



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE  
**AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES**  
A DIVISION OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

**MS-630: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler Digital Collection, 1961-1996.**  
Series A: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1961-1996.

---

Box  
3

Folder  
10a

Council of Jewish Federations [synagogue federations],  
1985-1995.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the  
American Jewish Archives website.

# MEMORANDUM

COPY

January 23, 1995

FROM: Edith J. Miller  
TO: Rabbi David Saperstein  
COPY:

Bob Adler shared this with us. I don't know if he forwards this kind of material to you, but since you are the point man for Synagogue Federation, I thought you should receive these items.

Fond regards



Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100





# JEWISH FEDERATION OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

Ben Gurion Way ■ 1 South Franklin Street ■ Chicago, Illinois 60606-4694

TEL: (312) 346-6700 FAX: (312) 444-2086

For Your Information  
Bob Adler

## REPORT OF THE SYNAGOGUE/FEDERATION RELATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING OF DECEMBER 13, 1994

### TO THE JEWISH FEDERATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING OF JANUARY 23, 1995

**PRESENT:** Lawrence A. Sherman, Chairman; Rabbi Marc Berkson; Rabbi Alan Bregman; Joseph J. Cohen; George Hanus; Marshall Krolick; Arlene Lewis; Richard S. Rhodes; Lottie Rosenson; Rabbi Michael Siegel; Stephen Silberman; Rabbi Mordecai Simon; Michael Steinberg and Francine Levy.

**UNABLE TO ATTEND** Judith Brody; Pat Cantor; Merle Cohen; Joan Epstein; Howard Geller; Phyllis Fischel; Lawrence Friedman; Fred Katzenstein; Laurence Kaufman; Rabbi Peter Knobel; Rabbi Michael Remson; Chana Rosen; Lester Rosenberg; Daniel S. Schechter; Norman D. Schwartz; Judy Smith; Rachel N. Stempel; Rabbi Louis M. Tuchman; and Rabbi Michael Weinberg.

**STAFF:** Merri Ex; Peter B. Friedman; Donna Kahan; Joel L. Rubin; Jane Yablon.

The Synagogue/Federation Relations Committee met to receive an update on several ongoing projects as well as some proposed activities.

### Synagogue/Federation Endowment Project

The Synagogue/Federation Endowment Project was approved in concept in June 1994. A proposal was prepared by staff that will be sent to the various Jewish and non-Jewish foundations. This proposal seeks funding so that the Legacies and Endowment Department can establish a special staff position which will promote congregational endowments. Merri Ex, of the Legacies and Endowment Department, indicated that she had been in contact with one foundation which expressed some interest in the project and suggested that a proposal be submitted. They did indicate that while the concept may be new to the Jewish community, it is not unique to the religious world and there are some non-Jewish congregational groups that have already developed joint approaches for appealing for endowments. Subsequent to the meeting it was learned that the Foundation turned down the proposal. Other sources of funding will be sought.

## Services to Congregations

The JFMC Facilities Corporation, on the initiative of the Synagogue/Federation Relations Committee, began to explore making some of its services available to congregations (e.g., central purchasing and master contract services). A meeting was held by the Chicago Association of Temple Administrators this past October. The initial response from a select group of congregational administrators was very favorable, and Facilities Corporation is now embarking upon this program on a pilot basis. The Committee will be apprised of developments at a subsequent meeting.

A question was raised about other areas of service which could be extended. It was suggested that a possibility is in the area of computer education. Federation was last involved in working with congregations in the area of computer education some six or seven years ago. There has been much change in the computer world both from a software and hardware perspective. It was mentioned that now would be an opportune time for another meeting to discuss the use of computers including such new developments as E-Mail.

## Quid-Pro-Quo Follow-up

In October 1994 a meeting was held with synagogue representatives to review the new law relating to charitable contribution substantiation and quid-pro-quo disclosure requirements. Representatives from twenty area congregations were in attendance. Michael Tarnoff of the Federation and Mort Kessel of Altschuler, Melvoine and Glasser discussed the specific impact of the law on synagogues. Those attending found the meeting to be very helpful. Subsequent to the meeting, materials were sent out to those synagogues who could not attend. It appears as if many congregations will now be sending out substantiation statements.

## JUF-Congregation Mission

The next part of the meeting was devoted to a presentation by Rabbi Michael Siegel of Anshe Emet Synagogue and Donna Kahan of the Jewish United Fund, who described a joint synagogue-JUF mission. From the synagogue's point of view the mission serves important functions of exposing congregants to Israel and furthering the connection between the congregational members and the synagogue. The synagogue can provide people who have never been involved with the Jewish United Fund and/or have not had an opportunity to go to Israel. The Jewish United Fund can provide a quality trip which is tailored to the needs of a specific congregation. The combination works to the advantage of both institutions and most important to the participants. It was explained that approximately forty-three people participated on the trip and that there are still very



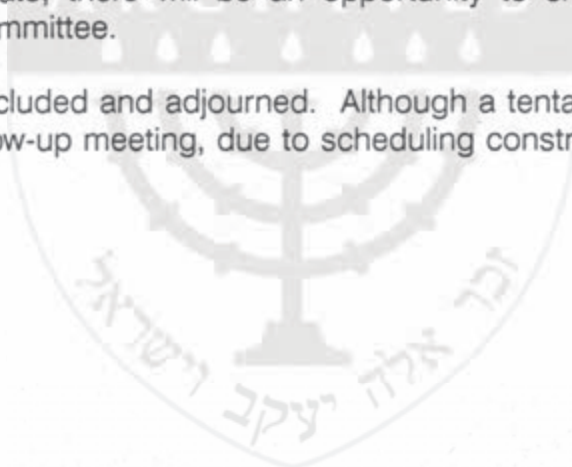
positive reverberations in the congregation about the trip. Several more trips are being planned.

Following the presentation there was a very lengthy discussion among committee members regarding joint synagogue-Jewish United Fund mission and contrasting views were expressed about these missions.

### **Synagogue/Federation Shared Goals**

Peter Friedman reported on a recent development at the national level among temple administrators/executives which has positive repercussions for federation-synagogue relationships. At an annual meeting, temple administrators discussed with federation planners ways in which congregations and federations can work together. They prepared a set of mutual objectives to serve as a basis for this discussion. These objectives start from the viewpoint of what the institutions have in common rather than what divides them. This is a very positive way to initiate a dialogue. Interest has been expressed at the local level for more interaction between congregational administrators and the Federation. This will be followed up by some meetings and opportunities to discuss different areas of joint activity. At a future date, there will be an opportunity to share the results of these dialogues with the Committee.

The meeting was concluded and adjourned. Although a tentative date had been set in late January for a follow-up meeting, due to scheduling constraints it is being moved to February.



*Sign/Hed*

DRAFT

DEPARTMENT ON RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS STRATEGIC PLAN

The Strategic Report of UJA-Federation, "One Vision," describes the organization's relationship to synagogues as being "characterized by [a] different culture and values."

The report articulates the goal that the organization develop, "A more collaborative relationship", with synagogues.

The Department on Religious Affairs is uniquely positioned to facilitate this new "collaborative relationship." Lay leadership and Department professional staff have a keen understanding of both cultures through their participation and leadership in the synagogue world as well as in the work of UJA-Federation. The Department, an integral part of UJA-Federation with its vast economic, organizational, technical and personnel resources, is especially able to facilitate the changes envisioned by the UJA-Federation Strategic Plan. It is critical to lower the barriers between synagogues and other Jewish communal institutions to positively effect Jewish continuity.

The Department on Religious Affairs is the primary entry point for the religious community into UJA-Federation. As such it functions as advocate for and representative to rabbis and synagogues.

The Department on Religious Affairs Strategic Plan discusses three areas in charting its

course for the future: the synagogue, the rabbinate, and UJA-Federation inclusive of its agencies.

## THE SYNAGOGUE

The synagogue, along with the family, is the seminal institution of Jewish life. The synagogue is the central communal instrument for the transmission of our religious and cultural traditions. UJA-Federation must provide services to synagogues as an integral part of its mission. However, it is not an easy task. The synagogues in our catchment area represent not only a broad ideological spectrum but also a great diversity economically and socially. To fulfill our commitment to build a stronger Jewish community and assure the continuity of the Jewish people, we must create services and programs responsive to the needs of synagogues, the primary institution for Jewish continuity. These programs and services should be reflective of the unique strengths and resources of UJA-Federation and neither in conflict nor competitive with programs and services provided by the umbrella denominational groupings.

Synagogues are the natural constituency of the Department on Religious Affairs. They collectively represent the values the Department seeks to disseminate through its own programs and activities. However, for a variety of historical and ideological reasons, synagogues have felt themselves to be outside the pale of UJA-Federation functionally and organizationally, with different values and goals. The UJA-Federation Strategic Plan



expresses a determination to focus on Jewish continuity as a primary goal. In making this decision, the UJA-Federation begins to embrace many of the goals and objectives characteristic of synagogues. This step represents a major impetus in forging new relationships with synagogues.

## COMMISSION ON SYNAGOGUE RELATIONS

The Commission on Synagogue Relations, a component of the Department on Religious Affairs, is charged with creating linkages between the synagogue community and UJA-Federation to enhance the relationship and build a true partnership. To realize these goals the Commission on Synagogue Relations will broaden its membership to further extend its constituent base. This will be done in cooperation with HRD as well as with the synagogue movements and will utilize the resources of the central organization and those within the agency network. Through its Executive Council and committee structure, the Commission will develop programs uniquely designed to respond to the needs of the synagogue world and establish mechanisms to facilitate the access to UJA-Federation resources by synagogues.

In cooperation with the Department on Shared Services the Commission will seek to create opportunities for synagogues to reduce expenses and overhead as well as to enhance their ability to increase membership and fundraising. With the Wiener Center the Commission will develop leadership training courses addressing the responsibilities

and requisite skills of synagogue leadership to effectively carry out their responsibilities. It will offer the synagogues technical services including, but not limited to, areas such as computerization, library science, and resource management to further the synagogue's ability to maximize its effectiveness. The Commission will work with the Management Assistance Program to draw upon pro bono expertise in the community to respond to individual as well as collective issues confronting synagogues. The Commission will seek to establish a Synagogue Institute which, through symposia and publications, will explore mission, role, and potential for synagogues in a changing environment.

The Commission is currently working with Jewish Board of Family and Childrens' Services and has identified four synagogues in the JBFCS area to pilot a program geared to the normative Jewish family. This program will deal with the issues of daily life and will incorporate a strong Jewish component. It is exploring a similar initiative with WJCS. With FECS, the Commission is looking to identify ten-twelve synagogues to participate in a plant management project. Both these projects are scheduled to begin in Fall, 1994 and will have lay oversight by subcommittees of the Commission.

In cooperation HRD, the Commission is planning to develop a curriculum for synagogue leadership. It is envisioned that this curriculum will encompass, in addition to the standard "job description" material, management skills, leadership skills, and meeting skills. This project will engage the lay and professional personnel from the synagogue movements in the design of the curriculum and in the planning of seminars which will



test the curriculum. Once having been developed and tested, the curriculum will be made available to all synagogues with the offer to arrange for appropriate faculty from our agency Network. This project is planned to span 3 years and to be divided into three phases: 1) identification of areas to be covered, 2) development of curriculum, and 3) testing of curriculum.

In Spring, 1995, the Commission is planning to mount a consultation on synagogue/UJA-Federation and agency relationships. This consultation will bring together agency, UJA-Federation and synagogue leadership to look at how the three institutional centers of the Jewish community can work together to strengthen the synagogue and enhance Jewish life in the community. To be planned by a subcommittee of the Executive Council of the Commission on Synagogue Relations, this consultation is seen as a way to begin to bring down the barriers that divide the community and to build trust among Jewish communal institutions on the local level.

Neighborhood preservation, an item which has been of concern to the Commission for several years, will be addressed in a focussed and proactive manner. Many neighborhoods in our area are experiencing demographic change. Some are seeing the Jewish population increase as is the case on the Upper West Side with young families and singles and parts of Brooklyn and the Bronx with the Russian immigration. Other areas are experiencing a decrease in Jewish population due to migration to Florida or the natural decline in population due to aging. It is the Commission's intent to look at these

demographic changes, and their implications for synagogues. It is anticipated that the Commission will be looking at ways in which it can link synagogues to available network services to explore merger options in those areas where the Jewish community has decreased and ways in which to assist synagogues to build and expand in areas that are seeing Jewish population growth.

In addition, the Commission has scheduled through its task forces a variety of projects and programs for next year. Under the auspices of the Task Force on the Jewish Woman there are plans for a UJA-Federation Network-wide conference on family violence. A seminar on "How to be Heard at Meetings" for lay and professional women is being planned in cooperation with the Wiener Center. There will be a Day of Reflection for Women Rabbis. The Task Force on Youth Activities Development is planning a training session for youth group workers in cooperation with Jewish youth organizations in the New York area. The Task Force on Addictions in the Jewish Community in cooperation with the Subcommittee on Refugee Adolescents is planning a training session on substance abuse for community center personnel working with emigre teens.

## THE RABBINATE

The rabbi, as the spiritual leader and teacher of our tradition, must be a critical player,

not only within the synagogue, but within the entire Jewish community. The Plan discusses a program to enhance the rabbis' ability to be more effective professionally. It also seeks to increase rabbinic opportunities for expanded leadership roles in communal settings.

The pulpit rabbi plays a multi-dimensional role in the congregation. As spiritual leader, the rabbi is the transmitter of a tradition representing a two millennia old heritage. A congregation's response to the challenge of the tradition is filtered through the rabbi. The rabbi is often called upon to perform many functions, moderated by the demands of a voluntary organization supervised and managed by lay persons. The community also makes its demands upon the rabbi, and s/he is often placed in the position of assessing a value priority on the community's demands, relative to those of the congregation, the employer.

The demands on a rabbi's time are many. How does the rabbi find time for personal study? How does one play a role fully as a family member, parent or spouse, given the inexorable demands of the congregation and community?

More significantly, the rabbi faces the challenge of bringing a religious world view to both the synagogue and the conduct of Jewish communal affairs. How can the rabbi effectively influence the decision making processes of Jewish communal life so to reflect the Jewish value system?



## RABBINICAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Rabbinical Advisory Council consists of pulpit rabbis across the denominational spectrum who make significant contributions to the campaign. It is poised to broaden its agenda beyond fundraising and respond effectively to the needs of its colleagues. The Rabbinical Advisory Council will utilize, in addition to the resources of UJA-Federation and its agencies, those of the rabbinical organizations, and educational institutions in our community.

It will facilitate the continued Judaic education inherent in the rabbinate. It will develop programs to enhance the professional skills of the rabbi. The Rabbinical Advisory Council will utilize the expertise in our family service agencies to enhance the rabbis' role as a pastoral counselor. It will expand the current Mission program to increase the rabbis' familiarity with the operations of our local agencies.

The pressures under which a pulpit rabbi works, often takes a personal toll on both the rabbi and the rabbi's immediate family. Cognizant of these pressures, the Rabbinical Advisory Council will work to access professional resources from within their network, and develop programs responsive to the unique needs of rabbis and their families.

The Rabbinical Advisory Council will be holding an orientation for new rabbis in the New York area in early Fall and a Mission to Israel for leadership in Spring, 1995. It

will be holding a Yom Iyun and training for rabbis in the areas of family violence and addictions during the next program year. As follow-up to the addictions training, the Rabbinical Advisory Council will be developing a mentoring program whereby rabbis who have been trained will work with those who have not.

In cooperation with the Department on Planned Giving and Endowments, the Rabbinical Advisory Council will be sponsoring a seminar on rabbinic finances. With the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, it will be developing sessions designed to address stress factors unique to the rabbi's role. This project will involve the use of focus groups to determine significant issues and the development of a design group consisting of rabbis and mental health professionals to develop the program. The project will span a two year development period with the program offered in the third year.

With the Wiener Center, the Rabbinical Advisory Council is planning to develop a four session course on, "The Rabbi as Leader and Manager". It will also continue to work with the Wiener Center to offer a program to rabbinic students acquainting them with the work of UJA-Federation and exploring with them how they, as rabbis, can become involved in UJA-Federation.

## UJA-FEDERATION AND ITS AGENCIES

A rabbinic dictum teaches, "adam karov leatzmo" (one must be true to one's self). This

is true of organizations. The Strategic Plan calls upon UJA-Federation to, "exemplify the standards needed throughout Jewish organization [al] life." Inherent in this charge is the assumption that the standards applied come from a Jewish value base and are an expression of the organization's commitment to its Jewish roots.

The agencies of UJA-Federation are the central organization's presence in the community. As such, they represent UJA-Federation and are seen as the ultimate expression of UJA-Federation's mission. They must likewise reflect the organizational commitment to Jewish continuity and values if this commitment is to be taken seriously by UJA-Federation's constituency.



#### COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

The Committee on Religious Affairs will work with relevant lay and professional structures within the central organization to support efforts to maximize the commitment to Jewish values. Using rabbis, prominent synagogue leadership and its own members, the Committee will work to heighten appreciation for the Jewish roots of the communal enterprise; classes, seminars, publications and outreach will be the medium to affect this.

As a resource to the network for the furtherance of Jewish identity, values and culture, the Committee will work with the agencies to facilitate the expression of a Jewish component within institutional frameworks. The Committee on Religious Affairs will, in



cooperation with the agencies, explore and identify strategies to enhance the Jewish nature of network institutions, taking into account particular agency function, staff and constituency. The goal is to clearly identify the network agencies as being under Jewish auspices.

The Committee on Religious Affairs will work with agencies to help train staff to reflect Jewish concerns and sensitivities, and where appropriate, for the staff to be transmitters of the Jewish tradition. It will facilitate the training of agency leadership to be mindful of the significance to be placed on the Jewish component of agency mission and service.

The Department on Religious Affairs, as the primary outreach vehicle of UJA-Federation to the synagogue community, will bring together a staff Synagogue Management Team from those departments within UJA-Federation that relate to synagogues. This Synagogue Management Team will share information and devise strategies to enhance UJA-Federation's relationship with the synagogue world. It will work to eliminate duplication and promote a cooperative, coordinated approach to the synagogues.

In the past year, the Committee on Religious Affairs has devoted its time to meeting with agency executives from a variety of functional fields as well as with 59th Street staff who work with the agencies in order to learn more about how the agencies function. The Committee is making plans for field visits to select agencies in the coming year and will



begin to engage with agency personnel around the issue of Jewish ambience. Following the field visits, the Committee will be creating functional field subcommittees bringing together staff from 59th Street, agency staff and members of the CRA to develop guidelines for Jewish ambience specific to agency function and environment. In fall, 1995, these guidelines will be circulated to all agencies and a retreat scheduled to review the guidelines and talk about their implementation. Members of the CRA will make themselves available to work with agencies on implementation. After a period of testing, the guidelines will be submitted to the Affiliation Committee to be incorporated in the affiliation review which each agency will be undergoing every three years.

As the Jewish community, we face external and internal challenges which threaten our being. The experience of American Jewry demonstrates we can persevere as Jews in an open society by being resourceful, imaginative and creative. The Department on Religious Affairs brings together under its umbrella virtually all sectors of the New York Jewish community and provides an environment which permits Jews of all persuasions to join together in an affirmative response to the challenges of Jewish life.

Netzach Yisrael lo Yeshaker. (1 Samuel)

# MEMORANDUM

COPY ✓

Sym/Fed.

November 22, 1994

**FROM:** Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
**TO:** Rabbi Allen S. Kaplan  
**COPY:** Arthur Grant, Melvin Merians, David Saperstein  
John Stern, Rabbi Daniel B. Syme,  
Rabbi Eric Yoffie

I have your memorandum of November 22nd regarding the proposal of the UJA/Federation to develop a program of synagogues on Managing Change. I certainly am in favor of joining their experimental program and urge you to recommend two NYFRS congregations to participate in the venture.

Nonetheless, it is most important that it is made clear to the Federation and so noted on all releases that this is a joint program of UJA/Federation and the New York Federation of Reform Synagogues.



**Union of American Hebrew Congregations**

**SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA**

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

# Memorandum

**To:** Rabbis Daniel B. Syme, Eric H. Yoffie, David Saperstein  
**CC:** Rabbi A. Schindler, Mr. Mel Merians, Art Grant, John Stern  
**From:** Rabbi Allen S. Kaplan  
**Date:** November 22, 1994  
**Subject:** UJA/Federation Strategic Planning

Today, Joe Bernstein and I met with representatives of the Department of Management Assistance Planning and the Department of Religious Affairs of the UJA/New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. Also in attendance was a representative of the UO. UJA/Federation proposes to develop a program for synagogues on Managing Change.

A volunteer in the Dept. of MAP is an employee of MacKensie, Inc., a major consultant to large corporations. They want to give us a program that will assist congregations in strategic planning. While their program is similar to a great deal of work being done by the UAHC Dept of Synagogue Administration, we saw nothing in their plan that was moving in on "our turf." In fact, their program could be useful to us in freeing up resources for better serving our congregations.

We agreed to be a part of their experimental program. We will recommend two NYFRS congregations to participate in the program. They will receive a six session series on Strategic Planning. If the project is successful, we will offer it as one of our programs conducted by UJA/Federation personnel.

They will also give two unaffiliated congregations an opportunity to participate. For the record, I gave my objection to unaffiliated congregations being supported by UJA/Federation programs and allowed to benefit while they neglect their responsibility to their particular national movement.



Handwritten notes and stamps in the top right corner include "YAS 100", a box containing "MEMO ON" and "TAPs", and a signature.



cc: RABBI DANIEL B Syme  
EMILY GROTTA  
MELVIN MERIANS



COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

Sym/7ad

November 16, 1994  
13 Kislev 5755

Stephen D. Solender  
Executive Vice President  
UJA Federation of New York  
130 East 59th Street  
New York, NY 10022

Dear Stephen:

Thank you for your thoughtful response to the matter I raised with you in Jerusalem.

I am grateful that the draft paper which was the source of so much dismay will now be the subject of a study involving not just your agency, but representatives of the Synagogue community as well. Of course, I will share your letter with all of our people and they will be reassured by it.

With warm regards and every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

Chairman,  
Board Of Directors  
Larry A. Silverstein

President  
Alan S. Jaffe

Executive Vice President  
Stephen D. Solender

President-elect  
Louise B. Greilsheimer

General Chairman,  
Campaign  
James S. Tisch

Vice Chair, Campaign  
& Chair, Women's Campaign  
Arlene Wittels

Chairman,  
Domestic Affairs Division  
Billie Gold

Chairman,  
Overseas Affairs Division  
Herbert Kronish

Treasurer  
Alan S. Bernikow

Secretary  
Sally Pearce

Chief Operating Officer,  
Financial Resources  
Adam B. Kahan

Chief Operating Officer,  
Program Services  
Jeffrey R. Solomon

Honorary Officers  
Nathan S. Ancell  
Charles Ballon\*  
Milton J. Bluestein\*  
Samuel Hausman\*  
Ludwig Jesselson\*  
Solomon Litt  
Ben S. Marcus\*  
Meshulam Riklis  
William Rosenwald  
Laurence A. Tisch  
Jack D. Weiler

Life Trustees  
Robert H. Arnow  
Henry Bernstein  
Lawrence B. Buttenwieser  
Irving Mitchell Felt  
Joseph S. Gruss\*  
George H. Heyman Jr.  
William Kahn  
Carl Leff\*  
Morris Levinson\*  
Frederick P. Rose  
Irving Schneider  
Daniel S. Shapiro  
Stephen Shalom  
Samuel J. Silberman  
Sanford Solender  
Herbert Tenzer\*  
Wilma S. Tisch  
James L. Weinberg  
Elaine K. Winik

Past Chairmen,  
Board of Directors  
Morton A. Kornreich  
Joseph Gurwin  
Irwin Hochberg

Past Presidents  
Peggy Tishman  
David G. Sacks

Executive Vice President  
Emeritus  
Ernest W. Michel



# UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

*We help 4.5 million people a year. One at a time.*

November 9, 1994

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
President  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Dear Alex:

I want to respond in more detail to your inquiry regarding the draft document produced by the staff of the Department on Religious Affairs. I appreciated your acknowledgement that it will be more productive if we communicate directly with each other rather than through intermediaries.

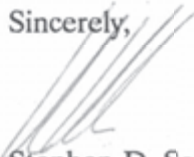
As I mentioned in Jerusalem, this draft is a preliminary think piece produced by the Department in an attempt to stimulate an examination of the ways that the Department may be able to be more effective in strengthening Synagogue-Federation relations. The draft was mailed to Executive Council members of the Commission on Synagogue Relations for preliminary discussion and review. It was intended to stimulate discussion among the Executive Council members regarding its contents. A Reform professional and lay leader sit on this Executive Council.

In response to the concerns expressed by staff persons in the Reform and Conservative movements, it was agreed that discussion on the paper would be deferred. Given the considerable interest on the part of Reform and Conservative professionals, we now intend to establish a task force of professionals from both within UJA-Federation and the movements to explore this issue in depth. We expect to eventually involve lay leadership as well.

Alex, I welcome the keen interest that this paper has provoked. You and I both know that 30 years ago, the Federation and Synagogue communities lived in different worlds. The demands of the community and the needs of our people are making it perfectly clear what obligations we have to face together. I look forward to this endeavor.

With best personal wishes.

Sincerely,

  
Stephen D. Solender  
Executive Vice President

sds/10781

United Jewish Appeal-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York, Inc.  
130 East 59th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022 (212) 980-1000 FAX (212) 888-7538

\*deceased

*[Handwritten signature]*

COPY

August 31, 1994

**PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL**

**FROM: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler**

**TO: Rabbi David Saperstein**

I have your memo of August 25th regarding the co-chairmanship of your Synagogue Federation Committee. When I first discussed this with Danny and Mel, neither seemed to remember having approved this appointment and I certainly was not involved or consulted in it. But apparently, the letter was sent out and we have no other recourse but to proceed.

On further reflection, it might not have been such a bad choice after all. To begin with, he is a rather capable young rabbi in a large congregation. Moreover, he is active in this Federation. And more importantly, he was successful in gaining Federation support for his Stepping Stones program (our program which offers two years of free education for children of unaffiliated mixed married families). This experience could stand us in good stead.

If things don't work out, we can always make changes.

All the very best to you, Ellen, and your brood - - may it continue to grow.



# RELIGIOUS ACTION CENTER OF REFORM JUDAISM

*Handwritten initials: JN*

## Personal and confidential

*The Religious Action Center  
pursues social justice and  
religious liberty by  
mobilizing the American  
Jewish community and  
serving as its advocate  
in the nation's capital*

2027 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 387-2900  
Fax (202) 667-9070

Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director and Counsel

Rabbi Lynne Landeberg  
Associate Director

Evelyn Laaser Shlainatzky,  
Chairperson  
Commission on Social Action  
of Reform Judaism

Rabbi Eric Yaffe  
Director  
Commission on Social Action  
of Reform Judaism

*The Religious Action Center  
is under the auspices of  
the Commission on Social  
Action of Reform Judaism,  
a joint instrumentality of  
the Central Conference of  
American Rabbis and  
the Union of American  
Hebrew Congregations  
with its affiliates:  
American Conference  
of Cantors,  
Association of Reform  
Zionists of America,  
National Association of  
Temple Administrators,  
National Association of  
Temple Educators,  
National Federation of  
Temple Brotherhoods,  
National Federation of  
Temple Sisterhoods,  
North American Federation  
of Temple Youth*

To: Mel Merians, Rabbi Alex Schindler, and Rabbi Daniel Syme  
From: David Saperstein  
Re: The enclosed  
Date: August 25, 1994

I am at a bit of a loss to know where we are with this. A copy of this letter was provided by Paul Vanek. Apparently we have invited Herb to assume this post. I'd love to have some confirmation of this. In addition, if anyone has any recollection of what the rationale was, it would be exceedingly helpful.

Enclosure

*Handwritten notes:*  
554,000  
160,000  
301,000  
Indecent  
Papers - Adverse





202-986-7792

## UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

January 14, 1994

Rabbi Herbert Brockman  
Congregation Mishkan Israel  
785 Ridge Road  
Hamden, Connecticut 06517

Dear Herb:

I am pleased to invite you to serve as the Vice Chair of the newly-formed UAHC Committee on Synagogue/Federation Relations. We have asked Dr. Paul Vanek, a member of our Board of Trustees, to serve as the Chairman of the committee.

The committee will attempt to work more closely with Federations in various programmatic and funding initiatives, to the betterment of our mutual endeavors.

I hope you will accept this post with us.

Sincerely,

Melvin Merians

✓ cc: Dr. Paul Vanek



598 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017-0069 (212) 249-0100

# MEMORANDUM

COPY ✓

Syn/Fed.

November 22, 1994

**FROM:** Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
**TO:** Rabbi Allen S. Kaplan  
**COPY:** Arthur Grant, Melvin Merians, David Saperstein  
John Stern, Rabbi Daniel B. Syme,  
Rabbi Eric Yoffie

I have your memorandum of November 22nd regarding the proposal of the UJA/Federation to develop a program of synagogues on Managing Change. I certainly am in favor of joining their experimental program and urge you to recommend two NYFRS congregations to participate in the venture.

Nonetheless, it is most important that it is made clear to the Federation and so noted on all releases that this is a joint program of UJA/Federation and the New York Federation of Reform Synagogues.



**Union of American Hebrew Congregations**

**SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA**

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

# Memorandum

**To:** Rabbis Daniel B. Syme, Eric H. Yoffie, David Saperstein  
**CC:** Rabbi A. Schindler, Mr. Mel Merians, Art Grant, John Stern  
**From:** Rabbi Allen S. Kaplan  
**Date:** November 22, 1994  
**Subject:** UJA/Federation Strategic Planning

Today, Joe Bernstein and I met with representatives of the Department of Management Assistance Planning and the Department of Religious Affairs of the UJA/New York Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. Also in attendance was a representative of the UO. UJA/Federation proposes to develop a program for synagogues on Managing Change.

A volunteer in the Dept. of MAP is an employee of MacKensie, Inc., a major consultant to large corporations. They want to give us a program that will assist congregations in strategic planning. While their program is similar to a great deal of work being done by the UAHC Dept of Synagogue Administration, we saw nothing in their plan that was moving in on "our turf." In fact, their program could be useful to us in freeing up resources for better serving our congregations.

We agreed to be a part of their experimental program. We will recommend two NYFRS congregations to participate in the program. They will receive a six session series on Strategic Planning. If the project is successful, we will offer it as one of our programs conducted by UJA/Federation personnel.

They will also give two unaffiliated congregations an opportunity to participate. For the record, I gave my objection to unaffiliated congregations being supported by UJA/Federation programs and allowed to benefit while they neglect their responsibility to their particular national movement.



Handwritten notes and signatures in the top right corner. A box contains the text "MEMO ON TAPs". Above it, "HAROLD" is written. To the right, there are several handwritten signatures and initials.

*Synagogue / Federator*

September 23, 1994  
18 Tishri 5755

Mr. I. Robert Freeland, Chairman  
Come Play Products Company  
44 Suffolk Street  
Worcester, MA 01604

Dear Sonny:

Better late than never, and certainly better when your candidate is a person of Michael Sleeper's calibre! I am grateful for your recommendation of him as he's ideal for our needs.

We've not appointed our committee as yet but I am certain he will be among those invited to serve.

Rhea and I join in sending you and Aviva fond regards and all good wishes for a sweet healthy and happy 5755.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

bcc: David Saperstein



SYNAGOGUE-FEDERATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Mail to:  
Synagogue-Federation Committee  
Religious Action Center  
2027 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-387-2800

NAME: I. Robert Freeland

ADDRESS: 770 Salisbury Street, Apt. #336

CITY/STATE/ZIP: Worcester, MA 01609

PHONE: (508) 754-2087

CONGREGATION/FEDERATION: Temple Emanuel, President/ Active with Worcester Federation

\*\*\*\*\*

1. Recommendation(s) for appointment to committee

NAME: Michael Sleeper

ADDRESS: 7 Oak Hill Road

CITY/STATE/ZIP: Worcester, MA 01609

PHONE: (508) 752-4863

POSITION HELD IN SYNAGOGUE/FEDERATION AND OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

Past President, Temple Emanuel

Past President, Worcester Federation

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

POSITION HELD IN SYNAGOGUE/FEDERATION AND OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

Please attach any additional names and appropriate information to this page.

Continued on back of page...

# Come Play Products Company

## Toy Manufacturers

September 20, 1994

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President  
UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021-7064

*To David S*

Dear Alex,

I want to wish you a Shana Tova, a very healthy, happy and sweet New Year.

I am sorry that I have been delinquent in returning the name of one of our Temple members, Michael Sleeper, who should be able to do a great job on the UAHC Committee on Synagogue-Federation Relations.

Aviva and I wish you all a very healthy and happy New Year.

Cordially,

*[Signature]*  
I. Robert Freeland  
Chairman

IRF:1jm  
Enclosure

*DS  
not to do*

*① Thank him  
② Ask him to  
appoint him  
he'll be great!  
I'd like to involve  
him in Union  
look  
③ involve  
all this  
with  
David S.  
before*



44 Suffolk Street, Worcester, Massachusetts 01604 / Telephone: (508) 756-8353  
FAX: (508) 792-6930

**BELIN HARRIS  
LAMSON McCORMICK**

A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION • ATTORNEYS AT LAW

2000 Financial Center • Des Moines, Iowa 50309-3989  
Telephone (515) 243-7100 • Telecopier (515) 282-7615

David W. Belin  
Charles E. Harris  
Jeffrey E. Lamson  
Mark McCormick  
Steven E. Zumbach  
Thomas L. Flynn  
Jon L. Staudt  
Jeffrey A. Krausman  
Jeremy C. Sharpe

Roger T. Stetson  
Charles D. Hunter  
John T. Seitz  
Robert A. Mullen  
William D. Bartine II  
Quentin R. Boyken  
Charles F. Becker  
Dennis P. Ogden  
Margaret C. Callahan

Robert D. Sharp  
Mark E. Weinhardt  
John M. Bouslog  
Timothy P. Willcockson  
Of Counsel  
Sue Luettjohann Seitz  
Gerard D. Neugent  
Lawrence E. Pope

November 15, 1993

Mr. Melvin Merians, Chairman  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York NY 10021-7064

Re: Demographic Revolution and Need for Reprioritizing UAHC Programming

Dear Mel:

As Chairperson of the Strategic Planning Task Force for Jewish Continuity and Growth, I am writing this letter to highlight major conclusions I personally reached after this past year of intensive study of UAHC programming. One conclusion stands out above all: We are living in the midst of a demographic revolution which threatens the very survival of our North American Jewish community. Among Reform Jews, the intermarriage rate is 62 percent and by the end of the decade will approach 70 percent. The Jewish retention rate of these intermarriages is only 30 percent, and the demographic consequences of such trends are devastating for the future of our Jewish community. These problems are compounded by the fact the synagogue affiliation rate among North American Jews is less than 39 percent.

In the face of these dire facts, the UAHC, in a manner all too similar to the blindness of IBM in the 1980s, continues the priorities of the past, giving its Social Action-Religious Action Center program more funds than the combined budgets of Outreach to Unaffiliated, Outreach to Intermarried, and Spirituality. This budgetary imbalance is compounded by an imbalance in the priority of deployment of top professional personnel. Two of the top five professionals of the UAHC concentrate their efforts in Social Action. No individual among these top five spends the majority of his time (the top five being all male) in either Spirituality, Outreach to Unaffiliated, or Outreach to Intermarried.

The social action preference imbalance is further compounded because although the two top social action professionals are members of the UAHC Cabinet, neither the director of the program of outreach to the unaffiliated nor the director of the program of outreach to the intermarried (both of whom are female) is a member of the UAHC Cabinet. Those who understand the inner workings of the UAHC know that it is the Cabinet, which is comprised of the top cadre of UAHC professionals, that has the most influence in planning the course and direction of the UAHC. This includes the planning of plenary sessions at Biennials, where, as I will discuss below, there is also favored priority given to social action.

It is time for a change. In the context of the demographic revolution in which we are living, the ways of the 1970s and the 1980s are no longer appropriate. Moreover, I believe if this



✓ reprioritization and revitalization of the UAHC takes place, it will substantially enhance our ability to meet and even exceed the current Endowment Fund goal of \$50 million. The fundamental change that must be made by the UAHC is to intensify its focus on the six original areas highlighted in the discussions and in the findings of the Strategic Planning Task Force for Jewish Continuity and Growth: spirituality, faith, God and religion; programs of outreach to unaffiliated Jews; programs of outreach to interdating and intermarried couples and their families; education programs for pre-college and college students and adults; summer Jewish camping programs and temple youth group programming; and summer programs in Israel for high school and college students.

The same priority given social action in the UAHC budget, the deployment of top UAHC personnel, and the composition of the UAHC Cabinet, is also followed in planning plenary sessions at the UAHC Biennial. There is always a Social Action keynote address, but never a keynote address on Spirituality, or Jewish Outreach to Unaffiliated, or Jewish Outreach to Intermarried. Yet, there is little doubt that rotating keynotes could be a tremendous success. For instance, at the San Francisco Biennial, HUC-JIR Professor Lawrence Hoffman led three study sessions focusing on spiritual empowerment of Reform Jews. They were packed. The overwhelming majority of the hundreds of participants who attended agreed that his talks were superb, charismatic, and very thought-provoking. One wonders why at the next Biennial, instead of a Social Action keynote, there should not be a keynote by Larry Hoffman on Spirituality or a moving keynote involving outreach to intermarried or calling for a new, imaginative program to reach out to unaffiliated Jews, or a keynote about transforming the synagogue to help ensure a greater retention rate of those Jews who at one time in their lives do affiliate.

The priority given social action resolutions at UAHC Biennial plenary sessions is another example of the dominance of the social action agenda. Of the first five resolutions proposed to delegates, one involved Jewish continuity and growth--the Report of Task Force that I chaired--and the remaining four were social action resolutions: fetal tissue; health care reform; District of Columbia statehood; and responding to the anti-gay rhetoric of the religious right. (Significantly, the Social Action Commission did not propose any resolution on responding to the rise of anti-Semitic rhetoric in the African-American community.) In allocating plenary session time for debating these resolutions, ten minutes was allocated to discussing the report and resolutions of the Strategic Planning Task Force for Jewish Continuity and Growth. Sixty minutes was allocated to the fetal tissue and health care resolutions.

To be sure, health care reform and fetal tissue matters are of great interest and public concern. However, they are issues that can be discussed in many other forums, including other Jewish organizations like the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress (both of whom are of liberal orientation) as well as the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, Common Cause, and other secular organizations. But which one of these organizations will discuss and come up with meaningful programs on how we can reach out to unaffiliated Jews and have them join the synagogue? And which of these organizations will seek ways to double the retention rate of intermarried Jews so that 60 percent of them, rather than 30 percent of them, provide a Jewish education for their children?

Moreover, as we look upon the San Francisco Biennial plenary sessions in retrospect, how much real impact on Jewish continuity and growth did the fetal tissue resolution have? How much impact on Jewish continuity and growth did the health care resolution have?



At the debate on the health care resolution, Shelly Zimmerman, President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, on two separate occasions made eloquent comments concerning the language in the proposed resolution. To be candid, at a Biennial General Assembly of our synagogue movement, although I have great admiration for Shelly Zimmerman's views on Jewish issues, I think it is not very productive to hear what he has to say about health care reform because it is not a central issue of Jewish continuity and because what Shelly Zimmerman has to say about a proposed UAHC resolution will have virtually no effect on the passage of legislation by Congress. But what I do care about is what Shelly Zimmerman has to say about transforming the synagogue and other issues at the heart of Jewish continuity. I believe that if instead of a Social Action keynote there would have been a keynote address by Shelly Zimmerman on transforming the synagogue delivered with the same passion and eloquence that he delivered at the debate of the health care reform resolution, it would have added infinitely more to the quality of our plenary sessions and to Jewish continuity and growth.

There are those who assert that unless we get involved in plenary sessions at the Biennial on political issues such as health care, we will not have as many delegates attend. I do not agree. But even if fewer delegates attended, I would far rather have 2,000 delegates engaged in meaningful debate and discussion about how to best reach out to unaffiliated Jews, and how to best reach out to intermarried Jews, and how we can have a prayer book that better meets the needs of our synagogue members, than 3,000 delegates debating about fetal tissue and health care reform.

Unfortunately, the Social Action dominance of our plenary sessions also occurs at meetings of our trustees and of the Executive Committee. Go back into the records and compare the number of times we have debated Social Action resolutions, such as the confirmation of Clarence Thomas, with times that we have discussed such issues as transforming the synagogue, helping make our prayer book more meaningful, understanding different concepts of God and how they affect our members individually, and how we can build a synagogue movement at a time when many people do not believe in a personal God.

The overall predominance of social action as compared with spirituality has led some people to say that Reform Jews are in grave danger of having social action become the golden calf of liberal Judaism. I know that this is not the intent of those rabbis and lay people who are so devoted to social action, but it is a potential problem of which we all should be aware.

So that there is no misunderstanding of my own perspective, I am a great believer in social action on the part of individuals. I practice what I preach, spending a great amount of time on many social justice causes. I also believe that social action should be an important part of our UAHC programming and that it encourages many people to become active Reform Jews. However, there are many people who have seen other activities, such as spirituality and outreach, have an even greater impact on bringing people into the synagogue and who believe that by putting greater emphasis on spirituality, outreach to unaffiliated and outreach to intermarried, even more people would become active Reform Jews. The key is not either-or, but rather both, with as much emphasis given to spirituality as social action, with as much emphasis given to outreach to unaffiliated as social action, with as much emphasis given to outreach to intermarried as social action.

Ultimately, the primary reason most Jews get involved in social action issues is not because of a social action committee at their synagogue but rather because of their Jewishness and the impact of Torah, Jewish education, and spirituality.



Al Vorspan developed his interest in social action because of his Jewish cultural background and education--not because of Social Action committees. So did Alex Schindler. So did you and I. The simple fact is that without Jewish education, without Torah, without spirituality and without major programs of outreach to unaffiliated Jews and outreach to intermarried Jews, the devastating demographic trends will eventually result in the North American Jewish community comprising barely 1 percent of the total population. With a community that small, the social action impact of Jews would become de minimis. Those political activists who truly care about Jews becoming involved in social action issues should have a sufficiently broad perspective to understand what will happen if we do not start to dramatically increase our retention rate among intermarried couples and if we do not begin to give greater priority to issues that are central to Jewish continuity and growth like spirituality, Jewish education, youth programming, camping, outreach to intermarried, and outreach to unaffiliated Jews.

Not only do the matters I have discussed go to the heart of Jewish continuity and growth, but they also have a direct relationship with our Endowment Fund campaign. The experience of the North American Jewish community shows that issues most directly related to Jewish continuity and survival have the greatest emotional impact to encourage major gifts. This is one of the reasons why Operation Rescue had such success in helping raise funds to bring Jews out of Russia. I have had recent discussions with Seth Moskowitz and Lydia Neumann of our development staff. They tell me that continuity issues like camping, outreach, and programming for youth are the issues that have the greatest appeal in raising funds for the Endowment Campaign. Their observations are confirmed by the fact that Bernard Rapoport committed \$1 million and Charles Schusterman committed over \$100,000 to programs of outreach to the intermarried. Bill Daniel told me that Jewish continuity was a primary reason for the major testamentary commitment that he and Lottie made to the UAHC for the Outreach Department. (He also told me that the booklet I wrote, "What Judaism Offers for You: A Reform Perspective," has had a very substantial impact on his commitment to Jewish outreach.)

To put this in proper context, we should understand that these commitments were made without the benefit of having two top people in major professional roles in the outreach department. By way of comparison, over the past 15 years, two of the top five professionals of the UAHC have concentrated their efforts in social action. I would respectfully suggest that if the same amount of effort and resources were devoted to outreach to intermarried as there is devoted to social action--two outstanding professionals in leadership roles, a doubling of budget which would include a public relations effort of the same sophistication as that which has been developed by the Social Action Commission, and the same kind of prominence featured at UAHC General Assemblies--the UAHC would have the opportunity to raise at least \$10 million of additional sums for reaching out to the intermarried--a project that is critical to Jewish continuity and growth.

The most amazing part about this whole subject is that the questions I raise as a lay person are not being raised by any of the top four rabbinic professionals of the UAHC, are not being raised by the President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and his predecessors, and are not being raised by the President of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, or by the Deans of any of its campuses. As someone who is passionately concerned about Jewish continuity and growth, it is deeply disheartening to me that in the context of the demographic revolution in which we are living, not one of these rabbinic leaders has addressed the issues I have raised in this letter and called for a major reprioritization of the course and direction of our synagogue movement.



What I propose is that in an age when the intermarriage rate among Reform Jews is 62 percent and is approaching 70 percent, we give outreach to intermarried the same priority as we give social action--in terms of budget, in terms of allocating the time of our top UAHC personnel, and in terms of participation on the UAHC Cabinet. I further propose that at a time where 70 percent of North American Jews pass through the portals of our synagogues, but little more than half of them at any one time are affiliated, we give outreach to unaffiliated the same priority as we give social action--in terms of budget, allocation of the time of top UAHC personnel, and participation on the UAHC Cabinet. I also propose that in this age in which increasing numbers of individuals are searching for spirituality, we substantially increase the budgetary priority and the personnel priority of spirituality components of our programs. In addition, I propose that when we allocate plenary session time at Biennials for debating resolutions, the majority of that discussion time should be allocated to issues most directly relating to the original six areas highlighted in the Report of the Strategic Planning Task Force for Jewish Continuity and Growth, or other issues directly related to the synagogue and our Movement.

Realistically, there are two major barriers which stand in the way of achieving the kind of major transformation of the priorities of the UAHC that should take place. The first barrier involves the practicalities of politics. Those who are politically most adept at getting first priority are individuals who are very experienced in the realm of politics. Here, the members of the Social Action Commission as well as the UAHC Religious Action Center-Social Action professional staff, are extremely skilled. Their public relations efforts are outstanding. They actively lobby for the Social Action agenda in the work of other committees. One of the best examples of this last area is how, at the very last minute, after the deadline for making changes had passed, David Saperstein and Eric Yoffie got together and introduced a resolution to have Social Action added as a seventh priority area in the Report of the Strategic Planning Task Force for Jewish Continuity and Growth. Although you and I both spoke against that resolution, it was adopted by a majority of those members of the Committee present, and perhaps most significantly, with the support of every UAHC rabbinic member of the Task Force who followed the lead of their fellow rabbis.

The second major barrier standing in the way of necessary reprioritization is what I call the IBM problem. Just as IBM was so mired in the ways of the past that it failed to recognize the consequences of the computer revolution and the need for making major changes in business strategy, the UAHC is so mired in the ways of the past that it is failing to recognize the demographic revolution in which we are living and the need to make major changes in the priorities, course and direction of our synagogue Movement. Ultimately, as IBM was heading toward disaster, the directors finally began to recognize the need for changing the ways of the past. Similarly, the Trustees of the UAHC must be willing to direct major changes in the priorities of the UAHC, giving top priority to the initial six areas that were highlighted in the Report of the Strategic Planning Task Force for Jewish Continuity and Growth.

The ultimate irony of the UAHC emphasis on social action is that contrary to the perception given to our Trustees and the delegates at Biennials, those who truly know the ways of Washington recognize that resolutions passed by the UAHC have minimal significance in the ultimate decisions made by Congress and by the President. To be sure, Jews traditionally love to debate political issues, but the luxury of those debates that we enjoyed in the 1970s and the 1980s must give way to the realities of the demographic revolution that is sweeping North America.

The issues of priority that I raise in this letter, Mel, involve critical policy decisions that most appropriately should be considered by our Executive Committee and, if it so recommends, by our



*Barry (7 ad)*

August 10, 1993  
23 Av 5753

Barry Shrage, President  
Combined Jewish Philanthropies  
of Greater Boston  
One Lincoln Plaza  
Boston, MA

02111

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

Dear Barry:

Thank you for sending me your North American Jewish Forum Magazine paper. As always. I admire your ideas and the manner in which you present them.

I had a long chat with Shoshana after our meeting and she is very much in our corner in the desire to move from the academic theoretical approach to a greater activism.

Again, thanks for sharing your paper. I am most admiring of your work.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



# COMBINED JEWISH PHILANTHROPIES

O F G R E A T E R B O S T O N

ALAN R. GOLDSTEIN  
Chair, Board of Directors  
BARRY SHRAGE  
President

One Lincoln Plaza  
Boston, Massachusetts 02111  
Telephone:  
617 330-9500  
Telefax:  
617 330-5197

July 30, 1993

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
Union of American Hebrew Congregations  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021-7064

Dear Rabbi Schindler:

Enclosed is a paper that will soon be published in the North American Jewish Forum Magazine. I think it has some implications for our ongoing discussion of the Jewish Agency and the WZO and the role of our congregational movements.

I wrote the paper in response to a specific question on whether our Jewish continuity and overseas agendas are in conflict. As you can see, I don't believe that they are, provided that you understand that the roots of Jewish identity and aliyah must be viewed in a religious context.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts, ideas and comments.

Sincerely,

*Barry Shrage*  
Barry Shrage

BS:mm

*Thank you for  
Send me your  
N A J Forum paper. As  
always, I don't agree  
your ideas, the manner  
in which you present  
them. I had a long chat with  
Shoshana after our meeting  
& she is very much in the desire  
to move in the desire  
Academic thinking  
opposed to a greater  
act. 5 min.*

*Again, thank for sending me your  
paper. I am most appreciative of your work.*



A United Way Agency

Established in 1895 • First coordinated communal and charitable federation in the United States

The  
CJP '93  
Campaign

THE FORUM

HOLY PEOPLE, HOLY COMMUNITY AND HOLY LAND:  
JEWISH CONTINUITY AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
THE DIASPORA JEWISH COMMUNITY AND ISRAEL

BARRY SHRAGE, PRESIDENT  
COMBINED JEWISH PHILANTHROPIES OF GREATER BOSTON

And it will come to pass that if you continually hearken to My commandments that I command you today, to love HASHEM, your God, and to serve Him, with all you heart and with all your soul -- then I will provide rain for your land in its proper time, the early and late rains, that you may gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil. I will provide grass in your field for your cattle and you will eat and be satisfied.

Beware lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve gods of others and bow to them. Then the wrath of HASHEM will blaze against you. He will restrain the heaven so there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce. And you will swiftly be banished from the goodly land which HASHEM gives you.

Place these words of Mine upon your heart and upon your soul; bind them for a sign upon your arm and let them be tefillin between your eyes. Teach them to your children, to discuss them, while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise. And write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates. In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the ground that HASHEM has sworn to your ancestors to give them, like the days of the heaven on the earth.

Dvarim 11:13-21

This is a critical time for our world Jewish community. A time for rethinking fundamental ideas about Zionism and Judaism and the ancient and eternal relationship between the land of Israel, the people of Israel, the tradition of Israel, and the God of Israel. It is a time that will require careful planning and swift action. A time that demands that we set aside organizational loyalties and abandon stereotypic thinking to find new solutions to pressing problems. A time for radical changes in the Israel/diaspora relationship and the organizational structures and ideologies that have supported that relationship since the founding of the



State of Israel. Many of these organizational structures and ideologies have become irrelevant at best, and counterproductive at worst, to the most important challenges facing our people: Strengthening Judaism against a rising tide of assimilation and intermarriage; rebuilding the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union; continuing the development of a strong, vibrant and economically independent Israel; building strong institutional and human relationships between diaspora and Israeli Jews; and speeding the vital work of ingathering the exiles that is at the core of the Zionist ideal.

If these challenges are correctly understood, and if we are prepared to re-engineer the Israel/diaspora relationship, we may have a chance to help create a great Jewish renaissance stretching from Washington to Boston and from Warsaw to Jerusalem. If we fail to grasp the seriousness of the challenge, and if we maintain our current organizational relationships, and ideological rigidity, our struggle may deteriorate into senseless arguments between "fundraisers" and "Zionists" and ridiculous fights over scarce resources between advocates for the "Israel agenda" abroad and the "Jewish continuity agenda" at home.

In fact, the way we pose the question itself may prejudice the outcome and oversimplify our choices. Is the division of scarce resources simply a choice between domestic priorities including the Jewish continuity agenda at home and the desperate needs of our people in Israel, or do we have other choices and other alternatives? Is it possible any longer to talk seriously about raising large numbers of "Zionists" in the diaspora without, at the same time, raising Jews in the fullest religious, cultural and intellectual sense of the word? I believe it is not. In the latter

part of the twentieth century, in the absence of widespread virulent anti-semitism, the only Jews who we can seriously expect to make aliyah in large numbers are Jews who have a broader commitment to Judaism within which their love of Israel can flourish and grow.

1. In North America, for example, we are clearly faced with a life or death crisis as intermarriage hits 52 percent in the youngest cohorts; fewer than half of American Jews say that being Jewish is very important in their lives and only a little more than one-third say they feel very attached to Israel. Jewish continuity will and must be our highest domestic agenda item requiring vastly more resources and the long anticipated "reordering of priorities" that we've promised but failed to deliver for over twenty years. But we already spend millions of dollars from our overseas allocation for "Zionist education," shlichut, and Israel travel and much of that is poorly coordinated with the real process of Jewish education in America which is largely conducted in the context of Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Judaism. In fact, much of what we currently spend on "Zionist education" better serves the political and organizational needs of various groupings within the World Zionist Organization than the educational needs of the American Jewish community or the real goals of Zionism in America.
2. Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union represent our greatest and most exciting opportunities as a world Jewish community. We have a relatively short timeframe to save



as many Jews as possible and to build real communities and real opportunities for Jewish education where none has existed for fifty to seventy-five years. The fate of over two million Jews is clearly at stake, physically, spiritually, and religiously. Currently, the JDC spends about \$10 million per year for community-building, Jewish education, and human services, as does the WZO/Jewish Agency to teach Hebrew and promote aliyah. All of these services, however, need to be vastly increased and much better coordinated now that there are new opportunities for outreach and program development. Unfortunately, the goal of aliyah is viewed by some as conflicting with JDC's broader identity-building and community-building objectives. Here again, rigid ideology and outdated decision-making structures seem to be slowing the world Jewish community's response to a crisis.

3. Finally, in Israel, as we evaluate our priorities, it may be time to look at the spectrum of services we provide to decide which must be maintained, which should be redesigned, and which should be eliminated as Israel's economic strength and independence increases. We might, for example, have a greater impact on human services in Israel for fewer dollars by shifting resources away from the fixed structures of the Jewish Agency and toward the more nimble service delivery capacity represented by the JDC in Israel. Similarly, Federation involvement in economic development in Israel could provide a greater economic, social and "nation-building" payoff for Israel at a much lower cost than our traditional service



priorities while, at the same time, providing greater opportunity for quality human contact and involvement between diaspora Jews and Israelis.

Properly understood, our overseas and local challenges; our need to strengthen Judaism and Zionism can be viewed as remarkably unified and consistent:

- In North America, we must reintegrate the sacred and the secular in our communal lives; we must make formal and informal Jewish education an absolute priority, and we must make a trip to Israel a standard and integrated part of every child's Jewish education from high school trips to college semesters abroad to post-college intern programs.
- In Eastern Europe and all the lands of the former Soviet Union, we must rebuild Jewish communal and religious life and at the same time, encourage aliyah for as many Jews as possible.
- In Israel, we must have greater flexibility in the way we use diaspora philanthropic dollars, if we are to have real impact in a rapidly changing environment. We must recognize that Israel is well on its way to becoming an economically vibrant and self-sufficient nation that will require different kinds of support than in the past. We must focus on the absorption of immigrants and the further development of a strengthened and independent economy that can provide jobs for those

immigrants. We must shift to short-term investments in "leading edge" human service programs -- probably through the JDC -- so that we can help create systemic improvements in Israel's service delivery system.

And we must help Israel with these challenges in ways that strengthen the Israel/diaspora relationship by fostering greatly increased involvement, investment, and contact between equal partners.

These goals are mutually reinforcing. Increased Jewish learning and religious involvement lead to increased travel to Israel which will make increased aliyah possible. Increased involvement through twinning and business relationships will lead to increased travel for adults and their families. Increased business relationships between North American Jews and companies and Israel will create more jobs that will make increased absorption possible and attract more Jews from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Strong Jewish communities and the revitalization of Jewish religious and cultural life in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union will create stronger Jewish identity that will inevitably -- over time -- lead to greater aliyah and potentially a Jewish religious renaissance in a geographical area where the light of Judaism had almost been extinguished.

#### JEWISH CONTINUITY AND THE ZIONIST AGENDA

The North American Jewish continuity agenda is inextricably linked to a



number of Zionist issues. Assimilated Jews -- intermarried Jews -- Jews with no religious affiliation -- make very poor candidates for travel to Israel, political action on behalf of Israel, or even fundraising for Israel, not to speak of aliyah.

The CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey puts it clearly. While a little more than one-third of religiously affiliated American Jews feel "very attached" to Israel (the proportion among younger Jews is significantly lower), less than eight percent of Jews with no religious affiliation say they feel "very attached" -- a smaller proportion than among Jews who have already converted to some other faith!

The Population Survey also discredited the idea that fear of anti-semitism, love of Israel, fundraising for Israel, or concern for Israel's survival, could support the entire weight of Jewish identity in America. It's now clear that this strategy has failed. Somehow Israel, without God, without spirituality, without community is not a strong enough hook to support our Jewish future. We have made Jewish survival our "civil" religion, "sacred survival" is how Jonathan Woocher has described the phenomenon, and that god has failed. This is the ultimate paradox. By concentrating on survival many of our own children, our own grandchildren will not survive as Jews.

This is not to say that secular experiences can't move us or our children. A trip to a Holocaust Museum, or a visit to Israel, or fear of anti-semitism can certainly have an impact on an individual's identity. What it can't do is provide the basis for a transmissible Jewish identity



with the philosophical, spiritual, experiential, and intellectual depth and power to pass from generation to generation.

Judaism has been a religious national culture for 3500 years, encompassing our commitment to the people of Israel, the land of Israel, the Torah of Israel, including its absolute commitment to social justice as a principle of Jewish law, and indivisibly the living God of Israel. It's not likely to survive without its religious core.

Moreover, the organizational structure of the American Jewish community is overwhelmingly rooted in religious movements and congregational life. American Jewry once included vibrant secular movements: Hebraists and Bundists, secular Zionists and Jewish socialists. They are all, for all intents and purposes, gone. What remains as a broadly based, grassroots, organizing principal for American Jewry is overwhelmingly rooted in our congregations and JCCs. In fact, in spite of studies that indicate that less than forty percent of American Jews are congregationally affiliated at any moment in time, the fact remains that well over seventy percent of American Jewish households affiliate with a congregation at a critical moment in the Jewish family lifecycle - generally when children are between eight and thirteen years old. Congregations are our most broadly based communal institutions involving far more young Jewish families than any other Jewish organization and probably more than all of our other institutions combined.

What's more, American Jews feel closer to their congregations than to any other institution in Jewish life. According to the American Jewish

Committee's 1989 National Survey of American Jews (Content or Continuity by Steven M. Cohen), sixty-one percent of American Jews feel attached to their synagogue. Significantly thirty-six percent feel very or extremely attached to their congregation and twenty percent feel very or extremely attached to their child's Jewish school, compared to only ten percent who feel very or extremely attached to a JCC or a federation.

All of this would seem to point to a new strategy for Zionist Education, shlichut and increased Israel travel for high school students in North America. Rather than focus on organizational structures that are virtually defunct in North America like Habonim, Hashomer Hatzair, Betar, or that only serve as travel agencies for Israel trips like Masada, we would do well to focus most of our energy on religious and congregational movements and youth groups like NFTY, USY, NCSY, and B'nai Akiva in addition to the non-denominational movements like Young Judea and BBYO that still survive and even thrive in some regions and communities.

#### COMMUNITY AND ALIYAH IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Similarly, in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union policy and resource allocation issues are complicated by ideological questions. If you believe that your goal is to touch the lives of as many Jews as possible to bring them into contact with Judaism -- the community of Israel, the tradition of Israel, the land of Israel and the God of Israel, you will use resources in a very different way than if you believe that Jewish life is impossible and inauthentic outside of the land of Israel. Jewish history clearly demands that we take the broader view in response to this historic challenge.



BREAKING DOWN WALLS AND BUILDING BRIDGES: TOWARD A NEW, MORE INVOLVING  
STRUCTURE THAT CAN RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF 21ST CENTURY JEWRY

The Jewish Agency Assembly that ended on July 1 could have provided an opportunity for real dialogue, soul searching and action for a world Jewish community facing complex and interrelated challenges and opportunities. It could have helped shape an agenda for the spiritual revival of the American Jewish community. It could have created a plan to bring hundreds of thousands of Jews to Israel from the former Soviet Union while also greatly increasing and better coordinating efforts currently underway to build real lasting Jewish communities for the millions who will inevitably stay behind. It could have built on the excellent efforts of the new government of Israel and several United States Jewish communities, including Boston, to speed the process of economic development and job creation through new Israel diaspora partnerships. It could have examined and improved its own structure to better involve diaspora Jews and Israelis in real dialogue to build our Jewish future.

It could have, but unfortunately it did not. The Jewish Agency Assembly, preoccupied with Simcha Dinitz and the Jerusalem Post, and locked into the usual stereotypic "Zionist" versus "fund raiser" rhetoric failed to confront any of the most pressing issues of our time in any meaningful way.

This is not to say that the Agency itself is inactive or unresponsive. Just the opposite is true. It has never been leaner; its professional leadership (at the level of the Directors General and below) have never



been more competent; the professional leadership of the new Joint Authority for Jewish Education is open, intelligent and sincerely interested in tackling the educational issues outlined in this paper; Shoshana Cardin's Goal and Priorities Report was a real breakthrough for intelligent planning; and the Agency's most important task -- the work of rescue and resettlement -- is being carried out with competence and valor.

In each of these areas, the Jewish Agency succeeds quite well, but as a platform for real meaningful dialogue between diaspora Jews and Israelis, the Jewish Agency and the WZO/diaspora partnership on which it is based, is a rather bleak failure. In fact, if aliyah depends in part on building organizational and human bridges between diaspora Jews and Israelis, then I fear that the Agency and the Assembly -- as institutions -- are structured more like walls and barriers than bridges. Over the last ten years, the Agency has undoubtedly become more competent but it has not created an institutional structure that has encouraged creativity or meaningful dialogue or exchange or a stronger partnership between Israeli and diaspora Jews.

Fortunately, the one bright spot in the formal deliberations of the 1993 Jewish Agency Assembly was the overwhelming passage of a resolution introduced by the World Union for Progressive Judaism calling for "the establishment of new, more comprehensive, more representative instrumentality which would be capable of responding to the needs of 21st century Jewry."

This process might well hold the key to a renewed partnership model that will allow us to address our most pressing concerns through organizational structures that create bridges, rather than walls between the diaspora and Israel and that will help us to think in new ways about the meaning of Jewish life and Jewish identity and about the relationship between Jewish education and Israel as communal priorities.

Hearken to my commandments . . . to love Hashem, your God and to serve him, with all your heart and with all your soul . . . And teach them to your children, to discuss them, while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise . . . In order to prolong your days and the days of your children upon the ground that Hashem has sworn to your ancestors . . .

The law of Israel, including an unshakable commitment to social justice. The God of Israel. The community of Israel. The land of Israel. We are told in Dvarim, and we are reminded twice each day in the "Sh'ma," that the issues of Jewish continuity and Jewish education and Jewish religion and Zionism cannot and must not be separated. It's now up to us to create programs and structures that reflect this ancient wisdom in the way we work as a world Jewish community to confront our most serious challenges: assuring Jewish continuity in the diaspora and assuring the continued vitality and growth of the State of Israel.





BCC: DRU GREENWOOD  
MELVEN MEREANS  
HARRIS GILBERT

COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

March 22, 1993  
29 Adar 5753

Peggy Tishman  
1095 Park Avenue  
New York, NY 10128

Dear Peggy:

Thanks for your prompt response concerning my request.

I am delighted that you sent the Project Syllabus along to John Ruskay. I know John, of course, and I look forward to working with him. We had several meetings with Steve Solender and Alan Jaffe and we are familiar with the agonies you went through in planning the work of the Commission on Jewish Continuity.

I am also delighted that you agree that this program ought to be brought to the attention of the General Assembly. I assume that program planning for that Assembly has already begun and I would appreciate it if you were to advance this idea to the appropriate planning committee.

Either I or members of our staff will be happy to be of help. It is an important endeavor and while we, on our part, will continue to pursue our work, it would be infinitely better if the entire Jewish community were to be involved in this effort. Don't forget, according to the National Jewish Population Study, there are approximately 650,000 or so interfaith couples in America today and their offspring already exceed the million mark. We must do everything we possibly can to retain them for Jewish life and for the Jewish people.

Thank you so much for all your helpfulness.

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



PEGGY TISHMAN  
1095 Park Avenue  
New York, New York 10128

March 10, 1993

Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
President  
UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10021-7064

Dear Alex:

Thank you so much for sending me the pamphlets on Stepping Stones, an effort to reach unaffiliated interfaith families, children, and parents.

I don't know whether you are aware that following the Report of the Council of Jewish Federations on the percentage of Jews marrying non-Jews, UJA-Federation of New York made the decision to initiate a Commission on Jewish Continuity. It was really not that simple. We first had a Strategic Planning Committee, and after many meetings, made the decision that what we were doing to promote Jewish Continuity was not sufficient, and we had to allocate specific moneys to initiate this program.

For this reason, I sent Project Syllabus to John Ruskay (formerly of the Jewish Theological Seminary) and now our professional with one of his more important responsibilities -- the servicing of this new Jewish Continuity Commission, which will shortly be constituted.

Since the program envisions a closer relationship with the synagogues, I thought it would be of great interest to all of us to understand this project.

I don't know exactly what you meant when you said that the program should be brought to the attention of the G.A. The next General Assembly is not until November, and it is in Montreal. I think, of course, that it is a program that should be discussed at the General Assembly, but in the interest of time, perhaps we can get a reaction to the proposal from the New York Commission.

Please feel free to call me, and I will be keep in touch with John Ruskay.

Sincerely,

Peggy

March 3, 1993  
10 Adar 5753

Ms. Peggy Tishman  
1095 Park Avenue  
New York, NY 10028

Dear Peggy:

It was good seeing you in Israel and I am glad we had a chance to chat. You will recall that I spoke of a very special program which I believe should receive funding from the CJF. To refresh your memory, Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me is designed to reach unaffiliated interfaith families, children and parents, to bring them closer to the synagogue and the Jewish people.

Stepping Stones began as an experiment in Denver and in its first year 40% of those who participated eventually joined the synagogue. There are now nine programs in operation, and the affiliation rate of involved families is very good! Three new Stepping Stones will open this Fall, and seven additional programs are in the early stages of development.

For your perusal, I enclose herewith a Stepping Stones Project Syllabus and fact sheet. This is a very worthy program which should be replicated in as many communities as possible. I hope you will agree and that you will seek to bring this critical program to the G.A.

Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions to pose.

With fond regards from house to house, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler



איחוד  
ליהדות  
מתקדמת  
באמריקה

# Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

PATRON OF HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100

DEPARTMENT FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

## MEMORANDUM

From: Rabbi Howard I. Bogot  
To: Friends of "Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me"  
Date: Winter/Spring 1993

I am delighted to share with you a complimentary resource packet designed for congregations and communities interested in initiating and implementing a "Stepping Stones" project. We are deeply grateful for the support granted us by the **Nathan Cummings Foundation** to pursue the initial phases of the effort.

Currently, there are nine programs in operation; three are scheduled to open in the Fall of this year, and seven additional programs are in the early stages of development. During the 1992-93 program year, 204 families, including almost 300 young people, participated in a "Stepping Stones" program, and at least 30 families affiliated with a synagogue.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the program philosophies, school management strategies, and curricular materials inspired by the original program in Denver, Colorado, can be effectively adapted to fulfill current and emerging needs in all Jewish schools, as well as those unique formats identified as "Stepping Stones."

I have enclosed an order form in this mailing so that you might assist me in encouraging others to become involved in this important venture, and look forward to providing consultation in this regard.





COPY

RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER • UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS  
PRESIDENT 838 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212)249-0100

March 3, 1993  
10 Adar 5753

Ms. Peggy Tishman  
1095 Park Avenue  
New York, NY 10028

Dear Peggy:

It was good seeing you in Israel and I am glad we had a chance to chat. You will recall that I spoke of a very special program which I believe should receive funding from the CJF. To refresh your memory, Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me is designed to reach unaffiliated interfaith families, children and parents, to bring them closer to the synagogue and the Jewish people.

Stepping Stones began as an experiment in Denver and in its first year 40% of those who participated eventually joined the synagogue. There are now nine programs in operation, and the affiliation rate of involved families is very good! Three new Stepping Stones will open this Fall, and seven additional programs are in the early stages of development.\*

For your perusal, I enclose herewith a Stepping Stones Project Syllabus and fact sheet. This is a very worthy program which should be replicated in as many communities as possible. I hope you will agree and that you will seek to bring this critical program to the G.A.

Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions to pose.

With fond regards from house to house, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

\* In virtually every instance, local federations are involved.

# MEMORANDUM

COPY

December 29, 1992

FROM: Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler  
TO: Melvin Merians

The attached material was sent from Stanton W. Brody to David Belin. He would like to be a member of this committee himself. I guess he is not used to playing second fiddle to his wife, who is really the Board member. Be that as it may, I see no reason why we shouldn't use him, even as we use other spouses of staff members for a variety of purposes. If they are going to come to our Board meetings, they might as well be involved and all spouses have much to offer. (Be sure to tell Rhea I said so).

Marginally noted, I consider his fear that the "separation of powers" between synagogue and Federation "would crumble" were we to accept financial aid from Federations. The extent of aid, at least in our lifetime, will not be so great as to make this a realistic threat.



Union of American Hebrew Congregations

SERVING REFORM JUDAISM IN NORTH AMERICA

838 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10021-7064 (212) 249-0100





**Mesirow  
Financial®**

STANTON W. BRODY  
Managing Director

Mesirow Investment Services, Inc.  
600 Central Ave., Highland Park, IL 60035  
(708) 926-1790 • FAX (708) 926-1784  
1-800-433-4510

COPY

December 29, 1992  
5      Tevet      5753

Stanton W. Brody  
Managing Director  
Mesirow Financial  
600 Central Avenue  
Highland Park, IL 60035

Dear Stan:

Thank you for your note and the enclosures which I read with a great deal of interest, albeit I find your fears concerning the possible "crumbling" of the wall separating the Federation and synagogue communities just a bit overdrawn. I think that only limited help can be expected, at least in the near future - - matching grants for camp scholarships, for Israel trips, in upgrading a part time school or youth group leader from a part time to a full time position, and the like. These will scarcely threaten our independence.

But we best discuss this in person. A letter is really an inadequate means of communication. A face to face encounter is infinitely better. This is why I am especially glad that Judy has been appointed to our Board. This means, of course, that we will be getting two for the price of one.

With warm good wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Alexander M. Schindler

STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE FOR JEWISH CONTINUITY AND SURVIVAL  
December 10, 1992 Meeting  
Ritz-Carlton, 100 South Ocean Blvd., Palm Beach, FL  
Agenda

1. Coffee

2. Introductions

3. D'var Torah:

Elizabeth Linkon, UAHC National Board member Temple Solomon,  
Centralia, IL

4. The Centrality of the Synagogue to Jewish Continuity and Survival:

Presentation:

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, Temple Emanu-El,  
Dallas, TX; Vice President, Central Conference  
of American Rabbis

- a. Is the synagogue still central to Jewish continuity and survival?
- b. Given the realities of American Jewish life, does the synagogue need a new mission/ vision? If so, what should it be?
- c. What key programs/activities does the synagogue need to initiate and which issues does it need to address, in order to insure Jewish continuity?

Questions/Comments/Discussion

\*\*\*\*Break\*\*\*\*

(continued)



## **5. Panel: Synagogue-Federation Alliances**

How can the synagogue and federation worlds (locally and nationally) work together in order to enrich programs and provide funding for Jewish continuity and survival?

Panelists:

- . **Rabbi Paul Menitoff** - UAHC
- . **Michael Rukin** - UAHC National Board and Chair, Allocations Committee, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston
- . **Jacob Solomon** - Executive Vice President, Greater Miami Jewish Federation
- . **Barry Shrage** - President, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston

**ARCHIVES**

\*\*\*\*Lunch\*\*\*\*

## **6. Jewish Continuity and Survival: UAHC Budgetary Considerations**

- . **Melvin Merians** - Chair, Union of American Hebrew Congregations

## **7. General Discussion:**

- a. What should be the synagogue's vision/mission?
- b. Given this mission/vision, what programs/activities/issues does the synagogue need to address?
- c. What should be the role of the UAHC? What programs/activities/issues should the UAHC address?
- d. How can the federation and synagogue worlds (locally and nationally) work together, in order to enrich programs and provide funding for Jewish continuity and survival?

## **8. Planning for the February Task Force meeting**

## BACKGROUND READING

Rabbi Zimmerman's presentation at our meeting will in part be based on his articles that are enclosed.



# the tent-peg business: some truths about congregations

BY LAWRENCE KUSHNER

1. If synagogues were businesses, their product would be Jews. The more Jews they could manufacture from otherwise illiterate, assimilated, and un-self-aware members, the more successful they would be. That is (to continue the metaphor) the bottom line. Simply getting together with other Jews may be ancillary and even indispensable to this ultimate goal, but it can just as easily be—as is often the case when Jews get together to watch a movie, eat dinner, or play tennis—a pleasant way to pass time.

2. Jews need one another, and therefore congregations, to do *primary religious acts* which they should not, and probably cannot, do alone. Doing primary religious acts is the only way we have of growing as Jews. Consequently, it is also the only justification for the existence of a congregation. Everything else congregations do, Jews can always do cheaper, easier, and better somewhere else.

3. There are three ancient kinds of primary Jewish acts: communal prayer, holy study, and good deeds, or in the classical language of *Pirke Avot*: *Avodah*, *Torah*, and *G'milut Hasadim*. This is not a capricious categorization. Prayer is emotional: song, candles, dance, meditation, and silence. A matter of the heart. Study is intellectual: reading, questioning, discussion, rigorous logic, and argument. A matter of the head. And good deeds are public acts: helping, repairing, marching, fighting, and doing. Matters of the hand. Only rare individuals are able to do all three with equal fervor and skill. And so our membership in a congregation and association with a broad spectrum of Jews will compensate for our personal deficiencies.



4. In order to maintain their congregations, Jews must do many other things which are not inherently Jewish. These secondary acts include building a building, raising money, and perhaps forming a board of directors. (It should be here noted, however, that in the long history of our people there have been healthy, vibrant, and solvent congregations which had none of the above.)

5. Congregations, unfortunately, often get so caught up in doing secondary acts that they actually begin to think that the building, raising money, or the board of directors is the *reason* for the existence of the congregation. Their members are busy at work, but because they have forgotten *why* they are at work, their efforts are hollow and come to naught.

6. People decide, consciously or unconsciously, how many hours each week they will spend at the temple being Jewish. Once there they assume that whatever they do, whether primary or secondary, is a primary Jewish activity. (There are many Jews today who sincerely believe that running a photocopier, attending committee meetings, and organizing bingo are primary Jewish acts.) It is in everyone's mutual best interest, therefore, to encourage one another to spend at least half our "Jewish hours" doing primary Jewish acts. Such a system, in addition to guaranteeing individual religious growth, invariably draws upon ever-widening circles of people who will in turn spend no more than half their time doing secondary congregational tasks.

7. Members of a congregation ought to selfishly and routinely demand that the congregation provide *them* with the instruments (teachers, classes, books, colloquia, services, programs, etc.) they need in order to grow as Jews. In many congregations, unfortunately, this order is reversed. Leaders who have not clarified their own religious goals are supposed to set policies for other members who themselves have not yet even determined that they need to come around at all. Here is the proper sequence: *first* comes personal religious growing, *then* comes effective congregational policy.

8. If people selfishly seek their own Jewish growth and do what they do because they want to (*lishma*, for its own sake), then there is no longer any need for the ritualized public displays of gratitude which threaten to suffocate virtually every arena of congregational life. Such obeisance at services and banquets, in print and on the walls, invariably degenerates into a system in which people give gifts

of time, money, and skill to the congregation not for the joy of giving itself but for the communal recognition. If everyone is thanked, the only noteworthy events are the invariable omissions.

9. If people are tricked into attending something they would not have come to otherwise, they will not know what to do once they are there. They will soon grow bored, bitter, and destructive.

10. There is no evidence whatever to support the notion that people who are drawn into the congregation for an innocuous non-religious event such as gourmet cooking move on to activities of more primary religious worth any sooner than if they had been left alone to discover their own inevitable and personal religious agendas and timetables. Indeed, there is substantial data to suggest that congregations which run many "basement" activities, in hopes of getting people from there onto upper floors, only wind up adding on to the basement.

11. The quality of interpersonal transactions between the members of the congregation is the single most important factor in determining its health. Do they bear witness to the piety the congregation claims to perpetuate? Where the human relationships are self-righteous, deceitful, and toxic, congregational life is wretched. Where they are tolerant, honest, and nurturing, congregational life can be a transforming joy.

12. The way a congregation gets its money may be finally more important than how much it gets. Consider the religious impact, for instance, between congregations getting, say, half their operating budgets from (a) bingo, (b) a few wealthy members, or (c) dues. There is a widespread misconception that because the congregation is nonprofit and tax-exempt, it is therefore a charity. Actually, even though the analogy makes us uncomfortable, a congregation is (with the possible exception of offering membership to anyone with a financial hardship) precisely like a country club. And like all such clubs, you get what you pay for.

13. Most forms of fundraising within a congregation might simply be understood as the establishment of a small business within the congregation which is staffed without charge by its members. This little fundraising business allows the members of the congregation to think that since their dues were lowered they are getting something for nothing. It works as long as the people who run the little business remain convinced that they are really doing primary Jewish acts.



14. Any attempt to get someone other than the members of a congregation to pay for what they want only cheapens the institution. Serious, quality, well-run organizations, with rare exceptions, do not solicit advertisements, sell cupcakes, or run raffles in order to meet their operating budgets. They may, of course, do such things for people other than themselves, that is, for charity.

15. Freud may have been correct in postulating that religion originated on account of some primal crime, the guilt for which continues to motivate and organize religious life to this day. But any attempt to use guilt to motivate religious behavior in a community is certain to generate an equal amount of resentment. People simply must be regarded as if they are wise and decent enough to do religious things and support congregational functions without manipulation.

16. The amount of creativity within a congregation stands in inverse ratio to the number of people, groups, or levels in the institutional hierarchy empowered to prohibit anything. With the exceptions of spending a congregation's money or using its name, the members of a congregation should not need anyone's permission to initiate anything—be it a letter in the bulletin or an alternate religious service.

17. The price of congregational vitality is the frequent appearance of confusion and even anarchy. The communal tolerance for such creative unpredictability is a learned skill. There can never be too many people trying too many things. If it's a good idea, people will keep coming. If it's not so good, no one will come. The committees, the board, and the rabbi ought not get into the business of approving or disapproving anything; they should only help whomever and whenever they can.

18. Since no one can be sure of what someone else must do to serve the Holy One, anyone who thinks he has a new idea or an old idea must be given a chance. This also includes the rabbi. Unqualified mutual support for one another is indispensable in a would-be community.

19. The amount, quality, and intensity of adult study, perhaps more than other mode of congregational activity, will liberate its members to make wise decisions for themselves.

20. The congregation, like an extended family, is a closed homeostatic organic system. Any anger, guilt, or malice, and any nurture, kindness, or encouragement put into the system eventually (it may

take years) returns to those who put it out. Sooner or later, it always comes back to you.

21. Rabbis, as Arnold Jacob Wolf has observed, do not own "their" congregations. Congregations belong to their members. For this reason, congregants have ultimate decision-making power and rabbis are well advised to invest their egos in something less mercurial and over which they have more control than "their" congregations.

22. Rabbis should treat Jews more like rabbis. Jews should treat rabbis more like Jews.

23. The chief goal of a rabbi is to teach the members of the congregation how to run *their* congregation without rabbinic help. The rabbi must tell them what he or she knows and then persuade, cajole, and even trick them into doing what they want to do with *their* congregation. The congregation belongs to them; but only when they realize that their rabbi will not "do it" for them, can they (and it) begin to realize their full creative and religious potential. In the imagery of Lurianic Kabbalah, as Eugene Borowitz has wisely suggested, this is called *tsimtsum* or voluntary self-contraction, resulting in the creation of a space within which people have room to experiment, fail, learn, and grow.

24. Rabbis ought to treat their congregants as members of an *am kadosh*, a holy people. Neither judging nor scolding, the rabbi ought to give congregants permission, encouragement, and support as they try to discover for themselves what they must do to be Jews.

25. Rabbis and congregants have it in their mutual best interests to encourage the rabbi to develop his or her own spiritual life, and to discourage the rabbi from serving as a communal surrogate for religiosity or as a skilled but hollow performer. The leader of the prayers, in other words, must also pray.

26. People must always feel free to establish mechanisms for telling one another the truth about their congregation. Boring worship, irrelevant classes, or cowardly social action programs can change only if members can share their evaluations. The bulletin ought to have its own independent (of the rabbi and the board of directors) editor and be a forum for real and open debate. Arguments are a necessary part of vitality. The opposite of telling the truth here is not lying but, out of some misguided attempt to protect the congregation,



"keeping it a secret." Nothing so paralyzes a social organism as secrets—especially those that are widely known yet never spoken.

27. The reality of a congregation's mood and vitality is a highly volatile, subtle, and even capricious creature. Ultimately our evaluation of the reality of a congregation and indeed the very standard of evaluation we choose may tell us more about ourselves than the congregation. Precisely because they are so amorphous, congregations tend to function as a kind of communal Rorschach for their members.

28. Finally, the members of the congregation must nurture one another because they need one another. They simply cannot do it alone. Hermits and monasteries are noticeably absent from Jewish history; we are a hopelessly communal people. When the wilderness tabernacle is completed, near the end of the Book of Exodus, we are told, "And it came to pass that the tabernacle was 'one' " (Exod. 36:13). Commenting on this curious expression, Rabbi Mordecai Yosef of Izbica (d. 1854) observes:

In the building of the tabernacle, all Israel were joined in their hearts; no one felt superior to his fellow. At first, each skilled individual did his own part of the construction, and it seemed to each one that his work was extraordinary. Afterwards, once they saw how their several contributions to the "service" of the tabernacle were integrated—all the boards, the sockets, the curtains and the loops fit together as if one person had done it all. Then they realized how each one of them had depended on the other. Then they understood how what all they had accomplished was not by virtue of their own skill alone but that the Holy One had guided the hands of everyone who had worked on the tabernacle. They had only later merely joined in completing its master building plan—so that "it came to pass that the tabernacle was one" (Exod. 36:13). Moreover, the one who made the holy ark itself was unable to feel superior to the one who had only made the courtyard tent pegs.

(*Ituray Torah*, vol. IV, p. 275)







AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

# WHAT JUDAISM OFFERS FOR YOU:

A Reform Perspective

by David Belin

# **WHAT JUDAISM OFFERS FOR YOU:**

**A Reform Perspective**

**by David Belin**



UAHC-CCAR COMMISSION ON REFORM JEWISH OUTREACH

838 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10021-7064  
(212)249-0100

Chairman: Harris Gilbert  
Co-Chairman: Rabbi Leslie Gutterman  
Director: Dru Greenwood



## WHAT JUDAISM OFFERS FOR YOU - A Reform Perspective

David Belin

Albert Einstein once said that he was sorry to be born a Jew because he was thus denied the opportunity and personal satisfaction of independently choosing Judaism. Today, in our free and open society, Judaism is in a sense a matter of choice for everyone—both those who have been born Jews as well as those individuals who have not been raised in the Jewish tradition. Each year thousands enter the Jewish community through study and a formal ceremony known as conversion.

No booklet—indeed, no book—can fully explain all that Judaism offers to help individuals reach their full potential and become happier and more fulfilled human beings. But for those who desire a brief glimpse into the wonders of Judaism—born Jews, Jews by choice, non-Jews who are interdating or have married Jews, children of intermarried families, and people who have no direct contact with the Jewish community but seek to explore it—this booklet gives a brief introduction to Judaism from a modern Reform Jewish perspective. If what you read appeals to you, hopefully you will want to enlarge your understanding and learn more about how special, how unique, Judaism is—how Judaism can help people best fulfill their hopes, dreams and aspirations—how being part of the wonderful heritage, culture, and religious philosophy of Judaism can make life more meaningful for you and for those you love.

Judaism originated and represents the purest form of belief in *one* God—with no other divinity to be worshipped. Its origins go back 4,000 years when Abraham and Sarah chose to become the first Jews. In a remarkable chain of continuity, for forty centuries Judaism has remained steadfast in its central theological belief that only God is God, that God is one.

That theme is so powerful, so compelling, that it has enabled Judaism to do what no other people in the history of the world have been able to do—survive as a creative people, faithful to their beliefs, despite the absence of a national homeland for more than two thousand years. That survival is all the more remarkable because it has occurred in the face of some of the cruelest oppression in recorded history—much of it, ironically, in the name of religion.

Judaism gave birth to two other major monotheistic religions: Christianity and Islam. Christianity added to the supreme divinity of a single God the divinity of a man—Jesus. This is in sharp contrast to the pure monotheism of Judaism where no individual in Jewish history—not even Moses—was thought of as someone to be worshipped.

Within the Jewish religion, there are three major branches—Conservative, Orthodox, and Reform Judaism (which in other continents is sometimes called Progressive Judaism) and there is a smaller fourth branch known as Reconstructionist. Some people think of Reform Judaism as a movement that is



relatively new—an outgrowth of the emancipation of Jews in Europe in the 19th Century. But in fact, the roots of Reform Judaism go back more than 2,000 years to the greatest reform in Jewish history—the dramatic change of Judaism from a priest-dominated religion of written law into a religion of both written and oral law where the priest was replaced by a scholarly teacher called the rabbi. That change was a forerunner of other major changes that have enabled Judaism to survive until the present day.

All branches of Judaism are the product and the beneficiary of change, and within each there are variations. However, there are also many constants, the most important being the belief, as Jews have proclaimed for four thousand years, that only God is God and there is none else.

Today, there is a broad spectrum of ways in which Jews perceive God, ranging from the belief of some who look upon God in very personal terms to those who think of God as an infinite force of creation or an infinite force for good. Some Jews even question the existence of God. Yet, all feel a part of a culture and a tradition that goes back for thousands of years—a tradition that speaks of God's Biblical covenant with the Jewish people and the mission of the Jewish people, in the words of Isaiah, to be a "light to the nations that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

Inherent in this tradition is the optimistic belief that people and society are perfectible—the concept of "Tikkum Ha-Olam." This belief is an integral part of the wonderful heritage of Judaism and is a central element of Jewish theology that emphasizes the link between belief and action. It has never been more important to humanity than it is today, when the problems of our society are becoming increasingly complex, that this tradition continue.

Judaism is not only a religion, but also a culture and a community of people bonded together by shared values and a feeling of Jewish identity—what some call a "peoplehood." Its gates are open to all, including those not born Jewish.

The pages that follow offer a brief glimpse of what can be in store for you—how Judaism can enrich your life and, indeed, enrich the lives of every woman, man and child.

### THE UNIVERSALISM OF JUDAISM AND PERSONAL FREEDOM

The unique Jewish perspective of universalism is one of its main differences with other major religions. For instance, Jews have never looked upon Christians or Moslems as "infidels." In contrast to the doctrine of traditional Christianity that one must believe in Jesus in order to be saved, Judaism teaches that one does not have to be Jewish in order to gain whatever rewards there are after death. Rather, Judaism's central criterion has been the goodness of the life that one leads—the deeds and actions that each individual performs. The "gates of heaven" are open to all, regardless of religious belief.

As Judaism has developed, its emphasis on actions in this world, rather than afterlife, has become even stronger. This central theme of Jewish tradition is one

of the principal reasons Jews have been in the forefront of the quest for a democratic society with freedom and justice for everyone.

It is no mere happenstance that disproportionately large numbers of Jews have been in the vanguard of battles to uphold freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and equal protection of the law. It is no accident that Jews have joined with blacks in the forefront of the battle for civil rights, not only in the United States but in other countries as well, including South Africa.

The central political issues affecting women today offer some of the best examples of the uniqueness of Judaism. Jews have been leaders in the battle for equal rights for women, and there is overwhelming Jewish support for the Equal Rights Amendment. In the debate between those who would deny a woman the right to have an abortion and those who believe that a woman should have the freedom to choose, the great majority of Jews—regardless of their own personal feelings about abortion—believe that every woman should have the right to choose, guided by her own conscience and religious beliefs.

Consequently, in contrast to the strong support that some religious groups have given to the anti-abortion movement, there is virtually no support from the Reform movement or, for that matter, from the Conservative movement. Among Orthodox Jews (10% to 15% of all North American Jews), there is some support for the anti-abortion movement, but there are many Orthodox Jews who favor freedom of choice.

The belief in individual freedom is deeply rooted in Jewish history which, in part, is a chronology of a people's fight for personal freedom. The Biblical story of the Exodus, retold each year during the Jewish festival of Passover, is the oldest continuous celebration of freedom in recorded history. The well-known story of Passover recounts the enslavement of the Jewish people by the cruel tyrannical Egyptian Pharaoh and their liberation through the leadership of Moses.

Passover not only inculcates in every Jewish woman, man and child the love of individual freedom and the responsibility of every person to ensure freedom for all, but it also exemplifies one of the most important and unique aspects of Judaism: The central role of the family and the home in the observance of Jewish holidays.

### THE CENTRALITY OF THE FAMILY AND THE HOME IN JUDAISM

In the pressure-packed society of the 1990s, when one wants to get away from it all and have a "very special" evening, a candlelight dinner is often the first choice. The combination of a leisurely meal with warm conversation and the sharing of ideas and feelings combine to create a special ambiance.

Judaism offers an opportunity to share this special ambiance every Friday evening at home, with the celebration of the Sabbath (in Hebrew, "Shabbat")—one of the greatest gifts of Judaism to civilization. The Sabbath begins at sundown and continues until sundown on Saturday. As the Friday night candles are lit, the recitation of the lovely blessing forges a meaningful spiritual and emotional link with generations past.



Blessed is our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who hallows us with Mitzvot and has commanded us to kindle the lights of Shabbat.

("Mitzvot" are good deeds that individuals perform, and the blessing is a vivid example of the Jewish emphasis on the importance of actions in our daily lives. "Mitzvot" also can mean divinely commanded acts.)

A cup of wine, the symbol of joy, is then raised and someone says (or sometimes chants) the "Kiddush"—a traditional blessing which ends with the prayer, "Blessed is our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine."

Everyone at the table (often including children) drinks from small cups of wine. Then, before partaking of the meal, all join together in the age-old Jewish "Hamotzi" prayer over bread—the symbol of life:

Blessed is our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

Even though one may not literally believe there is a God who commands that the Sabbath lights be lit, or who creates the fruit of the vine, or who brings forth bread from the earth, the repetition of these words helps create the specialness of the evening—what some call "creating sacred time." They are words that have been recited every Friday night, generation after generation, in a tradition that goes back thousands of years. They are part of a spiritual atmosphere that enriches the lives of everyone present—of every Jew throughout the world who participates in the Friday night Shabbat blessings and meal in the home.

The celebration of Judaism in the home reinforces strong bonds of mutual love and affection between couples, among members of families, and between close friends. Most Jews who grew up in families where there was a regular celebration of the Shabbat have warm memories and a keen appreciation of how much Judaism can add to one's life. Those Jews who did not share this experience when they were young have the opportunity to begin creating these memories for themselves and their families.

The home also plays a central role in the celebration of many Jewish holidays, engendering warm feelings among families and friends. The Passover Seder is probably the most beloved. The story of the Exodus from Egypt is read from a book called the "Hagaddah," usually with each person at the table reading portions of the story. There are traditional highlights, one of the most endearing being the "Four Questions" which are asked by the youngest child present, beginning with the first question: "Why is this night different from all other nights?"

As the Passover story is related in response to the four questions, the service in the home is enriched by the feeling of being part of a chain of tradition, by the singing of melodic songs, and by the Passover meal itself. Unleavened bread, "matzah," reminds everyone of the haste in which Jews fled to freedom with no time to allow bread to rise. Bitter herbs symbolize the bitterness of slavery. As the Hagaddah is read, there is a natural empathy that develops for the Jews who

were enslaved and for all people who today live without freedom. Everyone shares in the jubilation of the happy ending where the Jews ultimately gained their freedom and the Seder provides a moving and bonding experience that enhances the lives of all who come together for this special evening.

The home and family are also integrally involved in the celebration of the Jewish High Holy Days—Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement. The celebration of these holidays (like the Sabbath) actually begins on the evening before the official day, and there are family meals before the evening synagogue service at both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Apples and honey are often served to symbolize the hope that the coming year will be a sweet one.

Yom Kippur is a traditional day of self-examination, personal confession, repentance and fasting. It is a time to review the past year—where we succeeded, where we failed, where we could have done better, and how we might actually do better in the coming year. The synagogue services are the central part of the observance of both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but the meal before the evening service and the break-the-fast dinner following sundown on Yom Kippur day add in a very meaningful way to the observance of the holiday and also help engender a renewed bonding of family and friends.

The eight-day festival of Hanukkah is primarily celebrated in the home. It occurs in December (on different days each year because Jewish holidays follow a lunar calendar), and commemorates the liberation of Israel from Syrian rule by the Maccabees more than two thousand years ago. Other Jewish holidays occur throughout the year, and to all of these can be added (outside of Israel) secular holidays, such as Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July in the United States. For Jews, it is the best of both worlds.

Many Jewish holidays and home celebrations involve special foods, which add to the tradition. Matzah, of course, is part and parcel of the celebration of Passover. Potato pancakes—"latkes" are eaten at Hanukkah; "Hamentashen"—rolls with sweet poppy seed or fruit fillings—are eaten during Purim, which commemorates the triumph of Queen Esther and Mordecai over the despot, Haman, who sought to destroy the Jews. Special bread—"Challah"—is served at the Shabbat dinner and also during holiday meals. And, of course, there is the proverbial chicken soup—Friday nights, holidays, and on other special occasions.

Social scientists increasingly focus on the bonding of family as a key factor in the growth and development of positive relationships among people and in the development of important values such as morality, empathy, compassion, and justice. The strengthening of the family and the reinforcement of these values thus have both religious and societal significance, adding immeasurably to the social fabric of our nation.

The centrality of the family in Judaism is also expressed directly in one of the Ten Commandments: "Honor your father and mother." The imperative of this commandment is so strong that it continues even after death. In the synagogue, a prayer called the Kaddish is recited in memory of a parent during the period of formal mourning following death and also each year on the anniversary of death.



Husbands and wives who have lost their mates also "say Kaddish" during the formal mourning period following their death and on each subsequent year's anniversary of the loss of their loved one. (Kaddish is also often said when children, siblings, or other close relatives or friends pass away.) Literally, the Kaddish is a prayer that does not mention death but rather praises God. It helps individuals understand that death is part of the Divine pattern of the universe.

*Gates of Prayer*, a Reform prayer book published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, includes a number of meditations that may be read before the Kaddish. The very first of these is especially moving:

The origins of the Kaddish are mysterious; angels are said to have brought it down from heaven....

It possesses wonderful power. Truly, if there is any bond strong enough to chain heaven to earth, it is this prayer. It keeps the living together, and forms a bridge to the mysterious realm of the dead. One might almost say that this prayer is the guardian of the people by whom alone it is uttered; therein lies the warrant of its continuance. Can a people disappear and be annihilated so long as a child remembers its parents?

Because this prayer does not acknowledge death, because it permits the blossom, which has fallen from the tree of humankind, to flower and develop again in the human heart, therefore it possesses sanctifying power.

Before the Kaddish prayer is recited in the synagogue, the rabbi will often read the names of those for whom people are saying Kaddish—individuals who recently died and those whose anniversary of death occurred on the same day or the same week in prior years. In most Reform congregations, all people rise together and recite the Kaddish. In Orthodox and most Conservative synagogues, only those who are in mourning or who are "saying Kaddish" rise for the entire prayer, with the congregation joining in selected portions. But whether the congregation is Reform, Conservative or Orthodox, the entire congregation empathizes in a mutual bonding with those who are "saying Kaddish."

On Yom Kippur afternoon (and also on three other holidays during the Jewish calendar year), there is a special synagogue service called "Yizkor," meaning "memory." It is a time of special remembrance of parents or other loved ones who are no longer living, providing solace for all mourners.

The "Bar" and "Bat Mitzvah" ceremonies are yet another example of the integration of the family in Jewish religious celebrations. Generally, a child becomes Bar Mitzvah (male) or Bat Mitzvah (female) at age 13, after completing a course of study which usually extends over a number of years. Family and friends gather in the synagogue for a religious service celebrating this joyous occasion. Many congregations have classes for adults who may never have experienced a Bar or Bat Mitzvah ceremony. After a period of study, they, too, can become Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

These are just a few of the many examples of the centrality of the family in

Judaism and the human values that Judaism enhances. To be sure, Judaism does not claim exclusivity in its emphasis on the family and the home. But the warmth that comes from the Jewish emphasis on family and the celebration of Judaism in the home can enrich the lives of everyone.

As a matter of fact, many Jewish parents have recognized that in seeking to do everything they can for their offspring—good schools, travel, camping, music lessons, sports instruction, and the like—there are many long-term benefits that can come from a Jewish environment in general and the celebration of Judaism in the home in particular. Building Judaism into home life can have a great positive impact on the growth and development of children, helping create a climate of mutual love, respect, happiness and family bonding, with profound positive benefits for all.

## CONCEPTS OF GOD AND REFORM JUDAISM

When children first learn of God, they often think of God as a person—someone who created the world, who performs miracles, who hears prayer. As children grow older and expand their intellectual and spiritual horizons, their concept of God changes and they ask probing questions about the nature of God: What is God?—An infinite force? A spiritual creation of humanity?

Other questions are asked, some centering on whether there can be a God in the face of all of the tragedy that people suffer—unspeakable horrors such as the Holocaust where five million innocent Jewish women and men and one million innocent Jewish children were slaughtered like animals by the Nazis, simply because they were Jews.

Many modern Jews do not spend much time talking about God, yet often have deeply felt spiritual needs. Reform Judaism allows and, indeed, encourages, freedom of thought. There is no specific credo, but a thoughtful Reform Jew grapples with questions of spirituality and God. The study of differing Jewish perspectives of God can be intellectually stimulating, emotionally rewarding, and spiritually fulfilling.

One of the best sources for exploring diverse theological concepts within Judaism is a very readable book by Rifat Sonsino and Daniel Syme called *Finding God: Ten Jewish Responses*. (UAHC Press). In a brief 132 pages, Rabbis Sonsino and Syme summarize ten distinct concepts of God and spirituality, including God in the Bible, God in Rabbinic Literature, Philo's Spiritual Monotheism, The Neo-Aristotelianism of Maimonides, The Mysticism of Luria, The Pantheism of Spinoza, The Philosophy of Dialogue of Buber, The Limited Theism of Steinberg, The Religious Naturalism of Kaplan, and The Humanism of Fromm. An appendix summarizes these ten different perspectives on such issues as God's nature, God's relationship to the world, God and the people Israel, God and the individual, and the problem of evil.

The thoughtful examination of these theological concepts can help the development of one's own personal religious and spiritual philosophy. For instance, some may identify with the philosophy of Mordecai Kaplan, who wrote that a belief in God is an affirmation that there are reliable forces and processes in



life that can contribute to self-improvement and thereby enable man and woman "to achieve salvation."

To believe in God means to take for granted that it is man's (and woman's) destiny to rise above the brute and to eliminate all forms of violence and exploitation from human society.

It matters very little how we conceive God, as long as we so believe in God that belief in Him makes a tremendous difference in our lives.

Others may find great personal meaning in the perspective of Milton Steinberg, who wrote:

"The entire universe, as I see it, is the outward manifestation of Mind-Energy, of Spirit, or to use the older and better word, of God. God is then the essential Being of all beings, though all beings in their totality do not exhaust Him."

Steinberg urged that:

"...like all other propositions, that of the existence of God is not completely provable. It remains the conclusion of an act of faith."

Two related areas that can also be explored concern Jewish concepts of immortality and questions relating to the concept of a messianic age. The Prophet Ezekiel spoke of the Lord "going to open your graves and lift you out of the graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel." (Ezek. 37:11-12.) More than 2,000 years ago, the Pharisees and Sadducees debated whether there would be resurrection, a debate that had an obvious impact in the development of Christianity. Today, there are many Orthodox Jews as well as some Conservative and Reform Jews who believe in resurrection. However, most Reform Jews do not believe in an afterlife in the traditional sense. What Reform teachers have emphasized over the years is the immortality of the soul. In a companion volume to *Finding God* entitled *What Happens After I Die?*, Rabbis Sonsino and Syme write:

Throughout history many people have affirmed that after death even though our bodies waste away, something of ourselves remains. They have adhered to the belief that our soul, or intellect, or spirit does not disappear but returns to the Source of all life.

This theory cannot be confirmed empirically, but several thinkers have advanced compelling arguments. Some, for example, have argued that we are part of the entire universe and that whatever makes the universe "whole" is never totally lost....

After reviewing a number of differing concepts of immortality, the authors summarize:

The idea of immortality has had a very powerful appeal among Jews. Whether it is the "soul," "intellect," or "Spirit" that is eternal, many believers affirm that even after death something of us remains forever. It is this assurance that enables them to face life with greater courage and hope.

Those who do not believe in traditional immortality can consider such other options as biological immortality achieved through children and their descendants, intellectual immortality achieved through influencing others, creative immortality achieved through work and artistic endeavor, and, of course, spiritual immortality achieved through "Mitzvot"—good deeds. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, speaks of immortality "in the memory of those who knew us, loved us, and were influenced by our lives" and "the immortality of the human deed. The Talmud teaches that 'we live in deeds, not years'; Pirke Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) affirms that 'this world is like a vestibule before the world to come,' yet declares in the same passage 'Better is one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the whole life in the world to come.'"

Related to questions of immortality is the concept of a messianic age, which has been a part of Judaism since biblical times. Traditional Judaism looked forward to the time when God would send a Messiah who would redeem the people of Israel and all humanity, ushering in a messianic age of universal peace. Among the reasons Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah is that the messianic age did not come into being. In Reform Judaism, the emphasis is on seeking to attain the messianic age as a result of the collective efforts of human beings, rather than through the figure of a Messiah. Modern Reform philosophy emphasizes the responsibility of all people to work together to help achieve a Messianic Age for all humanity.

Exploring spiritual issues may yield complex, rather than simple answers. Even those who have not yet found satisfactory answers to spiritual questions or discovered a meaningful concept of God can take heart in knowing that Reform Judaism freely allows and encourages a personal search for God, a search for spiritual meaning in life, with no single belief absolute in its authority. It is the quest that is part of Jewish tradition, a link in a chain that goes back 4,000 years. Undertaking this quest can result in great intellectual challenge and emotional rewards.

## JEWISH CONCERN FOR "TZEDAKAH" (CHARITY) AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Most Jews are aware of the traditional story about the great Jewish scholar, Hillel, who was asked by a Roman soldier to summarize Judaism "while standing on one foot"—in other words, to put all of Jewish theology in a nutshell. Hillel's response was to repeat Judaism's original "Golden Rule": "That which is hateful to yourself, do not do unto others. That is the heart of the Torah; all the rest is commentary. Now go and study!"

The "Golden Rule" is in that portion of the Torah known as "The Holiness Code." (Leviticus, Chapter 19) It is a basic principle underlying the traditional Jewish commitment to fairness, human responsibility, and social justice.

These fundamental values, rooted in the Torah, have led Jews to establish relatively high standards of generosity for charitable causes. Actually, the concept



of "Tzedakah" extends beyond charity—its usual translation—and includes the dual concepts of righteousness and human responsibility—something a Jew is required to do as a part of her or his Jewishness, not simply a voluntary act.

The great Jewish scholar, philosopher, and rabbi, Moses Maimonides, who lived 800 years ago, delineated eight different levels of charity. As you read these words, consider how relevant these Jewish teachings are today, more than 800 years later:

Going from the lowest level to the highest:

1. One who gives unwillingly.
2. One who gives cheerfully, but not enough.
3. One who gives enough, but not till he is asked.
4. One who gives before being asked, but directly to the poor man.
5. The poor man knows from whom he takes, but the giver does not know who is receiving.
6. The giver knows to whom he gives, but the receiver does not know the giver.
7. The giver does not know to whom he gives, nor does the poor man know from whom he receives.
8. The highest form of charity is to strengthen the hand of the poor by giving him a loan, or joining him in partnership, or training him out of his poverty, to help him establish himself.

The highest level of charity—helping a person establish herself or himself—is the foremost ideal of our modern social agenda as we address the complex issues of poverty and welfare and seek the best ways to help people break the chains of poverty. The words of Maimonides exemplify the compassion of Judaism and also vividly show how Jewish sages have sought to point the way for Jews to help make our world a better place in which all people might live with dignity and self-respect.

Some people are surprised when they learn that Judaism embodies compassion and love, for language in the Torah often appears harsh to the modern ear. However, one must remember and understand that the Jewish Bible—what Christianity called the "Old Testament"—was written 3,000 years ago. Just as it is important to judge Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, in the context of the times in which he lived, and not in absolute terms of his having been a slave owner, we must judge the Jewish Bible, including the first five books known as the Torah, in terms relative to what was taking place in society 3,000 years ago. By that standard, the Torah was remarkably progressive. (For instance, the well-known adage, "an eye for an eye," may seem harsh today, but this concept was an improvement over the mores of Middle Eastern society 3,000 years ago when one could be killed for injuring another person's eye.) Actually, although the Torah is an ancient document, there is in Judaism a process of study, commentary, and re-interpretation that has allowed the Torah to continue to speak to Jews in every generation.

Even though Christianity's "New Testament" was written more than 1,000 years after the Jewish Bible, nevertheless both have passages that are harsh by modern standards. Both also have language of love and compassion, and there are many important similarities such as the Golden Rule. These similarities are not surprising since Jesus was raised as a Jew, as were all of his contemporary disciples.

On the other hand, there are major philosophical differences, the most fundamental being that Jews did not, and do not, believe that Jesus, who lived and died a Jew, was the Son of God. Another central difference was that Christianity asserted that an individual had to "believe in Jesus in order to be saved," therefore denying any life in "heaven" to non-believers. In sharp contrast, the central theme of Judaism was one of universalism with the "gates of heaven" open to all who lead an exemplary life of good actions and deeds, regardless of religious creed.

Although the Jewish Bible was written nearly 3,000 years ago, much of it still speaks directly to us today. For example, in an ancient world in which slavery and injustice were rampant, the Jewish prophets were among the first to call for social justice—for everyone, not just Jews.

One of the most meaningful aspects of Reform Judaism is that it offers a religious and cultural environment and structure in which these moral values can be enhanced and also transmitted from one generation to the next. Some people assert that there is no longer a need to have any religious identity and that these values can be transmitted automatically without the need for a religious framework. However, most thoughtful Reform Jews believe the remarkable extent of active involvement of modern Jews in support of charitable causes and issues of freedom and social justice did not arise in a vacuum but rather developed out of a religious and cultural heritage and faith, nurtured and refined over a period of 4,000 years. This Jewish heritage has been a very important factor in influencing and encouraging individual Jews to speak out on behalf of freedom, compassion, love, peace and justice for all. Therefore, committed Jews seek Jewish continuity, not just for themselves but for all humankind.

## EDUCATION AND STUDY—A JEWISH TRADITION

Although the Torah is best known as the first five books of the Bible, in Jewish tradition "Torah" has another connotation: Study. For thousands of years, study has been a central theme of Judaism and a key to Jewish survival.

In a Europe that for centuries discriminated against Jews, that consigned Jews to ghettos, denied Jews ownership of real estate, denied admittance to schools and universities, Jews overcame these terrible limitations by focusing on religious study. They studied the Torah and the other books of the Bible, the Talmud, the vast rabbinic literature, the challenging debates between the great rabbis of Jewish lore, and the poetry and thought of Jewish sages. Study, study, and more study—not just for itself but because, in the words of one of the great masterpieces of Jewish literature, the "Ethics of the Fathers," study leads to wisdom and wisdom leads to good deeds. For almost all Jews, scholarly attainment was a revered value.



Therefore, when Jews immigrated to North America in their search for freedom and opportunity, they naturally gave high priority to study and education for their children. As a result, Jews achieved unprecedented success in the arts, the sciences, and the professions as well as in business, commerce and industry.

In major universities Jews at last overcame barriers of discrimination that existed in academia through the first half of the Twentieth Century. In colleges with the highest academic standards, Jews rose to the top. Twenty-five percent of Nobel prizes in the sciences were won by Jews for accomplishments ranging from the development of the polio vaccine to historic discoveries in mathematics and physics.

Today, when there is increasing public commentary about the importance of education in helping people from poorer families break the barriers of poverty and become self-supporting citizens, people often mention as an example the Jewish emphasis on education and study, in the classroom as well as in the home. This fundamental Jewish tradition has played a key role in the continuity of the Jewish people and in the contributions that Jews have made to humankind.

### **"PEOPLEHOOD," ISRAEL AND THE QUEST FOR PEACE**

The underlying foundation of Judaism is the covenant between God and the Jewish people. The tradition of this covenant, coupled with centuries of shared history, values and experience, has contributed to an empathic emotional bonding among Jews that is unique. Judaism is more than just a religion. Among Jews, there is a community of feeling and identification—what some call a "peoplehood." This concept has had many positive benefits ranging from shared community responsibility and concern for the care and education of children to substantial charitable commitments for the care of the elderly and concern for the welfare of other Jews, including those in other countries who need help.

The concept of Jewish community and peoplehood is one of the most important reasons underlying the major Jewish charitable commitments in support of Israel. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Jews throughout the world joined together to help in the creation and support of a free democratic nation in the land of Israel where any Jew could go to live in freedom, dignity and peace. Since its declaration of independence in 1948, Israel has been an island of democracy in a Middle East region of authoritarian states. Literally, the desert was made to bloom. Tragically, it did not bloom in peace.

Surrounded by enemies pledged to its destruction, Israel has been forced to pay a tremendous economic price for its survival and spend an extraordinarily high percentage of its gross national product on self-defense. An even greater psychological and emotional price has been paid by Israeli women, men and children living in an environment where their lives have been in constant danger. Threats have been made by dictators in neighboring states on a regular basis. There have been repeated terrorist raids across the border including bombings of public schools, civilian buses and marketplaces. Terrorist acts have also occurred outside of Israel, such as the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics.

Day after day, for over four decades, Israelis have lived under a threat of annihilation by nations ruled by dictators. Their threats have been made all the more real because the richest oil fields in the world have generated billions of dollars for buying arms for Arab armies and giving financial support for Arab terrorist groups sworn to destroy Israel. In the 1991 Gulf War, the entire world witnessed the indiscriminate bombing of civilian Israeli neighborhoods by Scud missiles launched by Iraq dictator Saddam Hussein.

Although people of good will of every faith have admired the emergence and survival of a democratic nation in the Biblical land of Israel, there is particular empathy and support for Israel by most Jews. In part, this is because of the concept of peoplehood and Jewish tradition, including centuries of Jewish prayers for the return of the Jewish people to Jerusalem. In part, it is because most Jews are well aware of the Holocaust and other tragedies in Jewish history when Jews had no place else to turn. Most North American Jewish families are only one or two generations removed from grandparents or great-grandparents who fled Europe in the face of terrible anti-Semitism, such as the pogroms in Russia in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries when thousands of Jews were killed. Jews found it very natural to identify with Israelis, many of whom emigrated to escape anti-Semitism in the countries where they lived.

This does not mean that Reform Jews in North America agree with everything that takes place in Israel. Indeed, there is disagreement on many issues, ranging from dissatisfaction with the lack of religious pluralism in Israel to honest differences on how best to attain a genuine peace in the Middle East.

But despite disagreements, there is universal pride in the fact that Jews were able to return to the land of Israel after an exile of twenty centuries—that Jews were able to help rebuild a free democratic nation in their biblical homeland of Israel, that in this nation there is creativity in so many areas ranging from science and medicine to literature and the arts, that a new center of Jewish culture has been created that energizes Jews throughout the world and helps ensure the remarkable chain of dynamic Jewish survival.

Inside Israel, leaders of Reform (Progressive) Judaism have worked with groups who seek peaceful solutions to the long-standing controversies with the Palestinians and with neighboring Arab states. Most Jews believe that there will never be any lasting peace in the Middle East until all Arab nations genuinely recognize the right of Israel to exist as a free nation. Unfortunately, the repeated threats of Arab leaders to annihilate Israel and the absence of full-fledged democracies among the Arab nations have made it extremely difficult to overcome the many barriers that block the road to peace.

The traditional word of greeting in Hebrew is *Shalom*, which literally means "peace." Every Sabbath prayer service, every daily prayer service, includes a prayer for peace—not only for Israel, but for all humankind. This never-ending quest for peace is a primary goal of Judaism in general and Progressive Judaism in particular. That is one of the reasons why Reform Jews consider their Movement's social action activities and Religious Action Centers in Washington and in Israel among Reform Judaism's proudest accomplishments. These Centers have as one of their major goals the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.



## HELPING REFORM JUDAISM GROW AND DEVELOP

There is an old Jewish story that when two Jews discuss any issue, you have three opinions. For centuries, diversity has been part and parcel of Judaism. Naturally, there is also much diversity within Reform Judaism. In the first half of the Twentieth Century, Reform worship services in North America were generally conducted almost entirely in English, in part based on the rationale that people would understand all of the words that were being said. More recently, greater use of Hebrew has reappeared in a majority of Reform congregations. However, a number of Reform congregations maintain the more classical traditions of the early part of this century.

Within each congregation, one can also find much diversity. Some rabbis and congregants may wear a skull cap, known as a "kipah" or "yarmulke," while others may not. In many congregations, some rabbis and lay persons may wear the traditional prayer shawl, known as a "tallit." Others do not.

Such diversity will no doubt continue in future centuries. This is one of the most important elements of Reform Judaism. It has the capacity to change to meet the needs of Jews, wherever they live, and it also has the capacity to provide for individual diversity while still maintaining continuity with the central core of Jewish tradition.

Over the past one hundred years, the growth and development of Reform Judaism in North America has been nurtured by a triad of three major organizations: the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR).

Just as in the United States and Canada there is a union of states and provinces, in the Reform movement there is a Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC)—an umbrella organization which provides a broad array of services and programs for the more than 825 Reform Jewish congregations in North America. These range from education programs (including the development and publication of books, pamphlets, audio and video materials), camping programs for young people, outreach programs to interdating couples and to the intermarried and children of intermarried, and social action programs in both North America and Israel, to practical administrative guides and assistance to help individual congregations better serve their members. Among the many fine books published by the UAHC are several especially helpful for people who were not born Jewish, including *Choosing Judaism* by Lydia Kukoff.

Historically, the Reform movement has its roots in the active involvement of laity, and this is evident in the structure of the UAHC. It is governed by a Board comprised primarily of outstanding lay leaders from congregations across the breadth of the United States and Canada. Within the UAHC, there are several important affiliates including the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS), the National Federation of Temple Brotherhoods (NFTB) and the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY).

Another important part of the Reform movement is the Hebrew Union

College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), the Reform educational institution that educates rabbis and cantors and also offers doctoral and master's degree programs in Jewish education and Jewish communal service. Christian scholars also study at the College. Campuses are located in Cincinnati, Los Angeles, New York City and Jerusalem.

The CCAR is the third part of the central triad. It is the international association of Reform rabbis with a membership of approximately 1,500 women and men, most of whom live in the United States and Canada. (There are also professional associations for Reform Cantors, Educators, and Temple Administrators.)

Although the UAHC, the HUC-JIR, and the CCAR are three separate and distinct organizations, they work together in helping Reform Judaism develop and grow. There is no hierarchy. Rather, there is a democratic structure within each organization and a confederation among them. All seek to make Judaism a more meaningful, relevant, intellectually stimulating and spiritually and emotionally satisfying religion, culture and community for born Jews, Jews by choice, and intermarried families that identify as Jews.

But the successful growth and development of Reform Judaism does not rest in any one, two or three organizations. Rather, it rests in the commitment of the people who are involved. For 4,000 years, Jews have overcome every obstacle that they have faced—the most miraculous survival in recorded history. They now face perhaps the greatest test of all: the challenge of survival in a wonderful land of freedom and opportunity.

Most thoughtful Jews have both an intellectual conviction and an emotional desire to see Judaism continue to grow and develop. However, together with many non-Jews, they believe that Jewish survival is also vitally important for pluralism in the United States and Canada and, indeed, for the entire world, for the contributions of Jews to society have been far beyond their numbers. Though many point with pride to the outstanding accomplishments of Jews in a broad spectrum of activities ranging from science and medicine to literature and the arts, the most important Jewish contributions have been the intangibles that are an outgrowth of the heart of Jewish tradition—the optimistic belief that people and society are perfectible—the universalism of Judaism—the centrality of the family and the home in Judaism—the emphasis of Judaism on charity, freedom and social justice—and the Jewish tradition for education and study.

All of this heritage is part of what Judaism offers for you.

## CHOOSING JUDAISM

Judaism offers to everyone the unique opportunity to be an integral part of building upon and continuing a tradition that goes back to the days of Abraham and Sarah—a tradition unparalleled in the history of the world.

That tradition is open to all—not just born Jews. The biblical prophet, Isaiah, fervently believed in Israel's mission as a universal faith. He looked to the day when the House of God would be called "a house of prayer for all peoples."



During the Talmudic period, commencing approximately 2,200 years ago, Jewish missionary efforts were so successful that in the First Century the world Jewish population increased to between two and five million. However, in the Fourth Century the Edict of Constantine established Christianity as the official state religion and made conversion to Judaism a capital offense. Conversion efforts therefore ceased but resumed to some degree in medieval times. Then, in the late Fifteenth Century when the Spanish Inquisition reinstituted capital punishment for the "crime" of conversion to Judaism, together with a doctrine of "heresy," Jewish conversion efforts ceased and the rabbis developed a tradition of discouraging converts. This post-Inquisition development has led many Jews to assume erroneously that Judaism does not welcome converts, when in fact there have been long periods in Jewish history when Jews actively sought proselytes. In its truest ideals, Judaism is a loving, meaningful religion that welcomes all.

Many Jews believe that if there were a visitor from another planet who was seeking the kind of religious identification that would make the most sense from a rational standpoint and would have the most positive impact on civilization, she or he would find that Judaism would be the most appealing. If you were to add to this the emotional satisfaction, warmth, and support that come from being a part of the Jewish family—the Jewish community—with its religious traditions, culture, and history unique among all peoples of the earth—there is little doubt among most Jews who have experienced these feelings that Judaism is very special and there is nothing else like it in our world.

Obviously, the warmth and emotional attachments underlying these feelings cannot be gained overnight. Like most good things, it takes time and effort, but the rewards of personal satisfaction and growth can be great.

If these few pages have whetted your appetite to learn more about Judaism—the religion and the culture—and what it can mean for you; if, on the basis of what you have read, you believe that there is much about Judaism that is compatible with your own personal philosophy; then seek to learn more. The more you learn about Judaism, the more appealing it will be and the more it can contribute to your life and to your personal search for happiness. This booklet has just begun to touch on the many possibilities of what Judaism offers for you.

You have an opportunity to be part of the continuance of a remarkable tradition that is 4,000 years old but is yet so relevant and meaningful to modern times; you have an opportunity to know the fullness of the love, compassion and understanding that are an integral part of Judaism. You have an opportunity to be part of a unique religion, culture and community of people that emphasizes this world, rather than the next, that pursues social justice and freedom for all as part of the Jewish tradition of universalism.

There is a story drawn from Jewish literature about a cynic who approached a learned rabbi with a closed fist. "Rabbi, you are supposed to be a great sage. I have a question for you. In my hand, I hold a small bird. Is it dead or alive?"

The rabbi knew that if he said the bird was alive, the cynic would crush it and then open his hand and show a dead bird. If, however, the rabbi said the bird was dead, the cynic would open up his hand and let the bird fly away.

"Dear man," said the rabbi, "the answer lies in your hand."

For those who ask, "What can Judaism do for me?", the more you investigate, the more you study and learn, the more you will find. Ultimately, "the answer lies in your hand."



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Belin served as Chairman of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations Outreach program from its inception in 1978 until 1988. He is an honorary Vice Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the UAHC and currently serves on its Executive Committee. He also serves in leadership capacities in other Jewish organizations including the Presidency of the Jewish Outreach Institute and membership on the Executive Committee of the Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers, a national organization which emphasizes the teaching of moral values and which helps support Christians who, at the risk of their own lives, helped shelter Jews in Nazi-occupied lands in Europe during the time of the Holocaust.

In addition, he has had a broad range of public service including appointment by Chief Justice Earl Warren as counsel to the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (Warren Commission), appointment by President Ford as Executive Director of the Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States (Rockefeller Commission), and membership on the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

He is the author of the booklet, "Why Choose Judaism: New Dimensions of Jewish Outreach," and a number of books including "Final Disclosure: The Full Truth About the Assassination of President Kennedy" and "Leaving Money Wisely."

David Belin divides his time between New York City and Des Moines, where he heads the Belin Harris Lamson McCormick law firm. The *National Law Journal* has included him in its list of the 100 most influential lawyers in the United States.





**UAHC-CCAR Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach**  
**Union of American Hebrew Congregations**  
**838 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10021-7064**  
**212-249-0100**



# God Talk: God, Jews, and Pews

*Paul Menitoff*

NO MATTER how active a synagogue may be, worship services are not well attended. Worship does not attract people; programs at services sometimes do: family nights, Sisterhood/Brotherhood Shabbats, teacher appreciation services, scholar-in-residence lectures, commissioned cantatas, social action shabbats—the list is endless.

Novelties initially attract people to services. The newness, however, soon subsides. New sanctuaries, rabbis, cantors, guitars, creative liturgies, different seating arrangements and unique technical effects—all ultimately result in that same “saving remnant” gathering for worship, because something essential is absent.

The activity levels of synagogues vary among congregations. Fortunately, the Reform Movement has an abundance of temples with calendars full of well-attended activities. Unfortunately, the “dead spot” in most of our synagogues is the sanctuary, when it is being used for worship—not for special programs, novel trap-pings, holiday celebrations, bar mitzvahs, weddings, and funerals, but for prayer, “for God’s sake.” Strange, isn’t it? Have you ever heard of a synagogue without a sanctuary or some other form of worship space? What, then, is missing?

•

When was the last time you were with Reform Jews, outside of an educational setting, and talked about God? You probably cannot remember. It is not that the subject is too personal to be discussed. Reform Jews, like other people of the 1980s, speak openly about sex, politics, and other intimate subjects. This might

---

PAUL MENITOFF is Regional Director of the Northeast Council of the UAHC, Boston, Massachusetts.

suggest that God is not an issue for most Reform Jews. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that God may be an issue or a construct, but God is certainly not a reality. Many Reform Jews can tell you that they are Kaplanians or Buberians, naturalists or existentialists. Many of our people are capable of articulating the theological lingo. But their God, created through mental gymnastics, is a theoretical construct, not a reality. If Reform congregants were to stop giving lip service to their beliefs in a God, it would make substantially little difference in their lives. To be sure, they would need to deal with some feelings of guilt, but not with the loss of a reality.

Sizeable segments of the lay and rabbinic populations of Reform congregations do not believe in God. Some mouth the correct theological terminology. Some focus on the liturgical rituals. Some avoid using the word God, saying that God talk is for Christians, that it is not a Jewish activity.

A sanctuary that is filled with people for whom God is merely a mental mutation, and not a reality, is a sparsely populated place. Special services and gimmicks in sanctuaries are not a substitute for God. In fact, God is the whole point of prayer! Communicating implies an object, a receiver of the communication beyond ourselves. Prayer is communicating with God—not thinking, not meditating with ourselves. God is the object, the recipient of prayer.

People cannot pray to theological constructs. When they are thinking or meditating or being introspective, they are doing just that, but they are not praying. Congregants know this, at the very least, on an intuitive level. They, therefore, do other things on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. When God does not attend services, people stay at home. Our attempts at dealing with the lack of attendance at services have overlooked the real problem: God.

This problem can be solved. First, we rabbis must confront honestly the following questions: Do we really believe in God or are we fooling ourselves? Are we hiding behind the theological constructs and rituals while ignoring the issue of God?

God is not a four-letter word. Rabbis avoid talking about God because either they do not believe in God or they fear that they will be considered to be hopelessly naïve and intellectually unsophisticated.

Rabbis must be willing to examine and articulate candidly their beliefs about God. As the enthusiastic response to the CCAR's 1982 Conference on Spirituality attests, the spiritual climate in our Conference is right for a soul-searching examination of this issue by our colleagues.

Rabbis who do not believe in God should leave congregational worship to those who do. To do less is to be dishonest. Rabbis who do not believe are not helping their people pray; they are at best directing a presentation.

Rabbis who do believe in God as a reality must begin to risk talking about God, in very personal terms, with their congregants. These discussions must focus on a God who we believe really exists. We must speak of a God who can make a difference in congregants' lives, because this God has made a difference in the rabbi's life. It must be a God whose disappearance tomorrow would affect the very essence of our being, a loss that would equal the loss of a loved one.

This God, who makes a difference in our lives, will make a difference in the lives of our congregants. They may or may not develop a belief in their rabbi's God. Their rabbi will, however, have taught them that a belief in a real God is possible. We can help the Reform Jew in searching for God, because we will have already involved ourselves in our own search. The demonstration by rabbis that real belief is possible is equal in importance to the specific contents of the belief.

If we adopt this God-oriented perspective, we rabbis will have something more to offer in those moments of crisis than the social worker or psychiatrist. We will have something more than a program or gimmick to offer at services.

This approach will have a dramatic effect on the kind of programming we will encourage in our synagogues and on what we teach in our religious schools and adult education classes. We will not spend time worrying about competition from the Jewish Center, Federation, or Jewish Family Service, because we will be offering something that they cannot: God. We will have the potential for partnership rather than competition with these secular institutions.



Stressing God as a reality, and as the necessary object of worship, will focus our attention and that of our congregants on what was once self-evident: there cannot be prayer without God. When rabbis establish belief in a real God as a respectable option for congregants, members will be able to enter our sanctuaries with the realistic expectation of finding God, not a theological construct or an orchestrated program. When our congregants come to view our sanctuaries as places in which they can expect to meet God, more Jews may regularly fill our pews.



## The Role of Synagogue Leadership

by Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman

April 4, 1989

It is a special pleasure and privilege to be here, to be at this congregation, and to be able to share with you this evening, some things that I've been thinking about; some prejudices that I have, and what I hope will be a response to some of the challenges that you and I face today. We are living as Jews, in what many claim is a very difficult time to be Jewish but which I claim is an exciting and challenging time in American Jewish life.

Let me tell you what my prejudices are. Let me start with that. My prejudice is that the synagogue is the most important player in American Jewish life today. Call it the temple, call it the synagogue, call it what you will; it is the most important, significant institution. I'm going to try to show that to you. Secondly, the leadership of the synagogue, for the first time, is being called upon to play a different kind of role in terms of Jewish leadership and role modeling for Jewish life. And that, if that role is not played well, will lead to major problems in the future; and if it is played well, may change the future of American Jewish life. That's the thesis, now let me try to prove it.

In Jewish history, the synagogue has never been the major institution. I'm sure you've heard your rabbis tell you the synagogues were places of prayer, and places of study, and places of assembly and that's been the traditional name for over 2,000 years. But the reality is, that for the



Now let's understand this about America, American Jewry is very young; it's not old. Most American Jews have been in this country for less than 100 years. In the history of Jewish communities, we're an infant. We're just starting. The problem is that we weren't ready to have to do what we had to do. The Holocaust destroyed one major center. The Iron Curtain destroyed another center, and all that was left is America and our history. The reality is that no other Jewish community in its history has ever in its 100 years of major settlement had to be the central focus of world Jewish life. We're just getting started. The Babylonian Jewish community was 500 years old before it hiccuped. It didn't do a thing for 400 years. And it took it 600 to 700 years to develop its own educational, spiritual leadership. That's a long time. Yes, we know there were German Jews here in the 1840's and that Beth Israel was founded in the 1850's. However, the real Jewish immigration to this country comes 1880 to 1910, some say 1920. So most Jews, most, 80% and over, of American Jews have only been here for a century or less. We're just getting started. So what we're seeing is a community in its infancy, in its beginnings, not a community well developed. And whatever development has happened here has happened under the gun. We had to start raising money because the world Jewish community was imperiled. We had to support Israel because it was the only answer, at one time, for Jewish living. We had to create an institution for higher learning because the academies of Europe were destroyed. Remember in the Reform Movement, if you wanted to be a scholar in Reform Judaism in the 1880's, 90's, 1910's, 1920's, and 1930's they didn't educate you in America. They sent you to Germany. That's where they sent Nelson Glueck. That's where all the great scholars were sent. Henry Slonimsky, the great dean of the New York school

and probably one of the foremost Jewish thinkers said if we had bright kids, we always sent our kids to Germany. That was the only place he knew he could learn to do what he had to do to become a scholar.

In the last half century, America is having to replace all of that. You know it's amazing. Think about it. More students have studied Jewish studies today at the highest college of graduate level, than ever before in Jewish history. There are more universities offering college courses in Judaica than ever existed before. There are more students studying Judaism in a graduate, post-graduate level in this country than ever existed before. In all of Vilna, there weren't as many students of Judaism as there are in this day today. In fact, we've produced more Ph.D.'s in Judaism than the state of Israel. That's fascinating. We supply some of their professors. That's even more fascinating.

In just a short period of time the American Jewish community became a world leader of the Jewish community, became the spiritual leader and developer in the face of unbelievable challenges - the loss of 6,000,000 Jews. Who were the Jews that were lost? The greatest universities of Jewish literature, the greatest libraries, they're still over there. The Russians have them. To be able to somehow replace all of that and to do it in less than five decades. That's unbelievable. Can you imagine what this community could do in the future. We're just starting. America is radically different. Its beginnings are radically different. Its beginnings are forged in fire and in flight from old into the new.

But America is also different for some other reasons. One is that there is no government mandated Jewish community. It's totally voluntary. You have to want to be part of the Jewish community. If you don't want to



be part of the Jewish community, you don't have to be part of it. Whereas, in Germany, the government taxed you. And you listed on your form whether you were Jewish or Lutheran or Catholic. The government collected their religious tax, gave it to the community, which then determined how many senior citizens homes, and how many hospitals, and how many rabbis, and how many synagogues. There was a community that decided that.

Who makes decisions here? The federation makes decisions. But you want to set up your own program or institution. Set up your own. Who is going to stop you? And if you don't want to support the community, unless you join a certain country club, who's going to force you to give? It's a totally voluntary community that never existed before in the totality of Jewish history. So, there is no community. There is no centralized group determining who does what. And I think it's a good idea. We don't need that group. But the point is, there is no such thing. There is no independent academy. Even the talmud torah movement failed in this country. Remember the independent talmud torah movement, where you could send your kids to study and become Jewish and learn about it in schools? They were run independently of any synagogue or any movement. They were basically traditional, but they were independent. In the late 40's and early 50's they all met their end financially. There is only one major one left, Associated Hebrew Schools in Toronto. But, it basically is Orthodox. Milwaukee had a shot at it; it too failed financially. Most communities don't have that anymore. I think there have been some attempts at it but most Jewish education doesn't take place in independent academies. And even the great institution of Jewish learning is affiliated with movements. There is no independent academy. Even the Day School movement educates only

a small minority of our children.

How about the Jewish home? Aside from all the green tchatchkes we bring back from Israel, how Jewish are our homes? I always like to go home and take a look and find how many Jewish books are there. Where are they? Top shelf and dusty? What are they? Union Prayer Book I, Union Prayer Book II, etc., the confirmation Bible, or what you have is a very nice book on the top of the coffee table. Somebody gave you a present. You have Christian friends that want to give you something. They go from rabbi to rabbi, go to your Jewish friends, "I love them, I want to give them a gift. What do you suggest?" "Oh, there's this great book of photographs, etc. I'm sure your friends would like that." "Rabbi, that's a great idea," they say, "thank you and may God bless you." Then they go out and buy it. The other thing you have are these green ashtrays, green book ends, and other green Jewish things. Sometimes a Jewish festival gets to you. In the arts and crafts and stuff, you find a few very good Jewish artisans and your big buy is a handcrafted Chanukah Menorah, crafted, one in a hundred or actually a unique piece that you get and you put up there. And there it is. That's the Jewishness in our homes. The reality is that our homes, for good or for bad, really aren't very Jewish. The rituals aren't there. In many cases, they're not there because we don't know what to do. Many American Jews are very defensive about their ignorance, and really don't know what to do and are afraid to ask. We generally know this kind of discussion with our rabbi, "Rabbi, I'm embarrassed to ask you this stupid question." How many of you have said that? It takes a lot of courage to ask stupid questions. And a lot of people don't know, don't understand. But one thing is clear. At one time, the Jewish home was a major transmitter of Jewish knowledge.



You were non-Jewish outside but at home you could be Jewish. Today, it's okay to be Jewish outside.

When I was in New York, in the 15 years that I was at Central Synagogue, from no yarmulkes on Park Avenue, to thousands of yarmulkes on Park Avenue. That was the change. It's okay to be Jewish outside. Being Jewish is in. People say, "You want to wear a yarmulke? It's okay." You see all these orthodox lawyers and accountants on Park Avenue. These law firms are having talmud classes with noon luncheons that cater kosher. It's okay to be Jewish out there. Law firms that one time shuttered at the name Cohen have Cohen as a partner. Even in the so called waspy New York firms, it's okay outside. It's okay. But at home there's very little Jewishness. Parents feel so inadequate about teaching their children about being Jewish. But they expect the synagogue to teach it. They send you to the temple. Why do they send you to the temple, kid? So they can teach you to be Jewish. Why do I send my child to you rabbi, so that you can teach him how to be a Jew. Now it used to be that the child came to the rabbi. The child had been Judaized in the home and came to the rabbi for a reason, a question of observance. Now you come to the temple and say, "Do it for me."

The great institutions of the Jewish past, the community, the home, the academy, no longer exist. But what's left? We go to the JCC. The reality is the JCC is also different because the JCC has no commitment to you before birth and after death. The JCC doesn't run the cemeteries, making sure you're taking care of them when they're no longer alive. The JCC has no obligation to you before you are born. The JCC has only an obligation to those who pay their dues, and were there, and can serve in many ways, sometimes religious, but primarily other than religious ways. You need

someone to marry you, bury you, walk with you through each part of life, educate your children, be the center for the Jewishness of your being. There is only one place. That's the synagogue.

So, of all the communities that exist, the reality is, America is different. And the difference comes down to this one institution which makes all the difference in Jewish living. No other institution is even close. There is no other institution in which you will go to remember on yahrzeit. You depend on this place to remember. You depend on this place to be there for your children whenever you're gone. You depend on this place to be open for the kaddish you hope will be said. You depend on this place to be here when the baby is born, or the fetus dies, when you miscarry. This is where you come for comfort, solace, and encouragement. This is where you hope there will be someone for you. There is no place else to go. And so we have this magnificent, wonderful institution as the center. Never did we have anything like it before, and today, more than ever before, it's changed.

When they built synagogues in the 1870's, they built a big sanctuary with a basement and a few extra classrooms on the side. Why? Because the American synagogue of the 19th century was simply that; a place to pray and some classrooms. Could they have conceived something so radically new? Could they have conceived of a place where children gather for youth grouping, where there's a preschool emerging, where seniors may meet, where classes are held. Actually, we are beyond anything they would have thought of in the 19th century. What you and I are a part of is the emerging institution of the late 20th and early 21st century. Because even the synagogue of the 50's is not Emanu El of today. The synagogue of the 50's



was a big religious school with a small sanctuary. Why? Small sanctuary with a big auditorium in back of it with the walls opened. Why? Because few prayed. They wanted to educate their kids. So every suburban building was built that way. Lots of classrooms and a little sanctuary that could be expanded for that time of the year when everyone pays their dues, religiously and economically, and comes to pray. Today you can't even build it that way. Because you need rooms for seniors, you need barrier free bathrooms for the disabled. You need special learning centers for children who need help and for adults. You need a place where you assemble to remember. You need a place for the best in Jewish art. You need a place to educate for the arts through culture. You need music, which has the extraordinary power to uplift. You need rabbis who have the compassion to teach and inspire, to be available to you for all life's precious moments. A rabbi today is a different rabbi from earlier rabbis who might have said, "I'm studying, don't bother me." Today, you want your rabbi to be there. There is a new rabbinate emerging. All of that is different. And all of that is emerging.

That's point one. Point two is Reform Judaism. Reform Judaism is also different. What was the point of Reform Judaism? The point of Reform Judaism originally was to reform Judaism, to make it acceptable, meaningful to show modern Jews that they could be Jewish and modern at the same time. They didn't have to yield on their Jewishness, and they didn't have to yield on modernity. Somehow you could be modern and Jewish. Look around the room. Look at you. You look very modern. Some of you don't look very Jewish. But you feel very comfortable. If anyone told you being Jewish is uncomfortable you would say, "What are you talking about?" Yeah, there is

some antisemitism, we're not minimizing that. But we are comfortable. You ask your kids, "Are you comfortable being Jewish?" They say, "Why are you asking me that question?" It's like Tevye's question. How can you say, "Do I love you after all these years?" Of course they're comfortable as Americans. Their dress, their tastes, cultural and musical, are thoroughly American. So our kids are comfortable. See, Reform Judaism says you can be American and you can be Jewish and there's no contradiction.

Even modern orthodox Jews and their children are thoroughly American in dress, cultural tastes, aesthetics in their synagogues. They have accepted our premise - you can be Jewish and American at the same time without yielding on either. Even in our choice of synagogue or Temple, ideology plays a very minor role. Our choice has more to do with personality, friends, the rabbi, religious school, youth group, etc. - rarely ideology.

Reform Judaism of that period is over. It did its job. We're all free. We do what we want. We feel very comfortable. Now the question is "How do we avoid suffocating and drowning in our freedom." Now that we know that Jews can choose, what are we doing about all this choosing? Where do we get the choices from? How does a person know what to do? Now it used to be Grandpa did this; Grandma did that. If you were German, Oh, Father did this, Oh, Mother did that. If you were Czechoslovakian, Bohemian Jews, you did this, or you did that. However, today the reality is that our kids don't have those memories of what grandparents did. We don't have those memories. And their choices are often made on feelings and not on knowledge. Because in reforming Judaism, we forgot. So I'm suggesting to you that in this second stage of Reform Judaism we are no longer reforming Judaism. Our task is to reform Jews, to transform Jews and the synagogue.



The question for us in this second stage is how do you take this Judaism which is so precious and this reform which is so important and turn our way around to become transformed? Transformational institutions: The task of the synagogue is no longer simply making people comfortable. The synagogue's job now is to transform Jews. To grow from reforming Judaism to reforming Jews is the new project of reform Judaism. Not to make it conservative. Rather, how to help people plant their roots deeply in Jewish knowledge and understanding. The synagogue helps to transform. How do we take our synagogues and take the people committed to them and who come into them (and I believe more and more people come to us for a serious Jewish experience. They really want to know.) What difference can it make in my life? That's the new question. That question of serious Jewish experiences and how to make our institutions transformational, caring, human, religious places. We now are dealing with new challenges.

It used to be that the most important thing you would try for to be a synagogue leader was to leave a synagogue board and get on a national board or agency. The best people I could get my hands on always were grabbed up by national groups in New York. Yet, the real place where Judaism is going to be saved, the place that will keep it alive, is this place and places like it. This is where we need Jews to lead, that is the challenge of synagogue leadership today. So at one time, the role of the synagogue leader was to sit there and make some decisions about money, here and there, and what not, thinking the budget really had little impact on people. What kind of new leadership am I talking about? I'm talking about a leadership that understands that the decisions it makes impact upon the future of Judaism. What you do in the next ten years here will produce four to five

thousand caring, involved Jews or four to five thousand uncaring Jews. But at the minimum, can you imagine that you have the power as synagogue leadership to change the future. Because ultimately you will have the power to impact on thousands of Jewish lives by the decisions you make, and the budgetary priorities you set. The budget decisions you make are people decisions and future of Judaism and the Jewish people decisions. That's the kind of decisions you are making. It's not simply, "Well, we can't do it this year." The question is can you afford not to do things.

So, the synagogue leader has to be a new kind of synagogue leader. The synagogue leader today has to be a person who knows how to make decisions that are impacting on thousands of people. There are unborn people out there depending on your decisions. There are people in their 30's now who don't even know they're going to need you in 20 years. There are families out there who think I don't need a rabbi now. But when the husband drops dead while jogging, 15 years from now, they come running. And they can't get through to Rabbi So-and-So because you've decided to save money, so that a rabbi is not that accessible anymore. That's the decision you make. They don't even know what they need. We don't need demographic studies to tell us what our people need. We know what they need. The question is, do they know what they need. You must know. Knowledge is necessary! You must be involved. If you never come to pray or study, the message is very clear. The problem today is you and I make the following mistake. We think that attendance at committee meetings is our primary Jewish activity and commitment. What we don't realize is that a committee meeting is a secondary commitment made. That's not the goal of Jewish living. You've got to be involved. You've got to at least partake, be a participant.



Secondly, we've got to care about people. We teach our people that one person was created first because every life is significant. There are no institutions teaching that out there. At college, you're a number; in high school, you're a number; your drivers license is a number; at your local grocery, you're a number. The question is, is there an institution which says your individuality is unique, and respected, and loved, and admired, and cared for, and embraced when you are there and they care about you and miss you when you are not there.

Third, we need leadership which accepts the responsibility of leading a Jewish life - not just leaving it to the rabbis - becoming role models of committed Jews who are "Jewing" it - doing mitzvot and Jewish acts. Fourth, like Moses, we need to be willing to share our leadership mantles - involving others and bringing them close. Fifth, as Moses prayed we need to pray for a lev da-at, a knowing heart, knowledge that is balanced with compassion and empathy. Finally, we need leaders who dig deeply, and find in themselves, a spiritual center - who renew in their lives the spirituality at the very core of our Jewishness. These are the characteristics of our new Jewish leadership through whose hands and hearts we shall move forward to capture the future.

TRANSFORMING THE REFORM JEW

Address by Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman



Reprinted from

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

Yearbook  
Volume XCVII  
Tarpon Springs, Florida  
1987



## ADDRESS

SHELDON ZIMMERMAN

Before we begin to talk about transforming the Reform Jew, we need to know just who is today's Reform Jew.

Almost more than any other comparable group we Jews have bought into modernity. Part of the process of modernization in which Reform Judaism participated both in Germany and in the United States was the process initiated by Moses Mendelsohn to take the Jew at home in a medieval community in which Torah and Jewishness (for me Torah is the word for Judaism, and I will use the two words interchangeably) were the center of life — to take these Jews and bring them into the modern world. In other words, to take Jews and make them modern.

We have succeeded far beyond any legitimate expectations. Our people are at home with modernity. We Reform Jews today, for the most part,

- are highly educated in secular areas
- are affluent
- are at home in both the professional and business worlds — in all areas of vocational possibilities
- our family life is not different from the family life of other contemporary Western people
- our divorce rate is approximating that of the general population (or is already there)
- our children are highly programmed, from athletics to computers to camp and, yes, even to Hebrew School (although Jewish matters get a smaller and smaller share)
- although many are ethical, few see any connection between ethics and their Jewishness. We feel that we gain our ethical insights from the world around us.
- education is important to us, but we do not place the importance of Jewish education on the same level as secular education.
- we are very privatized. Our religion is our own affair. No one can tell us what to do. We reject the power of the community over our lives, whom we love, marry; how we raise our children, if we have any at all.
- we dress the same way, eat the same way, enjoy the same music, read the same books, go to the same vacation spots as everyone else. We have become — we are — thoroughly modern!

To respond to this new world, a new question arises — a question which by its very nature is different — a question which by its very nature reflects a new reality. As rabbis we know that the question is often more important than the answer, for it sets the stage and structure for whatever answers we attempt. The question also reveals something of the new world out of which it arises.

First, however, what was the old question? The old question was: How can I change Judaism — if you will, reform it — so that the Jew, newly entered into the modern world, would not reject it? Of course, it was concerned with creating the new Jew. But one created the new Jew through the process of changing Judaism or Torah, by creating Torah that was consonant with modern sensitivities, intellectual currents, and the modern aesthetic we could save Torah for the Jew. The Jew was changing. Either Torah changed or the Jewish people would lose the Jew. So we reformed Judaism, and in the process created a form of Torah which not only helped the Jew become modern but which helped Jews stay Jewish, loyal to God and the Jewish community. In our eagerness to respond to new challenges let us not ignore the great contributions of early Reform.

Then our people became thoroughly modern. Their sense of self, community, and God derived not from the ancient spring of faith, *ma-ayan hadorot*, but rather from the raging torrents of modernity.

Part one of our equation: We took Jews and made them modern.

For two centuries we in the West thought that modernity and its servants, reason, science and the idea of progress, would be sufficient for a contemporary faith — a faith in which "altglauben" (to stand Samson Raphael Hirsch's term on its head) would be done away with; a faith espoused in the dreams of the Conservative movement, for example, that they would be the new traditionalism as Orthodoxy withered away on the vine.

But surprise of surprises! The fires of "altglauben" remain. Orthodoxy has not disappeared, and more significantly for us, people still seek meaning, endowing the meaning they seek with religious symbols. A yearning is springing forth in the soul of the modern human for religion, or perhaps more accurately, for the realm of the religious quest. Not that we reject science and technology, but we have come to understand their limitations. As essential as reason is, it cannot of itself project us into the realm of the transcendent and the meaning of person-ness. And progress — even General Electric has dropped it as its central advertising logo.

Martin Marty, the noted Christian theologian, puts it thus as he reflects on the surprising ability of religion to survive:

Why are people religious? Because they cannot tolerate a completely random and plotless existence. Because someone they trust beckons them to believe. Because they hear the call of God.

Or it may be that they need suprahuman instruments to cope with human tragedy ... And, just as likely people respond to the transcendent as they celebrate joys undeserved: births and marriages, boons and blessings. Still others are religious as they find belonging and purpose by congregating in sanctuaries.

Individuals keep on being religious ... citizens do not have to sneak around during their spiritual searches. To use Peter Berger's phrase, they do not have to "smuggle in their Gods in plain brown wrappers" ... The questions faith signals and the tentative answers it implies are too cogent to go unheeded. So say those returnees to the sanctuaries, those keepers of bedside vigils, those peoples of consciences formed by belief.

This brings us to the second part of our equation. After taking the Jews and making them modern — now what?



Part two then — the question we are asking; the question which by its very nature reflects a new reality: How can we take these moderns who truly believe that what they are doing is as Jewish as they need to be, and whose Jewishness is often minimal, superficial and irrelevant — how can we take them and their initial return to religious search, including those who have a yearning in their hearts, and enable them to grow Jewishly in that search, enable them to encounter Torah in its broadest sense, and be transformed in the encounter?

Perhaps crassly, and certainly oversimplified: How do we take moderns who feel some sense of needing more and make them Jewish? Transforming and reforming Jews instead of Judaism. If you will — giving Torah its say. For we belong to a people who used to change the times, not merely who changed in response to the times.

The rabbis often pointed to Psalm 119, verse 126: "*Heferu toratecha, et la-asot l-Adonai*, They have broken your Torah, it is a time for acting for God."

In early Reform, they relied on a rabbinic understanding of the verse that permitted temporary abrogations of Torah law to maintain the general integrity of the Torah. *Et la-asot l-Adonai*, it is a time for acting for God. Because of the challenges of modernity, Torah needed to be changed. Time dictated the need to transform Torah radically.

Therefore, *heferu toratecha*, in order to save Torah, they have broken Your Torah.

Today, we start with *heferu toratecha*, Torah has become nearly obliterated in the lives of our people.

Therefore, *et la-asot l-Adonai* — we respond by transforming the Jew — that becomes the religious imperative for us.

*La-asot l-Adonai*, to be holy for God — to do God's work is to transform the Jew and renew the sense and imperatives of Torah.

Our starting point then is that the Reform Jew of the end of the 20th century needs to be transformed.

*Transform* means that we no longer accept what is as the final statement of what ought to be.

*Transform* means we reject the current intellectual and emotional world as the primary criterion of what we need become.

*Transform* means to question and challenge the times in which we live and the products of those times, accepting and rejecting at the same time.

*Transform* means to accept Torah (in the broadest sense, in all its aspects) as the starting point of the encounter, to accept *teshuva* as the primary category for Jews in our time.

What our people need as community and as persons — what we need as rabbis, as community, and as persons — will not be determined only by demographic studies of what our people claim they need and want to be, but by the vision, world-view, insights, challenges and imperatives of our tradition. To believe in the need for transformation is to believe that we have to assist our people in learning what they need. This is not patronizing — as if we know all the answers. Rather, we have come to understand that that which is, is not enough, that it somehow fails the test for ongoing commitments, loyalties and faith — and we need to enable our people and ourselves to

discover their needs in personal and communal encounters with God, our texts, and our communal institutions. These needs, I believe, they will discover within themselves, without our telling them. Out of this encounter can come a setting of standards — a vision for what can be — for self-transformation and communal transformation. Growing and becoming, a kind of Jewish stretching, rather than an easy acceptance of what is, will become renewed operative categories of Jewishness. We shall move toward *Kedusha*, the realm of the sacred. As you can hear, I believe in the power of Torah to move and touch our people. I believe in the transforming capacity of faith, *mitzva* and *teshuva*. I have seen it work — from children to seniors, to recovering alcoholics and substance abusers.

How will we then be Reform? Shall we not become an aspect of neo-traditionalism? We shall remain loyal to Reform:

1. by how we face and encounter the tradition, and
2. by beginning with the person, in each individual's autonomy, by helping them grow from within. We know that we cannot transform by external edict, by a Halacha imposed from without. The will must come from within.

Earlier this year an article on the New Orthodox appeared in *New York Magazine*. What emerged was a picture of men and women still doing what they want. Even they do not accept external edict without internal warrant and acceptance. As Reform Jews, we shall insist always on an encounter between the autonomous individual and God, Torah, and community.

It is not that we have to make Judaism good for Jews. Rather we start from the premise that Judaism in its fullness is good for Jews and can transform, enrich, and uplift their lives.

Like the old song of the *chalutzim*: "*Anu banu artsa livnot ulehibanot bah*, we have come to the land to build and be rebuilt in it."

For us, we have come back to an authentic encounter with Torah to build and be rebuilt, transformed and renewed by it, to find *Kedusha* — to renew the voyage set in place millennia ago — *kedoshim tiyu*. *Teshuva* emerges again as the central need of our times.

We begin the return and almost magically we feel embraced and drawn even closer. *Teshuva* is for us, as it is classically, a combination of Hosea's call "*Shuva Yisrael*," we begin with our return, and then the further call "*Hashivenu Adonai eleicha venashuva*" (Lamentations 5:21) — "Bring us back, O God, as we return; meet us on the way so that our return can be complete." Not magic, but true! We have all seen it happen — even for ourselves. We are embraced and drawn closer.

Torah is in a conceptual sense a verb — to be Jewish is a constant becoming. We move toward *Kedusha*. Often like Jacob we find *Kedusha* where we have been standing or sleeping all along: "*Achen yesh Adonai bamakom hazeh, ve-anochi lo yada-ti*, Surely God is in this place, I did not know it."

How then do we move to this old yet new understanding? Let us begin with ourselves — rabbis — *kelei kodesh* — vessels and instruments of the process of consecration. We rabbis cannot be "transformers" — the toy which can be twisted into a myriad of shapes and possibilities without breaking or being pulled apart. We cannot create, compel, or force the change — or maneuver



it all with some political or sly feat of magic. Our people believe we can, and worse, we too believe it at times. But we cannot be "transformers."

We are confronted with a test of our faith in our people. Do we believe that the tradition is powerful enough, meaningful enough, challenging enough that it can touch our people without our constant running commentary? Do we believe in the capacity of our individual congregants to learn and choose directly without always doing it through us?

After all, Torah is *morasha kehilat Yaakov* — the possession of all the Jewish people — not only *morasha kehilat rabbanim*, a rabbinical heritage alone. You and I need faith that Judaism can be encountered without our novel interpretation at every step. Let's admit it. We need ego-strength and inner security for the process to work. We need to believe that our congregants will not get rid of us when they study Torah directly or encounter tradition on their own. In fact, they will need us even more. They will need us as *morei derech*, those who point and show the way, as *madrichim*, those who counsel the way — to help move them to greater and deeper possibilities. *Avodat harabbanut*, the work of the rabbinate, is *lefanot derech*, to make a way. "*Panu derech bamidbar*, make a way in the wilderness of modern life."

We enlarge their vocabulary of possibilities for growth and encounter on all levels, study, mitzva, and the doing. We empower them — we get out of the way and let them have the Torah. It's what God did with the Ten Commandments. The first time, God even hewed the tablets as well as writing the divine utterances upon them. God acts; we passively receive. This totally God-centered revelation could not work. The second time God instructs Moses to hew the tablets: "*Pesol lecha shenei luchot avanim karishonim*." At first God suggests that these also will be divinely inscribed. But God then commands Moses to write down the utterances: "*Ketov lecha et hadevarim ha-eleh*." We can read the later verse, "*vayichtov al haluchot*," either way, either as God or as Moses, but it makes sense to see Moses as the writer. In any case, in this second attempt, which works, Moses is more intimately involved. Revelation which takes hold involves both God and humankind on an active level.

*Lehavdil* — the analogy is not complete but it points to an understanding. We as rabbis have played God too much with the tradition and its transmission. The price has been high. Our people have become passive participants in the process. We told them what the Torah mandated. Then we complained about their lack of involvement. For the process to work they have to be part of the process. Let us help them find out what the Torah mandates. The Torah is theirs too, not just ours.

The model of *tsimtsum*, contraction, advocated by our teacher Eugene Borowitz, is a more workable model than past models. The world could only come into being when God made room for it. The new Jew can come into being only when we make room.

Where was Moses when the commandments were spoken? Was he at the mountain top or below? Exodus 19:25 clearly indicates that Moses went down to the people. Only then did God speak the words: "*Vayered Mosheh el ha-am vayomer aleihem. Vayedaber Elohim et kol hadevarim ha-eleh*

*lemor*... Moses descended to the people and spoke to them. Then God spoke all these words..." Moses was with the people. We need to be with them too. In addition, they should be allowed to do Torah without us, study Torah on their own, lead Shabbat workshops on their own.

We become like the *kohen* of old, described in the book of *Vayikra*. The *kohen* was required to leave the safety of the sanctuary. He was required to place his own personal level of *Kedusha* at risk and go and serve the *mitsora*, the one afflicted with the ancient skin diseases and contagion. It was the *kohen* who diagnosed the disease, who prescribed the remedy. He did not heal them — they had to heal from within themselves. It was he who said "*tahor*" when they were ready, who facilitated the return, the *teshuvah* of the *mitsora* into the community and its destiny.

We need to leave the safety and security of our studies to be with the people, putting the old pulpit-elevated status at risk to be with them. We are to help them overcome the growing alienation from the unfulfilled spirituality of modernity, the alienation they feel from us and the community, helping them when they are ready to find the way for themselves, saying "*tahor*" and seeing to it that our institutions, spiritual forms, and communities are open and receptive to them.

"*Hashivenu eleicha venashuva*," help us on our way so we can come home again. Healing is essential. Like the *kohen* of old we can help it happen. So we, all of us, can come home again.

*Mamlechet kohanim vegoy kadosh* — to be a kingdom of priests and a holy people. What are the possibilities and realities of our search for *Kedusha*? What kinds of *Kedusha* are we talking about?

*Kedushat haShem* — God's Holiness — that there is a realm — transcendent yet close — a paradigm for human endeavor — source of our striving — that which calls us beyond where we are now to the realm we can only image in dreams of palaces and gates, a fiery mountain, an ancient tent. Can we connect our people's yearning and striving for God's personal touch in their lives with institutions which are of necessity highly structured and at times unfortunately impersonal?

*Kedushat hachayim* — that life itself is sacred — that we are blessed each day with opportunities to touch and be touched, to form and be formed, to find and be found. That to be a Jew is to be high on life and its opportunities for service. That to be a Jew is to celebrate time's passage annually and in our journey through life. *Kedushat hamo-adim vehazemanim* — the sanctifying of times.

*Kedushat hazeman* — that time is not merely limiting, but expanding, that in time there are unfolding possibilities for meaning, that killing time is a sin and sanctifying time is a blessing, that, as Bertrand Russell (certainly no theist) asserted, no one can fill your particular time and space — only you, for you are an absolute particular — and if you do not fill it fully, it is unfilled and empty forever, a jarring emptiness in the vastness of the universe.

*Kedushat ha-adam* — that persons and person-ness are sacred — that *Kedusha* cannot be neutral to persons — that *Kedusha* is both person- and God-centered — that you too are a complete world which I must nurture and



for which I must care — that internal piety and spiritual piety without love of one's neighbors are not genuine piety — that piety without ethics is contrary to Torah. We assert that part of *kedushat ha-adam*, the sanctity of person, is *kiddushin*, the sanctity of human relationships, *kedushat hamishpacha vehabayit*, the centrality and holiness of family and home. Without the home, Torah is lost — without loving, nurturing relationships, living becomes a burden, a battle against loneliness.

*Kedushat ha-arets voha-olam* — that the world is a workshop for the sacred — waiting to be pulled yet higher through human creative effort — yet to be guarded, preserved and handled with care — for *tov* — the world is good. The land of Israel has a special place in this ordering of sanctity and need measure its efforts by the measure of a higher standard — “if not higher.”

*Kedushat haShabbat* — that Sabbath observance is a transforming and renewing experience, giving us a sense of our own worth as God's children — just as we are and who we are, separate from the roles we play professionally or familiarly, separate from how much we make. We are God's children — as we stop what we are doing and are renewed.

*Kedushat hakehila voha-am* — that we know that we do not move to the sacred alone always — there are moments when, like Jacob, we dream alone at night of a meeting between heaven and earth — and there are moments when we stand together at Sinai — individuals yet essentially connected to each other — that together we are more than just an aggregate of individuals — we become Israel. That to denigrate this, our people and our community, by unethical behavior is a sin — *chilul* — the antithesis of *Kedusha* — for we are voyagers toward *Kedusha*.

*Kedushat haTorah* — that reason and revelation are forever linked — that the use of the mind is sacred. Study is worship, and in the use of the mind we discover the ongoing voice of God — the divine address to which we respond.

We are voyagers on a journey. Our task is to be *ma-alim biKedusha* — those who raise that which is imperfectly sacred to higher realms of sanctity.

Can we translate these concerns for *Kedusha* to attainable levels through the tangible realities of liturgy, the synagogue, the home, and the community?

There is a way. This is not the only way, but it is a way. This way is translated into a myriad of possibilities around the synagogue world today — each one of you is doing it and can continue to do it. This way then — if Torah, liturgy, *mitzva*, the synagogue, home and community can make a difference in our people's lives — then the process of *Kedusha*, not the finished product, but *Kedusha* — becoming holy and making holy can be actualized in our world.

If our synagogues become centers of caring and learning, humanizing institutions, where people are not numbers but feel touched and blessed by human closeness — where healing can take place, then we are on the way to *Kedusha*.

If our synagogues are places where people do not feel powerless and insignificant — where we teach them of *Kedusha* by letting them know and

experience that they and their lives count, make a difference; places where God-experiences and encounters are goals worked for in the school, in the auxiliaries, and at every level of synagogue life — then we are on the way to *Kedusha*.

Our synagogues can become places where Torah is not only something on view in the ark but is a hands-on experience every day, and where *gemilut chasadim*, acts of loving concern, are part of the obligations of membership; places that work together with our people to create homes that are centers for Jewish living and loving; places that work together to build a creative and mutually supportive partnership between home and synagogue.

The very existence of the synagogue is to teach people that they are unique — that their lives are significant. The test of a religious institution is how we treasure each person, each and every person, no matter how smart they are, no matter how much money they have. We need to teach them to find significance in their lives and in their relationships. Can we say honestly that the elderly, sick, or homebound are not relegated to the back pages, ignored or made to feel useless, because they cannot get to Temple on Friday night or during the week for a luncheon? The very life-meaning of the synagogue is to say, “Your life counts. You are important to us and to God whom we serve in this institution.” It is to teach that the world is open and not indifferent. It is to say, “When you are not here, we miss you. When you are here, we care for you.”

Our liturgy can help us understand the wonder of the world, ourselves, and our place in it — affirming our lives and our special moments, restating our ideals and hopes and giving them spiritual shape — affording us the means by which to express thanks for the gifts undeservedly ours and for the greatest gift, life itself. Our lives become an act of gratitude, a continuous *Shehecheyanu* — helping us move closer to God and faith.

We can build communities that help our people trust enough that they can overcome the walls of privatism and individualism that the times have erected.

Our synagogues, communities, and homes can become the refuge so many are seeking. There is a new magnificent obsession — a house in the country. So *The New York Times* magazine highlighted two weeks ago. A New Jersey Jewish lawyer felt he was on a merry-go-round. Stanley Golkin said, “My daughters were growing up. I started noticing my gray hair, I started worrying about my mortality. You ask yourself, ‘What’s it all for?’ So instead of having a mid-life crisis, I bought a house in the country.” The obsession of having a second home, a weekend retreat, is upon us. The leitmotif is ESCAPE. People are seeking escape from the city. People perceive their country weekends as a form of “therapy enabling them to cope with urban living.” Says Norman Jaffe, an architect, “The country craze is spawned by our inability to alter our state of consciousness in the place we are.” Professor Wachtel of City University says, “for the people from the most privileged sector, the house is a retreat from the way of life they’ve created for themselves. The country house is where they can live as they should be living all week — that is, as human beings.”



Our people have become space-bound. Torah offers us palaces in time and our people are trying to find those palaces in space. Yet by trying to find those palaces in space, they are killing (by intensity, changing the environment) the thing they love.

Our synagogues, communities and homes can help our people find refuges in them — build palaces in time. Through new forms of Shabbat and festival observances, through new celebrations of life-moments, through a *life-enhancing* partnership we can become again the architects of *Kedusha* for our people. Through the enhancing of every moment of every day, we can help our people change right where they are — helping them live all week, as they should, as human beings.

All of these we are taught by our people's yet incomplete voyage. Being a Jew and a part of the Jewish community makes a difference in the algebra and calculus of the universe.

To be leaders in this community-in-process requires personal integrity and a set of standards and values. The world of the ethical seems to be crumbling around us. Too many of our people are the featured subjects of the daily record of the disintegration of our moral fabric. Ethics must be the prerequisite of the life of the Jew. How much more so should we demand of those who are honored by us. "*Mechabedai achabed*," only those who honor Me shall I honor. If we want our people to overcome their sense of remoteness from our community, let's help them see our ideals in the character and actions of those whom we choose to honor. Let us remind all those on the fast-track to self-destruction — the Yuppie Interstate — that another way does exist — *Torah, avoda, gemilut chasadim*. To these "street" people, "walled or otherwise," we say, there is another way.

But before we call others to this accounting — should we not expect the same standards for ourselves, our synagogues, and religious community? *Peahs* do not mean pious, nor do neo-*peahs* guarantee morality. How do our own personal lives, professional lives, the College and Union, and this, our own cherished Conference, measure up to Amos' plumb line of old? Yet we hear the words *tikkun olam* again and again. Our goal is not only *letaken olam*, but, as the phrase continues, "*letaken olam bemalchut Shaddai*," ethics as the prerequisite on the road to holiness.

As this paper nears *sof sof*, its end, I do affirm that belief too transforms. It helps me sense who I am, why I am here, how best I can serve. We are all *mevakeshei derech*, searching for God's hints and signals in every place and at every time. The joy, the agony, the celebration and the doubts — all are affirming of the One whose Name we long ago forgot how to pronounce.

God too transforms us. In all my work with Jewish alcoholics and substance abusers I have watched them struggle to let go and let God. They have taught us that we cannot always program it the right way. We cannot control it all. Often religious worship fails to lift us — often our study ends in agonizing confusion and a myriad of interpretations — our attempts at helping others occasionally backfire in mutual resentment and antagonism. At times we feel the world will never change. We and our congregations fall short again and again. We can't always be in control and do it.

Sometimes we need to let go and let God. And at that moment we feel embraced, held and uplifted. If you doubt this, then ask your people of their faith. Talk to those who can teach us of God, God's presence and love, of those moments when they encountered the divine in their lives. We need create institutions that are open to the possibility of this encounter — an encounter which can take place in a moment of prayer, or study, or doing *mitzvot* or even moving chairs — places in time or space where God has reached out but we did not know or understand.

The world awaits. Our people await. Torah teaches that we are created in God's image, *betselem Elohim*. Many interpretations have been given of this concept — all helpful and important. Permit me to suggest another. What is the image of God in that first chapter in *Beresheet*? God is a *Borei*, a *Yotser* — a Creator. To be created in God's image is to be like God, a creator. Perhaps now we can understand the verse, "*Ki vo shavat mikol melachit asher bara Elohim la-asot*," God rested on it [Shabbat] from all the work which God had created *la-asot*, to be done, for doing. By whom? By us. God created a world, a place where we can do God's work, *melachit*.

*Et la-asot l-Adonai* — back to the verse in Psalms — it is time for God's work — *la-asot* — to be done by us. We are God's workers on the journey toward the end of time itself — *yom shekulo Shabbat, yom shekulo Kadosh* — a day which is totally Shabbat, totally sacred. This Jewish journey is the way of *Kedusha* — becoming holy and making holy — *lehitkadesh ulekadesh*.

We are the sanctifiers-in-process, where we and our lives can make the ultimate difference in the journey to the fulfillment of the promise.

"*Bayom hahu yihyeh Adonai echad ushemo echad*." Finally in that day God shall be One and God's Name one — one and united forever.

## Why is it Important to be Jewish ... What is the "Payoff?"

### NEFTYite responses:

\*Being Jewish is important to me because it gives me an identity, with tremendous support from other Jews, temple, NEFTY... and a rich background and distinct culture.

\*Being Jewish allows me to find myself through worship and other Jewish friends.

\*A religion of togetherness and questioning. Freedom to discuss issues, not just abide by rules.

\*It is part of who I am and part of my beliefs.

\*Being Jewish provides me with a set of beliefs that have been around for thousands of years.

\*Being Jewish is important because it is what I believe in and I am able to share these beliefs with others through the religion.

\*Judaism is my belief. My feelings are Jewish and this is Judaism to me.

\*It makes me part of something very special. I am one of very few who gets to carry on this special tradition.

\*It's important for me to be Jewish because all the different holidays bring my family together. Also NEFTY is a big part of my life and if I wasn't Jewish I couldn't be part of NEFTY.

\*To be part of a 5000 year old history - when every other civilization who have conquered us has disappeared - we still survive.

\*I think it's important to be Jewish because with all the inter-marriage and converting going on, we need to set an example for everybody.

\*Being Jewish is important because it forms a bond with people around the world, and we're a part of NEFTY.

\*Being Jewish is just cool.

\*I am Jewish because my parents brought me up Jewish. Now that it is my choice, my heritage is very important to me and I will continue to uphold my Jewish background.

(continued)



(NEFTYites cont.)

\*1. My parents are very active in their Judaism and they have raised me to be Jewish too. 2. I chose, after my confirmation, to observe the laws and customs of Judaism.

\*I am Jewish because I was born from a Jewish mother. It is important to me because I believe deeply in it's laws.

\*You have a sense of belonging to a certain community.

\*I am a Jew because it's a part of my tradition, my ancient heritage, my way of life, my heart and my soul.

\*It continues the heritage for generations to come.

\*It makes me feel special. I feel a part of a group of people who care about each other who can relate through their religion.

\*To me being Jewish means part of a community that is very special to me, full of traditions, friends, and family. Being in NEFTY has taught me a great deal of what being Jewish is and I think it's the greatest religion.

\*I have been exposed to many cultures; I feel most comfortable with it.

\*It is a way of life that instill certain values of work, family and religion and pre-marital sex.

\*I believe it is important to have something to believe in and I like helping other people and the world. That's what Judaism means to me and why I'm Jewish. I don't think there has to be any major payback but the satisfaction of helping others is payback enough for me.

\*Judaism is important to me because it gives me an identity. Many of my non-Jewish friends don't have this feeling of belonging to a religious community. Being Jewish has also made me more sensitive I think because of my heritage.

\*The Jewish community is more united because we are a minority.

\*Why be Jewish - Being Jewish is wonderful. Even though we may be a minority. It allows for great opportunities. You are forgiven for most everything. It's something to be very proud of.

\*Why be Jewish? I feel religion gives me something to believe in and a sense of family tradition and values.

(continued)

\*I like being Jewish because the temple is a close knit family and the younger children look up to me.

\*Why be Jewish? My mother and father are Jewish. My grandparents were Jewish. My great grandparents and great great grandparents were Jewish. It's in my history, it's in my culture, it's my blood, my heart and my soul. It's more though than just history and tradition; the beliefs of Judaism are my beliefs. Not only that but the feeling I get from Judaism are mine - they feel right and good.

\*I don't think that any other religion spawns as strong of a bond between it's people as Judaism does. Only in Judaism can you form and instant friendship with a stranger say, in a foreign, non-Jewish, country, when you each find out the other is Jewish. "Wherever you go, there's always someone Jewish."

\*Because you have to keep the tradition going. And it's a unique religion.

\*I think it is important to be Jewish to carry on in my beliefs.

\*Judaism brings people together, in times of happiness and sorrow! Shows unity!

\*I live in a Jewish state; I feel special and closer when I see other Jews (When I'm in America). I like being different from three people (when I'm in America).

\*To keep it going from generation to generation.

\*I am proud to be Jewish because I not only carry on the religion to the next generation but I also like being different.

\*Being Jewish is important to me because I don't want Judaism to deteriorate from the world.

\*I like being Jewish because I feel I have choices to make and freedom to decided what I believe in, with in this religion. I like that freedom, so I like being Jewish.

\*Being Jewish is important to me because I love the religion and it a big part of my life. Being Jewish, for me, goes hand in hand with my family and our traditions.

\*I've always been Jewish - Tradition is important.

(continued)



(NEFTYites cont.)

\*Being Jewish gives me the opportunity to read Hebrew and visit the Jewish homeland Israel. It also allows me to attend NEFTY and a Jewish camp where I meet life long friends with common values.

\*Carry on great tradition from my grandpa. It will always be a part of me.

\*Religious get-togethers.

\*I feel that being Jewish is an honor bestowed upon a select, chosen few.

\*Being Jewish is a responsibility and an honor to teach other human beings to responsible to their selves, their peers, their communities and their religion. It is erasing ignorance and bringing understanding.

\*I am proud to be Jewish so I can carry out the Jewish traditions!

\*I get a good feeling of participation in a group.

\*Carry on traditions, heritage, being part of an ancient covenant.

\*I find Judaism to help me bring forth what I really am.

\*I'm a Jew because it makes you special. It also gives you a great way to meet others who are like you.

\*One gains community and spirit from being Jewish...a history, music, food, and good values.

\*Being Jewish gives me sense of security with a religion.

\*I think being Jewish is a very important thing in my life. Without NEFTY, I don't know where I will stand in my social actions.

\*Judaism is an ancient an proud religion. Jews are ?shoos? people who have survived oppression time after time and we continue that tradition.

\*The feelings of community and uniqueness I get during services and all the time I'm with other Jews.

\*To repair the world.

(continued)

(NEFTYites cont.)

\*Being Jewish allows me to be part of a group, and answers questions for me. It is also important to be an active Jew, to keep Judaism alive! And, to never forget!

\*Being able to feel a part of not only a religion, but a culture and history that lasted 2000 years.

\*Judaism is important because it contains every aspect of life that is important to me. It contains music, morals, literature, love, pain, and many other aspects which bring life into focus.

\*Being actively Jewish continues my heritage, the whole reason why my family and I came over from Russia. It gives me something big to believe in, and a community of people who generally share my values.

\*Being Jewish gives meaning and direction to my life. It is also a common bond which give basis for special relationships.

It's a part of my life. It's a way for me to have answers to the unknown and laws to live by and grow towards.

\*My Judaism is important to me because it teaches me my traditions and it is part of my life.

\*My Judaism is important because its my past, present, and future.

\*I feel that NEFTY has shown me that I can really feel Jewish in the non-secular and religious aspect as well, my Judaism is based on Torah and other things. Also, I am circumcised.

\*Judaism gives me something to identify us. Besides being American and a student; being with other Jews and doing NEFTY makes me feel more complete and overall happier.

\*Helping myself find an identity, learning, and understanding religion is the basis for the world.

\*Because I believe it's important to pass my religion down to my children. I believe in one God and I enjoy being Jewish.

\*I like being Jewish because it is a religion that encourages us to be active in the world and to create a better environment. It is also a sound, close religion that has existed for thousands of years.

\*Being Jewish gives me a chance and way to express how I feel.

(continued)



(NEFTYites cont.)

\*Besides the fact that our history is such a wonderful one which needs to be kept alive, Judaism gives me the feeling of individuality, the values and morals are extraordinary and a reform Jew I have the opportunity to question my religion.

\*It is important to me because it gives me a something that is special and unique.

\*Being Jewish is important because it makes me feel like a special part of a group when we can all learn and talk together.

\*I love being Jewish because it gives me a sense of belonging. I feel a sense of completeness when I'm with other Jews and praying, and with NEFTY. Judaism has always been one of my pillars of support, something I can always fall back on.

\*Being Jewish is important to me, because it gives me a sense of community and spiritual understanding. I know that where ever I go, there will be other Jewish people like me sharing the same ideals and dreams.

\*Being Jewish gives meaning and direction to my life.

\*It gives me a sense of spirituality and the world around me.

\*It's cool because I have fun and it's cool because I've been to Israel and I can talk about it. It's groovy I'm also in NEFTY. Thank you very much.

(continued)

Advisors responses:

\*Being Jewish is very important to me for several reasons. First of all I have a very strong desire to be a culturally aware (as a Jew/American, etc.) as possible. I am also am a firm believer in feeling connected to as many communities as possible. As a member of the Jewish community I am exposed to manu fascinating aspects of North American Jewish culture as well as international Jewish communities. This enables me to interact with people with similar needs and interests.

\*1. Ethics/values of life: feeding the hungry, housing the homeless. 2. Feeling good, being true to my heritage through practice and traditions. 3. Being proud of my history, present and future . . . particularly as regards to Israel.

\*Jews have an enjoyable and comprehensible approach to appreciating and living that which is eternal and universal.

\*It provides a system for a code of life. Provides identity, and a sense of belonging to a group that has an evolved ethical way of life. Allows comfort and familiarity through tradition and heritage.

\*Feeling of community, belonging, coming home.

\*To explore my personal decisions and feelings.

\*It is my way of life. A value system and moral code ot live by.

\*Judaism is an integral part of my life which helps me to establish my views and perceptions of my environment.

\*Being Jewish is important to me because it's a background - a tradition to carry on from generation to generation through my children and their children. If a belief in one God - and in religion.

\*The Jewish religion must be dept alive from generation to generation.

\*Being Jewish is important to me because it defines who I am.

\* ?

\*Being Jewish is important because it gives me some identity with a struggling past and religion. It gives me a great feeling for tradition.

\*To protect what my ancestors fought for.

(continued)



(Advisors cont.)

\*Being Jewish provides me with my identity - It gives me a set of morals and values by which to live - teaches me what is important and also provides me with a sense of community, family and tradition.

\*It helps give meaning in my life and provides a sense of identity, as an individual and with a group.

\*It has become important to me over the years. NEFTY, Israel, and other experiences have all contributed to my sense of my Judaism.

\*Being Jewish to me is important because it is my path in life. I like the traditions, and I like passing them on to the next generations.

\*The reason: to not let the Jewish religion die and create another Holocaust. Payoff: to teach others the right from word of mouth.

\*Being Jewish is important to me because: 1. It helps me find my "place" in life, and this world and universe. 2. It gives me an identity. 3. It helps me belong. 4. It makes sense. I agree with most basic tenants. 5. You can believe in so many different principles and still be "Jewish."

\*I am Jewish because my parents were. I am Jewish because I gain a great deal of satisfaction being Jewish. I stay Jewish for the benefits of the personal satisfaction of accomplishing the responsibility.

\*Being Jewish means community, family, tradition, a sense of belonging.

\*Judaism is important to me because of the values and traditions it espouses.

\*Being Jewish means that I can worship God in any way I want in order to fulfill my religious needs. It makes it more important for me to be a good person and do wonderful things for other people.

\*I like reform Judaism because it allows me to question and learn while providing a strong moral structure.

\*Being Jewish is not only a way of life but it is me. Because I grew up in a Jewish home - because I found my place in a NEFTY group - my Jewish identity is strong. I try to pass this to my TYG so that this experience will be available to my children.

(continued)

Unidentified responses:

\*Because of my ancestors: Parents, grandparents... For me being Jewish: Living in Israel.

\*If not even for the religious aspect, Judaism builds strong values in its followers that will give you a positive outlook on your life and help you make the proper decisions you need when you reach a problem in your life.

\* ?

\*I am a Jew because I believe I am one and it's important to me because my life revolves around it.

\*I am Jewish because my parents are. It means I go to Temple.

\*I'm Jewish because I was brought up that way and I believe in most of the ideas and beliefs of Judaism. It's important because it helps me get closer to God and other Jews, and help my community.

\*To conserve our identity.

\*Being Jewish is to believe in something different. If your relatives or ancestors are Jewish, you will always be a Jew. Being Jewish is what your taught to believe in.

\*It's good to be Jewish because you get to eat.

\*It's silly.

\*I am Jewish originally because my parents are, but now because it is the basis of my beliefs, and my life.

\*I like being a Jew because: 1. Where ever you go, there's always someone Jewish. 2. "Jew" rhymes with "Pooh" and he's the coolest stuffed animal. 3. Just for the satisfaction, just for the Ahhhh! 4. Bio-degradable. 5. I am spiritually uplifted and emotionally controlled by that unique syndrome attached to the inner psyche known as Judaism.

\*I like the prayers that they're in Hebrew so we pray in unison and then we say our private prayers in our head and that we have so many special rituals, like lighting candles. I am proud of my race for being generally articulate, open-minded (somewhat) and educated.

\*It makes me special and lets me follow my heart. It makes me part of something bigger - something with a purpose. It's timeless.

(continued)



(Unidentified cont.)

\*Judaism provides a supportive community which makes everyone feel like they belong.

\*Carrying on tradition, way of connecting with God.

\*My father is Jewish and decided to become more involved because... I like the community involvement and the sense of belonging.

\*I am Jewish because Judaism represents most of my beliefs.

\*Food.

\*Self-respect.

\*Identity.

\*It is a religion that sets us apart from everybody else.

\*It is important to me because I get to experience of my life through being Jewish. If I wasn't I'd be missing out on a lot. (an aside from someone... "I agree").

\*Judaism gives most a sense of belonging. It is a link that gets all Jews together, having this our background. It keeps the world more diverse, more interesting (and more dangerous).

\*It's something important to me and it is my heritage.

\*Because it's special, and not too many people have as much privileges as we do. It is unusual and it makes sense.

\*It shows your religion and allows you to be different than everyone else.

\*It is important for me to be a Jew because being Jewish provides me an opportunity to share important, special feelings about myself, my family, society and God with others having a similar background.

\*Understanding ancestry, meet with others who share beliefs, guide to us through difficulties in life.

\*Judaism is important to me because it gives me a portion of my identity. God is a major part of my life and being Jewish outlines God to me. I like knowing that there is a bigger group to which I belong.

\*Being Jewish is important to me because it teaches me the laws to live by - (10 commandments) and also helped me to be knowledgeable about me people from years past and how I should be in the present.

COUNCIL OF JEWISH FEDERATIONS

Thursday, November 12, 1992

Melvin Merians

GOOD AFTERNOON. THIS IS A GOOD AFTERNOON, BECAUSE IT IS OUR HOPE THAT IT MARKS A NEW BEGINNING IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FEDERATIONS AND THE SYNAGOGUE COMMUNITY, ALTHOUGH I SPEAK FOR THE PARENT BODY OF REFORM JUDAISM, THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS.

OUR RELATIONSHIP IN MANY COMMUNITIES HAS BEEN DISTANT BUT IN THE MOST PART CORDIAL. RABBI'S AND CONGREGANTS OF OUR 865 AFFILIATED REFORM CONGREGATIONS ARE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS, LEADERS AND DONORS IN THE FEDERATIONS. WITH SOME OF THE LOCAL FEDERATIONS THERE HAS BEEN A PATTERN OF SOME FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND MUTUAL COOPERATION BETWEEN OUR REFORM SYNAGOGUES AND FEDERATIONS. BUT THOSE MUTUAL BENEFICIAL ENCOUNTERS TEND TO BE THE EXCEPTION RATHER THAN THE RULE.

THE UAHF AND THE REFORM MOVEMENT LOOK FORWARD TO A NEW ERA THAT IS LONG OVERDUE OF WORKING IN CLOSE COOPERATION FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE WITH THE COUNCIL OF JEWISH FEDERATIONS AND THE LOCAL FEDERATIONS.



THE NORTH AMERICAN JEWISH CRISIS OF ASSIMILATION, NON-AFFILIATION AND JEWS LEAVING SYNAGOGUES AFTER A BRIEF MEMBERSHIP, FURTHER COMPLICATED BY THE UNPRECEDENTED GROWTH IN INTERMARRIAGES OVER THE PAST TWENTY YEARS, NO LONGER OFFERS RESPONSIBLE JEWISH INSTITUTIONS AND LEADERS A CHOICE. THE SITUATION REQUIRES THAT WE ALL WORK TOGETHER AS A FAMILY OF JEWS IN ORDER TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF JEWS HAVE WITH JUDAISM AND THEIR SYNAGOGUES.

THE NEW REALITIES OF NORTH AMERICAN JEWRY REQUIRE THAT WE ESTABLISH THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE BONDS OF INTERDEPENDENCE AND MUTUAL SUPPORT - AND THE SOONER THE BETTER.

I MUST TELL YOU EMPHATICALLY THAT NONE OF THE MAJOR JEWISH CONTINUITY AND SURVIVAL PROBLEMS WILL BE SOLVED WITHOUT A STRONG SYNAGOGUE MOVEMENT THROUGHOUT NORTH AMERICA, OFFERING ORTHODOX, CONSERVATIVE, RECONSTRUCTIONIST AND REFORM JEWISH LIFE STYLES.

RABBI MAURICE EISENDRATH ONE OF OUR GREAT REFORM LEADERS WROTE: "SUBTRACT RELIGION FROM JEWISH PEOPLEHOOD AND YOU REMOVE THE HEART."

OUR CHALLENGE IS ENORMOUS. EVERY YEAR THERE ARE CREATED 30,000 NEW INTERFAITH HOMES AND 15,000 ENDOGAMOUS HOMES. THE SYNAGOGUE

MOVEMENT MUST GIVE ALL OF THOSE HOUSEHOLDS WHO CHOOSE TO AFFILIATE THE SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE OF JUDAISM, SO THAT THEY AND THEIR CHILDREN WILL BE JEWISH. IN ADDITION, WE MUST REACH OUT TO THOSE WHO DO NOT AFFILIATE AND BRING THEM TO THE SYNAGOGUE.

OUR SYNAGOGUES AND ALL OF THEIR AFFILIATES MUST MEET THAT AWESOME CHALLENGE. 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 SYNAGOGUE IS BOTH OUR COMMUNAL PLACE OF WORSHIP AND OUR JEWISH COMMUNAL HOME. 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 WHERE WE MUST TEACH THE SKILLS TO CREATE JEWISH HOMES. 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 MUST BE GUARANTEED.

THE SYNAGOGUE IS THE CENTRAL INSTITUTION OF JUDAISM, AND WITHOUT THE SYNAGOGUE, JUDAISM AS WE KNOW IT TODAY WILL CEASE TO EXIST. WE SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT JUDAISM IS A RELIGION. ETHNICITY AND PEOPLEHOOD ALONE WILL NEVER SUSTAIN THE CONTINUITY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN NORTH AMERICA.



THE UAHC AND EVERY ARM OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT HAVE BEEN PASSIONATELY ENGAGED IN THE WORK OF JEWISH CONTINUITY AND SURVIVAL FOR OVER 120 YEARS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE UAHC , ITS AFFILIATES, HUC-JIR, THE CCAR, AND ALL OF OUR SYNAGOGUES ARE CURRENTLY SPENDING OVER 500 MILLION DOLLARS A YEAR TO ENSURE THAT OUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN WILL BE JEWISH.

IN THE PAST 10 YEARS OUR MOVEMENT, COMPOSED OF SYNAGOGUE AFFILIATED HOUSEHOLDS, HAS GROWN BY 15%, AND WE HAVE GAINED 91 NEW CONGREGATIONS - A 12% INCREASE.

MORE THAN 300,000 AFFILIATED JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS IN NORTH AMERICA HAVE ENTRUSTED THEIR JEWISH DESTINY TO REFORM JUDAISM, AND MORE ARE JOINING US EACH DAY. WE ARE SUCCESSFUL.

WHILE WE CAN TAKE PRIDE IN THE CONTINUING GROWTH OF OUR SYNAGOGUE MOVEMENT, WE CANNOT BE COMPLACENT, FOR THE ALARMING FACT REMAINS; THE RANKS OF THE UNAFFILIATED AND SECULAR JEWS ARE SWELLING AT AN EVEN GREATER RATE.

AS A MOVEMENT WE ARE FALLING FAR SHORT OF OUR POTENTIAL. ACCORDING TO THE CJF STUDY, 827,000 JEWISH HOUSEHOLDS REPORTED THAT THEIR DENOMINATIONAL PREFERENCE WAS REFORM JUDAISM. BUT WE HAVE ONLY SOME 300,000 AFFILIATED HOUSEHOLDS ON OUR MEMBERSHIP ROLLS.

SOMEHOW WE HAVE FAILED TO ATTRACT OR RETAIN MORE THAN ONE-HALF MILLION HOUSEHOLDS WHO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS REFORM JEWS.

OUR COLLECTIVE CHALLENGE IS TO CREATE A JEWISH COMMUNITY WHERE TORAH, JEWISH VALUES, AND SPIRITUALITY ARE EMBRACED.

APPROXIMATELY EIGHTY PERCENT OF AMERICAN JEWS AFFILIATE WITH SYNAGOGUES AT SOME POINT IN THEIR LIVES. FREQUENTLY WHEN THEY OR THEIR CHILDREN ARE READY TO BECOME INVOLVED IN JEWISH EDUCATION. IT IS DURING THE RELIGIOUS SCHOOL YEARS THAT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY HAS THE BEST CHANCE OF CREATING COMMITTED JEWS. THIS MAKES THE SYNAGOGUE, THE KEY VEHICLE FOR CREATING JEWS AND THEREBY INSURING JEWISH CONTINUITY AND SURVIVAL.

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 EDUCATED, PRACTICING AND AFFILIATED JEWS.

EVERY JEW WHO COMES TO US HAS TO CHOOSE TO STAY JEWISH. TO HELP THEM MAKE THAT POSITIVE LIFE FULFILLING CHOICE IS OUR MISSION.

IN ORDER TO DO THIS, THE FEDERATIONS, THE SYNAGOGUE MOVEMENTS AND OTHER JEWISH COMMUNAL INSTITUTIONS MUST CREATE A SHARING AND WORKING PARTNERSHIP.



THE CONCEPT OF A FULL PARTNERSHIP ASSUMES A SHARED VISION AND A DISCIPLINED DETERMINATION TO REACH THE COMMON GOAL. IT ALSO NECESSITATES A SHARED GOVERNANCE - FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION TOO. WE DEEM THIS A SINE QUA NON, AND ON OUR PART ARE READY TO PARTICIPATE ENERGETICALLY IN THE WORK AND LEADERSHIP OF THE NEEDED JOINT INSTRUMENTALITIES.

THE NOTION OF A PARTNERSHIP ALSO ASSUMES A SHARED FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND WE ARE FULLY PREPARED TO MEET IT. SYNAGOGUES MUST BEAR THEIR FAIR SHARE OF THE COSTS INVOLVED IN FEDERATION SUPPORTED PROJECTS, AND THEY MUST BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS AS WELL AS THE QUALITY OF PROGRAMS THESE FUNDS SUSTAIN - SUCH STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE SHOULD BE JOINTLY ESTABLISHED WITH FULL RESPECT FOR THE INTEGRITY OF EACH OF THE RELIGIOUS STREAMS.

WE FEEL DEEPLY THE SENSE OF URGENCY AND THEREFORE HOPE THAT THIS MATTER WILL NOT BE CONSIGNED TO A HOST OF COMMITTEES WITH OPEN-ENDED TIME FRAMES. PRIORITIES NEED TO BE SET AND HEEDDED; A SCATTERSHOT APPROACH WILL ONLY DIFFUSE OUR ENERGIES AND WEAKEN OUR EFFECTIVENESS.

THERE IS A NEED FOR PROMPT ACTION. PROGRAMS AND SERVICES ABOUT WHICH THERE IS CLEAR AGREEMENT SHOULD RECEIVE IMMEDIATE SUPPORT

THROUGH THE REALLOCATION OF EXISTING RESOURCES AND THE SHARING OF PHYSICAL FACILITIES. GIVEN THE SERIOUSNESS OF THESE SURVIVAL ISSUES, WE OUGHT NOT TO WAIT FOR THE INFLUX OF NEW FUNDS. THESE WILL DOUBTLESSLY COME, IF WE BOTH FULFILL OUR RESPECTIVE TASKS WITH DILIGENCE.

WE AT THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS AND OUR ENTIRE MOVEMENT HAVE MUCH EXPERIENCE TO BRING TO THIS NEW PARTNERSHIP. WE ARE PROUD OF THE MANY EXCITING AND INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS THAT WE OFFER. AS I SAID BEFORE, OUR SYNAGOGUES ARE GROWING IN BOTH NUMERICAL STRENGTH AND SPIRITUAL SUBSTANCE, AND WE ATTRIBUTE OUR SUCCESS TO A VARIETY OF PROGRAMS THAT WE HAVE ALREADY SHARED WITH MUCH OF NORTH AMERICAN JEWRY.

SPECIFICALLY, WE ENVISION OUR GREATEST CONTRIBUTIONS REVOLVING AROUND AREAS IN WHICH WE HAVE A PROVEN RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT:

1. NURSERY SCHOOL AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
2. LIFELONG JEWISH EDUCATION
3. FAMILY EDUCATION; RETREATS AND OTHER TYPES OF INFORMAL EDUCATION
4. CAMP AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES
5. ISRAEL EXPERIENCE
6. OUTREACH TO THE UNAFFILIATED



7. OUTREACH TO YOUNG SINGLES
8. OUTREACH TO MIXED MARRIED COUPLES AND THEIR CHILDREN.

WE CURRENTLY REACH TENS OF THOUSANDS OF MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN WITH THESE PROGRAMS EACH YEAR. IN THE CONTEXT OF A NEW PARTNERSHIP, THAT NUMBER CAN AND SHOULD INCREASE GEOMETRICALLY.

ARE WE DOING EVERYTHING RIGHT?

ABSOLUTELY NOT. WE WOULD WELCOME THE PROFESSIONALS EMPLOYED BY THE FEDERATION TO REVIEW OUR UAHF PROGRAMS AND GIVE THEIR INSIGHTS THROUGH A CONSULTING PROCESS SO THAT WE MIGHT IMPROVE OUR JEWISH CONTINUITY PROGRAMS.

THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS THAT AS A COMMUNITY WE CAN WORK TOGETHER. GAINING STRENGTH FROM EACH OTHERS SKILLS, NOT REINVENTING THE WHEEL EACH TIME WE LOOK AT A NEW TASK.

THE UAHF OUTREACH PROGRAM TO INTERMARRIED FAMILIES, WHICH WAS INITIATED IN 1978 BY OUR PRESIDENT, RABBI ALEXANDER M. SCHINDLER; IS ONE SUCH EXAMPLE. THE NATIONAL JEWISH POPULATION STUDY OF 1990 AND OUR OWN OUTREACH CENSUS OF 1991 INDICATE A STRONG PREFERENCE ON THE PART OF INTERFAITH COUPLES WHO CHOSE TO AFFILIATE, TO JOIN THE REFORM MOVEMENT. OUR MESSAGE OF WELCOME TO THOSE JEWS WHO

INTERMARRY AND THEIR NON-JEWISH PARTNERS HAS BEEN HEARD. NOT ONLY ARE THEY ASSOCIATING THEMSELVES WITH REFORM JUDAISM, BUT THEY ARE JOINING OUR CONGREGATIONS, TAKING PART IN OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND EDUCATING THEIR CHILDREN IN REFORM RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS. IN ADDITION, 65% OF CONVERSIONARY FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN HAVE AFFILIATED WITH THE REFORM MOVEMENT, AND 85% OF CONVERSIONARY COUPLES WITH NO CHILDREN HAVE AFFILIATED WITH THE REFORM MOVEMENT.

THIS IS AN AREA WHERE THE UAHC AND OUR SYNAGOGUES HAVE BUILT A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF EXPERTISE, RESEARCH DATA AND PUBLICATIONS. THE SHARING OF THIS MATERIAL WITH OTHER INTERESTED INSTITUTIONS WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO US ALL.

I HAVE ALREADY HAD A MEETING WITH JONATHAN WOOCHEER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE JEWISH EDUCATION SERVICE OF NORTH AMERICA BETTER KNOWN AS "JESNA". IN MY CONVERSATION WITH HIM WE DISCUSSED THE POSSIBILITIES OF JESNA AND THE RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS WORKING TOGETHER IN A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT WAYS. FOR EXAMPLE, RESEARCH, CONTINUED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR OUR TEACHERS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SHARED VISION AND STRATEGIES IN JEWISH EDUCATION.

BARRY SHRAGE, PRESIDENT OF THE COMBINED JEWISH PHILANTHROPIES OF GREATER BOSTON AND I HAVE MET SEVERAL TIMES. WE HAVE SHARED OUR VISION FOR JEWISH EDUCATION, FOR THE IMPORTANCE OF JEWISH SPIRITUAL



VALUES AND THE SYNAGOGUE AS THE CENTRAL INSTITUTION FOR LIVING JUDAISM IN AMERICA. THIS EXCHANGE OF IDEAS BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOSTON FEDERATION AND THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF UAHG - AN ORTHODOX JEW AND A REFORM JEW HAS MOVED EACH OF US FORWARD IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC THINKING OF HOW OUR RESPECTIVE INSTITUTIONS CAN HELP EACH OTHER. IN HIM I HAVE FOUND A GOOD FRIEND AND ADVISOR. OUR MODEL OF DISCOURSE AND CREATIVE THINKING SHOULD BE REPLICATED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

WE MUST COME UP WITH PLANS TO REDUCE THE COST OF BEING JEWISH. THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE IN A STUDY THAT THEY HAVE RELEASED THIS PAST YEAR ESTIMATES THAT THE COST OF LIVING A "FULLY INVOLVED JEWISH LIFE" FOR A MIDDLE CLASS FAMILY OF FIVE IS 18,000 TO 25,000 A YEAR ON TOP OF THE COST OF LIVING. A UNITED JEWISH COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER COULD CREATE A STRATEGIC PLAN THAT WOULD REDUCE THAT COST THROUGH IMAGINATIVE PROGRAMING, A SHARING OF PHYSICAL FACILITIES AND PERSONNEL. WE MUST MAKE JUDAISM AFFORDABLE TO ALL THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO BE JEWISH.

JEWISH IDENTITY, SELF ESTEEM AND SPIRITUALITY NEED TO BE REINFORCED THROUGH A MUCH GREATER PARTICIPATION IN THE MORE EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY OUR YOUTH GROUPS, CAMPS, AND FAMILY RETREAT PROGRAMS.

THE REFORM MOVEMENT IS WORKING ON A NEW EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY TO COMBINE FORMAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION WITH EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION THAT OUR CHILDREN AND ADULTS RECEIVE IN CAMP, YOUTH GROUPS, ISRAEL EXPERIENCES AND FAMILY RETREATS INTO A SINGLE CURRICULUM, THAT WILL ENSURE THAT EVERY JEWISH BOY AND GIRL WHO ENROLLS IN OUR RELIGIOUS SCHOOL WILL PARTICIPATE IN AT LEAST TWO SUMMER CAMP EXPERIENCES AND A TEEN SUMMER TRIP TO ISRAEL. IF THIS PROGRAM IS SUCCESSFUL WE WILL TRIPLE THE NUMBER OF REFORM YOUTH THAT ATTEND OUR CAMPS EACH YEAR AND WE WILL TAKE 10,000 TEENAGERS TO ISRAEL EACH SUMMER. WE ONLY HAVE 9 CAMPS THAT ARE OWNED BY THE UAHC. WE WOULD NEED TO INCREASE THE SIZE OF THESE CAMPS AS WELL AS BUILD NEW CAMPS TO ACCOMMODATE ALL THOSE WHO WILL BE ATTENDING.

INSTEAD OF SPENDING SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS OF MONEY FOR NEW FACILITIES, MAYBE IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO USE SOME OF THE FEDERATION OR JCC CAMPS. HOWEVER IN THIS AREA WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THE STRENGTH OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY IS DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM. THE CAMP EXPERIENCE NEEDS TO BE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A DENOMINATION WHICH FOSTERS A PARTICULAR IDENTITY. THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS GENERIC JUDAISM NOR SHOULD THERE BE. IN ADDITION, WE NEED FUNDS FOR SCHOLARSHIPS SO THAT ALL OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE CAN PARTICIPATE IN THIS IMPORTANT, LIFE ENHANCING JEWISH EXPERIENCE.



THE FEDERATIONS EXPERTISE IN LEADERSHIP TRAINING COULD BE OF TREMENDOUS AID TO THE SYNAGOGUE COMMUNITY. THE AMERICAN RABBINATE AND LAY LEADERSHIP NEED TO BE REVITALIZED. SYNAGOGUES WILL NOT BE REVITALIZED UNLESS WE HAVE A PASSIONATE RABBINATE AND LAY LEADERSHIP. BOTH RABBIS AND LAY LEADERS NEED AMPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDY, FOR TRAINING, FOR STIMULATION, FOR EXPOSURE TO NEW IDEAS AND FOR INTELLECTUAL REAWAKENING. THE FEDERATION'S PROFESSIONALS WORKING TOGETHER WITH THE SYNAGOGUE MOVEMENT WOULD BE HELPFUL IN THIS AREA.

THE FEDERATION'S OWN NATIONAL JEWISH POPULATION STUDY ESTABLISHES THAT SYNAGOGUE-AFFILIATED JEWS ARE MORE DEEPLY COMMITTED THAN THOSE WHO DO NOT BELONG TO A CONGREGATION; THEIR ATTACHMENT TO ISRAEL IS MORE INTENSE; THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD INTERMARRIAGE IS MORE WHOLESOME FROM A CONTINUITY PERSPECTIVE; THEIR JEWISH FEELINGS SO MUCH MORE IMPASSIONED. SYNAGOGUE AFFILIATED JEWS ARE ALSO MORE LIKELY TO ASSUME THE MANTLE OF JEWISH COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP. INDEED, THE OVERWHELMING PROPORTION OF AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERS, AS WELL AS THE LARGEST DONORS TO FEDERATION, ARE, IN FACT, SYNAGOGUE AFFILIATED.

IT IS CLEAR, THAT FEDERATION AND SYNAGOGUE MOVEMENTS CAN FUNCTION MORE EFFECTIVELY IN A PARTNERSHIP MODE. EACH HAS WHAT THE OTHER NEEDS. FEDERATIONS HAVE RESOURCES AND NO CONSTITUENCY. SYNAGOGUES

HAVE PEOPLE AND NEED RESOURCES.

THE GREAT JEWISH POET, NELLY SACHS ONCE WROTE A POEM ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST. IN THAT POEM, SHE PORTRAYED THE JEWISH PEOPLE, MOURNING THE LOSS OF ITS CHILDREN TO NAZI VIOLENCE. AND IN THE POEM, THE JEWISH PEOPLE SAY:

"WE ARE GARDENERS WITH NO FLOWERS. WE STAND UPON A SHINING STAR AND WEEP."

DURING THE 20TH CENTURY, WE HAVE LOST ALMOST 3 GENERATIONS TO VIOLENCE. WE MUST NOT JEOPARDIZE OUR CONTINUITY THROUGH A COLLECTIVE NARROW VISION AND THE INABILITY AS A JEWISH COMMUNITY TO COOPERATE WITH EACH OTHER.

"FOR PERHAPS IT WAS OUR SINGLE GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT THAT NO MATTER WHO TRAMPLED OUR FLOWERS, NO MATTER WHO TRIED TO DESTROY US, WE GATHERED UP THE SEEDS, TIME AND TIME AGAIN AND PLANTED THEM IN THE SOIL OF ETERNITY."

"THAT MUST BE THE TASK AGAIN FOR US AS JEWS TODAY, THE MOST PATIENT AND THE MOST CREATIVE GARDENERS IN ALL OF RECORDED HISTORY."