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**Jewish Movements
and the Jewish Future**



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Jewish Life Network is dedicated to strengthening and transforming American Jewry to ensure a flourishing, sustainable community in a fully integrated free society. We seek to revitalize Jewish identity through educational, religious and cultural initiatives that are designed to reach out to all Jews, with an emphasis on those who are on the margins of Jewish life.

Photographs in this issue appear courtesy of contributors, Photos.com, Jack Pinto and Dave Phouff.

Jewish Movements and the Jewish Future

Since the beginning of our history, Jewish destiny has often been shaped not by individuals acting in isolation, but by movements of dreamers, seekers and activists inspired by a cohesive ideology. Sometimes these movements last a couple of decades; other times, they become permanent fixtures of Jewish experience. Particularly during periods of crisis, movements have served to galvanize the Jewish people towards new dimensions in the spiritual and even physical realms. It was the movement that surrounded Yochanan ben Zakkai's move to Yavneh that led to the promulgation of Jewish thought in the Rabbinic Era. A mystical movement following the Spanish Expulsion led to the reinterpretation of exile and redemption in Jewish theology. The vision of what was originally a small group of Jews enabled the profound historical achievement of the modern State of Israel.

In contemporary America, Jewish movements have arisen to inspire Jews towards a renewed excitement and commitment to Jewish living. Chabad, the Havurah Movement and the campaign for Soviet Jewry have each touched the souls of American Jews, invigorating their commitment to Jewish life in the last several decades. The question arises: Is it time for a new movement to inspire American Jewry towards renaissance? If so, what would such a movement look like? What can it learn from recent Jewish movements? Finally, how would a new movement succeed in spurring commitment and excitement among American Jews?

This issue of CONTACT explores recent Jewish movements that have found success in America. It also considers a potential future movement that might stimulate American Jewry towards renewed commitment. We begin with a special feature – an extended forum between Michael H. Steinhardt and Rabbi Yitz Greenberg on the possibilities and challenges of a new Jewish movement. Rabbi David Gedzelman suggests ways an American Jewish movement might relate to both the idea of Jewish peoplehood and to the culture of America. Robert P. Aronson speaks of the importance of attracting and retaining a cadre of highly-trained Jewish professionals that will form the backbone of any future movement. Finally, articles by Sue Fishkoff, Barry W. Holtz and Shaul Kelner analyze the attributes that have made several recent Jewish movements successful.

For several years, Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation has sought to revitalize American Jewish life through programs and partnerships that together encompass a movement of like-minded professionals and lay leaders. This issue of CONTACT considers ways we might broaden our work to further reach the hearts, minds and spirits of American Jews.

Eli Valley

Eli Valley

Jewish Movement, Jewish Renaissance: A FORUM

Michael H. Steinhardt and Rabbi Yitz Greenberg have given much thought to the idea of creating a new Jewish movement tailored to the challenges and opportunities presented by the open society. They agreed to discuss their ideas recently in an interview format for *CONTACT*, with Eli Valley serving as facilitator.

From the start, the forum was not intended to codify the philosophy and mission of a new movement, but rather to serve as a free-ranging exploration of why a movement might be necessary today, and what such a movement might entail.



ELI VALLEY: I'm going to start off with a basic, introductory question. What is the next stage of your philanthropic vision?

MICHAEL STEINHARDT: Beyond the micro issues of continuing our programs and founding new programs to reach out to the unaffiliated, I believe that it is vital for the Jewish future that a new Jewish unity be created. Today we have in America three or four denominations plus a very substantial number of unaffiliated. It is time to create a sense of a common Judaism, a Judaism that will relate to almost all of us, a Judaism that will resonate with Jews who presently lack an important spiritual or emotional tie with their religion.

YITZ GREENBERG: There are three pillars that make Jewish Life Network's philanthropy unique. First is the entrepreneurial philosophy — to change the state of the community through innovation. Second is the ethic of partnerships. The third element is the commitment to community building and transformation. So we're not just talking about adding another philanthropic organization or another

institution. We're looking for ways of restoring vitality to a community that's bleeding. The next logical step of our macro vision is to articulate this in the form of a movement of likeminded people — philanthropists and lay people as well as professionals (be they secular civil service, such as Federation, or social work Jewish organizations) and rabbis and educators — who share the vision of recreating the community, and who want to organize around a new Jewish unity.

EV: So are you thinking of an elite or a mass movement?

MS: We're thinking of the development of a broad group of adherents which might have an elite appearance at the start, but which will ultimately become a mass movement. Let it be clear that such an effort will not be without its opponents in the Jewish world. While not a direct outcome of this movement, one might expect the present divisions in the Jewish world to fall away ultimately, and a new Jewish unity begin to create a broad new infrastructure.

EV: That leads to another question. How will this movement differ from past movements in Jewish history, and contemporary movements

Michael H. Steinhardt and Rabbi Yitz Greenberg are, respectively, the Chairman and President of Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation.



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that already exist in American Jewish society?

MS: I'm reluctant to make historic analogies, but I don't know of any contemporary movements that are intended to have the broad community-wide impact that we hope this to have. The entrenched bureaucracies of established denominations in the United States have largely lost their vigor. At one point they may indeed have been movements, but that which distinguished them in their early vigor has long ago dissipated, and they now resonate with but a small fraction even of their own constituencies. Hopefully, that which we are about to attempt to develop will supercede the present.

EV: What makes you think your movement will galvanize American Jews toward renaissance after two hundred years of assimilation?

MS: Well, the contrast is not necessarily between renaissance and assimilation. The hope is for a Jewish renaissance, an acceptable word which I think captures much of what we want to do. But the challenge is even perhaps a bit more complex. It's to have a Jewish renaissance in an environment where some important degree of assimilation is assumed and acknowledged and accepted.

YG: Part of the challenge becomes, again, how do you maintain the inner Jewishness when there's no longer separation from the outside? It's not a simple choice of rejecting assimilation, because we're talking about a very high degree of integration, but to give the inner capacity to maintain identity. That's exactly the issue.

EV: Past movements often captivated the disenfranchised, whether spiritually or economically. In what way are American Jews currently disenfranchised?

MS: A fair portion is disenfranchised in the sense that they do not feel an important relationship with any contemporary institution in the Jewish world. They don't feel related to a movement or a synagogue, or, alas, to Israel. So they call themselves "cultural" Jews because they still have a memory of their Jewish childhood and their associations with the Jewishness that they have known, but in terms of having a vital connection to that which is going on in the Jewish world, in many instances it's attenuated at best.

The Jewish people in the early twenty-first century are in a difficult state. It is no accident that in the fifty-eight or so years after the Holocaust, our population has not grown. The demographics of the community are frightful. The philanthropic vigor of the community has dropped substantially. Should I go on?

EV: What you said is accurate and true, but for a movement to revitalize Jewish life, it has to say more than "We have to give more" and "We have to make more babies." It has to have an ideology behind it. Is there a theological, inspirational force behind your proposed new movement, and if not, how will it inspire Jews?

MS: Our hope is this: that which will be inherent in our movement will be inspirational, both from its ties to historical Judaism and its recognition of the application of this history to the present, and the fact that we are ever evolving toward some new commonality. We hope that that new commonality will capture the hearts and minds of far more contemporary Jews than is presently captured by the various divisions existing today.

EV: Can you articulate more of what this commonality would be, and how it would be so inspirational as to be the equivalent of *Eretz Yisrael* to the early Zionists?

MS: I believe that common Judaism in part is the culmination of much that has gone before us. It certainly includes a commitment to *Eretz Yisrael*. It particularly includes a commitment to what we sometimes call Jewish values. It has an important basis in historic Judaism, but it attempts to refine those elements that are core and common to the Jewish future. An element to include, for instance, is a great focus on education, which has perhaps for most of our history been a core, if not *the* core, Jewish value.

YG: Another thing you've spoken about in the past is meritocracy, that individual achievement is seen as part of world building. In other words, achievement wasn't just oriented towards social justice, but to *tikkun olam*. The notion of accomplishing and perfecting the world and this life has meaning, and therefore achievement in this world is seen as a significant expression.

The goal of *tikkun olam* is an unfinished task. There's a lot left to be done in this world. The Jewish people, as a people, has served as a role model and an avant-garde, and that task is not over. For example, how you handle affluence, or how you handle your achievement is a question that a lot of people are asking, not just Jews. If you can show as a people that you are able to turn this freedom into higher levels of *tzedakah* or higher levels of responsibility or connection to a country thousands of miles away, then the world will beat a path to your door to learn from you.

MS: The new questions that are facing Jews

are how to handle affluence, how to remain Jewish in a world where Jewishness does not create or maintain insularity.

YG: If any Jew is Jewish today, it's not because he or she feels commanded or intimidated or pious, it's because he or she made a voluntary choice. They really believe they want to make it a better world as a Jew. This is the idea of voluntary Covenant. In the biblical era, God not only expects you to observe — if you observe, God gives you rain; if you don't observe, God punishes you with drought. But that's over. In the Holocaust, observant Jews suffered as much as rebellious Jews. Jews faithful to the Covenant were punished far more than any fate God could threaten them with. Therefore, God can no longer morally have claims on the Jewish people. Jews' decision — their choice — to nevertheless obey and persist is truly heroic.

MS: But such an opinion must put you at odds with the bulk of Orthodox Jewry.

YG: Yes, this is the biggest argument against me in the Orthodox community — historically, people observed the laws because they really expected that if they made a wrong move they'd go to hell. That was a real factor. My argument is that the revolution of modern life is so powerful that even Orthodox Jews like me, and for other people not Orthodox, that fear is marginal or irrelevant.

MS: The Orthodox don't have that fear anymore?

YG: My argument is that part of the Orthodox community does not have that fear and the rest of the Jews for sure don't have that fear. There's a sense, really, of being Jewish voluntarily, not out of fear of punishment. That's exactly why I call our era one of "voluntary Covenant." The Jews keep the Covenant voluntarily, and they feel every morning, "I can do just the opposite if I want to." That is the revolution of modern life. That is a more mature form of religion in my judgment. In other words, these religious views give you a much greater sense of self, a freedom from being worried about punishment. Instead, we're worried about finding pleasure in Torah or fulfillment or purpose through religious life.

There's the famous scene in [Abraham Cahan's] *The Rise of David Levinsky*. He has to stow away on the boat, coming across to America. He's afraid to eat *treyf*, but he's so hungry that finally he eats it and doesn't get struck dead. So he cuts off his *payes* and he throws the whole tradition away, because he

was doing it out of fear, and once the fear was broken, everything went, because he had nothing else to hang onto.

True, observance is unlikely to be 100 percent consistent if people don't have that fear of punishment. However, I suspect there will be a higher and deeper degree of commitment, even if less consistent, because people will feel emotionally, "this is my choice." I think people are much more committed to "this is my choice" than they are to "God will strike me dead if I don't."

MS: You're right, this is a big point, because I think when most Jews who are not observant think about Jewish observance, they overwhelmingly think that Jewish observance is dominated by an absolutist theology of reward and punishment.

YG: But in the end they don't follow it. They may even feel "I should follow it," but they don't follow it.

MS: Who's the "they?"

YG: The majority of the Jews out there. They feel guilty about not following the tradition, but they don't follow it. In other words, intimidation doesn't work.

MS: So you're saying that those who choose it voluntarily are going to reach a new level. They will become more committed, even if less technically observant.

YG: Yes, there will be much less absolute consistency and much more commitment. The change is occurring already. The voluntary Covenant is a mark of modern man, and that, in the end, is the Covenant partner we were meant to be. The Covenant is almost like a three-stage rocket. The third stage launches from the second stage. I think in retrospect the whole goal of the religion was to allow the emergence of free, autonomous human beings, because there's no real dignity when you're intimidated.

I think that is another implication of what we're saying, that the non-Orthodox will hold themselves to a higher standard. It might be a totally different standard. Maybe they won't be interested in kashrut. But their standard of giving, or their standard of getting up early in the morning to heal somebody, will be higher. I think the bulk of Jews would agree that the ultimate dream is to live in freedom, to live in dignity, and I think the religion has to reflect freedom and dignity. It can't reflect being an outsider or being persecuted.

MS: This should be an important part of a common Judaism, a core of any future movement.



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EV: Let's talk about ritual. Please be as specific as you can about a particular life event that will be articulated in a way that will appeal to a majority of American Jews. Take, for instance, Shabbat.

MS: A joyous, fulfilling, familial Shabbat will be encouraged.

EV: Is Shabbat for you not driving from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday?

MS: For some, that's a central aspect of Shabbat observance. For others, Shabbat is defined by a cessation from the workweek, or time spent with family, or an immersion in learning. In all cases, there is an emphasis that this day is different, special and unique.

EV: I would like a little bit more about the specific nature of common Judaism and this movement that, in the open society, amid a free exchange of ideas, will make it binding from generation to generation. Someone could say, "I think Shabbat is special, but I have no reason to observe it."

MS: I think you're right. I think you have to let your mind go a little bit and say that in fifteen years or some period of time, this movement has caught on. What would distinguish the lifestyle of that family that considers itself part of this movement from today's contemporary secular or non-Orthodox Jew? Or Jew, period? I mean, you have to go and imagine it. It's worthy and we haven't done it.

EV: Ok, you want do it right now? You're welcome to close your eyes and think on the spot.

MS: How will that family who voluntarily adopts this movement be different? What will his lifestyle be? The adherent to our vision about common Judaism will be distinctive from today's contemporary Jew in what ways? First, the individual will have a knowledge of Judaism that will enhance his life far more than the contemporary Jew's Judaism enhances his.

YG: The individual will have more frequent, and I believe more intensely joyous Jewish experiences. Some of them might be out of traditional models like Shabbat or a holiday, but some of them may be like the birthright mega-event. They would have a lot more frequent and more intense joyful experiences — family and personal — that reflect the Jewishness.

MS: However he resolves the great issues such as belief in God, he will be fulfilled by a Judaism that answers many of life's most

important questions, like purpose and personal mission.

YG: Another aspect is that the movement holds itself to a higher standard, and therefore will be a source of values and wisdom and meaning.

EV: But again, it has to be specifically Jewish in the way it's articulated.

MS: We can debate all of these things. One of the things you can debate is a higher standard. Higher standard implies that the movement will have a higher moral order than that of people not associated with the movement. Is that really what we want to say?

YG: Well, I would like to. The movement will give people the apparatus to tap into Jewish wisdom. And we hope that Jewish wisdom involves a higher standard.

MS: But higher standard — then we ask the next question: a higher standard of what?

EV: Of ethical living. Of meaningful living.

MS: Well, meaningful and ethical are really two different things.

EV: I would think it would include both.

MS: I'm more comfortable with meaningful than I am with ethical.

YG: We're raising the question of how do you guarantee that higher standard. The answer is you can't. However, what I am deviating from is set at a higher level — whether it's what traditional Jews feel guilty about, say, that someone doesn't eat kosher, or that I should be getting up early in the morning to work for the downtrodden, or whatever.

MS: But all those things are higher standard. That begs the question: a higher standard of what? An Orthodox rabbi would say that a man who never put on tefillin before and is now putting on tefillin — he's living at a higher standard by his choice to do that. I don't know if that's what we're talking about here.

YG: I think it is. However, other Jews — maybe a majority — will define a higher standard as: I'm willing to get up earlier Sunday morning and campaign for Soviet Jewry, or something similar.

MS: You used a different point.

YG: Ritual and ethics are equivalent. In both cases, the Jew worked harder. This person got up earlier to put on tefillin, that person got up earlier to have a demonstration for Soviet Jewry.

MS: Is there not a very important distinction

between the act of putting on tefillin and the act of getting up early to help the downtrodden?

YG: Absolutely not. Both are core elements in the tradition.

EV: Listen, the core of common Judaism was this guy getting up early.

YG: Both undertakings reflect the notion of wanting to lead a meaningful life.

MS: But we know that many people who put on tefillin today don't necessarily live by a higher standard.

YG: Frankly, we would like to see a higher correlation between ritual and meaningful behavior. That would be a real accomplishment.

MS: That's why I say meaningful I accept, but ethical is hard to establish.

YG: You cannot cut ethics loose from ritual. This is an ancient point, centrally argued in prophetic tradition. Ritual excellence linked to lower ethical standards is offensive to God.

MS: But Rabbi Greenberg, with all your talk about new and common, are you not reverting back to an old Orthodox standard in terms of higher and better?

YG: No, I am repeating an old prophetic idea. Listen, I wish the Orthodox were ethically at a higher standard. Would you have the guts to say what Isaiah said in substance: "Take your sacrifices, I'm not interested, God doesn't want them. I'm sick and tired of violence and robbery, I'm sick and tired of you cheating..."? Or what Jeremiah said: "I [God] am going to close down this Temple because you come here to do a sacrifice and under cover of that net you come here to cheat, rob and lie." I don't think it's anything provocative to say this. If you had to choose between putting on tefillin and being honest in business, there's no question what you're supposed to sacrifice first. My dream would be that there should be a higher correlation — that the guy who cares about Jews abroad also does not cheat on his wife. I'd like to see a correlation.

MS: Rabbi Greenberg, you're on the Charlie Rose show. Will common Judaism have you encourage more and more people putting on tefillin?

EV: It's a secret agenda.

YG: The answer is, that is an individual choice. Some members of this movement, in fact like me, do put on tefillin and it helps them to link to God, and some don't. But

tefillin is not likely what's in common. Understand, I don't fool myself. The majority of Jews are not going to observe ritual.

MS: But can you give me a more succinct answer? Will common Judaism have as one of its goals, as a change in Jewish life, more Jews putting on tefillin?

YG: It may well be a result, but it's not one of its primary goals.

EV: Michael, you're saying it has to be no. Why?

MS: Because that won't speak to things we're interested in. I mean, we would welcome their doing it, but it won't be central. It's a very interesting line you're drawing here.

YG: I remain convinced that mitzvah observance will be available as a model. But do I think that wearing tefillin is going to be one of the defining models? I doubt it.

MS: You have to keep distinguishing, you have to keep separating. In other words, any movement separates itself by positive requirements and negative exclusions.

EV: Is there a modern way of having a version of tefillin that would unite Jews that doesn't necessarily involve phylacteries?

YG: Possibly a kind of morning meditation could be shared by all groups. We want people to have Jewish mornings. Wake up in the morning and face your day.

EV: Just wake up in the morning, that's it. Get up before noon, that's common Judaism. But then there will be a rival Judaism formed, nocturnal Judaism. You sleep until one in the afternoon and stay up until three in the morning.

YG: That's right, and I don't see one as preferable to the other, as long as you use your hours to do good for others and for the world.

EV: Yitz, can you elaborate on what you mean by "higher standards"?

YG: Part of the idea of higher standards is that we think that, as a community, we can serve as a model in which we are affirming freedom, affirming autonomy, affirming choice and, in that sense, affirming self-expression — all the elements that have been characteristic of our country — but participating in something larger than yourself. I think that's the heart of it, so that even the religious will belong to this common Judaism. Honestly, in the end, I think the majority here will not necessarily have a Covenantal belief of God. I think it will be marked by a common sense



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that this people as a people has an important role to play in a living model of how you turn freedom and autonomy into responsibility and love and to family. In other words, on a higher level. So we are going to be the model of how you turn to Torah voluntarily and competitively — not on the basis of fear or segregation or looking down on others — into a chosen higher standard of living.

I suspect in the end what we will have in common is that we will be living models of how you affirm freedom and autonomy and nurture these qualities. But you also turn choice into responsibility, into commitment to family and ways of living intensely.

EV: But isn't the age of ideology over? Aren't the only people entranced with ideology commonly thought of as extremists? On the other hand, if you do have a movement inspired by a common Judaism that is tolerant and open to all different variations, how will that really bind people?

MS: The fact that one might even think that the age of ideology is over suggests that we are in need of ideology.

EV: What I meant was that today the most cohesive and entrancing ideologies are those that are espoused by extremists. Those are the kinds of ideologies that are most trenchant today.

MS: What you're saying is that, a la "the end of history," it seems as if we have all accepted a sort of benign, socially sensitive capitalism that pervades the West, and the West, in this sense, includes much of Eastern Europe.

YG: And the dreams of a lot of the developing world, also.

MS: So in that sense the idea of a new ideology or disparate ideology is greatly diminished. That doesn't mean it's over. It means we're in a period where there's a broad-based acceptance of a generalized ideology and for sure that will not last. And I don't think that in any way impinges upon the need for an ideology that will attract people who are adrift. I think a substantial portion of the Jewish and the non-Jewish world are ideologically adrift at this point.

YG: That's an excellent answer, thank you. That's a good question, too. So you're not talking extremism, you're talking about giving meaning, and there are many people who need that right now.

EV: One defining characteristic of past movements has been the emergence of a fig-

urehead to lead the movement. Michael, you have asked, "Where is *Melech Yisrael* to guide us today?" Some would argue, though, that in contemporary American society, the Jewish community is too fractious to allow the emergence of a single figurehead. How do you propose to get around this if you are serious about a movement? Do you feel this movement needs a single figurehead? And are you that figurehead?

MS: I think that, at the risk of saying something that might be a bit clichéd, great leadership often evolves in times of great crisis, and this is a time of overt crisis, as we all can sense from the fading of philanthropy, or the fading of interest in Israel, or the fading in ideology, etc. It is a time of material comfort, a time when there aren't any barricades to get behind. So, with that as background, you can't arbitrarily choose leadership. Leadership should evolve in this case from that which we are trying to do. I don't have much else to say about it. I use the phrase *Melech Yisrael* to point to the contrast of this moment with many other moments when there was a more defined leadership of the Jewish community. How and when one will develop, I'm not sure.

YG: I think historically speaking, to have one figurehead has advantages, i.e., someone to give orders and lead marches. But I honestly believe that democracies have shown that collectives can rule more effectively and more powerfully, and inspire more accomplishments than authoritarian structures. Even though it's true that we start with a disadvantage — we don't have an undisputed God's representative or authority figure — I think that a new collective can evoke as much loyalty, as much commitment as an authority figure. But from the operation of the movement, individuals or an individual will emerge. People will say that this is the person I am listening to because I really follow that advice or am inspired by that person.

MS: If this proves to be a successful movement, and it's going to be very difficult, if it emerges and becomes successful, there will be leadership associated with it.

YG: It will earn its reputation by accomplishments. In a certain sense, what we're saying is this movement is another expression of the age of free choice and voluntary obedience. There is no professor or rabbi who's automatically fit to be a leader, emperor or king. We're saying that the people are going to earn their title as leader. ✿



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WHAT DOES THE HOUR DEMAND?

Creating a **New** Movement in American **Jewish** Life

by **RABBI DAVID GEDZELMAN**

Since the publication of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, Jewish institutions, leaders and philanthropists have launched a range of projects, initiatives and altogether new enterprises aimed at turning the tide of assimilation and intermarriage, engaging the unaffiliated, enhancing Jewish education, and encouraging pockets of Jewish renaissance. Yet, there is no sense of strong connection among these various initiatives. In the end, they seem like a sum total of disparate reactions which do not nurture one another in their momentum, learning processes and increased knowledge of the field. There is little of the kind of sharing that might enhance the community's ability to recruit and train professionals best equipped to lead the many new projects embarked on in this age of experimentation and risk-taking. There is no overarching rubric of ideology or spirituality that connects these many new approaches and projects and inspires enthusiasm among American Jews. In other words, this past

decade's various projects of Jewish renaissance and renewal, while in many ways impressive, have not constituted an inspired new movement in American Jewish life.

What would such a movement entail? What could possibly be its appeal to individual American Jews, as well as to rabbis and communal professionals, Jewish educators, lay leaders and philanthropists? A new, inspired movement in American Jewish life could break through communal divisions and create profound connections among Jews. Such a movement could strive to enhance opportunities for resonant Jewish meaning and experience for great numbers of American Jews. To achieve these goals, the movement would need to articulate a vision of Jewish ideas and values that could be shared by a majority of Jews across lines of denomination and affiliation. It would also need to inspire passion and involvement among leadership, both professional and volunteer, in such a way that would neutralize the petty jealousies, back-stabbing and nay-saying that unfortunately seem to characterize too much of organized Jewish life.

A new movement of renaissance in American Jewish life must seek to complement and strengthen, not sup-

Rabbi David Gedzelman is Executive Director of Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation and was the Founding Creative and Rabbinic Director of Makor.



plant, the denominations and federation structures. It should inspire a new generation of professionals and lay leaders, as well as millions of Jewish Americans, to become intoxicated with the possibility of working together to realize a synthesis between the great gifts represented by Jewish experience and wisdom on the one hand, and the values and opportunities of American democracy and freedom on the other. For that to happen, such a movement needs to entail elements which will seriously enhance the ways Jewish professionals are recruited and trained. It needs to see recruitment for inspired Jewish service not only as a post-graduate professional proposition, but as part of a continuum from the earliest stages of one's American Jewish education and life. Likewise, an authentic Jewish movement, which is not afraid of American values, will need to encourage professionals and lay leaders to spend serious time together immersed in exploring the richness of Jewish wisdom as well as the Jewish relevance of American thought and values. It will have to inspire a commitment to outreach and engagement among constituent institutions that will match the passion of Chabad, but bring messages and examples of Jewish values and life that can be fully embraced by the vast majority of American Jews.

Jewish Values, American Values

For such a movement to capture the imagination of American Jews, it must take seriously certain values that most American Jews embrace as Americans, and seek to find ways in which Jewish wisdom can both incorporate and inform those values. It must also be willing to recognize which values of American culture are irreconcilable with the core Jewish ideas without which no

movement could honestly be called Jewish. At the same time, it must reject Jewish teachings that negate the core Jewish value, consistent with American democracy, that all human beings are created in the image of God.

American culture celebrates a popular strain of Universalism, and is naturally suspicious of any ideology of Particularism which excludes more than it includes. Many Jewish Americans subscribe to this view, and therefore find it much easier to accept the nineteenth-century reformers' definition of Judaism as exclusively a religious faith than to see Jewish identity as necessarily entailing a personal identification with a particular people in history. This seeming contradiction between American values and any Jewish particularistic expression has had the potential to seriously distance American Jews from ever finding Judaism truly relevant to their lives. However, a deeper understanding of Jewish Peoplehood can move American Jews to appreciate that the idea of the Jewish people is not necessarily a kind of absolute Particularism, incompatible with American values. It is, rather, a kind of "Universal-Particularism," which, if understood better, could make a great contribution to American life.

The dilemma of American Jewish identity is compounded by the fact that while most American Jews do not consider themselves to be religious people, many – especially those under 50 – consider Jewish identity only in religious terms. In essence, they define themselves out of the very equation of Jewish life. It used to be that for most Jews, being Jewish was about ethnicity, peoplehood, culture, language, food and literature, as well as faith. To a certain

degree, the value of Jewish peoplehood has fallen victim to our very political success in America. It was as if the protections of the first amendment were afforded us only as long as being Jewish was about belonging to a particular faith community, but not about being part of a particular people or civilization.

Jewish Peoplehood and Covenant

The idea of the Jewish people is indispensable to Judaism and therefore must stand at the center of any movement that seeks to encourage renaissance in Jewish life. Yet, Jewish Peoplehood is not a simple idea limited to race, tribe or nation-state. From its beginnings in the Hebrew Bible, Jewish Peoplehood has always radically challenged the world's assumptions about race, nation, religion and history. To paraphrase Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, Jewish Peoplehood affirms a sense of "Covenantal community" through history that transcends race and tribe, but includes blood and faith. Jewish Peoplehood is about exploring and evolving the ideas of Judaism while providing a trans-racial mechanism of human connection for experiencing and realizing those ideas. Without the definitional elements of family and community encapsulated in the idea of the Jewish people, Jewish wisdom may be perceived by some as a collection of ideas available to any interested individual, but loses its ability to make those ideas real in experience.

Yes, the Jewish people welcomes those who decide to live its ideas and practices. But, the Jewish people really does exist, even if it eludes clear definitions. Therefore, to fully participate in Judaism, an individual not born into this people cannot do so without establishing a real Covenantal connection with a



To make this prospect even more complicated, such a movement needs to be built in a spirit of partnership with the various existing institutions and denominations which, if activated to break down the self-protective boundaries which sometimes cut them off from the open society, can realize themselves in ways far greater than they do today.

particular communal representation of this people. This means that living Jewishly cannot be achieved merely by searching the word “Jewish” on the internet and reading a few books, no matter how helpful those resources might be. It means entering into authentic historical relationship with the Jewish people and its God-wisdom through a contemporary Jewish community.

As articulated in the Torah, the ultimate goal of Jewish Peoplehood is the redemption of all the families of the earth. The ultimate goal is a universal one, not a chauvinistic one. As the great Zionist thinker, Aharon David Gordon, taught, the realization of the Jewish people has value only in a context by which all the peoples of the earth realize themselves. In fact, Gordon foresaw a process by which Jewish realization would inspire a flowering of organic national cultural expressions worldwide.

Likewise, Jewish Peoplehood in the context of American society can help to advance a revised multicultural agenda that celebrates difference and particularism in relationship to a universal community. Such a multicultural agenda stands to be considerably more encouraging of Jewish identity and commitment than was the hyper-assimilationist, melting-pot environment in which the masses of Jewish immigrants found themselves in the early twentieth century. This is not only good for the Jews, it is good for the diversity and cultural richness of America.

From America’s late twentieth-century crisis of community, we have learned that a Universalism which negates the particular ends up leaving the individual alienated and alone. The transcendent connection afforded the individual by Jewish community and Peoplehood has much to teach American

culture as well. In fact, a new movement in American Jewish life will only be exciting to the vast majority of American Jews if its ideas are meant to make a profound contribution to American life as well as to Jewish life.

God-Wisdom

There is much to be said and thought through as to what those ideas should be. Fortunately, the God-wisdom of the Jewish people is not at all univocal, with theologies ranging from God as legislator and separate reactive actor often portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, to the expression of existence itself revealed to Moses in the burning bush of Exodus, to the monism of Kabbalah and Hasidism, to Martin Buber’s dialogical “sphere of the between,” to Mordecai Kaplan’s Power which makes for Salvation.

An articulation of that God-wisdom, made meaningful both for those uncomfortable with a supernatural notion of God and those for whom such a notion is indispensable to Judaism, is necessary if a vision of Judaism common to a wide range of American Jews is to be embraced as part of a new movement in American Jewish life. Such an articulation is not an easy proposition. Nor, will getting American Jews – who, as Americans, find learning foreign languages difficult – to understand that Jewish Particularism, no matter how universally contextualized, is not authentic lacking a deep appreciation for the power and beauty of the Hebrew language as the concrete expression of the soul of the Jewish people. Likewise, without a deep appreciation for the miracle of Jewish rebirth and renewal in the Land of Israel, expressed through a rich cultural and political identification with the people and state of Israel, a new movement

in American Jewish life will deprive itself of a vital source of inspiration and renaissance.

Building a Movement

There is much work to be done in building such a movement, from creating retreat environments where Jewish identity can be transformed through immersion experiences, to taking a serious look at how we recruit and train our professionals, to creating mechanisms of outreach and engagement that do not present Jewish life as a static and closed book but as a dynamic work-in-progress whose ongoing evolution demands the input of our most talented, creative and insightful.

To make this prospect even more complicated, such a movement needs to be built in a spirit of partnership with the various existing institutions and denominations which, if activated to break down the self-protective boundaries which sometimes cut them off from the open society, can realize themselves in ways far greater than they do today. All of this will be of nought unless built in the context of what we at Jewish Life Network call the infrastructure of freedom. Those same American freedoms which have made Jewish identity a choice in America – and which set the stage for unprecedented numbers of American Jews opting out of the Jewish community – can guarantee renewal and renaissance if understood as the opportunities they truly are. If the innovative projects of the next decade are to be something other than a disparate sum-total of reactions, then they must see themselves as part of a movement – be that a loose affiliation or something more directed – which starts from a place of enthusiasm and optimism about the historic opportunity the American Jewish experience still represents. ✿

The effort to create a movement to attract, educate, support and retain a new generation of Jewish professionals for our synagogues, schools, Federations, JCCs and other agencies will be a massive undertaking.

The Case For A Movement of Jewish Professionals

by ROBERT P. ARONSON

I started what became my career as a Jewish professional in 1975, as a campaign associate at the Milwaukee Jewish Federation. As is the case with many who work in Jewish communal service, I had no training, simply a desire to “work for the Jews” — an idea I came up with while working as a volunteer on a Kibbutz in Israel.

In truth, I no longer wanted to work the third shift at the residential treatment center for mentally disturbed, criminal teenage boys. Working for the Jews seemed a highly preferable, not to mention safer, position for someone like me. The Federation director hired me as sort of an “aide-de-camp.” I started staffing a few campaign divisions and I was on my way, mighty thankful to have my own little office with carpeting on the floor.

At that time, the Federation, JCC and Home for the Aged were all connected. My grandmother lived at the Jewish Home and used to walk over to the JCC for the hot lunch program. I would occasionally run over to greet her at lunchtime. Grandma was always happy to see me, but she was confused as to why I was there. “Do you work for the hot lunch program?” she always asked. This has been the recurring joke in my family since that time.

Whenever I’m asked how my job is going, I answer that the hot lunch program is doing well. My parents love this answer, because they are still unclear and a little unsettled about what I actually do. This is not the case with my little brother, the successful urologist.

So here I find myself almost thirty years later, involved in a national initiative to improve the field of Jewish professional life, not just for communal workers, but for rabbis and Jewish educators as well. One could well ask, “Why bother?” These jobs are for the nerds among us who

caught the “Jewish bug” and are doing it because they are not capable of making it in the real world. So goes one undercurrent of thinking. “Who would be crazy enough to work for the Jews?” goes another argument. “They work you to death, pay you nothing, and never say thank you.” (That one may be partially true.)

Well, after thirty years in this business, I have come to realize two things: First, nothing really important or lasting can take place in Jewish life without the direct intervention and guidance of a Jewish professional. Second, there is a major crisis in our Jewish community. There are not nearly enough trained, motivated and successful Jewish professionals to fill the current and future positions in our schools, synagogues and agencies. This is true not only in Peoria but in Detroit, New York and in our national organizations as well. And things are getting worse. Enrollment in graduate school programs of professional training, with a few exceptions, are static at best.

Professional “burn-out” is also a major problem — many leave their jobs within the first five years and turn to other professions. Many departing Jewish pros cite difficult lay/professional relationships and lack of job satisfaction as reasons for leaving. “I’d rather be a lay person,” some say. It is ironic but true that the professional who is so fundamental to the process of changing, transforming and improving Jewish life in North America often feels undervalued, isolated and stuck in a second-class profession.

What needs to change and how do we go about this change? To put it simply, we need to greatly improve the stature of our field. We must create a movement that articulates the importance of Jewish professional service, creates a conviction of the meaning and value of our role, and brings together people from all the various fields — rabbinics, education and communal service — with a common purpose. We must provide the funding necessary to create internships, scholarships and continuing professional education programs.

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Many philanthropists throughout North American understand the importance of the Jewish professional and have invested heavily in individual graduate schools and scholarship programs. Several national agencies have developed continuing education programs for their professionals, and local agencies have struggled to set aside time for supervision and mentoring of new professionals. But what is missing is any kind of integrated national initiative that targets young, enthusiastic Jewish men and women with the message that they can be part of a movement to shape our Jewish future.

The universe of potential Jewish professionals exists. Thousands of college students have returned from birthright israel with a desire to become more Jewishly involved. Thousands more have attended Jewish camps or have been active in youth movements. Yet there is no clear path laid out for them on how they can turn their Jewish passion into a profession in which they can make an enduring contribution to our community and make a good living besides.

Before we can develop a plan for expanding the quality and quantity of those choosing a Jewish career, we have to figure out where to put our resources for the maximum impact. To this end, a group of philanthropists working

under the auspices of Jewish Life Network/Steinhardt Foundation have commissioned two research studies that will examine the determining factors in why a young person enters Jewish professional life and why he or she decides to remain or to leave the field.

No matter where the research leads us, the effort to create a movement to attract, educate, support and retain a new generation of Jewish professionals for our synagogues, schools, Federations, JCCs and other agencies will be a massive undertaking. It will require a partnership of philanthropists, universities, Jewish agencies and religious movements, as well as the national agencies which currently do recruitment and placement. I have learned that developing collaborative efforts between organizations in Jewish life is no easy thing. But it will be absolutely necessary if we are to succeed.

It is clear to me that without good Jewish professionals, there can be no true renaissance for Jewish life in North America. The time has come to address the issue on a national basis, within the context of a movement which will support, value and develop professional roles.

Come to think of it, grandma, working for the JCC hot lunch program might not be such a bad job after all. 🌸

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The Secret to Chabad's Success

by SUE FISHKOFF

Chabad-Lubavitch is a real American success story: a once-small group of ultra-Orthodox hassidim from Crown Heights who, in less than four decades, built themselves into a billion-dollar Jewish outreach empire with almost 4,000 full-time emissaries working in 100 countries and nearly every state in the Union.

I recently spent two years researching a book about Chabad outreach in North America, visiting Chabad centers from Alaska to Miami. Everywhere I traveled, I found that the overwhelming number of Jews who attend Chabad services, who send their kids to Chabad camps and Hebrew schools, and, most interesting of all, who support them financially, were self-identified Reform and Conservative Jews, Jews whose own lifestyles and beliefs are very far removed from that of

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Lubavitcher hassidism. Yet something in the Chabad message appealed to them.

How did this happen? How does Chabad manage to attract mainstream Jews and convince them, not to put on black hats and move to Crown Heights — although that, too, happens — but to take on more mitzvot here and there, maybe study a little Torah, or light candles on Shabbat, and, eventually, become the financial donors that the movement needs to survive? What can the leadership of other Jewish streams learn from this, and could Chabad be a model for other Jewish movements?

First, it's important to understand that Chabad *shlichim* are not missionaries. Chabad's goal is not to convert Gentiles to Judaism, but to persuade non-observant Jews to live more Jewishly, one step at a time. Lubavitchers are motivated in this task both by their devotion to their Rebbe, the late Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who taught his followers that this was the most important life work they could do,

and by Chabad's messianic theology, which teaches that each mitzvah performed by a Jew brings the world closer to the messianic age, and is thus critically important.

To that end, Chabad *shlichim* try to make it as easy as possible for a Jew to perform a mitzvah. Don't have candles? They'll give you some, and teach you the prayers to say when you light them. Don't have a succah? They'll sell, or give you, a kit, and even come to your house to help you put it up. They will create beginners' minyanim to introduce Jews with little Jewish background to the daily service. They will set up free or low-cost schools for your children to learn Jewish tradition and history. They will throw Purim parties or cook a Shabbat meal and invite you to take part. This is all immensely appealing and really quite generous.

Lubavitchers see themselves as a bridge between the observant and non-observant worlds, extending a welcoming hand to those who want to cross over — one way only, of course — but who don't know how,

or aren't sure how far they want to go. They are willing, non-judgmental guides, who will walk by your side at your own pace, with an encouraging smile.

That sets Chabad apart from the general Orthodox world, say many of the Chabad followers I interviewed. Typical was the young man in Florida who decided he wanted to begin delving into his Jewish heritage, but felt unwelcome in every Orthodox shul he visited because of his lack of Hebrew background. At the Chabad center, by contrast, he was welcomed with open arms. Today he prays on Shabbat at a Chabad shul, yet still considers himself an "observant Conservative Jew," and is very involved in his local Jewish federation.

The outreach imperative is an integral part of hassidism in general, but the eighteenth-century founder of Chabad hassidism, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, elevated it to a prime directive for his followers. That outreach remained fairly informal as Chabad moved its headquarters first to the Byelorussian village of Lubavitch, which gave the movement its second name, and then, in 1941, to Brooklyn and the New World. It was only under the leadership of the seventh and final Lubavitcher Rebbe, who headed the movement from 1951 until his death in 1994, that Chabad outreach became institutionalized, heavily funded and finally integrated into the larger American and world Jewish communities.

Many factors have contributed to Chabad's success this past half-century. Certainly the rise of Orthodoxy in this country since the Six-Day War has helped Chabad (and Chabad, in turn, has contributed to that rise). The Chabad leadership's investment in its own institutions — its yeshivas, girls' seminaries, publishing efforts, and monies given (in the early years, as sometimes now) for new Chabad centers — provided a strong and necessary foundation for the growth of its outreach empire.

But the major factor in the success of Chabad outreach lies in the *shlichim* themselves: their energy, enthusiasm,

learnedness, flexibility, ability and willingness to teach others, devotion to their rebbe and their faith, and a heartfelt love for their work that is palpable to those they meet.

Many young Jewish parents, in particular, say they like the free bar and bat mitzvah lessons and often move on from there to the usually not-free, but still reasonable, summer camps and Hebrew schools.

Some Jews, especially those who have moved often or suffered divorce and other breakups in their own backgrounds, respond to the warmth and closeness of the Lubavitch household, to the large family singing together around the Shabbat table. In this world of increased moral relativism and physical transience, Chabad stands as a bulwark of tradition (i.e. permanence) and spiritual certainty for many.

And everyone I interviewed mentioned the joy and passion Chabadniks display for their Judaism. They make it come alive, their followers say. Over and over I heard the same refrain: If only my own synagogue celebrated Lag B'Omer — or Pesach, or Shabbat — with that same enthusiasm. If only my rabbi called when I was sick, like the Chabad rabbi and his wife did.

Leaders of other Jewish streams admire the enormous dedication of Chabad *shlichim*, even as they differ with Chabad on many other issues. Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the Union of American

Hebrew Congregations, told me, "There's a tremendous sense of mission that exists in Chabad in a way that doesn't always exist in other movements." He said he "admired" the *shlichim*'s focus on the everyday details of Jewish observance, on their ability to teach Jews how to live more Jewishly.

But that dedication comes at a cost. In looking at Chabad's outreach success, one

must distinguish between the emissaries' interactions with the larger Jewish world — interactions that employ techniques available to the rest of us — and the internal dynamics of the Lubavitcher movement itself. Chabad emissaries are not hired outreach workers. Their motivation

comes from an all-embracing Orthodox faith and lifestyle, centered on devotion to a charismatic rebbe and reinforced by a tightly-knit international cohort of like-minded fellow Chabadniks. They couldn't do it alone; they need the group's approbation and support to function.

Although Chabad *shlichim* are renowned for their non-judgmental

What can the leadership of other Jewish streams learn from Chabad? Could Chabad be a model for other Jewish movements?

approach to non-observant Jews — an attitude based in a theology that teaches every Jew has the same holy spark — they themselves adhere to very strict Orthodox Jewish ritual practice, compounded by insistence on their own, higher standards of kashrut, modesty, cultural isolation (no TV, no literature, no movies, no modern music), and a typically right-wing political stance on Israeli and domestic issues. They do not recognize non-Orthodox streams of Judaism.

The Chabad model is heavily dependent on many such exclusionary beliefs, and is therefore quite limited in its applicability. It is certainly not a model for a broadly-based, pluralistic Jewish movement. However, there are significant lessons that other Jewish streams, and potential movements, can learn from the Chabad example, without "becoming" Chabadniks.

First, certainly, is the lesson that outreach has to come from a real place, a place of deep love and caring for one's fellows that is inculcated in one's Jewish and family upbringing. It's more difficult to learn that as an adult, but not impossible.

Successful outreach also demands real Jewish knowledge, which means ongoing, serious study by rabbis, teachers and communal leaders alike. It demands a synthesis of Jewish study and lifestyle, meaning a commitment to the framework of mitzvot, and a concerted effort to actualize Jewish values (welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick, burying the dead, etc.). Lastly, it requires finding the joy in Judaism, and learning how to express that joy in action. ✿



INFLUENCING CHANGE: The Havurah and the American Jewish Community

by BARRY W. HOLTZ

Havurah
was about
community
and the
perception
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The late 1960s marked the beginning of a number of transformations in American Jewish life. In retrospect, we can now see how significant many of these developments were. Some of the changes are well known. The significance of Israel in the wake of the Six-Day War and the growing exploration of the Shoah are perhaps the most well-documented phenomena. The resurgence of Orthodoxy in the 1950s and '60s is another significant story.

The Havurah movement was an additional important influence on American Jewish life. In 1968 I was one of the founding members of the first of the independent havurot, Havurat Shalom, located in the Boston area. In this article, I would like to examine how and why the Havurah emerged, and how it has influenced the Jewish community.

Havurah means “fellowship.” Today, the word is used in a variety of ways. In some places it means a small minyan that meets for prayer and celebration. In other places it is the term that a synagogue uses for groups of people that meet together for study, meals or other areas of interest. It is a term used in the Federation world and in some JCCs.

When we created Havurat Shalom, our idea was very different. It is true that certain historical precedents helped set the stage for some of the thinking behind the Havurah — in particular, Jacob Neusner’s studies of havurah in rabbinic times and Mordecai Kaplan’s concept of synagogue and community center — but essentially the Havurah was designed as a counter-cultural institution. It was created as an alternative, a critique of American Jewish life at that particular time. I think none of us expected Havurah to enter the mainstream Jew-

ish community.

What was the nature of that critique? It was a multifaceted attack on the nature of Jewish life, as we perceived it then, particularly in the world of synagogues. First, it was a reaction against the *bigness* of American Jewish institutions, the sense that the great synagogues of the post-World War II era were too cold, distant and unwelcoming. Havurah was about *community* and the perception that in its emphasis on institutions, Jewish life in American had forgotten community. In that sense, the Havurah was powered by a certain kind of romanticization of the world of Eastern Europe (think of Abraham Joshua Heschel’s *The Earth is the Lord’s*, for example, or Mark Zborowski’s and Elizabeth Herzog’s *Life is With People*). It recognized that for all its difficulties, Eastern European Jewish life gave Jews a sense of belonging that American Jewish life had failed to provide, at least in the 1950s and early '60s.

Second, the Havurah was a critique of the religious weaknesses in the synagogues of the time. Those weaknesses involved a number of important dimensions. First, there was a sense that the synagogue was not a spiritual place. Prayer in particular was highly formal, non-participatory and emotionally uninvolving. Although many of the founders of the Havurah were rabbis, the role of the rabbi as clergy in the contemporary synagogue was another focus of the critique. Rabbis had become the center of Jewish life. Rabbis were seen as doing Judaism *for* the synagogue members. The Havurah was said to be anti-clerical, but it was not so much against rabbis as it was opposed to the role that rabbis had taken on. It was not by any means accidental that the most well-known product of the Boston Havurah, *The Jewish Catalog*, called itself “a do-it-yourself kit” to Jewish living. The democratization of Jewish life was one of the primary goals of the Havurah.

But “do-it-yourself” implied something else as well: Jewish learning. This was the third

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major focus of the Havurah. To lead prayer services, read from the Torah, give a dvar Torah or engage in text discussions required more Jewish education. One of the Havurah's most enduring legacies was an approach to Jewish study that encompassed two important dimensions.

First, there was a strong respect for the contributions of modern Jewish scholarship. Not only traditional learning, but all the resources of academic investigation were appropriate to adult Jewish learning. This meant applying the critical tools of historical scholarship, an uncensored commitment to truth and an objective eye to what we were studying.

But stopping there would have meant reproducing the mode of scholarship found in universities and in the liberal seminaries. The Havurah added a second dimension: a commitment to finding personal meaning in Jewish study. We were not simply objective scholars, but Jews seeking wisdom. Along with a critical eye, we were expected to bring an open heart to what we were learning. Finding the way to balance these two dimensions was one

of the great accomplishments of the Havurah. We learned this from our teachers, among others Zalman Schachter, Everett Gendler, Michael Fishbane, Joe Lukinsky and Michael Swirsky. Most important of the teachers was Art Green, now a professor of Jewish thought at Brandeis University and the central figure around whom the Havurah gathered. Art's teaching of Jewish texts embodied these twin goals of rigorous

respect for scholarship and deep openness to meaning. It is not surprising that his writing in the years that followed the Havurah has encompassed both dimensions of this approach to Jewish learning. He has produced major works of academic scholarship and books for the general reader aimed at addressing the spiritual demands of the current age.

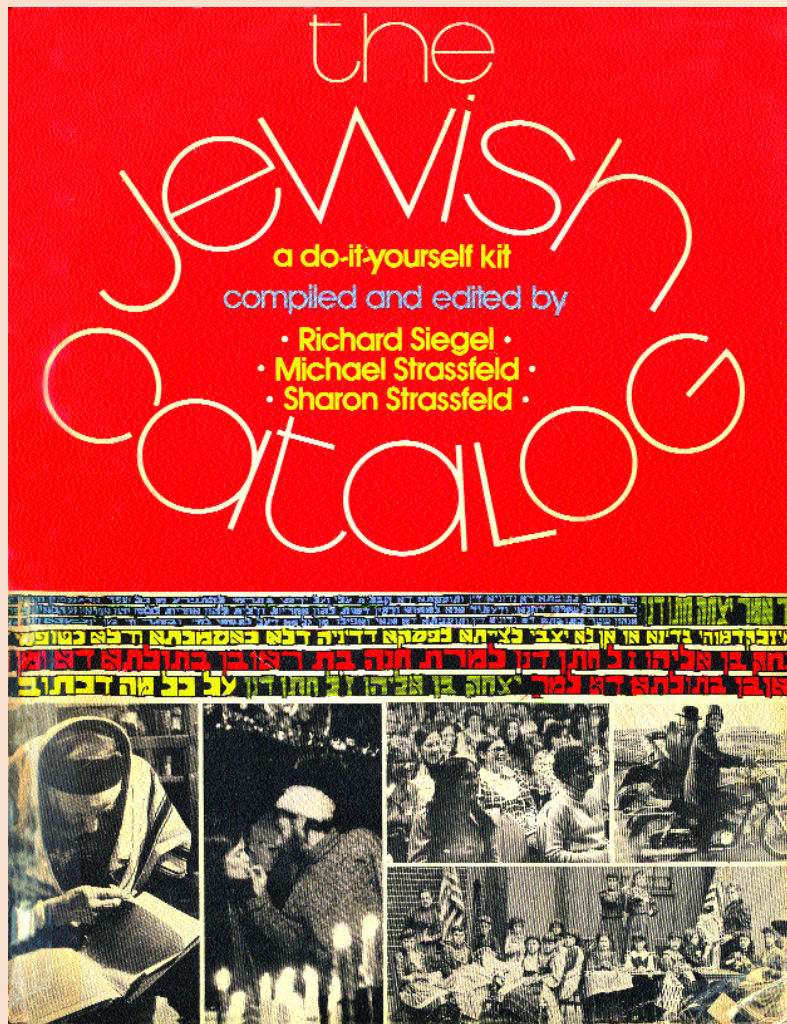
In the limited space that I have here,

helped shape the conception of Havurat Shalom. Nor have I been able to look at the institutions in American Jewish life, such as Camp Ramah, that influenced the founders of the Havurah. In addition, the Havurah saw the early stirrings of Jewish feminism and tried to find new directions to incorporate the feminist critique of Jewish life, arguably the most powerful change in Jewish life during the past fifty years.

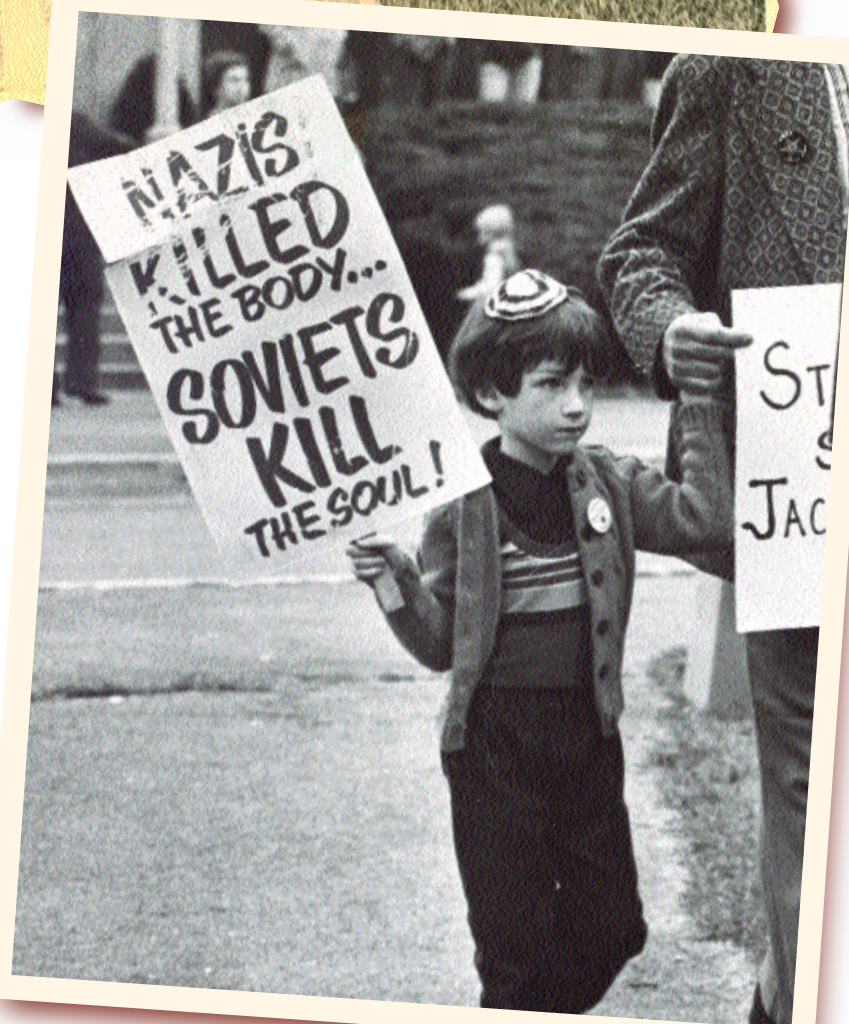
Ultimately, for me the most powerful lesson of the Havurah and its influence is something different from what I've talked about above. Havurat Shalom began with 25 people. The New York Havurah, founded a year later, and the Fabrangen in Washington DC, created a year or two after the New York Havurah, had similarly small numbers of people. But these institutions were instrumental in changing the face of American Jewish life. Indeed, the so-called counter-cultural institutions of the sixties and seventies have actually changed mainstream Judaism from within. One need only look at the number of Jewish scholars, educators and rabbis who came out of those counter-cultural institutions to see the impact that the institutions have had.

The true success of Havurah is that it no longer needs to exist as a separate movement, distinct and separate from the mainstream community. Havurah has transformed the way American Jews relate to Judaism and

the things they expect from their community. In everything from adult education to participatory synagogue services, the Havurah has democratized Jewish life and added a much-needed sense of community to our ceremonies and experiences. Havurah is another example of one of the chief lessons of Jewish history: that human beings with vision can revitalize the community and indeed change the world. ✿



I am not able to explore many other elements that came into play in those early years, for example, the political nature of Havurah's origins. The War in Vietnam and the critique of American policy and values was an extraordinarily important influence on the creation of the Havurah. I have not talked about the powerful personalities such as Abraham Joshua Heschel and Nahum Glatzer, whose ideas and personal influence



In the last three decades, something has changed in American Jewish life. Its public face has turned inward, becoming more pensive, more conscious of the fault lines dividing it, more apt to direct its spiritual yearnings into the religious realm. The great public policy commitments that galvanized and united Jews in the 1970s have largely become sources of division (Israel), rote enactments (Holocaust commemoration and anti-anti-Semitism) or missions accomplished (Soviet Jewry). If American Jews wax nostalgic for the 1970s, it is not because the issues were simpler then, but because American Jewish social movements embodied innovation, invigoration, empowerment and unity.

Social movements give historical eras their distinct flavor. They breed cultures that spiral outward beyond the policy goals that are their ostensible purpose. These cultures rivet attention and bear most of the responsibility for a movement's ability to motivate and inspire, shock and surprise, anger and offend. Like religions, social movements create cultures through the unique interplay between what they believe and what they do. To express new ideas, movements innovate new forms of action.

The American movement to free Soviet Jewry is a case in point. The first rumblings over the issue began in the early 1960s, but it took a decade for the community to enter the era of hundred-thousand-person demonstrations, high-level international conferences and Congressional legislation to place Soviet Jewry squarely on the Cold War agenda. Even as they clashed with establishment organizations over tactics (advocating public protest over quiet diplomacy) and goals (advocating emigration over religious freedom), a core of grassroots activists in groups like Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ) created a unique style of Judaically-inflected activism that would come to be associated with the Soviet Jewry movement as a whole.

From the movement's earliest days, SSSJ and similar organizations sought to link their cause with traditional Jewish symbols, themes and rituals. One of the defining features of the movement was the co-option and eventual transformation of Jewish holidays and life-cycle events in the service of the cause. Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies were "twinned," with boys and girls chant-

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The Renewal of Ritual in the Soviet Jewry Movement

by SHAUL KELNER

ing Torah portions on behalf of young refuseniks who were represented only by an empty chair on the bimah. Tisha B'Av services were moved out of New York synagogues and onto the plaza opposite the United Nations, where the recitation of Lamentations was transformed from a ritual of worship to an exclamation of protest. What led American Jews, particularly the religiously observant, to embrace these changes in the customary ways of conducting a Bar/Bat Mitzvah or Tisha B'Av service? The acceptance of these innovations suggests that they did not see them as calculated manipulations of the Jewish religion in pursuit of political goals, but as authentic and absolutely appropriate Judaic observances.

And yet, the result was a marked break with tradition. By coming out to protest on Tisha B'Av, and by overlaying other meanings on the synagogue's Sabbath rituals, Soviet Jewry activists changed the essential nature of these holy days. They moved Tisha B'Av out of the synagogue and into the streets, and moved the cause of Soviet Jews off the streets and into the synagogue. In so doing, they rejected the separation of the religious realm from the political/public. This was the Soviet Jewry movement's essential contribution to American Jewish life. It gave American Judaism in the 1970s much of its flavor and enthusiasm. The movement's leaders conceived of a Judaism inherently worldly and activist, meant not to stay in the private realm but to inform public and political life. They realized this conception by treating their protest as a sacred act.

Unquestionably, the Passover commemoration of the Israelite liberation

from Egyptian bondage reigned supreme in the movement's holiday-related mobilization efforts. The holiday's themes of oppression and freedom were so easily translated to the situation of Soviet Jewry that few even realized that the decision to mobilize around Passover was, in fact, a decision. Different choices could have been made. The Soviet Jewry movement could have adopted an entirely secular trope. It could have cloaked itself in the symbols of Amnesty International or the rhetoric of anti-communism. Even in its embrace of the Exodus story, the movement could have chosen a more ecumenical framing, to better draw in American Christians. But it tended instead to invoke symbols known best by a Jewish audience. This says much about what the movement was ultimately about.

One can imagine what Soviet diplomats might have thought as they looked beyond the gates of their consulates at groups of American Jews dressed in prison stripes holding eggs aloft, waving sprigs of parsley, and throwing what appeared to be crackers into their compound. The Soviets probably understood the basic message from the signs exhorting "Pharaoh Brezhnev" to "Let My People Go." But even if they were interested enough to pay attention to the clamor surrounding the food, would they have understood the significance of the symbols? Would they have known, as the SSSJ haggadahs and press releases explained, that the egg was supposed to represent Soviet Jews — "the more you boil them the tougher they become"? Would they have known that at the Passover feast, Jews dip parsley into salt water as a symbolic act to remind them-

One of the defining features of the movement was the co-option and eventual transformation of Jewish holidays and life-cycle events in the service of the cause.

selves of the bitter tears of slavery, but were doing so here "as a hope for tears of joy for our brethren in Russia"? Would they have known that the unleavened bread being placed by children through the gates of their compound was *matzah*, "the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt, and cannot eat in the land of Russia," and which "symbolize(s) the suffering of Anatoly Sharansky and all the Prisoners for Zion and refuseniks in the USSR"?

By co-opting the symbol of the *matzah* and transforming its meaning from a commemoration of ancient slavery to an assertion of contemporary defiance, the Soviet Jewry movement was communicating not only with the Soviet government, but also with those who understood what the Passover symbols traditionally meant — i.e., American Jews. It was showing them that the struggle to free Soviet Jewry was not just any old cause. It was a Jewish cause, a religious mission, a Divine imperative.

The Soviet Jewry movement used Jewish language and ritual effectively to further its own goals, and in the process, it changed how these rituals were observed and what they meant. In recent years, new movements are staking their own claims to the Jewish calendar. Feminist seders, with Miriam's Cups, oranges on the seder plate and tambourine dances are redefining Passover rituals. The mixing of red and white wines is replacing the tinkling of coins in the blue JNF *pushke* as the environmental movement adapts old kabbalistic rituals for Tu B'Shvat. Each movement brings its own innovations, and recreates American Judaism in the process. ✿



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Beyond the micro issues of continuing our programs and founding new programs to reach out to the unaffiliated, I believe that it is vital for the Jewish future that a new Jewish unity be created. Today we have in America three or four denominations plus a very substantial number of unaffiliated. It is time to create a sense of a common Judaism, a Judaism that will relate to almost all of us, a Judaism that will resonate with Jews who presently lack an important spiritual or emotional tie with their religion.

— MICHAEL H. STEINHARDT