

# F · O · R · U · M

## PRINCIPLES OF JEWISH COMMUNAL LIFE FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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*As we enter the 21st century, our community needs to reconsider its organizational principles and practices. Now is the time and the Journal the appropriate vehicle to discuss a new set of principles for Jewish communal life, which reflect the core challenges facing Jewish communal service in the new millennium.*

We have introduced below a series of observations, principles and expectations that we view as fundamental to the future of our Jewish community. As we enter the 21st century, the communal system of which we have been a part has served American Jewry for more than one hundred years. In an age of intensive competition, heightened patterns of individualism, and segmented marketing, our community will need to reconsider current organizational principles and practices.

We were struck by the significant and thoughtful responses given to our colleague Rabbi Richard Levy's "Ten Principles on Reform Judaism," which culminated in the adoption of the Central Conference of American Rabbis' *Statement for Reform Judaism*. Both the substance and the process of that endeavor intrigued us. We believe that the Jewish communal enterprise can find such an undertaking to be of similar value.

We acknowledge, however, that no suggested listing of Jewish communal principles will satisfy each of us or our respective constituencies. However, we do believe that this is an appropriate time and the *Journal* is a useful forum for such a discourse to be

launched. We acknowledge the valuable input of our HUC-JIR colleagues and the initial responses and useful reflections offered to us by our alumni and students. Engaging in this process has served as a beneficial teaching tool, permitting us the occasion to test out our ideas.

We are entering an era shaped by new events and institutional challenges. Change is occurring at all levels of our society, in part brought on by the information age and the technology revolution. We believe that just as our community has always valued our past and planned for our future, it is essential to create a road map for managing change, redefining our interests, and affirming our commitments. We believe that the principles, outlined below, reflect the core challenges facing Jewish organizational life.

We have been asked about the ranking of these eleven principles and the selection of texts to accompany them. The rationale associated with the ordering of these ideas is somewhat arbitrary. We believe that each principle speaks to a distinctive Jewish value but that no idea can be fully separated from this set of communal goals. The first principle (Transform-

mation and Renewal) can be understood as defining the new paradigm around which the other nine concepts are framed. The second principle, identified as Tzedakah/Tikkun Olam, reasserts a core, universal Jewish value, which we view as integral to the notion of community-building. For us, principles three (Our Personal Journeys) and four (Communities of Jewish Meaning) define the unique challenges facing Jewish life at this time.

Israel-Diaspora relations and our worldwide responsibilities, principles five and six, reflect for us the global mandate still significant to our collective mission. Principle seven defines an essential ingredient for community building, the concept of a federated community. The next two concepts, beginning with principle nine (the lay-professional partnership) and principle ten (reaffirming our core democratic values), give definition to two of the key values essential to the communal enterprise. We view principle eleven (on the cutting edge) as a measure of our collective capacity to respond functionally to the challenges framed by us in the previous ten principles.

## 1. TRANSFORMATION AND RENEWAL

Our tradition teaches:

"Rabbi Hiyya the Elder and Rabbi Simeon ben Halafta were walking in the valley of Arbel and saw the light of daybreak. Rabbi Hiyya said to Rabbi Simeon: Eminent master, Israel's redemption will be like this—little by little at the beginning; but as it advances, it will grow larger and larger" (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot, 1:2c).

The Jewish community of the 21st century will need to embrace change within its core institutions, while promoting growth and creativity among all sectors of our community. We must welcome and nurture new organizations, even as we promote innovation generated by our community's established institutions. We seek to encourage new models of institutional partnerships as well as collaborative planning and programming. These partnership opportunities might very well include

expansion activities that join together the resources of synagogues and their religious movements with federations, their agencies, and other Jewish organizations.

In this century alone we have witnessed the destruction of one-third of our people and participated in the rebirth of the Jewish State. We must fully appreciate the impact and meaning of major events and symbols within our tradition and as part of our experience as a people. "Memory" represents a critical component around which we have shared our ideas. Our sacred dates and places must be transmitted to future generations, just as we will add over time other such events that will mark the continuation of our march through history.

## 2. TZEDAKAH/TIKKUN OLAM

We are reminded:

"The fruit of tzedakah is a tree of life, and a wise person saves the souls of those in need" (Proverbs 11:30).

The Jewish concepts associated with acts of loving-kindness (*gemilut chasidim*) and a commitment to social justice remain important measures for defining the mission and focus of our institutions and the services that they render. The specific responsibilities on the part of our community to both save lives and preserve Jewish life must always be viewed as integral to our purposes. Toward this end, the Jewish communal enterprise must encompass a dual commitment to the welfare of Jews who are in economic, emotional, and social crisis and to policies and practices of government and the non-profit sector in securing the American dream for all of this nation's citizens.

Toward achieving these goals, we reaffirm the act of giving as a core ingredient of our communal responsibility. As we acknowledge and applaud the diverse and vital personal and institutional interests of American Jewry in building and sustaining organizational and synagogue life, we reaffirm the unique and special place of a federated campaign. In an

age of individualistic passions and choices and at a time of institutional independence, the idea of community and the act of collective giving needs to be reasserted. As our communal agenda undergoes change, so too federations must reconsider their mission and functions, and new constellations of services and programs must be incorporated into our community campaigns. As a result of these transitions, new organizational partnerships will guide the community's priorities.

### **3. OUR PERSONAL JOURNEYS**

We learn that:

"The first person knew it (Torah) not perfectly, neither will the last search it thoroughly; for its understanding is wider than the sea and its counsel deeper than the abyss" (Ben Sira 24:28-29).

We have a sacred obligation to assist all Jews with their personal journeys, providing information and education. We are reminded that the institutions that we have helped to lead are there to meet the needs of each Jew, their families, and our communities. Whether we represent synagogues, educational bodies, or social service organizations, all of us must be committed to making our institutions gateways for all Jews seeking to become a part of the community. By providing learning opportunities, we can enhance their engagement with Judaism. We must ensure that our institutions are linked to each other, permitting individuals and families to move comfortably among our organizations, allowing them to connect to those leaders, ideas, and programs that touch them. We have a responsibility to join the insights of our Jewish texts and traditions to the functional tasks of governance, leadership, planning, and fundraising.

### **4. CREATING COMMUNITIES OF JEWISH MEANING**

We are taught:

"Whoever occupies themselves with the needs of the community is as though they occupy

themselves with Torah" (Talmud Yerushalmi, Berakhot 5:8[4]).

Just as we must assist each other in our individual pathways to Judaism, our communal systems must reflect in their practices those Jewish values that enhance the dignity of the individual, respect our ideological and political differences, and acknowledge our shared peoplehood. With modernity, we are, in some regard, all Jews by choice, and as such our communal structures must be embracing and nurturing.

We must be inclusive, acknowledging and welcoming the religious, ethnic, generational, cultural, and sexual diversities of our community. Our communal institutions will need to reflect this diversity in their leadership structures and institutional policies and practices. Just as we have acknowledged the role of our educational and religious institutions to provide opportunities for learning, so must our communal structures be gateways to Jewish learning and engagement.

### **5. ISRAEL-DIASPORA CONNECTION**

We believe:

"All Jews are responsible each for the other" (Babylonian Talmud, Shavu'ot 39:1).

Israel remains an integral and unique part of the Jewish experience. Its political, economic, and social well-being needs to remain a significant item on the communal agenda. The pursuit of creative models that promote and sustain this "connection" is a communal responsibility. We must ensure opportunities for all Jews to experience Israel through travel, study, and engagement with its people.

We pray for Israel's welfare and are encouraged by its commitment to achieve peace with its neighbors. For this to occur, we call upon the Arab world and the international community to join Israel in a unique economic and regional partnership. We applaud the special role that the government of the United States continues to play in promoting avenues of peace while ensuring Israel's security.

## **6. OUR WORLDWIDE RESPONSIBILITIES**

We are commanded:

"You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother; you shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a sojourner in his land" (Deuteronomy 23: 8).

The welfare and security of Jews and of their communities, wherever they may reside, has historically bound our people together. We remain committed to this sacred obligation. During this past century alone, we were reminded how essential it is that we as a worldwide community remain institutionally strong and politically engaged.

As Jews who feel a responsibility and connection with fellow Jews wherever they may live, we must remain engaged in assisting our people who face physical and political problems requiring our assistance. We have this same obligation toward other communities and nations who must deal with natural disasters or human rights abuses or who suffer from the scourge of war and terrorism.

## **7. THE FEDERATED CONCEPT AS A KEY INGREDIENT**

We are reminded:

"Separate not thyself from the community" (Avot 2:4).

The concept of a federated communal system remains critical to the strength and welfare of the Jewish people. However, as the communal agenda changes, so must this system's roles be reconfigured. Federations in partnership with synagogues, schools, camps, and other educationally directed institutions will need to play a transformational role in the enhancement of Jewish learning, accessing new resources and revenues from a variety of communal and private sources.

Similarly, federations can and must serve as essential bridge-builders among diverse ideological and institutional groupings within Jew-

ish life. As with the earlier notion of "kehillah," we reaffirm the value and uniqueness of this model of community organizing.

Even as the systems of agencies and services that helped define our communities undergo institutional change, our responsibility will be to introduce innovative and collaborative models of community planning and programming, as we re-examine existing priorities and identify the current and future needs of our constituencies. Federations must nurture new constellations of cooperation linking our educational and religious infrastructures with the communal service enterprise.

## **8. REAFFIRMING THE CONSENSUS PROCESS**

We affirm:

"Do not judge alone, for none may judge alone, except One (God)" (Avot 4:2).

The art of consensus has defined the way in which the Jewish community has processed its decisions. Along the way, communal bodies placed value on being inclusive, democratic, and reflective. These principles remain essential to the practice of community building. As our community becomes more diverse, institutions at all levels will need to recommit toward sustaining and strengthening this goal. We acknowledge as well that many of our constituents feel left out of the communal decision-making process, and therefore, we need to encourage that the door to community participation is open to all. Simultaneously, we need to create streamlined processes that can lead to consensus building, which will enable us to make change quickly, wisely, and efficiently.

## **9. STRENGTHENING THE LAY-PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIP**

We are instructed:

"Rabbi Elazar ben Shammua said: "Let the honor of your student be as dear to you as your own, and the honor of your colleague be like the

reverence due to your teacher, and the reverence for your teacher be like the reverence for Heaven" (Avot 4:15).

The partnership between our lay leaders and professionals must be seen as a core communal practice. The ability of institutions and communities to thrive is dependent on these relationships. Our challenge ahead will be to identify, inspire, train, and promote the best resources of our communities—the lay and professional leaders of tomorrow. We must be equally committed to both elements of the partnership. The legacy of our leadership today will be measured both as to how they perform in this partnership and in their commitment to ensure the future. At the same time, the highest level of civility and respect must be shared by all.

#### **10. REAFFIRMING OUR CORE DEMOCRATIC VALUES**

Our tradition informs us:

"The heads of your tribes, your elders, your officers." (Deut. 29:9) Even though I appointed over you heads, elders, and officers, all of you are equal before Me, for the verse concludes, "All are the people of Israel." (Tanhuma, Nitzavim 2)

American Jewry has thrived within this society, due to our belief in and support for the core values of this democracy. The key ingredients include the centrality of religious freedom, absent the role of government; the distinctive and important place given to voluntarism and to the non-profit enterprise as a partner with the other primary sectors of American society; the principle of competition; and the absence of state-sponsored anti-Semitism, combined with the government's commitment to fight all forms of racism and prejudice. The constitutional guarantees of free speech and press have been essential civil liberties, ensuring our rights and those of other minorities.

Just as we take pride in the American story

of democracy, we as a community must demonstrate within our institutions and their decision-making processes the openness, fairness, and integrity that we hold as core values within this society and within our tradition.

In the framework of this society's multicultural character, our communal system ought to be a resource for and partner with other religious and ethnic groups. As this process unfolds, the core Jewish values that have inspired our people and the organizational norms and practices that have defined our community can be strengthened.

#### **11. ON THE CUTTING EDGE**

We are challenged:

"When one observed Rabbi Meir in the house of study, he appeared to be uprooting mountains and grinding them one against the other" (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 24a).

The Jewish communal system must understand the core social, technological, and public trends and assess their implications for our community and the larger society. In such areas as research and development, entrepreneurship, and marketing, our institutions will need to master and apply appropriate management and business tools in order to sustain a competitive edge. We must utilize technology, accessing the new information systems and communications resources. Our communal leadership must embrace the principles and practices of outreach and engagement, so that our synagogues, agencies, and organizations can involve new constituencies. We must employ those measures that can determine the effectiveness of our institution's activities, as well as evaluate the efficiencies of our operations.

As a religious community, our leaders will remain committed at all times toward upholding the principles of "best practices," abiding by the standards of ethical conduct as called for within our own tradition, as defined by the laws of our nation, and as established by the philanthropic sector.