PEARL: Providing Education and Resources for Leadership

Living our Values of Tikkun Olam Inside and Outside:

- Processes and Programs in our Congregations

- Taking Action in the Larger World

May 14, 2008 • 12:00 – 1:30 pm EST

Jewish Reconstructionist Federation

Transformative Judaism for the 21st Century

101 Greenwood Avenue

Beit Devora, Suite 430

Jenkintown, PA 19046

215.885.5601 / fax: 215.885.5603

http://www.jrf.org/to

packet compiled by Rabbi Shawn Zevit and Brian Fink

Contents

Texts for the Call

Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

- Deuteronomy 16:20

Belief in God, therefore, has to do... with human nature, with the way individual men and women act, with their attitudes, their ideas of what is good and what is bad, with their ideals... If we believe that life is worthwhile, that it is good, that, in spite of sickness and accidents, in spite of poverty and war, in spite of all the sad and difficult conditions in the world, that the world can still be made a better place, then we believe in God. When we believe in God, we cannot be discouraged because we believe that all the misery in the world is due, not to the fact that misery must be there, that it is a necessary part of life, but to the fact that we have not yet discovered how to do away with that misery.

- *Rabbi Ira Eisenstein (adapted), From the Shabbat Vehagim, the Reconstructionist Shabbat and Festival prayer book, Reconstructionist Press*

Many congregations sponsor occasional social action projects. Yet, if a congregation were to undertake the mission statement initiative, it is likely that it would find that one of the main purposes of Judaism is to bring aid and comfort to those less fortunate than oneself. A justice agenda will move a community between people doing important *mitzvah* work with each other. It will also result in attracting Jews to the congregation with deep commitments to working for peace and justice in the world.

- Rabbi Sid Schwarz, Finding a Spiritual Home, p.267

Making our Synagogues Vessels of Tikkun Olam

Rabbi Mordecai Leibling

http://www.jrf.org/showres&rid=201

> "The Jewish protagonists of social idealism should realize that the Jewish religion came into being as a result of the first attempt to conceive of God as the defender of the weak against the strong and that it can therefore continue to serve as the inspiration in the present struggle."
> - Mordecai Kaplan[1]

In the Exodus story, the quintessential liberation story and the Jewish foundational myth, when Moshe is at the burning bush and receives his mission to lead the people to freedom, he asks God, "Who shall I say sent me?" God's response: "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh- shall be what I shall be, Tell them that Ehyeh sent you" (Exodus 3:14).

Arthur Green, in his new book, Ehyeh,[2] teaches that for the kabbalists, Ehyeh is the deepest and most hidden name of God. God is the possibility of all that can be. Green writes:

> In the moment when Moshe needed to give the slaves an answer that would offer them endless resources of hope and courage, God said tell them Ehyeh sent you. The timeless God allowed the great name YHVH to be conjugated, as though to say, *Ehyeh*, I am tomorrow.[3]

The Challenge of Justice

The centrality of working for social justice was part of Mordecai Kaplan's vision for Reconstructionism. Kaplan believed that reconstructed religion had among its goals the need to mobilize human beings, through their own power, to combat social evil.

For those committed to social justice, this is a time of crisis for the planet, for the United States, and for Israel. The large majority of scientists agree that global warming is approaching a crisis stage; the United States has the largest disparity between rich and poor in its history; Israel is struggling with poverty, with nearly 20 percent of the population facing insecurity about obtaining food, and the occupation results in everyone's freedom being restricted.

Failing to Mobilize

Having been the executive director of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation for twelve years, I know as well as anyone that not only have we not succeeded at mobilizing our members to work for social justice, we have not made it one of our highest priorities. We are not alone - the level of social action in Jewish congregations in all denominations is low. I attended a meeting of the rabbinic advisory council of the Jewish Fund for justice a few years ago, and the leaders of all three liberal movements were bemoaning the lack of social action work at the congregational level.

Our synagogue communities are not fulfilling Kaplan's original vision. We need to strategize about how to lead our communities into a full embrace of the mitzvah "tzedek, tzedek tirdof" - "justice, justice you shall pursue" (Deut. 16:20).

To help us strategize, 1 want to describe some of the terrain in which we are operating.

Competing Claims on Attention

We cannot underestimate how two issues have affected the institutional Jewish community's attention to issues of poverty and justice. First, the 1990 national Jewish population study shocked people with its statistics on assimilation and intermarriage, and from that point on an enormous percentage of communal resources turned inward to combat these trends. As a community, we have become more myopic and increasingly focused only on our needs.

The second issue is, of course, the situation in Israel. Israel not only takes up a lot of attention, again focusing time and resources on our own affairs, it divides the community. Many of the people most drawn to social justice issues are precisely those who oppose the policies of the Israeli government, and they feel less drawn to be in a Jewish setting, given how most public Jewish voices support the policies of the Israeli government. Though this may not be true of most Reconstructionist congregations, it does affect those considering the very idea of joining a congregation.

Constraints on Discussion

More importantly, in the current climate, Jewish institutional leaders do not want to challenge the United States administration on policy issues because they do not want to risk their influence in matters concerning Israel. This landscape means that synagogue social action committees do not have a larger Jewish context within which to operate. Not only do they have to overcome the inertia within the congregation, but they often also find the larger community to be an impediment to their work.

In addition, the increasing number of very wealthy Jews in positions of power has changed the position and focus of some groups. One example is the struggle over domestic policy issues in the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), the umbrella organization of Jewish community-relations councils and national Jewish "defense" agencies. The JCPA historically took classic "liberal" positions, but in the last few years it has been pressured to make changes in the direction of more conservative positions, most notably regarding issues of low-income housing Around the country, the number of independent JCRCs is dropping, as Federations absorb them, further weakening the profile of the Jewish community in social justice issues.[4]

Reviving Interest

The apathy in our community about issues of poverty and justice reflects the apathy nationally. Until recently, there has been a low level of political activism across the country.

Partially in response to the pervasive low level of synagogue social action, the non-denominational organization Amos was conceived to help train and motivate congregations; sadly, it lasted only a couple of years. However, it did produce at least one enduring piece of work. Amos commissioned Stephen M. Cohen, a leading expert on Jewish sociology, and Leonard Fein, author and activist, to do the largest and most extensive study ever undertaken of the attitudes of American Jews to social justice.5The study was completed in 2002. Some of the key findings are useful and very heartening for us. According to the study, about 90 percent of American Jews agree with the following statements:

- "Jews have a responsibility to work on behalf of the poor, the oppressed and minority groups."
- "When Jewish organizations engage in social justice work, it makes me feel proud to be a Jew"
- "Jewish involvement in social justice causes is one good way to strengthen ties with other groups in society."

Three out of four said that "a commitment to social justice is at the heart of my understanding of Judaism."

Commitment Remains Central

Asked to rank "what quality you consider most important to your Jewish identity," 47 percent picked commitment to social equality, 24 percent religious observance and 13 percent support for Israel. By four to one, those surveyed agreed that synagogues should sponsor more social justice programs. Paradoxically, about half said that their synagogue had the correct number of programs. (Interestingly people do not like the phrase "social justice"; only 24 percent found it appealing.)

When I first read this study, I frankly found it quite astounding and puzzling. A commitment to social equality is far and away the most important aspect of Jewish identity for a representative sample of the Jewish community. The large majority of American Jews deeply understand that Judaism at its core is about justice. If this is true, why is the level of synagogue activity so low?

One reason offered is that only 15 percent prefer to promote social justice as part of a Jewish group, while more than 70 percent, while not opposed, are indifferent. This is a very important finding. For us to mobilize our congregations, we need to be able to address this ambivalence.

Cohen and Fein make an interesting point about the tension between universalism and particularism that Jews have been living with for the last 150 or so years. The tension is often framed as "How can Jews become an integral part of the larger society, while still maintaining a particular tie to other Jews?"

Universalism and Particularism

How does this play out in synagogue social action?

The universalist might ask: If I want to be universalist, undertaking work for the betterment of society - why should I do it in a particularist, meaning Jewish, context? If I want to play out my particularism - my identification with Jews - why should I at that moment turn it toward universalist ends? When I am with Jews, I want to "do Jewish," and when I am acting to change the secular world, I am being universalist. Another way of looking at this: It is precisely those Jews who are most drawn to the universalist values of Judaism who may be most disturbed by what they perceive as parochial or "ethnic" issues.

The challenge is to make the universalism/particularism paradox a tension that leads to energy and action, not ambivalence and paralysis. As many traditions teach, paradox can be a source of wisdom if we live with it and embrace it.

Murray Bowen, the founder of family therapy systems theory, stated that the fundamental tension in all systems is between the force to differentiate and the force to merge. He based this on observations by scientists in the fields of biology, physics, chemistry and astronomy. In

psychological terms, this is the central human tension of how to be both an individual and part of a larger unit - be it a marriage, a family or a community. As Lawrence Leshan wrote:

> On the one hand, we all have the drive to be more unique and individual, to heighten one's own experience and being. On the other hand is the drive to be part of something larger, a full-fledged member of the tribe. [6]

Competing Cultures

Recently, some anthropologists and systems theorists have postulated that the flow of human history from its origins involves the alternation between cultures focused on "I" (individualism, embodied in elites) and those focused on "We" (communal, embodied in attention to the collective).

In a model developed by Ken Wilbur and Don Beck,' the culture of modernity (the culture of the West for most of the 19th and 20th centuries and still the dominant culture), is an "I" culture; they dub it the "I improve" culture and it sets these goals:

- Strive for autonomy and constant change;
- Seek out the good life and strive for abundance;
- Progress through the best solution;
- Enhance living for many through technology; and
- Play to win and enjoy competition.

There are positive sides to this "I" culture. It is productive, goal-oriented, energized, and focused on results and outcomes, and it creates a strong middle class. The negative side is that it is materialistic, self-absorbed, short sighted, and focused on high[7] need achievement, and it encourages people always to want more.

Seeds of Change

Every culture produces the seeds of change for its transition. In the 1960s, in the West, more people began to discover that material wealth does not bring happiness or peace. There were renewed needs for community, sharing, and a richer inner life; there was a sensitivity to the have/have-not gaps. This is the period in which the Reconstructionist movement began to grow, when the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College was established and our congregations began to increase. This communitarian "We" culture is relativistic and sociocentric; it is the culture of "we become," and its goals are:

- To liberate humans from greed and dogma;
- To explore the inner beings of self and others;
- To promote a sense of community and unity;
- To share society's resources among all;
- To reach decisions through consensus; and
- To refresh spirituality and bring harmony.

There are positive sides to this "We" culture. It is consensual and inclusive, empathetic, sensitive to broader human conditions, and concerned about others. But there are also negative sides to this "We" culture. It can impose blinding group-think approaches. People are treated as members

of groups, not as individuals. And it is characterized by identity politics, too much emphasis on feeling, a vulnerability to narcissism, and a naiveté about power.

While this culture is clearly not dominant in governments or the economy, it is powerful in intellectual, artistic, and popular culture-postmodernism, relativism, multiculturalism, and the move to spirituality. This culture values consensus, seeks spirituality, is egalitarian and humanitarian and tolerant; its leadership style is the "sensitive facilitator." Its organizational style is social networks - and it sounds a lot like the culture of Reconstructionism.

A New Culture Emerging

The hope for the transformation of culture is activated when people feel overwhelmed by economic and emotional costs of caring, when they are confronted with chaos and disorder from lack of structure and clear hierarchies of value, when they feel a need for tangible results and functionality, and when knowing becomes more important than feeling.

This reminds me of congregations I consult with that were formed by groups of like-minded people, are somewhat structure-less and, when they hit sixty or seventy families, realize that feel-good, informal structures with loose-knit rules simply do not work any more - that they now have to develop a structure, set clear values, and have some formal hierarchy.

Wilbur and Beck maintain that a new culture is beginning to form. Their key point is that this new culture realizes that all of the previous levels of civilization coexist at the same time, and that objective economic and social conditions will produce cultures at different stages and with different needs living alongside each other, without the need to force one culture to accept solutions for another.

Beck worked extensively in South Africa with the African National Congress (ANC) and the government during the transition from apartheid. He learned that the steps of evolutionary change could not be skipped. Imposing the values of the "We" contemporary culture of the West on a society that needs to develop economically and politically does not work; it requires a more goal production-oriented culture. This is yet another way of stating the lesson: We can't impose our culture on others.

Evolution and Progress

Here is Kaplan writing about evolution and progress in The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion:

> Although progress is not always in a straight line, the course of human history shows that the human race is moving in the direction of enhanced personality and enhanced sociality. Where people once identified society with a small family; tribe, or clan, we are beginning to think in terms of a world society. At one time every detailed act of the individual in the pursuit of work or leisure was hedged about by the traditional taboos of the tribe, and had to conform to ancestral habits. People today are demanding and obtaining more and more of autonomous direction in the development and expression of their personalities. Personality and sociality are not static goals. They can never be reached and passed. But their pursuits give meaning and value to human life, and renders it inherently worthwhile.[8]

Kaplan is defining progress as the simultaneous development of a greater identification with an increasingly larger group - and the growth of greater individual freedom and creativity. This is very much in keeping with the paradigm that Wilbur and Beck are now developing about how civilizations have evolved. For Kaplan, as it is for Wilbur and Beck, progressive evolution is the ability to reconcile the "I-We" split on a larger and more sophisticated level. (Keep in mind that the "I" can also be my nation or nationalism juxtaposed to the "We" of the international community.)

For Kaplan, God is the spirit that makes for resolving the paradox of personal self-realization and social communion; God is the resolution of the universal-particular, merge - individuate tension.

Spiritual Development vs. War

Lawrence Leshan has written that one of the two ways to satisfy the two conflicting drives simultaneously and without contradiction is through spiritual development or mysticism. Unfortunately, the other way is through war. (This is part of his fascinating thesis about why societies have not been able to prevent war.[9]) A spiritual understanding allows us to view ourselves as separate individuals and as part of the total cosmos, with nothing ultimately separate from anything else.

How does this relate to social action, tikkun olam, and the repair of the world? In part, I want to explore how our belief in and relationship to God fit in. Spirituality can be seen as feeling connected to or even merged with all of creation. It is the quintessence of universalism. Religion is the translating of that feeling into a system of beliefs, ethics, rituals and hierarchy, thereby making it particularistic.

The Place of God

The classic Reconstructionist formulation of God is "the power that makes for salvation" - for making the world better, which is our understanding of "salvation." In that formulation, the power that is God is multidimensional, universal. God is the urge within us to bring about a more just world, God is the energy we use to fulfill the urge; God is in the vision we have of a better future. We fulfill our godliness through the process we use to bring about a better world. God, then, is not only in the means and ends, but also in the very fabric of wanting to repair the world. The role of God in the classic Reconstructionist formulation is inspirational and sustaining, and I would guess that the large majority of Reconstructionist congregants (whether or not they are involved in tikkun olam) would not, without reflection, describe this as their experience.

Many believe that God is that energy that helps bring about tikkun olam, but they do not know how to have faith in it upon which they can draw. We do not know if ultimately peace and justice will prevail; we do not know if the good guys are going to win or lose, we do not believe in an end-of-days messianic miracle - so what does it mean to have faith?

It is faith in the possibility that society will improve. Remember Kaplan's definition of progress the individual experience of self-actualization will grow deeper and be increasingly available to larger numbers of people, while at the same time individuals will identify ever more deeply with an overgrowing number of people.

Evidence of Progress

By those criteria, we are making progress. just think how much more individual freedom is available to women around the world, or about how much disaster relief is provided to people around the globe, how much more the world is becoming a global village. On a personal note, I have a child with Down syndrome; the possibilities that he has today have, in all likelihood, never been available before to people with mental retardation.

Having faith can give us the strength and vision to act more powerfully, as the God that we have faith in acts through us. It is not the faith of waiting for something to happen; it is not the faith of passivity; it is the faith that inspires us to act. Interestingly, the Jewish Fund for Justice, a secular group, in its analysis of the low level of social action activity in synagogues, cites the crisis of faith of many American Jews. JFJ acknowledges that God is neither a motivating force in the lives of most Jews nor a factor in helping determine values and priorities; this is an area ready for change.[10]

Cultivating an understanding of God that results in this kind of faith would provide buoyancy for our synagogues as vessels of tikkun olam. I have no easy answers about how to bring this about. Opening the conversation is very important. Conversations about our understanding of God can be very intimate; many, if not most, people feel vulnerable and even timid about expressing their beliefs, and many are even unsure what their beliefs really are.

Hard Questions

Consider the importance of such questions as: What are your beliefs about God and tikkun olam? What do you have faith in? Does this faith support your tikkun olam work? If not, could you draw upon it? And consider how difficult it often is to have such conversations.

It is by acting on the Jewish teachings of working for justice through a Jewish identity that we express our universal and particular needs and values simultaneously, and we need to be explicit about this.

As a result of our unique diaspora history, Jews have a long legacy of seeking to balance the universal and the particular, of being a Jew and a citizen of a large culture. Living in two civilizations in the era of the Global Village, we have a rich history upon which to draw.

Congregational Life

Going back to our organizing challenge, the survey with which I began shows that our congregants believe that social justice is a fundamental aspect of Judaism. How does this translate to congregational life?

Above, I outlined a formidable set of impediments to congregations becoming more activist. It is important to know the terrain in which we are operating. It is all too easy to blame ourselves, to think we are not doing a good enough job, and to feel disheartened - and then our energy drops. This is where faith comes in. There are, in fact, reasons for optimism. In the nation as a whole, there is an upsurge in political activity. We have the new phenomenon of Web-based organizing, with organizations such as MoveOn.org and Take Back America. Community organizing is increasing with groups like Jobs for Justice, the National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, ACORN and the IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation).

Most congregations relegate social action work to a committee, and its effectiveness frequently depends on the abilities of the chair. All of the responsibility for fulfilling one of the key tenets and identity pieces in Judaism often falls here. Sometimes the rabbi is supportive and sometimes not. A healthy system integrates the major responsibilities. It also allocates resources: How much staff time is devoted to supporting this work; how much money is allocated for programming; how much time on the board agenda is there discuss these issues?

Integrating, Not Segregating

Integrating tikkun olam values into the internal decision-making life of the congregation is one valid choice either for the tikkun olam committee or a special task force. The Washington-area Jews for justice group has compiled a very detailed audit for its congregations to help them understand the choices they have made. Let me suggest the kinds of issues a synagogue can examine:

- Do you pay your support and maintenance staffs a living wage?
- What benefits do staff members get?
- Are there pension plans for support staff, and what kind of health insurance is offered?
- Where do you bank? Could your banking be transferred to a community development financial institution?
- With whom do you contract for landscaping or other services, and what are their employment policies?
- What is the environmental impact of your facility?
- What kind of paper goods do you buy? Do you buy fair-trade coffee?
- Do you make your facility available to other groups?

I am sure that the above list can be expanded. By raising these issues, congregants become educated and the issues then have an impact on their lives. The congregation models taking responsibility for its actions, the way an individual needs to take responsibility.

Practical Applications

In talking about where the synagogue chooses to bank and how it uses its assets, individuals will begin to examine their practice. In talking about a living wage, people will think about how much they pay people who do domestic work for them. Perhaps they will think about how much they tip service workers, realizing that many of them do not earn a living wage. While this does not address public policy issues in the larger picture, by raising them as policy issues within the congregation, it raises the larger questions. Tikkun olam begins at home.

Every synagogue committee can integrate tikkun olam concerns into education, ritual life, the building and grounds, personnel, and especially the fundraising committee. This whole systems approach then apportions responsibility and provides a supportive context in which the tikkun olam committee can do external work. Several years ago, when the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation began a series of workshops on growth and outreach, the message was that the whole congregation is part of outreach and each committee had to make it part of their work. The same is true of tikkun olam.

Taking responsibility for one's actions is the heart of any spiritual path, and taking responsibility for one's role in society is the heart of good citizenship. A congregation that does both serves as a model for its members. This is living successfully in two civilizations.

Facing the Problems

To begin taking responsibility, one needs to know that a problem exists. There are significant numbers of poor and working-class Jews. The most recent census shows that one in five Jews in New York City lives below the poverty line. Yet the majority of Jews are middle and upper-middle class. The median Jewish income is 50 percent above the median income of others in the United States. The American middle class as a whole is insulated from confronting poverty. As our incomes have gone up, we have grown more distant from the problems of poverty. We do not understand how poverty affects choices that we make in our lives about where to live, work, and send our children to school.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Jacob Riis shocked America with his photos about the invisible poor, and contributed greatly to progressive public policy. Half a century later, Michael Harrington wrote The Other America: Poverty in the United States,[11] which helped bring about Great Society legislation such as Medicare and food stamps.

The invisible poor are now more invisible than ever. African-Americans are still disproportionately poor - and housing patterns in urban areas are more segregated than they were thirty years ago. The United States today has the highest proportion of immigrants in the total population since the early 20th century. This time, immigrants are far more likely not to be Caucasian, which compounds the problem.

Short and Long Term Needs

Many synagogue social action committees make the poor visible by focusing on direct service projects such as food pantries, soup kitchens and homeless shelters. These focus on short term needs; but many people drawn to activism want to work on advocacy for policy issues, addressing the long-term problems and causes. Even people involved in direct service can grow tired. This is not to say there is no place for direct service, only that advocacy and direct action need to be in balance.

In the Torah, the obligation to take care of the poor is unwavering; it is our responsibility Taking care means both direct service and structural or policy change. The Torah tells us not only to give money, food and clothing - direct service - but to have a sabbatical year, when debts are forgiven; a jubilee year, when property is redistributed and everyone starts out again; and to pay a living wage. There are many policy changes far short of redistribution that would make significant differences.

One of the most effective motivational tools is hearing people's stories. I recently spoke at the national Hillel Tzedek conference. One college student talked about how she was not an activist until she spoke to the maid in her dorm and only then realized what it meant not to be paid a living wage.

Service Work and Advocacy

Congregations can make the poor visible; direct service is a part of it. Some congregations are part of the Interfaith Hospitality Network, neighborhood networks of churches and synagogues that house homeless people for week at a time. This is a national effort.

Participating in the organization Mazon: The Jewish Response to Hunger, is another means of making congregants aware of poverty in America.

The basic principle is that whenever there is a simha, three percent of the cost of the food is donated to Mazon. Currently the largest agency in the United States combating hunger, Mazon directs its funds to both direct relief and advocacy.

There is a tension in many congregations between direct service work and advocacy. Advocacy can seem potentially divisive, and too large an issue if conceived of nationally. Focusing on local (city or state) policy can ameliorate much of this. On a political level, it frequently is less "hot button" than national issues. Good educational work can be done on issues without necessarily taking positions. Even raising the policy questions can be important.

I want to highlight a new effort of the Jewish Fund for Justice (I referred to its analysis earlier). It has developed an excellent program to revitalize synagogue social action based on working in coalitions with other faith groups. It is described in a pamphlet, "Faith Based Community Organizing: A Unique Social Justice Approach to Revitalizing Synagogue Life."

Respect for Differences

Congregations can encompass more than one position on an issue. Multiple positions can be advocated within the a unity of the congregation. This is most easily done in the context of educating people about the issues. It can also be done in the realm of advocacy. Different committees or working groups of a congregation can take different positions. The congregation as a whole needs to be fair about resource allocation and time. The congregation as an institution does not have to take a position on an issue and it can allow committees to engage in advocacy work. This will require careful negotiation, trust and civil behavior. This can only work in an atmosphere of respect, with everyone accepting that reasonable, moral and ethical people may have different opinions. The roots of Judaism are in the commitment to create the conditions where each living being has the opportunity to manifest godliness in daily life. The tradition teaches that justice is a necessary condition and that we are man dated to pursue it. The roots grow out of a faith in God that by definition guarantees that the possibility of attaining justice always exists. It is our task to cultivate that faith.

1. Mordecai Kaplan, "Marxism and the Jewish Religion," Reconstructionist (Vol. I, March, 1935), 15.
2. Arthur Green, Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights,2003).
3. Ibid., 1.
4. Some of these ideas were developed in conversation with Arthur Waskow.
5. Steven M. Cohen and Leonard Fein, American Jews and Their Social Justice involvement: Evidence from a National survey" sponsored by Amos: The National Jewish Partnership for Social justice, 2002, published.
6. Lawrence Leshan, "Why We Love War," the Reader (Vol. 15, Jan.-Feb. 2003), adapted from The Psychology of War: Comprehending its Mystique and Madness (Hellosess, 2002).
7. Andrew Cohen and Ken Wilber, "The Guru and the Pundit," and Don Beck, ,The Never Ending Upward Quest: An Interview with Don Beck," What Is Enlightenment (Issue #22, Fall/Winter 2002).
8. Mordecai Kaplan, The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1962), 122 123.
9. Leshan, op. cit.
10. "Faith Based Community Organizing: A Unique Social Justice Approach to Revitalizing Synagogue Life" (New York: Jewish Fund for justice, 2003).
11. Michael Harrington, The Other America: Poverty in the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

Making Decisions on Controversial Issues

Rabbi Rebecca Alpert

http://jrf.org/showres&rid=202

Every congregation (or havurah) faces disagreements, in which particular individuals or sub-groups feel compelled to challenge the status quo. While these disputes are often resolved amicably, they can also result in individuals feeling a need to leave the group, or in some instances, a group of individuals feeling a need to start a new group based on the point of conflict. None of these results is necessarily bad or wrong. But there are times when such disagreements create a negative atmosphere and hurt feelings that never heal. It is those situations that might be avoided through more understanding of the process of controversy and the values underlying disagreements about issues.

While disagreements are often ostensibly about specific political issues (like gay marriage or peace in the Middle East), they are also about making decisions around what we ultimately value. For some, those values are clear and unchanging (community over individual autonomy, justice over compassion), for others the value that takes precedence will vary based on the situation. But we aren't always aware of why we take a particular stance on an issue, and that awareness is a crucial part of being able to make good decisions. For a congregation to function well, it should be able to articulate why it has chosen a particular position over another, and members should be able to have a respectful dialogue about their differences based on values.

One issue in decision making about controversial issues is that values related to the congregation's internal dynamics may conflict with values members hold about issues in society in general. Inclusion, pluralism, sh'lom bayit, democracy and honesty are values about internal dynamics. The group must be clear about whether these values are going to be the ones that count above other values about social issues. Is it more important for the group to get along peacefully than to insist that the group take a position on an issue? Is it more important that no one be excluded from the congregation than that the group expresses itself on a controversial subject? If sh'lom bayit is the ultimate value, then the group must articulate that to members, so that they will understand that taking positions on Jewish or local or global issues will raise problems if there is disagreement about them.

Reconstructionist groups, who pride themselves on the values of inclusion and pluralism are susceptible to situations where controversy can be troubling. By definition, inclusion and pluralism make dissent problematic, because they guide us to want to make sure that everyone is comfortable in our communities. Surely, pluralism and inclusion are important values to us, but they may conflict with other things valued by our communities. We assume for example that people who don't believe in equality for women would not feel comfortable in a Reconstructionist setting. But if inclusion and pluralism were our only values, we would have to find ways to make room for such individuals if they wanted to join. What this tells us is that pluralism is one thing we value among many, and other values may outweigh it in some instances.

Other values may also come into conflict. Sub-groups in the congregation may find themselves at odds over whether the limited resources of the congregation should be used to support a soup kitchen (emphasizing the value of compassion) or go to a demonstration against welfare reform (emphasizing the value of justice). In other cases, people may believe they share the same value

(Jewish survival), but think they can foster it through demanding that their rabbi does intermarriages, or demanding that he or she refrain from doing so.

One important factor congregations shouldn't neglect in this process is understanding the power dynamics in their congregation. Is the congregation a democracy? How much power do the Board or influential committees have? What is the position of the rabbi? Does he or she have final authority (even if the group claims otherwise?) How about the President or other chairs? Do they gain power by virtue of their position (ascribed power)? What role do powerful individuals play? Can they sway people by virtue of charisma? The group needs to look at how decisions are made. It is often the case that the opinions of some hold sway, even if their opinions don't match the stated values of the congregation. This is something that groups must always be conscious of to make sure decisions are well made.

I am suggesting that Reconstructionist groups need to devote some time and energy to thinking through what communal values are, and to creating a process to resolve conflicting values when these situations arise. These complicated clashes of values and perceptions are best addressed when they are consciously articulated in an exercise of values clarification. I recommend the method created by Thomas McElhinney for this process, but any open conversation would be useful if its goal is to articulate the values and assumptions underlying people's different opinions, giving people an opportunity to air their differences. What follows is an adaptation of McElhinney's method that is designed for use by congregations:

A Three Step Method for Ethical Decision Making

Step One: Formulate a Premise

What does one group feel ought (or ought not) to be done in the situation? State your intuitive reaction as follows: "We ought (ought not) _____." (For example, we ought to perform same-sex marriages, participate in a protest about the situation in the Middle East, start a soup kitchen project.) The statement that you make becomes a hypothesis to be tested by argument.

Step Two: Conduct the Ethical Argument

a. List all reasons that support your premise. Make as strong a case as possible. Note any objections in a separate place, but save them for Step Three. Build only one case now.

b. Provide justifications for each of the reasons that you have given. These are the "reasons for your reasons" and form the heart of the ethical argument.

c. Separate the moral reasons from other supports for your premise. Whether something is legal or costly or politically wise may or may not count along with the question of whether or not it will meet some ethical norm or have good or bad consequences. The more moral thing may not be the least expensive or the safest for the congregation.

Step Three: Review and Act

a. Posit one or more other premises that could apply to the situation and list reasons and justifications for each. These will be alternate courses of action to the original premise. While most of the reasons will simply be negative forms of the reasons given in Step Two, this is the

place that objections can be listed. By looking at the counter arguments you may discover new dimensions of the question.

b. Compare the premises and then:

1. sustain your original position and take appropriate action
2. abandon your premise for a counter-premise and begin decision process again (to be certain);
3. modify your premise and do a new review

Summary:

Present a position and test it. It is likely that two (or more!) premises will have a moral strength, and it may be difficult to choose, but at least you know what you feel is best and how strongly you feel about it. You will also be able to explain to others why you would choose a certain action. And you will be able to anticipate their arguments when they disagree.[1]

It is likely that a congregation will rely on this process when there is a conflict, but it is also useful for a congregation to go through some process to articulate the values of the group when no problem exists. Does the group place more importance on its own survival or on taking controversial positions based on values, or does that depend on the situation? It is a useful exercise to rank values in theory, and then subject them to hypothetical situations. Sometimes the values we think we hold dear fade in significance when faced with a real life situation. But some groups may be able to articulate a hierarchy of values that will not change based on a situation. Sh'lom bayit may be the most important principle a congregation holds, but justice or democracy might be also. It will be important to know that before a conflict arises.

[1] This procedure is adapted from S. Lammers and R. Alpert, ed. Teaching Medical Ethics to Theological Students (RRC Press, 1983) 33.

Adat Shalom - Tikkun Olam Guidelines

http://www.adatshalom.net/tikunola.html

Our tradition bids us to align our values and beliefs with the ways we conduct our daily lives. Central to Judaism's codes of ethical conduct is the notion of redifat tzedek, pursuing justice in every aspect of our lives and our communities. Jewish ethics that help to create a more just and compassionate world can be divided into three traditional areas: tzedakah, in its narrow sense of supporting good in the world through financial contributions; Gemilut Chasidim, performing acts of loving kindness for others; and tikkun olam, repairing the world through social action.

Tikkun means "repairing"; olam means "world, cosmos, eternity". The Mishnah bids us to help others beyond what may be required, "for the sake of tikkun olam". In the Aleinu prayer we express our hope for a repaired world through Divine domination. Isaac Luria, the 16th century kabbalist, expanded our understanding of tikkun olam: with each mitzvah (commandment/good deed), we return a spark of God to its source, thus repairing the cosmos. Today, the words tikkun olam are often used as shorthand for "efforts to better the world," such as reading to an at-risk child, serving meals at a homeless shelter, or speaking out on an important matter of public policy.

The obligation to repair the world emerges from various Jewish sources. Some, including many of the ancient prophets, see our responsibility to engage in social action as emulating God's holiness and righteousness (Lev. 19). Others understand it as arising chiefly from the Jew's historical position as an oppressed people (Ex. 23). Still others believe that acts of tikkun olam are the primary means of satisfying the need to create a sense of Jewish community and identity, making the commitment to tikkun olam a calling, a vocation. In each case, Jewish survival and meaning depend on our being a community organized around values and committed to tikkun olam. Whatever its sources, tikkun olam is central to Judaism and to our Adat Shalom community.

Challenges in Practicing Tikkun Olam

Jews today are fully integrated into American society. We at Adat Shalom are drawn to the more universal teachings of the Jewish tradition requiring care and concern for all who suffer. At the same time, we recognize our special kinship with fellow Jews, both at home and abroad. In this spirit, Adat Shalom seeks to maintain a balance between its particular concerns to be active on behalf of the State of Israel and the Jewish people, and our universal commitments to help repair the larger world.

Similarly, while we now live in a "global village" , we realize that those nearest to us often require special concern. We thus seek to balance local needs with global issues, never forsaking the one for our focus on the other. In considering these questions of particular and universal, near and far, we turn to Hillel's ancient wisdom-"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" (Avot 1: 14). While deeply committed to standing up for our own self-interest, we also seek out opportunities to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

Moreover, the mitzvah of tikkun olam obliges us both to serve immediate needs and to work toward the prevention of hunger, homelessness, disease, ignorance, abuse and oppression among all people, as well as working toward preserving the health of the global ecosystem upon which all life depends. It obligates us to maintain democracy, equality, and free expression and to safeguard Jewish people and society's most vulnerable members. Adat Shalom promotes tikkun olam by

encouraging and facilitating individual as well as group participation in efforts to repair the world. While acts of tzedakah and gemilut chasidim do manifest a commitment to making the world a more caring and compassionate place, there are occasions when tikkun olam, the healing of our world, may most effectively be achieved by taking collective action.

Advancing Righteousness and Justice

The highest degree of tzedakah is enabling those in need to become self-sufficient (Maimonides' 12th century ladder) - sacred work which often requires working in coalition with others to create systemic change. Adat Shalom seeks new ways to build community and consensus, internally and externally, in order to pursue the work of justice. The Social Action Committee will continue to educate toward, encourage, and facilitate personal action to defend the Jewish people and improve the lives of others (efforts to support the Jewish state will primarily be handled by our Israel Connection Committee). At the same time, the Social Action Committee will from time to time pursue Board approval for taking communal action on issues where broad-based support exists within the Congregation, consistent with Jewish values and Reconstructionist thought. Specific procedures to approve any Adat Shalom affiliation or endorsement of collective action - such as marching on the National Mall under the Adat Shalom banner or putting our synagogue's name on non-partisan, issue-oriented advocacy statements - will supplement these guidelines.

Our Social Action Committee is primarily responsible for coordinating members' participation in individual and group tzedakah and tikkun olam efforts. This committee identifies areas of interest and develops programs to provide a framework for membership action. Frequently this involves interaction with other organizations that share our interests and values. Individual members are encouraged to present new issues or projects to the Social Action Committee they believe merit congregational involvement. The Social Action Committee will then be charged with determining which initiatives have such broad-based support within the Congregation as to merit consideration by the Board. The congregational newsletter, the listserv, the website and other special publications will be used to provide wider dissemination to social action projects or initiatives, and to solicit feedback and opinions about particular issues.

Ultimately, the true measure of our commitment to the advancement of righteousness and justice in the world lies in our actions not our words or prayers. At Adat Shalom, we encourage members of all ages to actively participate in Social Action activities within the Congregation. We emphasize that acts supporting social justice, alongside prayer and study, are an essential part of our spiritual practice.

An earlier version (http://www.adatshalom.net/tikunola_1995.html) of these guidelines was approved by the congregation in 1995; these guidelines were approved by the Board on March 21, 2006 and ratified by the Congregation on May 21, 2006. Members of the congregation had opportunities for input to this statement throughout the process of its development.

Advocacy at Adat Shalom

http://jrf.org/files/Adat%20Shalom%20Tikkun%20Olam%20Guidelines%20FAQ.doc

What is Congregational Advocacy?

Congregational Advocacy is when Adat Shalom takes a formal position on a public issue. This could show up in a wide range of contexts, such as participating in demonstrations (e.g. Million Mom March), signing a petition in favor of a certain policy (e.g. gay marriage), or hosting consciousness-raising events for a particular cause (e.g. genocide in Darfur).

What's the major difference between the revised and existing versions of the Tikkun Olam Guidelines?

Under the existing guidelines, a "majority vote" of both the Board and the congregation is required before the congregation as a whole can engage in advocacy-like activities (to take the banner to a rally, for example). Since congregational votes are extremely impractical ways to govern, in practice such decisions have by and large been left to the Board (with occasional input sought from congregants via the listserv or Scroll). This problem aside, the major impediment to congregational advocacy under the existing guidelines is the requirement that such "collective political activity" should be "rare" and take place only in "extraordinary circumstances." This extremely high hurdle to any sort of congregational advocacy has created what amounts to a de facto prohibition on virtually all advocacy-related activity. In place of this language, the new guidelines assert that "there are occasions when tikkun olam, the healing of our world, may most effectively be achieved by taking collective action."

Just how will things be better at Adat if we adopt the proposed new rules?

First: the congregation will be given the opportunity to discuss--and, yes, to argue about--what the values it espouses as a congregation mean in the real world. The new guidelines are explicitly designed to insure that these discussions will both educate and, where possible, build consensus around proposed issues. Second, the congregation will have the opportunity to act, in concert, and as a unified body, on those public issues for which there is broad-based support. We hope and genuinely expect to see a significant increase in congregational energy as we find ways to become advocates for those issues we care about most.

How would the new rules work in practice? In other words: when someone says "Adat needs to take a position on X," what happens from there?

The precise answer to this question is best found in the "Procedures" attachment to the new guidelines, but here is a quick summary:

> **1**. A member (or group of members) convinces the Social Action Committee (SAC), the Israel Connections Committee (ICC), or a member of the clergy that the congregation as a whole should take a public stand on a particular policy issue.
>
> **2**. In most cases, a draft congregational position will then be written—or we may simply be seeking to endorse the position or statement of another group (JCRC, CMMC, etc.)--and

those advocating for this position will endeavor educate the congregation on this issue (via the Adat Shalom website, the listserv, the Scroll, and via open and well publicized community meetings).

3. All feedback received will be collected, summarized and presented to the SAC (or the ICC for Israel-related issues), a member of the clergy and the Vice President for Programming. If this group agrees that the proposal has indeed gained "broad-based congregational support" with a "minimum of deep-seated opposition," the issue is deemed ready for Board consideration.

4. The board will consider the proposal, including the documentation and summary of feedback, as well as commentary on how the proposal takes into account the diversity of feedback received and a statement explaining how Jewish/Reconstructionist values support the proposal.

5. The proposal will be adopted if 2/3 of the entire board, or 80% of the board members in attendance, vote in favor. Adopted resolutions can be rescinded at any time by a simple majority of the board, and, to stay in force, each congregational position must be re-approved by a majority of the board every three years.

Does allowing the congregation to take occasional public policy positions increase the likelihood of dividing members along political lines?

We don't think so. The Board procedures contain serious consultation and content requirements before the clergy or the Social Action Committee can bring a resolution to the Board. They also raise the Board percentage needed for approval of issue-oriented resolutions. If every member of Adat Shalom is committed to respecting the right of others to think and believe differently, then we should be able to take positions on public policy issues now and again without dividing or splintering the congregation (particularly in light of the supermajority requirement for passage). We will seek to accommodate valid concerns and differences wherever possible. We have codified a checklist for consensus-building and approval. For example, the SAC and clergy may only bring forward resolutions that have "broad-based community support," they need to share with the Board "all community feedback" on the issue, the procedures state that "at open community fora, people on all sides of the issue shall be given an opportunity to state their views," and all resolutions must have Jewish/Reconstructionist theological support. The Board would then have to approve the resolution by a supermajority: 80% of those present or two-thirds of the board, whichever is greater.

But even after all that, might there not be some people that disagree?

There doubtless will be. The goal here is to move to an inclusive process in which everybody is heard, as opposed to banning a realm of activity because consent might not be unanimous. In our congregational Statement of Principles, we place an emphasis on collective social justice efforts. The proposed guidelines set up a mechanism whereby Adat Shalom, as a community, after refection and consensus-building, could act on the values articulated in our statement of principles. The new guidelines simply allow a substantial supermajority of the congregation to act on issues where the community, after reflection, discussion and consensus-building, find it important and appropriate to speak in one voice.

Is there a legal problem with advocacy?

The short answer is no. There is a legal ban on 501(c)(3) non-profit corporations (like Adat Shalom) from endorsing candidates for elected office or devoting a significant proportion of its resources to lobbying. The new Board procedures explicitly state that "the Board will not take any action that will likely result in disqualifying the synagogue for favorable tax treatment pursuant to Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3) or any other similar federal, state, or local law." Everything the board does is evaluated by legal counsel and these resolutions and actions would be no exception.

Mishkan Shalom Statement of Principles

http://www.mishkan.org

('The following statement was adopted as the founding principles of Mishkan Shalom at community meetings in July 1988. This initial statement will be discussed during 5749, the first year of our community, and revised for style and emphasis in a democratic communal process from March -May 1989. Mishkan Shalom welcomes all who share the values articulated in this document.)

עַל שְׁלשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד:
עַל הַתּוֹרָה, וְעַל הָעֲבוֹדָה,
וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים
(אָבוֹת פֶּרֶק א)

ON THREE THINGS THE WORLD RESTS:
ON STUDY, PRAYER AND ACTS OF CARING
(Avot, 1:2)

Mishkan Shalom is an activist, spiritual community of Jews committed to the integration of the three primary areas of Jewish life: *Avodah* (Prayer), *Torah* (Study), and *G'milut Hasadim/Tikkun Olam (Acts* of Caring and Repair of the World). Through prayer we seek to infuse our lives with the Divine Presence and with *K'dushah* (holiness). Through study we seek to enhance our understanding of our tradition and the ways in which its teachings and insights may inspire our ethical and spiritual growth. Through acts of caring and repair we seek to transform our world so that it reflects the divine values of justice and compassion.

עֲבוֹדָה

Avodah (Prayer, Spiritual life)

לְעָבְדוֹ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם
(דְּבָרִים יא"יג)
וְכִי יֵשׁ עֲבוֹדָה בַּלֵּב? זוֹ תְּפִילָה
(סִפְרֵי דְּבָרִים מ"א)

TO SERVE YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART
(Deuteronomy 11:13)
WHAT IS SERVICE OF THE HEART? IT IS PRAYER.
(Sifre Deuteronomy)

Our relationship to God orients and governs all of our activity. We seek to create an environment that will nurture heartfelt prayer *(avodat halev)* that will help us in our quest for God. In the prayers of our tradition, we express our yearning for an abiding connection with the Divine *(d'vekut)* and our thankfulness for what is miraculous in the world and in our everyday lives *(al nisecha shebechol yom imanu).* We seek to experience the original power and passion of traditional prayers by connecting them to our daily lives.

Striving to integrate tradition and innovation, we seek to deepen our understanding of the siddur and to expand the ways in which both traditional and new prayers, blessings, and rituals express our spiritual selves. New prayers, creative rituals, poetry, and music written or organized by our members enrich our liturgical expression.

In our community there are many different ways of understanding God. Our synagogue is a safe place to share our faith and our doubt, a place where we can ask questions and learn from one another. In our prayer we emphasize and seek to integrate a naturalist/humanist theology that sees God as a power within ourselves and nature and a theology of transcendence that sees God as the mystery that is present in the universe. The first inspires us to be aware of the God within us and to live lives that are reflective of the divine. The second inspires us to experiences of transcendence, of connection with the Unknowable, with the Mystery that lies beyond us.

While the traditional liturgy fails to recognize the experience of women, our community is committed to a feminist reconstruction of Judaism. Toward this end, we are committed to reclaiming feminist images from our tradition, including new prayers and rituals which reflect the experience of women in our liturgy, using female God language, and empowering women to take religious leadership.

Our prayer life must be connected to study and action. It must bring holiness into our lives and help us to transform our own lives and our society. It is our pursuit of godliness that impels us to *repair* the world so that the words at the end of the Alenu are fulfilled: "and on that day God will be one and His name one."

תּוֹרָה
Torah (Study)

תַּלְמוּד תּוֹרָה כְּנֶגֶד כֻּלָּם
(פֵּאָה א,א)

THE STUDY OF TORAH IS EQUAL TO THEM ALL. (Mishnah Peah 1:1)

We are a community committed to learning. We wish to connect with the sacred values of our heritage, the Torah, and other religious texts of the Jewish people from all periods and places. We recognize the central position of the sacred Jewish texts in our search for enduring values, as well as the importance of Jewish history and culture for gaining insight into these values. At the same time, we recognize that the study of non-Jewish sources is vital for a full appreciation of the meaning of Jewish texts and values in the modern world. Through our study, we seek to be full participants as knowledgeable Jews in a free exchange of ideas with all peoples.

The study of Torah is central in enabling us to pursue a just world. Torah teaches us our obligation not only to act, but to realize how much is in our power to change. Though much of our tradition was written in a setting very different from our own, it nevertheless has a wisdom and urgent message that speaks to our situation today. Torah gives us insights into problems that we can see, yet also helps us to see what we have closed our eyes to.

As well as leading to action, study enriches and deepens our prayers and religious life. Knowledge of Jewish languages, history, and literature enables us to understand, reform and recreate traditional practices and to maintain our connection to the Torah as a living document.

These goals that we seek for ourselves are also those that we seek for our children. We will strive to create an environment where adults and children can share in the joy of learning together and from one another. We hope that through study, we will be a community of teachers as well as learners, for *'lamad vilo limade ayn lecha hevel gadol mizeh"* ("to learn and not to teach, there is no greater vanity than this") (Leviticus Rabbah, 22:1).

גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים/תִּיקּוּן עוֹלָם

G'milut Hasadim/Tikkun Olam (Acts of Caring and Repair of the World)

לְתַקֵּן עוֹלָם בְּמַלְכוּת שַׁדַּי
(סִידּוּר)

TO REPAIR THE WORLD SO THAT IT REFLECTS THE KINGDOM OF GOD (DIVINE VALUES). (Siddur)

The *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* requires both *G'milut Hasadim* and *Tikkun Olam. G'milut Hasadim* refers to those acts of loving-kindness, generosity and helpfulness that come from the caring heart of a nurturing community. We will support one another as we face life's passage, sanctifying important moments in our lives within the framework of our shared Jewish tradition.

Tikkun Olam refers to the imperative to repair the world, so that it reflects the divine values of justice *(tzedek),* compassion *(hesed),* and peace (shalom). Our ethic as a people is grounded in our collective memory of slavery and exodus, oppression and liberation. The Torah repeatedly emphasizes that our experience as slaves teaches us that we have a special responsibility to the stranger and the powerless, "You shall not oppress the stranger for you know the experience of the stranger having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt." The Torah creates an Exodus morality that sees the the Jewish people as a covenanted people, bound together by a common commitment to be an ethical nation, a people in the image of God. This morality requires us to oppose the enslavement and subjugation of others and to fulfill *mitzvot* that help transform the structures of oppression.

Our historical experience of victimization has reinforced this moral commitment as an essential part of our collective *consciousness as* Jews. After the Holocaust, the Biblical commandment "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" assumes a new and urgent meaning. As a people *who* suffered so much as a result of the indifference and passivity of others, we must actively oppose injustice and oppression wherever it occurs. To be neutral on issues of justice is to side with the oppressor. Our passion for justice must be applied not only to Jews but to all peoples. If we are not for ourselves who will be for us; if we are only for ourselves, what are we?

This moral tradition, and the linking of *G'milut Hasadim* and *Tikkun Olam,* guides us individually and collectively in the expression of our activism. Currently, Mishkan Shalom joins with other spiritually-based communities in the movement to provide sanctuary to Central American refugees. Similarly, our moral commitments and our sense of peoplehood impel us to oppose anti-Semitism wherever it exists, and to support the struggle of Soviet Jews for cultural and religious freedom and the freedom to emigrate. This work combines the. compassionate care of the victims of oppression and racism with a challenge to the political and economic forces that perpetuate suffering and injustice. We join with other individuals and communities in the work of Tikkun Olam.

As a community of faith we are often challenged in our ability to repair and transfom *(tikkun)* a broken and unjust world. We hope that we will have the faith and courage to be such a voice in the Jewish community and the community at large.

Israel

צִיּוֹן בְּמִשְׁפָּט תִּפָּדֶה
(יְשַׁעְיָה פֶּרֶק א)

ZION SHALL BE REDEEMED IN JUSTICE. (ISAIAH 1:27)

The state of Israel is filled with symbols and hopes for Jews everywhere: it is a link with the covenantal relationship between God and the people, a vibrant center of Jewish culture, and a haven from persecution for Jews from many countries. We are dedicated to the survival of Israel as an independent Jewish state in which Jews can live in dignity, continue and revive their traditions, and shape their own future. Our need to see a secure Israel, however, must not blind us to the suffering of the Palestinians, who also have ties to the land. The perpetuation of this suffering violates the Jewish commitments to justice and. compassion. Jews and Palestinians must recognize and support one another's rights to *national self-determination* in the land they share and revere. Without this, there can be no peace and no security for either people. We therefore support those groups and individuals within Israel *who* are working for a just end to the conflict and a long-term solution based upon mutual recognition.

Community Process:

אֵין הַתּוֹרָה נִקְנִית אֶלָּא בַּחֲבוּרָה
(בְּרָכוֹת סג)

THE TORAH CANNOT BE ACQUIRED EXCEPT IN FELLOWSHIP.
(Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 60b)

As a community dedicated to Tikkun Olam, we acknowledge that repair of the world begins with ourselves, that our community should be a model of the world we wish to create. We thus seek to be a community that embraces those Jews among us whom the Torah and the Jewish community have rejected or made invisible: gay men and lesbians, the unmarried, the poor, the disabled, the elderly, Jews by choice, the unlearned. We *also* strive to be a feminist community, one that empowers women, and that creates a process in which all people will feel welcome to contribute, to learn, and to teach. Mishkan Shalom welcomes all Jews and partners of Jewish congregants who share our values and our aspirations to a full Jewish life in a just world.

We encourage our members to take responsibility for congregational life and for the ongoing process that gives shape to that life. At the same time, we recognize the special position of the rabbi as a spiritual leader who stimulates and guides us in our striving towards a fuller and more integrated Jewish life. It is the rabbi's responsibility to apply the ethical teachings of Judaism to issues of current concern in an atmosphere of open discussion and debate. The relationship between the congregation and the rabbi is one of mutual respect based on shared responsibilities.

JRF Teen-Parent Week of Service

http://jrf.org/tikkun-JRF

A Tikkun Olam Project: Week of Service

For teams of Post B'nai Mitzvah teens and their parents who wish to provide service work to a local community

August 10-15, 2008
Camp JRF in South Sterling, Pa

Post-B'nai Mitzvah teens and their parents are invited to share a week working together to make a difference. Space is limited! Enrollment is currently open for 20-30 adult and teen pairs, post-B'nai Mitzvah ages 13+ (teams may include one or two parents). You will live for a week in active, participatory community, connecting to local communities and providing much needed support and building work. We welcome your diverse skills and talents, including: carpentry, painting, meal planning, photography, team playing. Worker bees, educators, musicians and all others are welcome!

Other Service Learning links

- Programs run by the American Jewish World Service (AJWS)
  http://www.ajws.org/what_we_do/service_and_travel_opportunities/
- Programs run by Spark: the Center for Jewish Service Learning at the Jewish Funds for Justice (JFSJ)
  http://www.jewishjustice.org/jfsj.php?page=2.11
- How to Put Together a Tikkun Olam Family Work Project
  http://www.socialaction.com/families/WorkProjectManual.shtml
- Tikkun Olam Family Work Project Blog
  http://familytikkunolam.blogspot.com/
- El Salvador: Encountering Poverty and Possibility
  http://omer.jrf.org/week5_teaching2
- Living in Three Civilizations: A Jewish Delegation to Uganda
  http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=721

Kol Tzedek synagogue

http://www.kol-tzedek.org/

Kol Tzedek is a Reconstructionist Synagogue committed to creating a diverse and inclusive community. We cultivate the opportunity for people to experience Judaism through prayer, education, spirituality, and Jewish activism. We are dedicated to community building and tikkun olam, both within and beyond our local neighborhood.

→ http://www.kol-tzedek.org/media/exponent_first.pdf

Special Tzedek Shabbat - "Justice you shall pursue"

The Social Justice Committee of Kol Tzedek invites you to a Shabbat Service, Potluck and Conversation with special guest activist Margie Klein, Co-editor of "Righteous Indignation: a Jewish Call for Justice." This volume includes views of leading rabbis, intellectuals and activists both locally and nationally, exploring the relationship between Judaism and Social Justice. The conversation will focus on Reframing Environmental Responsibility as a Religious Priority in '08.

Friday, March 7, 2008 @ Studio 34

Kabbalat Shabbat Services & Potluck Dinner and Study with Scholar-in-Residence Margie Klein, co-editor of Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Call for Justice

6:30pm - Kabbalat Shabbat Services with drash by Margie Klein
7:45pm - Vegetarian Potluck Shabbat Dinner with text study

Margie Klein is coming to Kol Tzedek and a few other Philly synagogues to talk about our sacred Jewish commitment to justice and the about religious progressive organizing around the '08. Margie is founder and director of Moishe House Boston: Kavod Jewish Social Justice House and a student at the Rabbinical College of Hebrew College. Margie is the founder of Project Democracy, a program that mobilized 97,000 students to vote in the 2004 election.

For more information, email justice@kol-tzedek.org.

Urban Edge Shabbat Dinner
Discussion on Greening Kol Tzedek
April 25, 7 pm

Recycling? Reusable dishes? Local food? There are many steps we could take to make our synagogue's practices more environmentally sustainable. We want to start with something feasible, even if it's small. This will be an open discussion to gauge what members are interested in undertaking. Please come share your ideas and help us plan. If you can, please bring a vegetarian potluck dish.

Menschlekeit Matters - What is it?

http://www.kehillatisrael.org/

To be a *mensch* in our tradition is to be a good person, a whole person, a person worthy of merit. Adapting the nationally recognized program, CHARACTER COUNTS, Kehillat Israel is developing a Jewish program called Menschlekeit Matters, which is the foundation for our values-based education programs.

SHISHAH AMUDIM: THE SIX PILLARS OF CHARACTER (MIDDOT) PLUS KEDUSHAH

1. EMUNAH: Trustworthiness

Be honest • Don't deceive, cheat or steal • Be reliable — do what you say you'll do • Have the courage to do the right thing • Build a good reputation • Be loyal — stand by your family, friends and country

Do not bear false witness against your neighbor. (Exodus/*Shemot* 20:17)

2. KAVOD: Respect

Treat others with respect; follow the Golden Rule • Be tolerant of differences • Use good manners, not bad language • Be considerate of the feelings of others • Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone • Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements

Honor your father and mother that you may long endure on the land that Adonai, your God has assigned to you. (Exodus/*Shemot* 20:12)

3. AHARAYUT: Responsibility

Do what you are supposed to do • Persevere: • Use self-control • Be self-disciplined • Think before you act — consider the consequences • Be accountable for your choices

If I am not for myself, who will be for me. If I am only for myself, what am I. If not now, when. (Hillel, *Pirkei Avot*)

4. TZEDEK: Fairness

Play by the rules • Take turns and share • Be open-minded; listen to others • Don't take advantage of others • Don't blame others carelessly

Justice, justice, you shall pursue. (Deuteronomy/*Devorim* 16:20)

5. HESED: Caring

Be kind • Be compassionate and show you care • Express gratitude • Forgive others • Help people in need

Love your neighbor as yourself. (Leviticus/*Vayikra* 19:18)

6. KEHILLAH: Citizenship
Do your share to make your school and community better • Cooperate • Get involved in community affairs • Stay informed; vote • Be a good neighbor • Obey laws and rules • Respect authority • Protect the environment.

Do not separate yourself from the community. (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 2:5)"

OVERARCHING *MIDDAH*: *KEDUSHAH*: Holiness

We are God's partner in creating holiness. Within a Jewish framework, all of the pillars support a holy structure within which we can lead our lives.

You shall be holy, for I your God am holy. (Leviticus/*Vayikra* 19:1)
Kol Yisrael Aravim Zeh L'zeh - All Israel is responsible for one another.

Menschlekeit Matters

A conversation with Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben

http://www.kehillatisrael.org/education.php?id=36

Parent: Why did you decide to start the Menschlekeit Matters program?

Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben: The Menschlekeit Matters program grew out of conversations I had with Michael Josephson - who created the Josephson Institute of Ethics - about the impact of religious school education on the individual behavior of children who go through KI's educational program. Every few years the Josephson Institute puts out a "Report Card on America's Youth," a survey that reflects some specific categories of ethical behavior the Institute feels can be measured. They ask kids questions such as, "How often do you lie to teachers or parents," or "How often do you steal from stores, cheat on tests, solve conflict with violence," and the like. These categories usually relate to concrete, obvious ethical challenges and behaviors that kids tend to do.

One of the results from a past study was that there appeared to be NO significant difference in behavior between kids who go to public schools and kids who go to parochial schools (studies done largely in Catholic schools.) Michael Josephson is a KI member and his girls go to religious school here. Michael challenged me asking, "Shouldn't it matter? If a kid goes to KI, goes through the religious school and learns Jewish values, shouldn't it make a difference in his or her behavior?" His question, directed specifically to me as the Rabbi at Kehillat Israel was, "Shouldn't I, as the rabbi, be able to predict or assume that a child who goes through KI's full religious school experience would tend to be more ethical

in their behavior than someone who has no religious education?" More to the point, "Shouldn't I desire this to be the case, or is religious education simply a matter of how to say prayers, how to speak Hebrew, how to do the rituals of Jewish life?"

The answer could have been, "No, that is not what we're about." We could just be teaching kids to get through bar/bat mitzvahs, learn to read the prayers, know what blessings go with what, be able to recite the Four Questions at a Passover Seder, and develop an historical sense of the Jewish people and where we came from.

But, the answer that inspired me was Yes. I do want the educational experience here to matter in the daily lives and ethical values of our families. One of the biggest challenges of Jewish education is that, with 3000-4000 years of Jewish civilization, we are trying get across a lot of information in a very limited time frame. Certainly we want to teach children how to do all those things needed to live a Jewish life. But, I decided, it was also true that we are a values-based and religious-centered civilization. To me, what matters is the kind of person you become. That's why I believe that we at Kehillat Israel should be willing to take on the challenge of imparting an ethical education to our youth and adults. If not us, who will?

I have spent a lot of time in my own past studying ethics, character and values education, (I have a Masters Degree is Education and a Ph.D. in Religion) and have come to understand that everyone goes through stages of moral development and kids will be kids. They tend to act out and push limits whether or not they are in a religious setting. But it ought to be that the religious education at KI from preschool through adulthood should reinforce the values that will help make our children the kind of people who will bring godliness into the world. Judaism is a values grounded religious civilization. We understand God as the ultimate role model of compassion, justice, caring, love - the values we want to emulate in our lives.

So, we partnered with the Josephson Institute, which is known for creating the Character Counts program with its 6 pillars of character - Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, Citizenship. The Josephson Institute has been doing something similar with other religious traditions, such as the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles which has 100,000 students (we have 600.) I realized that we have the opportunity to create a Jewish version of Character Counts which could then be replicated in other liberal and progressive synagogues across the country or the world. We have already started the process.

Menschlekeit Matters is a teacher-training challenge where we have taken the model of the 6 pillars of character from Character Counts and transliterated them into Hebrew values. We do use terms that relate to the Character Counts 6 pillars (Emunah-trustworthiness, Kavod-respect, Ahariyut-responsibility, Tzedek-fairness, Hesed-caring, Klal Israel-citizenship) but, very importantly, we have added a seventh, Kedushah, or Holiness. In Jewish civilization everything is based on Holiness, which is not one of the pillars in the Character Counts but is specifically a Jewish value.

Parent: That touches on the next question. Other than using Jewish names for the pillars, what are the differences between the Menschlekeit Matters program and Character Counts?

Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben: One of the profound differences is that Character Counts is a secular program aiming to be as universal as possible. We, in Menschlekeit Matters, are discussing authentically Jewish values using Jewish tradition, history and writings as material. There is overlap with Character Counts in terms of general ethics in the community but Menschlekeit Matters grows out of thousands of years of Jewish tradition. The fact that Western civilization has, in many ways, adopted Jewish values is something to be proud of but should not overshadow the importance that these values are authentically from Jewish tradition.

Menschlekeit Matters values can be visualized as a menorah. The candlesticks are like the different pillars but the seventh value, Kedushah, holiness, is the entire base. In Jewish life and thought everything is grounded on holiness. In Jewish thought, the goal of life is not happiness, but holiness, of bringing a sense of holiness into the world.

Parent: How will Menschlekeit Matters affect the Religious School curriculum?

Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben: This is not just about the Religious School, but will affect all of Kehillat Israel. We want to transform the entire curriculum of the Religious School over the next two years so that it is reinvigorated into a values-centered curriculum. Students will continue to learn Jewish life skills, Torah, history and the Torah stories of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Rachel, Leah, Moses and so forth. They will learn about holidays and life cycle events. But the Menschlekeit Matters component will connect our history to those inspiring values that help the children and adults of today become the best they can be and it does this in a specifically Jewish context.

We hope the Religious School students will learn to associate Torah stories with particular values. For example, when Abraham was hospitable to strangers, the association might be with the Jewish value of Kavod, respect, one of the 'pillar' values of how to treat other human beings. We hope to create a matrix of values that relates to every aspect of Jewish life.

Our far-ranging goal is that the Menschlekeit Matters program will infuse the entire community of KI. This is not just about teachers and students. It is also about supporting parents in the often intimidating position of being a role model. We are expanding the family education activities of KI (a Parenting Series, parallel adult education and other activities) so that ultimately parents and kids are interacting together within a framework that we are helping to create.

Ultimately, kids learn their values at home and the reality is that the Religious School is only a part time adventure in Jewish learning. Children learn primary values from primary

role models, their parents, and they are learning 100% of the time. You don't get to decide if you are a role model, you just are, as a parent.

We want parents to feel comfortable, feel grounded in Jewish traditions and values, to feel empowered as role models. Often, parents tell me it is scary to be a parent - you realize you have this tremendous impact on your kids when they are growing up. You think about your own failures, lacks, not feeling so competent, but all you can do is the best you can do. And KI, with the entire scope of the Menschlekeit Matters, is growing in its potential to be an even more active support system.

From the classrooms to celebrations, leadership opportunities, the Board, or committees, through all interactions at KI, all these activities should reflect Jewish values. I want KI to be a spiritual values life laboratory that helps and provides a place where kids and adults, parents and families together can experience what it is to live a life that is infused with these values.

Parent: This is quite an undertaking.

Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben: You are your character. Habitual decisions makes the person. You can have all the best thoughts in the world, but you are what you do, how you act is how people experience you in the world. The quality of your life is directly the result of the quality of your choices. Our goal is to help people be able to make the right kind of choices in life, and help kids make the right choices, and to know that life is filled with constant opportunities. There are challenges to making choices; choosing to do the right thing, or to do the easy thing, or to even know the difference.

Parent: Are you hoping to stimulate family discussions or are you imposing values on people?

Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben: No, we are not imposing this on anyone. We are trying to clarify for people what we consider to be authentic Jewish values. We hope to illuminate how these values already function in families' lives and that there are already many teachable moments, many opportunities to reflect the values we feel underlie Jewish life. These are authentic Jewish values that we are not imposing, but that we think are necessary. The Jewish tradition, for thousands of years has asked and tried to answer, "How do you build a society that is just, compassionate, loving and caring in which you can take care of those most vulnerable and can also celebrate the successes of life?"

For example, Kavod - to honor or respect. The 10 Commandments begin with Kavod, as in Honor your Mother and Father. What does this mean to a child? Well first, they watch how you act and speak to your own parents.

Citizenship - Klal Yisrael - what does it mean to be part of a society, to be a friend? When they watch how you treat and speak about your friends, they are modeling and learning about the value of friendship.

Another example is the value of Emunah- trustworthiness, integrity. I don't think anyone is arguing that this is an imposed, external value - to be trustworthy. People should believe our word is our word. How do parents do this with children? The simple way is that when you tell them you will be home at 10:00 pm, be home at 10:00 pm. Otherwise how can you expect them to do the same thing when they have a curfew as teenagers, if they have not experienced trustworthiness from you?

Sometimes people are uncomfortable about talking on the subject of God, but in Jewish life, these are the qualities always associated with God, the ultimate role model. This is predicate theology. How do you bring godliness into your family, into the world? By your actions, by being trustworthy, having faith, showing responsibility and acting upon other values considered important that make the world work and improve the world. There are an endless number of values. We could have picked 30 other values but it is easier and more effective to create a powerful program based on Character Counts and the 6 pillars (plus Holiness) that already exits.

Parent: Then, how were these particular values, pillars, originally chosen by Character Counts and the Josephson Institute?

Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben: The Josephson Institute started with a think tank. I wasn't part of the process but I understand that over several days, they brought together a variety of thinkers from different disciplines and backgrounds from across the country. They wrestled with the question of identifying fundamental values, choosing what values to teach. These six pillars were chosen because they resonated with people as universal; that is they are not specific to a particular religion, the whole community can understand and relate to them and they are actionable - something that can be acted out in society and that kids can learn and experience as concrete behavior choices. Children could know that when they behave in a certain way (trustworthiness, respect, etc) or make certain decisions, they would be demonstrating good character. That is how Character Counts chose its pillars.

But, here is an example of how Menschlekeit Matters would develop one of those pillars, the value of citizenship, through a specifically Jewish lens. What does it mean to be a good citizen in the classroom, or in civic life? We have this notion in Judaism called Israel, which means the Jewish community, the Jewish people. We understand that one of the most important values is Hebrew phrase, "Kol Yisrael aravim zeh le'zeh", that all the Jewish people are responsible for each other. This speaks to responsibility and also refers to spiritual citizenship. It means to feel a sense of obligation, responsibility and the need to participate in the lives of other people. Judaism has a notion that there is no such thing as an innocent bystander because if you are standing by while something is happening to someone else, you are not innocent.

We can't sit by and watch what is going on in Darfur, namely, another genocide. Since the Holocaust, we Jews have been the ones saying, "Never again, never again,." It means

more than never again to just us. It means "Never again" to anyone, as in "Remember what it was like to be a stranger, remember what is was like to be a slave," which is the single most often expressed commandment in the entire Torah. Every time we celebrate Passover and remember the Exodus, we are asserting a Jewish value of communal responsibility.

Parent: I can understand ethics from a religious standpoint, especially when I agree to a 'social contract' by being involved in a religion. The Josephson Institute believes the Six Pillars of Character are "consensus ethical values," universalities. Can universal ethical values actually be defined by any person or group?

Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben: Maybe some people don't adhere to consensus ethics, but I am a man of faith. I have faith. I believe you have to start somewhere. I believe, ultimately, there is more good in the world than bad, that there are universal values and ethics and that Judaism certainly teaches them. The reason the Torah starts with God creating the world and not with God's relationship with Abraham, (who is specifically Jewish), is to teach that when we talk about God, we talk about the God of everyone. We are not discussing just our own personal God and our own personal values. And the God, theoretically, who gave the Jews the Torah, 10 Commandments and all the mitzvot, this is the God of everyone. Therefore universal values exist and we happen to express them in our uniquely Jewish way.

The world will work if everyone expresses and lives these values in their lives, regardless of their particular religious (or even lack of religious) label. We are doing a Jewish version of Character Counts because we believe the Character Counts values are in line with, and grow out of, Jewish values. We hope to be empowering our students, parents and adults with the intellectual, emotional and spiritual tools that will allow them to live their lives in an ethical and moral way, and with an understanding of the authentic Jewish underpinnings to the process.

Menschlekeit Matters: Monthly Amudim List

Forty-Nine Value Based Lessons: July 25, 2007

Month	*Amud*/Pillar	*Middah*/Value	Associated Holiday
September	*Emunah* Trustworthiness	Partners with God in Creation	High Holy Days
October	*Hesed* Caring	*Hahnasat Orhim* Welcome Guests	Sukkot
November	*Kedushah* Holiness *Hesed* Caring	*Hiddur HaMitzvah* Beautifying a Mitzvah/Creating Sacred Space *Hoda'ah* Gratitude	Shabbat Thanksgiving
December	*Kavod* Respect	*Sever Panim Yafot* Show Your Best Side	Hanukah
January	*Aharayut* Responsibility	*Ba'al Tashhit* Do Not Destroy our Natural Resources	Tu Bishevat
February	*Tzedek* Fairness	*Shem Tov* Earn a Good Name	President's Day/ Leadership
March	*Aharayut* Responsibility	Ometz Lev Courage to do the Right Thing	Purim
April	*Tzedek* Fairness	Shmiat Ha'Ozen Be a Good Listener (*Ve-Higadetah Le-vanehah) Tell your children…*	Passover
May	*Kehillah* Community	*Tikkun Olam* Repair the World	Mitzvah Day
** June / No RS	*Kedushah* Holiness	*Talmud Torah* Study is Sacred	Shavuot

Other Tikkun Olam Resources

- Suggested Ingredients to Synagogue Social Justice Initiatives, by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston
  http://jrf.org/showres&rid=234

- Synagogue 3000 report on "Synagogues and Social Justice: Creating Sustainable Change Within and Beyond the Congregation"
  http://www.synagogue3000.org/synagoguestudies.html

- Report from *Tzedek Yalin Bah/Justice Shall Dwell There:* A National Conference on Judaism and Social Justice, hosted by the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, April 10-11, 2005
  http://www.shalomctr.org/files/JCUAreportback.pdf

- *Judaism and Justice* (book), by Rabbi Sid Schwarz
  http://www.rabbisid.org/

- Integrating Spirituality and Social Justice, by Melanie Schneider
  http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=673

- Political Activism as a Form of Prayer, by Christine Balka
  http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=530

- Projecting Our Values into the Political World, by Jane Susswein
  http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=750

- Rabbis and the God of Transformation, by Rabbi Brian Walt
  http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=695

- Reflection As An Activist Practice, by Rabbi David Rosenn
  http://jrf.org/showres&rid=16

- The Spiritual Dimension of Justice, text and songs, by Rabbi Shawn Zevit
  http://jrf.org/showres&rid=481

- Tikkun Olam audio program with Brian Walt and Shawn Zevit
  http://jrf.org/showres&rid=137

- Tikkun Olam links for educators
  http://jrf.org/showres&rid=156

- Tzedakah and Social Action, by Jeffery Dekro and Betsy Tessler
  http://jrf.org/showrt&rid=644

JRF Resolutions and External Affiliations

- Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL)
  http://www.coejl.org

  JRF Resolution on the Environment
  http://jrf.org/files/RESOLUTION%20ON%20THE%20ENVIRONMENT.doc

- Conference of Presidents of American Jewish Organizations
  http://www.conferenceofpresidents.org/

- The Informed Meetings Exchange (INMEX) - Rights of hotel workers
  http://www.forward.com/articles/check-out-working-conditions-before-checking-in-fo/

- International Association for Religious Freedom
  http://www.iarf.net/

- International Jewish Social Justice Network
  http://www.koldor.org/

- The Jewish Coalition Responding to HIV/AIDS in Africa
  http://jrf.org/to/resolution-hivaids-africa.html

- The Jewish Council on Public Affairs (JCPA)
  http://www.jewishpublicaffairs.org/

- The Jewish Coalition for Disaster Relief
  http://www.jdc.org/jcdr_main.html

- Mazon – A Jewish Response to Hunger
  http://www.mazon.org/

- The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
  http://www.rcrc.org/

- Secure Communities Network
  http://www.scnus.org/

- The World Union for Progressive Judaism
  http://wupj.org/