

Spring 2010

The **NAASE** Journal

A Forum on Synagogue Management & Leadership

אל תפרוש מן הצבור...

Do not separate yourself from the community...

— Pirkei Avot 2:5

**Connection:
Bringing People Closer
to Torah and the Synagogue**

Published by

NAASE

NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SYNAGOGUE EXECUTIVES

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The NAASE Journal welcomes submission for consideration manuscripts and articles that may be of value to synagogue executive directors and others interested in synagogue management and leadership. All material to be considered for future issues should be sent to NAASE via office@naase.org, or sent to The NAASE Journal, c/o NAASE at Rapaport House, 820 Second Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

CREDITS

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A Message from the President of NAASE

Gilbert Kleiner, FSA

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As I looked at the titles of the articles in this issue of NAASE Journal, I was impressed. Our authors have given us compelling reading. When professionals develop skills and insights and pass them on to others in the field, their generosity in sharing their professional experiences places them among the leadership elite. Their research and their opinions are valuable tools for their colleagues in the field of synagogue administration. By sharing with us, they elevate their standing in our Association and in-turn, they make each of us that much better at performing our responsibilities for our congregations.

The NAASE Journal is our opportunity as professionals in synagogue management to learn and grow in this collegial yet learned forum. A scholarly professional Journal is a garden where valuable sharing thrives and the seedlings of ideas grown from practical experience and wisdom take root. Take this opportunity. Read these articles, and learn from your fellow professionals.

I hope you will then be inspired to share your own wisdom and experiences in the next issue of the NAASE Journal, as our unending search for new and inspiring ideas continues to transform our profession, and our congregations, in these challenging times.

As President of the North American Association of Synagogue Executives, I would like to thank our contributors, our editor David Rothenberg, and his editorial board for producing this year's NAASE Journal. Yasher Koach. ■

Gilbert Kleiner, FSA
NAASE President
February, 2010
Adar 5770



Gilbert Kleiner

ABOUT THE COVER

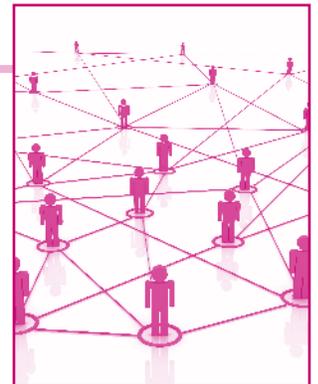
Our cover is an illustration of randomly placed human like figures connected by seemingly random vector lines. Some of the figures are in close proximity to each other, and some are farther off. Some have several lines of connection and some have less. This illustration, somewhat abstract but quite symbolic, in many ways reflects the web of relationships and people that is the modern synagogue community. It was chosen because it graphically represents that which concerns many of the articles in this issue of NAASE Journal – how can Jews connect to each other, to Torah, to their synagogue and to the community as a whole. And of course – we know the Executive Director has a role to play in either creating those connections, or at least fostering the opportunity for connections to happen.

Although the private life of the individual is important, the importance of community in Judaism cannot be overemphasized. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 17b) states that scholars should only reside in towns that had a structured, organized community. It defines the essential elements required - of course one of them being a synagogue. We are familiar with the cautionary statement in Pirkei Avot 2:5 – “*Al tifrosh min hatzibbur*” – do not withdraw from, or separate from, the community. And no one can be so ego-centric or sure of his or herself that he / she can be the center of that community – “*v'al ta-amin b'azmecha*”- and do not be so sure of yourself. Hence, no one figure in the cover illustration is taller or bigger than another.

Every day in our worship there is the statement attributed to Hillel, from Pirkei Avot 1:12 – to be like a disciple of Aaron – loving peace and pursuing peace, loving our fellows and bringing them near to Torah. We recite the passage from the Talmud which lists the deeds that bring reward, among them creating peace (i.e. – friendships) between people.

Although study and prayer can be done by individuals in private, it takes on a higher dimension of holiness when we connect with each other and pray or study in community. Talmud Brachot tells us that knowledge of Torah cannot be thoroughly acquired unless studied in a group. And of course, certain prayers and ritual privileges are reserved for the minyan. In fact, most of our prayers are written in the plural.

Since each Jew is inexorably tied to every other Jew (“*kol Yisrael averim ze la-ze*”) we cannot escape the community even if we wanted to. Inevitably there will be those who try to distance themselves, but we must always be prepared to welcome someone back. The prophet Isaiah expresses this well – “*Shalom shalom lerachok velekarov*”. (Welcome welcome to those who are near and those who are far - Isaiah 57:19). Recognizing, of course, that distance may not just be because someone traveled a long way to enter our synagogue... there can be a spiritual or an emotional distance as well. ■



B'reishit: The Beginning A Message from the Editor

By David I. Rothenberg, FSA, ATz

בְּרֵאשִׁית



David I. Rothenberg

Several years ago someone with a marketing background, who viewed the synagogue strictly as a not-for-profit business, asked me what exactly we were “selling” when we met with potential members. What was our “product”? What business were we in? Without hesitation, I told him we were selling connection to the Jewish People and the Jewish Community.

In recent years, it seems harder and harder to find people willing to “buy” that formal connection to the community that is expressed through synagogue membership. Whether it is the economy, delay or postponement of marriage, falling birthrates, lack of a compelling external motivational force, the preference for personal autonomy, or some other factors, finding people who want to connect to the Jewish community through synagogue affiliation has become a challenge.

We who live inside Jewish communal life know well the value of being part of the community. One of my favorite rabbinic stories tells of the rabbi who chooses to visit a “regular” who had stopped coming. The person had decided it was easier to pray at home. Silently the rabbi walked over to the fireplace and removed one of the red glowing coals from the center of the fire and placed it at the edge of the hearth. Soon the glowing hot coal faded, turning black and cold.

We all bemoan dwindling membership statistics. Sure, it is alarming. However, at some point in their lives, the majority of North American Jews will still consider formally affiliating with a synagogue. They will check out what we have to offer. At some point our synagogues will have an opportunity to connect to them, personally, and in turn, connect them to Torah and the synagogue. Whatever their motivations or intentions – life-long affiliation or just until their youngest child becomes a Bar / Bat Mitzvah, we will have a few years at best to make their synagogue affiliation and connection so meaningful and important in their lives that they just would not consider relinquishing it. As synagogue executive directors we have a lot of opportunities to help make that happen.

Some will move from the periphery towards the center. Most will stop far short of becoming officer material. Fortunately, most synagogues have multiple centers of activity. And not every member needs to become a “regular” on Shabbat morning, or a *macher*, to have a meaningful experience. Regardless of the level of participation by a member in the synagogue community, a feeling of participatory connection, and a sense of interconnectedness and belonging, needs to be nurtured. If not, at some point, for one or more reasons – reasons we may never come to know or understand, that person or family might choose to relinquish membership.

The contributors to this issue of NAASE Journal take varied approaches to grappling with the challenges of creating the personal connection that we want everyone - members and staff, to have with the synagogue. We must thank Glenn Easton, Marc Neiwirth, Tom Jablonski, Bernie Goldblatt, Steve Hecht, and Rabbi Lebeau for their gifts of thought and expression, for taking the time to consider some of the challenging questions facing our synagogues, and for taking the time to share with us.

I am grateful to many colleagues and friends - the NAASE officers and Board of Governors for their confidence in my abilities to organize and edit yet another NAASE Journal. I am indebted to those who volunteered to proofread and be on our “Editorial Board”. They took the time to read the articles with me and to help put them into the proper form for publication. Rachel Walters of Goin’ Graphics is a pleasure to work with. She has a superb sense of graphic design and style – and pulled everything together into an attractive and readable format. Harry Hauser helped me with many details. When I felt too pressured with editorial duties to implement my plans for the back cover, he stepped in to make it work. I am fortunate to have the support of the officers and staff of Beth Israel Congregation. Most important - I am grateful for the love of my family, whose dining room table and various computers spent many weeks being overwhelmed by the NAASE Journal.

As I write this message and put the finishing touches on this issue, it is early February. Here in Baltimore we have had an unprecedented amount of snow. But Adar is almost with us – Purim is coming, as well as our Annual Conference... spring and Pesach are not too far away either. Opportunities to feel the renewing warmth of our synagogue communities, and the special community that is NAASE. I hope that reading this issue of NAASE Journal will add to your sense of connection and commitment to our community. ■

David I. Rothenberg, FSA, ATz
Editor - NAASE Journal – Spring 2010

Five Challenges to Managing for Success

Glenn S. Easton, FSA, ATZ

Editor's Note: This article is based on an address to the Darrell Friedman Institute STAR Siyum at Baltimore Hebrew University. Special thanks to Marcia Newfeld and Cindy Easton for contributing to and editing this article.

As synagogue executives, we face many challenges. Are we leaders or managers? How do we encourage volunteerism and channel their energies most effectively? How do we work effectively with the younger generation, whether they are employees or volunteers? The nature of the Jewish community is changing. No longer is the synagogue the major focus in the lives of our congregants. Many other organizations vie for their attention, volunteerism and dollars. How are we, as Jewish communal professionals adapting to this change? Fundraising has become an issue. In the day when our grandparents belonged to a synagogue they gave their contributions almost always to the synagogue. Now there is a myriad of places where Jews may be philanthropic. How do we creatively convince our constituents to give to us in order to enhance Jewish growth and to further Jewish continuity? Finally, how do we attract, train or retain the best Jewish communal professionals to keep their lights burning as opposed to burning them out? These are some of the challenges synagogue professionals face in trying to manage a successful organization.

Challenge #1 – Understanding Leadership and Management

There is a difference between being a leader and being a manager. A leader has the vision; a manager puts that vision into play. As Jewish communal professionals we are put in

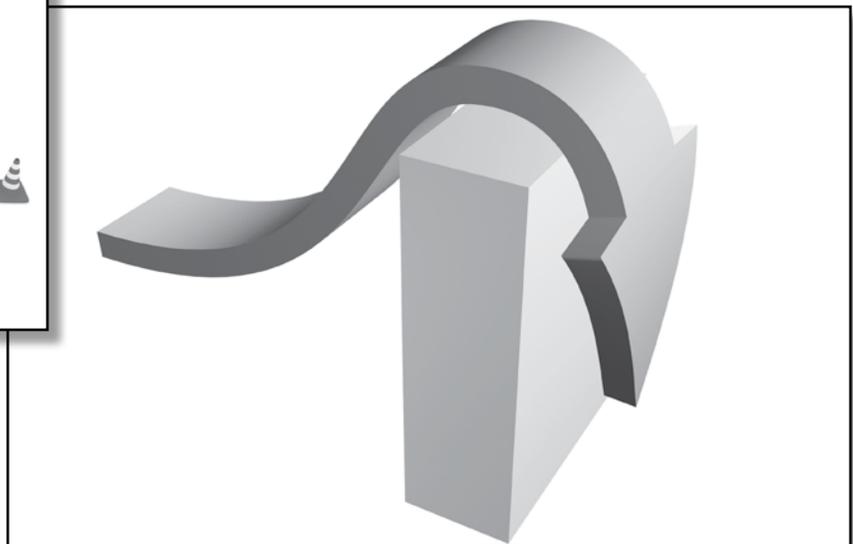
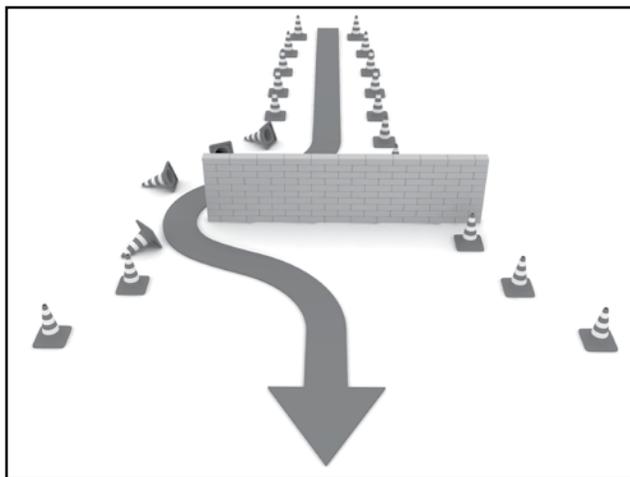
the difficult, often impossible, position of being asked to be both a manager and a leader; and sometimes at the same time.

When our organizations are lacking management or leadership or when we are aware that our institutions are in need of either, we are asked and expected to fill the gap. In many synagogues a new president is elected every two years each bringing different talents and skills to their position. Some are leaders and some are managers.

Some presidents want executive directors to be leaders and some want just managers. As professionals attempting to bring continuity and success to our organizations, we are constantly challenged with needing to balance leadership with management.

Synagogues, churches, Jewish organizations and other non-profit institutions suffered through a few decades of “managerial” crisis. Organizational Development, Management by Objective, Strategic Planning and other popular approaches tried to turn leaders into managers. Dr. Abraham Zaleznick at the Harvard Business School outlines four areas of difference between leaders and managers¹.

The first area deals with the “attitudes toward goals” of managers tending to accept and adopt impersonal, if not passive, attitudes toward these goals. Leaders actively shape ideas and they do not respond to them. Leaders attempt to influence and change the way people think about these desired possibilities within an organization. The second area deals with how the work is conceived. Many managers view work as a process involving people and ideas to establish strategies and make decisions. Leaders on the



other hand, develop fresh approaches to long-standing problems without limiting the choices. Leaders project ideas into images that excite people and bring excitement into the workplace. Zaleznick's third area of difference deals with "relations with others." Managers relate to people according to the roles they play. Leaders, who are concerned with the "big picture" ideas, relate to their staff in more intuitive and empathetic way. Lastly, managers and leaders have a different "sense of self." Managers see themselves as conservers and regulators of an existing order. Their individual identity comes from the organization that employs them. Whereby a leader may work in an organization, but does not need the organization to shape their sense of self. A leader helps to shape the organization.

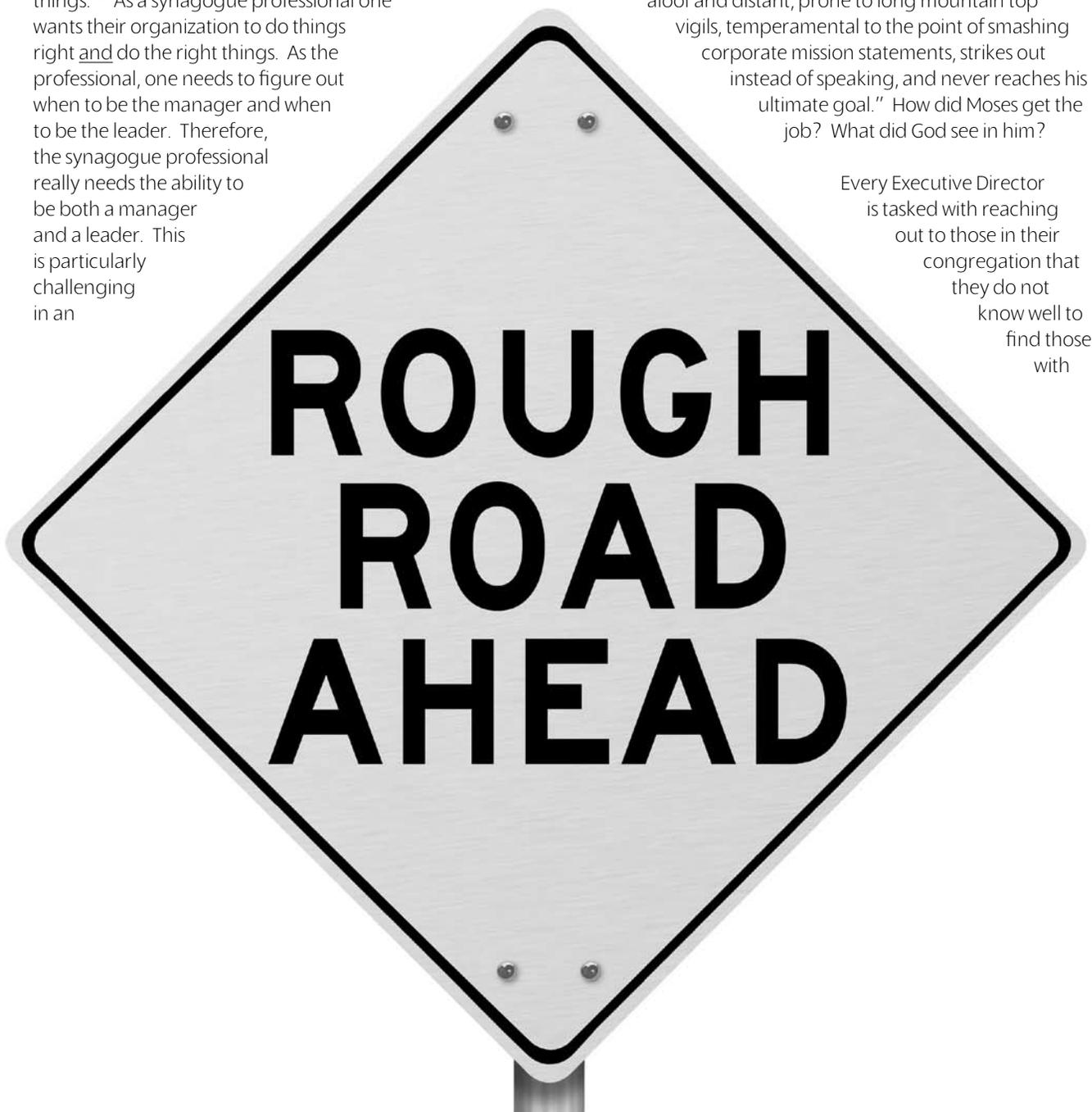
In their book *Leaders*², Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus define "Managers as people who do things right and leaders as people who do the right things." The late management guru, Peter Drucker, often said "Efficiency is doing things right and effectiveness is doing the right things."³ As a synagogue professional one wants their organization to do things right and do the right things. As the professional, one needs to figure out when to be the manager and when to be the leader. Therefore, the synagogue professional really needs the ability to be both a manager and a leader. This is particularly challenging in an

organization such as a synagogue where the Executive Director is not generally perceived as the leader or the visionary of the institution. It is the Rabbi who is looked to as the spiritual leader and the volunteer president who is the titular head of the institution. This can put the Executive Director in a tenuous position where s/he must be cognizant of others' positions and skills while discerning whether to focus on leadership or management.

Challenge #2 - Identifying and Developing New Volunteer Leadership.

Every Executive Director has the challenge to identify and develop new volunteer leadership. It is appropriate to examine the leadership of Moshe Rabeinu, (Moses, our teacher) the one person selected by God to be a leader of the Jewish people. As David Baron points out in his book, *Moses on Management: 50 Leadership Lessons from the Greatest Manager of All Time*⁴, if you were working in the HR department of your organization would you hire someone whose resume reads: "reluctant to lead, aloof and distant, prone to long mountain top vigils, temperamental to the point of smashing corporate mission statements, strikes out instead of speaking, and never reaches his ultimate goal." How did Moses get the job? What did God see in him?

Every Executive Director is tasked with reaching out to those in their congregation that they do not know well to find those with



particular skills and interests. They need to perform a leadership skills inventory of the membership and may need to redefine tasks into more bite-size, time-limited roles that might be more attractive to today's busy volunteers. The Executive Director not only needs to be better acquainted with their current volunteers, but more importantly they need to be acquainted with those congregants who are connected to the synagogue but are not yet volunteering.

Remember, God had to persuade Moses that he was the right person for the job. He assured Moses that He (God) would be with him. God assessed the leadership traits and needs of Moses and provided the tools needed to make him become a successful leader. God provided Moses with tangible symbols of authority, a staff and a few miracles, and provided partners, Joshua and Aaron, to delegate to in the areas in which Moses was weaker. The Executive Director needs to look for the non-traditional leaders. They need to consider creating "teams" of leaders to share jobs and the tasks at hand, in non-traditional ways.

Challenge #3 – Understanding and Working with Younger Staff and Volunteers

Every generation of synagogue professionals, are challenged to understand and work with younger staff and younger volunteers. Those born between 1926 and 1945 are known as the "traditionalists," according to Sarah Sladek author of *The New Recruit*.⁵ This generation Sladek describes as being "loyal to a fault," expecting to enjoy a lifetime career with one employer. The baby boom generation, those born between 1946 and 1964, Sladek characterizes as the "me" generation, dreaming of great career success and of achieving great things for the world. Unfortunately for them and for their families, they are often workaholics believing they can achieve their dreams through simple, honest, long, hard work. Generation X are those who were born between 1965 and 1981. They grew up in a time of transition. They are the complete opposite of the Baby Boomers. Sladek claims that Gen X grew up with overworked, absentee parents and few positive role models. They were much more isolated with their own TV sets in their own rooms watching MTV, compared to the Baby Boomers who watched Ed Sullivan with their families around one black and white television. Baby Boomers are sometimes tempted to call Gen X employees or volunteers "slackers" because they seem reluctant to volunteer for extra work or to join groups and associations. According to Sladek, they place a high priority on their personal and family time. Finally, Sladek characterizes Generation Y as those born between 1982 and 1995, as a truly different breed made up of "multi-taskers" who are totally plugged in, connected virtually but not necessarily interpersonally. She feels that the Gen Y generation is "the most protected, supervised, provided for generation in history. They were belted into their car seats and driven to some form of group activity. They are rewarded for participation, not achievement. They feel a sense of entitlement...and are very much geared to receiving positive feedback from others." They are the instant gratification generation having grown up on fast food, video games and the ability to watch movies, sports and anything

at the touch of a button.

Jewish communal professionals have the challenge to, not only hire and work with this range of generations, but the obligation to better understand the cadre of volunteers from each of these generations. According to Lisa Colton of Darim Online⁶, blogs, Facebook and webinars will provide some of the answers. Technology will reduce work travel, and conference calls will enable greater volunteer participation because they will provide briefer meetings without the congregant having to leave their homes or offices. Synagogue professionals must not fail to understand with whom they are working.

This multi-generational understanding of staff and volunteers is further convoluted by the complex nature of the relationships between the two. In his book, *The Director Had a Heart Attack and The President Resigned: Board Staff*

Every generation of synagogue professionals are challenged to understand and work with younger staff and younger volunteers.

Relations in the 21st Century,⁷ Gerald Bubis explores the often unclear expectations between volunteer leaders and staff which is further complicated by this overlay of differences in generational characteristics. His research suggests that the basis for all successful working relationships, no matter which generation you are dealing with, is trust.

Challenge #4 - Understanding and Adapting to a Changing Community

Synagogue professionals are continually challenged to understand and adapt to the changing nature of the Jewish community. For the past 20 or so years, our community and organizations have been very "top down" oriented. Leadership structures, programming and fundraising, have all mirrored the traditional organizational pyramid. When applied to the work of a synagogue, it is the difference between what Rabbi Sid Schwartz from Panim⁸ calls the "synagogue center" versus the "synagogue community." The synagogue center concept evolved from the time period when successful American Jews moved to the suburbs and began treating synagogues like business transactions, providing goods and services with the leadership of the congregation in the top 5% to 10% of the pyramid and the rest of the membership "badly informed," "hardly involved" dues paying customers and consumers.

The synagogue community, according to Schwartz, is round. The leadership makes up the nucleus surrounded by circles of activity and participation. One circle might be the Youth

group. One might be the group that leads the alternative minyan. Another circle might be those who volunteer at the soup kitchen. And another circle might be a group of major donors. Each circle intersects the others and are all linked to the center. People no longer come to the synagogue because they want a product or a program; they come because they want a community.

Bigger, better programming that happens less often may not be the answer. It may be just as important for small groups to connect with our institutions for projects and purposes that are important to them, in a circle of friends, creating small communities which in turn intersect with a circle of the larger community in meaningful ways. In a recent synagogue survey done by a consultant of the Alban Institute⁹, one respondent was asked "How do you find community in a congregation of 1,400 families?" The response was, "I belong to multiple, small communities that the synagogue has fostered and that serve the congregation. I have my friends at Shabbat services, my carpool friends in the Hebrew school, and my friends in the study group." A large synagogue recently wanted to do away with reserved seating on the High Holidays. Some congregants with dedicated permanent seats strenuously objected, not because of the loss of preferential seating, but because of the loss of community. While they may only attend services a few times a year, on those occasions when they attend they are surrounded by the same community of friends, thereby transforming the large sanctuary into their very own smaller community.

People desire and need to connect differently to our synagogues than in the past. They are willing to participate in smaller, bite-sized, segments that are meaningful communities. These smaller communities focus on specific projects or programs that are believed to be worthy of committing limited time and emotional energy.

Challenge #5 - Attracting, Training, and Retaining the Best Jewish Professionals

A final challenge the Jewish non-profit world faces is attracting, training and retaining the best Jewish synagogue professionals. We need to seek out and capture dedicated Jewish professionals by, welcoming, encouraging, and integrating them into the field. Successful Jewish communal professionals are effective, creative and dedicated. These individuals hold a spark to lead and inspire others in the community. We need to train our professionals and our lay leaders to become and remain true partners in this work. We need to educate our volunteers on how to support our professionals and evaluate us in meaningful and helpful ways. Synagogue professionals need to feel a sense of security in order to be comfortable trying new things, being creative and potentially taking a risk to ask for something new. We need to support and encourage those who laterally enter our field. Few people begin their undergraduate careers studying for or focusing on being a synagogue executive. We need to continue to invest in building the community of Jewish professionals such as NAASE and to reach out to the schools of Jewish communal service.

We need to support, financially and professionally, those entering the field and make sure they continue to "burn bright, not burn out" as so often happens.

Jewish communal service is a sacred profession. Some call it the family business. It is and should be considered an important and needed calling. Most Executive Directors love their jobs in the Jewish community. Jewish communal professionals have a passion for Judaism. To be able to combine that passion with a profession is the ultimate reward. As Jewish communal professionals, we are shlichim, "messengers" of the community. Each Shabbat, before the sacred Torah is returned to the Ark, the community blesses and recognizes "those who faithfully devote themselves to the needs of the community and the rebuilding of Eretz Yisrael". Synagogue executives are in the forefront of this devoted faithful community. May we continue to be challenged and up to the task. ■

Glenn S. Easton, FSA, ATz is the Executive Director of Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, DC. He is a past president of the North American Association of Synagogue Executives (NAASE) and current president of the Jewish Communal Service Association of North America (JCSA).

NOTES:

- 1 "Managers and Leaders: Are They Different?" by Abraham Zaleznik, Harvard Business Review, 1977
- 2 Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge, Warren Bennis & Burt Nanus, Harper Collins, New York, NY, 1985
- 3 The Effective Executive, Peter F. Drucker, Butterworth-Heinemann, Burlington, MA, 1967
- 4 Moses on Management: 50 Leadership Lessons from the Greatest Manager of All Time, David Baron with Lynette Padwa, Simon and Schuster, New York, NY, 1999
- 5 The New Recruit: What Your Association Needs to Know About X, Y, & Z, Sarah L. Sladek, Expert Publishing, Andover, MN, 2007
- 6 From an address by Lisa Colton of Darim Online, JCSA Local Group Leadership Conference, March 2008
- 7 The Director Had a Heart Attack and the President Resigned: Board-Staff Relations for the 21st Century, Gerald Bubis, iUniverse Publishing, Lincoln, NE, 2007
- 8 Finding a Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of Jews Can Transform the American Synagogue, Rabbi Sidney Schwartz, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000
- 9 Robert Leventhal, The Alban Institute, Herndon, VA 2007

Both Sides Now!

Balancing Work and Life as an Executive Director

Marc M. Neiwirth, FSA, ATz

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Editor's Note: The 10th annual Irma Lee Ettinger Memorial Lecture was delivered by Marc M. Neiwirth, FSA, ATz, at the NAASE Annual Conference in Philadelphia in March 2008.

At this conference we are emphasizing "Nuts and Bolts: Power Tools for the 21st Century". The emphasis is on practical ideas and skills we can use in our jobs. These are what I call "hard skills". However, there should be an equal emphasis on what I call "soft skills", those skills that really make us effective at our jobs; those skills that frequently determine if we actually keep our jobs. And, who is to say which is more important? As my Rabbi said to me in discussing this talk with him: "Both are necessary; neither is sufficient".

I am fortunate that my relationship with my fellow senior staff members in my current congregation is extremely collaborative and collegial. The shortest tenure of any senior staff member is six years, with our rabbi in his 29th year. We all get along, we all enjoy each other's company, and we all respect each other. This helps create a "culture of kindness" about which I will speak more a little bit later.

In doing some very unscientific research for this talk, I sent a questionnaire to a small, select group of colleagues. I asked a number of questions, including the following:

1. What do you think are the reasons why you are successful at your current job?
2. Please list characteristics that are crucial to being successful as an Executive Director.
3. What areas of knowledge are fundamental for someone considering this as a profession?

While I'm not going to go into all the answers I received, there was a common thread in the responses that did not surprise me. Suggested characteristics for success were in the following areas, not necessarily in order: people skills, ability to work under pressure, financial knowledge, facility knowledge, Judaic knowledge and organizational skills. None of these is terribly surprising. However, there are a few responses worth sharing.

"My Jewish values are aligned closely with those of the congregation I serve, so it is easy to support its mission and vision."

"I am a passionate Conservative Jew, and I love my job. I feel like it matters that I show up every day."

"Part of my success is due to having a senior staff that respects each others' opinions and works for a consensus."

All of the practical knowledge about everything from accounting to HVAC maintenance to web design to God

knows what won't help someone keep a job if these skills are accompanied by arrogance, an inability to work with others, refusal to hear criticism, untruthfulness, financial dishonesty and apathy. Likewise, all the people skills in the world won't help a person who hasn't a clue what he or she is doing, and lacks the capacity to learn and grow. That's one of the most interesting things about our job - everybody thinks they can do it until they actually get the opportunity. This work is not for everyone. It takes a special type of person to do our job; people like all of us sitting in this room. Most of the time our synagogues know this; they understand this and appreciate us.



Marc M. Neiwirth

However, regrettably, sometimes they don't. There are many among us, including me, who have at one time worked in synagogues that can only be described as toxic; and when that happens, sometimes the only thing left to do after all other avenues have been exhausted is to leave. No amount of money is compensation for misery. It reminds me of a saying in *Shemot Rabbah* (7:3) - God said to Moshe and Aaron: "My children are obstinate, ill-tempered and troublesome. In assuming leadership over them, expect to be cursed and even stoned by them."

So, in the spirit of being half as good as David Letterman, I am presenting:

MARC NEIWIRTH'S TOP FIVE LIST FOR BEING A SUCCESSFUL SYNAGOGUE EXECUTIVE

Number Five - Find a mentor - one who is successful and ambitious. Establish a network of colleagues who are supportive and helpful. When I was beginning my career as a Synagogue Executive, I sought the advice and counsel of colleagues that I met at NAASE Conferences, whom I had come to admire and respect. None of us can do this alone. And, none of us should have to.

Number Four - Take ownership of your synagogue, both physically and spiritually. Treat your shul as if it were your own home, because, in a very real sense, it is. The positive energy that we project into our work will spread to the entire congregation. Being upbeat and encouraging on an ongoing basis will help create good will and that "culture of kindness", which I referred to earlier, and will, over time, spread to the entire congregation. We need to be cheerleaders for our synagogues, promoting and supporting every aspect and every staff member; because when one staff member looks good, we all look good.

Number Three - Don't be afraid to make mistakes; likewise, don't be so arrogant as to assume that you can't make

mistakes. Always be ready to learn from everybody. It says in Pirke Avot, Eyzehu Chacham- halomed mikol adam. "Who is wise? He who learns from every person." Sometimes what we learn is what to do, and sometimes we learn what not to do, but there's something to be learned in every situation.

Number Two - Care. Make every congregant's interaction with you and your staff a positive one, leaving them with a sense that their needs have been met, insofar as you are able. Don't miss an occasion to show a congregant that you care. Every day we have opportunities to touch other people in ways we never imagined. We never really know what effect we have on other people, in our words and in our deeds. People may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

*If we want to attract people to synagogues
of substance, we need to make our
synagogues more substantial.*

And, Number One - Be a positive Jewish role model. Have a passion for living a Jewish life, for it is so vital to being a truly successful Synagogue Executive. Our work is very different from other types of management, whether in the for-profit or not-for-profit sector in that the framework and purpose of all that we do, is ultimately Jewish. This career path can't be just another "job". It requires more than simply agreeing with the synagogue's mission. It requires having the synagogue and the Jewish life it stands for become part of your very existence. This may be the hardest step to being effective, and I submit that without it, even the most seemingly successful Executive Director is falling short.

We all need heroes; and, in the Jewish religious world, our heroes have always been our rabbis - those to whom we could look towards to be our Jewish role models. Unfortunately, in our day and age, much to my deep regret and to our movement's detriment, not all of our rabbis and cantors live up to that high standard. It is so easy for any of us, professionals or congregants, to say, "Well, if it's not important to them, why should it be important to me?" But we know better. Everybody in our congregations sees everything. They see us in restaurants, they see us at shopping centers, they see us at the airport; and if they see us there on Shabbat, if they see us there on Yom Tov, and if they see us in restaurants eating treif, we have single handedly undone every lesson the synagogues in which we work strive to teach. Please think about that.

Now, I am going to talk about an area of our work that draws upon our entire arsenal of hard skills, soft skills, and

any other skill. If there are two words that strike fear in the heart of every Executive Director, they are ROSH HASHANAH. Just hearing those words now is causing pupils to dilate and blood pressure to skyrocket in this room at this very moment; and, just in case you are wondering, there are 204 days left until the next Rosh Hashanah. And, as if we as Synagogue Executives are not subject to enough torture regarding the High Holidays, the very first Mishnah in the tractate Rosh Hashanah enumerates four different Roshay Shananim. They are the first of Nisan for Kings and Festivals, the first of Elul for the tithe of animals, the first of Tishrei for years, and the first of Shevat for trees, according to Bet Shammai; Bet Hillel says on the fifteenth, which we know today as Tu B'shevat.

I would propose a fifth Rosh Hashanah, that is, our annual conference. I propose this because Rosh Hashanah is a time of renewal, a time of introspection, a time to look at what we do and who we are and seriously ask ourselves, how we can be better at what we do and at being who we are, and that's exactly what we do here at our annual conference. Also, we have the pleasure of seeing people we usually only see once a year, and that's something we also do on Rosh Hashanah, especially in most of our synagogues. However, at this Rosh Hashanah of our NAASE conference, we get to relax a little bit, live in the moment, and leave renewed, refreshed and invigorated with new ideas for being more effective as Synagogue Executives. So, let's look at these conferences just a little bit differently, and as far as I'm concerned it's OK to wish each other a Shanah Tovah when it's time to leave.

We celebrate some very important milestones this year. The State of Israel is sixty years old. Our professional organization, NAASE, is sixty years old. In two years, I will be sixty years old. None of us are getting any younger. I have very clear memories of NAASE celebrating its 50th anniversary at our conference, held in Orlando, Florida, ten years ago. We produced a beautiful anniversary journal at that time. Reading that journal after the conference, I was struck by a number of interesting facts about our organization, some of which we have received in the form of emails from our conference chairs. Back in the early days of NAASE, which was spelled NASA for the National Association of Synagogue Administrators, Executive Directors had to work very hard to be taken seriously even in their own synagogues, not to mention within the Conservative Movement. Sixty years later, I don't believe we have those challenges any more. We are taken very seriously today, both in our movement and in our respective synagogues, sometimes a little too seriously. I used to have a sign on my desk that said, "I have a very responsible job; when something goes wrong, I'm responsible". I have subsequently retired that sign, as I have come to understand that people don't necessarily need to be reminded of that fact. However, perhaps we need signs on our desks that say, "I have a very responsible job; when something goes well, I'm responsible". It's part of human nature to recognize and emphasize the bad or that which is lacking. Maybe we need to take the lead in recognizing the good.

Recognition is a most powerful motivator. As Synagogue

Executives we realize how important it is to recognize others, be they employees or congregants. If we are the managers we should be, then we are aware how powerful a simple "good job" comment can be to a staff member or to a congregant. This is among the best and least costly ways we can motivate people to want to do better and give it their all. However, how many of us come up short in receiving recognition ourselves? If you work hard and excel at your job and you get minimal recognition for it, it can become very frustrating. One of the unfortunate by-products of our jobs is that so much of what we do is behind the scenes and invisible to the "end user". Many of us have become used to the recognition extended to others whose work is more in the limelight. I believe that in the end, if we set the tone and give recognition when it is deserved, people will learn by

For NAASE's 60th birthday, I went looking for a card. I couldn't find anything I liked, so I went out and printed my own. It's an idea that I got from Rabbi Mitchell Wohlberg, rabbi of one of the congregations in which I served. It's just a little business card for me to carry around in my wallet. I printed on it one simple sentence that signifies any milestone or transition, whether it be in our organization, our jobs or our personal lives. You know what it says? It's Later Than You Think!

The words sound simple enough, but these are difficult words for us to hear. NAASE is 60; it will continue on for many years to come; but we as individuals won't. Each year, Glenn Easton gets up before this lecture and we as an organization pay tribute to those of our members who passed away during



our example. At some point we will eventually receive the recognition we so justly deserve.

What does it mean to be sixty? I have absolutely no idea; I'll let you know when I get there. But I will tell you one thing. This particular birthday of NAASE is a milestone, which is defined as a significant event in the life, progress and development, or the like of a person, nation, etc. Does it mean that we are just another year older? Or does being sixty signify a milestone in our professional and organizational development that should give us some pause for taking a closer look at ourselves?

the year. There is at least someone in this room who has lost a loved one during the past year. I know that because there isn't a year that I can remember where one of our colleagues hasn't needed to say kaddish at our conference, including me. It's Later Than You Think!

At our conference two years ago in Las Vegas, a conference of which I had the honor of being chair, Shifra Bronznick led a session on maintaining a balance between our work and our lives. While our jobs do call for a significant commitment beyond that of a regular 9 to 5 job, we need to be ever so vigilant to maintain a balance. How many of us are so wedded to our jobs that we have missed family events due to

our so-called “job obligations”? Were there times when we should have been someplace else, but were so “committed” to our jobs that we neglected those who are supposed to mean the most to us? Those opportunities will not present themselves again, so before the clock runs out, we need to remember - *It’s Later Than You Think!*

Speaking of the clock running out, how do you feel about the Conservative Movement? Do you feel, as we all should, that it is the most authentic interpretation of Jewish tradition and has the most to offer? Or, do you feel that it’s the “middle of the road” movement, as it has so often been described? Regardless of how any of us as individuals feel, working in our respective synagogues, it is becoming clear that what’s good enough for yesterday may not be good enough for today; and what’s good enough for today can only be a platform for what might be better for tomorrow.

As Rabbi Jerome Epstein said at the USCJ Convention in November, “We can’t expect our congregants to share our vision if they don’t understand our mission. We have been way too timid in declaring our mission. Why are we surprised by our congregants’ lack of commitment?” I have read many synagogue mission statements, and frankly, many of them are not very clear about what a synagogue is supposed to be. Virtually all of them skirt a primary purpose of synagogue involvement, which is to transform the lives of those Jews with whom we come into contact. If we don’t start working gently and lovingly towards those ends, accepting people for who they are, but constantly moving them closer to where they could be and where they should be, then we are going to mission statement ourselves out of existence. If we want to attract people to synagogues of substance, we need to make our synagogues more substantial. This moment in time for both NAASE and the Conservative Movement is not just a moment of existential challenge. We should also remember and be proud of our many accomplishments. The time has come to show our congregants that we stand for something and that we practice what we stand for. Our movement needs us now more than ever. *It’s Later Than You Think!*

It’s later than you think. But that’s only one side of the coin, or the card. So, I put another sentence on the other side of the business card - *It’s Never Too Late*. Yes, it’s never too late to “teach an old dog new tricks;” or an old Executive Director. It’s never too late to change. We are constantly changing. It’s never too late to change in the right direction. Rabbi Akiva, one of the greatest teachers in our tradition, didn’t learn an alef from a bet until he was 40 years old. *It’s Never Too Late*.

We have examples of people changing all around us every day. Recently, my synagogue was approached by a group of recovering alcoholics who wanted to have AA meetings at our synagogue. We not only agreed, but the leadership of the synagogue was gratified to have been asked and felt it was such an important mitzvah to help people who desperately wanted to help themselves recover. *It’s Never Too Late*.

We have examples of people in our congregations, who have been alienated from Judaism for a good part of their lives, who then become involved in synagogue life and start learning and searching . . . and then, what do you know, they start keeping kosher and observing Shabbat. *It’s Never Too Late*.

Who knows? Perhaps as a result of this talk, some of us will do some serious soul searching and come to the realization that because we do what we do, we need to try harder to live the life that our calling dictates. *It’s Never Too Late*.

What about us in our families? Many of us have to take care of elderly parents, something we had not counted on in our earlier years. We always joke that this was the part that they didn’t put in the manual when we were growing up. As time goes on, we come to realize that the greatest gift we can give to people is just simply being there. As Woody Allen said, “Eighty percent of success is showing up”. I believe that is one of the reasons our rabbis are so appreciated when they visit people, either when they are in the hospital or when they are in mourning; because they give their time. Time is something precious that we just can’t get back.

So, go out and enjoy life. Of course, we should work hard at our jobs, but don’t forget that we have families that need us, too. *It’s Later Than You Think*. You know those books you haven’t read? Read them. Movies you haven’t seen? Watch them. Relatives to whom you haven’t spoken in ages? Call them. Be there for your families. Do what you can now to make sure that those whose lives touch yours will never have to ask where you were.

We’re growing older, both as an organization and as individuals. *It’s Later Than You Think*. But we’re also growing up, and it’s never too late for that. Every single day, each one of us should look at the card, feel young enough to realize that *it’s never too late*, and also realize that as each day passes by, *it’s later than you think*. ■

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The Necessity of Human Connection and Engagement in the Synagogue

by Thomas Jablonski, FSA, FTA

Editor's Note: The 10th annual Irma Lee Ettinger Memorial Lecture was delivered by Thomas Jablonski, FSA, FTA, at the NAASE – NATA Joint Conference in Atlanta in November 2008.

I can't help but think that a good number of you may not recall items like carbon paper, the Gestetner machine, Addressograph-Multigraph plate making equipment, and the manual PBX switchboard. Those are technologies I grew up with. They and other tools of office productivity were vital in their times. As we enter the new millennium, they seem antiquated and unsophisticated. We have more intricate technologies that provide more powerful options for communicating our messages, but could these tools in fact be alienating our congregants?

The Internet enables us to send email, while cell phones provide us with the ability to send text messages. And all of this new technology has made instant communication a day-to-day reality providing us with both useful, and useless, information. With all of these technological advancements, we can accomplish almost everything online - obtain new members, offer shut-in religious services, and accept payment of dues and tuition, to name a few. Is it important to utilize these technologies within your portfolio of service solutions? Yes. However, with all of these new capabilities, something very important is missing - human interaction and connection. These faster, better, smarter methods of technological communication have created an impersonal communications monster. For some, these technologies appear to encourage less desire to rely on personal interaction.

Why do most people join a synagogue or attend religious services or social events? They are seeking to be a part of something, to make a human connection. Maybe for some it's spirituality, and for others more of a social need. We must, as synagogue managers, remember the need for human connection is first and foremost when communicating with our members. Every member experiences family life milestones and they look to their synagogue's religious advisors and staff to provide guidance with spiritual and soulful shelter for both joyous and painful events. It is our duty to ensure that each member is provided the appropriate level of human engagement and human connection based on their individual needs.

Prospective members come to us because they are seeking connection. This connection may be sought out due to a broken or absent bond at their current synagogue, or due to a newfound desire to be formally affiliated with a religious institution. Regardless of the motive, we are called upon as administrators to meet with these prospective members and learn of their needs. Then, in turn, we must do our best to

provide solutions via personal engagement. Talk with them, and based on each specific situation, determine and execute an action plan incorporating the communication tools that best fit those detected needs. When communicating with a potential new member, remember you are not selling them a car; you are introducing them to yourself as a representative of your synagogue and all of the services and human connections that are provided throughout their entire membership lifecycle. Administrators can have a profound effect on changing prospective members into new members; during the introductory meeting an initial tone is set, a bonding process begins, membership is courted and finally determined.



Thomas Jablonski

Establishing a comfortable environment for the new member is achieved at my synagogue through various personal connections, the first being a Shabbat membership basket, hand delivered to the new member's home by a Membership Committee representative. These baskets contain challah, wine, grape juice and printed material relating to the synagogue's history and services. Next, we offer a New Member Blessing by the clergy as part of a Shabbat service. We also introduce the new member to volunteer opportunities in Sisterhood, Brotherhood, Family Adventurers, and our Senior Ambassadors; this serves as an initial bonding venue to the Synagogue.

For all members of our synagogue, we have implemented some of the following activities, providing various outlets for personal engagement, connection, and both personal and spiritual growth:



On birthdays and anniversaries, we make personal phone calls to our members. When we are aware of a congregant in need, we ensure that a member of our clergy provides them with prayer and words of comfort. On Sunday mornings, as the students enter the school building with their parents, staff is always at the door waiting to welcome them with a "Boker Tov" and a high five. This is followed by an opportunity for the families to be together and enjoy a full breakfast before the start of classes, courtesy of our Brotherhood, and greatly appreciated by those who attend. Also on Sunday mornings, a lay-driven Minyan, enhanced by the Rabbi's presence, has been formed, originally by a few members observing Shloshim and saying Kaddish, and grew due to the camaraderie created.

Equally important is our Outreach Committee, which supports secular activities in the community. One example is our inter-faith Thanksgiving service; we worship together with two area churches, and rotate the hosting

These faster, better, smarter methods of technological communication have created an impersonal communication monster... encouraging less desire to rely on personal interaction.

responsibilities. We also invite The Greater New Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church to share a third Seder with us, which always draws large member and non-member attendance. The connection from that event allows for insight into the human condition and invites a greater human bond for all. We also strive to accommodate members of our congregation who observe the laws of Kashrut. When they use the Synagogue facility, our exclusive Caterer will work with our local Vaad and then, sub-contract to a kosher vendor. The ability to implement the aforementioned activities, and accommodate the needs of our members whenever possible, is how we display our "Welcome Mat", along with numerous other activities, communications and personal interactions.

At this point I would emphasize the importance of continuing self-education for us as administrators, to continue to hone our inter-personal communication skills. We all come from varying backgrounds and bring unique expertise to our role from previous vocations or personal experience. Personal and professional growth demonstrates that we not only perform our day-to-day activities, but also that we have

an interest in, and commitment to personal improvement, thereby reiterating our desire to maintain our position as an invaluable asset to our synagogue, staff, membership and community.

When I was President of NASA from 1988 to 1990, we began discussions with the Jewish Theological Seminary and, at that time, the United Synagogue of America, to develop more recognition for the FSA. The work/study program, I believe now in its 18th year, has continued to grow and provide continuing education and recognition for many of our colleagues.

Personal knowledge of religious observance as practiced by the congregation you serve is very important relative to your ability to effectively communicate to your members. Making an effort to say hello to congregants not only as one of the Klai Kodesh, but also as a friend, should be part of your professional protocol. It is another human interaction that you can provide, because many times you, as the Administrator, may know congregants that either the Rabbi or Cantor do not know. Your knowledge of ritual, as it evolves, is important so that you can communicate to those members who are both less and more traditional. All members have to be comfortable sharing their thoughts with the Administrator and know that their varying positions on rituals are not only open for discussion, but also a welcome avenue of discussion.

Changes within the interpretations of Halacha, particularly in regard to gay, lesbian and interfaith marriage issues are occurring too. Whatever your personal beliefs on these and other "hot topic" issues, you must remain neutral within your professional role. It is absolutely necessary for you to provide a "Welcome Mat" to any member compelled to discuss such issues with you. To provide open communication, you must be informed on the views of the Jewish community as it relates to your congregation. Interfaith marriage does occur, and gay and lesbian congregants are part of the community. With that said, it is up to you as an Administrator to maintain due diligence in your continued education on such subjects and how to address them with all congregants, over the broad range of views on these subjects. This issue can alienate or welcome people from either side of this dialogue, thereby making it a highly sensitive topic, which then necessitates neutrality in communicating the current stance of the Jewish community as it relates to your staff and membership when dealing with any current or prospective member.

It is imperative that we continue our education to follow and understand the "evolution of change" so we can maintain the ability to make members comfortable with the various religious, ritual and inclusivity changes. Face-to-face communication is necessary for addressing any of the above issues—deleting the human connection and relying on an email communication to encourage members to be comfortable or excited about upcoming change will only alienate them. Remember they came to you for the connection and comfort you provide, don't allow yourself to fail them by thinking "maintaining the status quo" is

sufficient. Now more than ever, personal connectivity is a necessary tool of communication during an “out-of-personal-touch” communication era.

Before I close, I would like to touch on another hot topic we are all facing; the challenging and uncertain economic times that are currently upon us. This economic instability will no doubt place financial pressure on all of us at some time during our tenure. Before making random personnel and program cuts, perform your due diligence in trying to secure additional revenue through various funding opportunities. Seek opportunities through venues you have utilized previously and be creative, research and reach-out to alternative approaches. Remember, it is important during these trying times to retain the same consistent quality of service for your members. During stressful times, it is imperative for the synagogue to remain a constant in the lives of those who face financial and personal hardships. For Synagogue Administrators that are newer to the field, seek counsel from colleagues who have survived hardships before. Allow them to mentor and guide you by sharing their experiences and insight. For Administrators serving older congregations, your synagogues have survived various crises along the way; research internal documentation, meet with lifetime members, and past board leaders, as well call upon colleagues so they can share their insight. Then tailor a solution to fit your current needs so you can navigate successfully through these turbulent times. For each issue, there is a solution. Be positive, be patient,

be creative and resourceful. Always remember you are not alone - enlist the insight of your colleagues. We can all learn from each other.

In summary, while members can send dues and tuition payments via electronic transmission, and as an Administrator you probably never have to personally connect and/or interact with them. But remember our profession is unlike any other. We provide a soulful and spiritual shelter, not a product or a dissociative service. So if you choose not to interact, not to provide the human connection and not to engage prospective and current members with the connection they are seeking, you are doing a disservice to your position, and synagogue. I encourage all of you to take a fresh look at your schedules and find time to welcome and engage your members with a human connection, a personal touch. When all is said and done we all seek a sense of belonging, a sense of community – be the first one to extend your hand.

Again, I thank you all for this honor to present the 10th Irma Lee Ettinger Memorial Lecture. May all of your dreams, ambitions and goals come true. ■

Thomas Jablonski, FSA, FTA, is the Executive Director of Temple Beth El in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.



Ideological Schizophrenia and Denominational Bewilderment: Conservative Theology in the Age of Personal Autonomy

Bernard Goldblatt, FSA, ATz



Bernard Goldblatt

As an Executive Director of a Conservative synagogue, at times I have the responsibility to discuss some halachic issues with our congregants. When does Shabbat end and when can my musicians set up for my Saturday night wedding? Why can't I bring non-hechshered items into the synagogue kitchen? Even, once in a great while, why can't I have non-kosher food at my daughter's Bat Mitzvah party at the synagogue? It quickly became apparent to me that trying to frame a discussion in halachic terms to many of our congregants was speaking a foreign language they neither understood nor could relate to.

The question "Is Conservative Judaism a halachic movement?" would be answered by almost all Conservative rabbis in the affirmative. But if the affirmative statement is true, why do most of the congregants I deal with no longer use halacha as a daily guide for their lives? And most importantly, what are the implications of this serious disconnect for Conservative Judaism?

There is not time or space for a discussion of the development of halacha, but I direct you to two books that are most helpful. A brilliant discussion of the Orthodox philosophy of halacha is contained in the book *Halachic Man*¹ by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, a renowned Orthodox scholar and philosopher of this past century. The Conservative view of halacha is laid out in depth by Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff, Rector and Professor of Philosophy at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles, in his book *The Unfolding Tradition – Jewish Law After Sinai*.² But this is not an article about halacha and its development, but rather about Conservative Jews today and how they relate to halacha.

Perhaps any discussion of Conservative Judaism and halacha might begin with arguably the best known history of Conservative Judaism – *Conservative Judaism: The New Century* by Neil Gillman.³ On January 31, 1886, a group of men met in the Trustee Room of the Shearith Israel Synagogue in New York City and founded the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York (JTS). Gillman identifies an ideology buried among the writings of the Movement's founders, primarily Solomon Schechter, but also Zechariah Frankel, Cyrus Adler and Louis Finkelstein. He identifies nine building blocks:

- 1) America is different (than Europe);
- 2) Judaism can deal with modernity;
- 3) If we are to deal with modernity, we must study Judaism

in a modern way;

- 4) Judaism has had a history;
- 5) The community becomes the authority;
- 6) Hebrew must remain the language of the Jewish people;
- 7) Zionism is a positive force in Jewish history and it should be encouraged;
- 8) Halacha remains the preeminent form of Jewish religious expression;
- 9) Halacha does change and develop to meet new situations, but the process is gradual, evolutionary, limited to the more superficial areas of Jewish life, and always under the guidance of recognized authorities of Jewish law.⁴

According to Gillman, the ultimate implication of studying Judaism in a modern way, rarely articulated specifically by Conservative thinkers and rabbis, is that Torah, the entire body of traditional Jewish teaching, "lost its distinctive status as sacred literature. This represented a radical break from the traditional methods of studying Torah."⁵ Orthodoxy sees and studies the Torah as the explicit word of God. In this view, the Torah's legal teachings – halacha – are eternally unchanging and binding. In response to this, Solomon Schechter wrote: "We must insist that the teaching in the Seminary be conducted along scientific lines This is the only way to save Judaism in this country and elsewhere."⁶

Building block 4, "Judaism has a history," was the primary discovery of the scientific study of Judaism. The idea that as every period of Jewish history changed so did Judaism change was a radical break from the traditional understanding of Judaism. For the Orthodox traditionalists, "nothing Jewish ever changed, particularly God's revealed law. How could God's explicit word be affected by changing historical conditions?"⁷ Gillman calls the appeal to history "the Pandora's box that Frankel opened for Conservative Judaism."⁸ The Reform Movement used the rationale to abandon traditional practices; the Conservative Movement used it to retain some and drop others.

To look at how Conservative halachic interpretation wrestles with modern issues, it is instructive to look at the recent halachic debate around homosexuality. In a brilliant article entitled "Conservative Judaism's Consistent Inconsistency," Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove, a pulpit rabbi at Park Avenue Synagogue, describes the three teshuvot approved by the 25-member Committee on Jewish Law and Standards.⁹ Two teshuvot affirmed the movement's stance prohibiting

homosexuality, while the third legitimized same-sex relationships with restrictions. While Conservative Jews focused their discussions on the ideological and pragmatic implications of these three teshuvot, Cosgrove focuses on the dissenting opinion submitted by Rabbi Gordon Tucker, a pulpit rabbi in White Plains, New York¹⁰. Cosgrove writes that sometimes the dissenting opinion contains the real story. To support this, he points to Justice Harlan's dissenting opinion in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) before the U.S. Supreme Court. Harlan's dissent boldly laid the groundwork for Chief Justice Warren's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which reshaped America's social and racial landscape. Although dissenting opinions like Harlan's and Tucker's are often overlooked in their time, they ultimately produce a far more enduring legacy than the majority opinions.

To understand Cosgrove's brilliant argument, one must look at two paragraphs in which Tucker calls Conservative Judaism to task and argues that it has failed to develop an approach to halacha that reflects the theological premises of the movement:

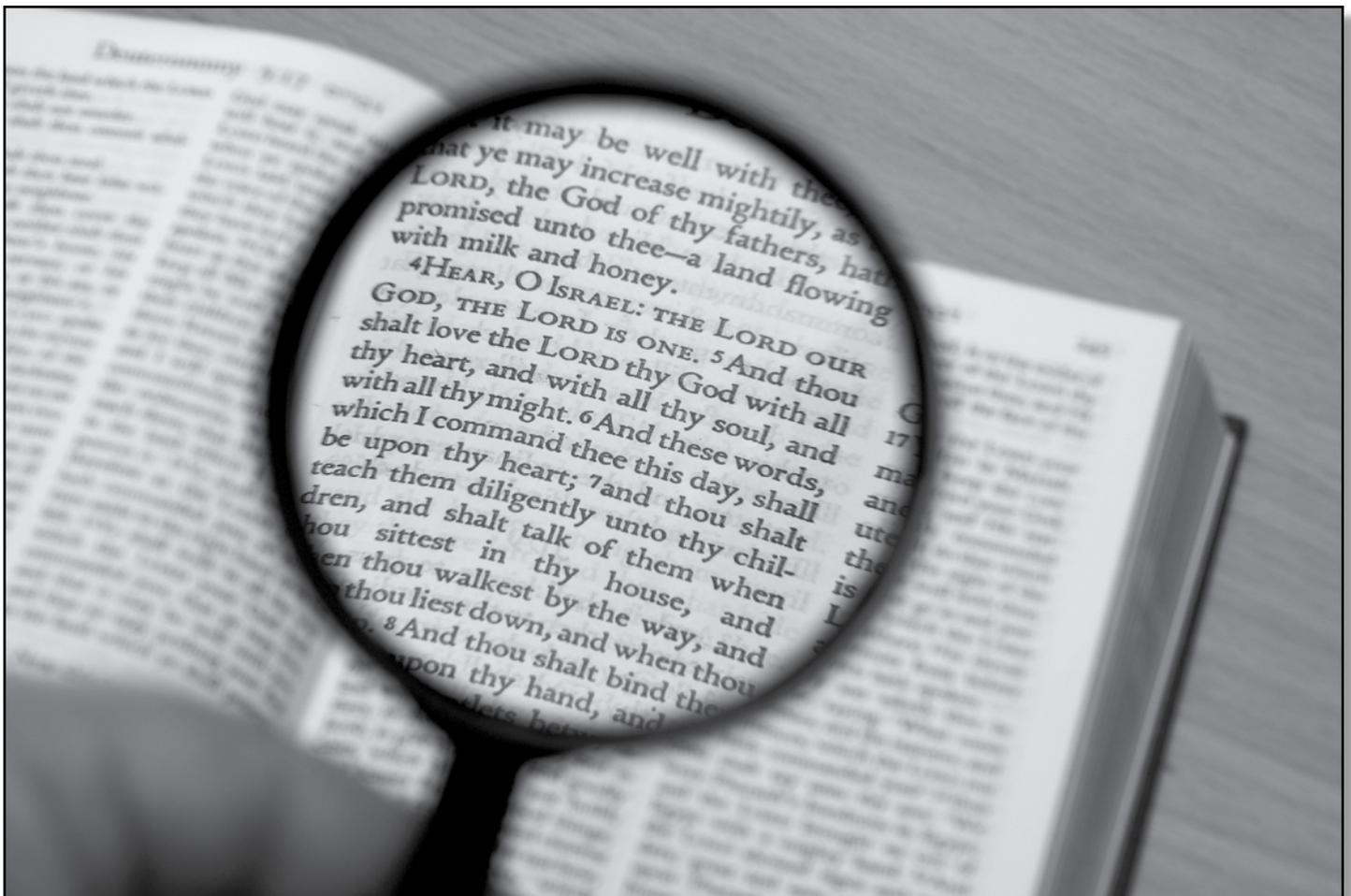
"When someone says, 'What can we do? The Torah is clear on the subject,' what is being said amounts to a claim of infallibility and irrefutability for the text of the Torah. And that claim ultimately rests on the assumption that the words of Leviticus (and, of course, those of the other four books of the Pentateuch) express

directly and completely the will of God... But that assumption (that the Torah is the direct and complete expression of God's will) is one that, for all its currency in parts of the Jewish world, is not accepted in our Conservative Jewish world. And it is not accepted for good scholarly and theological reasons."¹¹

And:

"Was it for nothing that we have celebrated the groundbreaking scholarship of Yehezkel Kaufmann on the religion of Israel? Is it merely an intellectual game that we have played for a century now by calling such people as Mordecai Kaplan, Robert Gordis, Gerson Cohen, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Nahum Sarna, H.L. Ginsburg, Jacob Milgrom, and Yochanan Muffs our masters and teachers? Why do we study and get inspired by such teachings, and yet fear to teach them in turn to our congregations, preferring to present to them the simple – but misleading – formulation that the Torah is the word of God? And why would we even consider doing halacha by appealing to an axiom of biblical inerrancy that undermines the very theology with which these revered teachers, and others, have gifted us?"¹²

Tucker argues that the "legal method employed by the Conservative movement operates independently, or 'at odds,' with its most basic theological and intellectual commitments."¹³ He says that it is "time to bring an internal



consistency to our halacha and theology.”¹⁴ Tucker argues that “our approach to halacha is internally flawed, intellectually dishonest and . . . disrespectful to our most esteemed pedagogues.”¹⁵

So what is the solution? Cosgrove says Tucker calls on the movement to end its identity crisis and extend Conservative theology into the realm of halacha. Conservative Jews, celebrating the ‘human element’ in Revelation must ‘do’ halacha accordingly:

“ . . . the time has come for a movement that has finally published a Humash commentary that reflects the theology our masters have taught us “to come out of the closet.” It is past time for us to be, in the Prophet Elijah’s words, “hopping between two opinions.” If the axiom behind this theological argument is to be accepted, then let us forthrightly admit that we have been misled by the teachers at whose feet we have sat. But if we confess that we do not accept the axiom of biblical infallibility, then let us honor our teachers by abandoning this theological argument, and by no longer permitting ourselves to say, when the matter of gays and lesbians comes up, “What can we do? The Torah is clear on the subject!” Could it perhaps be that critical study itself was given to us precisely so that we would not let the text of the Torah stand as an impediment to the acceptance, fulfillment, and normalization of God’s creatures?”¹⁶

Cosgrove perhaps sums up the nature of the halachic divide between our rabbinate and our congregants as follows: “Tucker’s call demands honesty and most of all consistency in Conservative Judaism’s approach to halacha. To do otherwise has and will continue to result in ideological schizophrenia, resulting in denominational bewilderment, confusing to its leaders and unintelligible to its present and future adherents.”¹⁷ Cosgrove concludes, “It is precisely because Tucker challenges the very foundations of Conservative Judaism’s ideological matrix that he cannot be ignored.”¹⁸

Tucker’s analysis is, in my mind, the most eloquent explanation of why our rabbis and 15% of our congregants live in one world while the other 85% of our congregants live in another -- ideological schizophrenia and denominational bewilderment. This 85% - 15% divide is identified by Gillman who writes “There is a general consensus that Conservative Judaism has failed to create a significant body of committed, observant lay Jews – Jews who keep a kosher home, who attend synagogue weekly, and who participate in a serious adult education program, to use three commonly accepted criteria of Jewish commitment. There is no firm statistical basis for this claim, but most Conservative rabbis questioned by this observer have estimated the committed core of their congregations to be somewhere between 10 and 15 percent of their membership.”¹⁹



Rabbi Robert Gordis, who according to Elliot Dorff was acknowledged by many of his generation as “Mr. Conservative Judaism,” had an interesting take on this law versus actual practice issue. His position, which is clearly that of Conservative Judaism, was that the fact that the vast majority of Conservative Jews eat unkosher food does not mean that the laws of kashrut are no longer binding, because serious and knowledgeable Conservative Jews overwhelmingly keep kosher. “Gordis is aware that this establishes a moral and social anomaly, for how can a minority of Jews arrogate to itself the right to legislate for the majority? He maintains that such a situation can only be accepted on a temporary basis and that our contemporary challenge is to transform Catholic Israel from a minority to the majority of Jews.”²⁰ This is a sort of messianic rationalization for halacha that depends on a majority of those 85% of unobservant Conservative Jews somehow deciding to become observant.

So, are we a halachic movement? Maybe the answer is one we repeat in jokes about how Jews answer questions – “yes and no.” Maybe this is a relevant question only for the 15% of Conservative Jews who see themselves as halachic or even understand what that means. But perhaps there’s a more important question for the 85% of Jews who could be classified “she’eino yodeah lish’ol” and don’t really consider halacha a factor in their daily lives. Perhaps the real question is how do we speak to people who don’t understand or observe halacha in a way that makes Jewish tradition and law comprehensible and even engaging to them?

There are three approaches I submit for consideration. The first approach was presented on November 10, 2005 when Rabbi David Wolpe spoke at JTS in New York and proposed that the name of Conservative Judaism be changed to “Covenantal Judaism” to better encompass the view that Rabbinic law is both binding and evolving. Rabbi Wolpe, prior to the talk, had asked colleagues, friends and congregants to define Conservative Judaism in one sentence. He called the experience dispiriting. Wolpe found that “In synagogues that do define themselves as Conservative, the congregants often expect halachic observance from their rabbis, yet they are not motivated to emulate them. Conservative Jews are increasingly confused and uncertain about their spiritual direction.”²¹ Wolpe proposes a simple answer to the question of “Who are you and what do you believe?” He declared, “I am a Covenantal Jew.” Wolpe posits that Covenantal Judaism is based on three relationships:

- The covenant at Sinai established our relationship with God
- The covenant with Abraham established our relationship with other Jews
- The covenant with Noah established our relationship with all humanity²²

That the concept of covenant is central to our biblical history

is plain to anyone who reads our Bible. Wolpe calls the covenant the “spine of Judaism” and asserts that no idea is more important to the development of tradition. He says that now is “the time to claim it, to develop it in powerful new ways and to fashion a movement of Judaism that can change Jewish life in America and beyond.”²³ The idea of a covenantal relationship is actually a condition precedent to the development of halacha, which is, in its simplest sense, a system of covenantal commitment of Jews to God. This idea is really quite beautiful and may be an accessible way for less traditional congregants to grasp what their relationship with God is and what it calls them to do.

The second came in a series of speeches by Professor Arnold Eisen when he travelled around the country to meet and

This is...the most eloquent explanation of why our rabbis and 15% of our congregants live in one world while the other 85% of our congregants live in another...

greet Conservative Jews in 2006, the year in which he became Chancellor of JTS. In what he called the Mitzvah Initiative, he passionately proposed that the way to speak to congregants of our Conservative synagogues is to emphasize the concept of “mitzvah.” He believes that that is the concept around which we can energize and engage our members in ritual and tradition. The JTS web site, on a page entitled “Guiding Principles for the Mitzvah Conversation,” says the following:

“Our tradition has always understood that “mitzvah” embraces a range of meanings broader than “commandment” alone. This is certainly true of popular Jewish usage of the word mitzvah. In common usage the word is generally understood as “good deed.” JTS renders our key term as “instructions” that were “enjoined upon” the Israelites and not only as “commandments” that they were “commanded.” The range of meanings demanded by our tradition’s use of the word over the centuries and to the present day is broader still. Those meanings include, but are not limited to, actions that we feel obligated to perform, that engage us, that we are responsible for, that we undertake out of love.”²⁴ [Emphasis added]

Despite attempts to bring a wider range of definitions to the word “mitzvah,” these other meanings are in addition to commandedness. Commandedness is still at the core of Eisen’s definition of “mitzvah.”

The third approach to our question is thoroughly explained by Rabbi Harold Kushner in 2007 in his article entitled

"Conservative Judaism in an Age of Democracy."²⁵ Rabbi Kushner says "One of the implications of the dawning of the age of democracy, one that gave rise to the Conservative movement but one that the Conservative movement has been reluctant to recognize, is this: In the absence of an enforcement mechanism, halachic Judaism is no longer viable."²⁶ Kushner says that the non-Orthodox response to halachic commandedness is "Why should I?" This is not said dismissively but simply asks for a persuasive reason.

Orthodox Jews can be halachic because communal standards and pressure impose halachic observance. In the Conservative movement our children are enrolled in religious school because of the requirements of the Bar-Mitzvah ceremony. What else do our congregants do as

*Stop confusing our congregants... develop
a meaningful language to explain our
theology that is understandable and
excites and engages them...*

Jews because we tell them they have to? Very little. The fact is Kushner states, "that our best members, our synagogue presidents, our ritual committee chairmen, the men and women who maintain our minyan and fill the pews on Shabbat morning, are not halachic Jews. They may be deeply and seriously observant, but there are elements of traditional halacha which even the most dedicated do not keep . . . and among the things they do observe, they feel they are choosing to observe them."²⁷ Kushner, like Cosgrove and Tucker, cuts to the heart of the matter when he writes that as Conservative Jews, "We damage our credibility, we blur our authenticity, and we cede our 'home court advantage' to the Orthodox when we continue to claim to be a movement of halacha, and we impose a measure of cognitive dissonance on ourselves when we do so because in our heart of hearts, we know that we are not really a halachic movement. Conservative Jews at their best are respectful of halachic rules but do not consider themselves bound by them a priori."²⁸

Kushner says he is in favor of Jews living maximally observant lives and following the guidelines of Jewish tradition, and says he could not be a Conservative rabbi otherwise. But he thinks they will only do this out of free will, not out of a sense of commandedness or obligation. The end of the halachic age may not be a bad thing, according to him, because most American Jews would rank action based on personal choice and values higher than behavior based on unquestioning obedience. Do we really admire people who live their lives by saying "I was only following orders?" My own personal experience in a right-wing Orthodox day school was that

they encouraged questions but only up to a certain point. Questioning any of the underlying assumptions of Orthodoxy was de facto disrespectful and even at the age of twelve I realized that at a certain point I was being asked to check my brain at the door.

Kushner insists that we must speak to our congregants to be observant not out of yir'at chet, fear of sin and dread of offending God, but rather out of ahavat Torah, the sense that an observant life will give them something that will enrich their lives.

If you ask a Reform rabbi what Reform stands for, he or she will tell you two words: social justice. Ask an Orthodox rabbi about Orthodoxy and he will answer "Torah Judaism" or "halacha." Like Wolpe, Kushner despairs that if you ask a Conservative rabbi what Conservative Judaism stands for, he or she will give you a 48-page brochure.

But Kushner has an answer that rings true. He suggests that the theological behavioral foundation of Conservative Judaism can be expressed in three words – "asher kid' shanu b' mitzvotav" – and will do for 21st century Jews what halacha did for our ancestors. This means life as a quest for holiness, kedushah, and the Torah as a guide for bringing holiness into our lives. Mitzvot do not command our loyalty merely by being, but rather by the holiness they lead to. Kushner would no longer translate "mitzvah" as commandment or obligation. He wouldn't translate it at all, but rather understand it to mean "opportunity, the opportunity to be in touch with God by transforming the ordinary into the sacred To call upon our power to take the ordinary and make it holy is to put ourselves in touch with the part of ourselves that is most like God."²⁹

So how do I see these three approaches? Eisen's call to mitzvah and Wolpe's covenantal system seem to both rely on a feeling of commandedness. Furthermore, the covenantal concept that worked in ancient times is based on contractual notions of consideration and can easily lead to problematic expectations of punishment for bad behavior and reward for good behavior. I believe we must accept Kushner's position that the notion of Conservative Jews guiding their daily lives by commandedness is over. In that respect, neither Eisen's language of mitzvah nor Wolpe's language of covenant seems to speak to our congregants in a way that is engaging and meaningful.

Perhaps the Torah gives us proof that Kushner is on the right track. The book of Va-Yikra in parshat Sh'mini, chapter 11, verses 1-47, contains the essential compilation of the laws of kashrut. The Etz Hayim Humash makes it clear that these are not health laws, but that "the overriding purpose of the dietary code is explicit: You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy." (v. 44)³⁰. How many Jews could identify that as the reason for keeping kosher? Most Jews treat the laws of kashrut as an obligation of commandedness rather than an attempt to take eating from the mundane and mechanical to an act infused with kedushah. Couldn't we better engage them through language of kedushah

as opposed to halachic commandedness? I submit that talking to our congregants through the language of holiness is accessible, meaningful and engaging. We respect the Orthodox for their strictly halachic world. We value the Reform for social action as their *raison d'être*. But the kedushah approach contains perfecting one's self as well as repairing the world, and uses halacha as a guide rather than a mandate to achieve those things. This is a positive, simple and elegant way to explain to Conservative Jews who we are, what we are doing here, and how we intend to use Jewish ritual as a vehicle to advance our goals as people and as responsible members of the world.

Recently I attended the new West Coast Institute of NAASE at the American Jewish University and had the privilege of learning with Rabbi Ed Feinstein of Valley Beth Shalom. He and Rabbi Kushner understand our present situation as Conservative Jews similarly. They direct us to look at the destruction of the Second Temple and Jerusalem by the Romans in the First Century which nearly destroyed the Jewish people. Jews could no longer worship in a way and place that had been the most symbolic and central expression of the religion for generations. In its place we had to invent (or reinvent), out of necessity, a Judaism of synagogue, study and mitzvot to replace the sacrificial system as a way to be close to God. The new halachic system maintained the Jewish people with depth and sensitivity and served generations of Jews much as the old sacrificial system had. But today the halachic system is withering in this age of democracy and personal choice. Both Kushner and Feinstein see this moment in our history as pivotal, and they call on us to act decisively. We must do what Yochanan ben Zakai and his fellow rabbis did 2,000 years ago and reinvent Judaism. To accomplish that we must:

- Stop confusing our congregants with "Torah mi Sinai" talk from our pulpits and help them understand they must be a part of ongoing revelation by engaging our Torah in an intellectually honest way as Conservative Jews.
- Accept and acknowledge that the concept and language of commandedness are no longer meaningful to our congregants, and that therefore we are no longer strictly speaking halachic Jews.
- Develop a new theology around the concept of kedushah -- holiness.
- Develop a meaningful language to explain our theology that is understandable to our congregants and excites and engages them. And we must use this in our sanctuaries and classrooms.
- Within that language and theology we must have a central place for halacha, not because of commandedness but rather because of meaning and personal choice. We must "choose life," and "be holy" -- and we can use the path of the modern Conservative halacha as a guide to get there.

So the next time a congregant asks me about having non-kosher food at her daughter's Bat Mitzvah party at the synagogue, instead of a dry answer about commandedness, I will answer her question using the principles above to engage her meaningfully and discuss the personal choices she can make, informed by choosing to honor certain halachic principles and make herself, her family and the world more *kadosh*. *Ken yehi ratzon*. ■

Bernard Goldblatt, FSA, ATz, is the Executive Director of Adath Jeshurun Congregation in Minnetonka, Minnesota.

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Inreach AND Outreach: Our Future

by Steven Hecht



Steven Hecht

Inreach - connecting to current members who may be under-served by the synagogue; outreach – reaching out to those who are not yet members and are therefore considered unaffiliated. BOTH are the essential for the future survival of our synagogue's mission and the future of Conservative Judaism.

Synagogues ignoring their current members by not meeting their ever-changing needs or expectations will eventually find that they are the ones not needed. Are we offering programming that we believe our members want, or is it the programming that our synagogues believe they desire? Are we so

interested in the number of people attending a function that we lose sight of the reason we planned the event? Or did we plan the event because a group of people was looking for a means of connection?

How many attendees will make it successful . . . fifteen, twenty, one hundred? We must not continue counting people as total numbers when determining the success of a project, but rather we should change our attitudes concerning the outcome of an event. Did the event create excitement, did it bring a different crowd, did it break even or was it a fundraiser with achievable expectations? Did we connect with our members and did they connect with each other?

We have a tendency to always look at membership as only bringing in new members, while forgetting our current member's needs. We could not possibly spend enough marketing dollars to equate to the potential membership increases that could be achieved through current members. Fulfill their needs and membership grows.

Ask for their interests on their membership application, and then follow through. We seem to lose it somewhere in the execution stage. Happy campers bring in other happy campers! One of the most engaging programs we offered was a blessing given by our rabbi entitled, "Bow Wow Blessings." Congregants brought their pets to our parking lot to be blessed, and the result was attendance by a segment of our congregation that had not been enticed previously to any other event. Whether or not you are a dog-lover, there was no denying that this particular program connected.

Board members must know that they are true ambassadors of the synagogue. The entire pressure of membership growth is typically on the shoulders of board members along with the membership committee. Each and every congregant is an ambassador. We must broaden our scope

of responsibility for membership growth. It is everyone from the support staff to our youth and every individual connected with our synagogues. If they do not feel a vested interest then it is our job to create one. If they are not vested in the synagogue and its future, they will never support its endowment. Others have gone before us, so we too must ensure the future for others.

The unaffiliated seem to be hiding, or is it just that we think so? There is a thought that people are unaffiliated because they choose to be. They know the synagogue exists and yet they have not sought us out. Is it possible that we have not enticed them by giving them a reason to seek us out? Who is to blame? Since we are always looking for someone to blame or a reason they choose not to join our Shul, we surmise it must be them. I contend that we must give them a reason to join.



Some believe we only think of outreach in terms of interfaith families, but yet there are those in-faith marriages that also make a conscious decision not to join at this time or maybe ever. Why? Everyone has his or her own preconceived notions of what membership to an institution of organized religion is like. Most of us belonged somewhere growing up and either have fond memories of those connections or we feel the guilt of having had it thrust upon us and vow we would not do that to our own offspring.

Imagine if we could connect with singles or young married couples and offer them reasons for joining other than their children. Did you ever have members leave when their youngest child was finished and stated their reason for leaving was because they don't need you anymore? If we are looking for blame when this occurs, it lies with us. We have not made the connection that so many of us desire. Dr. Ron Wolfson in his book, "*The Spirituality of Welcoming*" states "you must make numerous connections with new members before they feel engaged. This may ensure having a vested interest in the organization and its future. We're so thrilled when someone joins that we have a tendency to forget about them and put on the hard sell to the next one who happens to enter our doors."

Imagine if there was a plan to entice people towards your synagogue. Give them a reason to join other than their seven year old. What if we offered a free one-year membership to everyone? Yes, they might have to pay for Nursery or Religious School, but not dues or building fund for the first year. After all, the only cost of additional members is mailing. You will find that most will make donations throughout the year anyway.

What if your local Federation, Israel Bonds office or JNF would allow you to use their mailing list for unaffiliated? What if your Rabbis offered Judaic classes but held them in non-threatening venues, like a restaurant or a conference room of a law firm? Consider the Rabbi's hosting your interfaith members for an informal dinner at someone's home. List your interfaith member's simchas in your bulletins, engagements, weddings, birthdays, develop an interfaith section of your cemetery, hold programs in restaurants and bars such as martinis and munchies, latkes and vodka, softball, volleyball, bowling or other sports activities that are non-threatening to the in-faith and interfaith couples. These were some of the ideas that were successful in our city. Join together with the other Jewish Communal agencies in your areas and other synagogues of all denominations to hold Community Chanukah events, joint Purim Carnivals, Community Mitzvah Days, Chanukah in the Malls and Passover in the Aisles. Host others in your homes for a Shabbat meal or invite them to your Seder. Open up your events to the extended community and broaden your scope of appeal.

Sometimes membership is a process, and decisions aren't made after one encounter and it may occur over a period of years. New members want to experience before they purchase. Does it cost anything to give free tickets for

the High Holidays to a prospective member? Who's a prospective anyway? Isn't it anyone who has the potential to join your shul? Do our rules keep us from expanding? Are we so stringent in trying to follow the rules and make everything fair that we lose sight of the mission? We can't help save souls if we're too busy chasing them away.

There are those who would rather not waste their time on trying to entice in-faiths who haven't joined or inter-faiths who may be afraid to join. "They'll make me convert, it's too expensive, and we won't be treated as others." It's time to stop pretending that interfaith couples are not growing in numbers and that we shouldn't have to deal with the growth. It's a fact. Those of us who realize the interfaith community continues to grow may be better prepared for the next wave of Conservative Jews.

My Rabbi in a sermon stated that the true *eishet chayil*, the woman of valor, were those interfaith mothers who were raising Jewish children. Imagine, a mother born of another faith but willing to undertake the commitment of raising Jewish children. Just imagine if we reached out to help her? Imagine if we reached out to the Jewish partner and offered support so that raising Jewish children in their home is less difficult. Offer non-threatening sessions that are creative and not held at the Synagogue with and without the children present.

This is by no means a commentary on giving up on in-faith families who are unaffiliated. Outreach, Keruv, takes tremendous effort by all of us. Young families today may not feel they need a synagogue to feel Jewish. Some feel just by belonging to the local Jewish Community Center that they are affiliated. We must learn to adapt to a new era of "filling needs where they exist".

Many portals to synagogue life can be entered through social activities. Create opportunities that families, singles and other demographics would find of interest. Build upon those entry levels by introducing Judaic content along the way without it being thrust upon them.

The truth is, we have a good product. We are all sales people and need to become marketing and communication experts. It was never easy; it's just a little more difficult now. To use an analogy by Dr. Ron Wolfson, who in his book compares a Synagogue to a tent - we need to ask ourselves two questions. How do we get them to the tent entrance? And now that they have entered our tent, what do we do with them? ■

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Photographs from the NAASE - NATA Joint Conference in Atlanta



Sof Hadavar - End of the Discussion:

Im Ein Kemah Ein Torah - If There is No Flour, There can be No Torah

by Rabbi William H. Lebeau

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Editor's Note: The 9th annual Irma Lee Ettinger Memorial Lecture was delivered by Rabbi William H. Lebeau, Vice Chancellor of Rabbinic Development at the Jewish Theological Seminary, at the NAASE Annual Conference in Ft. Lauderdale in March 2007.

It is a special privilege to offer this Irma Lee Ettinger Memorial Lecture. She provided NAASE with her leadership and example. Her efforts were dedicated to increasing the sense of professionalism among Synagogue Executives. I have celebrated what she cherished – your growth and increasing maturity as a professional organization.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah's teaching in Pirke Avot, "*Im ein kemah eyn Torah*," "If there is no flour, there can be no Torah" seems to have been written for synagogue executives. It articulates the inescapable challenge you face to become effective fundraisers. You are a critical part of the leadership of your congregation, charged with the responsibility *L'hagdil Torah U'l'ha-adirah* --- to guarantee that Torah will not be forgotten among those in your community.

For purposes of our discussion, a better translation of your theme renders kemah not as flour, but as dough. If the dough is not rising in your synagogue, you will fail in your responsibility. I acknowledge that fundraising is a daunting challenge, but I want to encourage you to view raising kemah as a positive dimension of your work and not a burden. As further encouragement I want to assure you that the promise has been made that in the world to come, fundraisers will be seated at the right hand of martyrs.

But *Im ein kemah ein Torah* is not all that Rabbi Elazar wrote. He concludes his teaching with the inversion of your theme, saying, "*Im ein Torah ein Kemah* --- If there is no Torah there can be no dough. He offers more than clever symmetry. With the words, "*Im ein Torah ein Kemah*," Rabbi Elazar offers fundraising's most fundamental lesson. Every fundraising endeavor must have its Torah --- that is its compelling vision. Neither guilt nor assessments have ever been effective tools. Jewish tzedakah has been inspired by the conviction that Torah offers the blueprint for meaningful life, provides pathways to a personal relationship with God and must be preserved for future generations.

The first fundraising drive in Jewish history began shortly after the B'nai Yisrael left Mount Sinai. God appointed Moses Chair and provided him with a brief fund-raiser's manual. Recorded in Parshat Terumah, God's instructions remain an essential guide for all of us who are charged with providing kemah for sustaining the Jewish vision.

The manual: God spoke to Moses saying, "*Daber el b'nai*

Yisrael vayikhu lee terumah me-et kol ish asher yidvenu libo tikhu et terumatee ... "v'asu li mikdash v'shakhantee b'tokham." Speak to the children of Israel and take an offering for Me from every person whose heart is willing and build a Sanctuary that I might dwell among them."

God's first charge to Moses is "*Daber el b'nai Yisrael*," speak directly to the people --- face to face. An effective campaign cannot be conducted impersonally by mail, or e-mail, or even by phone. Fundraising begins with the passionate personal solicitation.

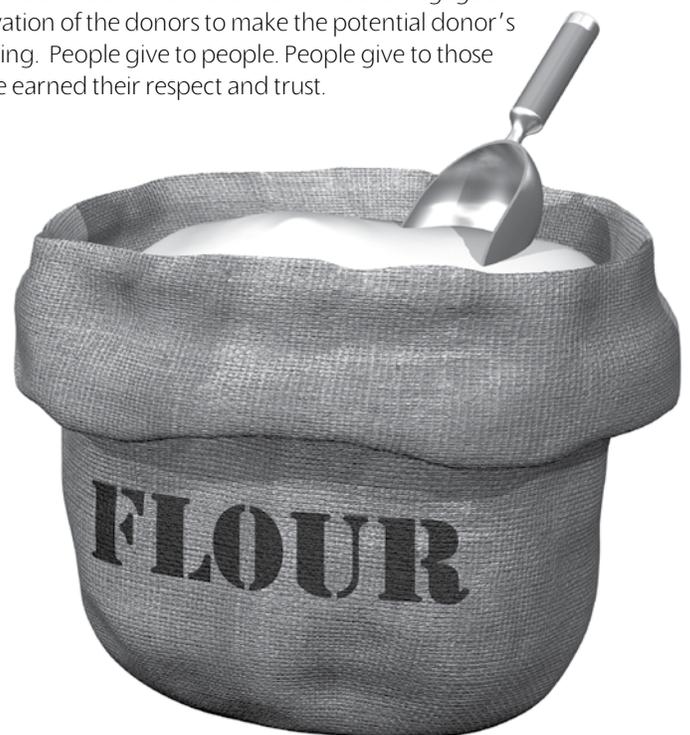
The next step is, 'Raise the dough.' "*Vayikhu lee terumah* --- take an offering for Me." "*I'm ayn kemah ayn Torah*."

The third rule suggests a goal of fundraising even more important than getting the money. "...*vayikhu lee terumah me-et kol ish* --- Speak to the children of Israel and take an offering for Me from every person." Successful fundraising is about raising the kemah from everyone, large donors and small, drawing every community member into a shared vision that will benefit both the donor and the community.

The next protocol of fundraising is found in the words, "*me-et kol ish asher yidvenu libo* --- from every person whose heart is willing." No fundraising gift can be taken from an unwilling person who is not convinced of the compelling purpose of the vision. So Moses understood that he had to engage in the cultivation of the donors to make the potential donor's heart willing. People give to people. People give to those who have earned their respect and trust.



William H. Lebeau



Moses earned the people's trust through the leadership he offered to the community. So, when he presented the campaign vision, "*v'asu Lee Mikdash v'shakhantee b'tokham.*" If you build the Sanctuary you will bring God's presence into the community, he was trusted. The people contributed enthusiastically to the construction of the Mikdash.

Each of you has earned the love and trust of your own constituency. Your acts of kindness to your congregants and your daily commitment to synagogue life have earned you precious personal capital. If you approach them personally with passion for your vision, congregants will respond when you seek to gain their support.

To this day, we continue to pursue the same vision for building sanctuaries bringing God's Presence to our communities. Once our sanctuaries are constructed they inspire the concretization of God's presence through acts of kindness between congregants that reflect the godly behavior God demands of us.

Judaism's world view has always taught that one individual acting alone will have little impact on the world's destiny. As Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik wrote: "The Jew cannot live alone... the password of the Jew is *chesed* - kindness, compassion - to his fellow Jews and to his fellow man."

We all face two counter forces to the successful raising of the dough needed to build our communities. First, we live in



a time when personal autonomy or as many have called it, "Me-ism," has become the most sacred value. Self-interest trumps the inclination to work in community to repair our broken world.

Increasingly, the preference of people is to go it alone. This was articulated most clearly in Robert Putnam's book about communal trends in modern society entitled, "Bowling Alone". Most of us are old enough to have either participated in, or at least remember the popular activity of earlier decades of bowling leagues. People bowled together on teams, competing, eating, drinking, and socializing together every week. Today, bowling is no less popular, but most people prefer bowling alone.

To make our constituencies willing contributors to our synagogues, we must convince them again of the blessings of living in Jewish community. We all need to articulate the compelling reasons for joining our energies together rather than going it alone.

We need to demonstrate that learning Torah together is a special the gift of being in community. As members pursue their own Jewish journeys they will appreciate how the responses and understanding of others enhance personal meaning.

Celebrating life's blessings and finding comfort when hope needs to be renewed becomes meaningful in the presence of a worshipping community. Through the celebration of births in the synagogue we proclaim that no Jewish birth is to be taken for granted. The baby's birth is of significance to the Jewish future. The entire community celebrates with the parents and grandparents.

A Bar or Bat Mitzvah cannot be taken for granted. More than half of our Jewish community has no knowledge of our tradition today. The Torah learning of a child is to be received with the fullest joy by the entire Jewish community.

The power of community is evident when God's Presence becomes reality in the acts of visiting the sick, assisting the caregivers, comforting the mourners, contributing to the rejoicing of the bride and groom, joining forces to respond to global Jewish issues in Israel or other places in the world. All who find meaning in shared observances and activities will become willing hearts.

One additional challenge to creating willing hearts among our membership is the need to make a strong case for the unique character of our Conservative synagogues and institutions. We have been hesitant to celebrate Conservative Judaism with pride. We are a centrist Movement. We often envy the clarity with which the Orthodox or Reform Movements define themselves. I would suggest that in matters of faith, absolute clarity has never been the Jewish ideal. Rabbi Ed Feld, Conservative rabbi and teacher at JTS once made the comment that Reform and Orthodox Jews seem more certain of what God said or didn't say. Conservative Jews are on their way to knowing.

We have chosen a middle position for our religious lives by choosing to become Conservative Jews. We need to champion Conservative Judaism for what I believe it to be -- the traditional position in Jewish life. We emulate the exciting and attractive approach to tradition reflected in the dynamic tension of 5400 pages of Talmudic arguments. The rabbis were not just argumentative. They cared deeply about the question of how to interpret Jewish law for their times. The teaching "Eilu V'eilu divrei elokim hayim --- the words of these scholars and the words of these other scholars are both the words of the living God," appear at the end of many Talmudic conflicts. This conclusion is not a modern invention. It was the rabbis' way of acknowledging the wisdom of the other's position. They admit that following either conclusion would be an appropriate way of understanding a verse or particular Jewish law. We are further encouraged to respect Conservative Judaism's decision, after a long and complicated debate, to validate multiple positions.

We are a movement in the middle and should proudly claim that position. We are in the middle between Orthodox and Reform, between the right and left, between faith and doubt, between the past and the future, between tradition and change, between a Torah that is human written and God-inspired, between a traditionally Jewish and totally secular way of life, between autonomy and commandedness, between our love for traditional texts and our compulsion to study those texts critically.

It is that very tension of being in the middle that I love. It demands of me that I strive to understand tradition for myself and learn respect for those who differ.

For the Jewish community to survive I believe that it must

reflect the rituals, values, commitments and beliefs that define our relationship with God and our tradition, even when those unique Jewish practices go against the grain of our autonomous inclinations.

The challenge is to demonstrate through Conservative synagogues and Conservative institutions that a Jewish community devoid of reverence for tradition and the authority with which Torah has spoken to all generations of Jews is vacuous. At the same time we understand a Judaism framed only within the confines of past generations' understanding of Torah without considering modern societal conditions cannot survive.

Our Conservative vision that is our Torah for living life in community is compelling for our time. That being so, we need to return to the fundraising manual given to Moses and find encouragement in our roles as fundraisers. We can raise the kemah because we have the vision for challenges of today's Jewish life, so we can make willing hearts of members.

We can come to see God, not only in theory, but also in practice through the hesed --- kindness and compassion one Jew shows to another in our communities.

The role of the fundraiser is to join the needs, interests and passions of individuals into a common embrace of a way of life that is superior to going alone. It is not easy, but the rewards of creating vision, making willing hearts and creating community makes raising kemah a positive dimension of our work as leaders in building sacred community and not a burden. *Im eiyn kemah eiyn Torah. Im eiyn Torah ein kemah.* Use your imagination and energies to inspire members to support the vision with enough kemah. Leadership is a privilege. The preservation of Torah for the next generation will be your reward. I wish you success and fulfillment. ■



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