

THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL IN DEVELOPING AND SHAPING JEWISH COMMUNAL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

BY

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Editor's Note: The following represents excerpts from a seminal essay prepared by Ralph Goldman for the International Conference of Jewish Communal Service (the forerunner to today's World Council of Jewish Communal Service). The Goldman paper was distributed prior to the 1981 ICJCS Quadrennial in Jerusalem. It provided the background and informed deliberations and discussions by Conference participants. Although written over two decades ago, it is noteworthy how much of Ralph Goldman's comments are so relevant to the Jewish communal field in the 21st century.

Throughout the millennia, Jewish civil servants — some paid by the community, others reimbursed only by the satisfaction of toiling in the vineyards of the Lord—played a vital role in serving the community and Jewish life. Since the days of the Levites and prophets, the Jewish civil servant has been a force for Jewish survival, keeping alive the vision of the Jewish people as an *Am S'gula*—a people with a mission, a sense of purpose.

Even today Jewish existence is under threat, as it has been so often in the past. And we, for whom the memory of the Holocaust is still fresh, can best honor our six million martyrs by helping assure Jewish continuity. We have a responsibility, too, to the Jewish communities of the future. They are the promise of continuity; and it behooves us to leave them a legacy strong enough for them to anchor their future to their past.

With the rebirth of Israel in 1948 we have become a renewed people. The destinies of the Jews of Israel and the Diaspora are intertwined: Two million Jews made their way to Israel in a mass migration that dwarfed the exodus from Egypt. Israel is focal to the millions of Jews in the Diaspora and vital to

their very existence: a center for creative Jewish scholarship and learning, and a beacon showing the oppressed and the rootless that they have a home.

Israel remains surrounded by hostile forces. The forces of evil elsewhere, somewhat subdued since the defeat of the Nazis, have now experienced a recrudescence, stimulated by OPEC oil and the lure of petrodollars.

The Diaspora courts disaster by the steady erosion of Jewish values and traditions. Assimilation and a sharply reduced birthrate have aroused dire predictions by demographers, Jewish social scientists, and communal leaders.

We Jews have had our doomsayers throughout history; yet we have survived by virtue of those who perpetuated Jewish tradition, learning and religion, Jewish culture and Jewish community life. It is that sense of community that keeps Jewry alive and vital — a spirit of community sustained throughout the ages by our sense of covenant and by our traditions and our teachings. And in every age this spirit of community has been reinforced by those who had a vision of our Jewish destiny: priests, prophets, teachers, sages, rabbis. . .communal workers.

It is with the Jewish communal workers of today that we wish to concern ourselves: their genesis, their development through the

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ages, and especially what they are today, the role they play in serving and safeguarding the Jewish community, and the promise they hold for the future.

THE JEWISH PROFESSIONAL

Historical Perspective

Jewish professionals have been an integral part of Jewish life since the Jewish community came into being. Their form and title have changed through the ages, and their role has changed with the changing needs. But always their purpose has remained steadfast—to serve their community and to preserve it.

In the days of the Kings, priests and prophets existed side by side with the ruling monarchs and even shared some of their power. The priests presided over Temple functions and served as teachers, judges, and healers. The prophets were the arbiters of social morality and profoundly influenced the course of political life.

In Babylonia the priests, prophets, and elders continued to lead their people. It was they who kept the exiles united and determined to return to Jerusalem. . .

It was the communal leaders in talmudic times—rabbis and teachers—who were largely responsible for making public education obligatory and raising the study of Torah to a religious imperative. They also redefined the concept of *tzedakah* (charity)—for their time and for all generations to come—transforming it from an individual voluntary act to a sacred communal obligation.

In each generation leaders have come forth to serve the Jewish community—often at great personal sacrifice and at times at great risk. . . They were chosen for their special skills in administering funds and property, supervising charity, interceding with the authorities, interpreting the law, and performing other duties essential to the functioning of a voluntary community.

In the Middle Ages, as the complexities of communal life spilled over the edges of talmudic law, scholars brought a new depth and

breadth to communal law by formulating *Takkanot*, or *Responsa*, to meet the changing needs. Each *kehillah* (community) developed its own *Takkanot*. Yet there were marked similarities among communities — scattered as they were—in the challenges they had to face. In recognition of these commonalities — from juridical and organizational to political and self-defense—communities convoked synods on a regional or even national scale. The final decision rested with the community, and all deliberations were reported back to the local leaders for action. In the words of the Talmud, “We must not appoint a leader over a community without first consulting it” (Berakhot 55:1).

Communal Institutions Adapt to the Environment

Jewish communities have developed a variety of institutions and services over the centuries in order to meet Jewish needs. The specific forms they have taken have been shaped to a great extent not only by Jewish tradition and culture but also by the external environment — the social and economic state of affairs of their host countries as well as the political climate

The Jewish community of Iran, for example, developed along family rather than organizational lines, influenced by centuries of autocratic rulers who harbored suspicions of organizations as challengers to their regimes. The Jewish community of 18th-century England modeled its Board of Deputies along the lines of the British Parliament. The Jewish communities of Central Europe cling to a formal structure reflecting government efforts during the Emancipation to allow a separate communal organization that was nonetheless integrated into the body politic. The American Jewish community, on the other hand, was built from the start on the basis of voluntary associations.

Commonalities Outweigh Differences

As much as communal structures differ from community to community, from coun-

try to country, and as much as the level of development varies, many commonalities exist between us. Most basic is our common sense of purpose, shaped by a common history and timeless Jewish values. Yet we also share the impacts of the present age — an age of specialization and technical sophistication. Thus, despite our differences, we share a common direction of development, as we strive to harness the forces of technical knowledge and professionalization in meeting Jewish needs.

STATE OF THE PROFESSION

Development of Professionalism

Throughout our history, exponents of Jewish thought and Jewish ethics ascribed the highest value to helping, the utmost importance to the proper means of helping, and the greatest respect to those who extended such help. Because of this legacy, Jewish philanthropic organizations have made a considerable contribution to the field of social service. They have provided an emphasis on self-support, an appreciation of individual differences, and concern with the quality and standards of work. . .

The Jewish Communal Professional Comes from Many Fields

Who are today's Jewish communal professionals, and why did they choose Jewish communal service as a career?

The professionals who staff the Jewish communal service agencies represent a wide variety of specialties. Although many are social workers, others are trained administrators and managers, psychologists and sociologists, teachers and rabbis, public relations practitioners and journalists, researchers and social planners, community organizers and fundraisers, and physicians and lawyers. Each community, by its own set of needs and level of development, determines the specialties of its professionals.

In Argentina, for example, physical education teachers have been historically a key Jewish professional. They were the mainstay

of the Jewish sports club, which was a central activity involving most Jews. . . . In Syria, Jewish physicians are responsible for organizing some of the communal health structures and assume an implicit communal responsibility toward the Jewish poor. . . . In Shiraz, Iran, Jewish doctors during the Khomeini upheaval on their own initiative opened a free clinic in the *maaleh* (ghetto) for both Jews and Moslems and in this way sought to deal with some of the general welfare needs of the community.

In every part of the Jewish world there are many who are motivated by idealism and a commitment to Jewish survival and want to work professionally toward that goal. In Israel as in the Diaspora, there is a desire to serve the community in the very same fields of service, regardless of auspices—public or private.

Some who have joined the Jewish communal services were originally motivated by other considerations. Some in search of opportunities for professional creativity were drawn by the reputation of the voluntary sector for innovative programming. Others were attracted to social service in the hope of improving the general society and later gravitated toward the Jewish agencies.

World War II and the Holocaust created an entire generation of Jewish communal workers motivated specifically by Jewish ideology. Social workers, chaplains, soldiers, nurses, and others remained in or returned to Europe to work for the United Nations Refugee Relief Administration, the Red Cross, the JDC, and a number of other welfare agencies. Some returned to the United States to provide the staff for the federations, UJA, and other Jewish agencies. Many returned to school and obtained advanced degrees and placed their skills at the disposal of the Jewish community.

Israel has become a source of inspiration for a rising new generation in the Diaspora who seek careers in communal service, particularly many university and high-school students who have spent a year or a summer of study in Israel.

The Jewish day schools and youth movements, as well as the young leadership programs newly developed by Jewish organizations in the Diaspora, have created a reservoir for recruitment of professionals and a means of involving Jews in the life of the community.

Professional Qualifications Vary Widely

Professional qualifications for communal service vary widely. In no country is there a standard set of qualifications applied to a Jewish communal professional. Some agencies stress Jewish background and experience. Others lean more heavily toward requirements similar to those sought in industry or the general non-sectarian field. With few exceptions in the past, only recently has the training of Jewish communal workers become a communal concern.

The level of technical training varies from country to country. Only a handful of countries have developed curricula in areas vital to voluntary service in general and Jewish communal service in particular—such as community organization, fundraising, and social planning. In no country is there a uniform program for training Jewish communal professionals. In many countries Jewish communal training is dependent almost entirely on the facilities for training available to the general population.

Inevitably the lack of qualified personnel for the Jewish communal service affects the development of programs and the provision of services.

Need for Career Structures

The lack of a career structure in the "Jewish civil service" in many communities is an obstacle to further professionalization. There has been increasing recognition, however, that we stand to lose our best professional talent if we do not build communal service mechanisms to assure professional growth and advancement. Attempts to develop community-wide pension funds and more attrac-

tive career opportunities are among a growing number of efforts to attract and retain professionals.

Wide Spectrum of Perceptions of Professional's Roles

Important changes have taken place, and are continuing to take place, in the prevailing attitudes toward professionalism. We find today a wide spectrum of perceptions of the Jewish communal professional — from *shtetl shamash* to full partnership with lay leaders. Yet only in the past generation — especially in large communities where programs are so complex—there has been a deeper and growing understanding between professionals and laymen. The appointment of professionals to boards of directors is an indication of their enhanced position.

We have made real advances in our professional ability to serve the Jewish community. We can bring even greater gains by defining—and demanding—basic essential qualifications for professionals in whom the welfare of the Jewish community is entrusted.

COMPONENTS OF JEWISH PROFESSIONALISM

As we have noted, the Jewish communal professional comes from a variety of disciplines and experiences; excellence in several disciplines is needed to meet broad communal needs. However, some qualifications are so vital they form a *sine qua non* for Jewish communal service. The primary components, as I see them, are Jewishness (commitment and knowledge), management skills, and leadership ability.

Jewishness

What must distinguish Jewish communal workers is a commitment to Jewish survival. They must see themselves as guardians of Jewish continuity and as exponents of a rich and illustrious tradition. . .

The North American Jewish communal professional of the 1980s is different from the

predecessor of the 1930s. As a matter of fact, some of the Jewish communal professionals of the 1980s who began their careers in the late 1930s profess a very different *Weltanschauung* now from what they had then. They no longer see economic and welfare problems as the major thrust. The trauma of the Depression has been displaced by the Holocaust and the birth of Israel. Today they see assimilation and intermarriage as major threats and look toward Jewish education to halt the erosion of Jewish life.

Jewish Knowledge is Necessary

If we reflect on the concept of commitment, we must also ask ourselves if feeling alone is enough. Is not a base of knowledge essential? We readily accept the dictum that professional work in an ethnic framework requires a thorough understanding and acceptance of the values and customs of that community. Applying this dictum to professional work in our community, we must conclude that a Jewish communal professional can rightfully claim expertise only if his or her professional talents and commitment are grounded in Jewish knowledge.

That base of knowledge should, ideally, be as complete and as rich as that of the rabbi, Jewish teacher, or scholar. This means Jewish learning in the broadest sense—rooted in our history, traditions, and literature—as well as a full understanding of the Jewish body politic of today—local, national, and international.

The need for basic Jewish knowledge is not particularly a Diasporic requirement. From the early days of Israel's statehood, the secularists began to be concerned about Jewishness and introduced subjects of what was termed "Jewish consciousness" into the public school system. The Israel Foreign Office recognized very early that its diplomats have as their major responsibility to represent their country to the host government, as well as to the Jewish community. Knowledge—nay, true identification with historic Judaism, its religious, cultural, and social institutions—must be recognized by Israeli diplo-

mats as part of their background in order to perform their role as representatives of Israel.

Unlike the training of rabbis or even teachers of Jewish studies, where defined curricula exist, there are now no standard Jewish curricula for Jewish communal workers to master. As we enter the final decades of the 20th century and look forward to the next century, is it unreasonable to expect that Jewish communal workers be required to know Hebrew, in addition to having a sound grounding in Jewish studies? The Hebrew language ought to be an integral component of our profession—as it is for rabbis, Jewish teachers, and scholars. . . . Hebrew is basic to our culture and a tool for Jewish survival. . .

Management

As we have noted, what should distinguish Jewish communal workers from other social service workers is their Jewishness, but their professional competence obviously depends also on other qualities. Firstly, they must qualify as a good manager. . .

The executive who is responsible to the board—which carries ultimate accountability to its constituency or public—cannot deal only with philosophy or the body politic; he or she must also deal with the elements of management and economic viability. Our sages said, "Without flour there can be no Torah" (Ethics of the Fathers 3:21).

The principal of a school, or the executive of a defense agency or a relief agency, cannot enjoy the luxury of saying, "I deal with the service. Let someone else—my board president or my deputy—deal with the problems of management." To do so is an abdication of responsibility.

Is this principle any different for the Jewish professional in Argentina, France, Sweden, South Africa, or North America? Obviously not! The level of sophistication may be different, as the scope and size of the enterprise may differ, as well as the cultural milieu. . . but the principles of competent management apply universally. No service

agency, large or small, can long exist without them.

Leadership

To Jewish knowledge and general management skills we must also add the essential quality of leadership that, as a combination of learned skills and native abilities, is more difficult to define.

A leader should be a font of new ideas, of inspiration, of motivation, of encouragement to change in the light of times and changing needs. . .

Planning and Research

Such an aim requires a dedication to planning, encouragement of fact-finding, and research. . . However, there is always more than one need that presents itself. And since we are constrained by limited resources, choices must be made. By research and analysis the professional can indicate the dimensions of a problem, the means of its treatment, and the implications of each course of action—thereby making an indispensable contribution to the establishment of priorities and assuring the most effective use of communal resources

Community Educator

The professional must keep the community continuously aware of the dimensions of communal needs and the responsibility to meet them. This casts the professional in the critical role of community educator. This is the true challenge to the public information efforts of our communal agencies. . . Therefore, vital to successful leadership is the ability to articulate needs, to stimulate awareness and interest, and to encourage people to act.

Negotiator of Coalitions

The professional must be a diplomat, a persuader, a negotiator of coalitions, and an influencer of institutions and people who have the power to allocate resources. There are those who would decry these political

skills as in some way diluting professionalism. To the contrary, it is difficult to see how planning can be made effective without recognition of the functions of power in making decisions that involve different interests and values. The professional must seek compromise instead of conflict and bring people together. To quote our sages, "Appoint over them a leader who will tolerate each one according to his point of view" (Midrash Tanchuma, Bamidbar).

When the commitment to Jewish survival is linked with management skill and leadership ability—with an implicit obligation to effective planning, community education, and assuring economic viability—we see that the professional, by definition, plays an integral part in the development of Jewish communal policy and strategy.

SHAPING POLICY

Everyone Shapes Policy

We must first dispel the mystique about the word "policy. . ." It is like the proverbial story about the person who learned the definition of "prose" and "poetry" and suddenly discovered that he had been speaking prose all his life. Every communal worker is involved in developing policy: It is merely a question of level and role of participation. . .

While deciding on policy is primarily the function of lay leadership, the executive too has a role in making policy, even though the chief responsibility lies in shaping and implementing it. A corollary is the development of strategy to determine the most expeditious and effective method of implementing policy, to assure the smooth transition of the decision from the board room to the operational arena.

Middle management professionals help shape policy by supervising the program, providing the expertise and guidance that will assure that the program is fulfilling its purpose. The operational professionals—the communal workers on the firing line, as it were—have a most significant role. How they perform may very well determine if the

policies are implemented. Moreover, they are in a key position to observe whether the needs are being met by existing policy.

Shaping policy is therefore a process—a continuum—to which each contributes based on training, knowledge, and experience.

Lay and Professional Leadership

The extent and effectiveness of the professional's participation also depend on the degree of professionalism of his or her colleagues on the staff, as well as on the sophistication of the laypeople and the esteem in which the laypeople hold the professional. . .

Thus, while the executive deals with problems of management and shaping and implementation of policies, the layperson assumes the responsibility of accountability to the constituency. What emerges is a system of governing by voluntary association, with its specializations and its checks and balances to prevent usurpation of power.

We have seen greater or lesser developments in this direction in different communities of the Diaspora and the beginnings of it in Israel's voluntary sector of communal services. . .

Throughout the Jewish world, in the Diaspora as well as in Israel, we observe a trend toward developing greater lay participation.

We must strengthen our boards to be representative of the total community and to include the diverse elements that comprise the Jewish community: leaders in commerce, industry, and labor; the professions, academia, and Jewish scholarship; writers, artists, and active leaders in fundraising and functional agencies and religious and cultural institutions. A well-trained professional supported by a representative and committed board is in the best position to participate fully in developing and shaping policy. . .

Shaping Policy on the International Level

Is it possible to shape policy regarding communal structures, professional training, coordinated fundraising, and Jewish political

issues on the international level? Of course, but there are obstacles—including language barriers, differing political philosophies, divergent national interests, and unequal levels of development. In a shrinking world of jet transportation and telecommunication, however, Jewish goals can transcend boundaries and overcome these obstacles.

As professionals we must constantly expand our scope, improve our techniques for dealing with Jewish needs, and aim to develop global Jewish strategies—but always with consideration and sensitivity to local customs and conditions. We must be careful not to impose programs because they are new or “modern” or encourage imitation—be it on broad structural issues related to community organization or fundraising, or services that may run counter to local custom. . .

There appears to be a tendency in Israel and the Diaspora to emphasize North American practices and structures and to view European or Israeli programs mainly through the eyes of the North American experience. If we accept each other, recognizing each other's strengths and limitations, we will be much better able to envision and formulate programs and strategies on a global basis. . .

THE AGENDA—DEVELOP A RESERVOIR OF PROFESSIONAL LEADERS

On the international scene as on the local scene, it is the professional who is in the front lines, thinking through the issues and studying and formulating policies that serve as the basis for decision making and action by the bodies accountable to their constituencies. Our agenda must be to develop a corps of trained, competent Jewish communal professionals.

As professionals we must first clarify for ourselves the nature of Jewish communal work and the role of the professional. We must define the structure of Jewish communal services and develop standards of professional practice.

We must organize broad-based efforts to

educate the community on the roles and functions of the Jewish communal professional, and develop an aggressive strategy of recruitment for the Jewish communal service—drawing the most promising from academia, the professions, and business. Adequate financial incentives must be provided to attract the most talented among them.

Each professional must assume a personal responsibility to seek out potential leadership from a variety of disciplines in his or her own community. And each professional must ensure that there exists in his agency an atmosphere conducive to professional growth, one that will attract and retain the best talents of the community.

Inter-Country Utilization of Personnel and Facilities

Workable solutions can be found in global planning and the utilization of personnel and facilities across national boundaries: bilaterally on a country-by-country basis or regionally. For example, some communities are beginning to give sabbatical leaves to their workers. Could some of these workers take their leave in a small or distant country? It would broaden their experience and, at the same time, enable them to make a significant contribution to the host community. Could not the Helsinki community be assisted by one of the large European communities? Could not Australia be assisted by one of the larger American communities or agencies?

Inter-country programs should not be considered a one-way street – from the big and affluent community to the small and struggling community. There are many Israeli and European professionals who could well serve other communities. . .

Training: A Primary Goal of the Jewish Communal Profession

Jewish communal survival in Israel and the Diaspora depends on dedicated, imaginative, competent, Jewishly committed, and knowledgeable professional leadership. Inspiration and concern will not produce leaders: Determined and planful efforts to recruit

and educate must be a primary goal of the Jewish communal profession.

The quality of training in a community or country is determined to a large extent by the level of development of the overall society. However, it does not follow that we must accept the limitations of training available in the non-Jewish community. Rather, we must adapt it to our own needs and supplement it with additional training or launch manpower training programs of our own. The initiatives already taken in several communities help chart the course.

Need for University-Anchored and Other Training Programs

Many positions in the Jewish communal services require university-anchored training. Some segments of the profession have achieved it; others have not.

Considering the paramount necessity for funds to sustain communal services, it is important to offer to fund raisers in the Jewish communal services professional status comparable to other segments of the profession. Fund raisers generally enjoy higher compensation than other communal workers. Their status, however, would be augmented if a specialized body of knowledge were developed, and fund raisers were required to be trained – as other communal workers – in university-anchored programs.

While we believe that top executive positions in the Jewish communal service should be filled by university-trained personnel, it is necessary at the same time not to apply this across the board. There are many positions that require more limited training. Overtraining can be as much of a flaw as undertraining. Jewish communal service must try to avoid imitation and adoption of standards not applicable and be ever mindful of social, cultural, and economic differences among our communities.

While warning against imitation, however, there are certain facts of life in international Jewish communal service. With the reduction of distances by ever faster means of communication and transport, our ability

and need as a people to act on global Jewish issues bring our leadership closer together. Our professional standards must be kept on comparable high levels in order to function adequately and to provide for professional mobility in our Jewish world.

As we reach into the future, our goal should be not only to train professionals for local and national service but also to develop a cadre for international Jewish communal services. It is necessary to develop training programs to answer the needs of Jewry internationally and to respond to the needs of the small and distant communities.

International Conference of Jewish Communal Services as a Forum

What significance does all this have for the members of the ICJCS (now the WCJCS)? We have seen the development of Jewish communal services – locally, nationally, and, to some extent, internationally – and can take pride in the leadership role played by the professional in that development.

The continuing quest for common goals and actions should be a major objective of the Jewish professional. The ICJCS [WCJCS] should provide a forum for review of international issues of concern to the Jewish communal professional and should strive to advance the role of the Jewish communal professional throughout the Jewish world.

CONCLUSION

The Jewish world is not a monolithic entity. There are vast differences – within each community of the Diaspora, between the Diaspora and Israel, and within Israel itself. We must recognize and accept the pluralism of the Jewish world if we are to uphold the ultimate goal of *Am Echad* – one people. For whatever our cultural and ideological differences, none is as basic as the issues of universal Jewish concern that bind us together: namely, the ensuring of Jewish physical and spiritual survival, the centrality of Israel to Jewish life, and the challenge of coping with the larger environment.

We once associated barbed wire barricades and intricate security precautions with Israel. Now we find these concerns on the agenda of Jewish institutions in a number of countries throughout the world. All are on the front lines. More than ever, the concept – “All of Israel is responsible one for another” – must be applied.

We must make this an era of true partnership, one that is no longer confined to giver-receiver relationships—a partnership that is firmly grounded in the commonality of challenges we face today—East and West, Israel and Diaspora: protecting Jewish rights, providing for Jewish needy, preserving Jewish identity, promoting Jewish learning, and preparing Jewish leadership.

Toward Coordinated Action

Policy and strategy on the international scene must be determined through extensive communication among communities – not only because of the obvious benefits coordination brings but also because of our interdependence.

In order to mobilize our forces and bring them to bear on global issues – and to translate Jewish values and purpose into realistic achievable programs – each Jewish communal professional bears a personal responsibility:

1. to develop and deepen Jewish consciousness based on knowledge as well as emotional commitment
2. to strive for excellence in professional competence – management, interpretation, and planning
3. to demonstrate leadership qualities through initiatives and serve as educator and model for emulation and inspiration
4. to promote participation of the constituency and balance between the roles of layman and professional
5. to make effective use of human and financial resources available to the community

Openness to Change

While working toward coordination, however, we must not stifle opportunities for new initiatives by groups outside the mainstream of the Jewish community – thus providing welcome new agendas and challenges for the Jewish communal service. The opportunities are limitless. We need vision and a creative urge to expand beyond near horizons.

There must also be a recognition that what was good for the Jewish community in one generation may not necessarily be good in another generation; what was necessary in a totalitarian environment may not be appropriate in a democratic milieu; what was good for Jews before the establishment of a Jewish State may not be applicable in the post-statehood period.

What is also necessary is a Jewish sense of humor to reduce to size our conceptions of yesteryear and to recognize that immortality does not apply to organizations and institutions. We must recognize that going out of business is an essential quality of community service — not change for the sake of change, but change because it is necessary and good. Ben-Gurion said, "It is possible to take care of the future only if we examine the changing realities, not only with the eyes of yesterday. . . but with insight into the stream of change."

The role of the professional in this kind of climate calls for practitioners who have flexibility of outlook and an acceptance of changing times tempered by limitations of resources and who, above all, are possessed of a vision of the Jewish future and will work toward its realization.

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**The United Jewish Federation of Pittsburgh
is pleased to recognize and pay tribute to Ralph I. Goldman
for his outstanding service to the Jewish Community**