

# CREATING A NEW PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN FEDERATIONS AND SYNAGOGUES

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*One of the crucial issues of the 1990s will be to restructure the relationship between Federations and synagogues. We no longer have the luxury of acting out old antagonisms or of fighting futile battles. We must create a new order, more along the lines of a partnership that utilizes the strengths of each institution.*

*UJA's Rabbinic Cabinet should be the national address for a new era of creative synagogue-Federation discussions.*

The 1940s and 50s saw the preeminence of synagogues in the United States. It was indeed the Golden Age of synagogue life. However, changes in the Jewish world—most specifically in Israel-Diaspora relationships—caused an ascendancy in the influence of Federations in the 60s and 70s, thus producing what most of us know today as committees on synagogue-Federation relations. This subject, which is universally relegated to a secondary status, bespeaks the lack of any meaningful relations between synagogue communities and Federations. With few exceptions there is a deep-seated frustration and sense of resentment toward Federations on the part of synagogue lay leadership and rabbis. The lack of a meaningful relationship between Federations and synagogues is made worse by a number of issues, including:

- Federation insensitivity to synagogue needs.
- The lack of real status and recognition for rabbis in Federations and in the wider community, and sometimes even in the rabbi's own synagogue.
- Budgetary constraints.
- The all too often lack of a critical mass in synagogues for many programs.

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I submit that one of the crucial issues on the agenda of Federations in the 1990s will be a resolution of this problem of reorientation of Federation's relationship with the synagogue community. Indicative of the changes in which we function is the statement of Shimon Ha-Tzadik in (*Avot* 1:2):

על שלשה דברים העולם עולם  
עומד: על התורה על העבודה ועל  
גמילות חסד

Thirty years ago, the source of *Torah* meant the seminaries from which we were ordained, *Avodah* referred only to our synagogues, and *Gemilut Hassadim* took place in synagogues or Federations. Today, *Torah* is disseminated on more than 300 college campuses in departments of Judaic studies with scholars and programs that often are equal in stature to any in our seminaries; *Avodah*, as often as not, occurs in Havurah settings separate from or nearly independent of our synagogues, or at Federation events or UJA weekend retreats; and *Gemilut Hassadim* occur in either the traditional Federation form of tzedakah or in new forms of private tzedakah funds or collectives.

All of these developments change the ground rules for coming to grips with the problems of the 90s. In the past, we might have had the luxury of letting one segment of the community, either synagogues or Federations, gain the upper

hand. Increasingly, my Federation colleagues are coming around to the point of view that Federations must come to a new understanding—an American Concordat, if you will—with the synagogue community. We must create a new order, more along the lines of a partnership that utilizes the strengths of each institution. Simply put, we must combine the content infusing and broad membership base of synagogues with the accountability, professionalism, and planning process vitality of Federations. We no longer have the luxury of acting out old antagonisms or of fighting futile battles.

But for this to happen, many changes will have to occur. In order for synagogues and Federations to talk meaningfully together, there need to be some institutional changes as well as shifts in attitude.

Synagogues function in ways which pose difficulties for Federations. Lines of authority are blurred. Who speaks for the synagogue community? The president? The rabbi? The executive director? The board? All of the above? What does accountability in the area of planning and *committed volunteerism* mean in the synagogue environment? In the Seattle Federation, every board member of a beneficiary agency must actively serve on a committee and be a contributor to Federation. Last year, every agency president and executive agreed to be solicited during a hotel suite solicitations of major givers. Not one synagogue president nor rabbi was among this group.

Who can speak for the synagogue community at large about these matters? Or for the rabbis, for that matter? What Board of Rabbis is empowered to negotiate such matters on behalf of its membership? What council of synagogue presidents is effectively able to negotiate with Federation?

Federation can and does speak with one voice. Rabbis and synagogues must do the same when they speak to Federation. I believe that this would go a long way in bringing us to the table so that we may begin to discuss pressing and mutually advantageous matters in a spirit of harmony

and creativity. The issues before us: unity, changing demography, inter-marriage, Israel–Diaspora relations, singles, nonaffiliated, institutional continuity, and education—to name but a few—are too important for us to leave to the status quo of non-dialogue. These issues are simply too significant to be left to parochial interests rather than the total community to be resolved, no matter how well meaning.

Let me speak for a moment about rabbinic roles and leadership. Many of the assumptions of the past several decades about Jewish life are no longer valid. The model of the rabbi was that of pulpiteer, representative to the general community or teacher/posek. Sometimes one could combine two of these roles. Today, the rabbi is one of the few repositories of legitimate Jewish learning—although not the only one—and I believe the rabbi of the 90s must teach and interpret as well as serve as a model for legitimate Jewish learning. It is our strength and we must play our trump cards in this ever-complex and increasingly competitive world. This is one area we can share together without a sense of ego loss.

As a group, rabbis must learn to be less competitive with one another. Above all, we must respect one another as *עבד ה'*, workers in the vineyard of the Lord, regardless of whatever adjective defines us. We must learn together and not be afraid to recognize a colleague's superior scholarship or ability to teach and motivate. Also, we must select community rabbinic spokesmen who are endowed with love and integrity. Rabbinic spokesmen to Federation must measure up in every way to Federation leadership. Beyond their level of rabbinic learning and expertise, they should measure up in terms of their level of giving to the campaign.

I believe the Rabbinic Cabinet, CJF and UJA have a critical role to play in this process. The Rabbinic Cabinet of UJA is the only address where such concerns can be articulated in a spirit of candor and constructive criticism. It is the only pan-denominational rabbinic group for whom

Jewish unity (with all its inherent difficulties) is a by-word.

Clearly, the Rabbinic Cabinet should be the national address:

- for serious discussion and programs of Jewish unity,
- for on-going professional enhancement programs for rabbis, similar to the Continuity Professional Educational Program the Council of Jewish Federations provides for Federation executives,
- for serious dialogue on changing Israel–Diaspora relations,
- for a new era of creative synagogue–Federation discussions predicated on mutual respect, accountability and a common ideology which stresses *clal yisrael*, and
- for like-minded rabbis of diverse religious points of view who understand the challenges of the 90s, who comprehend the new world reality for the Jewish community, and who are willing to confront tough issues with bold responses.

I believe that such a Rabbinic Cabinet deserves—more correctly must demand—more support from UJA. I also believe the time is long overdue when the Rabbinic Cabinet must likewise be formally connected to the Council of Jewish Federations. The Rabbinic Cabinet has had a dialogue with Federation professionals for a number of years. The Rabbinic Cabinet can become a constructive force in more and more local communities. Federation leadership, professionals and lay, will support the Cabinet's work. They already respect its efforts. The 1990s will present a new challenge. Now is the time to forge new coalitions to meet the challenge in unique and creative ways.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

The following is a partial list of 1990s communal issues for the Rabbinic Cabinet and Federations:

1. The formation of national, regional and local task forces on strengthening synagogue life.

2. Development of new and creative multi-membership plans for participation in the Jewish community—including community centers, synagogues and day schools.

3. The need to come to a consensus on the conservation of communal energy. This is especially true as a result of the decline in large membership organizations.

4. The issue of Jewish unity will continue to be a major one which will require a new look at planning for sectarian and community-wide programs. Some programs make more sense when planned on a community-wide basis.

5. The need for synagogues and Federations to address the issues of neighborhood preservation and/or new neighborhood development projects.

6. Seriously addressing issues of Jewish leadership. This should include recruitment of new leadership, training and tracking.

7. New mechanisms to develop community consensus in the face of greater diversity and rapidly changing communal realities. This will have implications for Jewish communal governance.

8. Exploration of the role of the rabbi as communal professional. This should include clarification of the rabbinic role in community.

9. Rabbinic roles in political action issues.

10. Development of joint Jewish education programs for non-affiliated and holistic Jewish education.

11. *Tzedakah* as a continuing Jewish *mitzvah*.

12. Translating Israel to American Jewry and vice versa.

13. Connecting with the Jewish transient.

# REVISITING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER MARKETPLACE

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*I continue to believe marketing to be a very valuable method within a Jewish community center, just as I continue to view social group work method as a valuable tool in a JCC. However, it can be effective only to the degree that it maintains the role of enhancing rather than corrupting the basic purposes of a JCC.*

## PREFACE

Some years ago in this Journal I argued for the need to redirect our normal non-competitive perspective and move more in the direction of competing with "other vendors . . . [who], in the minds of many of our potential customers, offer similar products."<sup>1</sup> In that article, I embraced the field of marketing as one of the most promising means of helping JCCs to better compete in the increasingly competitive and open marketplace.

While I have not shut my eyes to the marketplace reality, I now wonder about the wisdom with which input from the field of marketing is being incorporated by many not-for-profit agencies. With hindsight, I would counsel more caution today in terms of how marketing ought to be used in a JCC.

Unfortunately, I did not adequately consider at that time the effects of marketing upon basic institutional purpose, nor did I adequately distinguish in my own mind the fundamental differences between what I refer to in this article as "method" and "purpose." The following is

an effort to explore further this aspect so basic to the work which Jewish community centers do.

## ON METHOD AND PURPOSE

The current surge towards incorporating various facets of marketing into "not-for-profit" agency work has caused me to think further about method and purpose in institutions and how easy it is for the human animal to continually blur the distinction between the two or, worse, to shunt institutional purpose aside altogether.

*Purpose*, on the one hand, speaks to the very being of institutional existence. In a JCC, it even transcends the normally articulated articles of incorporation. The three-fold "G-d, Torah and Community" aptly summarizes whence and to whom JCCs ultimately derive and account for legitimacy. It is the shared purpose of all Jewish community institutions.

At least one of these three must always and consciously be at the core of JCC policy-making if there is to be Jewish relevance. This legitimacy—some may view it as a franchise or trust—stems from our biblical tradition in an unbroken linkage which can be traced back for over 3000 years. Because of this binding to our heritage no Jewish agency, particularly a Jewish community center, can for very long separate itself from the flow of Jewish history, religion, values and peoplehood.

Ideally, all institutional decision-making

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1. David Eskenazi, "Understanding the Jewish Community Center Marketplace . . .," this *Journal*, Vol. 58, no. 4 (1982), p. 315.