

1998 WORLD COUNCIL OF JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE QUADRENNIAL “A Unique Gathering”

HOWARD E. CHARISH
Chairman, 1998 Quadrennial

Several months ago the *New York Times* Magazine had a special issue entitled “What Technology Is doing To Us.” In the table of contents was this fill-in-the-blank phrase, “Technology makes us _____.” What followed were such responses as “better,” “richer,” “faster,” “daring,” “comfortable,” “crazy,” and “escapist.” The article that particularly intrigued me was the one that completed the phrase with the adjective “closer” and was about “the intimate reach of remote control.” Yet, ironically, the very nature of remote control puts one at a distance from the object, not closer, and it certainly does not create intimacy.

How different is the mindset that has been operative for more than three years in planning the Ninth Quadrennial Conference of the World Council of Jewish Communal Service. As Jewish communal professionals, we thrive on hands-on experiences and direct contact with our clients, members, and communities. We also recognize that we must educate ourselves to trends and developments, not only in our local settings but also in the national and international domain. We have therefore fashioned a Quadrennial that will bring us face to face with current realities and with opportunities to do networking on a colleague-to-colleague basis.

In reviewing materials from previous Quadrennials, I found that my predecessors as Program Chair usually stated that their Quadrennial was taking place at an important moment in Jewish history. The first Quadrennial certainly did, occurring in 1967 shortly after the Six-Day War. Yet, our gathering is also historic as we will be in Jerusalem when Israel celebrates its fiftieth year of independence! Additionally, past Quadrennials often used the terminology,

“world of change,” in their program literature. That term characterizes our deliberations as well. Our theme is “Strengthening Klal Yisrael—Jewish Unity, Israel-Diaspora Relations, Continuity—Role of the Jewish Communal Professional.” Our goal is to bring together 500 Jewish communal workers from all over the world for an interchange on the major issues confronting Jewish life today. Given the fluidity of so many aspects of communal life, our focus in plenaries, professional activity sessions, forums, and institutes will be on how we, the professionals, make a difference.

The Quadrennial will begin with five seminars: Training for Leadership in the Jewish World; Changing Needs of Aging Holocaust Survivors; Jewish Community Centers, Site Visits; Aging; and Community Development/Strategic Planning.

Then, through plenary sessions, we will explore the Israel-Diaspora relationship and Jewish peoplehood. Among the roster of plenary speakers on these vitally important topics are the Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu; the Diaspora Advisor to the Prime Minister, Dr. Bobby Brown; and the Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, Avrum Burg.

Israel has evolved from a position of vulnerability to one of military and economic strength, thereby altering the premises upon which Israel-Diaspora relations were built. In the plenary session, “The Israel-Diaspora Contract: Rethinking the Partnership,” these questions will be raised and discussed: What new patterns and options can be effective in this new reality and how far can reciprocity go?

In Israel and the United States there is a fractious relationship among some of the

streams of Judaism. At a second plenary entitled "Striving for Jewish Unity and Peoplehood," four panelists will give their views on the philosophical and programmatic bases for facilitating unity in such a climate. A forum will further explore how to create dialogue in a polarized society.

A cornerstone of the Quadrennial is providing opportunities for rethinking and reaffirming our practice methodologies. These topics will be pursued in the professional activity sessions: community and financial resource development; services to families, children, the aged, and people with special needs; and formal and informal Jewish education. Each session will meet twice and focus on skills and ethical issues we face as professionals.

From its inception the Quadrennial Program Committee determined that enhancing the career advancement of women in our profession must be addressed. An international panel of women will lead a forum on the topic in which data will be presented from a survey conducted worldwide with over 1,000 responses.

Interwoven in the proceedings will be opportunities for attendees to partake in special networking activities. One of the most exciting features will be home hospitality with our Israeli colleagues on Sunday evening. Matched with Israeli colleagues in our fields

of interest, we will have an intimate setting in which to engage in dialogue and share concerns and aspirations. We are very grateful for the graciousness of our Israeli hosts. Another special offering will be a chance for new professionals to meet each other and an opportunity for senior professionals to address the ideas and ideals that new professionals have as they begin their work in our field.

One of the advantages of meeting at the same time as the Jewish Agency Assembly and the CJF/UJA General Assembly is that we will be able to partake in a Shabbat experience—religious services, cultural events, learning sessions, and Jerusalem walks—with the delegates from these two conferences. The Quadrennial will close Monday afternoon with a keynote address by one of the world's most inspiring leaders, Dr. Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom.

We as professionals have demonstrated an extraordinary capacity to repair the hurts, neglect, and abuses that life can contain. We have also ascended the heights of spirituality and humanity. The Quadrennial has been created in recognition of the interdependence that now crosses all geographic and religious boundaries. It was created to emphasize the power of our professionalism and relationship as Jews. None of our challenges can be met by remote control. Join us!