THE RABBI-CONGREGATION RELATIONSHIP:

A VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

REPORT OF

THE RECONSTUCTIONIST COMMISSION

ON THE ROLE OF THE RABBI

JANUARY 2001/TEVET 5761

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Report of the Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE RABBI-CONGREGATION RELATIONSHIP: A VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The Report of the Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi

PREFACE

The Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi was convened in response to concerns within the Reconstructionist movement that the rabbi-congregation relationship was in need of rethinking. The Commission, at its first meeting, approved the following Mission Statement to serve as guidance for its work:

> The mission of the Role of the Rabbi Commission is to articulate a Reconstructionist vision of the role of the rabbi; to offer guidance as well as guidelines with regard to rabbi-congregation relations; to address the concerns of the rabbi as person as well as professional; and to suggest models, policies, and procedures which can further the vision we endorse.

This report embodies the vision that emerged from the work of the Commission. It is a vision of what the rabbi-congregation relationship can become. The Commission was not established to set policy but to offer new perspectives, guidance and suggestions. The report is thus not a definition of official Reconstructionist policy, nor is it binding on the three arms of the movement -- the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA), the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (JRF), and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC).

The report does not focus on pronouncements, policies and procedures as much as it offers perspectives, principles and proposals. Insofar as it deals *in general* with relationships that are always lived *in particular*, each congregation and rabbi will, we hope, engage in a sustained study and discussion of the report and assess its suggestions and implications in light of their own relationship and congregational community.

The wide variety of Reconstructionist congregations and havurot -- in terms of longevity, size, staffing and structure, for example -- suggests that different communities will make different decisions in terms of implementing recommendations. Reconstructionist congregations are invited and challenged to interpret and apply the insights and ideas that comprise the vision articulated in this report, as are the RRA, JRF and RRC.

There are, however, core components of the vision of the rabbi-congregation relationship which formed the basis for the specific recommendations found in the report. These are presented in abbreviated form in the Executive Summary and developed in depth in the full report. In order to understand how and why specific suggestions and observations were reached, one should read and study the entire document. The systemic way in which the report recommends looking at the rabbi-congregation relationship is reflected in the analysis and organization of the report itself.

In November of 2000, the Boards of the JRF and RRA, and the Executive Committee of the RRC, all voted to endorse this report and recommend it to their constituencies as a resource, tool and guide. With this statement of support from the leadership of the Reconstructionist movement, the Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi presents this report to the Reconstructionist and general Jewish communities with the hope that the vision it represents will find a place in the spiritual communities that our rabbis and congregants cherish, nurture, sustain and support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is the result of the collaborative efforts of a dedicated and committed group of Reconstructionist rabbis, lay leaders, and professionals, each one a teacher, each one a student. Their devotion to the work of this Commission was consistent and constant. Extensive background reading and a series of two-day meetings over a period of two and a half years demanded full intellectual and emotional engagement.

There were also meals, homes and rides shared, along with changes in personal and professional lives that punctuated the passing of the shared seasons. The times we set aside for rituals, from the many versions of *Birkat Hamazon* (grace after meals) and *Tefilat Haderekh* (prayer for the journey) we offered to the moments we paused for one (or more) of us to say *Kaddish* as newly bereaved mourners, helped bond the members of the Commission.

For people to come to a common vision around the controversial and provocative topic of the role of the rabbi, some uncommon cooperation had to be assumed. Although each person was appointed by one of the arms of the Reconstructionist movement, from the beginning of our work everyone put aside constituency and turf issues and focused on common goals. Difficult discussions that often appeared destined to end in disagreement moved towards compromise and creativity because of the shared commitment to the possibilities inherent in the rabbi-congregation relationship.

To be sure, rabbis had a lot to say about what rabbis think, need and want, and our lay members were not reticent about advocating for issues they deemed central to their congregations and their members. But the commitment to listen as well as to hear, to be open to change while true to one's convictions, and always to act with respect, compassion and kindness made even our most controversial conversations opportunities for the learning of new Torah from each other.

In the words of the Torah, the vision presented in this report "is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say 'Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say 'Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it and impart it to us, that we may observe it?' No, this thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it." (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

Much of what is presented in this report may seem innovative, and much may appear to be simple common sense. The vision of this report emerged out of a combination of discovery and rediscovery -- of finding new models and contemporary perspectives and coupling them with the wisdom of tradition and insights derived from prior experience between rabbis and congregations.

A chair of a Commission cannot ask for anything more than the marvelous combination of insight, acumen, intelligence, empathy, good humor and good will that the members of this Commission brought to our shared work. To each of them I express my appreciation for their persistence and perseverance -- and for their willingness to allow me to guide us through complex issues towards the vision embodied in this report. As chair of the Commission, I had the responsibility for drafting, writing and revising the report. But the content is the result of the thinking, creativity and visioning of all the Commission members, who reviewed several earlier drafts. We discovered that what we were searching for was indeed "very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart."

I also want to thank the people whose support of the work of the Commission on the Role of the Rabbi was indispensable. These include Cynthia Palmer-Kenzner, my secretary at the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation in Evanston, Illinois, where I served as rabbi at the time the Commission began; and Linda Kaplan, the administrative assistant of the Reconstructionist

Rabbinical Association, where I now serve as Executive Director. They provided the support staffing for the Commission's copious copying, mailing and administrative functions as well as encouragement and good humor.

Dee Einhorn of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College worked tirelessly before each meeting to set up meals, meeting space and materials. Lisa Cohen at the RRC kept our modest finances in line.

A number of people from the Reconstructionist movement were kind enough to read early drafts of this report and offer extensive feedback which greatly contributed to the final product. On behalf of the Commission, I thank Rabbi Joel Alpert, Rabbi Dan Ehrenkrantz, Barbara Hirsh, Vickie Korey, Dr. Nancy Post, Moti Rieber and Rabbi Sidney Schwarz.

As we present this report to the Reconstructionist movement and the wider Jewish community, this well-known hasidic tale serves as a fitting invocation:

> Rabbi Hayim of Zans used to teach this story:
>
> A sojourner had been wandering about in a forest for several days, not knowing which was the right way out. Suddenly he saw someone approaching. His heart was filled with anticipation. "Now I will learn which is the right way," he thought. When they neared each other, he asked: "Please, tell me which is the right way out of this forest. I have been wandering about for several days."
>
> Said the other to him, "I do not know the way out either, for I too have been wandering about in here for many days. But this I can tell you: do not take the way I have been traveling, for that will lead you astray. *Now let us look for a new way together.*"

Rabbi Richard Hirsh, Chair
The Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi
January 2001 / Tevet 5761

THE RABBI-CONGREGATION RELATIONSHIP:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REPORT OF
THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST COMMISSION
ON THE ROLE OF THE RABBI

THE RABBI-CONGREGATION RELATIONSHIP: A VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The Report of the Reconstructionist Commission on the Role of the Rabbi

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The relationship between rabbi and congregation is ideally understood as a sacred covenant in which the partners share in the nurturance, guidance, planning and programming of the synagogue. As in any relationship, however, the best intentions, strongest commitments and agreement on shared values do not guarantee that the relationship will always run smoothly. As in any relationship, differences must be negotiated, compromises reached, and decisions made with which each partner may not always be in full agreement.

In recent years, relationships between rabbis and congregations have increasingly been subject to disruption and dissent. At a time when increasing numbers of North American Jews are eagerly undertaking significant commitments to Jewish study, Jewish observance and Jewish community, our congregations and rabbis are often unable to respond fully with their best resources. An inordinate amount of time and energy is being used in response to problems of the rabbi-congregation relationship.

Rabbis and rabbinical students increasingly indicate a reluctance to serve in congregational settings. They cite several common concerns: that the job is simply unmanageable; that boundaries between personal and professional time cannot be established; that the variety of roles they must fill creates unreasonable expectations and confusing standards of evaluation; that an absence of efficient and effective models of decision making, communication and leadership hinders their work.

Congregation leaders communicate concerns about dealing with the rabbi as an employee while also interacting with the rabbi as a spiritual leader, pastor, teacher and officiant; about how to understand the rabbi's role in the congregation's leadership,

decision making and authority structure; and about how to use fully the resources the rabbi brings to the congregation.

In response to these and related concerns, in January of 1998 the Reconstructionist movement convened the Commission on the Role of the Rabbi, comprised of representatives from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA), the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (JRF), and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC).

The Commission hoped to develop new models for the relationship between rabbis and congregations, and sought to provide practical advice, suggestions and strategies.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

The Report of the Commission addresses three key areas:

• A framework for thinking about the rabbi-congregation relationship, using Jewish values, conceptual categories and current leading trends in organizational and leadership theory and practice.

• An analysis of rabbinic roles, professional as well as personal, and new ways of understanding those roles.

• A program for building, maintaining and enhancing the rabbi-congregation relationship, with specific suggestions beginning with a rabbinic search and continuing through the time when the relationship ends and the rabbi leaves the congregation.

PART 1: FINDING A FRAMEWORK

• The first section of the report opens with a brief history of the rabbinate, placing the contemporary situation in historical context. As Reconstructionism views Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people, it is not surprising to discover that the institution of the rabbinate, and the roles of the

rabbi, have undergone considerable development over the past two millennia.

• Reconstructionism affirms the importance of working with Jewish concepts, categories and values, and using the wisdom and insights of tradition to help reconstruct Jewish life today. We seek consciously to use values-based decision making in our communities. Fundamental Jewish concepts like *brit* (covenant) and *kavod* (honor/dignity/respect) should guide the rabbi-congregation relationship. Jewish tradition yields many values and ideas that can help us think of the congregation or havurah as a sacred society.

• Living in two civilizations means being aware of and affected by trends, insights and information from the wider society. In recent years a number of fields, including family therapy, anthropology, communications and business have focused on systems theory as a helpful and comprehensive way of understanding how individuals and organizations interact and operate.

• Systems theory is a "way of thinking about how the whole is arranged, how its parts interact, and how the relationships between the parts can produce something new....any person or event stands in relationship to something. You cannot isolate anything and understand it...all parts interface and affect each other." (Peter Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, pp. 3-5) The systems approach is essential to understanding the vision presented in this report.

• Systems theory focuses on the interaction of the individual parts of a system -- in our case, a congregational system -- so that things are understood dynamically in their relationship *to* each other, rather than in isolation *from* each other.

• In the early years of the Reconstructionist movement, rabbis were often seen as "facilitators" and "resource people." In an attempt to avoid the priestly and authoritarian overtones of earlier rabbinic models, Reconstructionist rabbis did not see

themselves as leaders in the congregations they served, and many Reconstructionist congregations were reluctant to vest leadership in rabbis.

• There has been an evolution in the understanding of the role of the rabbi in Reconstructionist settings. Using a systems approach in which leadership is a valued and indispensable component of a congregational system, the report affirms that a rabbi can and should be *a* (not "the") leader, can and should be *an* (not "the") authority, and can and should play a leading role in congregational decision making.

• It would be incorrect to see this evolution as a restoration of traditional rabbinic roles, or as a repudiation of the long-standing Reconstructionist commitment to democratic decision making and lay-rabbinic partnership -- both of which the report affirms. The vision is of leadership as an activity of the congregational system in which the rabbi and the congregation leaders collaborate in helping move the congregation forward.

PART 2: THE ROLES OF THE RABBI

• Rabbis play a variety of roles in congregations, some formally defined and others informally assumed or understood. Certain basic categories, such as counselor, teacher and officiant at congregational and life-cycle rituals, are common to almost all settings. In individual situations, depending on the needs of the congregation and the proclivities of the rabbi, a whole series of additional roles may be in play.

• The complex nature of religious identification and community is often reflected in a series of informal and subliminal issues that influence the relationship of congregants and rabbis. Many of the conflicts that surface around the rabbi-congregation relationship reflect unspoken and unconscious assumptions and attitudes.

• Rabbis need to be actively involved in congregational decision making. Congregation leaders need to identify the areas in which the rabbi is vested with decision making authority. Rabbis and congregations working together need to be sensitive to the implications of decisions that affect the culture of a community, and make the processes by which such decisions are reached inclusive and comprehensive.

• Rabbis are intimately involved with religious policies and procedures. As these relate to and affect individuals, rabbis most often operate independently, although in consonance with congregational policies. When dealing with issues affecting the larger congregation, decisions can be made on a variety of levels -- committee, board, congregation. But rabbis play a key role in teaching and helping guide the congregation through the study and discussion necessary to formulate responses to issues of the congregation.

• In addition to the many roles they fulfill in service to the congregation, rabbis are also in the role of employee, with the congregation in the role of employer. Many of the tensions in the rabbi-congregation relationship arise around employee-employer issues: contracts, compensation and evaluation, to name a few.

• Rabbis and lay leaders can experience burnout. Rather than looking at this as a symptom of the individual only, burnout should be analyzed from a systems perspective. What in the congregational system is resulting in burnout, specifically in rabbinic burnout? How can the rabbinic workload be managed collaboratively, so that essential tasks are accomplished but reasonable boundaries on potentially boundary-less work are established?

• Congregations and rabbis need to examine common assumptions about rabbinic schedules, work and leisure time and adequate levels of staffing to make the workload of a congregational rabbi more realistic. In helping set reasonable

expectations, and in helping maintain boundaries between the rabbi's personal and professional life, the congregation empowers the rabbi to serve more effectively.

PART 3: PRACTICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE RABBI-CONGREGATION RELATIONSHIP

• The relationship between rabbi and congregation moves along a continuum, beginning with the application and interview, the initial negotiating and contracting, integration into the community and development of the relationship, contract renewal and continuation, and, at some point, the ending of the relationship. At each stage, specific steps can be taken to help strengthen the rabbi-congregation relationship; strengthening the relationship should be a continual mutual goal.

• Congregations conducting a rabbinic search should see this as an opportunity to assess the congregational system and examine its current needs, resources and priorities. This will help shape the rabbinic job description, and help identify what specific roles a new rabbi will play at this specific stage of the congregation's development.

• Job descriptions should reflect a shared process of rabbi and congregation, resulting in a document that reflects how the rabbi and congregation see their roles.

• Part-time rabbis need to work closely and carefully with congregation leaders to ensure that expectations as well as responsibilities are mutually agreed upon and communicated to the congregation.

• Negotiations and contracts are two areas where the employer-employee relationship is central. Congregations should approach negotiations and contracting with an awareness that rabbis are highly skilled and trained professionals; rabbis should be sensitive to the fiscal responsibilities of the board and financial realities of the congregation.

• Negotiating and contracting should be carried out in ways that strengthen the rabbi-congregation relationship. Both parties should be aware that protracted and difficult negotiations can have a lasting negative impact on the overall relationship.

• Congregations should work with the rabbi to help integrate her/him into the congregation, devoting appropriate energy and resources to this important task.

• Communication is the essential component for keeping the congregational system healthy, and for sustaining the rabbi-congregation relationship. Common channels of communication include the president-rabbi relationship and rabbi liaison committees.

• Evaluation should be seen as a helpful systemic tool that strengthens the rabbi-congregation relationship. Rather than focusing only on the rabbi, evaluations should see the rabbi in the context of the total congregational system. The congregation itself can be evaluated, so that volunteers, staff, committees, rabbi and the board are all reviewed in light of the congregation's mission and goals. Evaluations that proceed from a systems approach will focus on the interaction and functioning of the component parts of the congregational system.

• Rabbinic evaluations should not be seen as popularity contests or referendums on the rabbi's contract. They provide a channel of communication through which the rabbi and congregation leaders can assess the rabbi's work in relation to mutually agreed-upon goals.

• When the time comes for bringing the relationship between the rabbi and congregation to a close, steps should be taken to enable the congregational system to place in perspective and honor the contributions of the rabbi while preparing the congregation for the transition to new rabbinic leadership. While honoring the past and taking steps towards closure, the congregation and rabbi also need to focus on the future.

• The Reconstructionist leaders who served on the Role of the Rabbi Commission believe that relationships between rabbis and congregations stand in need of honest assessment, frank discussion, new perspectives and common commitment to change. They also believe that the steps towards crafting a healthier, happier and more productive relationship between rabbi and congregation are within the reach of every rabbi, congregation and havurah.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT

The North American Jewish community stands at a pivotal point as we enter the 21st century. Increasing numbers of Jews are seeking spiritual sustenance, authentic Torah learning and meaningful religious community. The best opportunity in generations now exists for large numbers of North American Jews to reengage their Jewish identity, rediscover their Jewish heritage and renew and reinvigorate Jewish learning and Jewish community.

The spiritual community embodied in our congregations and havurot holds out the hope and the promise for the future of North American Jewish life. And our rabbis, working together with lay leadership, hold the key to mobilizing and motivating the Jewish people so the promise can be fulfilled.

At this same moment, relationships between rabbis and congregations in North America are increasingly subject to disruption and dissent, and fraught with friction. Congregations in general, and large congregations in particular, have begun to experience difficulty filling rabbinic positions. Rabbinical schools have seen a decline in applications over the past few years, and the major seminaries have needed to invest new resources in recruitment.

A decreasing number of rabbis and rabbinical students, in all streams of North American Judaism, intend to seek positions in congregations. They cite concerns about schedule, boundaries of personal and professional life, employment security, compensation, the complex nature of the diverse responsibilities that comprise congregational work, and the consequences for physical and emotional health of being on-call at all times.

All these factors contribute to the growing reluctance of many rabbis to place themselves in congregational settings. For those who do seek congregational positions, a preference often emerges for smaller congregations, or for part-time congregational work.

The convergence of these trends -- a hunger for renewed Jewish engagement through synagogues and a resistance on the part of rabbis to serving in the congregational rabbinate -- suggests an urgency to the need to rethink and reshape the rabbi-congregation relationship and the role of the rabbi. The work of the congregational rabbi has evolved in ways that make the job simply overwhelming and unworkable for many rabbis.

Many of the paradoxes and problems of the contemporary synagogue and of congregation-rabbi relationships result from default, not design. Many common patterns and practices simply evolved from ongoing attempts by rabbis and lay leaders to adapt to rapidly changing conditions in American religious life in general and Jewish life in particular.

Mordecai Kaplan demonstrated that pre-modern patterns of Jewish living could not simply be applied to the modern world in the vain hope that -- despite radically different circumstances -- what once worked back then would somehow work now. In pre-modern Judaism, adaptation and change were often unconscious, occurring in unplanned and even unproductive ways as Jewish communities attempted to recast patterns of belief and behavior without being discontinuous with the past.

When Kaplan argued that contemporary Jewish life would need to be consciously and deliberately reconstructed, he radically broke with the pre-modern paradigm. To get to where we want to go as a people and as individual Jews requires bold and decisive steps -- a willingness to confront change, and the courage to leave behind what no longer serves the best interests of the Jewish people.

In building that future, synagogues and rabbis are indispensable partners in the ongoing sacred work of bringing the richness of Jewish life to individual Jews in the context of communities committed to learning and living Judaism. Reshaping the rabbi-congregation relationship by rethinking the role of the rabbi can help create vibrant communities in which common agendas predominate and mutuality governs relationships.

THE ROLE OF THE RABBI COMMISSION

In January of 1998, through the initiative of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (JRF) and its former Executive Director, Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, Reconstructionist movement leaders convened the Role of the Rabbi Commission. The Commission was comprised of representatives from the JRF, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (RRA) and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC). With the recent dynamic growth of Reconstructionism, especially the rapid increase in the number of affiliated JRF congregations and havurot, paralleled by the rapid expansion of the RRA, the rabbi-congregation relationship was in need of being rethought. As increasing numbers of JRF affiliates grew to the size where hiring a first rabbi (either part or full time) was both feasible and desirable, more of our communities faced the changes and challenges inherent in that transition.

Theoretical models of the role of the rabbi and of the relationship between rabbi and congregation that were assumed when the movement was considerably smaller were in need of reassessment in light of more recent experience. The Reconstructionist emphasis on democratic decision making, for example, provided opportunities as well as obstacles to rabbis and congregations, as issues including authority, parameters and participation proved challenging.

A key aim of the Commission was to develop new models for creating and strengthening viable and vibrant rabbi-congregation relationships. A second key goal was to provide

rabbis and congregations with specific practical suggestions and strategies for strengthening, improving and/or repairing existing relationships.

Many Reconstructionist congregations and rabbis had created good and productive working relationships. But there had also been a significant increase in problematic relations between rabbis and congregations within the Reconstructionist movement. While each situation reflected particular circumstances, it was important to examine what common issues might be contributing to this pattern.

Although the original intention of the Commission was to focus primarily on issues of authority and decision making, it was decided at the first meeting that these types of specific issues could only be understood in their broader context. Towards that goal, the Commission employed the perspectives of organizational dynamics as well as leadership, systems and management theory. This meant that the work of the Commission became broader and deeper than originally envisioned.

Three key areas were identified for study and analysis:

- the rabbi-congregation relationship, including issues of authority, decision making, rabbinic roles and democracy;

- the rabbi as person, focusing on issues of quality of life, emotional and physical health, and the balance of personal roles (rabbi as child, sibling, partner, parent) with professional roles;

- the *tachlis* (pragmatic) issues of the rabbi-congregational relationship, including the application and interview process, negotiations and contracts, integration of the new rabbi into the community, job descriptions, evaluation and supervision.

OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

The report is presented in three sections:

• **Framework**: there is a need for language, concepts, and models that define the rabbi-congregation relationship in terms that are mutually acceptable. This theoretical framework is explored in Part I .

• **Roles**: there is a need to understand the complex and often conflicting roles the rabbi plays in a community/congregation. For example, the role of the rabbi as teacher, counselor, guide and presider at moments of the life-cycle often comes into conflict with the role of the rabbi as employee. Analysis and conclusions with regard to role issues and related topics are contained in Part II.

• **Relationships**: there is a need to review the stages of the rabbi-congregation relationship, to choose steps, procedures, policies and practices that will be in service of that relationship, and that can help build a sustaining and durable partnership. Specific areas and moments where such choices can be made are delineated in Part III.

CONSTITUENCIES FOR THE REPORT

The report was written with the following constituencies in mind:

• Reconstructionist movement organizations and their leaders, who have a key role to play in evaluating and implementing the recommendations herein;

• Reconstructionist rabbis and rabbinical students who currently serve our congregations and havurot or will do so in the future;

• Lay leaders in congregations, especially those who have responsibilities that directly affect the rabbi-congregation relationship (synagogue officers, board members, rabbinic search committees and rabbi liaison committees);

• The Reconstructionist Placement Commission, a standing movement commission having primary responsibility for creating movement guidelines and policies with regard to such issues as rabbinic search, interviewing and contracts; and

• The wider Jewish community, where work is also progressing on many of the issues discussed in this report.

Given the variety in style, size and structure in Reconstructionist congregations and havurot, it would be difficult in practice and undesirable in principle to identify "the" way in which any given issue should be handled. Local communities in relationship with their rabbis will need to weigh the recommendations and guidelines in the context of their own experience and setting.

PART I: FINDING A FRAMEWORK

A. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RABBINATE

[The following discussion is based upon a presentation to the Commission by Dr. Jacob J. Staub, Dean and Vice-President for Academic Affairs of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.]

Given their central role in Jewish life, it is surprising to discover that during the biblical period there were no rabbis. While later Jewish tradition retrojects the model of the rabbinate to the days of Moses (calling him "*Moshe Rabenu*," "Moses our Rabbi," although that term is never used in the Bible), the biblical period shows no model of leadership analogous to the rabbi. There are patriarchs, priests, prophets, elders, judges, kings and scribes, but there is no mention in the *TaNaKH* (Hebrew Bible) of a rabbi.

The title "rabbi" appears in the Tannaitic period (when the Mishnah was codified, c. 200 CE) after the generation of Hillel in the first century of the Common Era. After the codification of the Mishnah, the title "rabbi" was used for the Palestinian *Amoraim* (the authorities of the Talmud, c. 200-500 CE), as *semikhah* (ordination/investiture) could only be granted in the land of Israel. The *Amoraim* in Babylonia were called *rav*. During the period of the Mishnah and Talmud either title, "rabbi" or *rav*, designated a person who could expound and interpret Jewish law (halakhah). The title was an ascription of expertise rather than an indication of communal authority.

Beginning with the Geonic period (8th-11th centuries CE), Muslim authorities granted rabbis authority over their respective Jewish communities in the Muslim Caliphate. These rabbis served not only as judges, but as scholars, teachers and social-spiritual leaders. They were not normally leaders of prayer services, but as Jewish legal authorities they did supervise marriage and divorce. When rabbis received authority from outside their communities, there was not always parallel acceptance of that authority from within their communities.

In western Europe, which was not under Muslim control, rabbis emerged as experts in halakhic matters related to the management and discipline of autonomous local communities. Local rabbis were appointed on the basis of their certification, and they in turn certified new rabbis.

From the 14th century onward, there is evidence of the development of the concept *mara d'atra,* or "master of the locality." This meant that one rabbi was authorized and appointed as the master of a given community with regard to halakhah and related issues. This understanding remains operative for contemporary Conservative and Orthodox congregational rabbis.

By the 16th century, European rabbis were exercising broader authority. Especially in Poland, they were appointed by the lay leaders of the local *kehillah* (community), usually for three to five year terms, with a stipend supplemented by fees for what we would today call "life-cycle services" such as weddings and divorces. Rabbis exercised exclusive authority in their communities over civil and ritual matters. These are the roots of the modern synagogue-rabbi relationship -- the professional hired by laity, the use of term and contract, the circumstance of salary.

In hasidic communities there was often an emphasis on the rabbi as the rebbe, a spiritual master, guide and teacher whose compelling leadership created circles of loyal hasidim. Rebbes often focused on what we would today call pastoral roles, emphasizing personal spiritual counseling and guidance for their hasidim.

Beginning with the Emancipation in 1789 in France, the modern period saw changes in the nature of the rabbinate and role of the rabbi. Political emancipation of Jews in Europe and civic equality in the Americas effectively eliminated the authority of the Jewish community and of Jewish law over civil matters for most modern Jews. Cultural comparisons saw the Protestant minister as the modern exemplar of "clergy." The expectation

that clergy would be "educated" as well as "learned" laid the foundation for rabbinic seminaries, with the expectation of university education as a supplement to, and later as a prerequisite for, rabbinic studies.

Although in many areas of Europe rabbis continued to be engaged by communities, in the New World rabbis began to be hired by individual congregations. Rather than being appointed or invited, they were required to apply for such positions, much as one would apply for any other employment, making one of the rabbi's roles that of "employee."

Beginning in Europe in the 19th century, and expanding significantly in North America in the 19th and 20th centuries, the rabbinic role changed in many ways, deemphasizing some traditional responsibilities while incorporating and elevating some non-traditional roles. Rabbis were now expected to lead prayer services, preach sermons, do pastoral work and fulfill other roles derived from the minister model of Protestant churches.

At the same time, especially in non-Orthodox settings, rabbinic roles in terms of authority, decision making and communal recognition were diminished. The expectations and assumptions that went with the rabbi's role in pre-modern Jewish life, such as presumed authority over ritual matters of the synagogue, underwent substantial reinterpretation in the modern period.

For much of the 20th century, rabbis and synagogues in North America tried to adapt to ever-changing circumstances while applying often outdated models of rabbinic roles derived from an earlier period. The synagogue itself underwent a series of transformations, changing in response to each successive generation of American Jews and their changing needs. The entry of women into the rabbinate contributed significantly to changes in the role of the rabbi, as traditional models were challenged and alternatives offered.

Carrying forward historical concepts and categories was not always successful. By virtue of their education, experience and expertise, rabbis remained uniquely qualified to address many of the issues of Judaism and Jewish life. But whereas in the pre-modern period the rabbi might have been able to assume the prerogatives of that role, in modernity a rabbi could not simply assert or exert authority over his/her community.

Much of the difficulty surrounding contemporary rabbi-congregation relations is a reflection of the larger secular world. We should not lose sight of the wider context within which the discussion of the role of the rabbi takes place. We live in a time where imprecision and instability around issues of authority, power and decision making pervade our entire society. Teachers, politicians, academics, parents and a host of others who formerly commanded authority can no longer presume to do so.

That North American religious life in general, and Jewish life in particular, mirrors this reality should come as no surprise to Reconstructionists, who are accustomed to the implications of living in two civilizations. Our Christian neighbors and their clergy, and to a somewhat lesser degree our Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist neighbors and their clergy, struggle with similar issues.

B. INSIGHTS FROM JEWISH TRADITION

Synagogues are religious-spiritual communities, devoted to the transmission of Judaism and to the creative continuity of the Jewish people. Reconstructionist communities strive to embody values-based decision making, and to incorporate Jewish teachings and tradition into the conduct of their communal life. Jewish values and Jewish vocabulary should permeate the life of a synagogue, and infuse the covenantal relationship between rabbi and congregation.

The ten concept-categories that follow reflect essential attitudes, values, ideas and positions from Jewish tradition that can guide and strengthen the relationship between rabbi and congregation.

The ordering of these categories does not reflect a ranking of priority, nor are these the only values that can be derived from a study of Jewish sources. Rabbis and the communities they serve should share study and discussion that can identify additional values, concepts and ideas that can serve as key components in their relationship.

1. **Kavod** (respect/honor/dignity).The Hebrew term *kavod* appears in the Bible primarily in reference to God. *Kavod-YHVH,* formerly translated as "The Glory of the Lord," is more accurately understood as "the tangible Presence of Divinity."

In later Hebrew, *kavod* is frequently combined with another word to create a concept, such as *kevod-harav* (the honor due the rabbi), *kevod-hatzibur* (the honor due the congregation), and *kevod-habriyot* (the honor due all living things).

Rabbis and congregants are equally deserving of *kavod*, and should display it towards each other and all members of their communities as a contemporary manifestation of the "tangible Presence of Divinity."

2. **Brit** (covenant). The relationship between God and the Jewish people imagined by the writers of the Bible is named *brit*, which is also used to signify a solemn pact between individuals. The term implies mutuality, and suggests that each party in a relationship has obligations towards the other. In addition to being a contractual record of promises, a *brit* is a combination of expectation, trust, loyalty and affection.

The relationship between rabbi and congregation should be understood as a *brit*, in which each party covenants with the other in mutual devotion for a common sacred purpose.

3. **Avodah** (service). In the biblical period, *avodah* referred narrowly to sacrifices and rituals associated with the Jerusalem Temple. In the mythic imagination of our ancestors, the proper maintenance of the ritual cult on earth sustained and mirrored

the proper maintenance of the universe itself. The Mishnah teaches that "the world stands on three things: Torah (learning), *Avodah* (the Temple service) and *Gemilut Hasadim* (acts of lovingkindness)."

Later, *avodah* came to mean "sacred service," that which is in service of the Divine. Although contemporary Hebrew employs the term in a more secular fashion ("work" "labor"), the nuance of "sacred service" is at the core of the rabbi-congregation partnership.

Synagogues are not merely organizations, and rabbis are not merely officiants or administrators. Both are partners in *avodat-hakodesh*, sacred service, voluntarily undertaken in pursuit of the godly world to which Jewish tradition calls us. Disagreements should be, in the words of the Mishnah, *l'shem shamayim* (for the sake of heaven). They should be around causes and issues consistent with the sacred service to which synagogues and rabbis are committed, and appropriate in content, process and tone to the divinity that we are privileged to reflect in our daily lives.

4. **Hesed** (covenantal loyalty, caring, love). Old translations of the Bible rendered *hesed* as "lovingkindness," but contemporary scholarship understands *hesed* as a dimension of the covenantal relationship (*brit*). *Hesed* implies commitment, reliability, stability and loyalty, characteristics that sustain relationships over time.

Rabbis and congregations that cultivate and manifest *hesed* are able to discuss and deal with difficult issues honestly and openly because each trusts the reliability and durability of the relationship.

5. **Rahamim** (compassion/kindness). As has been observed by many contemporary scholars, the word *rehem* ("womb") is derived from the same Hebrew root as *rahamim*. *Rahamim* is the disposition towards compassion and caring, a reaching out towards the other in support and solidarity. It implies an attempt

to understand the circumstances of the other person, and a predisposition towards kindness.

Congregations and rabbis committed to *rahamim* can defuse difficult situations and provide mutual reassurance before engaging challenging issues.

6. **Din** (judgment/accountability). Rabbis are people, and congregations, however much we reify them as having a corporate personality (as in "the congregation said..." or "the congregation did....") are comprised of people. Partners in a relationship, no matter how committed they are to *brit*, and however much they strive to embody *kavod, hesed and rahamim*, are human; from time to time they will fail each other. Accountability is indispensable, as is honesty in indicating and acknowledging where people have failed to fulfill their covenantal obligations.

7. **Hokheyah Tokhiah (Et Amitekha)** ("You shall not hate your kinsman in your heart. Reprove your kinsman...," Leviticus 19:17). Often identified by the rabbinic tradition as the most difficult of all *mitzvot*, what Rabbi Everett Gendler translates as "the loving rebuke" attempts to embody the delicate balance in which parties who care for each other must critique each other. To do so in a way that preserves the relationship while delivering the message requires skill, thought and tact.

The commandment "you shall not hate your kinsman in your heart" teaches that problems do not go away because rabbis or congregations decline to discuss them. Indeed, in the absence of an honest and compassionate conversation, resentments, anger and problematic issues will eventually disrupt and damage relationships.

8. **Ve'ahavta L'reyakha Kamokha** ("Love your neighbor as yourself," Leviticus 19:18). Immediately after mandating the loving rebuke, the Torah says "Love your neighbor as yourself." *Ahavah*, rendered here as "love," does not mean romantic affection so much as it implies caring and fidelity derived from

respect for the other. When we offer the loving rebuke, we should imagine being the recipient, and comport ourselves accordingly, treating others as we would wish to be treated in a similar situation.

9. **Tzedek** (righteousness/justice). Commonly recognized in the word *tzedakah* (a deed in support of justice), *tzedek* implies that the terms of a relationship ought to reflect fairness, respect and an honest attempt to respond maximally to the legitimate needs of one's partner.

In Jewish tradition, one who attains *tzedek* on a consistent basis is called a "*tzaddik/tzadeket*," a term of honor that implies a consistent commitment to righteousness and right action. When embodied in the relationship of congregation and rabbi, *tzedek* can help create a posture that becomes a paradigm: the more we embody *tzedek* in each stage of a relationship, the more we come to assume it for subsequent stages.

10. **Tzelem Elohim** (the image of God). The Torah teaches (Genesis 1:26) that human beings are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, as reflections and refractions of godliness. This understanding, with its implication that we treat each other at all times as if we were in the presence of God, is the foundation for the relationships we craft with other human beings.

"Rabbi," "congregant," "president," "board member," "committee chair" are roles that individual people may play, or titles that individual people may earn or be assigned. Beneath such roles and titles is a common humanity embodied in the rabbinic teaching that all people derive from one primal set of ancestors, Adam and Eve, in order to teach that no one should assume superiority over another. Rabbis and congregants are human beings created *b'tzelem Elohim*.

C. A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

Reconstructionism has long advocated the importance of being familiar with the social as well as natural sciences and applying their insights to Jewish life. History, psychology and sociology, for example, have had significant influences on the ways in which Reconstructionism approaches the shaping of a post-modern Judaism.

When it comes to the role of the rabbi and the rabbi-congregation relationship, social scientific research and theory helps frame the discussion in innovative ways. In the past few decades an enormous amount of research has become available to organizations and their leaders regarding the nature of their identities, their work and their interaction.

Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, "systems theory" emerged in the fields of family therapy, anthropology and communications, as well as in the business world. A systems approach looks at the totality of a social organization and the interactions within it. This approach recognizes that the parts interact organically, with the whole being greater than the sum of its parts.

Peter Steinke writes (*Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, Alban Institute, 1996, pp. 3-5):

> Systems thinking is basically a way of thinking about life as all of a piece. It is a way of thinking about how the whole is arranged, how its parts interact, and how the relationships between the parts produce something new. A systems approach claims that any person or event stands in relationship to something. You cannot isolate anything and understand it. The parts function as they do because of the presence of the other parts. All parts interface and affect each other. Their behaviors are reciprocal to one another, mutually reinforcing. Thus change in one part produces change in another part, even in the whole. There is a "ripple" throughout the system.

> No problem can be seen in isolation. The problem is in the whole, not the part. The system is the locus of the problem. The problem is in the interaction between the parts. The same is true for solutions and corrections. With a systems approach, we "see" the *interactions* that take place, the *information* that is exchanged, and the *influence* that is reciprocally reinforced.

Dr. Nancy Post, an organizational consultant and member of JRF affiliate Mishkan Shalom in Philadelphia, provides these additional insights:

• The life of a system is evident in the interaction of its parts; as with any living organism, it is important to focus on what is dynamic and changing, not only on what is static and stable.

• A system needs to be seen within the larger system of which it is a part; a specific congregation exists within a larger pattern of congregations (for example, the Reconstructionist movement) and is influenced by, as well as having an influence on, the larger system.

• Subsystems within a system (e.g., a congregational board, the education committee, the fund-raising committee, the social action committee) are microcosms of the system as a whole and will often duplicate its patterns.

As applied to synagogue life, a systems approach sees the totality of the congregational system along with the interaction of the component parts, rather than looking only at individual roles or functions. There are significant and promising implications in this approach for understanding the role of the rabbi within a new conception of the synagogue as a system.

The systems approach provides rabbis and congregation leaders with a new approach to understanding their work, their roles, their interaction and their place in the total congregational system. This provides a new vocabulary for a common conversation that can support change.

Systems theory recognizes that what appears to be discrete and individual is in fact interconnected, dynamic and determined by a multiplicity of factors that interact in complex ways. Nothing is static; everything is in process. For Reconstructionists, this may sound familiar: what contemporary organizational theorists call systems theory is similar to what Mordecai Kaplan called the principle of organic reciprocity.

For Kaplan, organic reciprocity -- meaning that the whole acts upon the part, and the part in turn acts upon the whole -- is not only a way of understanding how social institutions function. It is also the foundation for contemporary Jewish ethics. Kaplan believed that we are obligated to behave ethically because everything we do affects everything else, with the responsibility for the world shared by all. Organicity for Kaplan implies responsibility. There are thus spiritual as well as organizational possibilities in using a systems approach to understand synagogue life (system) and the rabbi-congregation relationship (sub-system).

A systems approach implies new ways of thinking about the rabbi-congregation relationship. At any given moment, for example, specific individuals may be responsible for exercising leadership, but leadership is an *activity* of the congregational system, rather than only the *job* of one or more persons.

Systems theory broadens the traditional boundaries for roles, so that tasks formerly assigned to specific volunteers, committees and staff members can be redefined. Ensuring that the congregational system accomplishes its tasks, rather than monitoring how people fulfill preconceived roles, becomes a shared responsibility.

For example, a rabbi who excels in adult learning and pastoral counseling may not excel in youth work. Rather than view this as a task assigned to the rabbinic role (and consequently defining the rabbi as deficient notwithstanding her/his excellence in other areas), a congregation can hire a youth director.

An issue like stress is frequently understood in individual terms. A congregational board may legitimately find itself asking the following types of questions: "Why does the rabbi always complain about being overworked?" "Why have we had three different educational directors in three years?" "Why doesn't anyone want to stay on the board?" But rather than locating such types of burnout as an issue within a person or one part of the congregation, a systems approach encourages congregations to ask instead, "What in the functioning of our synagogue system creates burnout [which is manifest in the rabbi, or the staff, or the board]?"

Individuals, of course, play a role in and affect a system, as do subsystems of the congregational system. Any individual congregant or congregational subsystem can unbalance the entire system. For example, a decision of the education committee to increase the academic requirements for Bar/Bat Mitzvah will have an impact on the membership committee, the ritual committee and the synagogue board. It will also affect, among others, the rabbi, the cantor, the students and parents, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah tutors and the president (who is likely to get both irate and supportive phone calls).

Congregations go through various cycles; defining the role of the rabbi in a congregation is not an abstract issue but a concrete one: what is the role of *this* rabbi in *this* congregation at *this* moment in its development? Put differently: where is the congregational system in its developmental cycle, and at what stage is the rabbi entering that system?

For example, newly formed congregations may not want to handle difficult policy issues which can become divisive before the secondary stages of stability and consolidation are reached. Veteran congregations with precedent and policy may welcome an active engagement with substantive issues that help to chart new directions. The rabbi and leaders play a primary role in the congregational system by setting the agenda in response to the congregation's circumstances.

A systems approach holds out the vision of congregational communities functioning in healthier ways. Rabbis, congregants and congregation leaders yearn for healthy congregations. But what is "health?" Peter Steinke notes (*Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, pp. 3-13):

> From a systems approach, we look at the health of a congregation as a process. "Health" correlates with how a congregation manages its wholeness, that is, its interconnectedness....In "wholeness" differences are not eliminated; rather they become alive.....different parts interact and cooperate....As a system, a congregation influences its own health. By taking responsible action, it shapes its destiny....A healthy congregation is one that actively and responsibly addresses or heals its disturbances, not one with an absence of troubles.

The real work of a congregation is managing its ongoing life and continuously adapting to change, rather than focusing only on discrete problem-solving. The systems approach provides important and helpful insights for rabbis and congregations engaged in this central activity.

D. RABBINIC LEADERSHIP

Strong leadership is indispensable for healthy congregations, and should be welcomed rather than avoided. While some of the inevitable tensions and difficulties of the rabbi-congregation relationship are tied to the rabbi's role as leader, many of the best opportunities in that relationship are also found in the leadership role that a rabbi can and should play. *How* the rabbi leads, rather than *should* the rabbi lead, is the key issue.

Democracy is a value shared by Reconstructionist rabbis and congregants. As applied to congregational life, this creates a vision of rabbis and congregations working in mutually respectful partnership. Of course, because congregations are also organizations in which rabbis are leaders, specific areas of authority will need to be explored and resolved. But rabbis, by virtue of their education, skill and experience, are normally best

qualified to represent Jewish teachings and the scope of Jewish perspectives on issues. What the rabbi has to teach should be taken seriously and considered appropriately; his/her voice is not just one among many. A rabbi can be viewed as *an* authority without having to assume that the rabbi is *in* authority.

Ronald Heifetz writes in *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Belknap Press, 1994, pp. 14-15):

> Imagine the differences in behavior when people operate with the idea that "leadership means influencing the community to follow the leader's vision" versus "leadership means influencing the community to face its problems." In the first instance, influence is the mark of leadership; a leader gets people to accept his vision, and communities address problems by looking up to him. If something goes wrong, it is the fault of the leader. In the second, progress on problems is the measure of leadership; leaders mobilize people to face problems, and communities make progress on problems because leaders challenge and help them to do so. If something goes wrong, the fault lies with both leaders and the community.

Viewing the rabbi as a leader does not and need not imply ceding power, responsibility or control. A systems perspective enables Reconstructionist rabbis and laity to avoid the unproductive polarization whereby one person's leadership is presumed to be at the expense of another's, with leadership understood as a finite resource. If, as described above, leadership is thought of primarily as an activity residing in the congregational system, rather than an attribute residing in the rabbi, president and board, then ultimately responsibility for leadership (as well as for success or failure) in the congregation should be shared.

From its inception, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College sought to shape a model of the rabbinate in which the priestly role was minimized, the teaching role was maximized, and the ability to engage with congregants on a mutually respectful level was assumed and encouraged. This approach developed into thinking of the rabbi as a "resource person," one not vested with clear

decision making authority (the *mara d'atra*) but functioning more as a consultant-expert seeking to empower congregants to take responsibility for their own individual and collective Jewish lives. Reconstructionist congregations came to see democratic decision making as a hallmark, suggesting that the rabbi had "a vote but not a veto."

There have been many positive dimensions to the Reconstructionist rabbinic model. A high degree of participation and a sense of comfort, welcome and informality are often cited by Reconstructionist congregants as major factors that attract them to our communities. These attractions are directly related to the Reconstructionist style of the rabbinate. Reconstructionist rabbis welcome the opportunity to teach and to learn with congregants. Together, they engage in the common goal of balancing fidelity to Jewish tradition with appropriate adaptations for contemporary Jewish life. Our rabbis exemplify the importance as well as the satisfaction that derives from teaching people the knowledge and skills with which to expand their Jewish lives.

The demystification of rabbis and the empowerment of laity remain central to the Reconstructionist vision of shared responsibility. Ideally, democracy and lay empowerment ought to result in a mutually satisfying partnership. But there has been a down side as well, which is often cited by Reconstructionist rabbis as a particular source of unhappiness with and conflict in their work. When democracy is incorrectly invoked, it is often experienced by rabbis as disempowering, and delegitimating of their leadership, expertise, learning and experience.

Rabbis are not the only ones who are unhappy when democracy and empowerment go astray; congregations often report that the leadership they would in fact welcome from their rabbi is lacking. A rabbi can be a strong and effective leader in a democratic organization when the rabbi embraces the opportunity and the congregation supports and welcomes the rabbi's leadership.

Rabbinic leadership should be an essential and valuable component of leadership in a congregation, leadership that is valued, appreciated and acknowledged. Rabbis provide a combination of academic training, practical skills, professional experience, passionate personal commitment and dedication to serving the Jewish people, which enables them to serve as leaders and guides in their communities.

The traditional category of *kevod ha-rav*, respect for the rabbi, should be operative in our Reconstructionist congregations. Reciprocally, Reconstructionist rabbis, valuing the democratic and participatory impulse in our congregations, need to model *kevod ha-tzibur*, respect for the community. Viewed systemically, both *kevod ha-rav* and *kevod ha-tzibur* become subsets of the *kavod* of leadership which our communities should strive to embody. The leadership function can best be accomplished as a harmonious and mutually respectful interaction between lay and rabbinic participants.

PART II -- THE ROLES OF THE RABBI

A. CHANGING ROLES OF THE RABBI

Congregational rabbis fill many roles. Consider this example of a rabbi's walk through the halls of a synagogue on a Sunday morning:

• encountering an unfamiliar face, the rabbi is an outreach worker/friendly welcomer, guiding the newcomer to her/his intended location or program;

• encountering children arriving for religious school, the rabbi is a friend, acknowledging names and faces;

• encountering the board president, the rabbi is a facilitator-communicator, noting two issues forthcoming on that morning's education committee agenda that the board will need to review;

• encountering the religious school director, the rabbi is a supervisor-administrator, reminding her/him that the religious school faculty meeting needs to be arranged so the rabbi can leave early in order to....

• be a pastor at an unveiling later that afternoon, about which the rabbi is reminded when s/he encounters the sister of the deceased in the hall who...

• mentions that her brother is refusing to attend the unveiling because of family tensions, and asks that the rabbi give her a few minutes in her/his study for a consultation (rabbi as counselor)...

• making the rabbi late for her/his adult Bat Mitzvah class (rabbi as teacher)...

• making the rabbi miss his daughter's soccer game (rabbi as parent).

The contemporary rabbi stands in a line of continuity as well as in a place of confusion. The title "rabbi" suggests a model or role as traditionally ascribed; yet the functions fulfilled today by those who are called "rabbi" are in many ways radically different from those of their predecessors who held the same title. The actual day-to-day responsibilities of a contemporary rabbi suggest that s/he is attempting to carry out a much wider and more diverse series of tasks than our ancestors could have imagined subsuming under that one title.

Two primary factors account for this. First, with the advent of modernity and the dissolution of the pre-modern organic Jewish community, many of the tasks that were part of a communal division of labor (for example, legal jurisdiction, preaching and teaching, administration of the community) have been telescoped into one person -- the contemporary rabbi.

A second factor which influences and affects the roles that rabbis play is the ascription to the rabbi of a series of ministerial functions primarily derived from Protestant models of clergy. Grouped largely under the heading of "pastoral duties," these include visiting the sick, providing spiritual guidance, consoling the bereaved, counseling the troubled and helping individuals through transitional moments in their lives.

Such pastoral duties are almost always carried out in relationship to individuals, rather than in community, and consequently are neither witnessed nor widely understood. Congregants and/or board members who are aware of what the rabbi does in a public setting (a Shabbat service, for example) are often unaware of what comprises the rest of a rabbi's daily and weekly schedule. Much of the work rabbis do with individuals is labor-intensive and unpredictable, and accounts for the reactive rather than proactive dimension of rabbinic work in congregational settings.

Additionally, much of this type of pastoral work was, in the pre-modern Jewish community, the responsibility of everyone, and

not solely (or even) of the rabbi. Many of the categories mentioned above as clergy pastoral duties have a Hebrew analog: visiting the sick is the mitzvah of *bikkur holim*; consoling the bereaved is the mitzvah of *m'nachem avel.*

The American (as well as Protestant) emphasis on autonomy and individualism is often at odds with the Jewish emphasis on community and responsibility. In borrowing Protestant models of clergy in an American setting, earlier generations of American Jews, including their rabbis, not only added to the multiplicity of roles assumed by the rabbi; they inadvertently removed other Jews from the responsibility for these *mitzvot.*

B. THE ROLE OF THE RABBI: FORMAL AND INFORMAL PARADIGMS

In his article "The Rabbinic Role in Organizational Decision Making"*(The Reconstructionist*, Fall 1999) Dr. David Teutsch identifies five primary roles for rabbis:

• pastor-priest: one who presides/officiates at life-cycle moments with liturgy, teaching and ritual acts; and in personal interventions through counseling, guidance and referral.

• administrator-facilitator: one who directs the work of a congregation through routine executive decision-making and the application of policy and precedent; who deploys and directs staff (cantor, educator); who facilitates lay involvement in committees and works closely with the officers and board of the congregation.

• scholar-adjudicator: one who through Torah-learning and grounding in Jewish history, literature, texts and tradition represents the inherited Jewish tradition and often is its voice; who guides the congregation to employ Jewish sources, values and models in managing the work of the congregation; who models life-long learning as essential.

• *maggid*-teacher-prophet: one who instructs, exhorts, inspires; who speaks through story and sermon to issues of consequence in their relationship to the Torah tradition; who challenges the congregation to a vision of responsibility beyond itself.

• beneficiary-supervisee: one who is employed by the congregation, remunerated and compensated for services provided, and subject to contractual terms of employment including renewal of contract and evaluation-supervision.

Rabbi Dennis C. Sasso, in his earlier article "The Rabbi's Role in a Participatory Community" (*The Reconstructionist*, June 1989) offered a related catalogue of rabbinic roles, including:

• *darshan/maggid* (preacher)
• *ro'eh* (pastor-counselor)
• *klei kedusha* (vessel of holiness, ritualizer, symbolizer)
• *navi* (spokesperson for ethical values)
• *rosh* (executive administrator, head of synagogue)
• *hakham* (spiritual leader and advisor)

These delineations show a fairly consistent identification of primary roles which are part of every rabbi's work with every congregation. Depending on the congregation, some of these roles may be more prominent, others less central. In Reconstructionist congregations, the rabbi's role as one who teaches others how to do for themselves Jewishly is emphasized.

If, however, a congregational board were to brainstorm about the role of a rabbi, the list might look something more like this:

> human resource, outreach worker, mediator, ambassador, model of family life, tone-setter, spiritual therapist, holy person, issue-framer, spiritual role model, model Jew, teacher, scholar, administrator, financial manager, ideologue, sales and marketing director, priest, prophet, conscience, pastor, consultant, organizer, visionary, fund raiser, transformer, transmitter, innovator, friend, policy maker, liturgical artist, performer, programmer, school administrator, prayer leader...

Sometimes the rabbi's role is obvious and formally confirmed (as when the rabbi is leading a Yom Kippur service); sometimes it is informally assumed (the rabbi will call after hearing of an illness in a congregant family). While it might be tempting to establish a hierarchy, all these roles (as well as their sub-roles, and other roles not noted) are interrelated; at a given moment, a rabbi can be filling more than one. For example, the rabbi officiating at a funeral attended by many prominent non-Jews is engaged in both community relations and interfaith work, although on the surface the role appears to be that of presiding over a life-cycle ritual.

C. INFORMAL AND SUBLIMINAL ISSUES

When one considers all the expectations that correspond to rabbinic roles, it is worth underlining the obvious: any given rabbi simply cannot excel in every role s/he will be expected to fill in a congregation. Nonetheless, expectations about the rabbi do exist, overt as well as informal and/or subliminal.

Informal and/or subliminal expectations might include: demonstrating attention to needs, displaying unconditional love for the congregation, helping people feel taken care of, sharing the congregational tone and aesthetic, communicating respectfully especially when disagreeing, endorsing congregational policies and positions, being fair, serving as a protector of the community, being experienced "as a part of" rather than "apart from" the congregation.

Such informal expectations are rarely stated, and would be unlikely to turn up in this type of language in a job description (although they often find their way into evaluations). Nonetheless, such expectations, with their informal association with rabbinic roles, indicate an important area of concern, namely the unspoken and often unconscious dynamics of the rabbi-congregation relationship.

There is a vast amount of literature and research dealing with the psychological dynamics of clergy and congregation. Unconscious emotional issues (both for clergy and congregant) often arise in ways that are both more frequent and more intense than in secular organizations. The dynamics that psychologists refer to as projection and transference are often much stronger and more fully evoked in a religious setting. Individuals often respond to the rabbi on the basis of some other relationship in the congregant's life for which the rabbi is (unwittingly) substituting. This can lead in certain cases to congregant behaviors that are inappropriate. Being alert to these issues and dynamics is a shared responsibility of the rabbi and congregation leaders.

Rabbi Jack Bloom has written extensively on the role of rabbi as "symbolic exemplar," the one who is expected to embody not only the conscious expectations of the congregation but more importantly, the unconscious expectations. "Being a rabbi means being a symbolic exemplar who stands for something other than one's self." (Bloom, "The Special Tensions of Being 'the Rabbi'" in *Sh'ma* 20/386, 1/19/90) If so, a whole series of subliminal expectations likely attach to what a rabbi stands for in the eyes of a given congregant. Feelings, expectations and emotions cannot be legislated, but they can be acknowledged and managed. Rabbis and congregation leaders need to recognize the high level of emotion that pervades congregational life and the informal and subliminal issues which often underlie that emotion.

In her doctoral dissertation entitled "Work and Family In Organizational Life: The Case of a Contemporary Synagogue," Dr. Adina Newberg notes a primary issue of communal identity with direct bearing on perceived roles of the rabbi. She found that congregants often employ the metaphor of "family" in describing the congregation, bringing to the synagogue all the expectations and hopes, as well as the frustrations and issues, that one would normally associate with being in a family system. Rabbis, however, primarily see the synagogue not as their *family* but as their *workplace*. Rabbis can inadvertently trigger emotional reactions in congregants as a consequence of being seen

(unconsciously) in the role of parent -- or as perhaps representing God-as-Cosmic-Parent when the metaphor of family is applied to the rabbi-congregation relationship.

The family metaphor, which in some ways accurately embodies the relationship of many congregants to their congregation (as in "the shul is my family"), is not helpful when applied to the rabbi-congregation relationship. It may also not be in the best interests of the synagogue itself, which is, after all, a not-for-profit business as well as a religious congregation. However stable the relationship may be, the rabbi is always an employee of the congregation, and consequently will always have a different relationship to it than congregants have.

Congregations and rabbis who lose sight of the full complexity of the congregation sooner or later arrive at a difficult and often destructive moment when the metaphors of "family" and "business" come into conflict. Anger and frustration derive from the role confusion of rabbi as "member of the family" and rabbi as "employee." Congregations frequently expect the rabbi to "be a part of the family." But the congregation always has the power to dismiss the rabbi or cause her/him to leave, undermining the concept of family; as unhappy as we may be with an individual in our personal family system, we cannot fire her or him. Both rabbi and congregation should always remain aware of the rabbi's role as a salaried member of the community whose tenure is subject to the approval of the leaders and members.

The contemporary quest for community suggests a mediating model for a congregation, somewhere between "family" and "business." "Community" suggests a voluntary association of individuals who collaborate for common purposes. Some are dues-paying volunteers and some professional and salaried. Their association and interaction will of necessity deal with business and administration, but it will equally be expected to be sensitive and responsive to human dynamics, to Jewish values, and to the sacred mission of a congregation. While the rubric of "community" cannot fully resolve the inherent paradoxes in the

relationship of the rabbi to the congregation, it does provide a useful understanding of the human interactions and relationships within the congregational system.

In a community, commitment and loyalty are essential. Rabbis and congregations that cultivate and manifest *hesed* towards each other are able to engage difficult issues precisely because the assumption is the reliability and durability of the relationship. Rabbis and congregants should share and show an authentic common emotional stake in the welfare of the community.

D. THE ROLE OF THE RABBI IN A PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY

1. Reconstructionist Ideology: Reconstructionist Judaism has exemplified a commitment to democratic process and values-based decision making. At its best, democracy in our congregational communities should be a process that both rabbi and congregation experience as Jewishly authentic; that is community-building; that incorporates Jewish principles, values and categories; and that balances the congregation's mission of representing and transmitting Judaism with the needs and circumstances of a contemporary congregation's constituency.

The valuable core ideas of democratic participation should be saved from the problematic and unhelpful extremes to which they can sometimes be taken. At one extreme are congregants who deny rabbis *any* authority, often displaying hostility towards and showing a need to control them. Democracy at this extreme can become a pretext for unhealthy and disruptive rebellion against authority that has less to do with *lay empowerment* than with *rabbinic disempowerment.*

At the other extreme are rabbis who strongly assert rabbinic authority, exercising a veto over religious policy issues and denying laity a voice in the establishment of key congregational policies and procedures. Authority at this extreme can become a pretext for the expression of frustration, resentment and

disparagement, and has less to do with *reclaiming* the role of the rabbi than with *restraining* the role of the laity.

Between these unhelpful extremes, congregations can live out the best implications of a democratic community. Reconstructionism has correctly identified the importance of engaging Jews with Judaism, and encouraging, even requiring, that they take responsibility for their Jewishness. Reconstructionist rabbis are not in the role of surrogate Jew, the one expected to fulfill Jewish ritual on behalf of congregants. Reconstructionist rabbis are teachers and guides, leading congregants into deepening cycles of personal involvement with Judaism and the Jewish people. Reconstructionist laity seek the opportunity to learn by doing, to take on ritual roles, to study, to deliver *divrei Torah*, to *participate in* life-cycle events rather than only to watch the rabbi *presiding over* them.

2. Executive and Legislative Decision Making: In most modern organizations, and congregations are no exception, decisions often divide into either "executive" or "legislative." For effective and efficient day to day functioning of the congregation, executive decision making cannot be subject to democratic process. The congregational board needs to vest a professional with this function. Often this executive is the rabbi, although depending on the issue, it might be the executive director, the school director or the cantor.

While it is not possible to anticipate every contingency, rabbis and congregations should define as clearly as possible -- especially to board members, committee chairs and other synagogue staff -- what executive decision making functions are vested in the rabbi. This will avoid many potential problems that can arise because of unclear lines of authority.

Democratic process is both necessary and desirable for legislative decision making, where decisions shape the life and culture of the community. In such cases -- examples being a change in choice of prayerbook, a structural change with regard to schedule of

religious services, engagement in a controversial social action project, or a change in dues structure -- congregants want and need participation. While the rabbi is both a leader and a participant in such processes, the broader community -- in the language being advocated here, the congregational system -- should be actively involved, engaged and ultimately responsible.

Issues will not always neatly fall into one of these two categories. In some cases, even when a rabbi can in theory exercise executive decision-making authority, s/he should understand the value of working with the appropriate committee, board member, or staff person rather than operating independently. The way in which a decision is reached can be as important as the decision itself.

3. The Rabbi and Religious Policies and Procedures: The rabbi is actively involved with all aspects of congregational religious practice and ought to be involved in the decision making process around issues of religious policy and procedure. Depending on the issue and the congregation, such matters may come before the religious practices (or ritual) committee, the synagogue board, or the entire membership.

For example: a religious practices committee might handle an issue such as trying an experimental format for a once-a-month Shabbat service, while a board might take responsibility for adopting Bar/Bat Mitzvah policy guidelines, and the entire congregation might be involved in a decision about the role of non-Jews in Jewish rituals. Regardless of the venue, the contribution of the rabbi as a leader, teacher and expert in areas of religious policy and procedure is central.

Democracy is an imperfect system, predicated on people seeing their participation as a right coupled with responsibility. All citizens who are eligible can vote on election day, irrespective of their awareness of issues and understanding of the positions of candidates. But even though people can exercise their rights in an uninformed way, this is far from optimal. Just as we endorse citizens becoming informed and personally committed in our

civic life, so should our congregants have a significant degree of literacy with Jewish sources and involvement in the religious life of the congregation in order to participate maximally in the democratic fashioning of policy and making of decisions.

Reconstructionist congregations should set expectations of involvement and study as prerequisites for participation in certain decision making processes. Congregational by-laws may allow any congregant to vote in certain settings -- for example, on a slate of officers presented at an annual meeting. But a congregation can and should establish conditions for participation in a decision making committee or process affecting ritual and religious policies -- for example, debating levels of communal Shabbat observance or the *kashrut* of the synagogue kitchen.

Such requirements might include an attendance requirement (to vote, one had to have been at X% of the meetings devoted to the topic under debate), a study requirement (to participate in a ritual policy decision, one had to have engaged in study of relevant Jewish sources), or a participation requirement (to be on the *siddur* selection committee, one has to be a regular attendee at services).

It is useful to distinguish between decisions that affect individuals and issues that affect the congregation. When working with individual congregants, rabbis make decisions in response to the individual's circumstances, being careful to operate with an awareness of congregational policies and procedures. While the rabbi may inform the congregational president of such decisions, they do not require input from congregational leaders. When rabbis are engaged with issues that affect the culture, policies and practices of the entire community, they convey their positions and exercise their leadership by teaching and/or attempting to persuade, but they normally will not have final decision making authority.

One useful indicator of when to broaden the decision making process is to gauge the impact of an issue on the congregational system. The congregation will benefit when issues with a deeper, long-lasting impact are handled in a collaborative lay-rabbinic process. Another useful indicator is to anticipate strong reactions among congregants to certain issues and decisions. Significant congregational decisions underscore the importance of broad accountability.

Many conflicts over authority between rabbi and congregation can be avoided when issues are viewed systemically. Decisions which shape the character and culture of a community need to reside within the congregational system, hopefully with concord between rabbi and congregation. A shared and broad decision making process provides credibility, which both supports the decisions and helps bind a congregation together despite differences of opinion.

While the distinction between individual and communal issues is suggested as one guideline, the two areas cannot always be kept discrete. Individual life-cycle events, for example, often occur in communal space and time -- such as a baby-naming at Shabbat services. The choice of which Rabbis' Manual to use is made by the rabbi, while the choice of *siddur* being used at that same Shabbat service reflects a decision of the congregation.

Personal or familial issues can easily become communal issues of the entire community. Whenever possible, controversial and sensitive issues should be anticipated and dealt with before they arise for a specific congregant or congregant family. But in a time of changing demographics in the Jewish community, with a variety of understandings about what constitutes Jewish identity, there will inevitably be moments when there will be disagreement over what the congregant, ritual committee, board and/or rabbi believes appropriate.

Congregations and rabbis today find themselves engaged in the sensitive task of responding to the unprecedented circumstances of our open and rapidly changing society. For many of the most pressing issues, there are as yet no clear guidelines. The recent report by the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, *Boundaries and Opportunities*, for example, outlines suggested positions on a number of ritual issues as they apply to the role of non-Jews, but also indicates the responsibility of each congregation to review and decide if and how to incorporate those recommendations.

The rabbi-congregation relationship is a *brit* (covenant) in which *hesed* (loyalty) and *rahamim* (compassion) are indispensable. At no time is this more important than when feelings are the strongest. Even where consensus is unattainable, the rabbi and congregants need to be heard and respected, and to be given the opportunity to make their case based on the teachings of Jewish tradition, Reconstructionist positions and the nature of the community.

As leaders, rabbis have the opportunity to push the congregation beyond where it might feel comfortable, to encourage risk-taking and innovation. But simply asserting rabbinic authority without the support of the relevant committees or lay leaders can create a negative ripple effect through the congregational system. The more buy-in rabbis can generate through teaching and persuasion, the more receptivity there will be for the positions they advocate -- and the more positive the impact on the congregational system.

Ideally, both rabbi and congregation should have clarity about bottom line issues at the time of interviewing and hiring, so that they do not end up in a partnership when there is fundamental disagreement on basic issues. Even with the best intentions and clear communication, however, unforeseen issues may later arise. In some extreme situations, the congregation may face the possibility of making a decision with which the rabbi not only cannot agree, but which, if made, would result in the rabbi no longer being able or willing to serve in that community.

Wherever possible, in the interests of preserving the rabbi-congregation relationship and with an awareness of what it would mean for the congregation to lose its rabbi, rabbis should receive the benefit of the doubt, and their strong convictions should be taken into account by congregational leaders. For their part, rabbis need to understand the importance of limiting the exercise of such power to an absolute minimum.

In such a conflict, the congregation and rabbi both need to examine ways in which the discussion can be *l'shem shamayim*, "for the sake of heaven," argued on merits rather than politics, argued with passion but not with anger, argued with an awareness of a common stake in the welfare of the congregation as well as with respect for the employment implications for the rabbi. It is always to be hoped that a compromise, option or alternative can be reached and the rabbi-congregation relationship can continue. Occasionally, regrettably, such a resolution may not be attainable. Regardless of outcome, both rabbi and congregation should act towards each other *l'khaf zekhut*, "with an assumption of the best motives."

E. RABBI AS EMPLOYEE

1. A Profession and a Professional: Rabbis choose their work in order to teach Torah; to apply Jewish liturgy, wisdom and ritual to moments of life passages; to lead and shape spiritual communities; and to encourage acts of *tikkun olam*, repair of the world. These are the tasks for which they entered the rabbinate, and for which the congregation has engaged them.

But the rabbi is also in the role of "employee." This is a function of the way in which synagogues are formed and sustained as not-for-profit businesses run by elected Boards of Directors who retain final authority over hiring, supervision and termination of employees. While some aspects of the rabbinate are unique, being hired as a professional is a normal part of being a rabbi.

Many areas of tension between rabbis and congregations often occur in the roles of employee and employer. Tensions arise around such issues as contractual terms, job descriptions and evaluations. Rabbis understandably experience vulnerability as employees, as their economic security and well-being, as well as that of their families, depends on their retention by the congregation. Rabbis who lose their jobs often have to move, uprooting spouse/partner and/or children from careers, schools and social networks of friends. Related issues such as loss of health insurance and pension are also present.

Rabbis did not become rabbis to engage in employment negotiations; congregations were not created in order to function as businesses and employers. These are, however, necessary roles that appropriately engage and define *a part* of the relationship between rabbi and congregation. But when they become the *dominant* roles there is an imbalance in the system that needs to be corrected.

There are specific moments when the rabbi's role as employee is central. These include: evaluation/feedback/supervision; contract negotiations; contract renewal; reviewing of job description and priority-setting; role conflict with the board; and discussion of such work arrangements as, for example, space allocation, office and secretarial support for the rabbi. Controversy between the rabbi and congregation frequently moves the employer-employee relationship to the fore.

At all times, but especially when operating as employee and employer, the rabbi and congregation should strive to act in ways that will strengthen the overall rabbi-congregation relationship. Communication and decisions informed by Jewish values can help keep the relationship on track.

2. The Role of Lay Leaders: Congregation leaders have important responsibilities, including managing the business and employer aspects of the congregation. But those leaders also have an important role to play in interpreting to the congregation the

valuable roles that the rabbi plays in the life of the community, and advocating for the rabbi to the community. By so doing, leaders help keep the rabbi's primary roles before the congregation.

When it comes to the role of employer, many congregational boards are engaged in a task for which they typically have little training or preparation. People may be elected to boards primarily as a recognition of their commitment to and interest in the congregation, coupled with a willingness to serve as volunteers. It is an additional benefit if those elected to an office have independent expertise in their area of responsibility (a treasurer who is an accountant, for example). However, because of the distinctive nature of a congregation as a spiritual community, even certain business expertise and/or skills derived from the commercial sector may not translate helpfully into the congregational setting.

Congregational boards and individual officers charged with supervising the employment of the rabbi should optimally have training and experience in dealing with complex and sensitive issues. Congregation leaders should use resources available through the staff of the JRF and the Reconstructionist movement's Placement Director. Consultations *prior* to interviewing, hiring, negotiating with, or evaluating a rabbi can help avoid creating unnecessary tensions and issues, and can guide the congregation in the direction of steps that will strengthen the rabbi-congregation relationship. Rabbis can consult with the staff of the RRA for advice and information that can support and guide them.

Relationships between rabbis and congregants can shift. The *friend* next door to the rabbi who shares car-pool responsibilities and backyard barbecues becomes, upon election to the synagogue board, a direct *supervisor-employer* of the rabbi. S/he may even become the congregation's primary *contract negotiator* with the rabbi. Being alert to and consciously monitoring these changes in relationships avoids problems stemming from role confusion.

3. Who Speaks for the Congregation? Rabbis should know who represents the congregation in the role of employer. Leaders should identify clear channels of communication for the rabbi regarding his/her employment.

There is no single model for communication with the rabbi about employment issues that is appropriate for every congregation or havurah. Size, style, precedent and process are factors that need to be considered by congregations. Informal organizational structures are especially prone to informal (and hence imprecise) channels of communication. Common channels of authority on behalf of the congregation can include the president, the board, an executive committee or a rabbi liaison committee.

The role of the rabbi as employee should not define the rabbi's relationship to the congregation, the board and the president. It is a necessary component, but the rabbi's day to day roles are remarkably coordinate with the day to day needs and functions of the synagogue. Ideally, the rabbi's roles as leader, teacher and pastor operate in the foreground, while the rabbi as employee operates in the background except when needing specific attention.

F. DEPLETION AND RENEWAL: BURNOUT AND SUPPORT

Earlier generations of rabbis often assumed the necessity of sublimating self to role, and very often paid a price in terms of emotional, physical and family health for their essentially unboundaried availability to their congregations. While in no way being disrespectful of those earlier generations, rabbis today share an emerging consensus on the need for a better balance of one's life with one's work, and the need to attend to one's physical and emotional well-being.

Like other professionals in today's demanding work climate, clergy are subject to burnout. The excessive demands are reflected in the difficulty and high cost associated with obtaining disability insurance for clergy, as well as in the cancellation in

recent years by anxious insurance companies of many clergy group health insurance plans.

Burnout is sometimes viewed as a problem which only derives from an inability to manage work load and prioritize responsibilities. This may be true to a certain degree -- people of differing temperament manage stress in different ways, and those who are unable to organize and control their lives and schedules are more likely to experience stress as a result of losing control of time and tasks. But from a systems perspective, rabbinic burnout should also be seen as a symptom of a problem in the congregational system which is manifesting itself in the rabbi.

In *The Truth About Burnout: How Organizations Cause Personal Stress And What To Do About It* by Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers,1997), the authors identify six primary causes of burnout: work overload, lack of control over work, insufficient reward for accomplishment, breakdown of community, absence of fairness in the workplace and conflicting values within the organization.

Maslach and Leiter propose that a *systemic* response to burnout should begin with the promotion of human values. Members of the congregational system should engage in a process of reviewing and restoring core values around which consensus exists and give priority to human values. The promotion of shared human values helps to restore the necessary sense of community and partnership that sustains the individuals in the system:

> The lack of common purpose undermines the organization as a community. Is this erosion of community a serious loss? Absolutely. People have always looked for a sense of community at work. They have been pleased when it is present and disappointed when it is absent. The support, recognition, and collaboration of others in the job environment permit people to focus their energy effectively, justify their involvement, and extend their achievements -- in other words, a strong organizational community prevents burnout. Is a sense of community too idealistic a goal for this

> day and age? We don't think so. And our top candidate for building such community is shared values....(pp. 146-147)

Congregations that routinely engage in an articulation of shared values help create a sense of community, which in turn creates an environment in which those who work -- as professionals and as volunteers -- can do so more productively.

It may be disconcerting to congregation leaders when a rabbi reports feeling burned out. But rather than viewing such an admission apprehensively or critically, a sympathetic response to rabbinic burnout can help the rabbi and the congregation seek alternatives to alleviate the circumstances that are producing stress and burnout. The rabbi is signaling to congregation leaders that there is an imbalance in the system which, if corrected, can improve the functioning of the entire congregational system and help it regain health.

Supporting the rabbi as person as well as professional is a major responsibility of synagogue leadership. Resources for support within the congregation should be noted, and where absent, created. Appropriate professional support may be needed: for example, voicemail, adequate computer availability and expanded availability of secretarial services can help a rabbi manage her/his workload more efficiently and consequently more effectively. Personal gestures can also help reduce stress and burnout. These can range from the simple occasional celebration of rabbinic successes in the president's newsletter column to the Shabbat dinner sent to the rabbi's family after a particularly hectic week when congregational life cycle or other events reduced the rabbi's schedule to a shambles.

Sabbaticals of between six and twelve months are indispensable for rabbis serving congregations over an extended period of time. Sabbaticals should be planned for and announced to the congregation well in advance.

Most congregations make formal provisions for the rabbi to have a "day off per week." Unlike most of her/his congregants, who may reasonably be presumed to have a full two-day weekend, the expectation that rabbis work at least six days a week often goes unquestioned. And when that day off is lost to a necessary function (such as a funeral), it is usually impossible to recover.

Rabbis try to be available as needed (but not always when wanted out of convenience) but also need reasonable blocks of personal time that are set aside. While it is not feasible for a congregational rabbi to expect Saturday and Sunday off, finding two other days or their equivalent in a week is a reasonable and important goal. The demands of contemporary life guarantee that "the [one] day off" will be filled with personal tasks, leaving no other time for necessary relaxation, refreshment and renewal.

For their part, rabbis should understand and accept the responsibilities of serving a congregation. Congregants often work outside the home during the day. Their available time for the synagogue, as participants, workers, volunteers, students and officers is normally in the evenings and on weekends. Serving a congregation as rabbi does routinely involve being "at work" on Shabbat and festivals rather than at home with family.

But because a schedule of demanding and event-filled three-day weekends over the course of a year can lead to rabbinic burnout, increasing numbers of congregations are seeing the wisdom of giving a rabbi some weekend time off on some regular basis (one Shabbat evening and/or a Shabbat and/or a Sunday morning in a month, for example), with congregants taking on the opportunity to lead services.

Reconstructionist congregants place a high value on the rabbi-congregant relationship. Many of our congregants are middle or upper-middle class babyboomers. They are high consumers of professional services, and rabbis are among the professionals whose services are sought. These factors combine to place additional demands on Reconstructionist rabbis. Congregation

leaders should always be aware that among their most important jobs is managing the limited resources of the congregation, including those of the rabbi.

Congregation leaders and rabbis should anticipate when it might be time to bring on more professional staff, specifically additional rabbinic support for the congregational system. Older models of rabbi-congregation relations used numbers in the area of 500-600 households as a break-point where hiring an additional rabbi would be recommended. Given the high demand Reconstructionist congregations place on their rabbis, coupled with the desire of rabbis to maintain active relationships with their congregants, it is important to revise that break-point number significantly downward. This would help alleviate rabbinic stress and burnout and enable the rabbi to better serve the congregation.

Rabbis are encouraged to find support resources both within and outside the congregation. Consultation and mentoring with other colleagues is indispensable. Some rabbis engage a senior colleague or other counselor on a professional basis to provide supervision and consultation. Some congregations include this in the rabbi's contract as part of sustaining the rabbi as person as well as professional.

Rabbis need to engage in stress-reduction activities. A program of exercise is valuable and recommended. Rabbis often use daytime hours for such programs because their schedule includes so many evening and weekend commitments. A regular period of daily and weekly study, prayer and/or meditation is indispensable. Attendance at rabbinic and other professional meetings and conventions, which provide professional collegiality and resources as well as relaxation and renewal, should not be counted as vacation time.

Congregations and rabbis should work cooperatively, trustingly, honestly and openly to help craft new models, to ensure that the needs of the congregation are met (which as noted above may well

require the hiring of additional rabbinic and/or other staff) and to minimize the circumstances in the congregational system that can lead to stress and burnout. Unchecked, rabbinic stress and burnout can ultimately lead to a disruption of the entire congregational system when the rabbi inevitably either resigns, is removed, or continues on without energy, vision or enthusiasm.

G. BALANCING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ROLES

Rabbis have been experiencing increasing dissatisfaction with their work in congregations. While some of this dissatisfaction comes from balancing disparate rabbinic roles, or from the inevitable tensions between lay governance and professional leadership, much dissatisfaction emerges from what rabbis experience as conflicts between "work" and "self," between "role" and "person."

Overwork, unrealistic expectations and conflicts between home and work are experienced both by rabbis and congregation volunteers. Although the primary focus of this discussion is the rabbi, congregations can benefit from addressing the broader issues as they apply to all their members. How a congregation discusses the rabbi's balance of work and self can become an example of how it responds to role conflict, overwork, stress and burnout elsewhere in the staff and among the lay leaders, board and committees.

Rabbis are parents, partners and children; siblings, in-laws, aunts and uncles; consumers, vacationers, hobbyists, volunteers and friends. Balancing the expectations, needs and wants that arise from these personal roles with the demands of rabbinic roles is reported by rabbis as a major source of stress for them and their families. Rabbis cannot give their best when their work is consistently experienced as without boundaries and intrusive of their personal life. Congregations need to be alert to and make provisions for adequate attention to the rabbi as person. This not only benefits the rabbi, but the congregation as well. A rabbi

whose personal and professional life is balanced will be able to serve a congregation with more energy and clearer focus.

Extended family issues affect everyone, and rabbis are no exception. Maternity/paternity leave, as well as leave in order to care for elderly parents, need attention. The role of the rabbi's partner/spouse is a complicated one; there are often unvoiced expectations that s/he will be an active member of the congregation and/or fulfill some formal or informal role him/herself. Congregations and rabbis should explore and discuss the role of spouses or partners during the interviewing process.

The rabbi's role as parent, and the effect of the rabbi's professional role on his/her children, are also issues deserving attention. The children of rabbis face issues of privacy, boundaries, and expectations. It is often difficult for children of rabbis to experience the congregation as their community, and to be accepted as "one of the kids" by other children in the congregation.

H. GENDER AND PERSONAL STATUS ISSUES

The entry of women into the rabbinate has created new opportunities, new paradigms and new models. It has also produced unique issues that require attention. In recent surveys, Reform and Conservative female rabbis report significant instances of sexual harassment, discrimination and inappropriate behavior. Reconstructionist female rabbis have not been similarly surveyed, so it is difficult to determine if such issues also occur in our communities, but it would not be surprising if we were to find that they do.

Congregations should be sensitive to gender-related issues. These include: differing societal attitudes towards the role of parent, with the "father-rabbi" who works being seen primarily as a rabbi, and the "mother-rabbi" who works being seen primarily as a parent; resistance to female rabbis under the guise of resistance

to "feminism;" perceived and real withdrawal of men from synagogue leadership and attempts to correlate that to the presence of female rabbis; power issues between men and women, especially when a woman appears in an authority role (rabbi) still viewed by many as belonging to a man; and unequal expectations and demands regarding family leave time.

There are also persistent issues of unequal pay and benefits, as well as occasional examples of discomfort on the part of some congregations with interviewing female rabbis. For female rabbis, all these areas are potentially additional places where role and person can come into conflict.

Since 1984, when the RRC faculty voted to admit and ordain openly gay and lesbian candidates for the rabbinate, there has been a steady increase in the number of gay and lesbian rabbis serving in Reconstructionist congregations. Our congregations display, in general, considerable comfort with and acceptance of gay and lesbian rabbis. In view of Reconstructionist advocacy for gay and lesbian equality, as documented in the *Report of the Reconstructionist Commission on Homosexuality* (1993), it is encouraging to note an absence of significant problems for gay and lesbian rabbis seeking positions in Reconstructionist congregations.

As with other specific issues of gender, there are unique issues that affect our gay and lesbian rabbis. Congregational comfort on the "civil rights" level of equal opportunity/non-discrimination is often ahead of interpersonal comfort with a rabbi's same-sex partner or "Jewish comfort" with rituals such as *aufruf* and weddings for same-sex couples. Contractual benefits (for example, health and dental insurance) should be treated equally for homosexual and heterosexual rabbinic families. Discomfort expressed around the rabbi as role model, especially when raised in terms of the synagogue school, may suggest larger unspoken issues.

Several issues are specific to single rabbis. Because of their presumed availability, single rabbis may be subject to forms of sexual harassment that married or partnered rabbis do not experience. If married/partnered rabbis often report a lack of awareness on the part of a congregation of their personal life, single rabbis often report the opposite, namely that their personal life receives an inordinate amount of attention. Well-meaning congregants may see it as their role to help arrange dates for the rabbi; single congregants or staff who may in fact be interested in dating a single rabbi may avoid doing so for fear of being the subject of rumors.

In recent years, clergy, along with many other professionals, have become increasingly alert to role conflicts between personal and professional life. Single rabbis, especially those in smaller Jewish communities, face the difficult and problematic issue of whether to date congregants and/or synagogue staff members. As the RRA *Ethics Guidelines* note, "any romantic relationship between a single rabbi and a single congregant is fraught with risks for both parties." Any romantic relationship between colleagues or co-workers also carries risk, including legal liability, especially if the other person is professionally subordinate to the rabbi (for example, an assistant rabbi or religious school teacher). Single rabbis, especially those serving in smaller and/or isolated Jewish communities where it is more difficult to find other Jews who are not members of their congregations, must deal with these additional concerns of personal and professional roles.

During their tenure at a congregation, rabbis often undergo changes in their personal lives. Marriage/partnering, arrival of children, divorce, and/or a death in the rabbi's family are among the more frequent changes experienced. Such changes have an impact on the balance of a rabbi's personal and professional roles, and usually affect the congregational system and the rabbi-congregation relationship.

PART III:
PRACTICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE RABBI-CONGREGATION RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between rabbi and congregation is built over a period of time. It begins with the application and interview; continues with the offer, negotiation, and contracting; moves into the arrival, orientation, and integration; and is central to contract renewal. The relationship grows through a series of stages as the rabbi and congregation come to know and trust each other. At each stage of this process, there is the potential to strengthen the relationship. Making choices with that in mind is a primary way in which congregations and rabbis build and maintain healthy relationships.

A. PREPARING FOR A RABBINIC SEARCH

A rabbinic search is a sensitive and complex process which, when done effectively, can help a congregation focus its identity, determine its priorities and assess its strengths and weaknesses.

When a congregation convenes a rabbinic search committee, it is important to appoint people who are personally active in areas that are pertinent to the anticipated roles of the rabbi. While a non-active congregant with expertise in management may seem like a good choice, the better choice is, for example, a congregant who regularly attends Shabbat services, one who takes adult learning classes, one who serves on a committee and someone active in the school so that the committee is a cross-section of the congregation, reflecting the diversity as well as the activities of the community.

Volunteers on the rabbi search committee may or may not have prior experience and comfort with interviewing and hiring a rabbi. The indispensable step of consultation with JRF staff and the Reconstructionist Placement Director should be taken *prior* to formalizing the rabbinic search process. Before a search

committee is even established, before a job description is prepared, before the congregation appears on the Placement List, it is imperative that congregation leaders have an understanding of the Reconstructionist rabbinic placement guidelines. While each rabbinic search is unique, most include fairly common processes, as well as the potential for common errors. Consulting with professionals in the Reconstructionist movement will help maximize the effective use of volunteer time and energy, avoid unnecessary errors, and provide advice and insight that reflects the accumulated experience of our congregations and rabbis.

The first step in a rabbinic search process should always be congregational self-reflection. Leaders should assess the state of the congregational system, and consider where the community is in its development. Only when the congregation is clear about its identity, where it is in its history, what stages of development and/or cycles it is in, and what are the recent, current, and near-future issues facing the congregation, can an effective and productive rabbinic search begin.

The role of the rabbi as envisioned by the congregation should reflect the congregation's mission. Some congregations have a mission statement in hand when beginning a rabbinic search, while others do not. Where such a statement exists, the board should review it as a starting point for shaping the role of the rabbi. Where such a statement is missing, the board can informally prioritize the rabbi's responsibilities by seeking general consensus regarding the major values, goals and activities of the congregation.

The potential relationship between rabbi and congregation begins with the initial meeting and subsequent interviews with a rabbinic candidate. The interview process, which plays a significant role in shaping the future nature of that relationship, is the first opportunity to begin building what may become a long term relationship between a specific congregation and a specific rabbi. Seemingly small issues, such as having a visiting rabbi stay at a hotel rather than at the home of a congregant, can

symbolize something substantive; in this case, acknowledging the rabbi's need for privacy and not being "on" at all times during an interview-visit.

Congregations should allocate the funds necessary to conduct a rabbinic search that reflects the understanding that the (potential) rabbi will be a valued resource of the congregation. There is a normal, but generally not helpful, tendency to use frugality as the guiding principle in a rabbinic search. While responsible administration of congregational funds is obviously important, it is equally important that the congregation graciously fund the costs associated with interviewing, engaging and sustaining a rabbi. Hiring a rabbi is the single most important staffing decision a congregation makes, and the selection process deserves the best resources the congregation can responsibly allocate as an investment in its future.

B. THE JOB DESCRIPTION

1. The Function of the Job Description: As the congregation prepares for a rabbinic search, the next step is usually to outline a job description. Job descriptions ensure accountability and provide a basis for evaluation. They can also identify challenges and opportunities, enabling a rabbi to maximize personal and professional growth.

The job description is an instrument of communication. It communicates to applicants the congregation's vision of itself and of the role of the rabbi. It also helps with relationship-building, because it serves as the basis for discussion of an applicant's interests and abilities and shapes the rabbi's expectations. The rabbi's job description should accurately reflect reasonable expectations, priorities and responsibilities. Both the president and the chair of the rabbinic search committee should review the proposed job description and secure board endorsement for it before it is made available to potential applicants.

In the search process the job description functions in much the same way as a rabbi's resume. What is said directly as well as what is implied is important. Rabbis and congregations should carefully consider how they represent themselves in each type of document. JRF staff, the Reconstructionist Placement Director and the RRA staff are available to review proposed job descriptions and resumes before they are finalized.

Congregations that have had a negative experience with a prior rabbi should be alert to the tendency to try and correct for that experience in the next rabbi's job description. Rabbis entering a congregational system should be alert to issues derived from the congregation's relationship with the previous rabbi. Job descriptions and contracts which reflect unresolved issues with the previous rabbi are often a signal to the (potential) new rabbi that the congregation has not done the necessary work to move the previous rabbinic relationship towards closure.

A healthy relationship with the new rabbi can play a powerful role in accelerating the closure and healing process with the previous rabbi. It is unrealistic to expect a congregation to put aside its relationship with the prior rabbi, as that relationship is now absorbed into the history of the community and continues to influence the congregational system. But it is important for the congregation to focus on where it is headed, even while it is acknowledging where it has been. The job description should embody this emphasis.

2. The Content of the Job Description: Although traditional rabbinic job descriptions often reflect specific tasks (for example, the rabbi will conduct life-cycle services as needed) it is important to think as well in terms of roles. How does the congregation prioritize the rabbi's roles? What does the congregation want to accomplish, and how would the rabbi fit into a plan for fulfilling that vision? What does the congregation imagine a rabbi bringing to the congregational community?

Specificity of tasks should not obscure a broader vision. What a congregation imagines its rabbi doing can be a reflection of what the congregation imagines itself accomplishing. As an example, a job description might state: "The rabbi should embody and advocate the centrality of Torah and learning in the life of the community" -- highlighting the importance of learning as a primary activity in the congregation -- as well as noting that "The rabbi will teach the 7th grade class and two adult education classes a year."

Effective and efficient rabbinic job descriptions should include a listing of roles and responsibilities. In order to minimize misunderstandings, it is essential that job descriptions be appropriately specific. But a job description should not attempt to quantify the rabbi's role, which normally proves unproductive because of the complex nature of a rabbi's work. Job descriptions which attempt to anticipate every possible contingency are usually too long, too specific and ineffective.

The tone of the job description is important. "The rabbi will be in the office and available Monday-Friday between 10-4" and "the rabbi will keep regular office hours which are communicated to the congregation" are very different ways of articulating expectations. The first statement aims to quantify and inappropriately control the rabbi's schedule; the second statement sets expectations and emphasizes communication and availability.

In addition to proactive responsibilities, rabbis are called upon to respond to congregant needs, from requests for counseling, to hospital visitation, to officiation at life-cycle events. It is difficult to anticipate, legislate and enumerate how a rabbi should fulfill those reactive responsibilities.

If, for example, the rabbi is expected to work with families and students in preparation for Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the rabbi will need to work out ways to do that in response to available time and the number of families celebrating B'nai Mitzvah. The amount of

time a rabbi can offer to each family in a year when there are fifteen students will be greater than in a year when there are fifty.

To specify that the rabbi should do "x" and spend "y" number of hours doing it is neither helpful nor appropriate. The listing of responsibilities should speak to tasks, expectations and roles but avoid micro-managing or prescribing how a rabbi should accomplish said tasks.

3. Reviewing the Job Description: Once a rabbi is hired, the job description becomes a living document. The relationship between the rabbi and congregation will be strengthened and kept healthy if the rabbi's job description is reviewed from time to time. After a rabbi has been part of a congregation long enough for his/her responsibilities to become clear, a review of the job description helps the rabbi and congregation to keep mutual expectations in focus, and to monitor and respond to changes in the congregation. In the first year of a relationship between rabbi and congregation, it is prudent for several congregation leaders to meet with the rabbi every three or four months to review and evaluate the job description in response to the rabbi's real day-to-day experience. Reviews should be done on a less frequent basis as the rabbi's tenure increases.

Any time the job description is reviewed or revised subsequent to the hiring of a rabbi, the leaders of the congregation should appoint a small group -- not more than two or three -- to work with the rabbi. Unless there is a major role revision under discussion, adjustments in the job description should be seen as a process of mutual collaboration and goal-setting, not as policy issues requiring board involvement. The revised document should be reviewed and co-signed by the rabbi and president and placed in the rabbi's personnel file.

When a congregation grows and new staff positions are added, job descriptions tend to become more specific. When a new staff position is created, it is important to review *all* staff job descriptions to avoid duplication of tasks, confusion about

responsibilities, and potential conflicts in staff roles in the congregational system.

4. Part-Time Rabbinic Positions: When a rabbi is engaged on a less than full-time basis, the specific issues of defining the expectations of the rabbi in terms of roles, hours, services (communal and individual), availability and priorities need to be addressed. Quantifying a rabbi's work on an hourly basis is nearly impossible. But rabbis who work part-time for congregations need to collaborate with lay leaders to identify and agree upon a reasonable set of responsibilities and expectations tied to a basic schedule that is mutually agreed upon. Identifying priorities and responsibilities for the rabbi is a key component in creating a workable job description for a part- time rabbinic position. (When a congregation grows to the point where the rabbi and congregation mutually agree on increasing the rabbi from part-time to full-time, a thorough review of the job description should occur.)

Rabbis working part-time may reside in the community or travel to it. Non-resident rabbis will be in a different role than those involved in the day-to-day life of a congregation on a part-time basis. The expectations of a non-resident rabbi need to be mutually agreed upon, especially regarding life-cycle officiation, hospital visitation and availability by phone and email between visits.

Resident part-time rabbis should expect to absorb *occasional and unanticipated* extensions of their availability, and respond with a reasonable amount of flexibility. However, this should be carefully monitored, as it can rapidly lead to the rabbi *regularly* working more hours than agreed to in the contract. A *pattern* of increments should be noted early and addressed collaboratively by the rabbi and congregation leaders.

Rabbis who work part-time should understand that while office hours, meetings, educational responsibilities and religious services can normally be confined to a schedule, officiating at

life-cycle events such as funerals, or ministering in times of illness, cannot be subject to the same boundaries. It is important that the congregation be assured of the rabbi's availability, within reason, in times of need.

Some rabbis choose to work part-time to divide their careers between serving a synagogue and, for example, working for a Jewish agency. Others choose to work part-time for personal reasons, often including a desire to be available in the role of parent for young children. Female rabbis report that congregations they served were often respectful of the part-time nature of the rabbi's work if other time was spent in other employment; when the other time was identified as parenting or family time, it was not always as easy to have the boundaries of schedule respected. Personal as well as professional reasons which incline rabbis to work part-time should be equally respected.

When first deciding to bring a rabbi to the congregation, many JRF affiliates choose to hire a rabbi part-time. Often this is a fiscal decision, but it can also be a preference for reasons indigenous to the congregation. Congregations undecided and/or uncertain about whether to hire a rabbi for full or part-time should consult with the JRF staff and/or the Placement Director.

C. NEGOTIATIONS AND CONTRACTS

The rabbi-congregation relationship is a sacred covenant guided by Jewish values. Negotiations and contracts, while attentive to economic and legal realities inherent in the employer-employee relationship, should reflect covenantal concepts, behavior and language. The Jewish values discussed in Part I of this report should be reflected in the process as well as in the content of negotiations between the congregation and the rabbi.

1. Perspectives on Negotiations: Congregations should approach negotiations cognizant of the professional and personal resources the rabbi offers to the congregation. Negotiations should presume genuinely sufficient, respectful and respectable compensation that is commensurate with the demands of the rabbinic position and the qualifications, skills and abilities of the rabbi.

Congregations often need to make hard choices about allocation of resources. Occasionally, congregational boards mistakenly approach negotiations with a rabbi on the assumption that saving money, or offering the lowest salary -- below what a congregation can in fact afford -- is a good negotiating strategy. Experience demonstrates that such an approach often results in protracted and difficult negotiations that can have a long-lasting negative impact on the relationship with the rabbi.

Congregations should be aware that they are engaging a highly skilled and trained professional. The compensation for the rabbi should reflect that reality. The JRF, RRA and Reconstructionist Placement offices can provide guidance on considerations to take into account in arriving at fair and appropriate rabbinic compensation.

Rabbis respond best to negotiations when they feel that the congregation is making its best faith effort to offer appropriate compensation. Those representing the congregation should present an offer, including proposed salary and benefits to the rabbi; the rabbi is not an independent contractor bidding for a job and should not be asked for his/her salary expectations. Rabbis for their part need to understand and respect the congregation's fiscal responsibilities and financial realities. It is in the best interest of both rabbi and congregation for congregational financial information to be shared. Congregations using the Reconstructionist Placement Service are asked to provide basic financial information about the congregation as part of their application for candidates.

2. Negotiations and the Rabbi-Congregation Relationship: While conducting negotiations, congregation and rabbi function primarily in employer-employee roles. Especially in negotiating a first contract, when there has not yet been a sustained opportunity to shape a relationship between rabbi and congregation, care should be taken so that the negotiations do not damage the personal and professional relationship that is forming.

One way to reduce potential points of friction is to reduce the number of issues that need to be negotiated. The JRF and RRA, in the 1994 *Guidelines for Rabbinic Placement*, recommended several standard items for inclusion in all rabbinic contracts. When these items are incorporated into the congregation's offer to the rabbi, experience demonstrates that negotiations move more quickly and with fewer problems. For example, when pension and health insurance are included as benefits as recommended in the *Guidelines*, these do not become issues that have to be negotiated for in principle.

Rabbis and congregations often inquire as to the wisdom of having intermediaries conduct their negotiations. A compelling case can be made that in service of the larger rabbi-congregation relationship, it is better to minimize the employer-employee roles and allow third parties to handle the negotiations. Other opinions suggest that direct negotiations serve the larger rabbi-congregation relationship by keeping the parties in direct contact.

For many rabbis, the financial and employment intricacies of negotiations are intimidating, awkward, and/or uncomfortable. This can often be exacerbated if the congregation chooses more than one person to be its representative in the negotiations, and/or if experts in relevant issues (such as attorneys) are chosen. A rabbi should have the right to choose someone to represent him/her in negotiations if that is his/her preference. Because the contract does potentially have legal implications, both rabbi and congregation should have it reviewed by an attorney.

Choosing a negotiator for the congregation is a sensitive issue. The congregation should select as its negotiating representative a trusted individual whose character, style of interaction, and familiarity with the congregation can best help accomplish the task and simultaneously support the rabbi-congregation relationship. While this would normally be a board officer or member of the search committee, it can also be a member of the congregation who, while holding no current office, is the right person. This sensitive task deserves appropriate management, and it should not be seen as either an automatic right or an honor.

In the case of a first contract, the person designated to represent the congregation should be someone the rabbi met during the interviewing process. This might be a member of the rabbinic search committee or a board member. The president should not be a negotiator as s/he may need to intervene at some point.

3. Contract Content: The contract between rabbi and congregation functions best when it records the basic terms of employment in the briefest possible way. Just as one goal of negotiations is to reduce the number of issues that can prolong those negotiations, a contract should avoid extensive legal language that may have little relevance to a rabbinic contract and obscure the covenantal nature of the rabbi-congregation relationship. Such complex documents often create tension and needlessly aggravate and/or prolong the process of agreeing on contract terms. A recommended letter of agreement currently exists in the JRF-RRA *Guidelines for Rabbinic Placement.* The use of this sample letter of agreement is preferable to having an attorney draft a contract.

The purpose of a rabbinic contract is to define the congregation's legal and fiscal responsibilities and obligations to the rabbi as employee. Because of the power and economic imbalance between the rabbi as employee and the congregation as employer, contracts primarily protect the rabbi, not the congregation.

Sometimes a relatively fast and friendly verbal negotiation which left all parties feeling good disintegrates when the actual

document is presented to the rabbi. Those who negotiate for the congregation should ensure that both the tone and terms of the written contract reflect the tone and terms of the negotiations.

4. Contract Approval and Renewal: When a rabbi is hired for a *first* contract, depending on the by-laws of the congregation (and in some states legal requirements) the approval to hire may need to come from the executive committee, the board or the congregation as a whole. As the decision to hire a specific rabbi is the type of legislative decision that affects the entire community, seeking a broad consensus from the congregation is an important and recommended step. When a rabbi's contract is being *renewed*, approval is usually vested in the board and should not require a congregational vote.

A first renewal opportunity often includes an assessment of how well the relationship is working and if the congregation is generally satisfied with the rabbi and wants to continue in relationship with him/her. When the relationship between the rabbi and congregation is working well, contract renewals subsequent to the first renewal should not be framed as a debate about whether the rabbi will be invited to continue. Well-functioning communication channels will have identified and presumably resolved issues serious enough to affect the rabbi's continued employment. As the rabbi's tenure with the congregation lengthens, the normal presumption is in favor of contract renewal. The responsibility for contract renewal normally belongs to the synagogue board, which approves a motion to enter into contract renewal negotiations with the rabbi.

Contract renewal should focus primarily on the basic terms of the rabbi's agreement: salary and benefits, including any proposed increases over the term of the contract, and length of contract. There may be a need for incorporating issues that were not relevant in earlier contracts (for example, family leave or sabbatical). In a healthy rabbi-congregation relationship, substantive issues such as job description changes should

presumably be addressed as part of ongoing communication, and should not wait for contract renewal.

In all negotiations, first-time as well as renewal, the synagogue board should vest negotiators with the authority to work within approved parameters. When a rabbi agrees to negotiated terms, s/he should have the confidence and comfort of knowing that those terms are not going to be subject to further discussion and approval by the board or congregation. If the board has appropriately vested negotiators, and the proposed contract faithfully reflects the parameters established, the board should only need to review and formally approve the proposed contract before it is finalized with the rabbi.

Before a contract is proposed to the Board for final approval and presented to the rabbi for review and signature, it should be reviewed by the congregation president. The president should ensure that the contract conveys a sense of partnership and covenant, and reflects appreciation of and respect towards the rabbi. Especially in a first contract, the document represents not only the substance of the agreement but sets the tone of the relationship as anticipated by the congregation. The contract may also be reviewed by JRF staff and/or the Placement Director.

The rabbi's privacy should be respected. A balance should be reached between a board's *need* to know, and any congregant's *right* to know, the terms of the rabbi's compensation. The terms of the rabbi's compensation should be handled with discretion, and normally kept within the board rather than publicized to the congregation. Specific inquiries about the rabbi's compensation are best directed to a private discussion with the board president or treasurer rather than debated at public meetings.

The job description should be attached to the contract but not be a formal part of it. If absorbed into the contract and later subject to revision, board action may be required to in effect emend the contract, a bureaucratic burden best avoided. The job description serves as the basis for the ongoing monitoring of the rabbi's roles

and as a benchmark for whatever forms of evaluation are subsequently agreed to by the rabbi and the lay leaders.

The conclusion of negotiations and the signing of a contract (new as well as renewal) is an important and symbolic moment in the relationship of rabbi and congregation. Some appropriate ritual and/or event which both celebrates a successful conclusion and helps the rabbi and congregation refocus on their roles as partner in service of Torah and the Jewish people can be useful, meaningful and functional. A special *oneg shabbat*, or some ritual analogous to a *siyyum* (celebration at the end of a process of learning) or a *seudat mitzvah* (celebration subsequent to a life-cycle passage) might be arranged.

D. INTEGRATING THE RABBI INTO THE CONGREGATION

One of the central tasks of the first year, when the foundation for the rabbi-congregation relationship is being established, is the integration of the rabbi into the congregation. While congregations often devote a good deal of time, energy, planning and resources into the rabbinic search process, they often overlook the importance of integration, which in addition to strengthening the rabbi-congregation relationship can also serve as an important community-building opportunity.

The arrival of a new rabbi (and especially the arrival of a first rabbi) generates excitement as well as anxiety, enthusiasm as well as ambivalence, hope as well as fear, and comfort as well as discomfort. The inevitable changes that result from the introduction of a new rabbi into the congregational system generate disequilibrium. Everything that the rabbi does is new, from the way she announces pages from the *siddur* to the style of counseling he embraces.

Change is often accompanied by anxiety. Congregation leaders can help alleviate some of that anxiety, and help ease the rabbi's entry into the community, by modeling ways in which change can be accommodated and directed, rather than resisted. A primary

task of the first year is for the rabbi and congregation leaders jointly to monitor and manage the reaction of the congregation to change, and to guide the congregation through the transition process so that the relationship between rabbi and congregation can be consolidated, stabilized and made effective.

In addition to managing the impact of change on the congregation, rabbis in their first year are integrating on many levels into life in a new place. Like all people, rabbis (and their families) undergo many significant changes when moving. A congregation that consciously takes on the tasks of helping the rabbi settle in helps the rabbi feel at home in both professional and personal terms. Just as a congregation appoints a chair of the rabbinic search process, congregations should name a chair for the rabbi integration process. The chair should take responsibility for marshaling resources in the congregation.

Examples of steps that might be taken in the first year to help integrate the rabbi -- many of which are also of significant benefit to the congregation -- include:

• Guide the rabbi to key players in the congregational system, formal and informal, who can share the history of the congregation and convey something of its culture.

• Create occasions (a social event, parlor meetings) where congregants can tell the story of the congregation and speak of its role in their lives.

• Communicate the specific customs that a community recognizes as carrying its identity. These are often casual and informal, and for a new rabbi can be easily missed. It is especially important to note customs associated with the Fall holiday cycle, when the rabbi is meeting the congregation for the first time. If there are videos of congregational services and events, these can be very helpful to a new rabbi.

• Ensure that in addition to hearing all the positive things about the congregation, the rabbi hears the problems as well.

• Introduce the rabbi to groupings within the congregation, such as veteran members, interfaith families, various havurot and so forth.

• Discover the special gifts the rabbi brings to the congregation and find ways to highlight and publicize these.

• Communicate to the new rabbi the experiences and impact of the previous rabbi; help the new rabbi understand where s/he is picking up.

• If the rabbi is succeeding another rabbi, monitor the steps necessary to continue and complete the process of closure for the congregation with the previous rabbi, which normally continues at least through the first year of the new rabbi's tenure, and sometimes beyond.

• Find people in the congregation who can help with specifics. For example: recommendations for daycare, home contractors, transportation, carpooling, making suggestions for places to take a family (museums, etc.) and finding congregant families (with children close in age to those of the rabbi, where possible) to invite the rabbi (and family) to such places. (In general, rabbis should avoid doing business with congregants so as to avoid potential complicating factors in their relationships with congregants.)

• Ensure that the rabbi (and family) receive invitations to, for example, High Holiday meals, Shabbat dinners and lunches (although many rabbis may not be able to accept Shabbat invitations because of synagogue schedules), Hanukkah candlelightings and Pesach seders. It is always better for the rabbi to receive too many invitations than too few.

• If the rabbi's spouse will be seeking employment, find people in the congregation with similar interests and backgrounds to provide suggestions on where to look for work.

• Plan and time the rabbi's installation as a key event in the integration of the rabbi.

• Make certain the rabbi receives copies of the prior year's newsletters as well as policies, meeting minutes and other documentation.

• Enter a subscription for the rabbi to local general and Jewish newspapers.

• Have the integration chairperson meet with the rabbi monthly. Questions worth asking include: "How is it going? What can we do to help? Are you getting what you need to settle in?"

The publication *New Beginnings, A Pastorate Start Up Workbook*, available from the Alban Institute in Washington, D.C. (see bibliography) is a recommended resource.

E. COMMUNICATION

One of the central tasks of a healthy relationship is the maintenance of clear and consistent communication. Congregations and rabbis often need to begin dealing with each other without having first established the necessary channels for effective communication and trustful conversation.

Given the multiple tasks that demand the rabbi's attention and the limited time and energy that volunteer congregation leaders can devote to the synagogue, it is difficult to find the time necessary for ongoing discussion about expectations in the rabbi-congregation relationship. Both new and established rabbis and congregations often find themselves caught up in the immediacy of daily needs, problem-solving, committee work, building and staff concerns and a host of other issues that demand attention.

Few things permeate the ongoing life of a congregation more than the nature of the relationship between the rabbi and the congregation. Few tasks are more crucial to the healthy functioning of a synagogue system than maintenance of that relationship. Yet too often, little or no attention is paid until a crisis occurs, a contract is due for renewal, or an annual evaluation is proposed. While finding the necessary time may be a challenge, routine maintenance of the rabbi-congregation relationship takes less time and creates less stress than managing the inevitable problems that result from an absence of communication.

Many channels exist for communication between the rabbi and the congregation, including:

1. The President-Rabbi Relationship: The president and rabbi share the responsibility for leading the congregation. A key channel of communication should exist between them; their working relationship is indispensable to the congregational communication network. Rabbis and presidents should be in regular weekly communication, preferably in person, to update each other, note issues of concern, work on projects and problems and handle decisions within their common purview.

As early as possible in the president's term, s/he should discuss with the rabbi visions and hopes for the congregation as well as the president's anticipated models of leadership and governance. While the functions of the office of president are usually standardized in congregational by-laws and practices, the role is also a function of the person filling it; each presidency is unique. One president may be relatively hands-off, and the rabbi by design or default will assume the role of routine decision making. Another president may be more interested in the day to day workings of the congregation, and the rabbi may not need or want to attend to such issues.

Rabbis should review with new presidents the communication channels used with prior presidents, and ascertain if those arrangements remain workable. Among issues to consider: frequency of meetings, agenda-setting, availability at home or work, preference for phone, e-mail, or in-person communication, the nature of issues each wants to be informed of, and what kinds of issues don't need to be shared. New presidents should also consult with the past president about his/her relationship with the rabbi.

A congregation with no rabbi, one with a part-time rabbi, or one with a full-time rabbi can each require different levels of involvement and management from the president. If a congregation has an administrator or executive director, this will normally relieve the president of the day-to-day administrative management of the congregation.

The rabbi as senior professional and the president as senior volunteer share the responsibility of leading the community. Rabbis and presidents need to be attentive to the complementary nature of their roles: rabbis need to be sensitive to the administrative, fiscal and management issues of the congregation, and presidents should be involved with and support the spiritual life of the synagogue and involve themselves in it. Older models of the rabbi-president relationship often saw a power polarization in which each claimed sole leadership. A systems perspective, however, sees both rabbi and president as key players in the *systemic* task of congregational leadership.

The relationship between rabbi and president is a sub-system of the relationship between rabbi and congregation, and it should model a culture of appreciation for the entire community. Respect for the rabbi and acknowledgment of him/her by the president, and by the rabbi of the president, should be hallmarks of their public presentation.

Some congregants will resent a good working relationship between rabbi and president, as if the president were somehow "owned" by the rabbi and unable to operate autonomously.

Presidents need to be alert to this issue and to the unhelpful and unhealthy motivations of those who seek to drive a wedge between the president and the rabbi.

The president can help alleviate the loneliness and sense of isolation that the rabbi frequently experiences. S/he can be a friend and a supporter as well as the head congregational officer. But neither president nor rabbi should forget that the employer-employee roles remain active at all times, even if operating in the background. Rabbis cannot assume total trust and openness with a president if only because the president also fills many roles; something the rabbi tells the president in confidence as a friend the president may need to tell the board as chief lay officer of the congregation.

2. Liaison Committees: Many congregations have a rabbi liaison committee to facilitate communication. A liaison committee can be an effective channel that eases frictions that arise at times in the rabbi's relationships with the president, the executive committee or the board.

There are several possible models for such a committee. One option is to have a formal committee charged with specific responsibilities, whose work is integrated into the communication system of the congregation (executive committee and board, for example). This type of liaison committee could be a small-scale two-way channel for the rabbi and congregation to conduct the ongoing business of their relationship. In a large congregation with a large board and/or executive committee, a liaison committee can be a helpful smaller-scale conduit. Such a liaison committee might also have responsibility for ongoing mutual feedback between the congregation and the rabbi.

An alternative model is for a liaison committee to be informal, with the primary function being support for the rabbi -- a rabbi's "kitchen cabinet." This type of liaison committee would be a relatively safe space for the rabbi to raise concerns, discuss problems and strategize solutions. However, the rabbi remains an

employee, and the members of a liaison committee remain congregants; a rabbi should not assume absolute confidentiality and should exercise discretion with even the most supportive liaison committee. When needing absolute confidentiality and a totally safe space in which to discuss issues, rabbis should consult with professionals, colleagues and friends outside of the congregation. The RRA staff, in addition to being available to rabbis, can connect rabbis with other resources.

If the liaison committee supervises or evaluates the rabbi, this should be clearly communicated and understood by all parties. It is also prudent to ascertain to what degree, if any, the congregation's by-laws might be in conflict with the role of a liaison committee. A liaison committee should not have the authority to terminate a rabbi, extend or renew a contract, or change responsibilities of employment as agreed to in the rabbi's contract. Those prerogatives belong to the board as the congregation's elected representatives.

Each congregation and rabbi should evaluate the communication channels that exist, and whether they are adequate. Where good communication exists, it may not be necessary to create a liaison committee. If communication is haphazard, informal or imprecise, or if it has been absent or problematic, a rabbi liaison committee might help facilitate better communication.

The question of whether the president should sit on a liaison committee is a complex one. The president and rabbi presumably have a direct channel of communication, and the president is usually over-extended already; having one more committee to sit on may be a duplication of effort. On the other hand, can the president afford not to be part of this primary communication affecting the ongoing relationship between rabbi and congregation?

But a congregation should also anticipate what would happen if it needed to address a bad relationship between rabbi and president and the president were on the liaison committee. Because liaison committees are relatively new, and because of the variety of models and functions they embody, it is difficult to determine a universal guideline. Congregations and rabbis should weigh and balance the advantages and disadvantages of having the president as a member of the liaison committee.

If a liaison committee is formed, it should be kept small. The rabbi and congregational leaders should mutually endorse and trust the members of a liaison committee, and therefore should consult with each other before any invitations are extended. Specific board officers may be appropriate, but a congregation should also consider members with relevant experience, interpersonal skills, sensitivity, a high level of involvement and respect for both rabbi and congregation.

3. Evaluation: Evaluation should be a helpful systemic tool that strengthens the rabbi-congregation relationship. Open, direct and honest discussions between rabbis and lay leaders that go to the heart of their relationship and to the congregational system itself are challenging but indispensable for a healthy relationship. The ability to manage and learn from sensitive and often difficult conversations is a sign of a healthy relationship between a rabbi and a congregation and its leaders. Evaluation can provide a continuous loop in which successes are celebrated, mistakes identified, progress noted, tasks reviewed and problems resolved.

But as currently practiced, rabbinic evaluations rarely yield such benefits. Rabbinic evaluations normally focus solely on the rabbi, generating stress and often creating lasting problems. Rabbis often see their work as such a complex weave of the public and personal, the spiritual and the administrative, the tangible and visible and the intangible and invisible -- with the dimension of counseling and confidentiality thrown in -- that they remain convinced that volunteer leaders simply cannot evaluate what they do in a fair and effective way.

Congregation leaders, on the other hand, often believe they can in fact objectify and quantify the performance of the rabbi. They are used to receiving their own workplace evaluations and see no reason why the rabbi should not as well. It is not surprising that such differing viewpoints lead to evaluation processes that often weaken the rabbi-congregation relationship.

Vulnerability is a primary reason for rabbinic unhappiness with evaluations, and this contributes to the stress and anxiety that permeate most rabbinic evaluation processes. Rabbinic vulnerability derives from several factors:

• Evaluation focuses on the employer-employee role, and as employees, rabbis are subject to termination. It is inappropriate to tie the timing of an evaluation to contract renewal. When this occurs, there is an extreme power differential between rabbi and congregation. When rabbis perceive themselves as fighting for their jobs, evaluation becomes something to defend against.

• Evaluations frequently occur with confusion as to purpose and procedure, and without adequate planning. Congregations and rabbis often stumble into an evaluation process with contradictory goals and unclear expectations.

• Evaluation is often construed as one-way: the congregation evaluates the rabbi. This individualistic model is contrary to the systems approach, isolating the rabbi as if s/he can be evaluated in isolation from the congregational system.

• Those responsible for the evaluation are also congregants whose personal needs and experiences are often overemphasized in the evaluation process.

• The evaluators have little opportunity to see the rabbi's role in a larger perspective in comparison to other rabbis and congregations.

But if rabbis report anxiety, evaluations place congregations in the role of employer in which the potential for volunteer anxiety is also heightened. When evaluating staff a congregational board must function as administrators of a not-for-profit organization, as well as being volunteer workers on behalf of the religious community. This may be an uncomfortable role for leaders; it is often one for which no prior training or experience exists.

Rabbis should be evaluated primarily in the context of the congregational system. A productive and continual process of communication, review and evaluation should focus on how the entire congregational community is fulfilling its goals, mission and vision. The rabbi will certainly play a major role in how a congregation advances its agenda, and should be evaluated within that framework. As the term correctly implies, an evaluation should focus on the value of the rabbi to the congregation, and congregations should make a conscious effort not to use the term "performance review."

A systemic evaluation should examine how the leaders, board, officers, committees and other staff are interacting and together fulfilling, or failing to fulfill, the objectives of the congregation. While volunteers are not employees and are not accountable in the same way as rabbis, a healthy congregational system is one in which discussion and evaluation can take place regarding the board, committee chairs, other staff and teachers as well as the rabbi.

While some congregations may succeed by themselves in the task of self-assessment, others benefit from having someone from outside their system work with them on a systemic evaluation. JRF can assist in finding professionals trained in congregational systems processes who can work with congregations and rabbis on a systemic evaluation.

Within this wider perspective, congregational leaders and the rabbi can benefit from that part of a systemic evaluation which focuses more narrowly on the rabbi's work. It is important for the

rabbi to get honest feedback, affirmative as well as critical, designed to strengthen and improve his/her service to the congregation. Specific concerns or problems that come to the attention of congregation leaders or the rabbi should of course be dealt with promptly and directly and should not be deferred pending a scheduled conversation or formal evaluation process. This can avoid having small problems develop into large ones.

It is easy for evaluations to become emotionally tangled and counterproductive. Evaluations are neither personality assessments nor popularity contests. They should not be seen as a referendum on the rabbi's contract. When this happens, the vulnerability of the rabbi becomes paramount, and the caricature of the rabbi as one employee with a thousand bosses becomes an unpleasant and unhealthy reality.

A congregation should avoid surveys about the rabbi. Surveys are counterproductive and unhelpful as well as inappropriate. Experience demonstrates that surveys emphasize the negative and generate tension and gossip instead of providing useful information. They often result in marginal issues getting a disproportionate amount of attention, or even create issues where they did not exist. Evaluation of the congregational system and of the rabbi within that system is an ongoing responsibility best carried out by a small number of leaders from the congregation. These leaders should work collaboratively and consistently with the rabbi in continuous conversation that promotes the health of the rabbi-congregation relationship.

Congregants should know how and when rabbinic evaluations occur, and the goals of such evaluations. Congregation leaders should always indicate what channels of communication exist when a rabbinic evaluation is in progress, so that compliments as well as concerns can be conveyed. It should be made clear that evaluation is a tool of communication and not a means of deciding upon the renewal of a rabbi's contract. A board member may be designated as a liaison to collect information. In addition, evaluators should solicit information from key committee

chairs, staff and others with whom the rabbi works closely on a regular basis. Evaluations should focus primarily on patterns and rabbinic roles rather than on individual events or episodes.

Those responsible for communicating with the rabbi regarding evaluation should be carefully chosen. They should be active and respected leaders, familiar with the rabbi's work as well as the needs and demands of the congregation, and unencumbered by personal issues with the rabbi and/or congregation. They should be familiar with the rabbi's job description and the goals agreed upon by the rabbi and leaders. Sensitivity to implications for the rabbi's employment is important. The rabbi should have an opportunity to respond to the evaluation.

Congregation leaders should understand the importance of filtering feedback to the rabbi. Not every concern and complaint needs to be relayed; one of the responsibilities of congregation leaders is to identify recurring issues that deserve attention while avoiding the sharing of every negative opinion. Evaluations should present criticism in balance with appreciation, note weaknesses in the context of strengths, and identify areas where improvement is needed along with areas of growth and accomplishment.

In addition to the ongoing evaluation and feedback that regular communication can provide, there should be an annual evaluation of the rabbi's accomplishments within the synagogue system. Before the beginning of each synagogue program year (August-September/Elul, a time of self-assessment) the rabbi and congregational leaders should identify the needs and goals of the congregation in the forthcoming year as one determinant of priorities and goals for the rabbi. This creates common expectations, as well as a baseline for later evaluation.

At the end of the synagogue program year (June/Sivan, season of the first harvest) there should be a summary and evaluation of how the earlier identified goals and responsibilities were fulfilled. Evaluations should be formative (providing "course

correction" by focusing on where things are and where they ought to be going) as well as summative (focusing on what was done).

Records of the annual evaluation signed by the rabbi and congregation president should be placed in the rabbi's personnel file.

Rabbis and congregations should think of evaluations in terms that will support and strengthen their relationship. Evaluations do not stand apart from the totality of that relationship; rather, they function best as a part of the communication about that relationship.

F. RABBIS AND SYNAGOGUE STAFF

In many Reconstructionist congregations, the rabbi is the only professional staff person, supplemented by an administrative support person/secretary (and in our smallest communities, not even that). There may be some part-time religious school teachers as well. But increasingly, as our congregations grow, executive directors, education and preschool directors, cantors and other professionals join the synagogue staff. The relationship of the rabbi to the rest of the staff needs to be clearly communicated to all parties. Synagogue staffs function best when accountability, expectations and lines of authority are clear.

With allowances for the individual approaches appropriate to a given congregation, the following points should be noted:

• The rabbi is always to be considered the senior member of the synagogue staff, whether or not s/he has direct supervisory responsibility for other staff.

• It should be established and clear to other staff as well as board members if and when the rabbi has hiring, firing, supervisory and/or evaluative discretion. For example, most rabbis would need and want this discretion regarding their assistant/secretary. Congregation leaders normally have the responsibility for most staff hiring, supervision, compensation, evaluation, promotion

and termination. But rabbis should always have input regarding key staff positions.

• The rabbi is a resource to other staff, primarily in terms of Jewish tradition, but also in terms of guidance and advice regarding professional issues.

• The unique nature of clergy roles requires that rabbis and cantors establish, with the input, advice and agreement of the congregation, clear guidelines and communication with regard to expectations, roles, decision making, and authority. The rabbi should be a member of any cantor search committee and should discuss with the appropriate congregation leaders, before the cantor search process is initiated, how s/he envisions the rabbi-cantor relationship and the roles of the cantor in the congregational system.

G. BRINGING THE RELATIONSHIP TO A CLOSE

The conclusion of a rabbi's service to a congregation is a complex process, emotionally and organizationally. Without attention to the dynamics of such a transition, unresolved issues are likely to carry over to the process of integrating a new rabbi and to affect the congregational system in other ways as well.

Complete closure in the sense of "out of sight, out of mind" is unattainable. In a congregational system, the presence of the outgoing rabbi remains within individuals as well as within structures. The positive and lasting legacies of a rabbi to a congregation need to be recognized and honored, acknowledged and appreciated: the congregation is different for having had this rabbi in its midst for this period of time.

Negative issues also need to be assessed, evaluated and worked through. If the outgoing rabbi's tenure coincided with a period of disruption or if the rabbi was seen as a contributing factor to or source of problems, the congregation needs to examine ways of learning from those experiences and placing them in perspective.

Transitions partake of both celebration and sadness, noting the roles the rabbi has played in the life of the community while allowing for the grieving process over her/his departure so that the congregation can successfully move on.

1. Retirement: Ideally, after a period of sustained service to the community by the rabbi, a mutual agreement is reached regarding the timing and terms of retirement. The primary tasks include: helping define what if any role the rabbi will retain; making whatever necessary and appropriate financial arrangements need to be made for the rabbi's retirement; devising a plan for programs, events and other formal ways in which the rabbi's contributions are honored; and finding ways for the congregation to say goodbye to the rabbi.

2. Resignations: Resignations usually subdivide into two types. In forced/hostile resignations, the rabbi is unhappy and wants to leave, and/or the congregational leadership makes it clear that the rabbi needs to resign. In voluntary/friendly resignations the rabbi chooses to move on for new personal and/or professional opportunities.

The forced/hostile resignation of a rabbi may point to issues in the congregational system as well as issues specific to the rabbi and his/her relationship to the congregation. For the congregation to have a better relationship with the next rabbi, addressing what went wrong from a systemic perspective is indispensable. Congregations should not assume that issues of the congregation are resolved with the resignation of a rabbi.

A voluntary or friendly resignation may still be experienced as hostile by some congregants out of a sense of abandonment or loss. The congregation may wonder what it did that made the rabbi choose to leave, or may experience a need to find fault with the rabbi. If the rabbi says there was nothing wrong, but s/he needed or wanted to move on to a new setting, opportunity or challenge, congregations may assume an unspoken criticism and defend against it by imputing failings to the rabbi.

Such emotional cycles are to be expected. But between the time the rabbi announces her/his resignation and when the rabbi actually leaves, a process of honoring and appreciating the relationship and providing closure should be shaped by the leaders. This helps place things in proper perspective so that the congregation and the rabbi can move on to their respective next stages.

3. Termination: A third way in which a rabbi leaves is termination. The rabbi may feel s/he has been the victim of an unfair process; the board may feel defensive; the average congregant may feel caught between both without adequate information to assess the situation.

Among the tasks to be managed at this stage are: consistent and clear communication between congregation leaders and the congregation; balancing between providing information and maintaining confidentiality; availability of the leaders by way of accountability to the congregation; and honest assessment of the systemic factors that contributed to the decision of termination. This last point -- looking frankly and openly at what in the congregational system, and not only in the rabbi, shaped the decision -- again plays a critical role in moving the congregation forward.

4. Closing the Relationship: As the rabbi's relationship with the congregation is coming to a close, wherever possible the rabbi and congregation leaders should maintain their communication, continue to work on behalf of the community, and cooperate on shared tasks, including those associated with the forthcoming rabbinic transition. In situations where the relationship with the rabbi is strained, fulfilling these responsibilities will take more effort.

The process of separation of the rabbi from the congregation should optimally include the following steps:

• Establishing a clearly agreed-upon schedule and the terms for the rabbi's departure.

• Communicating explanations to the congregation as to why the rabbi is leaving. It is desirable for the rabbi and board to provide coordinate letters to the congregation where possible, conveying a common, honest and accurate explanation.

• Ensuring that in addition to fulfilling his/her usual responsibilities, the departing rabbi makes provision for transferring necessary information to the next rabbi.

• Conducting exit interviews with the rabbi, beginning early enough to incorporate the information gathered into the search process for the next rabbi. A final exit interview just prior to the rabbi's departure can help both rabbi and congregation to clear the air of any residual issues that need attention.

• Organizing small group appreciations and goodbyes with such groups as committees, school faculty and the board.

• Creating an opportunity for the staff and rabbi to share a closing event.

• Providing an opportunity for the congregation to be together with the rabbi for a final event (such as a special Shabbat service) marking her/his departure.

The very first steps in integrating a *new* rabbi into a congregation begin with the management of the process by which the *previous* rabbi leaves the congregation.

CONCLUSION

This report began with the following observation:

> The North American Jewish community stands at a pivotal point as we enter the 21st century. Increasing numbers of Jews are seeking spiritual sustenance, authentic Torah learning and meaningful religious community. The best opportunity in generations now exists for large numbers of North American Jews to reengage their Jewish identity, rediscover their Jewish heritage and renew and reinvigorate Jewish learning and Jewish community.
>
> The spiritual community embodied in our congregations and havurot holds out the hope and the promise for the future of North American Jewish life. And our rabbis, working together with lay leaders, hold the key to mobilizing and motivating the Jewish people so the promise can be fulfilled.

Even as we are aware of this opportunity, we should not underestimate the urgency of the need to reconstruct the rabbi-congregation relationship and rethink the role of the rabbi. The negative signals from rabbis and rabbinical students regarding congregational work, as well as requests for assistance from our congregations, should be taken seriously. An increasing number of rabbis have been leaving congregational work for other areas of service to the Jewish community. In the past few years several Reconstructionist congregations have gone through difficult rabbinic transitions. If we are to realize the potential for renewing synagogues and improving rabbi-congregation relationships, we can no longer assume that we are well served by minor adjustments, by a return to past practices or by avoidance of hard choices.

For the Jewish community, and specifically the Reconstructionist movement, to miss this moment of opportunity would be nothing less than a tragedy. The difficult and challenging issues that shape the relationship between rabbis and congregations should not be ignored, but neither should they be taken as immutable.

Mordecai Kaplan left the Reconstructionist movement a legacy of boldness and a model for how to grapple creatively with new paradigms in response to new problems. In honoring Kaplan's vision, we need to consider not only his particular intellectual and spiritual insights; we need to embrace his courage and his conviction in meeting unprecedented challenges.

This report presents a pioneering vision of how the relationship between a rabbi and congregation can function, and what that relationship can become. Fulfilling that vision begins with a commitment on the part of Reconstructionist leaders to place this report and its recommendations on congregational, regional and movement-wide agendas.

But the true test of these proposals, guidelines and perspectives will be in the effort of rabbis, congregants and synagogue leaders to incorporate them into a new understanding of their relationships. The systems perspective advocated throughout this report offers a new way to look at things, a way that can help build community through recognition of commitments to a common cause. Rather than focusing on the rabbi and the congregation as independent entities, the focus needs to be, in effect, on the hyphen in "rabbi-congregation relationship." Rabbis and congregations should focus on what moves back and forth between them, what connects them to each other, and on the dynamics of their relationship -- and on what ultimately binds them together in sacred service.

The insights, analyses, strategies and recommendations that comprise this vision can reduce the inevitable moments of conflict and keep the congregational system focused on its primary purposes and goals. Our congregational communities can then direct their time and energy to their spiritual mission; our rabbis can then focus on their roles as leaders, teachers, counselors, celebrants and guides. Congregations and rabbis can truly become partners; the Reconstructionist vision of a maximal progressive Judaism in the service of a pluralistic Jewish people can come to life in caring and mutually respectful communities.

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