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WINTER GOALS GROUP MEETING, NYC, December 1996
SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This meeting brought together participants from last summer's Jerusalem Goals Seminar who are particularly interested in institutional change. Invitees included Amy Gerstein, Linda Thal, and Alvan Kaunfer, as well as Gail Dorph, Nessa Rapoport, Karen Barth, and Daniel Pekarsky from CIJE. At the last minute, Alvan had to withdraw because of a bad case of the flu, a circumstance which had a bearing on our meeting because part of it was to be organized around a recent project of his in Rhode Island.

Following an introduction led by Daniel Pekarsky, the day was broken down into two sessions. One of them focused on a goals-sensitive congregational change process presently under way with a middle-sized Conservative Congregation; this discussion was led by Daniel Pekarsky. The other discussion, led by Amy Gerstein, focused on "approaches to educational change" and was based on a recent paper she wrote on this subject.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DAY

In his introductory comments, Daniel spoke to the question of what this group is. Part of what brings us together is that we are all interested in institutional change. Beyond this, and the fact that all of us (with the exception of Karen), participated in the Goals Seminar last summer, it is hoped that all of us will function as resources to the Goals Project at one point or another. While this might involve specific assignments, Daniel expressed his hope that today we would view ourselves as beginning a kind of "Study Group" that would meet periodically to help one another think through goals-related efforts we are individually engaged with. Today we would be looking at some work that he and Amy have been doing; but it is hoped that at future meetings we will have a chance to contribute to the work that other participants bring to the table. J

CONGREGATIONAL CHANGE PROJECT

Daniel introduced this project by offering a chronological account detailing the unfolding of this project. Along the way, participants stopped to ask questions and to offer insights, and often brief discussions would follow, after which Daniel continued with his account of the project. The project is focused on a Conservative Congregation (We'll call it Congregation Israel) of some 700 families located in the suburbs of Midtown, a mid-sized Midwestern community. Daniel's account of his work with this Congregation broke naturally into 4 stages: an initial stage in which a relationship with the Congregation was born; an exploratory stage in which Daniel got to know the Congregation better and in which he and the Congregation

considered the wisdom of a partnership; an initial commitment stage in which, due to internal congregational issues and strategic errors, the partnership got off to a bad start; and a fourth stage in which the process was launched a second time, giving rise to what appears to be a very productive and energized Steering Committee that has held several rewarding and fruitful meetings. Each of these stages was described in some detail, with attention to the challenges and achievements of each. DP's "Description" and "Analysis" pieces provided the material for his presentation and can be referred to for a detailed discussion of this presentation. A variety of areas were explored in relation to Daniel's presentation. Below is a brief summary of some of them.

Constructing a case. Considerable discussion focused on the way to present a case. This discussion began with the observation that it would be best to use pseudonyms rather than the actual names of the institution and its stake holders. But it quickly moved beyond the question of names to questions pertaining to candor: in developing a case-study, how candid or uncensored should one be in detailing one's interpretations and reactions?

The sense of the group was that it was important for someone working with an institution (We'll call this person a consultant, for now) to have a back-stage setting in which to articulate -- and get reactions to -- his/her uncensored perceptions and judgments. Better to express and better understand these perceptions than to let them operate without critical assessment. The situation was compared to psychoanalysis, the power of which depends on the client's willingness and ability not to censor his/her thoughts and associations.

It was also noted that in presenting a case it is often possible to interpret a problematic situation (say, a conflict among the protagonists) in more than one way, ranging, for example, from an approach that focuses on psychological idiosyncrasies of the participants, to an approach that highlights the predictable clash of individuals positioned in certain roles, to an approach that emphasizes the substantive concerns that divide them. One needs to choose the form or level of interpretation to adopt, and which one is chosen may vary with context and need. This point is relevant a) in back-stage deliberations of the kind we were engaged in, b) in determining how to frame issues in case-studies that will be made public, and c) in determining how to identify problematic situations to the protagonists in an institution that is undergoing change. The challenge is to be arrive at a formulation that is honest, that will prove constructive, and that will honor the privacy or comfort-level of the individuals who are referred to. Ron Heifetz's book on leadership was suggested as a useful resource in thinking about this problem.

An additional observation concerning the presentation of case-studies grew out of Daniel's observation/apology that he had taken so much time presenting his case. In response, it was suggested that an alternative to the kind of chronological account that he had presented would have been to take a particular dilemma as a focus and provide only enough background concerning the situation to allow a meaningful discussion of the dilemma. It was suggested that Judy Shulman's work on cases might be a useful reference.

The protagonists - and the consultant. A lot of our discussion focused on the problematic relationship between two of the principal protagonists - the rabbi and the educational director, the one of them Right Wing Conservative and somewhat rigid, and the other, by his standards, relatively non-observant. In trying to better understand what might be going on between them, many illuminating comments were made. Particularly helpful to Daniel were:

a) the comment by one participant that the rabbi's rigidity may to some extent reflect not his personality but the ethos the institution which ordained him. This suggests the importance of taking the larger institutional context in which the congregation is embedded into account.

b) the observation that, in resisting him, the educational director was in a sense "speaking for" a significant constituency within the Congregation; she was, in effect, like Ozzie in Roth's "Conversion of the Jews", who feels impelled to say out loud what many others are privately thinking.

c) An important question was raised concerning how it happened that the observance issue was not tackled when the educational director was hired; Daniel offered his view that, given scarce human resources, the rabbi might have felt that this was the best he could do, and that perhaps he and she deliberately avoided discussing this issue. This was a matter Daniel hoped to get clearer on.

d) the observation that the educational director was so busy resisting the rabbi that it wasn't clear how she herself would think about observance issues and Shabbat (in independence from her embattlement with him); perhaps, it was suggested, it would be important to elicit this from her and to encourage her to think about this.

e) while the rabbi's continuing refusal to accept the fact that his educational director was not observant along his lines was viewed as rigid and

counterproductive, at the same time his aspiration to have an educational director that could be a role-model who embodies what he felt a Conservative Congregation needs to stand for seemed to be sound [consistent, for example, with our own discourse concerning the defining features of vision-driven institutions].

f) On encountering what looks like a dysfunctional relationship in an organization, it is worth asking what supports this dysfunctionality and whether it satisfies certain organizational- or constituency-needs.

It seemed to several members of the group that, despite the affection and respect they have for one another, the tension between the rabbi and the educational director (grounded in his uncomfortableness with her level of observance) contributed to a relationship of mistrust which could prove crippling to the change-process, and it was suggested that in a way that was respectful of the needs and expectations of the participants, it might be appropriate for Daniel to find a constructive way of focusing them on this issue. There was some discussion of whether it would be important, as a preliminary, for Daniel to address the issue privately with the rabbi. Daniel expressed a measure of uncomfortableness about raising this issue at all due to a sense that this might be stepping out of and beyond the role agreed to in the process.

Who is the client? The question of whether, as a matter of principle or strategy, Daniel ought first to raise the issue of tension between the rabbi and the educator with the rabbi led to a more general question: Who is the client? Is it the rabbi, or is it the Congregation? How one answers this question may carry significant implications for how to approach the work.

Some general suggestions. Beyond what was noted above, a number of general suggestions for the work were offered in the course of the day. These included the following:

1. Develop an understanding of the roles that different stake holders play in maintaining the system. "Roles" refers not just to formal titles or official positions but to the function played by different individuals in the life of an organization, e.g. custodian of tradition, whistle-blower, representative of "the people", etc. It was observed that one of the reasons that the change-process is difficult (and sometimes stressful) is that people's roles may undergo contestation and change, and this can be scary.

2. Develop a multi-dimensional map of the system, with attention to elements like the following: roles of different stake holders, structures, pattern of programs and events, constituencies.

3. When encountering "a difficult person" in a change-process, one needs to be alive to the possibility that the person might be representing an issue, point of view, or need that needs to be attended to. Sometimes, if "the difficult person" disappears, another person will step in to express the concern or point of view that the first person had represented. That is, what this person expresses is a theme that is an organic part of the dynamic pattern that makes up the organization.

4. It was noted that the data-collection effort that is central to Congregation's change-process can be very powerful in shaping engagement and direction; it is by no means a neutral process that leaves the environment being studied -- or those doing the studying -- unaffected. Moreover, it can help draw out the vision that is implicit in existing practice. It was suggested that this "data-collection" be viewed as a form of action-research. It was also suggested that we might find helpful Karl Glickman's book on action-research.

Time-constraints cut short our discussion of Daniel's case. While there were rich opportunities to discuss some of the interpersonal/ideological complexities that he had hoped to illuminate in the course of the day, there was not enough time to discuss other critical issues that he had hoped to consider -- for example: 1) ways of infusing "content" into the process that would be substantial, non-artificial, and "impactful"; 2) how to maintain and build on the momentum now generated.

DISCUSSION OF AMY GERSTEIN'S WORK ENTITLED, "APPROACHES TO EDUCATIONAL CHANGE: CHOOSING A ROUTE THAT MAKES SENSE"

Background. As an aid to her own thinking on educational change and how approaches to it differ from change in the corporate sector, Karen Barth had requested two individuals, one of them Amy Gerstein, to write a paper sketching out major approaches to change found in the world of education. Following an introduction and a statement of her basic assumptions, Amy's paper (see document) details several categories of change-efforts and gives the reader significant examples of initiatives that fall under each heading. These categories include: "whole school" change approaches; "change in school governance" approaches; standard-based reforms; and policy reforms promoted at district, state, and national levels. In discussing these various initiatives, Amy not only describes them; she also identifies significant critiques that have been made of each; and along the way she also offers her own critical assessments. Two concluding sections round out the paper -- one of them entitled "Emerging Lessons from Educational Reform", and the other "Considerations when choosing your route and your destination."

Discussion. Since not all of us had the opportunity to read the paper prior to the meeting, in her presentation, Amy took us through some of its major points. In this context, it will be

more useful to highlight matters we discussed that were not found in the paper.

On a personal note, Amy noted that while the assignment that defined the paper seemed to be a simple one (given her professional background and experience), it proved more difficult than she had imagined. The reason for this is that it in effect asked her to summarize and identify the critical lessons acquired in the course of her career to date.

At the center of Amy's discussion was her own assessment of the paper now that she had finished it. In this context, she pointed to two ways in which she would strengthen it if she had the chance to do it over again.

First, she was troubled that in detailing the various approaches to change, she had not explicitly identified the varied understandings of "the problem" which these approaches took as the background to their respective "solutions". In taking the group through these various approaches during our discussion, Amy was therefore careful to identify what understanding of the problem underlay each of them. For example, in the case of the Coalition for Essential Schools, the problem is interpreted as expecting too much of teachers [in too many areas of development] given the number of students and the available time (and the solution is to adopt a narrower "use mind well" focus). In the case of Accelerated Schools "the problem" is insufficient resources to the children who most need it. In Comer's work, "the problem" is a failure to meet the social and psychological needs of children, a failure bound up with the absence of enough opportunities for meaningful relationships with adults.

Second, Amy noted that in detailing the different approaches to change, it would have been valuable for her to discuss how each of them understands the role of teachers and learners. [A related matter that might have been worth more explicitly tackling is what each of them would count as "success".]

Below two additional conversations triggered by Amy's comments are noted. First, in the discussion of Site-based Management as an approach, it was noted that this was a response to the perception that local educators, especially teachers, do not typically have sufficient power to determine the course of what they do; too much is determined by external bodies of different kinds. There is, it is thought, too much centralization. In response, the hypothesis was ventured that perhaps the opposite is true in Jewish education -- that is, there is too much autonomy at the local level, and not enough centralized guidance. [On reflection, it seems to me -- DP -- that we find in Jewish education is neither centralized control emanating from external bodies nor anything that would count as "site-based management".]

Second, there was a discussion of Michael Fullan's approach to educational change, a discussion that focused on the question: is he against serious attention to "vision" in the process of fostering educational change? In response, the view was suggested that Fullan is critical of efforts to formulate visions at the outset of a process of change before an appropriate culture and social climate have evolved through more piecemeal efforts that nurture a healthy pattern of relationships and expectations; but that he is not averse to working towards a vision later on in the process. Hence his phrase, "Ready, fire, aim."

Amy concluded with the observation, drawn from her paper, that those trying to change educating institutions need to take the community seriously into account. There is a need to figure out what constitutes the relevant community, to do appropriate kinds of needs assessments within that community, and, most importantly, not waiting too long to solicit this community's input (say, via needs assessments) and engagement in the change-process.

CBI INTERIM REPORT: ANALYSIS December 1996

This brief report is designed to accompany the more blow-by-blow descriptive account of the Congregation Beth Israel Pilot-Project. The report is being written at a stage at which the project seems to have gathered considerable momentum; there seems to be a lot of excitement about it on the part of the rabbi and his Steering Committee. Moreover, the Steering Committee is - finally! - made up of a group that is exceptionally strong both in respect of its seriousness and its credibility within the Congregation. It includes the rabbi, the educational director, the president, and a number of critical lay leaders representing varied constituencies in the Congregation. Their meetings have been consistently productive and energizing, and, to date, they continue to seem eager to move ahead. But the picture is not entirely positive, and even if it were, there would be serious questions concerning how to build on and spread the developing sense of momentum. This report is being written both to summarize the process to date, to elicit feedback concerning what has been done, and to get help in thinking through the project's further elaboration. It is organized around the following themes: Selection of Congregation Beth Israel; Purposes; Approach to change; Challenges and questions.

Selection of Congregation Beth Israel. Congregation Beth Israel was identified as a site for a CIJE Pilot-Project based on a number of desirable characteristics. First, its professional leaders (the rabbi and the educational director) seemed extremely serious, competent, and interested in the project; and by the time we started working together they already knew something about the Goals Project's assumptions through participation in a sequence of three hour Goals Seminars held in Milwaukee. Second, unlike our other principal institutional pilot-project (a community Day School), it was a Conservative Congregation that includes a Congregational School. Since the bulk of Jewish children continue to get most of their Jewish education through such institutions, attention to what may be done to improve them is essential. Third, and not unimportant, it is in Milwaukee, an hour and a half away from my home in Madison. Fourth, I already had a long-standing relationship of trust with the Congregation's rabbi. There was, it is true, some concern in my mind about whether there would be much lay support for the project, but I decided to go ahead in spite of this. As it turned out, this problem has not, to date, been a serious one, while others that had not been anticipated have proved much more troublesome. More on this later.

Congregation Beth Israel and CIJE entered into the Pilot Project agreement only after a period of "feeling each other out". For my part, I wanted to be more confident concerning the seriousness of CBI's critical stake holders in undertaking a serious process of self-development. For his part, CBI's rabbi wanted an assurance that CIJE would not back-out of the project mid-stream and the project would be

conceptualized in such a way that it would have a determinate end and would result in discernible changes in Synagogue life. It was only six months or so after our initial conversations that we agreed to go ahead together.

Purposes. CIJE and CBI entered into this arrangement for overlapping but different purposes. CBI's rabbi was interested in CBI's participation because he had just taken over as the new Senior rabbi and saw this as a good opportunity to chart the congregation's direction under his leadership. While somewhat nervous about being perceived as trying to change things too fast, he was also eager to work towards a clearer definition of what the congregation would be under his leadership. That the project would draw on the resources of CIJE and might also give CBI some visibility nationally were also relevant circumstances. From CIJE's side, this was a chance to test out and develop a cluster of ideas relating to the development of vision-driven educating institutions, an approach that emphasizes a) the desirability of getting clearer concerning fundamental purposes and b) the desirability of incorporating serious Jewish content into this process of clarification. An additional CIJE hope was that, if successful, this intervention could be used as an example to other institutions of what might be accomplished in a change-process that treats questions of educational purpose seriously.

As the process moved along, these overarching purposes were translated into more narrow terms. Thus, the ideal of becoming more vision-driven was replaced by the aim of deepening the Congregation's approach to Shabbat through a process of clarifying its understanding of Shabbat and the relationship of this understanding to practice in different congregational domains. And a variety of new aims -- some of them exclusively my own -- also emerged out of the process, e.g., reconstructing the relationship between the rabbi and the educational director, helping the educational director take initiative for the development of the school's curriculum, helping the rabbi deal more adequately with the gaps between his own view of what the Congregation should be and where most of the membership is; these new aims might be defined as "instrumental aims", in the sense that their achievement may well be necessary to meaningful progress on the project's larger purposes. Deeper than all these aims, perhaps, was the aim of creating a culture, at least among the Congregation's leadership, that emphasized the desirability, and even the excitement, of thinking systematically about hard questions concerning the why's and wherefore's of Congregational practice and a willingness to reshape practice to better accomplish thoughtfully determined Congregational priorities.

Approach to change. Several assumptions have informed my approach to work with CBI. These include:

1. The need to actively engage critical stake holders in the process. In the case of CBI, this has meant, at a minimum, the rabbi, the educational director, and the Congregation's President. In addition, there may well be critical others not identified by formal titles, e.g. Louise Stein. Failure

adequately to engage these stake holders so that they feel they are serious partners in the effort can undermine one's work; so can communication-breakdowns.

2. The power of conversation that is informed by data to surface problems and catalyze action. In the case of CBI, these data have included interviews with teachers, the results of focus-groups, and reports to the committee based on inquiries into the school's curriculum and into other congregational domains. Note that it is not just the data that are powerful, but also the conversation itself: as thoughtful people discuss the data in the context of their own aspirations and concerns, issues surface that stimulate one another's thinking in powerful ways.

3. The need to connect discussion with the stake holders' own deep concerns and to encourage reflection designed to elicit their own insights and anxieties. In the context of CBI, this is exemplified by the exercise designed to elicit from the Steering Committee its views concerning what Shabbat at its best is like for them and the conditions that made possible this experience; the results of this exercise were then used as a lens with which to scrutinize the menu of activities and customs that typify congregational life at CBI.

4. The power of powerful content: powerful Jewish ideas about the nature of existence and Jewish life may serve to radically re-frame and enrich participants' understandings of what Judaism is about, thus catalyzing energetic and focused action designed to make these understandings come alive in day-to-day life, both personal and institutional. In the CBI case, this means introducing content that will transform the way participants understand the significance of Shabbat and how it might fit into their own lives; that is, coming to see Shabbat in new and transforming ways through the encounter with powerful ideas at work in the institution and practice of Shabbat.

5. While the immediate object of change is defined by the problem or set of problems identified by the critical stake holders, the process of change tends in the direction of a cultural change; it tends towards a culture that is at home with inquiring into the values or purposes that are to be secured by customs and practices, that is willing to re-think practice based on whether or not these practices, in their current form, are succeeding in actually achieving these purposes, and that looks to Jewish tradition to better understand what is at stake in considering these matters.

6. While it is assumed that critical conversation among critical stake

holders, informed by assumptions 1 - 4, is essential, it is also essential to engage other, more rank-and-file, constituencies in this conversation if change is to occur.

7. It is critical that the conversation among critical stake holders not become detached from practical concerns; it is critical that, at significant points, they attempt to consider the implications of their conversation for the world of practice.

8. A fanning-out principle. The process begins with those identifiable individuals already recognized to be critical; with their help, the problem at hand is tentatively formulated and other individuals - also critical - are identified; this group in turn further interprets (or reinterprets) the problem at hand and identifies other critical constituencies that need to be engaged, and so forth.

9. Trust - the kind of trust that may cross-over into friendship - needs to be an essential feature of the relationship between the outside consultant (in this case, me) and the critical stake holders he/she is working with. In its absence, thoughtful candor and receptivity are difficult to achieve, if not impossible.

Challenges and questions. Many challenges and questions have surfaced in the course of the work with CBI. Here I try to raise some among them that I am particularly interested in exploring. They include: **"Key stake-holder" challenges; Maintaining momentum; Deepening the content-dimension.**

"Key stake holder" challenges. The relationship between the rabbi and the educational director at CBI is complex, and it is problematic to the point of possibly undercutting the process. While these individuals seem to like and respect one another a lot, each of them also finds the other seriously problematic, and they are capable of being very critical of one another. As might be expected, the complexity of their relationship reflects differences between them in temperament, style, and outlook; but it also captures a problem that is serious and common within the Conservative movement.

Raised in a very traditional Jewish family, as a young woman, Pamela Lager made Aliya and had been part of the larger secular Israeli community. After meeting her husband in Israel, they returned to the United States, and she has worked in a number of Jewish educational settings quite effectively. She is bright, serious, strong Hebraically and Jewishly literate, and she is currently in an MA program in education in a local institution of higher learning. She is, by the rabbi's standards, relatively non-observant and does not live in a predominantly Jewish area.

This is Ms. Lager's third year as principal of the school. In this capacity, Ms.

Lager has been reluctant to take much responsibility for the school's curriculum; asked about curriculum, she is like to point to a curriculum-document she admires that was developed by her predecessor; it is doubtful that this curriculum seriously guides much that goes on at CBI. Ms. Lager's strengths as an administrator are in her personality and her inter-personal skills. These skills are at their best in her dealings with the teachers and the children. She is exceptionally respectful of her teachers and they have become very loyal to her. Similarly, the kids seem to see her as someone who might be "No nonsense" but is their ally. Her relationship with the synagogue's office staff is more complex. She feels like, as a woman, she is not treated by them as seriously as her male predecessor had been. She also feels that they are resentful that she expects to be treated as a professional rather than in the more familiar or familial way that has defined relationships in the CBI office.

If Ms. Lager's insistence on being treated as a serious professional has created tension between her and some of the administrative staff, her being non-observant (by the rabbi's standards) has created a measure of tension with the rabbi. Before focusing on this, a few words on the rabbi.

Rabbi Buckman only recently assumed his position as senior rabbi of CBI. He is a very bright, very serious individual, generally egalitarian in his outlook but overall on the Right Wing side of Conservative Judaism. He is concerned about consolidating his position (he comes up for contract renewal within a year or two) but also wants to give the congregation a direction that is more coherent with his (more conservative) outlook. Rabbi Buckman is sometimes perceived as cold and a bit distant (a point perhaps obliquely referred to in our Steering Committee meeting when a few people commented on 'the coldness' of CBI). Rabbi Buckman is very respectful of Ms. Lager's virtues as a principal, but, as she reports it, he is deeply troubled by her being non-observant and periodically makes comments to her (or offers body-language) that conveys this discomfort. He has, for example, pointedly expressed disapproval when she mentioned in a group-setting that she was going out to dinner "in a few minutes" (which happened to be before the end of Shabbat); and more recently, he resisted the idea of her walking prospective Bar Mitzvah-aged students through the ceremony in the main sanctuary. In Ms. Lager's opinion, this had to do with his uncomfortableness with her non-observance.

As noted in the other section of this interim report, the relationship between Rabbi Buckman and Ms. Lager, already complicated, took a serious turn for the worse when, according to her, he failed to support her in her salary-discussions with the Board. She expressed her unhappiness in very strong terms which included a kind of character-assault; so, at least, she reports it. They have managed to patch things up somewhat over the last several months, but the tensions between them continue to surface periodically.

There is a sense in which the observance-gap between the rabbi and Ms. Lager parallels the gap between the rabbi and much of his Congregation. As reported by Ms.

Lager in any case, his vision of Conservative Judaism and of what this congregation should become is deeply out of touch with much of his community; she also feels that he is very tied to his vision and unwilling to let it be molded by congregational realities. The extent to which this analysis is accurate is not entirely clear at this point. What is clear is that she perceives him this way.

The Shabbat-focus for the pilot-project surfaced some of the tensions between the two of them. The rabbi was, in fact, pretty wedded to this theme, a theme which Ms. Lager was reluctant to embrace. In her view, the rabbi's underlying purpose was to make the congregation more observant, i.e., more in consonance with his vision. In point of fact, while the rabbi would clearly be happy with such an outcome, in the process to date, it is far from clear that he is unable or unwilling to view things in a more open-ended way. He was, for example, very comfortable with the substitution of "deepen appreciation of Shabbat" for "becoming more observant" language; and he seems interested in any activities that would engage his community in Shabbat observance.

In any event, my own sense is that neither Ms. Lager nor the rabbi is entirely unproblematic this situation, and the dynamic between them could prove a serious impediment to the future of the project. Help in illuminating this problem and how to approach it would be appreciated.

Another "key stake holder" challenge pertains to the Congregation's president, Ms. Rakita. Although Ms. Rakita initially seemed suspicious of our project, she seems increasingly interested in it. Most recently, her level of confidence in the group and in me as a consultant was expressed in her request that we devote some of our meeting time to a problem which she regards as very serious at CBI: namely, the splintering of the congregation into a Day School and a non-Day School community somewhat in tension with each other. The issue never did make it on to our agenda, and my sense is that I have done too little to engage Ms. Rakita in serious conversation.

The content-challenge. To date, the process has been at its richest at those junctures when we have elicited from participants their own views and underlying assumptions concerning e.g. what is central to the Shabbat experience. I feel that we have yet to find an adequate, non-artificial vehicle for bringing powerful "outside-content" into the process to enrich and deepen the thinking of participants.

1. Brief study-sessions at the beginning of our meetings is not resisted; but it's not clear that what is studied than infuses our deliberations. We have spoken about trying to deepen these sessions, but I am not sure what their potential is; and I know the rabbi is concerned that members of the Steering Committee may resist a lot of time devoted to study.

2. I have given thought to the possibility of creating 3 Shabbat-vignettes, each embodying a different understanding of what Shabbat is about as a

way of enriching the process, but this has not yet been done.

3. I have also talked with the rabbi about bringing in a guest (like Art Green) who could take Congregants through a process of learning, partly experiential, that might enrich their conversations.

4. It is conceivable that if the group agrees to come up with a position-statement about "Shabbat at CBI", this challenge would give rise to a spontaneous effort to look at alternative conceptions of Shabbat and ways of thinking about the Shabbat experience.

5. In the end, it may be that the best and most important thing I can do is to find, in the midst of on-going discussions of whatever we happen to be discussing pertinent ways of drawing on content to illuminate the issue at hand. This means that I need to have a map in my own head of how content-issues bear on and can illuminate the varied issues we discuss. (See in this connection, Dewey's *THE CHILD AND THE CURRICULUM*).

In any event, your thoughts on this issue would be valued.

The Momentum-challenge. My impression is that the CBI Steering Committee has generated quite a lot of momentum. The process of writing this up has led me to think that this assumption needs to be checked. But if the assumption turns out to be correct, there is still a question of how to proceed so as fruitfully to build on the momentum that's been generated. Right now the group has discussed reports based on CBI's history with Shabbat, on the teacher-interviews, and so forth, and it is now waiting to hear back from various focus-groups. These discussions have been extremely thought-provoking and have given rise to a number of rich suggestions for reform, e.g. developing a Shabbat tool-kit for use in homes; expanding the empty-nester Shabbat dinners program (the Shabbat Connection) to other constituencies and using them as an outreach tool; rebuilding the Congregation's Friday night program; making efforts to reach populations that may be "turned off" by existing Shabbat programming. Interesting questions have also surfaced -- for example, why it is that many people do not participate in the Shabbat-life of the Congregation. The question is, where do we go from here? I am concerned that members of the group not come to feel that this group is "all talk"; I am also concerned that the process be infused in a meaningful way with more outside-content. I am also concerned about developing a too insular process among Steering Committee members and wonder about the advisability of beginning to engage other constituencies more actively (including, for example, those we've worked with already in a preliminary way, e.g. teachers, participants in focus-groups).

One possibility is to work towards a position-statement on Shabbat and to use that as occasion to deepen and broaden participants' thinking about shabbat. Once constructed, perhaps the group could be broken down into sub-committees connected to

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different congregational domains. Led by members of the Steering Committee and guided by the position-statement, the sub-committees would engage others in the process of thinking about the Shabbat experience in their particular domain. This would serve to make the tie to practice and to expand the number of participants. The results of these efforts could then be brought back to the full Steering Committee for discussion.

I am, however, unsure about the best way to proceed, and would welcome input.

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL PILOT PROJECT INTERIM REPORT:
DESCRIPTION--Dec. 1996

In the spring of 1995, a set of seminars on the subject of vision-driven education was held in Milwaukee. Among the attendees was Rabbi Lee Buckman, who had just assumed the leadership of a local Conservative Congregation in which he had heretofore functioned as an Assistant Rabbi. Congregation Beth Israel is a suburban congregation of about 700 families. It is located in a building that is perhaps 25 years old, and it is in many respects very typical of Conservative Congregations. In particular, the congregation houses great diversity, with a membership that includes Right Wing conservative Jews (close to Orthodoxy, except on the issue of women in Judaism) and Jews who are very non-observant. As is typical of many such Congregations, the rabbi embodies a traditional way of life that is at sharp variance with much of the membership, many of whom do not go to Shul regularly, do not keep kosher, etc. There is, that is, a terrific gap between the Synagogue's official ideology, genuinely well-embodied by the rabbi, and the congregation's rank and file! Nowhere is the range of outlook better discerned than in the staff of the Congregation's school; the educational director, who is many ways extraordinarily competent, is relatively non-observant, as are many teachers; but the school also includes a number of teachers who are most at home in the Orthodox community (see below).

Rabbi Buckman initially attended the spring 1995 CIJE seminars with reluctance; it is conceivable that he had been pressured to attend by one of his powerful lay leaders. Nonetheless, once he began attending he became increasingly excited about the ideas he was encountering and by the end of the seminar he seemed eager to enter into discussions about his congregation, (Congregation Beth Israel, or CBI) becoming a CIJE pilot-project, a project from which, it was hoped, CIJE would learn and CBI would profit. Rabbi Buckman was particularly taken with the notion of CBI becoming a more vision-driven institution.

This idea was explored in a preliminary conversation that included myself, Rabbi Buckman, his educational director Pamela Lager, and Ruth Cohen, a member of CBI who is also the professional director of the Lead Community project. In response to CIJE's request, the rabbi brought to this meeting a statement developed by him and a team of congregants in which an attempt was made to identify their view of the challenge facing the congregation.

Essentially, as the rabbi saw it, the challenge was this: to communicate the rabbi's vision of what the congregation should be about to the various constituencies and sectors that make up the Congregation, with an eye towards then embedding the vision in

all dimensions of congregational life. Because the team he had been working with was not made up of the most powerful members of his congregation, the rabbi felt that the best way to approach this challenge was to begin by educating his board concerning the beliefs of Conservative Judaism. Once this had been accomplished, he felt, it would be possible to communicate the vision -- as it were, from Central Command -- to the rest of the Congregation.

A number of concerns relating to this approach were surfaced at our meeting. Was it wise to devote the whole first year exclusively to the Board-process he'd envisioned? Should the process be thought of as one of communicating his pre-determined vision to the Board and from them to other constituencies? Was it all that simple? While continuing to hold on to the idea of board-seminars,¹ by the end of the meeting, we were discussing the possibility of engaging broader constituencies in thinking through Conservative ideology; and it was also agreed that I would spend some time trying to better understand the Congregation and its school. No commitments towards a pilot-project were made by either side at this time; it was to be a period of getting to know each other better.

Though troubled by the rabbi's avowed lack of lay support for the kind of process we were considering, I left the meeting guardedly optimistic. This optimism was, however, dampened somewhat when I discovered that the school's educational director, Pamela Lager, had left the May meeting quite upset, feeling that the rabbi had committed the congregation and the school to some involvement with me without adequately consulting her and getting her agreement. The rabbi apologized to her for this, and encouraged me to speak with her.

In my over-breakfast conversation with her, she indicated great interest in the project -- but only so long as her teachers were actively involved in the process and were not in a position simply to be dictated to. I was impressed by Ms. Lager's intelligence, seriousness, thoughtfulness and insight; I felt that this was someone I might be able to work with in a productive way. We agreed that later this academic year I should

¹ In fact, the rabbi did launch these study-sessions at Board meetings, and this initially caused difficulties for two sub-groups -- those who felt that this was not what they had agreed to come to Board meetings for, and those who felt threatened and marginalized by the rabbi's articulation of Conservative ideology, an ideology that was far removed from their own outlook and way of life. The rabbi subsequently made adjustments designed to lower the threat-level; but I now realize that I have yet to inquire in any depth into the character and impact of these study-sessions.

try to get to know the school.

In the months to come, I observed several classes; I interviewed several teachers; and I led a teacher's meeting devoted to questions of goals. My intention was to get as good a feel as I could for what the school was like, for the way the teachers taught, and for the way they thought about what they did. A number of things struck me as I went through this process: first, as indicated above, the diversity of outlook and way of life represented at the school. Teaching in this school were generally secular Jews, strongly Orthodox Jews, deeply spiritual but non-Halachic Jews, and more garden-variety Conservative Jews. Religious differences were matched by "teacherly differences". The ranks of the teachers included stereotypically disengaged, mechanical teachers, but also some extraordinarily dedicated and talented teachers; it is, though, noteworthy that there was as much diversity among the dedicated/talented teachers as among the total population of teachers. It was clear from conversations with the teachers that there was no overall coherence to the school's educational program; and it was also clear that the principal, while deeply respectful and supportive of her staff and able to generate great loyalty, did not have a handle on the school's curriculum. In theory, a curriculum developed by her predecessor and of which she was very respectful was in place; in practice, she knew that it was not seriously used as a guide to practice, and she herself seemed reluctant to take responsibility for putting her own mark on the school's curriculum.

Following my discussions with Pamela Lager and my developing acquaintanceship with the school, I began to feel more confident about the possibility of a serious pilot-project with this institution. Though I had yet to see much lay-support, I was impressed by Rabbi Buckman's and Ms. Lager's seriousness and interest in the project, and I felt that this might be an interesting setting to work with. In February 1996, at a meeting attended by Rabbi Buckman, Pamela Lager, Ruth Cohen, and myself, we entered into more formal discussion concerning a pilot-project.

At the February 1996 meeting, I reported to the group what I had been learning through my meetings with the school's teachers, and we then moved on to discuss the development of a pilot-project. At this time, the rabbi made some important expectations clear: first, CBI had some negative experiences with projects that had been abandoned mid-stream, and the rabbi wanted to be assured that CIJE would prove reliable; second, he was concerned that the project not go on forever, that it be developed so that there would be tangible outcomes in a determinate period of time. Also stressed at this meeting was that the scope of the project was not to be the school but the congregation as a whole. Near the end of this meeting, we agreed

that the next steps would include my trying to develop a better understanding of the institution and an effort to develop a Steering Committee that could help guide the project's development. The meeting concluded with my turning to the assembled group for confirmation that we were, indeed, entering into this project together. The rabbi pointedly turned to Pamela Lager and asked her if she felt ready to proceed, almost as though the whole decision rested in her hands. She looked a little uncomfortable being put in this situation, but said she was very interested in the project. I was a bit confused by the rabbi's behavior and have continued pondering its significance.

In the months that followed, Pamela Lager became the "point-person" for the pilot-project, and our energies focused on generating a Steering Committee. My assumption was that she and the rabbi were in regular communication about this, but this impression turned out to be mistaken. In fact, the spring brought significant problems to the relationship between Ms. Lager and the Rabbi and the Congregation. Ms. Lager's request for a raise precipitated some uncomfortable interactions with the Congregation's Board. Equally important, Ms. Lager felt that the rabbi had been unwilling to defend her or support her during this difficult period. The rabbi's uncomfortableness with her lower level of observance was prominent during this period; also prominent was the tension between Ms. Lager and the synagogue's administrative staff. Ms. Lager resented the unwillingness of the office staff to treat her with due respect for her professional status and role, and she felt that they resented her for demanding to be treated like a professional. She also felt that there was a sexist element to this. In this area as well, she felt she received little support from the rabbi. Ms. Lager came close to being fired and/or to resigning during this period, but in the end she stayed on the job. The experience did, however, take a serious toll on her relationship to the rabbi and the Congregation. The bonds of friendship and trust have been deeply strained.

One result of these tensions (of which I knew little at the time) is that there was very little communication between the rabbi and Ms. Lager about the project during this period. While in theory the Steering Committee put together at this time reflected the views of both the rabbi and Ms. Lager, in fact it turned out to be based almost exclusively on Ms. Lager's intuitions and efforts. This group, which included the rabbi and the Congregation's new president, was called together for a meeting in June of 1996.

The June meeting was designed to acquaint participants with the project we were embarking on and to elicit their views concerning the Congregation's strengths, weaknesses, and pressing needs. It was a spirited conversation in many ways. Unfortunately, it suffered from some serious weaknesses. The

first is that the invitees, while thoughtful and informative, turned out not to be comprised of critical stakeholders in the Congregation or even to represent significant constituencies; there was no clear logic to their selection. The second problem was that the President of the Congregation, who showed up late for the meeting, had apparently not been at all informed about the pilot-project by either the rabbi or Ms. Lager; I felt in her bearing a measure of suspicion and reserve -- anything but buy-in. I was very surprised that she knew so little about this enterprise. The other serious problem is that the rabbi never showed up at the meeting, and we were informed in the middle of the meeting that "something had come up."

Deeply disturbed by these matters, the next day Ruth Cohen and I spoke with the rabbi, and I indicated that I was unsure whether the project could proceed in the absence of a more serious commitment to it on his part. The rabbi was clearly disturbed by this and expressed his strong interest in seeing the project go forward. While acknowledging his lack of involvement over the preceding period, he also observed that little effort had been made to keep him actively involved in the process. In this he was entirely correct; as noted above, Pamela Lager had become the "point-person" for the project (and there had been precious little communication between them during this period). In effect, we agreed to make a new beginning and to work towards a more successful launch of the project over the summer.

This new launching began with an August meeting convened by the rabbi to which were invited myself, Ruth Cohen, Pamela Lager, the Congregation's President Gayle Rakita, and Louise Stein, a prominent lay leader (Co-Chair of Milwaukee's Lead Community Project). All but Ms. Rakita were able to attend. The agenda for this meeting was to sketch out a tentative direction for the unfolding of the project, so that an idea could be placed before the re-constituted Steering Committee for deliberation. The second principal item on the agenda was to identify appropriate individuals for the Steering Committee.

I decided to "prime the pump" by bringing to this meeting some concrete suggestions for the way the project might unfold. One of these involved engaging critical constituencies in the Congregation in what I described as "the Big Conversation" -- in using a number of powerful but different conceptions of the why's and wherefore's of Jewish existence (for example, figures like Buber, Rosenzweig, Heschel, Soloveitchik) as a vehicle of getting these constituencies to reflect on their own Jewishness and on the character and direction of the Congregation.

A second idea was to take particular theme that is central to the Congregation - for example, "Israel," "Hebrew", "Prayer", "Text Study", or "Shabbat" -- and to examine it systematically by doing the following: 1) inquiring into the way the theme was

expressed in the day-to-day life of the Congregation across different contexts; 2) eliciting the views of critical constituencies concerning this theme; 3) encouraging these constituencies to develop a deeper understanding of the theme by bringing them into contact with powerful Jewish ideas that address the theme; 4) using the understanding developed through this process to clarify what the Congregation hopes to stand for and to encourage in relation to this theme and to find ways to express this in the life of the Congregation. As part of this conception, it was suggested that the Steering Committee would do some of the critical work, e.g. interviewing Congregants concerning their own views and then analyzing the data in order to understand "where people are".

There was significant enthusiasm for the second idea, and the conversation moved quickly to the identification of an appropriate theme around which to organize the effort. The rabbi quickly expressed a strong preference for "Shabbat" as a theme, his reasons being that Shabbat is at the heart of, and cuts across Synagogue life, and also that it had already been earmarked for special attention in the Congregation this year. Louise Stein and Ruth Cohen seemed comfortable with the idea; Pamela Lager was much less so. In part, this might have reflected her own distance from Shabbat observance; in part, it may also have reflected her sense that there were many in the Congregation who, like her, might feel threatened by a focus on Shabbat.

Underlying Ms. Lager's uncomfortableness was the assumption that a project focused on Shabbat would ultimately be aimed at making the members more observant; and in fact such an assumption may initially have been shared by some of the participants in our meeting. It therefore seemed important to make this assumption explicit and to call it into question -- which I proceeded to do. Indicating that rhetoric encouraging people "to become more observant" would likely alienate many people, I suggested that we might do better with language that encourages "deepening the members' appreciation and enjoyment of Shabbat". Participants in the meeting, including the rabbi, appeared comfortable with this reformulation, and it seemed to render Pamela Lager somewhat more comfortable. She probably continued to wonder whether the change in language also signalled a change in intention!

In any event, it was agreed that the "Shabbat-idea" be put on the table for consideration by the re-constituted Steering Committee, and the last part of the meeting focused on identifying appropriate members. Those at our meeting seemed very thoughtful about this, and they generated what seemed like a strong list. At the end of the meeting, the rabbi announced his willingness to contact all of the potential invitees and to convene the first meeting. It was also agreed that he would chair the meeting and that I would participate as an ex officio

member, that is, as a CIJE consultant. The rabbi's announcement that he would do these things signalled what to my mind was the most important development expressed in this meeting -- namely, his acceptance of responsibility for and leadership of the project.

Using a proposal I had drafted that was in effect a summary of our August meeting, in the weeks that followed, the rabbi contacted the proposed invitees. He also talked with me in depth a number of times about the agenda and the pedagogy for our first meeting with the Steering committee. He succeeded in recruiting a very strong group of constituents for this meeting, which was scheduled for right after the holidays in the fall of 1996.

The rabbi was thoroughly in charge of the October meeting. He spoke of the project as an opportunity to deepen the Congregation's understanding of its core-values and aspirations and to find ways of embedding this understanding in the fabric of synagogue life -- in the school, in family educational settings, and in other contexts. He then suggested that we would be wise to start this process by focusing not on the Synagogue as a whole but on a particular dimension of congregational life, and he proposed Shabbat. The object of the Shabbat project would be to enable the membership of CBI to grow in their appreciation and enjoyment of Shabbat; this would happen through a process that includes reflecting on what, at its best, is special about Shabbat, and then using the results of this thinking as a basis for figuring out how to enrich congregants' encounters with Shabbat, be it in the school, in the main sanctuary, or in other settings. He expressed his hope that by the summer of 1997, we would be in a place to agree on recommendations for implementation.

Against this background, Rabbi Buckman engaged the participants at the meeting in an exercise organized around the following questions:

1. When Shabbat really clicks for you, what's special about it?
2. What were the contributing circumstances? What was present or absent that made it possible for Shabbat to click in this way?
3. Based on this, are there things Beth Israel could be doing, but isn't, to make Shabbat click more regularly for you and others?

The discussion growing out of this exercise occupied the bulk of the meeting and was extraordinarily rich and engaging. In addition to generating important ideas, the exercise got the participants into the subject in a way that would have otherwise

been impossible.

Following the Shabbat discussion, participants briefly considered alternatives to Shabbat as an organizing theme, but the group seemed to find the Shabbat theme very congenial. By the end of the meeting, there was agreement that the process should now proceed along two simultaneous tracks:

1) focus groups, some of them organized around the questions the group had just wrestled with, and designed to elicit information concerning the outlook, expectations, and hopes of the CBI constituency. There was in this connection a good discussion of the kinds of constituencies that should be focused on and of the kinds of questions that are likely to elicit useful data without making the interviewees' feel defensive or inadequate.

2) an attempt to gather information concerning the way Shabbat had been, and is, embedded in the Congregation's life. A long-standing member of the Congregation volunteered to develop a longitudinal perspective that contrasted present Shabbat-customs in the congregation with its predecessors; others took responsibility for looking at the way Shabbat figured into the congregation's family education program and into the school. Looking at the school would involve scanning the curricula and interviews with teachers designed to learn more about what really goes on.

It was agreed that the results of these inquiries would be brought back to the group's next meeting, in November.

I was genuinely excited at the end of this meeting and felt that many of the other participants, including the rabbi, were as well. Between this meeting and the November meeting, Pamela Lager, with my help, developed a set of questions to be used in interviewing teachers. She also sent me the school-wide curriculum drafted by her predecessor - a document that does not see much use.

Scanning this document, one finds little that would offer any guidance concerning the meaning and approach to Shabbat; at best, there tend to be references to other curricula that might be appropriate, e.g. Melton materials. I came away from my scan of these and other curricular materials and from my discussion of this subject with Ms. Lager with the distinct impression that teachers did pretty much what they wanted in the area of Shabbat and that she herself was unclear what in fact they did do.

During this same period, I continued to be in touch with Rabbi Buckman, both to plan the next meeting and to get a sense

of whether the members of the group had carried through with what they agreed to do. The rabbi assured me that they had, and this provided the agenda for the next meeting.

Attendance at the November meeting was excellent! Interviews with the teachers had not yet taken place by the time of this meeting, with the result that the meeting focused on reports from individuals assigned to see what was going on in different congregational domains. These reports were generally well done, and they generated very fruitful conversation. Stimulated by Bunny Dolnick's account of historical changes in the celebration of Shabbat at CBI, there was a thoughtful discussion of "the old days", which featured a lively, well-attended Friday night service that was family-friendly and seasoned with a lot of singing. The disappearance of this service, it turned out, reflected the preceding rabbi's belief that Friday night should be a family-at-home experience, and our own discussion at least called into question the wisdom of his decision (given a world in which both parents typically work and get home late even on Fridays).

There followed a presentation by the Rabbi and the President of the congregation that highlighted the way Shabbat is currently marked in the Congregation -- a presentation that took the group through Shabbat and emphasized the Congregation's regular services and a range of other programs associated with Shabbat. On hearing the relatively lengthy list of things going on, a number of participants expressed surprise that so much was happening on a regular basis; and they wondered whether there might be others, especially newcomers, who are unaware of how much is happening. At the same time, someone else noted that although a lot is going on during Shabbat, only a small percentage of the congregation is involved in these Shabbat experiences. This in turn led to a brief preliminary discussion of the way the Shabbat experience at CBI could be strengthened. Rabbi Buckman indicated that he was keeping a list of the suggestions that were made.

Briefer discussions followed of the way Shabbat figures into family education programs and into the life of the school. In view of the little concerning Shabbat that is reflected in the school's formal curriculum, the importance of hearing from the teachers what they in fact do was underscored, and two members of the group agreed to be responsible for speaking with them.

Towards the end of this conversation concerning the place of Shabbat at Beth Israel, the group indicated an interest in knowing more about the following: 1) what is it that draws people who do participate in the Shul on Shabbat? 2) Why do a lot of people stay away -- and is there perhaps a sub-group among them who would eagerly participate, if the content and/or tone and/or structure of Shabbat activities were differently configured?

These seemed to be important questions to be considered in the focus groups, and the last part of the meeting focused on their composition, i.e. what constituencies would be worth looking into. Following discussion, it was agreed that a trial-run focus-group would be held with what were described as "the empty nesters", and Sandy Thau, a congregant trained in facilitating focus groups, agreed to develop the questions and to lead the session.

Like the October meeting, this one had a good feel to it; while I am not sure that the feeling was universally shared, people generally seemed "pretty high".

Between the November and December meetings, Sandy Thau developed a carefully framed set of focus-group questions aimed at "the empty nesters", another individual interviewed about 8 teachers and recorded the results of these interviews, and the rabbi and I gave thought to the agenda for the next meeting. I encouraged him to introduced some study of Jewish sources that speak to the meaning(s) of Shabbat as a way of adding an important input to our conversation.

Attendance at the December meeting was again very strong; it may be that everyone was there! The session began with a period of study, led by the Rabbi, focused on two different biblical discussions of Shabbat (one of them enjoining us to "observe" the Sabbath, and the other "to remember" it). While the effort to get participants to compare these texts was promising, the discussion was truncated and did not really add ideas to the group's developing conversation. This was unfortunate and left me still wondering how best to infuse the process with content that would not feel artificially appended to an otherwise organic process.

Most of this meeting was organized around the information gathered through the teacher-interviews. After scanning the data, participants offered a variety of responses. They were struck by the extent to which, though not found in the formal curriculum, Shabbat is represented in what teachers do. They also noted that there seemed to be no coherent set of objectives informing what teachers did in this domain -- an observation that led one member of the group to wonder aloud, **"What are the Congregation's goals in this area?"** Scanning the interview-data, it seemed that teachers were deeply frustrated by what they took to be parental disengagement from the school's efforts; and they were most animated and excited when discussing occasions when they had brought students to their homes for a Shabbat-experience. This, they felt, was rewarding for them and powerful for the children.

The observation concerning children going to their teachers' homes to celebrate Shabbat elicited an interesting discussion

concerning the desirability of this practice. A concern was expressed about whether this practice took the children away from their families on Shabbat -- to which someone else responded that for many of the children the alternative to Shabbat at the teacher's home was no Shabbat at all! In this context, the idea of reintroducing a family-oriented Shabbat service in the Synagogue was re-introduced.

A second discussion stimulated by this discussion focused on why it is that non-celebrating families don't celebrate Shabbat. One hypothesis focused on "lack of knowledge" as an obstacle, a hypothesis which led to a suggestion that a user-friendly "tool-kit" or manual needs to be developed. While there was enthusiasm for this proposal, others cautioned against hastily concluding that lack of knowledge is the reason for non-observance; for many, the issue is more lack of interest or motivation!

Against this background, the suggestion was advanced that perhaps CBI should begin thinking of the family rather than individual children as the client for its Shabbat education initiative. Perhaps, as one person put it, the challenge should be to empower families to experience Shabbat and to incorporate it into their lives.

Before concluding the discussion triggered by the teacher-interviews, one of the participants, herself a teacher, noted that much more might be going in the school's Shabbat programming than was elicited by the interviews. It was agreed that we should bring those interviewed together for a focus-group that builds on the individual interviews that had been conducted.

The last part of the meeting was occupied with reactions to a report detailing the Congregation's new "Shabbat Connection" program, which brings "empty-nesters" together for Shabbat dinners in the homes of participants on a regular basis. After it was determined that the Congregation does nothing to contribute to the content of these dinners other than arrange the logistics, the group discussed a proposal to create and distribute a "Shabbat in the home" tool-kit that could be used by host-families. It was also suggested that the Shabbat Connection model, which brings individuals together in private homes for festive Shabbat dinners, might prove an excellent out-reach tool to other populations.

The meeting concluded with an agreement to meet two weeks later to discuss the results of the first focus-group. This meeting, like its predecessors, had seemed very exciting; the rabbi, especially, seemed very high.

As it turned out, there was insufficient time to process the results of the first focus-group, and our meeting was postponed until January 1997. In lieu of the meeting, I had a

lengthy conversation with the rabbi concerning three matters. The first of these was his idea of doing a kind of "Best Practices" study that focuses on congregations that have a vibrant "Shabbat Observant" community. Using the internet, he had already identified some possible sites, and he had recruited two members of the Congregation who were willing to travel to the site to see what could be learned.

The second subject of our conversation was the possibility of the group's developing, based on its work together, a vision-statement that articulated its considered views on the larger ideas and aspirations around which Shabbat programming at CBI should be organized. Once developed, this vision-statement could be put in the hands of sub-committees attached to different congregational domains, each one of them charged with sketching out the practical implications of this statement for its domain, e.g. the school, the Congregation's shabbat programming.

Our third subject concerned Jewish content. The rabbi agreed that a process of deepening the members' understanding of Shabbat would be a useful ingredient in this effort to develop a vision-statement, and we spoke at some length of possible strategies for introducing the content-discussion. One of them was to focus more extensive study time on the different biblical passages relating to Shabbat that we had studied at the preceding meeting. A second was to develop three vignettes, each representing a different portrait of Synagogue-based Shabbat-celebration (like 3 different conceptions of what one's new house might look like!), and to use these as a vehicle of stimulating discussion concerning the Congregation's choices. We agreed to give this matter more thought.

A few days following my conversation with the rabbi, I received a call, out of the blue, from Pamela Lager who asked, "Where do you think all this is heading?" I was not (and am not yet now) entirely sure about what was behind the question. At first, I thought she might be feeling that "we weren't going anywhere" (too much talk, no action), but as we talked it emerged that her central concern was that the rabbi might resist any congregational initiative in the area of Shabbat that did not reflect his own conservative approach to Jewish life -- an approach she felt to be out-of-touch with the Congregation's center of gravity. This was an important issue to raise; also important -- and a possibly serious impediment - is the continuing tension between her and the rabbi and her own uncomfortableness with the Shabbat focus. I came away from the conversation sensing that our overall progress may require their making progress in their working relationship and her developing the confidence; it may also require her developing the confidence to take more initiative in shaping the School's curriculum.

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- ④ Inquiry, Conversations,
Relationships are key!