

revolution at our peril. The Sacred Aging project of the Union for Reform Judaism has created these programs and resources to allow our congregation to be proactive in meeting the challenges of what may be "the new Jewish majority" within our synagogues.

URJ RESOURCES

"To Honor and Respect: A Program and Resource Guide for Congregations for Sacred Aging". URJ Press. 2005

"That You May Live Long: Caring for our Aging

Parents; Caring for Ourselves." URJ Press. 2004

"A Time To Prepare: A Practical Guide for Individuals and Families in Determining A Jewish Approach to Making Personal Arrangements and Establishing Limits of Medical Care and Embracing Rituals at the End of Life" URJ Press. 2002

R'fuat Ha Nefesh: Caring for our Soul: A Mental Health Resource and Study Guide" URJ Press 2003.

Our Changed Reform Jewish Family: Celebrating a Unity of Diversities. URJ Jewish Family Concerns 2003-04.

UNITED SYNAGOGUE'S HAZAK PROGRAM

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Hazak (strength) is the organization of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism for senior congregational members, those 55 years of age and older. It is intended to supplement the normative roster of congregational activities in a Conservative congregation with a pattern of study, social functions, recreational activities, and religious experiences specifically geared to the senior. The key word is "supplement" not "parallel" because there is much in overall congregational life that is not attendant upon age determinants. However, each age constituency does have specific needs, and especially so the older adult. Hazak understands these needs in terms of "Hokhmah"—a study pattern geared to the elder; "Ziknah"—programming that recognizes the appreciative mass of those who have lived quite a few decades; and "Kadimah," the conviction that elders can and will move forward and are not moored to retrospect or nostalgia but are future-oriented.

Married seniors, widows and widowers, and singles, both male and female, constitute the Hazak membership, which currently numbers some 9,600 in 102 chapters—all based in United Synagogue congregations in

North America. The groups range in size from 15 to 150 members, with an average size of around 50 members. Some Hazak chapters allow those who are not synagogue members to join as well.

The United Synagogue has consistently aspired to provide each congregational element—either in terms of its age or other determining status—with programs suited to its needs, and this was the basis for the creation of Hazak in 1999/2000. The goals of Hazak are realized in chapter meetings, study groups, religious experiences, and travel (usually within a relatively limited geographic radius—save for Aliyat Regel to Israel, currently being offered for the first time).

There is one vital element in all of these programs and in Hazak activity generally: Although they are determined by the needs of elders, the programs are determined as well by the elders themselves. Each Hazak chapter is self-governing (within the religious/ideological norms of the Conservative Movement). The elder is not regarded as one for whom "things are done and projects assigned," but rather as an active determiner of participative activities.

Hence, study subjects are proposed by the Hazak members; visits to points of Jewish interest devolve from chapter discussion. This approach is deliberately intended to enhance not only the participation of the senior in Hazak matters but also to reinforce his or her confidence and self-respect. The senior is not the recipient of others' planning but rather independent and involved. To be sure, the professional staff members of the congregation are involved in varying degrees and varying from congregation to congregation, but the Hazak chapter knows that it is not being cared for but is caring for itself.

As to being "cared for," there is an additional consideration. Hazak seeks to provide programs for all elders who are capable of reasonable activity patterns *and* to plan that those who may be "disadvantaged" in terms of sight, mobility, or auditory functions will be given programs amenable to their situation. This, self-evidently, involves creative thinking and careful planning and, to be sure cannot always be provided.

Hazak too encourages its members to contribute to their congregation and to the community—and not primarily financially, although that is not ruled out. Where suited, Hazak members can be of help with the religious school, with the library, with services, and with visits to those who are especially in need of companionship or solace. Hazak groups often cooperate with other congregational groups, such as the women's league and men's club. As well, Hazak partners on programs with JCCs, the federation, and other social and educational groups that target older adults.

To date, Hazak has added chapters each year, and its membership rolls have grown as well. Congregations that sponsor Hazak chapters generally are pleased by the role of "Hazakniks" in the synagogue. But much remains to be done according to both the membership and the leadership: The

library of Hazak materials needs expansion; the frequency of the Hazak newsletter and its contents require attention (see the Web site www.uscj.org/hazak), the number of summer encampments (each usually of some ten days duration) should be increased, trips to Israel need be increased substantially, and intensification of study programs on intergenerational communication is imperative so that parenting and grandparenting can become increasingly Jewish and meaningful in family life.

Perhaps most essential, and most difficult is the re-creating of the idea of the *Zakeyn* (the elders) as an emulative example of Jewish living and of Jewish leadership. The verb "re-creating" is employed deliberately. The Jewish view does not regard the elder as subject to sympathy or pity. Instead, the tradition teaches that, maturity in years, when accompanied by maturity in religious living and with a clear ideology and purpose, is the expectation of and for the *Zakeyn*. This re-creation of the *Zakeyn* as emulative example (which is not to say that there are not already quite a few *Zekaynim* who can now be so described) is the main task for Hazak. To that end several United Synagogue regions have regional Hazak staff, and the resources for programming are increasing gradually but steadily. Many regional staff already have training in working with older adults, as well as receive training from United Synagogue. The support of the United Synagogue and the increasing interest and support of its congregations are invaluable, enabling program expansion and movement toward the objective of the elder in an "operational mode" as emulative Jewish example. In sum, the Hazak Commission of the United Synagogue and the staff assigned, along with the regional staff, regional Hazak Commissions and, congregation personnel, are committed to doing all possible for the *Zakeyn*, within the framework of the movement and its congregations.