whether or not there's a lot to learn (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

M1:

So the real question is about (inaudible), right? OK, good.

(laughter) OK, Mark.

Mark:

Yeah, whether by design or by chance, [00:33:00] the majority of the people that were chosen to participate (inaudible) were chosen for Federation involvement. Some of them maybe have synagogue involvement, some less so. But you're talking in various groups, first or second tier leadership of the Federation. We were summoned some four years ago, I think, with a similar message, that we were in trouble. And I thought at the time that the marketing plan was put to us coherently, that continuity that expressed the trouble that we were in, the marketing plan was supposed to push for greater strength in Jewish day schools, Israel summer programs, and Jewish summer camps. Now, the letter that summoned us all here to this meeting of the Board of Directors, as it was couched, it almost seemed like we had to put the marketing plan into effect, and how should we change (inaudible). So what I came here expecting was to find out: have we done the marketing plan? Is the marketing plan that was talked about four years ago correct?

[00:34:00] If so, have we, the members, carried it out? Since you have a lot of Federation people in all the (inaudible), wouldn't we really need to reimagine the whole (inaudible), because (inaudible) don't think that we've done anything significantly in the various communities to really put the marketing plan into effect, because I don't think any federation has had a significant reorientation about sort of the various programs that were outlined. So either tell us that what was talked about four years ago was incorrect and forget the marketing plan, we'll reimage the product, or tell us what you think is most important for us to go back and do in our communities. Or maybe it's to get a whole bunch of new Wexner people that are in the synagogues, and not so much in the federation. Let's have Wexner (inaudible). (laughter and applause)

M1:

OK, (inaudible).

Q:

The question that I wanted to ask is about intermarriage. It seems that in our society now that the point that we have taken, it's better to keep the Jew involved, whether they a Jewish

spouse or a non-Jewish spouse, and the question is [00:35:00] what's the incentive to convert, or to be sure that you marry somebody Jewish, when we seem to be treating the person that isn't... We seem to be bending over backwards to make sure that the Jew stays involved.

M:

(inaudible)?

Q:

No, it's a question as to how... I mean, we -- I'll give you an example: we went to a wedding a couple weeks ago which was the most Jewish wedding I have been to in years, and about the time that they were up on the chairs, holding handkerchiefs, we found out the groom wasn't Jewish, and there's no way you could have told from that wedding. And so what incentive did this bride have to marry somebody Jewish when what was said was, well, he's going to raise the children Jewish? And we seem to be treating everybody the same, and it's like, everything's fine. So what are we supposed to do about that?

M1:

Amelia?

Amelia:

In the synagogues, how do we get past on the education with rabbis, the whole group, sort of the administrative level, past the egos [00:36:00] and the lack of communication to get to the content of reimagining, (inaudible)?

M1:

Very political question. (laughter)

M:

I've got an answer for that one.

M1:

Carol?

Carol:

There were two very intriguing questions from the first round that weren't, I didn't feel, answered, I'd like to have answered by all the panelists. The first one was: why be Jewish? The second one was: what idea was the most valuable, the most important that you got from the other panelists? I would like to add, if I could, a negative side to that: what's the idea

you least liked, or thought was least effective? Less than 30 seconds.

M1:

OK, we're going to take two more questions, and then we'll have one last round at the end. OK, Mark?

Mark:

My question is (inaudible) in a sense in both the little dialogue between (inaudible) was struck that at some level the things that Irwin has been saying, the things that Saul has been saying, [00:37:00] have come together. Although I look at the two of them and view them as coming from very different perspectives, they at some level have reached the same result. And I'm wondering whether Rabbi Perkin's thoughts could be articulated meaningfully in the non-Orthodox community and have acceptance, and whether Rabbi [Kola's?] could be said in the same way in the Orthodox community, with acceptance and credibility, and provoke some sort of meaningful dialogue.

M1:

OK, last question, and then we'll (inaudible).

Q:

The original invitation to this retreat sort of set up, framed the question from the standpoint that we're members of a board, or we're shareholders, and our stock is falling, and we're not sure we have the right leadership. And as you read that, intuitively you say, well, fire the CEO, or bring in a new board. And [00:38:00] I don't mean to make light of it. I think all of us think that we can make a difference in our communities, but the truth is I think we're more sheep than shepherds in many respects when it comes to what we're talking about today. We're all going to go back, and some of us have asked for the Cliff's Notes or the McGuffey Reader to help us, you know, spread the word, but the truth of the matter is that we work in other areas, and once we get into that work and immersed in that work, all of a sudden a week and a month and six months goes by and we haven't done a whole lot. And this sort of goes to what Larry was speaking about yesterday: whether it's the synagogue or the JCC or Emory University, it's not the place, it's the person that's in charge. And I feel like we really suffer, with all due respect, and, frankly, not including the people that are here, but we really suffer from CEOs, or what I will call Jewish professional leadership, that can lead us. [00:39:00] We need to be led. We'll work our

butts off to do what we think makes sense, but we really need to be led. And I sort of feel like until that leadership is there, I'm not sure that we're not going to have -- that we need to fire the CEO, and I just would like that issue addressed.

M1:

OK. (inaudible). Irwin, you start.

Irwin:

I forget who asked the question now, but I don't know if that person saw how animated I was when Saul finished. What struck me about all the talks was that I felt we were -- I mean, I don't want to be presumptuous, but I felt that those two talks were, in many ways, saying [00:40:00] almost the exact same thing, just I play out some implications that I then call radical. He never uses the word "radical," because the population predominantly think -- part of it's just predisposition. You know, I really grew up in the '60s, right? I did all the things that we do in the '60s that stretch certain boundaries that I recognize were dark sides, (laughter) right? I also recognize that (inaudible) is incredibly productive and creative if you don't fall in. So there's some life experience. And I speak predominantly to peripheral Jews. I think Saul

speaks predominantly -- this is probably as close as he gets to peripheral Jews most of the time. (laughter) [00:41:00] And so we have different rhetoric. We have different rhetoric. Also, I grew up as a real Baby Boomer and TV generation. The imagistic way of relating things to me is very important, right? And so I think there's a lot of rhetoric there, but if you look at what he says, when you talk about the spirituality, the *kedushah* of materialism, what you're really saying then is there's going to be a whole set of new places where people are exercising their materialism that now become *kedushah* places if you can unfold the ethics, make the connections, not pander, all of Danny [Horace's?] important correctives to sometimes the way I'm interpreted, which is something I learned from Danny is I should... Well, first of all, I learned I was a genius, that I was unbelievable. (laughter) That was the most important thing I learned from him. (laughter and applause) [00:42:00] I just thought --

Saul:

That's where we all disagree with him. (laughter and applause)

Irwin:

But what I learned from Danny is that I take for granted my background, how much I know, and I shouldn't do that, and therefore I have sometimes a rhetoric that's sloppy, right? So that I learned from Danny. But I think that Saul and I are speaking to different communities, and saying very -- I'm interested in the *kedushah* of materialism, I'm interested in the *kedushah* of productivity. That's why I speak about the socket maker. What we don't have is the institutions -- and this is where I, a little bit, disagree -- as much as it's individual, [00:43:00] identity is not mediated without institutions. We do not have the institutions set up to deal with the *kedushah* of materialism, the *kedushah* of productivity, the *kedushah* of the self, and the *kedushah* of freedom itself. And that's a very, very big job of retooling. But I was blown away by how similar it was. And Danny, I felt somehow our speeches were exactly the opposite, yet we have very similar backgrounds, went to the same training. And so that really did strike me.

M1:

Saul, you want to respond to that?

Saul:

I think that in many ways what Irwin says is really true, except that having gone through sort of the '60s, living in Berkeley, (laughter) I learned by the mid-'70s that radical rhetoric [00:44:00] doesn't necessarily produce results on the ground. And, you know, I combine that with Shelley's -- my wife's -- lesson to me, and that is that if you have something really radical to say, say it in Yiddish. (laughter and applause) Because she understood that if people believe that it is integral to the tradition, then they will view it differently, right? Not because they wouldn't understand it. You know, they'll view it differently, because they'll think that it is rooted in the tradition, and that will give you a much better chance at a fair evaluation of the position that you take.

Now, I think Irwin is correct that we speak to very different audiences, and while this may not be the most alienated Jewish audience that I speak to, the truth is that I assumed an enormous amount of knowledge on your part [00:45:00] in that presentation, right? And the fact is that you guys have an enormous amount of Jewish knowledge, right? And I could stand up there and assume that you would know all of the pieces of the Shabbos and their connections to the *Mikdash*, right? And it just had to be structured for you. And I could assume that you

understood what it means to talk about the agricultural model and its connection to Shabbos, and all of the *mitzvah* that are (inaudible). And there's an enormous amount of knowledge that you have that I can speak to, and therefore, you know, I'm able to sort of move, and with you and with, let's say, audiences that are fully Orthodox audiences, I'm able to sort of move people from the grounds of what they already believe to seeing some of the implications of that in a different way in real life, and in that regard, if I [00:46:00] delivered the talk that I delivered here to a totally unaffiliated Jewish audience, it would be one of the biggest bombs in history, right? And by contrast, if Irwin tried to deliver the talk that he gave here the other day to an Orthodox audience, he would hardly be alive anymore. (laughter) Right? (applause) If you delivered in Yiddish, you'd have a fighting chance. (laughter) That's because half the Orthodox community doesn't understand Yiddish anymore. (laughter)

But in any case, so I think that's true. At the same time, I think -- so just to sort of turn back -- one of the critical things that I learned was actually from something that Irwin said to me at Aspen, which I then [00:47:00] sort of saw played out in his talk here, and that is the realization that I had

created a straw man, and that I needed to look more honestly at the issue of the integrational values, that is of the areas where Jewish and contemporary values really overlap in powerful ways, and it was that realization that helped me see an enormous amount. In any case, I think, just to sort of spread, since I'm on the mic already, the question of... (laughter)

Larry:

Well, I'll say what he was going to say, (laughter) but in Yiddish. (laughter) [00:48:00] I'm intrigued by that -- have been intrigued... (laughter) I'm intrigued by the question at the end about we are sheep and we need some leaders, and the earlier comment about have we really gone home and done what we had to do. And I can't help but say that if you leave here today feeling that, yes, disempowered, if you leave here today thinking you can't do it, whatever it is, then we have failed you absolutely, failed you absolutely. There's an oddity here: the more you know, we say, the more you'll do, but, in fact, sometimes the more you know, the more you know what you don't know, and the less you're inclined to do anything, because you say, "Who am I?" So you (inaudible) try to learn more, only to find out, "My God, there's even more I don't know." I mean, it's a terrible dilemma that I know you feel deeply.

Now let's speak personally for a minute. [00:49:00] I'm in a somewhat different position from you, obviously. Here I am, a rabbi. I've given my life to learning Judaism. But I'll tell you one way I think I'm different from the other people on the panel. I had a real late start. I'll tell you a personal story. I had a real late start. I decided to become a rabbi when I was 16, 17, or 18. I was looking into it. The first rabbi I went to see and told him I wanted to be a rabbi, he said, "Give it up, you'll never know enough." Went home, told my parents. Too late. I don't know any Hebrew. I'd never studied Gomorrah. I'd never read Torah. I didn't know anything. I went to the Hebrew Union College without a word of Hebrew. Only my parents, who said to me, "You don't have to give up, you can start now and you'll see," they were smart enough to be good Jewish parents when the first rabbi told me to give it up. They said, "Well, get a second opinion."

(laughter)

At any rate, I offer my own story to you really only as a model. The fact is you don't have to know everything, and the fact is that's one area in which I was going to ask Danny [00:50:00] to be a little fuller, and I'm afraid that he will disempower,

though I know he doesn't intend it, and I'm sure he would clarify it. But the fact of the matter is you know enough. Now, you know enough in the sense that of course you've got to keep learning more, like I do, we all do. Everybody learns more. But you know enough. Here's where I think this weekend, this Shabbos and whole weekend fits in. When we said that we're going to reimage Judaism, what I came here to do -- I don't know why you came, because I didn't get your letter, but when I -- I mean, I'm not on the board, I don't know -- but what I came for was some years ago I realized that the issue isn't more and more knowledge; the issue is what counts as knowledge. We have to redesign what counts as knowledge in our lives.

And what I'm trying to say, and I think others on the panel are trying to say, and I'd like to hear from them, but what I'm trying to say is [00:51:00] what counts as knowledge now is the personal taking on of that knowledge as the model to draw our own dots, to join our life together. So what you need to be able to do is go home and not do more of the above only. You're terrific at what you're doing already, but I'm not sure the people I talk to all have put together the knowledge that you've gained into your own life yet, because you still say, "Well, a little more, then I'll do it," but you've got enough. You can

do it. What you can't do is you can't do it alone, and that's when Saul said, you know what? You study with somebody else for the hour. Right on the money. And it's not just study. Everybody here needs -- and this is part of what synagogue reevaluation is -- we discovered everybody who's active in a spiritual environment in church or in synagogue needs a small sort of a spiritual support group, if you like. By that, it can be a group that meets to study every week, [00:52:00] that meets to pray every week, like he says, whatever it is to you. But you need that small support group. And it may not be just yourselves. You've got friends at home who are looking. You can go out and you can find four or five other families, or six friends or whatever, and you can do it. You can start. And then you'll have not only the model of your work in the community, but a model of lives in the making. And that's going to make you, and it's going to give you the sense you can do it, and you'll have supporters to do it, and you'll discover you really do know enough. We're really here to tell you that you can do it, not that you can't. (applause)

Dan:

Now, I think it's very important to respond to this whole issue of the potential disempowering nature of the call to knowledge.

I think it's really a critical issue, and it points to one of the things that I've learned over the course of the weekend, that I've learned, actually, through Wexner as a whole, but this weekend, particularly in a conversation with Irwin, and I think we had a conversation also [in groups?]. [00:53:00] I recognize that that's a take on this. Just as Irwin, you know, is nice enough to say that in part what I've helped him see is the dangers of his rhetoric, so the same thing is true here. I think there is an issue of making sure that the rhetoric is not misunderstood. I remember two years ago or three years ago we were doing the basic Judaism course during the summer at [Snowberg?]. And I was doing that course, and (inaudible) [Greenberg?] is one of the other people there doing fundraising. He asked if he could come in and sit on my basic Judaism course. I didn't really think he would learn a tremendous amount, (laughter) but I -- you know, it's fine. And he sat down, and I did a session, and he took me aside afterwards and he said, you know, "Can I give you some feedback?" Obviously, of course. Here's the feedback he says to me: he says, "You make too much of the role of *halacha* in Jewish life." This is the first time, I think, in the history of the Jewish people that an Orthodox rabbi told a Conservative rabbi he was making too much of the

initial *halacha*. (laughter) [00:54:00] And I said that. I mean, I peeled myself off the floor.

You know, I said to him, and what I still think is true, I think to a certain extent the rhetoric that we use is framed as a corrective on the community from which we come. In other words, he lives in a community and speaks mostly -- although because of his professional work it's a little bit different, but he certainly lives in a community primarily in which the role of *halacha* is central. And what's therefore interesting and innovative to him is the role of the *aggadah* side of Jewish life, the ethical side of Jewish life, and that's what excites him, and that's what he sees needs to be focused on as the direct... I work and live in a community primarily in which I think some of that is taken for granted, and there is a, perhaps, insufficient attention to what I think are the rigors of Jewish tradition, and what I would call non-negotiable (inaudible) a couple years ago. I think that therefore it's a part of what is humbling about all of this is to recognize that one of the great things about Wexner is that we really are all from different places in this room, and therefore rhetoric that is fashioned from one particular perspective [00:55:00] or

another is going to be problematic, no matter whose rhetoric it is, and mine is not an exception to that.

Having said that... (laughter) Well, I say that very seriously, but here's one -- I don't want (inaudible) that you say, "OK, well, I didn't really mean what I said." So (inaudible). That means that I just wasted your time, and I wasted my time, and I don't want you to walk away without feeling either. I believe what I said. I'm going to tell you how seriously I believe it. I believe it because we have a new rabbinical school that admits students in their forties who can't read Hebrew. I'm not exaggerating. A lot of you don't speak Hebrew real well. They can't read Hebrew. Now, you might say to yourself, what kind of 40-year-old who can't read Hebrew is ever going to make a rabbi? (chatter around room) Well, OK, all right. Then according to that story, live 120 years, right, and married to somebody who'll let you study the full language the next 40. We haven't found those people yet. But I take seriously the premise that people have the capacity to learn a tremendous amount [00:56:00] when they put their mind to it. And I'm going to be very realistic and honest with you: is a person who comes into the program at the age of 40 and doesn't know how to read Hebrew going to know as much as (inaudible)? Not in a million years.

It's not going to happen. It's not going to happen. Are they going to know enough to, A, know what they know, and B, know what they don't know, to be able to frame a visionary conception of what Jewish life is about, and to root Jews back to their tradition and back to their text? Absolutely, or we have to go out of business.

So when I say to you that knowledge is (inaudible), it's not because I want you to walk away and say, forget it, (inaudible) know anything. It's because I have a higher estimation of you than you do, because I really believe that we can all learn this. And I'll tell you from my own personal experience, watching friends, when I've really come to understand this: we have a number of friends that we know over the course of, let's say, the last 10 or 12, 15 years, who, I mean, (inaudible) basis, who have had children born with serious issues. And I have watched people who knew nothing about this field, nothing about this field, become expert [00:57:00] in this field. I have watched people who are trained as documentary film writers go to the library and learn how to read medical journals, because they were convinced that nobody cared enough about their kid. And if their doctor was too busy to research what was wrong with their kid, well, then damn it, they would go to the

UCLA Medical School library and they would figure it out. And you know what? More times than you would dare imagine, it worked. Their kids are a lot better off than any physician told them they were ever going to be, because the parents simply said, "I'm not stupid. I don't have a medical degree, and these journals are all gobbledygook to me now, but damn it, I'll figure it out, and they did. And that stuff isn't any harder or easier than the stuff that we're asking ourselves to figure out together. When we talk about knowledge, it's really I need a sense of empowering.

Part of the problem of leadership -- I forget who asked the question -- but part of it is that rabbis have this notion, which is both incorrect and has to be undermined, that they're the only ones who know anything. The way to change rabbinic leadership in this country is to take away from rabbis [00:58:00] the monopoly that they're the only ones who can read the *Mishnah*. If you want to have a rabbi who has to be forced to rethink dramatically what their community impact is going to be, and what their vision is going to be, they have to be in a community of people who know a lot also. Then they've got some real hard thinking to do. What can I bring to this? What do I have to add? What do I have to keep learning 10, 15, 20 years

out of the rabbinate so I'm not recycling the same five years of learning into 50 years of sermons?

So I understand -- and I'll just end with this -- I really do understand that there is a way in which this can be seen as disempowering. Do you think that when I realize how much he knows there aren't moments that I feel like a charlatan? He knows more of [Gamara?] in his little finger than I'll ever know. There's people on my faculty. I teach Talmud in a department with people who at the age of seven they knew more [Gamara?] than I know now. (laughter) That's not exaggeration. That's not an exaggeration. [00:59:00] So one reaction would be, this is ridiculous. I can't teach this.

A quick, quick story that I just told Saul yesterday: that about a year ago -- [Beth?] goes to a [Gamara shira?] every Monday night at our shul. So about a year ago my son [Avi?] was about six. He said to me, "Well, (inaudible) you teach. What do you teach?" So I said to him, "Well, I teach (inaudible), but today I'm teaching Talmud." He said, "You can't teach Talmud." My students say the same thing. (laughter) But I said to him, "Why not?" He said to me, "Because Talmud's for girls." (laughter and applause) Because the only person he knows who

leaves home specifically to go study Talmud is [Ima?]. That's the one (inaudible) pretty sure (inaudible) is, you know, because (inaudible) babysitting because Beth's going to go study Talmud. But my point with the other one, there are people here -- I consider myself (inaudible) teach Talmud. I can say that. (inaudible), I'll do something different. And I don't think this is false humility. It's not false humility. It's really true. [01:00:00] But I know what I know, and I know what I don't know. And I try to use what I do know to help shape people's conception of what they can also know, and what I don't know I see somebody else to teach. I'm not embarrassed. I wish I knew more. I wish I knew a lot more. But I think we can all learn a lot more than we give ourselves credit for, and the goal is to take ourselves seriously, to recognize the intelligence that got us to where we are, whatever professional work that we do, and say, I can apply that to the Jewish tradition, no less. And to say that the need for knowledge is empowering, not disempowering.

M1 :

OK, Irwin, (inaudible).

(applause)

Irwin:

I'm going to try to do this with a contained rhetoric.

(laughter) Now, this is an experiment. (laughter)

M:

He has 40 seconds left. (laughter)

Irwin:

That's the problem with containment. There is a difference.

[01:01:00] I'll start with an example. The reason that mother or that father learned what they did and went into that library and went into the internet and went into etc., etc., etc., the reason they did that is because there was a compelling need. It wasn't commanded by God. It wasn't from the outside. It was from the deepest levels of self, out. And then they went... Now, if that is the case, and that's what you're talking about knowledge, then the implications are very, very radical as to what you're going to teach, how you're going to teach.

Knowledge then is not some mystical body that's whole. What it is is it's a process, an ongoing process, of integration from a wide variety of places. And it's not more knowledge or less knowledge. That's really very rarely the question, which is why

[01:02:00] with very different knowledge bases we can sit on the same panel. It's about the depth of integration to who you are as a human being, whether it's three facts or five thousand facts. That identity information is that complex. It's not about there's this input that came down, and it's whole, and you're receiving. It's about a relationship between who you are at the deepest levels, and whatever knowledge bank, whatever pieces of information you come into contact with.

So if you want people to respond to Torah, then you better discover what are the real human needs people have, and the Torah that you teach and choose has to respond to those needs. If their needs are not going to be met by a prayer book knowledge right now, then -- and I don't want to be misinterpreted. I don't want to say the prayer book's not important. I don't want to say that you shouldn't pray. I don't want to say that I don't value [*shakri?*]. (inaudible) I have no problem with (inaudible). (laughter) I don't want to say any of that. If you came to the service yesterday, it was amazing -- I know, I know -- it was amazing how much the (inaudible) was there. I did not do one English (inaudible). But it's asking about the relationship between the inside of a person and knowledge. In that respect, that is what the shift

in consciousness is about. But I think there Larry and I are really -- I think we are really saying the same thing about we construct the world. As we construct the world, the world then comes back and constructs us, and then we go back and construct the world. That is a dynamic process, and anytime we as rabbis, or we as -- this is the problem with the Wexler bit -- anytime we think there's this curriculum, and somehow if you just get this curriculum you will be a serious Jew or a serious Jewish leader, right, you will produce this intolerant people, which is, to a great extent, [01:04:00] one of the great tragedies of this experience, because the real issue is -- and here's -- you know, the funny thing is that no one's going to quote more texts than Saul and I. We quoted the most text.

But there's a text that I learned from *Chabad*, as you said, about *Chabad*, and you'll understand all *Chabad* just from this text, (inaudible), actually. There's a text that says [Hebrew]. Teach a child according to his way -- but it was always understood as the Torah's way -- and when that child gets old he won't -- [Hebrew] -- he won't destroy you, he won't depart from this beautiful text. (inaudible) has a reading on this, that you know what (inaudible) is? It's not that you teach a child... It's not that you teach a child in the way of the

text, but [darko?], teach a child in the way of his own path. And if you understand that own path, [01:05:00] that Torah will take hold in a way that that mother with a cancer child will, and it will explode off the scene in a wide variety of ways, some of which we ourselves will find detestable, because it will be unbelievable. Where did you go? But that's the believable uniqueness of human beings. And when that happens, and we can begin to accept it and learn from it, then you'll have a fine Jewish community. (applause)

M1:

I wanted to close now, a couple minutes each on what you would like each of these people to go back with, as individuals, and as community leaders, so that it's clear to them what -- you know, (inaudible).

Saul:

I guess I already told you what I think you ought to do. I'd like to just frame it a little bit differently in two minutes. [01:06:00] The *Mishnah* says [Hebrew], right? The *Mishnah* says that there are three legs upon which the world stands, and they are Torah, and worship, which in its broader sense includes the whole of the doing of mitzvah, and [Hebrew], and the performance

of acts of loving kindness. But it is my conviction that if we lead our lives in such a way that on a daily basis we can ask ourselves at the end of the day, on this day, did I do Torah, on this day, did I study Torah, did I learn something new that my tradition could teach me, did I do (inaudible), did I engage in a symbolic act of worship of God using [01:07:00] either speech or action? Did I engage in an act of kindness, of goodness to another person? If we can ask ourselves that set of questions at the end of each day, and in the main respond affirmatively, then we are deeply engaged in a path that will lead to our own transformation, the transformation of our families, of our marriages, of the whole of our lives. You know, it simply does not take extraordinary brilliance or extraordinary range of Jewish knowledge to live one's life in accordance with the will of God, but it takes conscious desire and intent to do so. So I guess the bottom line [01:08:00] of my suggestion to you is sort of take that mission and post it someplace, and try to ask yourselves those questions, and live with it.

Larry:

Well, I need to return, of course, to my message about synagogues. I'm inclined just to continue our conversation this morning, but I don't want to lose sight of that. I'm happy to

say I think that the synagogue/Federation wars are largely over. I spend most of my time in synagogue meetings, and I see a significant change in attitude taking place, but there's still a great deal of suspicion between the two camps. So one of the very immediate things you can do is go back and drop out the suspicion. That is to say that you can begin building bridges by letting synagogues know that you know that they matter, and that you want to work with them and within them to make them [01:09:00] into spiritual centers, that they have a unique place in the community that other institutions don't do, just as they won't do what some other institutions do do. Our own models in Synagogue 2000 are being tested in 16 synagogues this particular year. They are not just programmatic. They are changing the very nature of how we conceptualize the place. Call it the re-spiritualization of synagogues for this post-ethnic and post-pediatric age in which we find ourselves. In a year's time, I hope I'll have a lot of good news to share with you, and I'll have learned a lot, to be sure. And at that point we'll be facing the need of how we spread this to synagogues around the country, and I'll need your help then, to help me think that through. In the meantime, I hope that you'll stay in touch with me. I'm very anxious to retain our dialogue on all of these things.

I want you to know that we've talked here about the issue of leadership that's come up several times. Several of us at the table have talked about certainly UF and Hebrew Union College, which are training rabbis, we've talked about getting together and [01:10:00] having a special track to help students develop the kind of new thinking. That's very much in the process. We've talked with calm, and sharing that. So these are kind of informal conversations that have gone on. You should know we're aware of the need for leadership, and we're not just ignoring it. We hope to attend to it.

Lastly, then, personally... Well, I'll tell you a story, lastly. It's a story about Harry, who is a man who lived on the Lower East Side in New York, and he had a furniture store. And Harry used to have lunch with the boys, as he called them in those days. And anyway, to make a long story short, the Lower East Side was gentrified, and they bought up the restaurant, and pretty soon the guy who owned the new restaurant, the old restaurant, figured out that the waiter was taking too much time talking to Harry and the boys, and it was taking every lunch, and they had a big table, and they sat forever, and they weren't ordering enough, and a long story short he decided to change the

whole thing, get square tables, and he fired the waiter, big lights, get 'em in, get 'em out, [01:11:00] so on. Well, Harry and the boys used to eat this corned beef sandwich every lunch, God help us, used to -- that's, as I say, how I know God exists: that we've been eating red dye #2 all these years and we're still here (laughter) -- so it turns out that Harry says to me, he says, "You know what? I'm getting old, and Joe is retiring anyway. I'm going to retire. It's not worth it anymore." And he sold the store and he moved away.

So he moved south, naturally. He's in the Miami area. And I visit him in Miami one day, and I say to Harry, looking at him (inaudible). I said, "Look at Harry." I said, "In your desk, I notice you have an ashtray. This surprises me, Harry, because I didn't know that you smoked." And Harry says to me, "Oh, that beat up old ashtray?" He says, "I don't smoke," he says. "But, you know, my last lunch in the restaurant, and they're going to tell the whole thing down. And I thought to myself, my God, it's the last time [01:12:00] I'm going to be here. Every lunch, like religious ritual, rabbi," he says, "I go religiously to lunch, and not anymore? What'll I do? And so before I left I figured, they'll throw it out anyway, right? They're not going to keep the old ashtray. I'll take it. The only time I

ever stole anything. I put it in my pocket. I walked out with it. And I didn't take a lot of stuff from New York South, but I brought the ashtray. And there are moments when I just sit, looking at my life, and I think of my life, and I look at the ashtray, and I remember that the most wonderful, most meaningful moments of my life were spent sitting around a table with the boys."

Now, what bothers me about this story is that Harry nothing at the end of his life to recollect better than sitting around a table in a restaurant with an ashtray. "What happened to the synagogue?", I asked. He should've had a synagogue. We will know we succeed [01:13:00] when the people we know best, including ourselves, have something better than an ashtray to take with us whenever we move where we do, and we start getting to our old age, and we start remembering moments in synagogues and spiritual communities, we know we will have transformed our Jewish institutions the way we should, and in the meantime, for yourself, if you don't have such a spiritual group, make one. If you don't have one for your friends, but you see them in other ways, join together with them, because you know what? I started saying when you get to be about 40, it's time to say, "I've come of age, spiritually." And you know what? It's the

most wonderful thing in the world to know that you're building more than ashtrays. (applause)

M1:

Irwin.

Irwin:

[01:14:00] (inaudible) everything that I say is one thing. We really have to begin to trust each other, trust ourselves, and trust the cosmos. We've gone through a century in which there's been so much mistrust and so much death that there is a rupture at the core of what it means to be human, and all religions right now, and all cultures, are going to have to heal that rupture. First eleven chapters of (inaudible) are just about can God trust human beings, and can human beings cross God, when they cross the boundaries, when they make mistakes, when they do things that are very rough on each other? Can they trust each other and love each other, [01:15:00] and commit to each other? And when they do -- and it's hard -- when they do, you can begin a (inaudible) journey that is indeterminate. The journey is indeterminate. We don't know where we're going. It's [Hebrew]. I'm going to show it. You'll know it when you get there. So we've got to heal. That is what all of this is about, whatever

the technology we wind up disagreeing on or agreeing on. We've got to really trust each other, trust the cosmos, and trust ourselves. And when we do that, the journey that we do go on will be a journey of *berakhah*. There will be a *berakhah* to the world that needs that perhaps even more than the Jewish people. Everything that I say flows out of that, so when you go back, start trying to love each other, and love the people you disagree with, and love the people that you get angry with. That's what the culture's about, the bottom line. And the world will be transformed. And that's what we say at a marriage: *Mehera*, "soon it'll be." Because here we get a little sense of the possibility of two different people committing themselves forever. *Mehera*. You know, soon it'll be that we'll hear the voices of everybody, everybody, in song, in joy. That's [Hebrew]. That's [Hebrew].

Dan:

I think that it's not just an issue of a marketing plan. [01:17:00] I think that that is the first stage of reimagining (inaudible) Jewish life. It's about thinking better about marketing, to be sure, but about recognizing that the product that we could market may be unmarketable. And it's about recognizing that our reengineering the product has to proceed in

two very different, and yet coexistent, directions. It has to recognize that the journey is indeterminate, that the sea change of a married life is so profound that in Judaism that is I'm willing to change, and I'm willing to ask new questions, and I'm willing to see whoever it is (inaudible) do its work, and I'll survive. But that Judaism that does not insist upon remaining rooted [01:18:00] in the world from which it came ultimately won't have much to say and won't be Judaism.

I chose to reflect over the course of the weekend on the latter half of what is really a very delicate balance. And so I would urge us to think about the following issue: commissioner, you all know (inaudible), and it says, among other things, [Hebrew]. It's commonly translated as get for yourself, or make for yourself, a master or a teacher, and acquire yourself to train. And I would encourage you to take that on a lot of the obvious levels, (inaudible) first, about the spiritual group level at the second level, and I'd encourage you to think about the following third level. Start with the second half: [Hebrew].

[01:19:00] One (inaudible) I think is (inaudible) says that *haver* is actually a book. When it says acquire for yourself a friend, how do you acquire -- how do you purchase, really -- (inaudible) is purchase at a certain level -- how do you

purchase...? Well, you can't, because that, by definition, is the opposite of what you would do to acquire a friend.

(inaudible) book, see the book as a friend. See the tradition, as complex, and as inscrutable as it sometimes is, not as a deep black hole to be avoided at all costs, but as our friend, as our source of meaning, as the root of our context, as the wellspring from which that which we will ultimately have to say to the world will emerge.

And I would suggest that in this day and age [Hebrew] doesn't mean anymore "hire a rabbi." I think it means find somebody visionary [01:20:00] with whom to study. It means find somebody who takes you and your personal religious journey seriously. It means find somebody who doesn't really mind if at times you don't agree with them. It means find somebody who believes that just because they may know more something doesn't mean they know more everything. It means ultimately saying that being a Jew in this world is about seeking a vision wherever it can be found. So it's about finding people and finding sources to help us each emerge with a sense of a powerful vision of what Jewish life can yet become, and to commit ourselves in whatever institution we choose to work in, to make that institution vision driven, if it's a shul, if it's a Hillel, if it's a Federation, if it's

your family. [01:21:00] The issue is what's the vision, the dream of Jewish life that has to animate my work here. Go out and make yourself a vision. Acquire the books, and use them in the presence of teachers to create a vision, and make that vision a reality. Do it with courage. Do it with conviction. And do it with the confidence that even though Judaism has seen glorious eras in its past, great Jewish days still lie ahead.

(applause; standing ovation)

(singing and clapping)

M:

Now we'll have about an hour for concluding in the workshops, getting your...

END OF AUDIO FILE