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28

Folder
20

Merians, Melvin, 1991-1992.

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American Jewish Archives website.

Memorandum

TO: Virginia Levi
FROM: Shulamith Elster
DATE: October 15, 1991
RE: Melvin Merians

I spoke with Mr. Merians last week to arrange either a phone conference or a meeting in New York. He respectfully asked that we postpone any discussion of CIJE matters until the middle of November. He explained that Mrs. Merians had recently been diagnosed with breast cancer. She has had surgery and now they are moving temporarily to Philadelphia (Monday through Friday) to be close to where she is being treated. Her prognosis is good!

In addition to this news he is busy with the upcoming biennial convention of the UAHC. He will be installed in his new office.

I will stay in touch with him, send a note with good wishes for Mrs. Merians' recovery and congratulations on the installation.

Mort may want to know about this and contact him personally.



MORTON L. MANDEL

4500 EUCLID AVENUE • CLEVELAND, OHIO 44103

November 18. 1991

Dear Mel:

Congratulations on your installation early this month as Chairman of the Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. It is important that the leaders of the denominational movements share our commitment to Jewish education and I, for one, am happy to see you at the helm.

I look forward to continuing to work with you on these shared concerns, and to seeing you at the annual meeting of the CIJE on Thursday, January 16, 1992.

Best wishes for what I know will be a successful tenure as Chairman.

Cordially,



MORTON L. MANDEL

Mr. Melvin Merians
10 Bonnie Briar Lane
Larchmont, NY 10538

bcc: S. ELSTER

Memorandum

TO: Steering Committee/CIJE
FROM: Shulamith Elster
RE: Melvin Merians
DATE: December 13, 1991

I met with Mr. Merians at his UAHC office on December 11th: he is at the UAHC every business day. We spoke for close to two hours and I found our conversation instructive regarding the Reform movement's interests and priorities and very useful, as you will see from the following, in planning our work.

I. On the CIJE

I began my report on our activities by letting him know about my recent contacts (individuals/groups) within the Reform movement--including my day at the Biennial and participation at NATE (National Association of Temple Educators Conference with Sara Lee), meetings with Dan Syme, Howard Bogot, Isa's work and the participation of Sherry Blumberg (UAHC-New York) in our first Best Practices panel the evening before.

Mel inquired about the search for the Executive Director. He suggested that the "tentative status" of the CIJE would be an issue for the type of experienced professional we are looking for as Executive Director. This suggested (and this emerges again later) that he has serious concerns as to whether or not the agenda of the CIJE can be implemented.

He would like to see evidence of the CIJE's ability to truly bring together movements and funders beyond our ability to bring them to the table as members of the Board.

II. On the Lead Communities

It is clear that he is dubious of accomplishing anything within the lead communities if one of the prerequisites will be the full participation and cooperation of the Orthodox. His experience within the New York community, the Synagogue Council and other organizations suggests that within the community process the other movements will be forced "to participate in outlandish compromises that would waterdown what we want to accomplish on behalf of Jewish education". He feels that there appears to be a never-ending series of "stumbling blocks" and if there is any progress it is "pitifully slow"!

Therefore, his suggestion that within the communities we have separate programs for the educational institutions organized by denominations and forgo joint ventures insofar as he believes these will be less productive.

Clearly, his interest

educational programs. The objective of the movement is "to fulfill the needs of the synagogue". He spoke eloquently on the role of the synagogue in "spiritual transmission" and if I wanted a speaker on the subject of the need for synagogue affiliation and involvement, I would invite him!

In questioning the federation as the mailing address for lead communities, he emphasized the fact that there is, in his view, no money flowing from the federations to the synagogues to support their important mission.

III. On the Reform Movement

He wanted me to clearly understand the relationship between the UAHC and its activities and HUC- the College and the Schools. In his view the schools exist to serve the movement and scholarship is second to practical Rabbis and training professionals to "serve" the synagogues. He reminded me that when I consult HUC staff on matters related to education that is not the "same as" working with the UAHC- its staff and its lay leadership. I will keep this in mind as I think about participation from the Reform movement in the various projects.

He suggests that I learn more about the staff people in the 13 regional offices and offered to give me the names of people he would recommend. He also is interested in our soliciting the views and opinions of lay leadership concerned with Jewish education in the regions. We will have to think about this issue especially because it has implications for our work in developing support in the local communities. These people may be the ones we want to interest in the local lead communities! I will follow up with him on this.

IV. Board and Annual Meeting

He plans to attend these meetings. He explained that he was quiet at the first meeting because it was his first meeting. I think we can expect that he will be an active participant from here on.

IV. ETC

FYI: Mr. Merians is the Treasurer of The Jewish Museum and a cousin of Rabbi Harold Schulweis. He volunteered that both have helped him understand Conservative Judaism's issues.

Both Mel and Mrs. Melton spent time talking with me about outreach to interfaith families. We should keep this growing concern in mind as we proceed with the lead community work and perhaps consider it somewhere in the top ten for Best Practices.



MEMO

COMBINED JEWISH PHILANTHROPIES
OF GREATER BOSTON

APR 03 1992

To: Dr. Shulamith Elster
Stephen H. Hoffman
Jack Ukeles

From: Barry Shrage *Barry* April 1, 1992

Attached is a most important document from Mel Merians, Chairman of the Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. From time to time, we've each wondered whether we can find partners within the congregational world who share the vision required to make real change in our Jewish education system within a congregational framework. I think you'll find in this document a real strategy that could virtually be adopted in its entirety by any local community as a blueprint for collaboration with our congregations.

While Mel does not focus on the federation/congregation linkage, his vision is certainly amenable to collaboration. His blueprint for action contains all the important ingredients that many of us believe are critical to a revolutionary integrated approach through which parent and family education, camping, Israel experiences and youth groups -- formal and informal Jewish education at its best -- become an integral part of a youngster's Jewish education. I know you'll enjoy the paper and I hope you will agree that it deserves widespread attention and thought.

I'd welcome your thoughts and comments. Warm regards.

:mm

COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
THE JEWISH FAMILY, INDIVIDUAL AND SYNAGOGUE

THROUGHOUT MOST OF JEWISH HISTORY, THE NATIONS AND SOCIETIES IN WHICH WE JEWS LIVED ISOLATED US, EITHER THROUGH GOVERNMENTAL LEGISLATION OR SOCIAL PREJUDICE. AS A RESULT, A LARGE MAJORITY OF JEWS WERE FORCED TO REMAIN IN THE CONFINES OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. A PERSON BORN A JEW IN MOST CASES REMAINED A JEW. THERE WAS VERY LITTLE CHOICE.

IN NORTH AMERICA TODAY, WHEN A CHILD IS BORN TO EITHER ONE OR TWO JEWISH PARENTS, THE EVENT OF BIRTH ALONE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT CHILD WILL BE A JEW. THE FREE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY IN WHICH WE LIVE EXERTS NO PRESSURE ON US TO REMAIN WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY - OR EVEN TO REMAIN JEWISH.

SOCIETY ALLOWS US TO MAKE A CHOICE. OUR CHOICE OF A PERSONALLY MEANINGFUL FAITH IS NOT RESTRICTED TO THE ONE OF OUR PARENTS OR GRANDPARENTS. BIOLOGICAL JEWISH BIRTH IS SIMPLY THE FIRST STEP IN A SERIES OF CHOICES THAT STARTS AT BIRTH AND CONTINUES THROUGHOUT LIFE. IN THE BEGINNING THE CHOICES ARE MADE BY THE PARENTS. DO THEY LEAD A JEWISH LIFE? DO THEY MAINTAIN A JEWISH HOME? DO THEY OBSERVE THE JEWISH FAITH? DO THEY WANT TO RAISE AND EDUCATE THEIR CHILD TO BE A JEW? THEIR CHOOSING OF JUDAISM FOR THEIR CHILD

REFLECTS THEIR OWN CHOICE OF JUDAISM FOR THEMSELVES. THE CONTINUITY OF JUDAISM THEREFORE DEPENDS UPON THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE FAMILY UNIT CHOOSING TO BE JEWS.

EVEN AFTER THAT CHOICE IS MADE, WE KNOW THAT JEWS CANNOT LIVE JEWISHLY IN A VACUUM. JEWS NEED OTHER JEWS TO BE JEWISH, AND IT IS THE SYNAGOGUE THAT PROVIDES US WITH PARTNERS IN JUDAISM. OUR HOMES ARE A SANCTUARY WHERE WE CELEBRATE OUR FAITH. OUR SYNAGOGUE IS BOTH OUR COMMUNAL PLACE OF WORSHIP AND OUR JEWISH COMMUNAL HOME. IT IS IN THE SYNAGOGUE THAT WE BECOME PART OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. IT IS IN THE SYNAGOGUE THAT WE CELEBRATE LIFE-CYCLE EVENTS. IT IS IN THE SYNAGOGUE THAT WE EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN AND OURSELVES. IT IS IN THE SYNAGOGUE THAT WE MOURN THE PASSING OF OUR LOVED ONES. IT IS IN THE SYNAGOGUE AND IN THE HOME THAT WE LIVE OUR LIVES AS JEWS. IT IS IN THE SYNAGOGUE, WITH THE FAMILY AND HOME FUNCTIONING TOGETHER IN A HOLY PARTNERSHIP, WHERE NEW JEWS ARE CREATED, WHERE PRACTICING JEWS FULFILL THEMSELVES AND WHERE JEWISH CONTINUITY SHOULD BE GUARANTEED.

IN OUR TIME, HOWEVER, A HARD LOOK AT REALITY SHOWS THAT THE JEWISH HOME, FAMILY AND SYNAGOGUE ARE WEAKENED INSTITUTIONS. AT THIS MOMENT IN HISTORY, THE TWIN INSTITUTIONS OF FAMILY AND SYNAGOGUE ARE EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTY IN THEIR ROLE AS GUARANTORS OF JEWISH CONTINUITY. THAT FACT, COMBINED WITH THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE

PHENOMENON IN OUR SOCIETY, HAS LED TO THE VAST GROWTH IN NUMBERS OF UNAFFILIATED, UNIDENTIFIED, INTERFAITH MARRIED AND SECULAR JEWS.

THE CJF POPULATION STUDY OF 5.5 MILLION CORE JEWS INDICATES THAT ONLY 2,150,000 MAINTAIN ANY SYNAGOGUE OR TEMPLE AFFILIATION ONLY 41% WITH 3,350,000 NOT AFFILIATED. THAT PROFOUNDLY UPSETTING STATISTIC CANNOT BE IGNORED, AND AS LEADERS OF JUDAISM, WE CANNOT REMAIN IDLE.

WE KNOW THAT 75 TO 80% OF JEWISH FAMILIES DO COME TO OUR SYNAGOGUES FOR A LIMITED PERIOD OF TIME, EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN, AND ATTEND SERVICES, MOSTLY ON ROSH HASHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR. THEN, AFTER THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IS COMPLETED, A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER DROP THEIR MEMBERSHIP AND LEAVE US. THAT BEHAVIOR PATTERN, IF PROJECTED OVER THE NEXT 2-3 GENERATIONS, RAISES THE SPECTER OF ENORMOUSLY WEAKENED JEWISH IDENTITY AND ACCELERATED ASSIMILATION.

THEREFORE, RETENTION, RETENTION OF JEWS WITHIN THE SYNAGOGUE IS ONE CRITICAL, PRIMARY RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE OF THE NON-AFFILIATED JEW AND ASSIMILATION. A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY IS CREATED WHEN THE INDIVIDUAL JEW OR THE JEWISH FAMILY COMES TO THE SYNAGOGUE. AT THAT MOMENT IN TIME THE SYNAGOGUE MUST BE AN INSTITUTION STRONG ENOUGH TO INFLUENCE THEM TO LIVE JEWISH LIVES, TO BUILD JEWISH

HOMES, TO CHOOSE JUDAISM FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN, AND TO REMAIN AFFILIATED JEWS.

IF WE HOPE TO ATTAIN THESE GOALS, THEN THE SYNAGOGUE AND WE ITS LEADERSHIP, MUST BECOME ADVOCATES AND MISSIONARIES, DEDICATED TO TEACHING TORAH, AND INSTILLING A SPIRITUAL PASSION AND LOVE OF JUDAISM IN THE HEARTS AND SOULS OF ALL THOSE WHO COME TO US. IT IS THROUGH THAT PROCESS THAT THE JEWISH HOME, FAMILY AND SYNAGOGUE WILL BE EDUCATED, RE-ENERGIZED AND HEALED.

THERE IS A GENUINE SPIRITUAL HUNGER OUT THERE. PEOPLE ARE SEEKING FULFILLMENT. THEY WANT TO GRASP THE TRUE MEANING OF LIFE, TO FIND GOD. JUDAISM AND THE SYNAGOGUE CAN HELP THEM IN THEIR LIFE LONG SEARCH, BUT ONLY IF THEY REMAIN WITHIN OUR RANKS.

THE CRUCIAL QUESTION IS, HOW DO WE KEEP THEM IN THE TEMPLE? BECOMING ANGRY AND DISMISSING THOSE WHO LEAVE US IS NOT THE PROPER RESPONSE EITHER FOR THEM OR FOR THE SYNAGOGUE COMMUNITY. WE NEED EACH OTHER. WE ARE ONE MISHPACHA - ALL OF US ARE DESCENDANTS OF SARAH AND ABRAHAM. JOINING A SYNAGOGUE IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT LIFE CYCLE EVENTS OF A JEW. AND YET, FOR SOME REASON, THAT IMPORTANT JEWISH MOMENT IN MOST TEMPLES IS NOT RITUALLY CELEBRATED. WE DO NOT VIEW IT AS A HOLY MOMENT, BUT IN MY OPINION IT SHOULD BE. IT IS THE MOMENT WHEN JEWS AND THEIR FAMILY JOIN IN

A COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THEIR SYNAGOGUE. CALLING OUT THEIR NAMES FROM THE BIMA IS NOT ENOUGH. WHITE FLOWER BOUTONNIERES, NEW MEMBER PARTIES AND DINNERS ARE NOT ENOUGH. WHAT IS NEEDED IS A MEANINGFUL FAMILY RITUAL ON THE BIMA OF THE TEMPLE, WHERE THE NEW MEMBERS AND THE SYNAGOGUE PLEDGE THEIR COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP TO EACH OTHER IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION.

HOW DO WE BEGIN TO CREATE THAT COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP? I WOULD SUGGEST THAT, WHEN THE INDIVIDUAL, COUPLE OR FAMILY DECIDE THAT THEY ARE GOING TO JOIN A TEMPLE, A SMALL, PRIVATE MEETING SHOULD BE HELD BETWEEN THE CANDIDATES FOR MEMBERSHIP AND THE RABBI, EDUCATOR AND POSSIBLY THE TEMPLE PRESIDENT. AT THAT MEETING, THE RABBI WOULD PRESENT THE CONCEPT OF A LIFE LONG RELATIONSHIP THAT WOULD BE ESTABLISHED BETWEEN THE SYNAGOGUE AND ITS MEMBERS. IN THAT COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP, THE EXPECTATIONS THAT THE NEW MEMBERS HAVE OF THE TEMPLE WOULD BE EXPRESSED AND THE TEMPLE WOULD PRESENT THEIR EXPECTATIONS TO THE POTENTIAL NEW MEMBERS.

A DISCUSSION OF THIS TYPE THAT IS BOTH SENSITIVE AND CARING WOULD INDICATE THAT THE SYNAGOGUE HAS A DEEP AFFECTION AND INTEREST IN THE CONTINUING LIFE OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS. THE CONGREGATION IS THERE TO SERVE AND HELP THEM IN THE CREATION OF A MEANINGFUL REFORM JEWISH LIFE. THE CONVERSATION MUST NOT FOCUS ON THE COST OF THE

MEMBERSHIP, INSTEAD IT MUST FOCUS ON THE LIFE ENHANCING REWARDS OF MEMBERSHIP.

THE POINT WOULD BE MADE THAT IF THE EXPECTATION OF THE NEW MEMBERS WAS THAT THE SYNAGOGUE WOULD EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN, THAT IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO DO A GOOD JOB WITHOUT THE PARTICIPATION OF THE PARENTS AND THE MAINTAINING OF A JEWISH HOME. A JEWISH HOME GIVES MEANING AND FOUNDATION TO THE JEWISH EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILDREN. THE IMPORTANCE OF BOTH FORMAL AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES WOULD BE OUTLINED.

THE TEMPLES CONCERN SHOULD BE THE ENTIRE FAMILY GROUP. THOSE MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS AND CONCERNS SHOULD BE OUTLINED IN A PRESENTATION BOOK OR FOLDER. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A ROAD MAP, AN INTEGRATED PLANNED CURRICULUM OF JEWISH FORMAL AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION AND JEWISH LIVING FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY WOULD ESTABLISH AT THE BEGINNING OF THE RELATIONSHIP A MIND SET TO DO THOSE THINGS THAT NEED TO BE DONE FOR THE ENTIRE FAMILY, ADULTS AND CHILDREN ALIKE, TO BECOME PROUD, EDUCATED, AND COMMITTED REFORM JEWS.

IN ESSENCE, THE COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY AND THE SYNAGOGUE IS THE BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF EACH OTHERS MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS AND OFFERS THE CHOICE TO MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER TOWARD THE GOAL OF ESTABLISHING A JEWISH LIFE AND TRADITION FOR ALL

CONCERNED.

I'M NOT GOING TO DESCRIBE THE ENTIRE PROGRAM. THERE WOULD HAVE TO BE DIFFERENT PROGRAMS FOR DIFFERENT KINDS OF FAMILIES AS WELL AS PROGRAMS FOR INDIVIDUALS. PLEASE ALLOW ME TO GIVE A FEW EXAMPLES THAT WOULD STAND FOR THE WHOLE:

- * A NEW MEMBERSHIP INTRODUCTORY EDUCATION COURSE.
- * CHILDRENS ENTRANCE INTO FORMAL SUPPLEMENTARY RELIGIOUS SCHOOL OR REFORM DAY SCHOOL IF ONE IS AVAILABLE.
- * PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY RETREATS AS PART OF THE SCHOOL PROGRAM.
- * AT AGE 11 AND 13 THE CHILDREN SHOULD HAVE A JEWISH SUMMER CAMP EXPERIENCE AT ONE OF OUR UAHF CAMPS WHICH WILL BE PRESENTED TO THE FAMILY AS A PART OF THE JEWISH EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM.
- * THE PARENTS OF A BAR OR BAT MITZVAH CHILD DURING THEIR CHILDS 13TH YEAR WOULD TAKE AN ADULT EDUCATION COURSE SO THAT THEY COULD BETTER APPRECIATE THE MEANING OF THAT EVENT.

- * THE CHILDREN SHOULD BE MEMBERS OF THE JUNIOR AND SENIOR YOUTH GROUPS IN ORDER TO ENHANCE JEWISH IDENTITY AND FRIENDSHIP.
- * AT AGE 15 OR 16 PARTICIPATION IN A UAHC SUMMER TRIP TO ISRAEL.
- * "HOW TO DO" CLASSES TO ENCOURAGE FAMILY CELEBRATIONS OF HOLY DAYS AND FESTIVALS.

THE ADULT MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO EXPRESS THEIR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN JUDAISM BY PARTICIPATING IN VARIOUS, ADULT EDUCATION COURSES AND TEMPLE COMMITTEES, SUCH AS SOCIAL ACTION, OR ANY OF THE OTHERS THAT MIGHT INTEREST THEM.

IN ORDER FOR ALL OF THE DETAILS OF THIS PROGRAM TO BE FORMULATED, A COALITION OF VARIOUS DIFFERENT UAHC PROGRAM DEPARTMENTS WOULD NEED TO BE BROUGHT TOGETHER FOR ITS CREATION AND EVENTUAL DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIALS TO THE TEMPLES.

I SEE THIS AS A MAJOR, IMPORTANT INITIATIVE, THAT IS DESIGNED TO REDUCE THE NUMBERS OF THE UNAFFILIATED JEWS BY MAKING THE SYNAGOGUE A MORE IMPORTANT PART OF THEIR LIVES AND RETAINING THEIR ONGOING IDENTITY WITH THE SYNAGOGUE AND WITH JUDAISM.

THE SYNAGOGUE IS NOT JUST A BUILDING. WHAT MAKES IT A HOLY PLACE IS WHAT YOU AND I DO IN THAT BUILDING. THE CHANGING OF AN INSTITUTION STARTS WITH THE LEADERSHIP OF THAT INSTITUTION. WE, AS LEADERS, MUST BECOME PASSIONATE ADVOCATES OF OUR SPIRITUAL TRADITION AND THROUGH OUR LEADERSHIP EXAMPLE INSPIRE AND CREATE ATTITUDINAL CHANGE IN OUR SYNAGOGUE AND IN THE RANK AND FILE MEMBERSHIP. THEY SYNAGOGUE, THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS, THE WHOLE REFORM JEWISH INFRA-STRUCTURE MUST RISE TO NEW HEIGHTS IN ITS QUALITY OF PROGRAMMING SO THAT WE CAN FULFILL THE NEEDS OF OUR MEMBERS. EVERY JEW WHO COMES TO US HAS TO CHOOSE TO STAY WITH US. TO HELP THEM MAKE THAT POSITIVE LIFE FULFILLING CHOICE IS OUR MISSION.

- OLD HASSIDIC TALE - GOD, ANGELS MADE MAN IN GODS IMAGE.

OUR RABBIS, OUR CANTORS, OUR EDUCATORS, WILL WELCOME THIS NEW ATTITUDE, WILL WELCOME THIS NEW SPIRITUALITY. THEY WILL WELCOME A NEW LEVEL OF LAY PARTICIPATION AND OUR PARTICIPATION WILL EVEN INSPIRE THEM TO GREATER EFFORTS AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE. THE SYNAGOGUE MUST BE A WARM WELCOMING, NON-THREATENING PLACE TO BORN JEWS, TO JEWS BY CHOICE, TO INTERFAITH MARRIED COUPLES AND THEIR CHILDREN. WE NEED TO ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD AND TORAH. WE MUST NO LONGER BE ASHAMED OR SHY ABOUT TALKING ABOUT GOD. WE

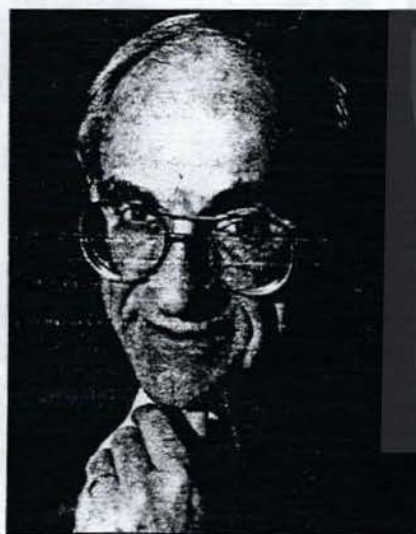
MUST INSTILL A LOVING PASSION FOR JUDAISM SO THAT THE JEWISH FAMILY AND SYNAGOGUE WILL BE NOURISHED BY THE SPIRIT AND BEAUTY OF OUR TRADITION. THAT IS OUR CHALLENGE AS JEWISH LEADERS, A CHALLENGE I BEG ALL OF YOU TO ACCEPT, AND A CHALLENGE THAT WE MUST MEET SUCCESSFULLY.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.



Raising TOUGH Questions

A Conversation with Mel Merians, UAHC Chairman



Melvin Merians of Larchmont Temple, NY, recently elected chairman of the UAHC Board of Trustees, was interviewed by RJ editor Aron Hirt-Manheimer.

What precipitated your interest in the Reform movement?

It started with my first visit to a Reform congregation shortly after my father had passed away. I said *Kaddish* at a Conservative synagogue but didn't find much meaning in the experience. Then I went to a Reform synagogue

and immediately felt at home with the combined English-Hebrew service, the sensitive manner in which *Kaddish* was said, and the beauty of the ritual. At that service I decided to become a Reform Jew.

Since that time, has your self-concept as a Reform Jew changed at all?

Many times. As a Reform Jew, I am expected to constantly study our literature and rethink how I express my Judaism and define my relationship with God. I'm constantly reading and learning and listening in order to better understand what is required of me as a human being and as a Jew.

As your tenure as chairman begins, what goals have you set for yourself?

I'm looking forward to a major expansion of our camping movement as well as a reinvigoration and recharging of all of our departments concerned with Jewish identification. And given the recent demographic studies, I think programs for winning the unaffiliated and Outreach must be greatly enhanced. In addition, I think the Union needs to find a way to improve its communication with synagogue lay

leaders. To achieve these and other goals I will encourage the Board to participate actively in the operations of the Union and work closely with the professional staff. I will try to motivate and energize staff members by raising questions. Through that process, I think the programs of the Union will be enhanced.

Your concern about the disturbing number of synagogue-unaffiliated Jews led you to conceive of the Privilege Card idea, which allows young adults to gain membership at discounted rates in various congregations. What other steps do you think must be taken to attract more people to congregational life?

The Union can supply the synagogues with various materials to help them analyze the problem. But the local synagogue is the institution that has the responsibility to reach out to the unaffiliated. As I see it, the solution to this monumental problem has two requirements. The first is reaching out and bringing the unaffiliated back to the synagogue, and the second is making sure that they find the members welcoming and the programs and services meaningful, innovative, stim-

ulating, and sensitive. Reaching out to the unaffiliated requires much more than running an advertisement in the newspaper or phoning. It demands taking stock of the synagogue itself—its religious school, sisterhood, brotherhood, youth groups, all the various programs and activities. We have to keep asking ourselves how we can make our congregations a place in which Jews want to spend a significant portion of their lives.

In recent years, spirituality has become a top priority of our leadership. What can the UAHC do to promote religious living?

One thing the UAHC could do, through our Commission on Religious Living, is to encourage more discussion of God among our rabbis, ritual committees, and congregations. We need to educate our constituents about the various Jewish philosophies of God, giving them an opportunity to discover which approaches are most compatible with their own thinking. Hopefully, they will then start their

own quest for God. Serious Torah study is another challenge we must meet, so that we can learn modern interpretations of the Torah that will help us live moral and spiritual lives. Of course, as Reform Jews, which of the mitzvot we adopt is a matter of choice, based on our reading and interpretation of Scripture.

I think familiarity with our sacred texts can best be achieved through programs of adult education. I might add that the kallot, organized by the Commission on Jewish Living, in which Reform Jews gather for several days of prayer and study, are the kind of adult educational programs I would like to see expanded throughout North America.

As immediate past treasurer of the UAHC, what do you think the UAHC must do to secure its financial future?

We now have an endowment program to provide the Union with funds for programmatic expansion at no cost to our member congregations. If the

Union can raise fifty million dollars of endowment, we will have taken a big step forward toward securing the organization's financial future. Just as important is the fiscal state of our synagogues; that is why our endowment program, through the partnership sharing concept, addresses their financial security as well. [see page 58 for additional endowment information] I sincerely hope that this program will move forward, and that we will be successful in its implementation over the next couple of years.

As we approach the end of this century, what do you regard as the movement's greatest challenge?

Statistics show that 80% of American Jews pass through temples, joining when their children begin religious instruction and leaving ten years later. Our challenge is to retain the full 80% who have at one time been affiliated. If we could achieve that level of membership we no longer would have a problem with the unaffiliated. □



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MELVIN MERIANS - BIOGRAPHY

Melvin Merians is Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the central body of Reform Judaism.

Long active in Reform Judaism, Mr. Merians was elected to a two-year term as Chairman of the policy-setting body of the UAHC, which represents 856 congregations in the United States and Canada, with a membership of 1.3 million.

Mr. Merians was President and Chairman of the Board of the Oxwall Tool Company and was formerly senior Vice President of the Consolidated Food Corporation, now known as the Sara Lee Corporation.

He has served the UAHC as its Treasurer and as a long-time member of the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee. The new UAHC Board Chairman heads the UAHC Endowment Campaign Steering Committee and is Chairman of both the UAHC Commission on Outreach and its Task Force on the Unaffiliated. He is also a member of the Board of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

In addition to his activities on behalf of Reform Judaism, Mr. Merians is Treasurer of the Jewish Museum and has been active in the American Jewish Committee. He is also a Board member of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture and Treasurer of the Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers.

In 1976, Mr. Merians and his wife, Elaine, created and served as the driving force of an unusual art exhibition, "Spiritual Resistance: Art of the Holocaust," that toured the United States in three years. He is a former Chairman of the Board of the Neuberger Museum in Purchase, NY.

The Merians have three grown children and four grandchildren.

Post-It™ brand fax transmittal memo 7671		# of pages > 1
To: <i>Handel London</i>	From: <i>Terry Bobrow</i>	
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Melvin Merians
10 Bonnie Briar Lane
Larchmont, NY 10538
914-834-0235

Married: Elaine Blum

Children: Three

Grandchildren: Four

Graduate of University of Pennsylvania, B.S. Cum Laude

Founder of the YM/YWCA of Mid-Westchester

Past Member of Board of Associated Y's of Greater NY

Past Vice President and member of the Board of Larchmont Temple

Past Chairman of the Board of the Friends of the Neuberger Museum

Past Vice Chairman of the Board of the UAHC.

Past ~~Member~~ Member of the Board and National Budget Chairman of the
American Jewish Committee

Associate Treasurer of the Jewish Museum

Present Treasurer of the UAHC

Chairman of the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of UAHC

Chairman of the Task Force on the Unaffiliated - UAHC

Member of the Board of HUC-JIR.

Business Man

Said to FOX

OK to go.

Cap

SCHINDLER

Dear Melvin.

per Alt