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2018

# The NAASE Journal

A Forum on Synagogue Management & Leadership

**NAASE**  
NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SYNAGOGUE EXECUTIVES  
**נאסע**  
Founded in 1948



# Table of Contents

3. **A Message from the Editors**  
*Shelley Engel, FSA*  
*Jill Goldwater*
4. **A Message from the President of NAASE**  
*Susan Z. Kasper, FSA*
5. **Ethical Decisions in a World of Intricacies**  
*Mark Block, FSA*
7. **Transition: Irma Lee Ettinger Award (March 2016)**  
*Marcia K. Newfeld, FSA*
11. **TZORKHEI TZIBBUR: Amin Tzibur Lecture (March 16, 2016)**  
*Randy E. Spiegel, FSA, ATz*
18. **Practical Wisdom**  
*Rabbi Rikki Arad*
19. **The Executive Director As Leader: Irma Lee Ettinger Lecture (March 2015)**  
*Fred Rothstein, FSA*
23. **Jewish Ethics in Our Jobs**  
*Tamah Kushner*

**NAASE**

Founded in 1948

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

# The NAASE Journal

SPRING, 2018

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Harry Hauser

# A Message From the Editors

Shelley Engel, FSA • Congregation Har Shalom, Potomac, MD  
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As executive directors, we love our work for the wide variety of challenges it encompasses. Many of our duties have proscribed mandated methodology, some have general guidelines, but none are more complicated than the ethical challenges we face on a regular basis. Working in a Holy atmosphere and with the *neshama* of our congregants, we are challenged not only with how to do “good” by our congregants, but also how we can be ethical in our own behavior.

Several years ago, we were all deeply affected by the revelation that one of our own had embezzled a significant sum from the congregation at which they worked. Through elaborate money laundering and almost singular control of the finances, over half a million was taken from the congregation. [That former colleague was subsequently fined and sentenced to prison, and by now has served the prison term and has been released.]

Yet, this wasn’t a “one and done” situation within our ranks. A year after this situation, another occurred. A colleague tried to gain reimbursement from their congregation for “paying registration fees by credit card,” a payment method we were not yet accepting; and we fear there are more stories out there. While these are not only challenges we face, this was the impetus for the “Ethics” topic.

Why, when we work in institutions that hold as central to their mission the 10 Commandments, do some do off the *derek* (path)? In this Journal, several of our colleagues have taken time to think about these issues and how we can better ourselves as we move forward.

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**Working in a Holy atmosphere and with the *neshama* of our congregants, we are challenged not only with how to do “good” by our congregants, but also how we can be ethical in our own behavior.**

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In addition, we are pleased to present the Irma Lee Ettinger Award Lectures from Marcia Newfeld (Page 7) and Fred Rothstein (Page 19). In addition, we also present Randy Spiegel’s *Amin Tzibur* paper (Page 11).

We hope you enjoy this opportunity to learn from your colleagues about “Ethics” in our work and a chance to relearn from Marcia, Fred and Randy.

Thank you for your support of the NAASE Journal.

# A Message from the President of NAASE

Susan Z. Kasper, FSA • Tiferet Bet Israel, Blue Bell, PA



**“God has shown you,  
O Man, what is good;  
and what does the Lord  
require of you but to do  
justly, and to love mercy,  
and to walk humbly  
with your God?”**

**Micah 6:8**



I am honored to have been asked to offer the introduction to this NAASE Journal. I thank all of our colleagues, with so much appreciation for their talent and dedication to both our profession and NAASE. Those whose work is included within have taken the time to share the wisdom of their experience. The critical topic we explore is Ethics, so timely, given our current societal climate and conscience.

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**In our daily work, we must be thoughtful,  
deliberative and consistent...  
I charge us all to continue to  
learn from and live by [the]  
key tenets of Judaism...**

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As Executive Directors, we continually reach for higher ground. I quote from NAASE's own, Melechet HaKodesh: The Holy Work of the *Kehillah's* Executive Director. "It is through the operational and organizational framework that the executive director carries out his/her work as a valued member of the Kley Kodesh, those in whom is entrusted the sacred and impactful work on behalf of the Jewish community." As Executive Directors we guide our synagogue and global Jewish communities to be spiritually richer.

In our daily work, we must be thoughtful, deliberative and consistent. We are maximizers and developers, but there will be no success unless we partner it all with a fine tuned combination of intentional spirituality and empathy and are moral and ethical as we perform our tasks. Morality, after all, is one of the central components of Judaism: "God has shown you, O Man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8) In Judaism, ethical thought and behavior are as tightly bound to theology and practice as to law.

I charge us all to continue to learn from and live by these key tenets of Judaism: *mishpat* ("justice"), *tzedakah* ("righteousness"), *chesed* ("kindness"), and *rachamim* ("compassion") as we enable ourselves, our Boards and our communities to behave in an ethical and moral manner.

To Shelley Engel, our Editor-in-Chief and her co-editor Jill Goldwater, thank you for undertaking this very valued project. Your tireless efforts and *kavanah* are reflected in the caliber of this 2018 NAASE Journal. On behalf of all of our colleagues thank you for bringing this to us.

# Ethical Decisions in a World of Intricacies

Mark Block, FSA • Congregation Rodeph Sholom, Bridgeport, CT



## Making Ethical Decisions in a World of Intricacies

Let me start off with this question, “How should we make ethical decisions in a world of intricacies?”

I believe we would agree there are many moral questions whose answers are very clear. For example, the torture of innocent people for fun; the immorality should be beyond dispute. Even so, we find we are faced with important ethical questions in both our professional and personal lives that are difficult, and

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**Ethics is complex. There is no warranty manual or instruction book to tell us with certainty that how we act directly affects how we live, or that the ethical decisions we make are just, right and fair.**

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don't offer us the benefit of simplicity; more so, we are bound by our faith to be reflective and thoughtful in our responses. These days, oftentimes ethical discussions are reduced to Facebook or Twitter posts, and not thought through carefully and with the importance required in a world of intricacies. Thus, we are left being unprepared or equipped to make good sound decisions.

In the Jewish professional's world I believe we have an obligation to look to the Bible for direction to do what is just, right, and fair by making ethically sound decisions. We shouldn't misunderstand or misinterpret the Bible, and we shouldn't mine it for verses to suit our needs. If we do so, we miss its point. It is a

guide for positive moral interpretation and allows us to focus our attention on contemporary decision-making through the lens of ancient writings.

The ethical interpretations of the Bible are authoritative when they are properly and appropriately applied in our present-day lives as synagogue executives.

Because we hold the Bible in such high view, there are many matters that are not nearly as straightforward that we can feel completely comfortable in finding one passage or verse that contains direct instruction or interpretation on what to do in a given situation. Because of our different interpretations, it is often complicated to determine on purely biblical grounds exactly what the best decision is. We are left with knowing that our education, training, professionalism and individual character will lead us to decisions when applied in complex or sensitive situations will be reflected on as being sound.

Ethics is complex. There is no warranty manual or instruction book to tell us with certainty that how we act directly affects how we live, or that the ethical decisions we make are just, right and fair. It requires our best efforts and ends with results that can never be certain.

Our ethical decisions can also be influenced by people or groups of people, all of whom have a legitimate stake in the outcome of a decision. The experiential facts may not be easy to determine or establish, therefore, it is recognized that moral judgments can hinge on non-moral facts. This does not render

an ethical decision meaningless or wrong, it simply applies the notion of fairness to the equation to allow a decision to be made and supported.

In studying ethics, the complexity of an ethical dilemma should be understood to be one that is a conflict between two or more value- or virtue-driven interests. Because these interests can often be competing ones, having tools to assist us in making sound ethical decisions is critical.

So, what do we do? First, we gather the facts. Ethical issues are often determined by understanding the details of the case. Therefore, we should ask if the context of the ethical deliberation is fact-based. If it is, the ethical decision is not based on circumstance, but on true moral assessment. If not, then a determination may not be possible.

Second, it's important to determine the ethical issue. At times we are faced with situations that present personal and professional difficulty; this does not mean that it constitutes an ethical dilemma. In such cases, it is important to identify as explicitly as possible what are the challenging moral interests that stand in need of a decision.

Third, take time to determine what virtues and principles have a bearing on the issue. If the argument being addressed actually is an ethical quandary, then, of course, the competing values or principles that underlie it need careful consideration. After identifying these principles, the key task is to settle on that which should be afforded more weight in the context where unavoidable moral conflicts emerge. This means that all things being equal, the rules that carry moral obligations in most situations can be overridden by other ethical considerations in situations where there are genuine ethical dilemmas.

Fourth, be sure to list the alternatives. When this is done, we can see that some decisions eliminate themselves. We should always make every effort to be as imaginative as possible to achieve an ethically proper result. The more alternatives generated, the greater the likelihood of discovering an option that enhances the positive outcome of a decision.

Lastly, we must consider the consequences. A decision

should be determined and assessed as thoroughly as possible if it is not entirely possible to rule out possible alternatives when applying the rules of ethics. A negative consequence need not determine the outcome, but it should retain significant attention in the decision making process.

Ethical decision making requires us to avoid the paralysis of analysis. In other words, we must make a decision. Sometimes this means choosing the best available alternative even if not ideal. Whatever decision is to be made, it should be as consistent with our Jewish values as possible given the distinctive features of the circumstances.

Ethical decision-making should not be reduced to simply identifying and applying rules and principles. Rather, a crucial part of ethics is about determining what and the way we should respond to an ethically challenging situation. Applying guidelines is only part of a proper response. Equally as important is the reflection brought to the matter which shines a light on the kind of person we are and strive to be. In striking a balance we must provide answers to the questions, "What ought I to do?," and "What kind of person should I be?" Without question, character counts.

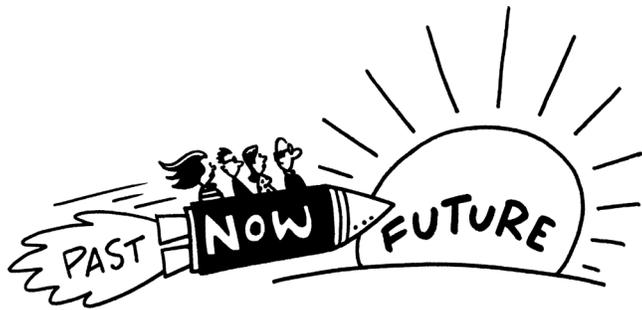
Additionally, ethics is a strongly communal exercise. We are created as social beings. Certain shared moral responsibilities and moral bonds are proper requisites of genuine community. Therefore, most frequently ethical decisions do not take place in isolation. We seek advice, counsel, and work to shape our decision in a way that integrates into the community, not one that sets it apart from the community. We must work to remove any barrier that creates isolation and indifference, both to the decision maker and to the decision-making process. We work in our congregations to grow in character not apart from the community that helps form and shape it, but as leaders of it.

Making ethical decisions in a world of intricacies is not solely a deliberative process. It is one which in the midst of the complexity of decision making our deliberations should be informed, developed, and conforms to our character as professionals in a world of faith. A world in which there is ample room for positive outcomes.



# Transition: Irma Lee Ettinger Award (March 2016)

Marcia K. Newfeld, FSA • Beth Sholom, Frederick, MD



I have chosen to speak about transition. We all go through transitions in our daily lives as well as in our professional lives. Growing up is actually transitioning from one stage in life to the next. Marriage is another transition in our lives. For many of us beginning our first job is another transition. Becoming an executive director is yet another transition. When we each became an executive director, we transitioned into a role that none of us could have imagined, as being an executive director is unlike anything any of us could ever have imagined.

Webster defines transition as passing from one condition, form or stage to another. I would like to define transitions, for now, as growing, having new experiences, learning from them, and adding to our own journey through life.

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**As executive directors we have to learn to work with all different types of personalities. We have to look out for our staff members and our congregants and put their needs before our own...**

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The Torah speaks about many transitions. Abraham is told by God to leave the home of his father and go to a land he does not know. He takes his family and his household treasures and follows God to the place which God will show him. Abraham is transformed from the son of an idol worshiper to the father of a great nation. Later in Exodus, the Hebrew slaves transform themselves, they have to grow from being slaves into being a nation of God. They leave Egypt and become free men and women, but in order to fully make this transition they have to grow emotionally and spiritually. They have to learn to not only rely upon themselves, but also to believe in God. The Israelites learned by trial and error that if they believed in God and followed his commandments, then God would take care of them. These

were not easy lessons for the Children of Israel to learn, but the end results were well worth their troubles.

Who helped them along the way? Who taught them the laws and commandments? It was God's servant, Moses. Did Moses have any easy time doing this? Hardly, but as a good shepherd does by putting his animals needs before his own, just as a good leader, Moses had to put the thoughts, feelings and needs of others before his own. As David Baron states in his book, *Moses on Management*, "The skills Moses used to lead his people through the wilderness are extremely relevant: being flexible, thinking quickly, maintaining the confidence of your people in uncertain times, and creating rules that work for individuals from widely diverse backgrounds." These are the same skills that we, as executive directors, need and use.

Think back to when you accepted the position as executive director of your first synagogue. If you were like me, you probably thought you knew the right way to do things. If only your congregants would do things your way everything would work smoothly - everything would be perfect. Or for that matter, if your staff and your rabbi would just listen to you, everything would get done and get done in an efficient manner. But I bet that this is not how things actually happened. As executive directors we have to learn to work with all different types of personalities. We have to accommodate people who come from various backgrounds. We have to look out for our staff members and our congregants and put their needs before our own, just as Moses did. We need to be the "shepherd" of our flocks.

In *Parshat Mishpatim*, Chapter 24, Moses has written down all of the laws that God gave him. According to Rashi, Moses built an altar at the foot of Mt. Sinai, he sent youths to bring an elevation offering which they slaughtered and burnt as peace offerings to God. Moses read out loud the Book of the Covenant and the Hebrews said, "Everything that Hashem has said, we will do and we will obey." - *Naase V'heshema*. Onkelos states that the Jews declared their resolve to do and obey whatever God would command even before the commandments were issued. This was a transformative moment in life of the Jewish people. They had gone through the different stages of growing up - the baby stage of being slaves, unable to make decision for themselves; the teenage stage of rebellion with the golden calf

and the spies saying that the Canaanites were too fierce for them to conquer; and finally they transitioned into adulthood, a place where they have grown to believe in God. Baron points out that the transformation of the Hebrew slaves into true Israelites ready to enter the Promised Land took forty years in the desert. The Hebrews were physically not far from the land of Israel, perhaps a walk that might have taken a week or two, but they needed forty years to mature as a people. Moses instinctively knew that the Israelites needed to transform, to go through these different stages in order to believe in God, and to be able to obey God's commandments.

We go through these same stages throughout our careers. We must learn to listen to others very carefully, as well as paying attention to our own words, in order to keep problems to a minimum. Some things that we think are innocent remarks or a remark meant to be funny is not viewed by others as such. We, too, must continue to grow as leaders, just as Moses continued to grow throughout his life, both when he was in exile and later as the leader of the Israelites. But we must always remember that we are also part of a team. We need to work with our team for the benefit of all. As David Baron states, and it is very true, "We all need other people to support us and help us to accomplish our objectives."

There are many, many other transitions talked about in the Bible. But the next one that I would like to speak about is in *Parshat Tetzaveh*. As you will recall in this parsha Moses passes along the mantle of the priesthood to his brother Aaron and Aaron's sons. Nowhere in this parsha is Moses' name mentioned, even when God is directly speaking to him. As in all other instances it states, "And God said to Moses..." but in this parsha Moses is referred to as "You, *Atah*." Rabbi David Hoffman Vice Chancellor of JTS, wrote in his commentary on this parsha that Moses understands that it is time for a transition. It is time for him to step out of the limelight of leadership and appoint his brother, Aaron and Aaron's sons to be the high priests. Rabbi Hoffman wrote, "Such is the case with great leadership and all covenantal relationships. One of our tasks is to manage our own egos. The message is clear: it is only by means of contraction of self that room will be created for the indispensable work of others."

This is also true in our lives. We need to give members of our staff meaningful jobs to do and we need to take a step back and let them do the job the best way they see fit. They may consult with us, ask our opinion, but it is up to them to facilitate the task to the best of their abilities. It is the same when working with committees within our congregations. We must perform *Tzimtzum*, a contracting of one's self to make space for others

to shine. God created the world in *Parsha Bereshit* through the act of *Tzimtzum*, by contracting himself to make space for the world. This is so important, especially as we see ourselves transitioning either by leaving our current synagogue to take a different position or when it is time to think about retirement. I don't believe that any one of us would leave our synagogue without such preparation, without making sure that our staff knew how to jump in and ensure a smooth transition between executive directors. This same preparation is needed when a new Rabbi joins your congregation.

In my synagogue we were without a rabbi for three years. The first year the synagogue was without a rabbi we invited in rabbis to be scholars-in-residence for a number of *Shabbatot*. We are fortunate enough to have lay leaders who have the ability to lead services, *lein Torah*, and even give meaningful *D'verei Torah*, so we were able to continue to handle all services, as well as *B'nai Mitzvah* without the benefit of a rabbi. Then through JTS, we joined the Gladstein Fellowship Program which gave us a student rabbi for the next two years. The students visited twice a month and our lay leadership continued to lead services the other weeks. A year and a half ago we made an offer to our second student rabbi and he accepted and became our new rabbi. Our lay leadership is still very involved in helping lead services. The leadership enjoys leading the service and it affords the rabbi the ability to greet each person as they enter the sanctuary Shabbat Morning. A rabbinic transition is an important ritual for the congregation. How this transition is handled affects both the congregation and the rabbi. Whenever a new rabbi steps onto a new pulpit it is almost like walking on eggs. The new rabbi will inevitably do things differently than the previous rabbi, he or she will use different tunes, they will want to take control of certain areas within the congregation. This is normal and it creates another transition for the congregation and the staff. Everyone, including the rabbi, has to learn to accommodate each other.

I asked my rabbi, Rabbi Jordan Hersh, what his transition was like. Before he began at Beth Shalom he told me that he had spoken to several of his mentors who had suggested that we should hire a management consultant. They suggested to him that since I had been running the *shul* for so long, we might run into conflicts of who should have which responsibility. I told him that, personally, I did not think this was necessary. In fact I assured him that anything I do which he would like to take over would be welcomed, but that if he felt strongly about this we could hire such a person. In the end we did not hire the consultant. I asked him after he had been with us for about six months if he felt we made the right decision. He said "Yes!"

Rabbi Hersh, said that he thought he and the congregation had an easier time with the rabbinic transition than most since he had been our student rabbi first. That first year of his being our student rabbi was like the honeymoon period in a new marriage. We got to know each other and he got a taste of how things worked at the congregation. Rabbi Hersh felt that our community knew what it had been missing by not having a rabbi and was actually looking forward to something/someone new. Because we had gotten to know him preceding his being hired, we knew what he stood for and what his beliefs were. He told me that he has always felt very supported by the leadership of the shul. Not all rabbis have this advantage.

As Steven Fried mentions in his book, *The New Rabbi*, the search that a community undergoes to find a new rabbi can tear the community apart. Many factors have to be examined such as will the new rabbi have a good rapport with both the older members of the synagogue and the young families? Will they draw in new families? Will they be great orators and as Fried put it when describing Rabbi Emeritus Wolpe's sermons, "will they change the DNA of all who hear them?" Will they be able to counsel congregants? If there is a Rabbi Emeritus how will they interact with the new rabbi? Trust me when I say that no matter who the new rabbi is there will be a transition period for everyone: the rabbi, the congregation and the staff.

Having gone through this transition recently I can truthfully say that ours was a very smooth transition. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't always easy for me. There were times when I had to step back and be quiet. There were times when a congregant would ask me a question and, when normally I would have given them an answer, I had to say, "That's a rabbi question. Please go speak with Rabbi Hersh." And there were times when I would schedule something and the Rabbi was taken aback that he wasn't consulted first. It has been a learning experience for both of us, but as I said, we have been fortunate and it has been a relatively smooth transition.

After being in this field for almost twenty-five years I have been thinking about my next transition, retirement. No, I am not making an announcement, but as with all transitions it takes planning. Not only as I consider what I will do with my personal time, but I am also thinking about how I can make this transition

easier for my synagogue. What can I be doing now, even if my retirement is four, five or ten years away? Steven Covey says that we all have the power to rewrite our own script. We can choose to act the same way we always have or we can choose to act differently. We can make a transition by rewriting our own personal mission statement, linking our past to our future, because real change comes from the inside out. This is true of transitions within the synagogue, as well. We need to link what has happened in the congregation's past, the way things have always been done, with new possibilities of how things may happen in the future and the changes that may come down the road. The membership has to want change, they must own the change, in order for any transition to be successful.

The transition of power that occurs near the end of the Torah when Moses turns the reins over to Joshua, was planned for ahead of time. God told Moses that he would not be permitted to enter the land of Israel and that Joshua would take his place as the leader. Moses, in response, took Joshua under his wing, made him his protégé. Joshua was afforded the opportunity to ask questions concerning Moses' decisions, understand Moses' style of leadership and ways of handling difficult situations. This allowed for a smooth transition for the Jewish people.

How can we do the same for our congregations? Obviously it is not up to us to choose our successors. However, we can prepare ourselves and our congregations for as smooth a transition as possible through advance planning. Where before I defined transitions as growth, now I would like to think of transitions and how they are implemented as being prepared, planning thoughtfully. Do we have policies and procedures in place that anyone who walks into our office can follow? Have we worked with our team, our staff, so that everyone understands how things happen? Have we worked with our lay leadership so that they feel confident that the decisions they are making and the direction that they are taking the congregation is the direction that the congregation wants? All of these questions should be addressed. The answers will be different for every congregation, but planning is the key. The decision to make a change, for transition to occur should not be made unilaterally from the top. Decisions need to be discussed and understood by the membership and your staff.

I would like to leave you with a story. This legend was first quoted in the name of Rabbi Nahman of Hordenka in Miedzyboz, Podolia. It is from a book called, *Legends Worth Living* by Nathan

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**Where before I defined transitions as growth,  
now I would like to think of transitions  
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Drazin. This legend is titled "King for a Year."

"A man was on a sea voyage when a terrible storm broke with fierce fury. The ship rose and fell with the waves, and within minutes it was wrecked and splintered. It sunk quickly. The man survived, holding on to a board, tossing in the surging waves. For a day and a night the man endured the fury of the sea until he felt his strength ebbing away. He was about to accept his fate and sink into the black oblivion when the waves rose and tossed him tumbling upon the shore of an uncharted island.

He lay on the sand exhausted, almost dead, for a long time. When he finally regained some strength, he rose and began to explore the island. He walked for several hours, saw buildings, and realized that the island was large and well populated. He was sighted by some of the natives, who surrounded him and exclaimed: "You are our new king!"

The man was carried into the city on the natives' shoulders, he was taken to the royal palace, and dressed in gold. Trumpets were sounded and people gathered in the palace courtyard to witness the coronation. With lavish ceremony the man was seated on a lush, golden throne and crowned with a crown of gold and jewels. The people shouted: "Long live our King! Long live our king!"

Hardly able to believe what was happening, the man thought he was dreaming and would soon awake. Yet when he awoke the next morning, he was still lying on silken sheets, and servants were there to help him bathe and dress. A royal breakfast of the finest fruits and other foods was served, and shortly thereafter, splendidly attired government officials visited him, congratulated him and pledged him homage. He was handed the silver palace keys on a golden tray and shown sparkling jewels from the royal treasury. He was assured that he would be consulted regularly for his advice on government affairs.

From all appearances he was king. Yet he was uneasy. He could not understand it. Why would these people take a complete stranger, whose ability they had never tested, and make him their king? He put this question one day secretly to a servant.

"Your Majesty," the servant replied, "this is a secret that our law forbids us to divulge."

The servant's reply alarmed the king. He insisted upon a reply. He pleaded and threatened. He refused to eat or drink. He promised that the servant would not be harmed if he revealed the secret, and offered him a reward. The servant relented. He said: "We crown strangers as king for a year. During that year the king rules the country and can do what he wants. At the end of the

year, we take everything from him and dress him in the clothes he wore when he appeared on our island. We take him by ship to a distant desolated island and leave him there to starve."

"Have any of my predecessors taken any precaution to avert this calamity?" the king inquired.

"To tell you the truth," the servant replied, "they were so anxious to enjoy each day's delights that they never asked what might happen tomorrow."

This king acted differently. He gathered a large crew of workers and shipped them to the far-off island to till the soil, to plant trees and gardens. They built a comfortable home there with barns for domestic animals. He transported animals and food, and enough books to last a lifetime.

When the year ended, the king was prepared. He left content with his past and assured about his future. He knew he was not going to a desolate island to starve alone, but to a garden island where he could enjoy life's comforts as long as he lived."

This king planned for his future. He transitioned successfully to the next adventure in his life. We should all follow his example, prepare and plan and transition successfully from each stage of our lives and our careers to the next. We should strive for this personally as well as helping our congregations plan for the transitions that they will ultimately face.

Each stage in life is a transition, whether it is in our personal lives or our professional lives. Each transition must be carefully thought out and planned for in order to be executed successfully. In our congregations everyone, staff and lay leadership, must be involved in the transition. They must feel that they have contributed to the process before it happens, as well as during the implementation, to feel that they made a contribution. Transitions can be frightening. Think of the slaves leaving Egypt. They were afraid because they did not know how to take care of themselves, but with the guidance of God through Moses they slowly bought into the idea of freedom, self-reliance and a belief in God. This transition took planning and patience on the part of Moses, and in the end it was successful.

May we all go from strength to strength, from transition to transition... successfully.

*This lecture is dedicated to Erma Lee Ettinger and Harvey Gold, executive directors extraordinaire.*



# TZORKHEI TZIBBUR: Amin Tzibur Lecture (March 16, 2016)

Randy E. Spiegel, FSA, ATz • Beth Tzedec Congregation, Toronto, ON



## העוסק בצרכי ציבור כעוסק בדברי תורה

# MINISTERING TO THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

### Introduction

On a study trip to Israel at Beit Hatfutsot/ The Nahum Goldman Museum of the Jewish People, inscribed on a wall in the heart of the museum, as part of a Communities exhibit, I saw a phrase from the Jerusalem Talmud: "*Haosek b'tzorkhei tzibbur k'osek b'divrei Torah*"<sup>1</sup> - one who is occupied with the needs of the community is considered as if they were occupied with matters of Torah.

The words jumped off the wall, raising questions:

- Was this why my parents committed so many hours to volunteer work?
- Is this what motivated my immigrant grandparents to lead a group of families in a small rural community to create a shul and a Jewish community in the midst of a non-Jewish world?
- Was this a signpost, pointing me in a sacred direction to the future and a profession?
- Was this the incentive used by the Rabbis of the past to motivate and encourage people to enter communal service?
- Where did these words come from and why were they here?

I chose a career in Jewish Communal Service and have worked in this field as an *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur*, one who ministers to the needs of the community. This Talmudic phrase continues to motivate me in my work. Throughout my career, there have been opportunities to discuss the phrase and to consider what it means to be an *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur*.

Additional questions have arisen:

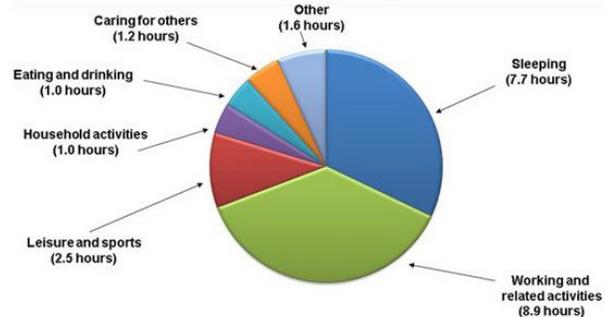
- What do our teachers and ancestors think about *tzorkhei tzibbur*?
- Is serving the community's needs to be valued and/or praised?

- Is there short-term or long-term merit to choosing communal service as a way of life?
- Is there a difference between one who engages in *tzorkhei tzibbur* as a volunteer versus the one who earns her/his livelihood as a guardian of the *tzibbur*?

This paper is a start to addressing these questions, by exploring where in classical Jewish texts *tzorkhei tzibbur* appears, and the impact of Torah on how work done on behalf of the community is undertaken. There will also be an examination of the phrase *b'divrei Torah*, the proximity of which suggests the significance or value given to the work done by one who is an *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur*, be they lay leader, clergy, Jewish communal agency or organization worker, or synagogue executive director.

### How We Spend Our Time

#### Time use on an average work day for employed persons ages 25 to 54 with children

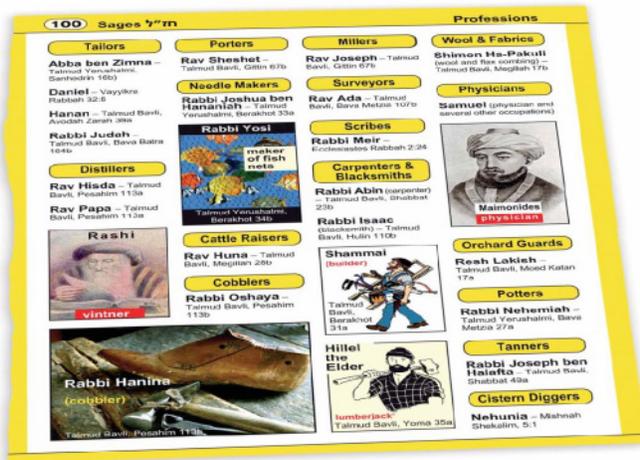


NOTE: Data include employed persons on days they worked, ages 25 to 54, who lived in households with children under 18. Data include non-holiday weekdays and are annual averages for 2014. Data include related travel for each activity.

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey

According to Statistics Canada<sup>2</sup> and the US Department of Labor<sup>3</sup>, the average North American between the ages of 25-54 spends more than eight hours of every day working or in a work related activity. That is, thirty percent of the average person's day, or up to one-third of the average person's life, is spent working. While it is crucial to provide for one's family and community needs and interests, how do people spend the rest of their time? On average, these same individuals spend in excess of seven

hours sleeping (less than one third of the day) and the balance of the day on “other” activities. Put another way, of approximately fifteen waking hours, the average person spends about 47% or nearly half of their waking life, working.



Sociologists spend countless hours and dollars researching what motivates a person to choose a particular field, how society values different professions, job satisfaction, and the impact of different jobs on the mental and physical health of an individual. Industrial psychologists analyze the cost/benefit of where and how people choose to spend their waking hours -- nearly half of their adult lives.

According to the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations in Canada, two million of 35 - 36 million Canadians are employed in the charitable or nonprofit sector. Nationwide, of the population over the age of 15 years, more than 13 million people, or over 44%, volunteer for charities and nonprofits -- institutions that are established for the purpose of addressing the needs of the community. They may be privately or publicly funded and under the auspices of religious or secular leadership.

In Canada alone, there are more than 170,000 charitable and nonprofit organizations of which approximately 50% are registered charitable organizations or foundations. These include religious schools, social service agencies and synagogues. Jewish or non-Jewish, the number of people who work or volunteer on behalf of the community, who dedicate substantial portions of their lives working in this sector, is significant.

Our greatest sages, in addition to the time they devoted to study, teaching and otherwise ministering to the needs of the community (*tzorkhei tzibbur*), all had vocations that earned them rubles, zlotys or kopeks, enabling them to provide for their families.<sup>4</sup> No statistics exist to compare the amount of time they spent working versus the number of hours they spent on

communal affairs but we know that they dedicated and inspired others to become *oskim b'tzorkhei tzibbur*, those who busy themselves ministering to the needs of the community.

Maimonides, considered to be “the most influential Jewish thinker of the Middle Ages and quite possibly of all time,”<sup>5</sup> in addition to his prolific works on Jewish thought and law, worked as physician to the Sultan of Egypt and authored a number of books on medicine. In his own words, his job was so taxing that “when night falls I am so exhausted that I can scarcely speak.”<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, Maimonides was selflessly dedicated to *tzorkhei tzibbur*. While he was virtually inaccessible during the week, he still made time to address the challenges faced by the community. As he writes, “no Israelite can have any private interview with me, except on Shabbat.”<sup>5</sup>

A Google search returns thousands of references to *tzorkhei tzibbur*. These include excerpts from rabbinic literature, articles, obituaries and dedications where the subject engages in or is recognized for their great contributions to the community. Supporting Torah institutions or guiding social service organizations, professionals and volunteers in small towns and large cities are counted among those whose work for the community is recognized. Just one of the many examples is a reference to Dr. Marvin Schick. He divided his professional and volunteer time between teaching political science, as a consultant in Jewish education and as President of a Jewish day school for 30 years. In being honoured by his community, Dr. Schick is described as “an *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur* par excellence.”<sup>6</sup>

## The Importance of Study

How important are *divrei Torah* (“matters of Torah” refers to Torah study/ Jewish education)? In every community, formal and informal Jewish education is a priority and is seen as an essential component in instilling a commitment to Jewish living and perpetuating the Jewish people. Rabbi Ronald H. Isaacs of Temple Shalom in Bridgewater, New Jersey in his essay, “The Rewards for Torah Study,”<sup>7</sup> provides a number of references describing the importance of Torah study:

- “One who has acquired Torah has acquired eternal life” (Avot 2:8)
- “If you have studied much Torah, your reward will be abundant” (Avot 2:21)
- “The Torah is a tree of life to those who cling to it. All who uphold it are happy” (Proverbs 3:18)

Rabbi Isaacs writes:

"Studying Torah--broadly construed to include almost all traditional Jewish learning -- is valued by Jewish tradition as one of the most important activities for both children and adults. The rabbis emphasized the study of Torah because they believed that Torah study leads a person to the observance of other mitzvot [commandments]."

In 1992, David Dubin, then Executive Director, JCC on the Palisades (Tenafly, New Jersey) wrote in his essay, "Lay Leadership and Jewish Identity":

"The commitment to Jewish education among lay leadership from all sectors within the Jewish community has never been greater. Agencies now tend to accentuate Jewish education in their request for allocations, and federations respond to this priority in the distribution process. Funds for Israel are also significantly earmarked for Jewish education."

Countless sums continue to be spent on Jewish literacy programs. Schools evaluate the quantity and quality not only of *limudei kodesh* (Jewish studies), but also the math, science, literature and the arts curricula. At the higher levels, in Israel there is debate about the amount of time dedicated solely to Torah study at the expense of participating in national service and in the diaspora at the expense of earning a living to provide for the needs of one's own family.

Rabbis and fundraisers teach that supporting someone whose vocation is the study of Torah is not only desirable, it is most honourable. Although *neged* usually means in opposition, *K'neged* suggests a balance or something of equivalent value. For both the recipient and the contributor, the importance of Torah study is so deeply ensconced in Jewish tradition that rabbis of the Talmud state: *Talmud Torah K'neged kulam* - measured against other great enjoyments in the physical world, the study of Torah is deemed to have a value comparable to the other enumerated acts of communal *hesed*.<sup>8</sup> As translated in *Siddur Sim Shalom*, the study of Torah is suggested as being the basis (*k'neged*) of all other actionable *mitzvot*.

YOSR, the screen name of a regular contributor to an online chat, explains that *neged* can mean **next to**, so that Talmud Torah is not in opposition to other *mitzvot*, but rather supports and connects all *mitzvot* by standing next to them. According to YOSR, Torah study standing next to each *mitzvah* helps one understand their value. When *mitzvot* are understood they lead one to action, and it is action that creates a better world for all.<sup>9</sup>

## From Study to Action

Teachers expect their lessons to lead their students to a deeper appreciation, understanding and humility for G-d's creations. With this comes sensitivity and a recognition of how to respond to the needs of others, how to "repair the world." Knowledge is the first step to action, to realizing one's own potential to make changes and improve the world for others. Knowledge that leads to action brings the sacred teachings to life.

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**Torah study comes alive when the student takes learning from the classroom to the street. The value of quality education is seen when the student becomes actively engaged externally as well as internally.**

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It is a commonly held view that one's actions speak louder than any words. In the Talmud, the rabbis debate the rank of study versus action, with the clear winner being study because study **leads to** action. As it is written:

"Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were dining in the loft of Bet Nitzah in Lod. This question was asked before them: Is study greater or practice?"

Rabbi Tarfon answered: "Practice is greater."

Rabbi Akiva answered: "Study is greater for it leads to practice."

Then they all answered and said: "Study is greater for it leads to action."<sup>10</sup>

This theme appears in Avot 6:6. In Avot 1:17 the lesson is expressed with a slightly different emphasis, where we are told that "study is not the primary thing, but action." Study with purpose, study that is actionable, study that leads to purposive functioning is of the highest value, and actions that are *b'tzorkhei tzibbur* are valued *k'divrei Torah*, as highly as Torah itself.

Today, when entire communities learn Torah while basic and essential needs are taken care of through donations, it is important that the recipients of this support put into practice what they are studying. Torah study comes alive when the student takes learning from the classroom to the street. The value of quality education is seen when the student becomes actively

engaged externally as well as internally.

Participating in *tzorkhei tzibbur*, social actions that benefit the community, is so important that the activist role is to be recognized as a crucial element of the curriculum taught in supplementary schools, day schools and yeshivot, rather than a role left to others.

Professionals and volunteers, often faceless and other times quite public, contribute countless hours and untold sums to strengthen the social service, educational, spiritual, cultural and social structures that offer comfort to the lonely, clothe and feed the hungry and provide shelter to the homeless. The teachings of the Torah underscore that it is the role of every community to take the actions necessary to provide for their most vulnerable: the widow, the orphan and the poor.

### **Tzorkhei Tzibbur in Sacred Texts**

Rabbi Bezalel Borstein, in his essay, "*Tzorkhei tzibbur*,"<sup>11</sup> discusses not only the importance of *tzorkhei tzibbur*, but also how it differs from *tzorkhei yachid*, one's personal work. He notes that the rabbis define *tzorkhei tzibbur* to include things that affect the infrastructure of a city (fixing roads, putting down telephone lines, building sewers, collecting garbage) and things that affect the social capital of a city (providing legal opinions, helping resolve conflict between parties). He states that one who is an *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur* is promised tremendous *s'char* (reward) and this leads us to that most important reference from the Jerusalem Talmud, "*ha'osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur k'osek b'divrei Torah!*"<sup>12</sup>

So highly regarded is work for the community that one opinion holds that there is the exemption from saying Shema if one is involved in *tzorkhei tzibbur*.<sup>13</sup> Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, in his commentary *Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer* (6:2), notes that the exemption is because *tzorkhei tzibbur* may be considered equal to or greater than Talmud Torah.

The importance of *tzorkhei tzibbur* can also be seen in the Talmudic story of two Amoraim, Rabbah and Abaye. The discussion goes on to say that Rabbah, who only learned Torah, lived 40 years while Abaye who did *hesed* as well, lived for 60.<sup>14</sup> *Hesed*, (acts of kindness) are actions that help individuals and the community. By engaging in acts of *hesed*, Abaye was an *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur* and through his actions merited an extension to his life.

Another rationale comes from the Talmudic story of Nechunya, the digger of water wells. Nechunya's daughter had fallen into one of the wells he had dug to provide water for the



traveller. Rabbi Chaninaben Dosa, upon hearing the news, declared that no harm would come to the child because "G-d does not punish a *Tzaddik* with the same thing in which he excels in his service."<sup>15</sup> Nechunya, who served as an *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur* digging wells, provided physical sustenance to those in transit; through his actions, his daughter was saved from harm.

### **Values That Guide What We Do**

If *tzorkhei tzibbur* is a righteous act, even to the level of the Torah study itself, then how we do what we do is essential to the *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur*. A Shabbat morning prayer tells us that when engaged with proper motivation, the *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur* will be rewarded for her/his actions. Rabbi Borstein points out that prior to the musaf prayer in the *yikum purkan*, we are told how we should perform community service: *b'emunah* -- faithfully, sincerely, guided by Jewish/Torah values. When we act faithfully, motivated by commitment and not by vanity, popularity or reward, there is the hopeful public declaration that G-d will bless us: "*Kol me sheosekim b'tzorkhei tzibbur b'emunah Hakadosh Baruch Hu Yishalem shearem.*"

"Amazing!!!" writes Rabbi Borstein, "We are promised that such a person will be physically healthy - "*v' yasir mehem mahala, v' yirpa l'hol gufam,*" he will be spiritually healthy - "*v' yislakh l'hol avonam,*" and to top it all off, he will be successful as well - "*v' yishlach bracha l'hol ma'aseh yideihem.*"

As a motivator to engage in *tzorkhei tzibbur*, the rewards are surely great, almost over the top. Yet, "It's not for *tzorkhei tzibbur* alone that we are promised these tremendous rewards. But only when it's done *b'emunah!*"<sup>16</sup>

For those who work for Jewish or non-Jewish organizations, the example of learned ancestors committing to giving back illustrates how to faithfully address the needs of the community. Volunteerism, a highly valued and highly respected way for a person to spend a portion of their discretionary waking hours, must be actualized with integrity and adherence to Jewish values.

The community depends on leadership that is selfless and responsible to pull it together and keep it together. When leaders can practice what they preach, their actions speak louder than their words. Rabbi Jay Kelman, a noted Toronto educator and

communal leader, writes in his parsha blog on *Toldot*, Eisav's Revenge:

"It for this reason that Judaism attaches so much importance to the concept that those engaged in *tzorkhei tzibbur*—rabbis, politicians, and community lay leaders, for example—do so b'emunah, faithfully. If a leader cannot meet this standard, it really is time to move on."<sup>17</sup>

To hold a place of honour as a leader of a synagogue, agency or organization of the community, individuals must be guided by the principles of Torah, be respectful, lead with humility, and adhere to the highest standards of conduct, so that the community will have confidence in the leader's decisions and actions.

For the communal service worker and the dedicated volunteer, the common theme is action with purpose. The value system of Judaism provides the base from which the *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur* can govern. In *Rabbinic and Lay Communal Authority*, edited by Suzanne Last Stone, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein discusses at length how those in positions of authority must view and act in carrying out their communal governance responsibilities.<sup>18</sup> The business of the Jewish community is not business alone, but must be values-based and all actions, to be true to the mission, must be delivered *b'emunah* (faithfully) and for the sole benefit of the community.

In another of his essays, "Jewish Values in a World of Change: The Role of Jewish Communal Service,"

Rabbi Lichtenstein notes that part of the role of Jewish Communal Service is to

"...help preserve our people by enriching its spiritual fiber; and part of that fiber is the empathetic readiness to help. Today as ever, therefore, the first priority of Jewish communal service should be enhancing the very sense of community, as opposed to individualism, on the one hand, and universalism, on the other."<sup>19</sup>

For the professional, a fundamental driver for ministering to the community is to strengthen the concept of community itself. Where the parts of the community are connected and committed one to another, the community will be strong. Grounded in Jewish values, emanating from Torah, the bonds of connectedness and strength in numbers help to manage the stresses and strains of communal life.

How we do what we do is as important as what we do.

## Avodah

"*Al shelosha devarim ha'olam omed - al haTorah, al ha'avodah, v'al g'milut hasadim.*"<sup>20</sup> Simon the Just, who lived during the last days of the Temple taught that the fate of the world rests on three things: Torah, avodah and acts of lovingkindness. *Avodah*, the priestly work originally performed in the Temple, has a value equal to each of the other two, and each relies on the other, for something uneven will cause the world to crumble under its own weight. If the Rabbis want us to exemplify these things, each area of activity must have the strength, stability and balance to support the other, as well as sustaining the entire world.



If the state of the world depends on these three things and one of them is missing, how is it that our world has not collapsed? Torah remains our teacher, our guidebook to life. Acts of kindness continue to be at the heart of our relationship with others. But now, the Temple does not exist. The Temple was the place in our human world where G-d came closest to us, perhaps a place where heaven and earth touched. It may be difficult to comprehend the sights, smells, crowds and intensity of Temple times, but there can be no mistaking that service to G-d in the Temple must have had a profound impact on the individual.

Today, although there is no sacrificial *avodah*, there is a place for communal prayer and coming close to our Creator. Our sages tell us that the *avodah* of the Temple has been replaced by prayer, by service of the heart. Our synagogues, our houses of worship, draw us in and substitute as the sacred places where we may be inspired by the *ruah hakodesh*, the spirit of holiness. If there were strength and stability through *avodah* in Temple times, then perhaps *avodah* in our day may be that pillar of action by which one who is an *osek b'tzorkhei tzibbur* can connect the people to each other and to the Creator, helping them engage in prayer and study and share all that Torah teaches about life and living.

*G'milut hasadim* is nurtured and taught in our houses of worship. Synagogues are key gathering points through which we engage in Talmud Torah while teaching and practicing *g'milut hasadim*. Without them we lose our *minyán*, our shared prayer experience, our holy places of comfort and our intimate connections with G-d. *Avodah* is holy work that comes in many forms and whose absence can cause our holy institutions to become weak and meaningless, leading to greater dispersion,

assimilation and the disappearance of our people. Genuine *avodah*, committed service that is conducted, *b'emunah*, for the congregation, enriches the life of one who performs this *avodah* as much or more as the *avodah* (service) does for the community.



## Conclusion

Many of us are motivated to spend the better part of our waking hours in a profession that demands more than an average amount of time and brain power, or as a volunteer where the challenges sometimes can make one wonder why we do what we do. Our tradition says much about *tzorkhei tzibbur* and its importance as an activity or vocation. Rabbi Jonathan Ziring, a leading young Rabbi in Toronto, noted that because ministering to the needs of the community is so challenging, the liturgical reference *yikum purkan* was added to convince people of the importance of helping the community and to inspire others to be engaged in *tzorkhei tzibbur*.<sup>21</sup> While there may be some dissenting opinions as to the value of engagement in *tzorkhei tzibbur* and how important it may be relative to other *mitzvot*, there can be no mistake that to be involved with communal service at every level can be powerful and inspiring for both the recipient and the activist.

We enter this world at point "A" and we leave at point "B" never knowing when "B" will arrive. What is done during one's time on this earth is what gives one's life meaning. Jewish learning and Jewish values shape and affect how that life can be lived and the impact that one can have on society. Learning is critical to influencing action, but it is action that drives change and betters the world. The Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 37a) reminds us of the power possessed and the significance of a single life; one who preserves a single soul is as though he had preserved an entire world.

*V'shinantam l'vanecha*, as we teach our children, and students of every age, their studies must lead them to action as they "walk on the way." They and we must all be students who are motivated to action. If doing the work of the community is held in such high regard, and the one who does the work is to be praised, then it may be that we share the aspirations of our Creator, making our actions *kadosh*, holy, with the power to make G-d's gifts to humankind better each day.

For those of us who choose to spend our lives engaged as *oskim b'tzorkhei tzibbur*, who humbly choose to spend our waking hours in an endeavour that can influence or even change the world for others, Judaism teaches that there is holiness in our work. We who choose to serve the community as professionals or volunteers are driven by mission and vision to accept the many challenges we face as agents of change. As *oskim b'tzorkhei tzibbur*, we give of our time and financial resources with the hope of repairing and improving the world - *l'takayn et haolam*. From a personal perspective, as a synagogue Executive Director, who serves as part of a *klei kodesh* team having the capacity to touch and shape the spiritual, social, educational and cultural experiences for members of the community, there can be no greater professional reward or personal meaning. When we, professionals and volunteers, hold hands, through our actions the bonds that tie people to people through G-d, is complete.

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Which is Greater: Study or Deeds?

[http://beth-torah.org/sites/www/uploads/adultlearning/13345Which\\_is\\_Greater\\_-\\_Study\\_or\\_Deeds.pdf](http://beth-torah.org/sites/www/uploads/adultlearning/13345Which_is_Greater_-_Study_or_Deeds.pdf)

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**All are oskei tzorkhei tzibbur par excellence!**



# Practical Wisdom

Rabbi Rikki Arad • B'nai Torah Congregation, Boca Raton, FL



## Practical Wisdom - The Heart of the Business

I recently read an inspiring book by Barry Schwartz titled, "Practical Wisdom". In it, he describes the importance of every single team-members' embodiment of an organization's core values so that each person can bring these values to life in their daily work.

Schwartz drew on a particularly relevant example of a local hospital whose clear mission statement was to "help people with kindness, care and empathy". For over a month, a distressed father sat at the bedside of his son while he was in a coma. He left the room for a moment and upon his return angrily yelled at the janitor, demanding that the floors be cleaned. The janitor had a choice, he could explain to the father that he had, in fact, just cleaned the floors while he was away, or he could recognize that standing before him was a father who was helpless, sleepless

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and in need of compassion. The janitor had the practical wisdom to understand his responsibility as part of this hospital, extended beyond clean floors. Without any argument or justification, the janitor chose to clean the room a second time as he knew this was his small contribution to comfort the father.

The everyday acts of staff thinking beyond their job requirements is what brings the organizations core values to life.

As Executive Directors, we wear many hats. People often ask me what my primary responsibility is and the truth is, it's not so simple. We are tasked with fundraising, managing the budget and recruiting and mentoring staff members, but we are also responsible for creating a sense of inclusion, learning and Tzedakah.

Synagogues are meant to take care of people when they need it most: we help families who can't afford a Jewish education for their children, we hold jobs for employees who

need personal time and we give financial support to members of our congregation in need. It's not only important work, it's sacred work. However, we are only able to provide these services if we also act as financially-sound institutions.

The need to balance these seemingly contradictory responsibilities is the reason why practical wisdom is such a central part of the Executive Director's job.

Several months ago an elderly congregant came to me in confidence regarding an incident that caused both her and her husband great embarrassment. During Shabbat morning services, her husband was unable to hold his bladder and had an accident on the way to the bathroom. He called his wife to bring him a change of clothes, but she felt too uncomfortable to enter the men's room until everyone else had left. Had our synagogue been equipped with gender neutral restrooms, this congregant would have been able to assist her husband quickly and with dignity. Within one week this incident was brought to the attention of the synagogue leadership, and we are now in the midst of accepting bids and proposals to renovate our facility to include a gender neutral restroom. While our mission is to be inclusive, it's our actions that define us and whether or not we are truly living by our mission.

As Executive Directors, we are constantly faced with moments that require a deep understanding of our synagogue's core values. A large part of our work lies in the space that exists between the rules necessary to operate a business, and the sacredness of working in a place of worship. In order to balance these two responsibilities effectively, we need the support and empowerment from our clergy, lay leaders, and congregants. Provided with enough flexibility, Executive Directors are able to navigate this space with practical wisdom and within the embodiment of the synagogues' collective values.

What Barry Schwartz and Aristototle call "Practical Wisdom", I understand to be the ethical heartbeat of a synagogue and the primary responsibility of an Executive Director.

# The Executive Director As Leader Irma Lee Ettinger Lecture (March 2015)

Fred Rothstein, FSA • Congregation Neveh Shalom, Portland OR



I matter. You matter. We all matter. Each and every one of us, by virtue of our roles as Executive Directors, has the ability to significantly and dramatically affect the lives of individuals and their families, the health and well-being of our synagogues, and, by extension, the future of our Jewish communities, locally and beyond.

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**Yes... managers do things right. But leaders do the right thing. This is the distinction...**

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I will not challenge that every day each of us does much that is mundane. We monitor and adjust budgets; we supervise and evaluate staff; we confirm that two groups don't show up at the same space at the same time; we coordinate and monitor communications and marketing efforts; we plan programs and we raise money. These are the *'kishkes'* of synagogue management. My goal today, though, is to remind us that we are much / much more than the managers of our congregations. Whether our title is administrator, chief operating officer, chief executive officer, Executive Director or something else... we are and, in fact have a responsibility, to be leaders.

For just a moment, think back.... Think back to your first hours, day and week as a synagogue Executive Director. Did

you know what to do first, second, next? Who to call...and how to organize your day? Do you think you had a clear view of the breadth, depth and scope of the job you'd just begun?

In his book, "The Prime Ministers," Yehuda Avner remembers that Abba Eban, in 1986, related how Levi Eshkol asked him what exactly the job of the prime-ministership entailed. In his previous capacities as minister of agriculture and of finance, Eshkol explained, he had dealt with concrete matters for which his responsibilities were clearly defined. But now, he had been sitting at this desk for a couple of days as prime minister, and he was not quite sure what he ought to be doing. He was so un-used to his new position, he said, that at a public event the evening before, when the prime minister was announced, he had looked around to see who was entering.

Eban described how he had told Eshkol that, first and foremost, the job of a prime minister was very much like that of a conductor of a symphony orchestra. The conductor did not play an instrument, but his will, personality, and interpretation decisively determined the sounds that emerged from the collective whole.

"And you, Mr. Eshkol, are our conductor," trumpeted Eban, impersonating a maestro waving a baton. "Your task is to persuade us, your cabinet ministers, to perform together in a single, harmonious whole in accordance with your program, your vision, and your interpretation."

Manager...and Leader – what are the differences between them? Much, of course, has been written about each. I must share that it is not random that I wanted to, and chose, to speak today about us as leaders. We are here in the midst of a conference whose focus and theme is “change”. While management and leadership go hand in hand, they are not the same. John Kotter of the Harvard Business School, distinguished management from leadership. He described management as “keeping the current system operating through planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling and problem solving”. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it, with the list of day in day out “kishke” tasks I identified earlier. Necessary... generally important even, but not transformative. I believe we can be transformative. Management, said Kotter, is about coping with complexity. Leadership, on the other hand, is about coping with change. Leadership, without change, equals management. The purpose of management is to keep the status quo – to maintain smooth functioning through systems, policies and mechanisms of command and control. Managers do the right thing. We do the right thing...for large chunks of every day. Necessary, important even, but not transformative. I want us to be transformative.

Yes... managers do things right. But leaders do the right thing. This is the distinction taught by Warren Gamliel Bennis, a pioneer in developing the study of management and leadership. While managers focus on the here and near, leaders look to the future. They / we keep an eye on the greater prize – we have long-range perspective. Bennis taught us some of the differences...

- The manager administers; the leader innovates
- The manager is a copy; the leader is an original
- The manager maintains; the leader develops
- The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people
- The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust
- The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why
- The manager has his / her eye always on the bottom line; the leader’s eye is on the horizon
- The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it

*Hadracha b’dugma* – leadership by example. When I was a teenager, I was in USY. There can be no denying that USY was one of the powerful influences of my life. From chapter officer to

regional vice-president, I learned that leadership influences. In an era before ‘gap year programs’ even had a name, I freaked my parents (*zichronam livracha*) out by choosing to spend a year in Israel on a program called, fittingly enough, *Machon LMadrichei Chutz L’Aretz* – Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad. If USY

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**We must hold ourselves accountable,  
not only for what we do or do not do,  
but also for the consequences  
– intended or unintended –  
on those around**

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had been impactful, imagine the experience of being fully immersed in learning and living the history, philosophy, theory, responsibilities and skills of serving as leader to impressionable adolescents. Those were the days before cell phones and ubiquitous worldwide communication. Other than a few airgrams – do you remember those – one very thin blue sheet of paper that folded over to become its own envelope and one phone call to confirm that I had arrangements for my return to the US, I lived, breathed, ate, slept and was trained to lead USY’ers following my return. *Hadracha b’dugma* – leadership by example... the refrain that had been taught to me by Rabbi Stuart Kelman, my regional USY director and re-taught again by my teachers on the Machon, and then again by Jerry Bubis in graduate school, now became mine to understand, live and teach as I became youth advisor, director, Jewish communal worker and a synagogue executive director.

So... I mentioned along the way that I had the honor and responsibility to give this talk to my colleagues. She said – if you’re going to speak for more than four minutes, be sure to include some element of humor – or you’ll be completely boring and lose your group. Hmm...humor, leadership and Jewish context – *hadracha b’dugma* – leadership by example...

A *yeshiva* outgrew its downtown quarters and moved to the former site of an upstate boys’ academy. Finding a boathouse on the property, the Rosh Yeshiva called in one of the rabbis and ordered him to organize a rowing team.

“Rebbe. What do we know from rowing?”

“We can master Talmud, we can figure out rowing!”

So he put together a team and began to practice on the river. Soon they were good enough to challenge and beat local prep schools. They challenged another and won again. When they

had beaten every school in the vicinity, the Rosh Yeshiva called the rabbi in again:

"Now we'll challenge Princeton!"

"Princeton, Rebbe?! We've been rowing six weeks, they've been at this three hundred years.

The Rebbe insisted, and the race was set. Princeton won by twenty lengths. The despondent rabbi was once again called in to the Rosh Yeshiva.

"How did they beat us so badly?"

"Rebbe, Princeton has a secret. They have eight men rowing and one man shouting.

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**I am not an accountant. I am not a plumber, electrician or building contractor. I am not a trained strategic planner. I am not an IT or computer professional. I am not a professionally trained Jewish educator, Cantor or Rabbi. There are many things that I am not. What I am, though – what each of us is, and what I – and we – have a responsibility to be as a synagogue Executive Director, is a leader.**

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**Hadracha b'dugma:** Leaders Take Responsibility. We can view the taking of responsibility as three concentric circles. The first, the most innermost, is the willingness to own our own actions, or inactions, in relationship to others. We must hold ourselves accountable, not only for what we do or do not do, but also for the consequences – intended or unintended – on those around me. The second circle is for those with whom we are already in relationship and whom we are capable of affecting or influencing. We accept responsibility for the welfare of others. The third, and outer circle of leadership responsibility is for those with whom we may not have a substantive previous relationship, but whom we can affect because of the positions with which we have been entrusted.

**Hadracha b'dugma:** We Don't Lead Alone. Leadership is teammanship. Is there any setting that this is more true than ours? We live our professional lives as part of a leadership team. We work in coordination and partnership with our clergy and our lay leaders. At so many conferences, we have heard the analogy of the three-legged stool... that for our synagogues to function well, the three legs of leadership – executive, rabbi and president must be holding hands and pulling in the same direction.

**Hadracha b'dugma:** Leaders Provide Hope, and at the same time, Leaders are Truth Tellers. How many meetings have you been in this past year, and how many articles have you read in this era of Pew prophesying the doom and gloom of Conservative Judaism and American Jewry. I know that I've been through more than my share. Yet... I, and you, get up and go to our synagogues every day. We engage with and see lives improve and Jewish life enriched. Some of us remember the studies that proved our demise would be complete before the end of the 20th century. But it didn't happen. It hasn't happened. And I live with a confidence that through our work as synagogue leaders, it won't happen. We offer hope for a rich and vibrant Jewish future, and develop the goals, strategies, and relationships that give that hope body and substance. At the same time, and without any sense of paradox, we tell the truth. As leaders, we face the challenges in front of us honestly and directly. Just two miles from where we now sit, our colleague unraveled one small thread to find and face an awful truth... and by not turning away, that kehilla kedosha, that sacred community is again serving its community with renewed hope and emerging confidence.

**Hadracha b'dugma:** Leaders Plan and Look to the Future... But Leaders Also Lead and Do. We are all familiar with the *raison d'atra* of planning, clichéd though it might be: if we don't know where we're going, we will never know when we get there. We will hear more this week about the strategic plan NAASE recently completed. Many of us guide our congregations through strategic plans. Planning is an essential exercise and useful tool. It is, though, only as valuable as the vision of the future that is seen and envisioned by the organization's leaders. We are lead actors in imagining that future and setting those visions for our congregations. In the end, though, all the planning in the world is irrelevant if we don't actually do. "*Breishit Barah Elohim*", "in the beginning, God created...". In their book, "Leadership in the Bible", Paul Ohana and David Arnow point out that the Torah does not describe God, perhaps the ultimate leader, as planning or organizing or strategizing. No, the Bible begins with God "doing". So must we – Leaders act... and leaders do.

**Hadracha b'dugma:** Leaders Learn. Not only do we teach by living and setting example, but we continue to learn. Without study and growth, leadership lacks direction and depth. We are here this week out of our own commitment to continuing education and learning. Think for a moment about great leaders – the books in their studies and the books they have written. As have many of you, I visited David Ben-Gurion's house in Tel Aviv – it was essentially a library with over 20,000 books lining each nook and every cranny. Study, and continuing learning makes the difference between the statesman and the politician, between

the transformative leader and the manager.

**Hadracha b'dugma:** Leaders Believe In the People We're Leading. During the past year, I and the leaders of my congregation have studied and discussed the book, Relational Judaism. We spent a weekend in November with its author, Dr. Ron Wolfson. Leaders do not, and cannot, lead in a vacuum. We must, and, in fact, are most effective when we lead with appreciation and respect for, and are in relationship with those we are leading. Human beings have been created, "*b'tzelem Elohim*", in the image of God. Human dignity is a core Jewish principle and value. Judaism will always value the leadership of influence over the leadership of power. Power lifts the leader above the people; influence lifts the people above their former selves. Power controls people; influence respects people.

**Hadracha b'dugma:** Leadership is Hard – It is Stressful and Emotionally Demanding. Each week I read and hear the haftarah. So many of our prophets found the burdens of leadership excruciatingly difficult. Think of Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah – each at some stage prayed to die rather than carry on. We are not prophets – please God none of us have quite reached that. But our work is hard, and we know it – even harder when we take leadership responsibility as seriously as management efforts. Why, then, do we continue to shoulder the responsibility and burden of synagogue leadership? Because, of course, it's important. We have articulated a vision and internalized a purpose. Synagogue allows people to become their better selves. It provides the structure through which we help one another to fulfill the biblical command to be an "*or l'goyim*", a light for all people.

I am particularly struck by the opening line of this week's Torah portion, *Va'yikra*. "*Va'yikra el moshe va'ydaber Adonai eilav*" – The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him..." No discussion of Jewish leadership should be concluded without remembering Moshe – perhaps the greatest leader of our people. Why did God need to call out to Moses? One rabbinic interpretation suggests that Moses believed his mission

had been completed. After all, the Israelites were out of Egypt, he had ascended Mount Sinai and received the Torah and had supervised the construction of the Tabernacle. But, of course, it wasn't. Leadership accompanies responsibility. And it doesn't end with one task or another. Our focus and attention are on the future. We are called to continue moving forward, to affect change.

I am not an accountant. I am not a plumber, electrician or building contractor. I am not a trained strategic planner. I am not an IT or computer professional. I am not a professionally trained Jewish educator, Cantor or Rabbi. There are many things that I am not. What I am, though – what each of us is, and what I – and we – have a responsibility to be as a synagogue Executive Director, is a leader. Each of us must work, as part of a whole, to provide vision, direction, plan, hope, respect, relationship and resources to our synagogue community.

**Na'aseh v'nishma** – we will do it and will continue to learn from and with one another.



# Jewish Ethics in Our Jobs

Tamah Kushner • Congregation Tikvat Jacob Beth Torah, Manhattan Beach, CA



## Jewish Ethics in Our Jobs

When my youngest was about 3 and we were walking to *shul* one perfect LA Shabbat morning, he whined, "I wish we were Christian!" one of those parenting moments where you stare into the abyss of your future with your adult children writing a tell-all memoir lamenting their observant Jewish childhood.

"Why" we asked with fake casualness?

"Because then we could drive to *shul*," he explained as we cancelled the therapy fund in our mental bank accounts.

I thought of that moment recently when contemplating all of the ethical demands of our field, as Executive Directors of Synagogues. Would it be easier to be the Executive Director of a secular institution? Are there things I do in my job because of Jewish law?

Certainly our ethical behaviors all have roots in basic morality and the Torah's *mitzvot*, but do we go above and beyond what is expected because of our legal code?

**Al TiGnov - "Though Shall Not Steal"** - is obviously one of the Top 10. In our ED work, I find this to sometimes be an expensive commandment to keep. Movie rights, to show movies in our congregations, can have a hefty invoice, not to mention the time arguing and reminding staff and congregants that it doesn't matter if Netflix or Amazon has the movie to stream for free; we still have to pay for the rights to show it, even if we are not charging.

I take this commandment seriously also with rights to music and written material. "Nope. You can't copy the entire book and give it out." "Let's write to the author and ask for reprinting rights in our newsletter." In retaliation of this moral code of mine, my staff has planned to show bootlegged first-run movies for free

while I'm away.

**Paying wages quickly:** There are a number of reminders in the Torah to pay the wages of your worker quickly, within the same day. Although I follow our usual payroll schedule, on occasion I have driven delayed checks to pay a vendor's invoice, or reimbursed an employee from my personal account when we made a payroll error.

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**I try to always remember that everyone is someone's child and treat them as such.**

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Our shul's Financial Aid policy is rooted in Jewish ethics. To care for the widow and the orphan - which I take in a broader sense of the disenfranchised and the people who don't have the necessary income or resources to meet their shul financial obligations. Most importantly, we are cautioned as Jews to not embarrass others, a transgression that is compared to shedding their blood. We have to walk the line carefully between guarding our congregations' resources while not embarrassing someone by asking too many or too invasive financial questions.

Even how we treat our belongings at our shuls is proscribed by Jewish law. The Talmud cautions us to not buy something with the plan to return it, to not use the shopkeeper's time if we truly don't intend to buy something - a caution I find especially compelling in our time as brick and mortar stores close in the face of Amazon's reduced prices.

We have the responsibility of making sure our buildings are safe, of repairing our building's "*parapel*" so as not to cause harm or danger.

We all struggle with what safe and secure means when we are so aware of *hachnasat orchim*, the welcoming of guests, as modeled by Abraham. I make sure to offer photographers, the

mailman, and the Office Depot delivery guy a drink and a snack (we always have those) with our forefathers in mind.

For me, the most important Jewish ethic we must follow in our *shuls* is *b'Tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God - to see that each person and individual is made in the image of God. I find this most challenging in our community with the mentally ill. Over the years we've had a number of people who have come to our services and our *kiddushim*, who range from slightly different to obviously schizophrenic, and within reason and safety it is our obligation to include and welcome them. One hygiene-challenged young man

attended our kiddush for many years, manically taking notes and often speaking in a confusing word salad. One day he arrived on a weekday, sat down at the piano, and played exquisitely for twenty minutes. I found out that he was the son of a cantor.

I try to always remember that everyone is someone's child and treat them as such.

As I contemplate our jobs, I realize how much of our behavior is driven and reinforced by Jewish laws and ethics. Especially as Executive Directors in *shuls*, we are all aware of our Holy Work.

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