

# GATHER THE PEOPLE

## Organizing for *Awe*

A Strategy for Strengthening  
Covenantal Community

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## Preface

What is this book about? We are Jews and community organizers who are concerned about the need to strengthen congregations. We are troubled because when we look around us we see that most Jews are not participating actively in congregational life. We see a long-term weakening of the practice of Judaism in day-to-day life, a decline in the study of Torah<sup>1</sup> and the doing of mitzvot<sup>2</sup>—an erosion of commitment to covenantal community.<sup>3</sup> We have concluded that the hallmark of this erosion is the “out-migrating” Jew.

Why does this concern us? First, we have seen the cost of out-migration to our own family; some of our family members have migrated out of Judaism. And we feel the charge of the mitzvah not to be indifferent. We believe it is happening in our family and with others because people are under pressure. We Jews, even with our educational and worldly achievements, are not free of the destructive pressures in American life. We too are oppressed by economic uncertainty, the promotion of drugs and alcohol, growing youth gangs, criminal violence, overwhelming job demands, and the like.

In regard to these pressures, most of us may be described to be in a crisis of faith. That is, we do not have confidence that we or our congregations or Judaism or even God have any power to do anything about pressures that affect our daily lives.

Second, it concerns us because as community organizers we think we know of something that can be done to help. We believe that it is possible to restore confidence by making the synagogue relevant to the pressures and hopes in the day-to-day lives of its members. The synagogue may accomplish this by gathering members and others to do a mitzvah together, one that will help to relieve the pressures and realize the hopes—and that will create a moment of awe.<sup>4</sup>

How can the synagogue gather to do a mitzvah? It must develop many leaders as gatherers. The work of those gatherers will be to create a series of openings to the doing of mitzvot, and to help people through them by supporting and challenging and holding them accountable—and by challenging them to do the same with others. That is, they must organize for awe.

To challenge<sup>5</sup> ourselves and others to do a mitzvah is the beginning of doing many mitzvot. As ben Azzai<sup>6</sup> said, “. . . One good deed draws another good deed in its train.”<sup>7</sup>

Organizing for awe—what we call covenantal community organizing—can enable many members of a congregation to do a mitzvah in such a way that it leads to the doing of another mitzvah, and in such a way that it challenges increasing numbers of individuals to do a mitzvah. In this way we can create a pathway of “in-migration.” That is what this book is about.

We have not concerned ourselves here with the question of authority for covenantal community or the mitzvot. We recognize that in the branches and movements of Judaism, such authority will range from belief in divine revelation and direct commandment from God to the autonomy of the individual for self-imposed commandment.

We are concerned, however, with what will happen if we ignore the irrelevance of the synagogue to the pressures and hopes. We believe that without visions and methodologies designed to reach the institutional causes of out-migration, the problem will worsen.

For those who find our conclusions and recommendations overdrawn or impossibly burdensome, we acknowledge the enormous task they impose on us and thousands of other religiously committed Jews. But we do not accept that the decline of Jewish religious life is an inevitable result of modernity. And for those who say Judaism will survive, no matter what we do, we ask: How can we avoid the question of what in our own time, as religious Jews, we are responsible to do?

We understand that the responsibility for awe is ours, and that we have the power, with God, to create it. And this book is about how to organize to do that—how to organize for awe.

## How is this book organized?

In the sections that follow we address four questions about covenantal community:

- In the Prologue we have asked: *What is a solution to the lack of participation in congregational life?* and *What is a Torah vision for leadership development with the potential to remedy that lack of participation?*
- In The Rabbi's Story we have asked: *How can that vision be applied in a congregation now?*
- In the Epilogue we have asked: *What are we called to do?*
- In Questions from the Audience we have asked *additional questions we imagined our readers might have.*

## Acknowledgments

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# PROLOGUE

Gather the people. . . .

—Joel 2:15<sup>8</sup>

## Max and Zelda

Max came to New York shortly after the turn of the century, from a village in what was then Austria. He had left all of his family behind him. He married Zelda, who was from the same village, and they settled on New York City's Lower East Side. There he eked out a living as a pushcart peddler and she raised eight children. A ninth died during the influenza epidemic. Max and Zelda were pious Jews, observing Shabbos (Sabbath) and keeping kosher.<sup>9</sup> Max davened (prayed) daily with tefillin<sup>10</sup> (phylacteries).

All eight of Max and Zelda's children married Jews. Six of them then moved to Southern California in the 1940's, and Max and Zelda moved there to be near them. Nearly all of the six children were successful in business. As far as anyone could see, however, none of them were affiliated with a congregation or observant, except for short-term memberships, mostly for the sake of b'nai mitzvah.<sup>11</sup> One member of that generation did become interested in Judaism when her adult son began studying to attend seminary in his mid-40's.

Max and Zelda's children in California had 12 children of their own. After Zelda's and Max's deaths, in the 1950's, there were many family get-togethers of that second generation and their dozen children during their "Christmas holidays." These celebrations took place on Christmas day when gifts were exchanged. The extended family did not celebrate Chanukah.

Only half of Max and Zelda's grandchildren, the third generation in California, married Jews. Virtually all of that third generation attended and graduated college; several also attended professional and graduate schools. But no more than three have shown any interest in Judaism or in living a Jewish life as adults. Only one who lived in Southern California has had a Jewish congregational affiliation as an adult. At least one other claims openly to be no more than "born Jewish." And one has converted to Christianity.

Among Max and Zelda's great grandchildren and great, great grandchildren, the fourth and fifth generations, we believe there are many who claim no Jewish identity whatsoever.

Of all the family Max left behind in that Austrian village—the parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews—we know of only one cousin who

survived the Holocaust. And of all the family born here in the United States, we estimate that less than one-fourth are practicing Jews and part of a Jewish religious community.

This is a history of loss in our own family. We believe it to be emblematic of the travail of Jews since the turn of the century, both those who remained in Europe and those who came to America. For the majority of those who were born in America, Judaism has had less and less to do with their day-to-day lives—and many have ceased to have any Jewish religious identity.

We asked ourselves: If many families like ours have strayed so far from Judaism in five generations, what is to become of Jewish religious life in America in the next century? Who or what is to lift up this people?

## Lifting Up the People

Moses might have asked the same question.

When he complained to ה',<sup>12</sup> “I am not able to carry all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me,”<sup>13</sup> the answer he got was: Gather!

“Gather to Me” 70 elders “. . . and bring them to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you.”<sup>14</sup>

Why *gather*?

Since the response—Gather to Me—comes hard on the heels of Moses’ prayer for help, one might suppose that it is for his sake that ה' answers his appeal—and Rashi<sup>15</sup> interprets “gather to me” as, “Here is an answer to your complaint. . . .”<sup>16</sup> But why then, “Gather to *Me*”? Why not, gather to *yourself*?

Perhaps it is also a response to the question of the people: “Who shall give us flesh to eat?”<sup>17</sup> In the words of the Psalmist, “. . . they spoke against God; they said, Can God spread a table in the wilderness?”<sup>18</sup>

Is not the context of Moses’ complaints the complaints of the people? Though Moses but barely communicates it,<sup>19</sup> it is the rebellion<sup>20</sup> of the people to which he reacts. “The mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting, and the children of Israel also wept again and said: ‘Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic. But now our soul is dried away, there is nothing at all, besides this manna before our eyes.’”<sup>21</sup>

What kind of rebellion was this? Was it really the “freedom” of Egypt that they remembered? How, possibly, could the people juxtapose the words “Egypt” and “freely”?—unless, as Rashi argues, “freely” does not mean free of charge, but rather “exempt from the commandments.”<sup>22</sup> After all, anything which requires one’s enslavement as a condition of receiving it could hardly be described to be “free”—except to the extent that it means free from moral responsibility. “When they [the sages] said *hinam* [i.e.,

freely] they meant ‘free of *mitzvot*.’ Not food or drink, fish or cucumbers, whether given away or cheap, fresh or stale really concerned them, but that freedom from the irksome demands of civilization. . . .”<sup>23</sup>

To be free of this burden, free of the demands of Torah, is to be a moral child. And the people’s questions are the questions of a child, the ones that every child must learn to answer in growing up: “Who will provide for me?” and “Who will be responsible for me?” Or, perhaps, asked in the imagery of Moses’ prayer, in the image of a nursing child, “Who will carry me?”

The answer comes back in the response to Moses’ prayer: “Gather to Me”—in effect, you will carry yourselves with My help. ה' had clearly turned the people’s question on its head! The answer was not only in what God could do *for* the people, but also in what God would ask *of* them and in what God would do *with* them:

“Gather for Me . . . and I will come down and speak with you there, and I will draw upon the spirit that is on you and put it upon them; and they shall share the burden of the people with you, and you shall not bear it alone. And say to the people: Be ready for tomorrow and you shall eat meat. . . .”<sup>24</sup> The Lord will give you meat and you shall eat.”<sup>25</sup>

In the response to Moses’ prayer, both questions—who will provide and who will carry—are answered in an echo of the Covenant: I, ה', will continue to provide for you (meat among other things) and you also will be responsible (to bear the burden of yourselves as a people). Rashi says that bearing the burden of the people means “. . . that they [the elders] should take upon themselves the troubles of my children. . . .”<sup>26</sup>

But in order to gather as a whole, we must also gather the individuals who make up the whole. The Scripture says: “You shall not watch your brother’s<sup>27</sup> ox or his sheep go astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall in any case gather them again to your brother. And if your brother is not near you, or if you know him not, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall be with you until your brother seeks after it, and you shall restore it back to him. In like manner shall you do with . . . every lost thing of your brother’s, which he has lost, and you have found, shall you do likewise; you may not hide yourself.”<sup>28</sup> (Emphasis ours.)

Tradition interprets “in any case” to include the loss of our neighbor to Judaism and the religious life it teaches.<sup>29</sup> That is, if we are taught not to hide ourselves from the loss of our neighbor’s ox, then how can we righteously hide ourselves from the loss of our neighbor’s Jewishness?<sup>30</sup> We are taught that, “Saintliness of deed in the relationship between man and his neighbor consists in the doing of good in abundance, in one’s always benefiting his fellow creatures and never injuring them. This applies to the body, belongings and *soul* of one’s neighbor.”<sup>31</sup> (Emphasis ours.) We must not be indifferent, the rabbi taught, to the loss of Jewish faith and practice by other Jews.<sup>32</sup>

What would be the consequences of such indifference, of a failure to gather? What would be the results of a failure to bear the burden of the people—or a failure to reach out to those Jews who are lost to the covenantal community? What would happen to Am Yisrael (the Jewish people)?

We believe that, given the powerful evidence of the decline of Jewish religious life in this century, we are witnessing precisely those results in our own time.

The prophet Joel (2:15-16) may have asked himself similar questions about the impending destruction of the people in his time. He declared: “Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go out of his room, and the bride out of her chamber.” Everyone was to be gathered—women and men, young and old, rich and poor, unlettered and learned.

The power of this vision is in the image of the Jewish people gathered as one. Gather the people (אָסַף יִשְׂרָאֵל) is a defense, a rear guard, a protectorate of peoplehood. Whether we gather for protection from an enemy or from the evil grumblings of our own people, whether we gather to bear the burden of the people, or gather those who are no longer a part of the community, or even in death are gathered ourselves, gathering is about becoming one people.

In the beginning of his prophecy, Joel (1:2) asks, has anyone seen a plague of locusts as bad as this one—even you old folks? Whether the plague was literal fact or metaphor, the prophet’s words prompt us to ask ourselves the same question. We Jews are affected for both good and evil by American society. We believe that the Jewish family is facing an historic spiritual assault from the “depraved society that we live in today.”<sup>33</sup> Rabbi Yissocher Frand observes that, “As happens with the Gentiles, so too happens with the Jewish people. In a smaller measure, all the major problems that are occurring in the larger society are happening in Jewish homes as well.” Rabbi Frand concludes, “One would have to have their head in the sand to think that this change in the society around us has not taken a toll on the holiness of the Jewish people.”<sup>34</sup> Or, as Rabbi Eric Yoffie<sup>35</sup> has said, “Who would deny that we live in an atmosphere of ever-weakening moral constraints?”<sup>36</sup>

We live in a time when Jewish religious life is progressively losing its meaning for most Jews. Approximately one-half of the Jews in the U.S. are at various stages of migration away from the regular practice of Judaism.<sup>37</sup> It is clear that whatever strategy is proposed to deal with this out-migration, it must somehow confront the loss of meaning of Judaism. It must also confront the magnitude of the problem, that is, the very large number of Jews who have experienced that loss.

What today could we learn from Moses about the survival of Judaism and Jewish religious life? What might he have to say about the often-small number of people involved



in the leadership of our synagogues and temples? And what might he say about the millions of Jews drifting away from Jewish covenantal community?

*Gather!* When the survival of Torah is at stake, *Gather!* For the protection of the people, *Gather!* Increase the number of leaders. Reach out to those who are drifting away.

## Covenantal Community Organizing

But is there a way to gather the people, to multiply the numbers, to increase the leadership? If gathering is the art of bringing into association, it is also an apt description of the professional discipline known in the United States as community organizing. Thousands of neighborhood and congregational organizations have successfully used the methods of community organizing to strengthen their communities and to deal with the pressures that affect them. We have used some of the *tachlis* (practical aspects) of that discipline in forming a strategy to strengthen covenantal community in synagogues and temples, a strategy that we call *covenantal* community organizing.

Covenantal community organizing begins with the recognition that American Jews experience pressures and disappointed hopes in their day-to-day lives, and that the synagogue is largely irrelevant to them. This strategy is designed to help a congregation become relevant by gathering members who can act together to do mitzvot that will relieve the pressures and realize the hopes. To accomplish this a congregation must develop many leaders as gatherers, who can create a series of openings to the doing of those mitzvot and help people through them.

The linchpin of covenantal community organizing is thus the development of leaders as *gatherers*. The power of this strategy is in the *number* of gatherers developed. Why is this so important? To answer that question we turn to our model for understanding leadership development. It is a model that challenges many popular conceptions about leadership.

## Leadership Development

The Torah vision for our approach to leadership development is the relationship of Moses and ה'. This model redefines the role of a leader, the importance of which we shall see momentarily. For if Moses is no longer to comply with ה''s charge to carry the people,<sup>38</sup> then what *is* his mission as a leader?

The answer, we believe, is revealed in Moses' response to the prophesying of Eldad and Medad in the camp. To the report of their unauthorized prophesying, Joshua says to Moses, "Forbid them."<sup>39</sup> But Moses responds, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would God that *all* the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!"<sup>40</sup> (Emphasis ours.)

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch<sup>41</sup> comments on the preceding verse (Numbers 11:29): “. . . Moses’ answer to Joshua remains for all teachers and leaders as the brilliant example they should keep before their eyes . . . to make themselves superfluous, that the people of all classes and ranks reach such a spiritual level that they no longer require teachers and leaders. And indeed the successors of these ‘elders’ have well inherited the spirit of their Moses, have recognised their highest mission to be להרביץ תורה בישראל to make the knowledge of the Torah the broadest foundation of life in the people, and have proclaimed והעמידו תלמידים הרבה (‘establish many learners’) . . . as the first maxim for all spiritual leaders of their people. With הֲיִסָּאֵל לִי אַתָּה, ‘are you jealous for me?’ our Moses has broken down the dividing wall between ‘intellectuals’ and the ‘lower classes,’ between clergy and laity, for ever in Israel.”

A leader, then, must be one who develops other leaders. But how does that happen?

In our society leaders are often described as “born that way.” They are often regarded as those who “speak well” in front of others, that is, they are good at speech-making. Those who do not speak well are often not thought of and, maybe more importantly, *do not think of themselves, as leaders.*

Moses himself had this problem. He did not believe that he was a leader. To יְהוָה’s challenge—“Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt”<sup>42</sup>—Moses reacts, as we might, with quaking confidence and self-deprecation: “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the people of Israel out of Egypt?”<sup>43</sup> Neither did he “speak well.” In the next chapter, Moses says, “I am not eloquent, neither yesterday nor the day before, nor since you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.”<sup>44</sup> Given his lack of confidence, how is it that Moses then goes on to gather the people?

Moses learns how to be a leader in a *relationship*. He is neither born a leader nor programmed by his upbringing to become one: his transformation occurs visibly through the sustained tutelage of יְהוָה. The character of their relationship is that יְהוָה speaks to Moses “as a man speaks to his friend”<sup>45</sup>: פְּנֵים אֶל פְּנֵים;<sup>46</sup> (face to face)—פֶּה אֶל פֶּה<sup>47</sup> (mouth to mouth) and עֵין בְּעֵין<sup>48</sup> (eye to eye). They communicate directly! Their relationship shows the proximate character of all relationships for effective leadership development: they are panim el panim (face to face).

The importance of the relationship between יְהוָה and Moses becomes apparent when we examine what יְהוָה does to help Moses build his confidence. יְהוָה’s first response is support: “Certainly I will be with you.”<sup>49</sup> What may be less apparent is the role that challenge plays in building Moses’ confidence. Moses is challenged to do something that he has not done before. Rashi says it took יְהוָה seven days to convince Moses to do it.<sup>50</sup> To

Moses' continued arguments that he does not speak well, ה' responds: "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Is it not I ה'? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say."<sup>51</sup>

Moses holds ה' accountable, although that tradition neither began nor ended with him.<sup>52</sup> With the destruction of the Israelites imminent for their sin of making and worshipping the molten calf, Moses argues with God: "ה', why does your anger burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?"<sup>53</sup> "Turn from your fierce anger, and repent of this evil against your people."<sup>54</sup> The response: "ה' repented of the evil which He thought to do to His people."<sup>55</sup> Thus, in the context of a relationship, both support and challenge are necessary to the development of leaders.

If we want to test the efficacy of leadership, we may ask: How many leaders, who were not previously considered leaders, have you gathered this past year? And how many leaders are they gathering? The significance of these questions is numerical, for if leaders gather other leaders, who themselves become gatherers, then there is a potential multiplication of the number of leaders.

In regard to ה' saying, "I will take of the spirit which is upon you and will put it upon them,"<sup>56</sup> Rashi understands the meaning from the *Targum* (the Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch) as "And I will make great [the spirit that is on Moses]."<sup>57</sup>

Interpreting this "divine manifestation," the instance of God's coming down to take of the spirit within Moses and to put it upon the 70 others, Rashi asks: "To what may Moses be likened at that moment? To a light lying upon a candlestick, and everyone kindles (the other lights) from it, but its own light does not diminish at all."<sup>58</sup>

# THE RABBI'S STORY

You will certainly wear away, both you, and this people who are with you; for this thing is too heavy for you; you are not able to perform it yourself alone. (Exodus 18:18)

*This is the story of a conversation among three rabbis. If it seems an unlikely conversation—who has time for leisurely talk?—we nonetheless hope it is one that will take place, somewhere, someday. Rabbi Dan Feldman is the senior member of the group. He's 49 years old, 15 years in the rabbinate, 10 years at Beth Israel, a Conservative synagogue. He is married and has two children. Susan Levine, a second career rabbi from social work, is 39. She was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary. She's been the rabbi of a small Conservative congregation for two years. She is divorced and the parent of one child. And Martin Margolis is 36, 10 years a rabbi, now at a medium-sized Reform temple. He is married with three children. If we asked our rabbis, they might not remember how the argument (which they have continued for more than a year) got started. (It was over lunch at a board of rabbis' meeting.) What would be the future of Judaism here in the United States? they debated. Would there be a Judaism in 50 years, if so few of their members continued to come to synagogue and the rest stayed home? Would fewer and fewer come? Is it inevitable?*

## AV (August)

*Susan:* Dan! What's going on with you? You look like you're in another world!

*Dan:* I am, kind of. (POINTING TO HIS JEWISH NEWSPAPER) Did you see this article, "Looking For Leaders?"

*Susan:* Did you see Bill LeBeau's<sup>59</sup> quote in it?

*Dan:* I'm reading it. "I'm well aware of our dying as a community. We're awaiting not one giant to lead us, but a chorus of courageous leaders who will help us transform the shudder of a dying people' into something new."<sup>60</sup>

*Martin:* We have a lot of strengths we haven't used yet.

*Susan:* You think he's exaggerating?

*Martin:* I think we have serious problems.

*Dan:* I'm glad he said it—I wish more would.

*Susan:* Did you see the Reform and Conservative polls on programming to the inter-married? I'm reading from the back side of your paper. It says, ninety percent say they want more outreach.<sup>61</sup>

*Martin:* I've seen the numbers. The mystery is *how*.

*Dan:* Inter-marriage isn't the problem.

*Martin:* You think inter-marriage isn't a problem?

*Dan:* I think it's a symptom.

*Susan:* Of what?

*Dan:* A lack of meaning. It seems to me that a lot of our people are thinking they've been sent here for nothing.

*Martin:* What are you talking about?

*Dan:* Not for naught have I sent you.<sup>62</sup> I talked to a guy the other day, he didn't know I was a rabbi. So, coincidentally, the subject of synagogue comes up. First he tells me that he doesn't care whether Judaism lives or dies. After it comes out I'm a rabbi, he says he attends a Seder (ceremonial Passover meal) every year. Don't you think it's ironic that in some studies he's counted statistically as a religious Jew?

Of course, no one wants to say it for attribution in their own congregation. But look at the difference between attendance at High Holy Days and weekly. If the synagogue had real meaning in their lives, don't you think they'd come more often? I don't see how we can say the congregation has meaning in the lives of people who don't participate in it.

*Martin:* That's true. Last year, we had 300 for Yom Kippur. I saw all these people straining, reaching out for the Torah. It almost brought me to tears. But then I thought, what does it mean to them that they come once a year? Days later for Shabbat (Sabbath), we were back down to thirty. Then, a week later, on Friday night, I was leading a service for four people again.

*Susan:* What can you do? You can't forge community when community doesn't show up. I think the worst is feeling like I'm never going to turn it around.

*Dan:* I know one thing, we're not going to get the unaffiliated if we can't even get our own members.

*Martin:* Do you really think we're going to get them back? Did we ever have them?<sup>63</sup>

*Dan:* I figured it out once. Even those who come for services every week, they come for maybe three or four hours out of 168 in the week. I say maybe because a lot of them are only with us for three hours a *year*. How much influence do you think we have in *those* three hours?

*Susan:* What's the point? It's always been that way. It's the 80/20 rule.

*Dan:* The point is, what's going on with them during *the other 165 hours* of the week?

*Martin:* Work and family, what else?

*Dan:* Think of it like a kind of slow disintegration of your life. What happens in the three hours comes to be increasingly disconnected from what happens in the other 165 hours, until the two are hardly connected at all. In other words, the synagogue has very little to do with what goes on in the rest of their lives.

*Susan:* Who's responsible for that?

*Dan:* You mean whose fault is it that America is a great and hospitable land to Jews, so we've become educated and successful and we've fanned out across it and no longer live in well-defined Jewish communities?

*Martin:* Maybe the problem is with the family. Less than half of our families have two parents still together.

*Dan:* Is that a cause or a symptom?

*Susan:* Even so, hasn't the percentage of affiliated stayed about the same?

*Dan:* Actually, it's dropped a lot since the 50's—also, I think many people are walking away or apart from us without leaving the synagogue. But we don't think of it that way because we're measuring commitment by *numbers of members*—never mind how religious, spiritual, or educated they are, or aren't.

*Martin:* Do you think they're apathetic?

*Dan:* I've noticed we call it apathy when we're talking about other people, not ourselves. Why do you think that is?

*Susan:* I suppose because we're involved. Why should we think of ourselves as apathetic?

*Dan:* Exactly. We don't think of ourselves that way because we *know* the things that concern us; but I don't think we know the things that concern our members.

*Susan:* I'm not sure. If our members were really upset about something, don't you think we'd hear about it?

*Dan:* We might, if we were living in a shtetl.<sup>64</sup> If we lived close, we'd talk. We'd know each other as neighbors. But we don't live close, we don't have the opportunities for talk that people living in Jewish neighborhoods once had, and we don't know each other very well. And I don't think we know what's going on during those 165 hours.

*Susan:* What do you think is going on?

*Dan:* I'm not sure, but I think that people may be under a lot of pressure.

*Martin:* What kind of pressure?

*Dan:* Like Mitzraim (Egypt) . . . it comes from the outside and presses in on you, like a narrow place in your life, something that harasses you and even makes it difficult for you to breathe. It's tyranny by a different kind of kingdom.<sup>65</sup>

*Martin:* What are you talking about?

*Dan:* Imagine you live in the suburbs and commute every day to work. On a good day, it takes you 45 minutes each way. Lately you haven't had many good days. So it's been taking more like an hour and 20 minutes. You also tend to work long hours. So, you're getting home around 7:15 to 7:45, exhausted, and you're not paying much attention to your daughter. Your spouse gets home earlier than you do and is doing most of the parenting. Your spouse is worried and upset with you because he or she suspects that your teenage daughter is experimenting with, *fill in the blank*.

*Martin:* Oy. That's pressure!

*Dan:* Or, change the daughter to an elderly parent. Because the care isn't adequate at the nursing home where you've placed your mother, her eye becomes seriously infected. You decide to remove her from the nursing home and care for her at home. There's no Jewish convalescent home in the area. Both you and your spouse work, and it's been very difficult to arrange adequate care for your mother when you can't be with her. You've been worried and upset a lot, and lately you've caught yourself hyperventilating. And it gets worse. Imagine you're alone with the pressure—no community. How do you feel?

*Martin:* Not very good.

*Susan:* Lousy. I think I know what you're talking about. Joshua is a good kid, but I've been worried about some of the things that have been happening at his school.

*Martin:* What's going on at the school?

*Susan:* Kids pushing other kids around.

*Martin:* Hasn't that always gone on?

*Susan:* With guns? Did you see last night's paper? More and more kids are bringing weapons to school.<sup>66</sup>

*Martin:* I agree it's scary, but what's that got to do with Jewish? What's *Jewish* about these pressures?

*Dan:* The people who experience them. But normally we don't see it, because, like Ibn Ezra<sup>67</sup> said, they "suffer in secret."<sup>68</sup> Maybe that's the way the rabbis talked about denial.

*Martin:* You'd rather we suffered publicly?

*Dan:* No, I'd rather we didn't think we had to have things under control that we weren't meant to control, and suffer in secret until they blow up in our faces.

*Martin:* It depends on your definition of control.

*Dan:* I meant not control as individuals. An individual can't fix unemployment or crime.

*Martin:* Suppose for the sake of argument that it's true, that a lot of Jews are living under pressure. What's it got to do with the synagogue?

*Dan:* Think of it this way: Someone comes to you carrying a load of stones. Your job is to get this person to be more Jewish. So you say: "Here! Carry the Torah! Be a Jew! Be a part of the community!" What realistically do you think the person is going to say to you?

*Martin:* Carry it yourself!—No meal, no Torah!<sup>69</sup>

*Dan:* You're making my point. Most of us accommodate our burdens one way or another. Suppose the accommodation was such that Jews who carried these burdens had less and less time and energy and money for the synagogue? What I want to know is, how do we make the synagogue a place where we can do something about the pressures?

*Martin:* They won't even come to synagogue. Now they're going to change the world?

*Susan:* I don't know. I can barely take care of what's on my plate now. How am I going to help them with their burdens and dreams?

*Dan:* I had the same reaction. But I think that when we begin to understand the pressures in our members' lives, who they are the other 165 hours a week,



then we can figure out how to be relevant. And if we get together on a common pressure or hope, we might find a way to do something about it. Maybe that's a way to get back meaning. Think about what the cost will be if we don't. Pressures like these can't be ignored. They push people to spend a lot of time and energy and money looking for relief. When they don't find it in Judaism and a congregation, they go elsewhere.

*Martin:* You expect the congregation to offer counseling? What's the point?

*Dan:* The point is, where people find solutions is where they'll most likely invest themselves. I also think that where the pressures aren't relieved and their hopes are always disappointed, like Rashi says, the people may become demoralized.<sup>70</sup> They may conclude—I believe it's already happening—that neither they, the congregation, Judaism, nor even God has any real power to do anything about the pressures that affect them the rest of the week. The ultimate price may be that Jews come to see the synagogue as having little or nothing to do with the most important parts of their lives.

*Martin:* But if they're suffering in secret, why should they tell us?

*Dan:* They might if they were convinced that together we could do something about it—and that it would be Jewish.

*Susan:* Even if you could get them to tell you, what can *you* do?

*Dan:* I'm getting to that. Remember the organizers I told you I was going to meet with?

*Martin:* Who?

*Dan:* They're staff for a non-profit that does synagogue training and education—strengthening covenantal community. Their board includes rabbis from all over the country, Orthodox to Renewal.

*Susan:* Why'd you meet with them?

*Dan:* Initially I was curious what all these people could be agreeing on. Covenantal community organizing is how they describe what they do. You know, Abe is on their board. He was the one who suggested that I meet with them. Anyway, I wound up spending two hours with them.

*Susan:* Two hours? Why?

*Dan:* The questions were stimulating. Things like, what's my vision for my *lifetime rabbinate*? And what am I willing to take risks for?

*Susan:* What'd you say?

- Dan:* I'm still thinking. Then they asked about my hopes and dreams for the synagogue and what I hoped my *legacy* would be to the congregation.
- Susan:* My question is, how do you connect the hope to the reality? What'd you tell them?
- Dan:* I laughed. I said my hope was "to remain employed!" Then I told them, what I really wanted was to strengthen the people somehow, bring Torah to the people, or vice-versa—make them more Jewish. Although, when I said it, I was remembering an incident at a Shabbat Shaharit (morning) service. Besides the regulars, we had another 125 for a bat mitzvah, and they wouldn't do anything at all in the service—wouldn't sing, wouldn't read responsively, nothing. I finally challenged them with something to the effect that Judaism requires more than just sitting and praying, it calls for action—all of which went nowhere, of course, because they weren't listening. By the end of the service I was angry, and I had to work to control myself. Sometimes I wonder why I'm knocking myself out. I'm out there leading for the sake of heaven and I turn around and find myself alone in the desert.
- Martin:* Speaking of legacy, I was at the Jewish library in the city a few months ago and I ran into a past president from my last congregation. He told me that in the three years since I've left, things have really gone downhill. It seems the new rabbi is much more scholar than program instigator. For a moment, I felt kind of pleased with myself—so they missed me after all and couldn't get along without me. But then I thought, if things began falling apart as soon as I left, what had I built there?
- Susan:* I try to think of the glass as half-full.
- Dan:* The trouble is, it doesn't *feel* that way. I sure would like to know what it's like. . . .
- Susan:* What what's like?
- Dan:* A *full* glass.
- Martin:* What other questions did they ask?
- Dan:* We talked about Nehemiah for awhile. They asked me if I had ever thought about *how* Nehemiah got the people to rebuild Jerusalem— day-to-day. I remembered that Nehemiah was a man of planning and action.<sup>71</sup> So . . . he exhorted the people, he questioned them, he appealed to their love of God and Torah, and he brought them together to rebuild the wall and gates.<sup>72</sup> They said, they wondered if the important thing wasn't rebuilding the confidence of the people, since the people didn't believe they could do it. Looking at it that way, the need for rebuilding the wall could be seen as a chance to rebuild the people, so to speak. It was a different way of looking at a problem, kind of

like “getting honor out of Pharaoh.”<sup>73</sup> And I was intrigued by it. Then they asked me what kind of leader I am and what I do to help leaders develop.

*Susan:* I’m not sure how I’d answer that. What’d you tell them?

*Dan:* I was a little embarrassed. I try to give people who show initiative room to operate, but I can’t really say I have a plan.

*Martin:* Lately I’ve been seeing the need for one. I had a conversation the other day with one of our board members—we’re trying to get a khevra kadisha (holy burial society) started. I said, “George, you’re on the cemetery committee, right?” And he said, “I *am* the cemetery committee.”

*Susan:* Develop in what way?

*Dan:* They gave me a list of questions about leadership development that were helpful. They’re in here somewhere (PULLING A PAPER OUT OF HIS BRIEFCASE).

### How Many Leaders Are You Developing This Year?

- Do you have a list of people in the congregation whom you have identified as potential leaders (people who aren’t leaders now, but could be)?
- Are there consistent, week-to-week opportunities in the synagogue for members to get experience as leaders, outside of holding office?
- What is your plan for helping those leaders to develop?

*Martin:* What kind of a program is this?

*Dan:* It’s not really a program. It’s a process to help people become leaders. The goal is a multiplication of leaders.

*Susan:* Does this mean you’d have a much bigger board? How’s that going to help?

*Dan:* No, this is a different kind of leadership—leaders as gatherers.

*Susan:* Gatherers of what?

*Dan:* Other leaders.

*Susan:* Where would they be getting these other leaders from?

*Dan:* Actually, what we’d be doing is gathering people who could become leaders.

*Susan:* Gathering to do what?

*Dan:* To do mitzvot to deal with the pressures in their lives.

*Susan:* What do you mean “deal with”—stress management?

*Dan:* No. It’s like in Nehemiah, there’s a number of possibilities—anything from self-help, like the way they rebuilt the wall, to holding corporate and public officials accountable, as Nehemiah did with the usurious officials.<sup>74</sup>

*Martin:* Hmmm. . . . So everybody’s going to go around developing everyone else?

*Dan:* Well, not everybody, and not everyone else either, but, more or less, yes. Contrary to popular opinion, I don’t think leaders are born, I think we have to raise them up.

*Susan:* We try to do that at our annual leadership retreat. They get training in running meetings, leading services, that sort of thing.

*Dan:* We do too, but I think we have to do more than that, by supporting and challenging and holding them accountable throughout the year. The organizers asked me how I am at challenging people.

*Susan:* One of *my* weaknesses. What’d you say?

*Dan:* I’m not very consistent about it. Usually, I’m not sure what to do, or how people will react. Sometimes I just back away. Other times when things get tense, I wind up trying to meet everybody’s needs or I relieve the tension by throwing myself into the breach. It really doesn’t work, and it’s hard on me.

*Susan:* And on the family.

*Dan:* Yes. Did you know Ruth was teaching at the synagogue? Of course, getting people to stick with the Hebrew classes is tough. So now we’re both feeling the pressure. Anyway, the other thing about challenging is that in the past I didn’t do much preparation to make sure that people would even be open to a challenge—no planning, no follow-up, no accountability.

*Susan:* If you do this, won’t it mean they’ll hold you accountable? Hokeah tokiah?<sup>75</sup>

*Dan:* Meaning under all circumstances.<sup>76</sup> That’s the way I want it. In the past I nearly always thought only what it would cost me to challenge someone. Lately I’ve started looking at the price I’m paying for *not* challenging.

*Susan:* Are you going to go around challenging everybody now?

*Dan:* Maybe. But what did you think I meant by challenge?

*Susan:* Exhorting them? What *do* you mean?

*Dan:* It's not about telling, it's about asking. It's about helping people to think something through and then asking them to take a step forward.

*Susan:* Are you determining their next step? Shouldn't they be doing that?

*Dan:* That's what the thinking through is about in this process. It's a form of support for the person, while they're figuring it out. I think the thing that people fear most is failure, and reducing the risk of failure makes it much more likely that they'll take another step.

*Martin:* But how do you know whether they'll fail or not? Besides, I think I've had about all I can stand of trying to talk people into things.

*Dan:* You have to gauge the resources of the person you're challenging—their experience, skills, emotional wherewithal, learning, etc. You're probably asking someone to do something they haven't done before. It requires some planning not to make the challenge so small that it's not challenging or so big that it's overwhelming. It isn't about talking people into things. The challenge is always in the form of a question, like, "Would you be willing to do . . . ?"—fill in the blank. This kind of language and a neutral tone of voice allows the person to accept or to refuse with dignity.

*Martin:* And that's all you have to do?

*Dan:* There is one other thing, probably what I do least well. After you've asked the question, you have to be quiet. I realize that in the past when I filled in the silence with talk, I made it hard for the person to consider what I had said. Nowadays, when they don't say yes right away, I don't start making excuses for them, by saying things like, "of course, if you're busy," etc. The idea is, *be quiet*. Let them do the thinking and talking.

*Martin:* How is your challenging people going to change the synagogue?

*Dan:* It won't. Most people only relate in this way to a half-dozen people. I may do two or three times that number, but I'll pick the people very carefully. They should be people with real potential for building relationships.

*Susan:* What about the rest of the members?

*Dan:* That's why it's important to pick people who can build relationships—a lot of other people have to be doing it, if we're going to change the synagogue.

*Susan:* But why would they *want* to do it?

*Dan:* It's their pressures and hopes we'll be dealing with. I think they can be challenged to improve their own lives and other Jewish lives.

## CHESHVAN (Late October)

*Martin:* The last time we got together, it seemed like you were talking about overhauling your rabbinate.

*Dan:* In a way, yes, although I didn't decide to do anything right away. I realized as I talked with the organizers that what they were proposing would change the culture of the congregation and my role in it. On the one hand, it made me nervous. I wasn't sure how our people would react. On the other hand, given the numbers of members who don't come to synagogue, I thought a lot about the idea of rebuilding the confidence of the people. It touched a nerve. I could see that if we wanted to get anywhere, we would need a way to multiply the leadership—leaders developing leaders developing leaders.

*Martin:* P'ru ur'vu (be fruitful and multiply)?<sup>77</sup>

*Dan:* Too slow. I started to wonder what it would mean for the congregation, and for me personally, if we had a lot of strong, skilled leaders. I realized it wasn't only the confidence of the people that needed rebuilding.

*Susan:* How are you proposing to rebuild confidence?

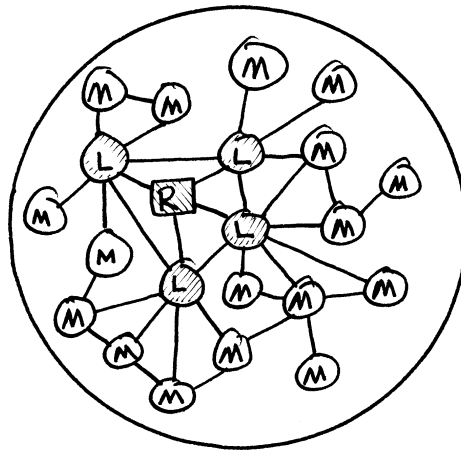
*Dan:* By challenging people to take leads. When they succeed, their confidence is strengthened.

*Susan:* But if they don't have confidence, how do you know they can be leaders?

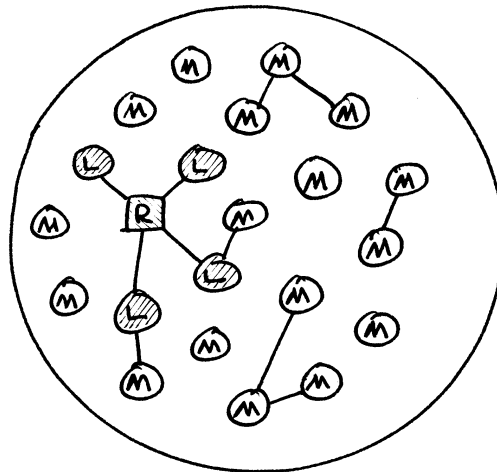
*Dan:* I think you'll be surprised by the answer. A potential leader is someone who can build relationships, someone who can listen to others, like the officers who took on the troubles of the people.<sup>78</sup>

*Martin:* A leader has to do a lot more than listen.

*Dan:* But if they can't listen, I don't think they can be leaders. Look, I can show you what the effect is on my role if they aren't listening. It's like this (DRAWING ON HIS NAPKIN). This analysis of the rabbi's influence doesn't start with the rabbi. It begins with the congregation as a whole. Imagine that this [FIRST FIGURE ON THE NEXT PAGE] is an urban congregation—"R" equals rabbi, "L" equals leaders, and "M" equals members—75 to 100 years ago, before our suburbanization. Then, most of the members lived in the neighborhood of the synagogue, and they tended to know each other. In this picture, when the rabbi relates to one of these leaders, he or she is also relating to others, through that person.



Now it looks more like this. Most of our members don't live in the same neighborhood anymore, and most of them don't know each other well.



*Martin:* That's something I do feel good about in my work. I've built a lot of relationships.

*Dan:* I've admired your ability to do that. But I'm not talking only about our relationships with members, but their relationships with one another, including the three-quarters we rarely see.

*Martin:* What kind of relationships are you talking about?

*Dan:* Let me ask you something. How many times in the last year do you suppose your average member or even one of your leaders has sat with another member, not a good friend, and listened for 15 to 30 minutes while that person told about his or her pressures or concerns—about health or marriage or children or community or whatever—without being interrupted, argued with, or given advice? (POINTING TO THE DRAWING ABOVE) Here's the contemporary rabbi communicating with several of the members, but the number of their in-depth

relationships with the remaining members is very limited, so their influence is limited, and so is the rabbi's.

*Martin:* You think we're responsible?

*Dan:* No, I finally see that it's not the rabbi's fault. I've been out front, trying to get the membership to be more Jewish. I've tried to do that through the leaders, but they don't have the relationships to support it. I realize now that without community I'm never going to have enough influence to make a real difference in observance. There has to be a community to receive what I'm giving, like mattan Torah.<sup>79</sup>

*Martin:* So how do you reconnect them?

*Dan:* The first step for me is getting to know our members better—meeting with them, panim el panim—to find out about their pressures. Also, when we talk, I may test their potential for leadership by asking them to do something. In that respect I'm a gatherer of gatherers—my role isn't much different from what the members and leaders and the organizers will be doing. But there is a way in which I have to provide the vision.

*Susan:* I want my congregation to come up with the vision.

*Dan:* I have the same instinct. If it's relevant to *their* lives, then they'll own it and want to pay the price for it. And I believe we can do that. The problem is, the board and the members may not be in a position to do it alone.

*Martin:* Why not?

*Dan:* It's like this: If 15 of our board members sat down to produce a vision for the synagogue, first they'd have to spend a lot of time agreeing on the ground rules. Such as, how do we decide what goes in the vision and what doesn't? And how is the process guided by Torah? Most of them aren't in a position, either by experience or available energy, to lay out for themselves such a process.

*Susan:* So who should decide?

*Dan:* The substance of it is their job—based on Torah of course. My job is to propose a process for achieving that, also Torah-guided. I believe that I have the responsibility and obligation to do that as the mara d'atra.<sup>80</sup>

*Martin:* What finally convinced you to take the risk?

*Dan:* Mrs. G. Lately, when I think of the demoralization of Jerusalem, I think about her.

*Susan:* The demoralization of Jerusalem?



*Dan:* Nehemiah's Jerusalem comes to mind.

*Martin:* Who's Mrs. G?

*Dan:* One of our members, a woman in her early 50's. When she came in to see me she was really overwrought—I had never seen her that way. Her younger son is getting married.

*Martin:* The soon-to-be daughter-in-law isn't Jewish.

*Dan:* Right. Mrs. G is obviously torn. First she says she feels *sick* about it. Then she tells me she's getting used to it—the older boy also intermarried. Then she says she can't turn her back on her children, and her daughter-in-law is really a very nice person. . . .

*Martin:* She's just not Jewish.

*Dan:* When she wasn't talking, she was crying. She kept saying she didn't know what she'd done wrong. I told her I was sorry that I wouldn't be able to marry them, which was why I thought she'd come. Then, she said, "Oh, they don't care about that." Afterwards, I couldn't get that out of my head. Why didn't they care about it? Finally, it was the numbers that got me to take the first step. I could see that whatever I tried—to reach people—it wouldn't be enough if it didn't affect large numbers. It wasn't only a question of what we would do with people, but how many people we would do it with. I've only got so much time and energy, and I want to use it better than I have. I want to reach the hundreds.

*Martin:* What hundreds?

*Dan:* The ones who come only on High Holy Days.

*Susan:* How does the congregation feel about all these ideas?

*Dan:* I started laying groundwork last spring, after Pesach. I talked to 10 members, individually. I wanted to get an idea of how people in the congregation might feel about it.

*Susan:* You talked to 10 people, just to get it started?

*Dan:* Yeah, it's consulting with the people. God consulted with the angels—*derekh erez* (the way of the land).<sup>81</sup>

*Martin:* It may be, but it sounds like a lot of work.

*Dan:* I realize the price I'm paying for *not* challenging. I'm tired of charming, strong-arming and guilt-tripping people into things. And I don't like what I'm teach-

ing people by doing it. Sometimes lately I wonder if this is the best way to use my life.

*Susan:* How are you learning to do all this?

*Dan:* The organizers provide support on an ongoing basis.

*Martin:* What did you tell the 10 people about why you wanted to meet with them?

*Dan:* I said I was very concerned about the need to strengthen covenantal community in our congregation. I told them that I wanted to hear their reactions to the ideas. I said that before I did anything to take a formal step, I wanted to get some opinions.

*Susan:* What did they think about your opinion polling? Do they think there's a need?

*Dan:* I think it caught them a little off guard. Some said, "What do you mean, strengthen covenantal community?" I told them that we have about 350 adults in the synagogue, but only about 50 people show up on any kind of regular basis. More than three-quarters of our members don't come to synagogue. We need to strengthen the community in a way that draws into participation as many of those people as possible. "Well, that's true," they said, "but what can you do about it? It's always been that way." Then I told them that I had been exploring a process, which I said I was convinced would help us strengthen covenantal community. I told them that I had a manual I wanted them to read. I asked them if they would be willing to read it and then meet with me afterwards for 45 minutes to give me their reactions, and talk about it with me.

*Susan:* It doesn't sound like you got a lot of support. Do they think there's a need to strengthen the community?

*Dan:* Actually, most said they could see real value in exploring the process. Some were leaders who had gotten burned out in the past. They, especially, could see the value in developing more leaders.

*Martin:* What about your board?

*Dan:* Since I had checked it out informally with a few leaders and members, I felt confident about taking it to the board. I've got my impromptu notes for the board meeting in here somewhere (RUMMAGING AND THEN FINDING THE NOTES).

*Martin:* Dan, it looks like chicken scratches.

*Dan:* All right. All right. I have the whole thing printed out. Here it is.

*Susan:* How long is it? I'll read it to us.

*Dan:* Good.

*Susan:* (READING) “More than three-quarters of our members are not actively involved in the synagogue. We need to increase participation in our congregation. And I want to challenge us tonight to begin to explore a process which I believe would be helpful in doing that. It’s a method that brings Torah to bear on everyday pressures that are destructive to our families. I also believe that these pressures divert time, energy, and money in those families from Judaism and congregational life.

“The first step in this method is strengthening the relationships among ourselves, toward what Jews once had when we lived as neighbors. Why am I talking about ‘neighbors’? When we ignore each other as neighbors, we find ourselves, by definition, without real community, and subject to pressures we can’t handle alone.

“The method that I’m talking about is described in detail in a manual that’s available to us. I’ve read the manual and met informally, over a period of several months, with the people who wrote it. I think it’s worth your time. And I think, potentially, it might be important to our congregation. I was convinced that, given the complexity and potential value of the process, I wanted to confirm my own reactions, so I asked 10 people in the synagogue to read the manual and give me some feedback. The majority reacted positively, which convinced me to bring it before the board tonight.

“I want to propose that we do three things over the next three months. First, I’d like you to meet individually with the people who wrote the manual, and who are the staff of the organization. They would also like to meet and talk with you, to see what your interest is, and to see if our congregation is a candidate for this process. Second, I think it would be much more productive in terms of your understanding, and our discussion, if we all read the manual on covenantal community organizing. And third, I would like us to schedule some discussion time at our next board meeting, at the end of summer, to talk about taking a next step in the process. If you would like, the organizers are willing to be present for some portion of that meeting, to answer questions, and as a way for you to learn more about them.”

*Martin:* I’m not sure my board members would want to take the time for all that.

*Dan:* Some of ours felt the same way. They asked why the organizers had to meet with them, why couldn’t they just read the manual and talk about it? I emphasized again that the process that we would be exploring aims to restore the relationships we once had as neighbors. That means we take time to meet and talk with each other, and with them. They’re asking for nothing less than that. Lastly, I told them I wanted to ask the organizers to call each of them for an appointment, and I hoped that they would seriously consider giving 45 minutes of their time.

*Susan:* Were you a little nervous about letting them loose with the board members?

*Dan:* No, not really. I've been meeting with them, actually getting to know them. And they were very clear about what they would be doing in the meetings. They would get acquainted and then ask a number of questions—like: Would you want to see many more people active in the synagogue? Do you think it would be important for many more members of the congregation to know more about Judaism? What kinds of things could be accomplished if there was an abundance of committed people? When you think of the future of the city, and your children in it, are there things that worry you?"

*Susan:* Did they meet with them?

*Dan:* About three-quarters of them did.

*Martin:* Do your board members care about getting more people active? What'd they say?

*Dan:* They cared enough that at the end of summer it was back on the board agenda, and it was labeled "Next Step." The question was, did we want to take another step in exploring covenantal community organizing? We decided we did.

*Susan:* Were the organizers at the board meeting?

*Dan:* Yes—and our people had some tough questions for them. We taped and transcribed the discussion for people who couldn't make the meeting. Do you want to hear some of it?

*Martin:* Give us a taste.

*Dan:* I'll read some of the questions our board members asked and the answers the organizers gave. It started with three of our youngest members saying that our congregation and our region of the country are very different from other places. They wanted to know, "How do we know it'll work here?" The organizers answered: "What we have learned is that, not surprisingly, each congregation is different and unique. As a result, the process must always be understood as a set of principles to be tailored to local needs, not applied as a rigid model. But we do believe that virtually every congregation has the capacity to empower itself by organizing as a covenantal community." Then someone asked, "How can we be sure the congregation won't be divided by the issues that come up?" The organizers answered: "One of the ground rules of strengthening covenantal community in this process is that we only work on things we can agree on. In that way, it not only doesn't create division, it helps to heal it, because it helps people identify things to do about the concerns they have in common."

*Martin:* In terms of that kind of stuff, don't you already have a social action committee?

*Dan:* Somewhere here there's a question by our ethical issues chair. Yes—he said, “We already have a committee for social action. This is a duplication.” Then the organizers answered: “The work of covenantal community organizing and of a committee for social action are both important, but different. Covenantal community organizing begins with a commitment by many members of the congregation to building deeper relationships—relationships that would involve face-to-face sharing of daily pressures, concerns and hopes. They would also include support and challenge as the main tools of leadership development. In covenantal community organizing, there is Torah learning by many members of the congregation in search of visions, principles, and methods to deal with their common pain and hope. Also, covenantal community organizing leads to the congregation doing a mitzvah together to deal practically with the pressures in their lives, both for themselves and for others who are suffering similarly.”

*Martin:* I don't see how our people could agree on an issue.

*Dan:* The action here isn't driven by issues. It comes out of our getting to know each other much better, out of talking about our pain and hope, and out of our looking at Torah and challenging each other to act on it.

*Martin:* You think this is a cure-all for the troubles of the synagogue?

*Dan:* Our school principal asked a similar question—let me find it. Okay—“Are you proposing this organizing as a ‘definitive model’ for congregational development?” The organizers answered: “We certainly don't believe that covenantal community organizing is the only thing congregations should be doing day to day, or the only framework for their visioning and strategic planning. On the other hand, we do think that the essentials of the process—building relationships as neighbors and linking Torah to the pressures of everyday life—are indispensable to any vital congregation.”

*Martin:* What about a survey, couldn't you find out what you need to know with a survey?

*Dan:* Our surveys, useful as they've been, haven't revealed the particular pains and hopes of individuals. So of course they can't tell us how to respond to them.

*Susan:* I agree with that. How did your board members feel about the idea of building relationships as neighbors? I think mine would say they already have them.

*Dan:* Some of our people felt the same way. One said he didn't see why we should do this because he already knows most of the people in the synagogue. But then one of the younger board members said he'd been a member of the synagogue for years before he got to know many people. He liked the idea that it would be possible for people to get to know one another much more quickly. Then several people wanted to know how much it would cost. The organizers explained: “In the first phases, we would assist you in writing proposals to

cover the start-up costs. The synagogue would submit the proposals to foundations, Federation, and individual donors.”

*Martin:* But what would be the actual financial commitment of the synagogue?

*Dan:* Virtually zero at this point. As I understand it, once we have gone through the initial phases and have seen results, and if we’re happy with the results, we could contract with the consultants for ongoing support, including training and networking with other Jewish congregations that are working in this way. The annual costs are relatively modest and are calculated on a sliding scale by congregational size. I also said, one of the things that is attractive to me about this is that we can explore it step-by-step, without being pressured to make one big decision to do it or not. We don’t move ahead if we don’t have the people. I see opportunities all along the way to decide whether to take a next step or not. Once the synagogue has seen results, then we can decide whether and how to continue.

*Martin:* How do you get a committed core of people to do all this?

*Dan:* We talked about that at length. I told the board that I thought we needed to test the reactions of a lot more people, to find out what they think about this, and that the organizers would go out and talk to maybe 10 to 15 members to test their interest. As a part of these interviews, the members would be asked if they would be willing to attend a series of three workshops, two hours each, a week apart, which would take place when the visits are completed. The workshops provide the foundation. If the 10 to 15 members were not interested, there was no point in going any further—but of course the board would make that decision. The board understood that if the 10 to 15 visits went well and our people felt positive about them, then the organizers would do another 25 to 100 visits—with the understanding, of course, that if there were enough people who expressed interest in the workshops, then we would schedule them. After half of the interviews by the organizers were done, if the responses warranted it, I would ask the board to endorse and schedule the three workshops.

*Susan:* But won’t the same people come to the workshops that come to everything else? How do you get new people?

*Dan:* The initial visits by the organizers were an opportunity for us to see if we could involve members who are on the periphery, which, of course, is the majority of our members. I wanted to hear from some of them, to see if it would excite them and draw them in. If it turned out that people didn’t want to come to the workshops, it would’ve been over.

*Martin:* How many are enough?

*Dan:* About 20.

*Martin:* What do the organizers do in these visits?

*Dan:* They follow a 45-minute generic format, which remains about the same whether an organizer or the rabbi or a congregant is doing them. There are five main pieces: The first is to lay out your credential, which should answer all the questions people have but often don't ask—like: Who are you? What do you want? Who sent you? How much is this going to cost me? The second piece is to get acquainted. The third is to learn about the other person's hopes and pressures, the day-to-day dreams and demands. They asked me, for example, "When you think about what's happening in the city, are there things that worry you for your family's future?" The fourth is to tell a Torah story about how covenantal community can be strengthened. We use Nehemiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem because it has so many contemporary applications. The fifth is to invite people to join with others in the congregation to take a step in moving ahead. In this case, the step is an invitation to attend the workshops.

*Susan:* But why would you expect that members of your congregation would share intimate details of their lives with "outside organizers" they hardly know?

*Dan:* I think many may be willing to share information about their lives and their families if they believe it will help them and other Jews. Also, the organizers' experience has been that most congregation members have never been asked about their burdens, troubles, and afflictions by someone from their congregation. So, for many, a visit from someone who is working as an adjunct member of the synagogue staff is the first time anyone from the congregation has asked them face-to-face about their pressures and hopes.

*Susan:* Who gets to be on the list?

*Dan:* We wanted a random cross-section of the congregation, not biased toward the people who have been active on issues in the past. Anybody who would be offended to be left out was included. But we especially wanted to reach people with children, because they have the greatest stakes in what's going on in the world and the future of Judaism.

*Martin:* But why not start with the people who have been active on issues?

*Dan:* If we go with the people who have already been out front, then we end up not helping people *become* leaders.

*Martin:* I'm always hearing from people who are skeptical that anyone else will do anything.

*Dan:* They met initially with 11 people. Most that I heard from were cautious but interested. One member—the family really supports us financially—said: "We don't need to bother everybody in the synagogue. What we need is to put together a plan, like a marketing plan, to reach our young people and get them

involved.” On the other hand, I heard from several people I rarely hear from, who aren’t around the synagogue much and who seemed to like the ideas. The organizers heard about a number of pressures. Three things got a lot of air time: care for the elderly, things related to youth, like kids becoming sexually active too early and using drugs and alcohol, and, more often than I would have thought, economic pressures. Of the 11, seven said they would come to a workshop.

*Martin:* Why have the organizers do the face-to-face visits? Wouldn’t you rather do them yourself?

*Dan:* I did do some. We did some together. We talked about them afterwards and they gave me some critical feedback.

*Susan:* In what direction?

*Dan:* In the past I did most of the talking. I do more listening now.

*Susan:* What’s your goal for these visits?

*Dan:* Short-term, I’m looking to gather and challenge and support at least a dozen potential leaders.

*Martin:* What’d you do in the way of preparing the congregation?

*Dan:* At the beginning of Elul (Jewish month before High Holy Days), I did a devar Torah.<sup>82</sup> The theme was “first steps in strengthening covenantal community.” The parsha (weekly Torah reading) was Nitzavim: “You stand this day all of you before the Lord your God. . . . That He may establish you today for a people to himself, and that He may be to you a God. . . .”<sup>83</sup> I had two basic questions: How are we standing before God *now* as a community? That is, what is the state of the relationships between us as a people? I talked about how American Jewry is in an historically new and different situation.<sup>84</sup> Our place and potential as a people has changed, along with the changing conditions of our American citizenship. We now have full citizenship, and we’ve become fully integrated into American society. And I talked about how Jews are affected both for good *and* for evil by that fact.

*Martin:* Evil, now? Do you think people believe that?

*Dan:* They do, if you count the families who are under heavy pressure. I told them I thought the synagogue has to pay attention to that. Then I talked about the numbers of Jews who are disaffected from Judaism, in general. The big numbers. I asked: “What is happening to us as a people? What is missing?” I said I thought that what had happened was that many of us Jews had lost our relationships with each other as neighbors. “Whose fault is it?” I asked. My answer was: “It’s nobody’s fault and it’s everybody’s fault. Few are guilty—but all are responsible.<sup>85</sup> The fault is that we don’t live in neighborhoods anymore. The fault is we don’t see each other as often as we used to. And the result is, we don’t have the opportunities to talk about important things.” I



raised up the fact that all this is true for our congregation, as well, that more than three-quarters of our members don't come on any regular basis. My closing questions were: "Do we want to have relationships as neighbors? And if so, how do we get them?" I said I believed that possibly the most important thing that we could do to strengthen covenantal community would be to create opportunities for conversation about things that matter.

*Martin:* Sounds good. How'd you publicize the workshops?

*Dan:* I sent a letter to all the people who had received a panim-el-panim visit, plus some others—56 said they would come to the first workshop at least. The actual attendance was 47.

*Susan:* We send out loads of letters and newsletter inserts and don't get much response. How did you get people to come?

*Dan:* Lots of personal contact. I talked to people in person and told them I'd like to see them there. Of course the organizers had met with a lot of people, panim-el-panim, about 75, and had begun to get to know them. It's the relationships that get people to come. Between the three of us, we talked to a lot of people.

*Martin:* Why not get moving on an issue with the members that the organizers visited?

*Dan:* The *congregation* wouldn't own it, which is the boat we're in now too much of the time. The workshops allow people to think it through for themselves. Also, the organizers' visits don't build relationships between congregants, which we want to do.

*Martin:* What's the point of the workshops?

*Dan:* The first one, which we just did, was structured around y'mei hara'ah (days of trouble)<sup>86</sup> and y'mei haMashiach (days of Messiah).<sup>87</sup> We butcher-papered all of one wall in the room. Above half of it we wrote, "DAYS OF TROUBLE," and over the other half we wrote, "DAYS OF MASHIACH." Written across the top was "I will bring you out from under the burdens."<sup>88</sup> It paved the way for our people to talk about their troubled days, their day-to-day pressures and hopes.

*Martin:* What was your part in it?

*Dan:* I introduced the organizers and their organization, and I did an opening devar Torah. I talked about the meaning of Mitzraim. I explained the shoshonim-midrash (interpretive-root) of the word—to harass. I talked about how oppression can be institutional, as it was with Pharaoh, but that it need not be formal political pressure. The word oppression in English means to subject to pressure with hurtful effect, to lie heavy on, weigh down, burden . . . the feelings, mind, spirits, etc. It could be social, economic, cultural, or community pressure. Then we talked about the *day-to-day troubles* that our people had in Egypt, the specific ways they were harassed. It was surprising to a lot of

them in the workshop that our people were afflicted not only with hard labor and the drowning of their children, but more commonplace pressures.

*Martin:* Which ones are you talking about?

*Dan:* Difficulty in breathing,<sup>89</sup> separation of husbands and wives, rape.<sup>90</sup> I talked about how the people were oppressed in different aspects of their lives—economic, cultural and religious.<sup>91</sup> We talked about “Days of Mashiach” as the time in which all of our deepest hopes are realized, and that we have a critical role to play in making that happen, one step at a time.

*Martin:* Fine, but how’d you get them to take ownership?

*Dan:* After the devar Torah, the organizers led a workshop. They started by asking, “What are the narrow places in our lives where we feel pressure? Mitzraim. What is the nature of the pressure for us?”

*Martin:* Was it hard to get people to open up?

*Dan:* In some areas everyone knows we have problems. We need a Jewish convalescent home—that’s no secret. But it was the groundwork before the workshops that paid off. In the organizers’ panim-el-panim meetings, a number of our members opened up. The organizers asked many if they would tell their stories in the workshop, and some said okay. And then, of course, others in the workshop followed their lead.

*Susan:* What kinds of stories?

*Dan:* It didn’t start with a bang. The first two people who spoke didn’t really say much. There was a minute or two of silence. Then a woman in her thirties—rarely seen at services—raised her hand, looking embarrassed. She said that even with her income as a supervisor for Emporium, she’s barely able to support herself and her two teen-agers as a single parent. One middle-aged couple, to everyone’s quiet surprise, said that one of their three sons has had serious drug problems. They haven’t been able to get him into effective treatment, and he’s still living at home. Everyone could see their anguish.

*Susan:* Isn’t the real question how you make days of Mashiach relevant?

*Dan:* We asked them, “What’s the world you want for the next generation—for your children and grandchildren?” People talked about their hopes for safer neighborhoods, better care for their elderly, gangs, public schools that work, jobs, stuff like that.

*Martin:* How do you get from the pressure to the hope?

*Dan:* I’m getting to it. We shifted gears and focused on what Torah teaches about relationships between neighbors. We listed some of those qualities on the butcher paper. Finally, the organizers asked, “Is there a connection between the Torah vision of relationships and getting from days of trouble to days of

Mashiach.” It didn’t take more than a few seconds for a couple of people to see that days of trouble are characterized by the absence of Torah-guided relationships between neighbors, and that we understood days of Mashiach mostly as Torah sees those relationships. They drew a path from one world to other on the butcher paper. We labeled that path derekh y’shara (path of righteousness),<sup>92</sup> the Torah vision for our relationships as neighbors.

*Martin:* No explosions?

*Dan:* Well, not everyone agreed on everything. But they found out they had a lot in common and they don’t have to be alone with the pressures. I think some people began to get a new sense of “Days of Mashiach.” Some may now be thinking in terms of dor l’dor (generation to generation) the world that they want their children and grandchildren to inherit. At the end of the workshop, in the evaluation, there was an acknowledgment that people in the congregation virtually never talk about the kind of problems that were discussed in the workshop, because we don’t have the kind of relationships where we do that.

*Susan:* What did you think after it was over?

*Dan:* It seemed so clear to me—how can we expect to strengthen covenantal community if our people aren’t talking about their hopes and pains, if they’re not looking at Torah to figure out what to do, and if they’re not doing something about what’s wrong?

## KISLEV (Late November)

*Susan:* So, give us a progress report. Do they own it yet?

*Dan:* We're working at it. We started the second workshop looking at another troubled time, not entirely unlike our own, by way of a "readers' theatre" Talmud Torah, which took about 15 minutes. People at the first workshop who had stayed for the evaluation were recruited to play the parts.

*Susan:* What do you mean, "readers' theatre"?

*Dan:* I've got extra copies of the script—you can keep 'em.

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## AN ANCIENT FUTURE

### A play with two characters:

Nehemiah (costumed, if possible), who speaks to us from Jerusalem in the fifth century before the Common Era.

And a contemporary Jew who speaks to us from our own city.

Props: Two stools.

Scene: the two characters are seated on the stools, facing the audience, about eight feet apart.

*Nehemiah:* In the month of Kislev of the twentieth year. . . one of my brothers, together with some men of Judah arrived, and I asked them about the Jews who had survived the [Babylonian] captivity and about Jerusalem. And they told me, "The survivors there in the province are in dire trouble and disgrace; Jerusalem's wall is full of breaches, and its gates have been destroyed by fire."

*Contemporary Jew:* My son told me the other day that kids at his school are fighting and threatening each other all the time. He doesn't want to fight with them but he doesn't know what else to do.

*Nehemiah:* When I heard that, I sat and wept, and was in mourning for days, fasting and praying to the God of heaven. . . .

- Contemporary Jew:* Sometimes I feel like weeping when I see what's happening, the hatred between the kids.
- Nehemiah:* I was the king's cupbearer at the time. . . . I took the wine and gave it to the king. The king said to me, "How is it that you look bad, though you are not ill? It must be bad thoughts." I was very frightened, but I answered the king, "How should I not look bad when the city . . . of my ancestors lies in ruins, and its gates have been consumed by fire?" The king said to me, "What is your request? . . . I answered the king, ". . . Send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves, to rebuild it."
- Contemporary Jew:* I'm only one person. Am I supposed to save the kids and rebuild the city?
- Nehemiah:* After I was there [in Jerusalem] three days I got up at night . . . [and] I went out by the Valley Gate and I surveyed the walls of Jerusalem that were breached, and its gates, consumed by fire.
- Contemporary Jew:* I walked several miles the other day through the city and what I saw depressed me—empty store-fronts and jobless men, street people begging me for money; I saw the bus bench where two kids were killed in a drive-by shooting. Skinheads hanging out in front of Thrifty's, loaded, acting obnoxious.
- Nehemiah:* Then I said [to the local leaders], "You see the bad state we are in—Jerusalem lying in ruins and its gates destroyed by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and suffer no more disgrace." And they said "Let us start building!" When Sanballat [the governor] and Tobiah [the major landowner] . . . heard [about this], they mocked us and held us in contempt and said, "What is this that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" I said to them in reply, "The God of heaven will grant us success, and we His servants, will start building."
- Contemporary Jew:* I can see the trouble we're in, but what am I supposed to do? Get into a fight with politicians? What'll that accomplish? And where am I going to find help?
- Nehemiah:* Then . . . the high priest and his fellow priests set to [work] and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. . . . Next to him, the [people] of Jericho built. . . . Next to them, Zaccur son of Imri. . . . The [family] of Hassenaah rebuilt the Fish Gate, they roofed it

and set up its doors, locks, and bars. . . . Next to them, Meremoth son of Uriah repaired; and next to him, Meshullam son of Berechiah. . . . and so on until we rebuilt the wall to half its height [100 feet]; for the people's heart was in the work.

*Contemporary Jew:* Would my neighbors work with me if I tried to help turn things around? I barely know them.

*Nehemiah:* When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, it angered him, and he was extremely vexed. He mocked the Jews, saying in the presence of his brothers and the Samaritan force, "What are the miserable Jews doing? Will they restore [the city and the Temple], offer sacrifice, and finish [rebuilding the city] one day? Can they revive those stones out of the dust heaps, burned as they are?"

*Contemporary Jew:* Sometimes I'm afraid to get involved. Things seem so far gone, I don't know if we can bring them back.

*Nehemiah:* And our foes were saying, "Before they know it or see it, we shall be among them and kill them, and put a stop to the work." [And I said] "Do not be afraid of them! Think of the great and awesome Lord, and fight for your brothers, your sons and daughters, your wives and homes!" I further said to the people at that time, "Let every man with his servant lodge in Jerusalem, that we may use the night to stand guard and the day to work." There was a great outcry by the common folk and their wives against their brother Jews. Some said, "Our sons and daughters are numerous; we must get grain to eat in order that we may live!"

*Contemporary Jew:* I'm overwhelmed just trying to keep my own family together—what am I going to do to fix a whole generation of families?

*Nehemiah:* The wall was finished on the twenty-fifth of Elul, after 52 days. When all our enemies heard it, all the nations round about us were intimidated . . . ; they realized that this work had been accomplished by the help of our God. [Then] my God put it into my mind to assemble the nobles, the [local leaders], and the people. . . .

*Contemporary Jew:* In the face of all this, can I count on God and the synagogue to help me?

*Nehemiah:* When the seventh month arrived . . . the entire people [of 50,000] assembled as one . . . in the square . . . .

*Contemporary Jew:* Would the Jews of this city gather as one?

*Nehemiah:* [T]hey asked Ezra the scribe to bring the Scroll of the Teaching of Moses. . . . [and] they read from the Scroll. . . . [T]he people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Teaching.

*Contemporary Jew:* What's the Torah got to do with me trying to live and work and hold a family together?

*Nehemiah:* The Levites . . . said: "Rise, bless the Lord your God who is from eternity to eternity. . . . 'You alone are the Lord. . . . You are the Lord God, who chose Abram, who brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and changed his name to Abraham. Finding his heart true to You, You made a covenant with him. . . . You took note of our [forebears'] affliction in Egypt, and heard their cry at the Sea of Reeds. . . . You led them by day with a pillar of cloud and by night with a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way they were to go. . . . You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke to them from heaven; You gave them right rules and true teachings, good laws and commandments. . . . You gave them bread from heaven when they were hungry, and produced water from a rock when they were thirsty. . . .

*Contemporary Jew:* Who's going to lead our children?

*Nehemiah:* In view of all of this, we make this pledge and put it in writing. . . . an oath with sanctions to follow the Teaching of God, given through Moses the servant of God, and to observe carefully all the commandments of the Lord. . . . The officers of the people settled in Jerusalem; the rest of the people cast lots for one out of ten to come and settle [and rebuild] the holy city of Jerusalem. . . .

*Contemporary Jew:* Am I supposed to believe that God's promises are for me?

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*Martin:* The trouble is, I don't think our people believe the promises are for them.

*Dan:* I agree. That's why we raised questions for discussion. They're on the back of the script.

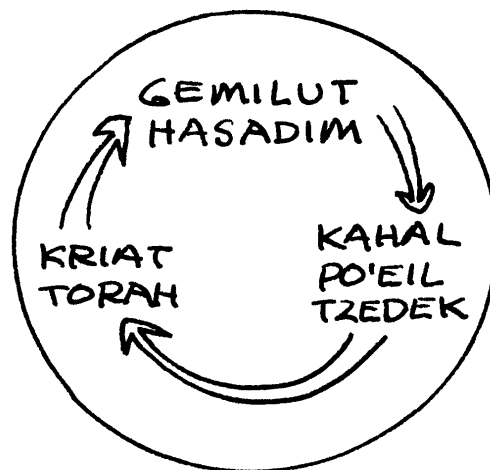
## Discussion Questions

- Why do you think so many diverse people in the Nehemiah story were able to work together as a kahal poalei tzedek<sup>93</sup> (a congregational community of doers of justice and righteousness) successfully, and ultimately rebuild Jerusalem?
- What do you imagine people learned from rebuilding the wall and gates together?
- What was their common vision from Torah for their city?

*Dan:* I finished up the Talmud Torah by saying, “What Nehemiah shows us is neighbors with common pressures coming together as a congregation for their tovat ha-kahal, their common good.”<sup>94</sup> Then I told them, “Tonight we are going to examine what it might mean for us to be such a congregation.” And then I handed it over to the organizers.

*Susan:* I think it’s great that you’ve been getting people to talk about what’s bothering them, but I don’t really understand how it all works. How do you get a lot of people together to do a mitzvah?

*Dan:* The organizers began by giving an overview of covenantal community organizing. They see the organizing as having a cycle, in the same way that we see a cycle of the Jewish calendar and congregational life. It’s like a wheel—like this (DRAWING ON HIS NAPKIN).



The three main *congregational* activities for strengthening covenantal community are: gemilut hasadim (loving-kindness), beginning with panim-el-panim visiting, in which we learn about one another’s hopes and pressures, and challenge one another; kahal poalei tzedek (a congregational community of doers of justice and righteousness), in which the congregation does a mitzvah to relieve the pressures and realize the hopes; and kriat Torah (reading of Torah), in



which we learn and teach Torah meanings of what we have done, and prepare to begin again with gemilut hasadim.

*Susan:* I still don't get it. How does it work down on the ground?

*Dan:* They explained it using Nehemiah as a model of covenantal community organizing. There's a background paper here somewhere, which we handed out at the end of the first workshop. It's presented as a series of questions. Here, you can keep these.

<h2 style="margin: 0;">The Book of Nehemiah as a Guide to Restoring Confidence in Congregational Community</h2>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>STEP ONE</u></b></p> <p>How can confidence be restored? Begin by listening and challenging.</p>	<p><b>NEHEMIAH LISTENED AND CHALLENGED</b></p> <p>Nehemiah observed the demoralization of the people—the housing was destroyed, the security of the wall and gates was breached. The people were immobilized from acting to deal with the conditions that were undermining their families and community.</p> <p>Once he had seen Jerusalem's destruction, he agitated those who were with him about the city's condition and then he challenged them to act: "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates are burned by fire. Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we no longer should suffer insult."<sup>95</sup></p> <p>After he had begun gathering others to rebuild the wall and gates of the city, Nehemiah was confronted by many of the relatives of those who were doing the work and who were defending it against their enemies. The relatives told Nehemiah that, because of the famine, they had to borrow money to buy food and to pay their taxes. And to pay the interest on their loans they were forced to sell their children into slavery and, ultimately, to relinquish their land. Nehemiah listened to the people.</p>	<p><b>A KHEVRA (GROUP) OF THE CONGREGATION LISTENS TO THE TROUBLES OF THE PEOPLE AND CHALLENGES THEM TO DO MITZVOT TOGETHER THAT WILL RELIEVE THEIR PRESSURES AND REALIZE THEIR HOPES.</b></p> <p>Many of us are now living with destructive pressures and we no longer believe that we or our congregation or Judaism or our God have any power to do anything about those pressures.</p> <p>A khevra of congregation members begins by getting to know members of the congregation better, through panim-el-panim visits.</p> <p>Members of the khevra, over a period of several months, may visit 50 to 300 members of their own congregation, depending on their numbers and the size of the congregation. They may also visit others who have a common self-interest. Their visits are concentrated initially on getting acquainted and identifying pressures in daily life, and in challenging them to do a mitzvah with others in the synagogue that would do something about those pressures.</p> <p>The panim-el-panim visiting increases the ownership of the mitzvah by many members of the congregation.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>STEP TWO</u></b></p> <p>How many troubles should you work on at one time?</p>	<p><b>NEHEMIAH BEGAN BY RE-BUILDING THE WALL</b></p> <p>Nehemiah proposed that people begin by rebuilding the wall and the gates.</p>	<p><b>THE KHEVRA BEGINS WITH ONE TROUBLE</b></p> <p>After doing many visits and reaching a consensus among themselves on a broad concern, “young people in trouble” for instance, the khevra identifies more specific problems for research.</p> <p>Success is critical to rebuilding confidence, and success requires focusing resources. The Khevra uses well-developed criteria to decide what they want to begin with, the most important of which is that they only work on things which unify them, because they reflect their common concerns.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>STEP THREE</u></b></p> <p>How can you learn more about the nature of the trouble and what you might do about it?</p>	<p><b>NEHEMIAH DID RESEARCH</b></p> <p>Nehemiah surveyed the city. Once he understood the pressures experienced by the people, he went to the officials who were responsible. He confirmed the facts of the situation by questioning them about their behavior.</p>	<p><b>THE KHEVRA DOES RESEARCH</b></p> <p>Delegations of a half-dozen or more members of the khevra arrange meetings with local experts and decision-makers in the larger community, those who have relevant information or the power to make a decision about the pressure. The khevra’s objective is to learn more about the pressures they have identified and to learn what institutional authorities are doing, are proposing to do, or are not doing about those problems.</p> <p>So, for example, if the khevra found that selling alcohol to kids was the most widely-shared concern in the congregation, research might start with a half-dozen khevra members meeting with an Alcohol Beverage Control official to learn more about the law affecting liquor retailers and law enforcement options.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>STEP FOUR</u></b></p> <p>How can you decide what to do about the trouble?</p>	<p><b>NEHEMIAH ORGANIZED BOTH SELF-HELP AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACTIONS</b></p> <p>Part of Nehemiah's strategy was in the self-help genre, rebuilding the wall, and part of it was in the vein of holding officials accountable, targeting usurious interest rates that were bleeding the people. He was angry to hear that their own officials were exploiting the people, and he decided to bring charges against the officials. He went to them and said, "You make claims for debt, each from his brother."<sup>96</sup> When the officials were silent in the face of his challenges, he organized a large meeting at which the officials would be publicly held accountable. He organized a "great assembly" (קהלה גדולה),<sup>97</sup> roughly comparable to what we call a kahal poalei tzedek, at which they were held accountable.</p>	<p><b>THE KHEVRA FORMULATES A STRATEGY FROM A VARIETY OF APPROACHES</b></p> <p>The khevra members devise a strategy to do a mitzvah as a congregation. The khevra plans how the congregation can act as a body to achieve a solution to the pressure the group has identified. Such actions may involve: self-help, such as a fix-up day in a local park; advocacy, such as recruiting and training members of the congregation to "advocate" for elderly nursing home patients who cannot defend their own interests; service, such as recruiting members of the congregation to supervise an after-school study hall for "latch-key" children; and accountability, such as bringing together many members of the congregation to hold local liquor store owners accountable for training their employees not to sell liquor to minors.</p> <p>Accountability actions are also directed at decision-makers in public and non-profit organizations.</p> <p>The khevra may want to hold institutional decision-makers accountable, much as Nehemiah did. Although other approaches to the problem, such as service, self-help, education, and mutual aid may be useful, the preferred approach initially is to hold decision-makers accountable, since this approach usually offers the greatest potential to bring about change.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>STEP FIVE</u></b></p> <p>What happens when the congregation does a mitzvah?</p>	<p><b>KEHILA GEDOLAH<sup>98</sup></b></p> <p>At the action the officials were confronted with selling their own kin who, afterwards, had to be redeemed by their families. Nehemiah then challenged the officials: "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the taunts of the nations our enemies?"<sup>99</sup> They were further challenged to restore to the people their property and the interest they had paid. In response, the officials promised to ". . . return them, and require nothing from them."<sup>100</sup></p>	<p><b>KAHAL POALEI TZEDEK</b></p> <p>What does doing a mitzvah as a kahal poalei tzedek look like?</p> <p>The purpose of the kahal is to reduce and resolve the pressure by doing a mitzvah, such as removing a stumbling block, as a congregation. So, for example, the synagogue might invite liquor-store owners to meet with a large group of the congregation's members. Their goals, based on their research, might be to get the liquor store owners to agree to increase training for store employees and changes in store policy on "carding" youthful-looking customers. The action of a kahal poalei tzedek is a highly planned and disciplined activity to achieve these goals.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>STEP SIX</u></b></p> <p>What do you do with the good you have created? We learn and teach from it, and we use it to create greater good—more mitzvot.</p>	<p><b>KRIAT TORAH</b></p> <p>When the campaign to renew Jerusalem's wall and gates was ending, Nehemiah gathered virtually all the population of the city and the surrounding countryside.</p> <p>They had rebuilt their confidence by rebuilding the wall and gates, and now their hearts and minds were open to hearing the blessings and commandments of Torah.</p> <p>Moreover, Nehemiah gathered the leaders—heads of families, priests, and Levites, including Ezra—to figure out what the people should do following the rebuilding of the wall and gates. The leaders studied the Torah to do that. Then, with Ezra's teaching, they went on to rebuild the city and the nation.</p>	<p><b>KRIAT TORAH</b></p> <p>Kriat Torah is an event that combines prayer and thanksgiving, celebration, and learning. The learning is focused on the mitzvah we've done and on which mitzvot we'll do in the future.</p> <p>There are three major objectives: to overlay Torah on the experience of kahal poalei tzedek, thereby raising up the larger meaning of the struggles of the people; to overlay the experience of the people on the words of Torah, thereby incorporating into Torah the present pain and hope of the people; and, with the reciprocal relationship of life and Torah established, to begin to understand more deeply the Torah's spiritual and religious requirements for rebuilding the city in the image of God.</p>

*Dan:* Then we began to analyze some of the pressures that were mentioned in the first workshop. That is, the workshop participants did the analysis. They picked three or four pressures, and the organizers asked a series of questions about each one of the pressures. I've got the list of questions here somewhere.

*Martin:* Dan! You've really turned into a paper-schlepper. You've got notes and hand-outs for everything.

*Dan:* Actually, I've been keeping a journal of my experiences in this process, so I've been keeping all the paperwork too. Here they are. My notes are in between. Okay, so this one woman raises her hand and says "graffiti." They asked her to spell out the details.

*Susan:* Graffiti is a pressure?

*Dan:* That's what we discovered. Turns out, she has a business, a little travel agency over on Horn and 4th. I know the corner because it's not far from the synagogue. A few days before the workshop, she gets to work and there's graffiti all over the side of her building.

*Susan:* Anti-Semitic?

*Dan:* No, she said the police called it "garden-variety" gang-writing. But she was clearly nervous about what it meant. Then the organizers asked: "How do you practically accommodate the pressure? What do you do differently because of the graffiti?" At that point, someone says, "It's probably just kids doing their thing. Why don't you just paint over it?" She says, "Their thing is costing me money and aggravation. Besides, I've already done that—it doesn't make it go away. I'm not an alarmist, but now I stay away from the agency at night, unless I'm with someone. But I need to be there to do my work." Here's the next question: "What pressure is being created in your family by your practical accommodation of the pressure?" So then she says, "The repainting and the insurance company hassles take a lot of time and they're draining. The thing that really worries me is the area is declining. Other buildings on the block have been graffitied. It seems like, once it starts, you can't get rid of it. People don't want to come here like they used to, and my business is suffering. And moving a business is much more expensive and complicated than most people understand. The worst is that I just don't feel safe anymore." Then the organizers asked: "Is this pressure having any effect on your family?" She answers, "I'm worried a lot about the business. It's depressing. I'm a single mom. I've got one kid in college, and another one who'll be going next year. Sometimes, I'm just distracted. Right before taxes this year, within five days, I put my watch in the washing machine with my jacket, drove 20 miles out of my way on the freeway before realizing I had missed my turnoff, and locked myself out of the apartment. I never do that. And I don't feel safe, so I drag my teenage son out to the agency a couple of nights a week. He hates it, but what else can I do? It's created a lot of tension between us."

*Susan:* I'm wondering how long it'll be before the synagogue gets graffitied? How'd people react to her?

*Dan:* People started out thinking, like you said, how could graffiti cause pressure inside a family? But when she got done analyzing it, it was clear that it was a pressure for her family.

Then one of our former board members said, emphatically, he felt for her but he didn't think the synagogue could get involved in that kind of problem. He said, "There are agencies for this." Then she said, "I don't need social services. I need something done to stop the graffiti."

*Martin:* Isn't she an exception rather than the rule?

*Dan:* I don't think so. We heard a number of stories. Last week someone had mentioned safety of children. He's one of our older members, who moved here a couple of years ago from the other coast to be with his grandsons. So he says, "I don't know that this has anything to do with the gangs, exactly, but can you imagine, someone tried to kidnap a child in broad daylight. It was at the park, in the parking lot. It was a woman. She waited until the mother was getting in on the driver's side, and then she reached in and grabbed the child from the passenger seat. Thankfully, the mother was able to grab the child back." The organizers asked, "How is that a concern for you personally?" He says, "I moved here looking for a little peace, and to be near my grandsons. I love to take them for walks in the park, near my apartment. But I'm an old man, what could I do if they tried to steal one of those treasures?"

*Martin:* Which park was it?

*Dan:* The one over on Stanton, Oak Park, I think it's called. Anyway, the next question was, "Where do you get help with these kinds of pressures?" People said different things—family, friends, therapists, and even synagogue. Then a middle-aged member says, "It's the business of the families of the children who are doing the graffiti to fix the problem. Someone should get them to do that," he says. Of course, the question is who?

Then they asked them, "How does the synagogue help?" The first person says, "I met with the Rabbi to get advice." And a couple of others said the same. Then the organizers turned to me and asked: "Rabbi, what do you do when these members with family and community problems come to you?" I said, "When it's not uniquely Jewish, there's not much I can do. Kids can buy spray-paint everywhere. What can I do about that?"

Next they asked, "Who is the synagogue?" And of course, almost everyone answered, "All of us who are members." Then, they asked, "Why is it that the synagogue, meaning all the members, hasn't been doing anything about these pressures as a congregation?" Nobody answered right away. Then someone said, "Probably because we haven't seen ourselves in that way." "Why not?"

they ask. A couple of people respond, “Because, we don’t normally talk about these kinds of things at synagogue.” So the organizers say, “Why not?” One of the same speakers answers, “I don’t know exactly. Maybe because people wouldn’t feel comfortable talking about these kinds of things with people from synagogue.” “You did, why is that?” they ask. He goes on, “I guess I felt like I knew you a little. Before I came to these meetings, you came to my home, and we talked.”

Then we shifted gears and analyzed the amount of contact that synagogue members have with one another as members of a congregation. The organizers acknowledged that it’s typical for a relatively small percentage of a congregation’s membership to be actively involved. They asked me, “Rabbi, how many family units are there here at Beth Israel?” I said, we have about 250, which means about 350 adults. Then they asked, “How many can you identify as regularly involved in the synagogue?” I said that on Shabbat, about 50 people come to services, far fewer on Friday nights, and of course there’s turnover—about half of them are regulars. Then they wanted to know, “How many of those people, approximately, are more involved than that?” I said that I see about 25 people regularly around the synagogue, sometimes fewer. Then they asked how many hours a week the average congregant is involved at synagogue. I said that, of course, it varies—for those who come for Shabbat morning services, it’s three hours at most. Out of the 50, maybe half come around for another hour or two a week. That’s five hours. Most of the rest come only for High Holy Days, and occasionally festivals, a Shabbat now and then. A lot of them we may see for only five hours a year. So, we concluded that 25 to 50 people out of 350, that’s less than 15 percent, come for three to five hours out of the 168 hours in the week—and the contact with the other 300 is very irregular.

*Martin:* That’s about the way our numbers look, but what’s the point?

*Dan:* Isn’t it fair to conclude that if most of our members rarely come, and even more rarely participate in an active way, they’ll have little or no chance to get to know each other as members of the same congregation?

*Martin:* Obviously, but I still don’t see where this is leading.

*Dan:* A while back you asked, how do we go from pressure to hope. I believe the first step is that we have to become neighbors. If we don’t know each other, we can’t rebuild the walls and the gates of the city—we can’t make it safe for our kids. Our vision now for doing that is derekh y’shara. It begins with listening to one another, panim-el-panim.

*Martin:* I understand that. I often think how much my kids are missing, not growing up in a real neighborhood. So what’s the bottom line?

*Dan:* We talked about what Nehemiah is teaching us about strengthening covenantal community. When he arrived in Jerusalem the people were demoralized and

immobilized. They had to become a *kahal poalei tzedek*, a congregational community of doers of justice and righteousness, that could deal with their pressures. I told them I believed that we, like them, could become a *kahal poalei tzedek*. Then I asked them, “Does it make sense, as a first step, that many more people in the congregation begin doing what you’ve been doing, talking to each other about pressures and hopes?” I told them, “Don’t answer that yet, but come next week for the final workshop and we’ll talk more about the how-to.”

*Susan:* Do you think they want to do it?

*Dan:* I’m not sure, but I’m feeling hopeful. I never thought of graffiti as a pressure. I started to wonder about what other pressures our members are under.

*Susan:* That’s hopeful?

*Dan:* I realized what a key it was to understanding how people feel and why they don’t come. I started to think that maybe depression was the modern symptom of oppression, and to think about how it was related to my own depression.<sup>101</sup>

*Martin:* I hadn’t thought of it that way. Are you feeling oppressed?

*Dan:* I’ve had this dream, lately. I’m on the *bimah* (*dais*)<sup>102</sup> giving a *devar Torah* with my eyes closed. And my eyelids are so heavy that I can’t seem to open them. I think, every week when they don’t show up I feel like they’re voting on me with their feet. Sometimes I used to feel guilty for being depressed about it. Now I wonder if that isn’t the appropriate response. After all, should I be happy that they don’t come? People sometimes talk about the numbers as if they weren’t Jews.

*Martin:* I don’t think you have to feel happy, but why drive yourself nuts over something you can’t do anything about?

*Dan:* I’m more miserable thinking that, than trying to do something about it. I’m beginning to believe that it’s more loving to challenge people than to accept the status quo.

*Susan:* Don’t you think you have to accept people where they’re at?

*Dan:* Look at the Talmud Torah we used in the third workshop. Here’s a copy.



## LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and [you shall] not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:17-18)

### *Commentary*

We know from Rabbi Akiva,<sup>103</sup> “This is a fundamental principle in the Torah.”

“Rabbi [Judah haNasi]<sup>104</sup> says: Which is a right way [בדרך ישרה] that a man should choose? Let him love reproof [תוכחה], since as long as there is reproof in the world ease of mind comes to the world, good and blessing come to the world, and evil departs from the world, as it says, But to them that are reprovved shall come delight; and a good blessing shall come upon them.” (Tamid 28a)

Within covenantal community organizing, we use the word challenge in the way of rebuke or reproof, as the means to go from days of trouble to days of Mashiach.

### *Questions*

- What does the verse say about the relationship of challenge to chesed?
- Why might “ease of mind” come to the world with challenge?
- What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself?

*Susan:* Challenging to do what, though?

*Dan:* First, to get to know one another much better. We started out the workshop with an analysis. It goes like this: We have a problem. When we look out we see a lack of involvement by most of the congregation’s members. Only a small proportion of them are involved in the congregation, and for only a few hours a week. They’re doing a good thing, but their numbers are far too few. They can’t deal at all with the day-to-day pressures of the congregation’s members. And the small number of leaders mirrors a lack of relationships as neighbors.

*Susan:* The analysis is plausible, but how do you get people to start acting like neighbors again?

*Dan:* By creating opportunities for conversation about things that matter most to us—our families, our work, our neighborhoods, the synagogue—through listening to each other, panim-el-panim.

*Susan:* How is listening going to get something done about pressures?

*Dan:* It's not only listening. The person doing the visit does three things: asks questions, listens, and challenges.

*Susan:* So, you challenge them, and they challenge others. What do they challenge people to do?

*Dan:* First they challenge the people they visit to become more aware of pressures in their own lives, which they may have been suffering with quietly. Second, they challenge them to help do something about those pressures with others in the synagogue—for starters, come to a meeting or a workshop. Here's a hand-out that we used.

## CHALLENGING

Challenging is a part of a relationship between neighbors.

Our relationships as neighbors require that we support the person we're challenging.

Supporting the person means that we are available to help them think through how to meet the challenge.

Challenging in this process uses particular language that is respectful of the person we are challenging: "Would you be willing to do \_\_\_\_\_ (whatever it is)?"

Challenging also means that we are prepared to respond respectfully when someone says no, even when we believe that they are morally obligated—which does not mean that we stop challenging them.

*Susan:* Isn't there a difference between talking about challenge and doing it? How do you get beyond the talking?

*Dan:* We spent most of the workshop on the how-to of doing a panim-el-panim visit. We did role-plays and demonstrations. People were paired up to do a visit with one another. It was emphasized that the purpose of the visit was to begin to get to know someone. There's a simple agenda: ask a couple of key questions, listen carefully and non-judgmentally, and, if it makes sense, invite the person to do something with the khevra or the congregation. So they understand that the purpose of the visit is not to do a survey—we're not census-takers.

*Martin:* Role-plays usually seem so mechanical to me.

*Dan:* The interviews were for real. But I was kind of surprised, too. They liked it a lot.

*Martin:* But how do you get a committed group of people to do this?

*Dan:* At the end of the workshop—we had 30 people—I asked them some questions: “Does it make sense to you that many members of the synagogue should begin to talk with one another as neighbors, panim-el-panim, about their own day-to-day pressures and their hopes regarding the life of the wider community? And does it make sense to you that as a synagogue we should be learning how to affect those pressures?” Then I asked them to vote on whether they wanted to form themselves as a *khevra* to begin actively organizing to strengthen covenantal community in the congregation.

*Susan:* Did you have to do a lot of arm-twisting?

*Dan:* No. At first, there was silence, and I didn’t say anything. Then someone spoke up and said, “I’m not exactly sure what the synagogue should do, but kids can buy dope and alcohol all over the place, and I hear, guns too now. I’m worried a lot about my kids. I’ll support it, even though I don’t know how I’m going to find the time.” We had 22 yeas, six nays, and two abstentions. So we had a *khevra*. They’re calling themselves the “*khevra shel kharakim*,” the group of the openings.<sup>105</sup>

*Susan:* Openings to what?

*Dan:* To do mitzvot.

*Susan:* What exactly are they committed to?

*Dan:* I proposed that they meet with at least one-quarter to one-third of our members in the coming two to four months. They finally settled on doing six visits in eight weeks. The arithmetic is that if the 22 people all do six visits each, that’s 132 visits. We have 350 adult members, so it’s a little more than a third.

*Susan:* Who’s holding them accountable?

*Dan:* They’ll do it themselves. For the next couple of months the *khevra* members will be doing a lot of visiting, and they’ll be meeting every three or four weeks to check in.

*Susan:* How do you keep people from burning out?

*Dan:* One thing we did at the beginning was to get them to acknowledge who’s sending them, and that what they’re doing—service to the community—is *avodah*.<sup>106</sup>

*Susan:* How do you get them to see it?

*Dan:* After the third workshop we did a special thing at a Shabbat morning service, which we called a *mishmeret* (charge),<sup>107</sup> to commission the *khevra* doing visits.

I said a few words, we passed the Torah, and they affirmed their commitment in front of the congregation.

*Susan:* I'm not sure our people would want to do that.

*Martin:* Why not?

*Susan:* I don't know. I think some of our people would think that they don't need that kind of recognition. Some might think it's unnecessary.

*Dan:* Maybe the reason for that is we doubt our own capacity to do great good in the world. That's part of the reason why we do the mishmeret. You might have liked the text I used: "When R. Yose came to Kufrah, he wanted to appoint leaders over the people, but they refused to accept office. So, quoting to them 'Ben Bebai was in charge of the wicks [for the Temple lampstand],' he said: 'If he who was appointed to have charge of wicks merited being mentioned with the notables of his generation, how much greater by far will be your merit for you are to have charge of the vital needs of human beings.'"<sup>108</sup>

## TEVET (Mid-January)

*Susan:* How's the challenging going?

*Dan:* Let me show you some of the results. I brought along a Talmud Torah that one of our new leaders put together. Here's a copy.

### MEN AND WOMEN OF TRUTH

Yitro said to Moshe: "Listen now to my voice, I will give you counsel, and God shall be with you; Represent the people before God, that you may bring the causes to God." (Exodus 18:19) "And you shall choose out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating unjust gain; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." (Exodus 18:21) "If you shall do this thing, and God command you so, then you shall be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace." (Exodus 18:23)

#### *Commentary*

Who are "men [and women] of truth"? In other words, who are leaders? Rashi says: "These are people (commanding) confidence who are worthy (enough for one) to rely on their words, for by this means will their words be heeded."<sup>109</sup>

#### *Questions*

- What is the price of holding each other accountable? What are the things that we worry will happen?
- What is the price of our not holding each other accountable?
- What happens to an organization's effectiveness when accountability is weak or nonexistent?

*Susan:* What do you think is the price?

*Dan:* What can you get done without it? The numbers determine our power.

*Martin:* Should rabbis be ambitious for the power of numbers?

*Dan:* Our people are experiencing destructive pressures. I want the congregation to be able to do something about them.

*Susan:* But whose power is that, yours or theirs?

- Dan:* Both. It means that I use my power in a way that empowers them. Do you think there's anything wrong with that?
- Susan:* No. Not having power has been one of the frustrations of my life. It's probably why I left social work.
- Martin:* I had forgotten you were a social worker. Why did you leave it?
- Susan:* I lost conviction and energy for the work I was doing, that it could meet the needs of the whole person, including the spirit. I felt like I had to turn off everything that I knew Jewishly—the practical Jewish teachings—in order to do my work. Most of my clients were people who were dependent—I was very conscious of their powerlessness. And every day I saw the results of not having a real community. I wanted so much to help create a community that was whole. I thought the answer would be to become a rabbi. But it's frustrating. Before, there was an endless line of clients; I had the setting, access to the people, but not the license to deal with religious and spiritual needs. Now I have the license, but not the setting—they don't come.
- Martin:* Would you go back?
- Susan:* No way—but I don't like feeling useless.
- Martin:* What do you do to hold people accountable?
- Dan:* Lots of follow-up. On an individual basis we follow up, either to affirm the good work they've accomplished or to help them think through what went wrong and what they might do now. It's usually some combination of the two. With the *khevra*, the first practical principle of accountability is that when people are making commitments, they must understand that their commitments will be "called in"—the organization will revisit the commitments at a specified time and place in the future, ordinarily at the next regular meeting.
- Susan:* But how does the accountability get you power?
- Dan:* To the extent that people learn to be held accountable individually for their organizational commitments, then they can develop a group confidence and competence to challenge others, much more powerful than themselves, and to hold them accountable. Accountability on the individual level is a first step to accountability action as a *kahal poalei tzedek*, to getting something done about the pressure.
- Susan:* But how does that work in practice? Give me a for-instance.
- Dan:* Well, let's say that at Beth Israel we decide we want to hold the city manager accountable. What will happen if we don't hold ourselves accountable when we're doing the *panim-el-panim* visits, and we don't know whether we've done eight or 80? And the city manager asks us, "How many people have you actually talked to?" He wants to know that because he's judging how seriously to take us. And we can't say? How are we going to hold him accountable?

*Martin:* How can you hold people accountable in a meeting?

*Dan:* It's very straightforward. Everyone is openly asked individually to report on his or her progress. We spend about half the time reporting on the visits that we've done—the pressures people talk about, what went well, what didn't. People are asked to say the number of panim-al-panim visits that they've done since the last meeting, to describe the top two or three concerns that congregants related to them, to tell one thing they did in the visit that worked well, and one thing that didn't. Then, for the second half, the organizers do a workshop that focuses on the problems people are having. It's troubleshooting, using the experience of everyone in the room.

*Martin:* I think some of our people would be annoyed by the idea, somehow. How did people feel about having to say in front of others what they had done?

*Dan:* Well, a few were uncomfortable, because they had nothing to report. But since we had already talked about accountability in the Talmud Torah, there was a foundation for it. And afterwards, when we evaluated the meeting, we talked about it again and everyone, including those who had been uncomfortable, agreed that we needed to know what progress we're making.

*Susan:* How do you avoid acrimony?

*Dan:* What do you mean?

*Susan:* In some of our meetings we can't seem make any decisions, or if we do, there's a lot of rancor, even over things like what color the carpet should be.

*Dan:* I think it's because we're talking about common concerns, and we're looking for consensus. Also, before the meetings, our people are talking panim-el-panim. Anywhere from three to six people get together to plan the meetings.

*Martin:* How do you keep the planning from being dominated by a leadership clique?

*Dan:* It's an open process, and everyone is challenged to participate. It gives people, who might not otherwise take part, an opportunity in a smaller, more workable meeting to talk about things in greater depth. Their responsibility is to come up with an agenda that is printed, and timed for each item.

*Susan:* That's sounds kind of rigid.

*Dan:* I haven't heard any complaints about it since we started it, but over the years I've heard plenty from members fed up with meetings that run on for hours—as if they didn't have babysitters, work to do, jobs in the morning, etc. And what they come up with is a proposed agenda—the khevra votes on it when they convene.

*Susan:* They have a meeting to plan a meeting? You'll be meetinged out in a month, at that rate.

- Dan:* We're looking at it differently than you might imagine. We're working to restore confidence in a fairly short period of time, about six to 12 months, by challenging people to do things they haven't done before—and that's stimulating for them. I see this process as an explicit set of week-to-week opportunities for learning about leadership. People are learning new skills. It's kind of like building a wall; you lay down course after course.
- Susan:* My experience of meetings isn't much of people learning new skills.
- Dan:* We're using a structure for meetings that prepare leaders to support, challenge, and hold each other accountable. It's a collective leadership. The roles in the meeting are circulated.
- Martin:* Who's in charge of the committee?
- Dan:* We've traded a permanent chairperson for an open planning process. At any given moment, the planning committee ensures there's a chairperson prepared to run the meeting or *kahal poalei tzedek*. We have a lot more people who are able to do it now.
- Susan:* There's no permanent chair? How do you know who's committed to doing what?
- Dan:* It's open to anyone at any time, and commitment to it is measured by attendance. Members of the committee challenge and support one another to do the jobs that need to be done. From the first meeting, members of the *khevra* took on all the key roles—planning the meeting, Talmud Torah, chairing, everything except the workshop, which the organizers do.
- Susan:* How is the visiting going?
- Dan:* They were a little intimidated at first making the phone calls, but once they get into doing the visits, I think they really enjoy getting to know the people, like they did in the workshops. I think they were surprised to find out what was really going on in people's lives.
- Martin:* How many did they do?
- Dan:* Over three months, about 120.
- Martin:* That's impressive.
- Dan:* I was surprised too. I didn't think we had 20 people who would visit another 120. Most of the feedback I've gotten from the people who were visited was positive. There's been a kind of a buzz in the congregation, low-level excitement, questions and talk.
- Martin:* When do you decide which pressure you're going to do something about?



*Dan:* After you've done a bunch of panim-el-panim visits, things begin to emerge. When half of the visits were done, khevra members were getting impatient to do something. We winnowed down the list by applying some common-sense issue-criteria.

*Susan:* That sounds good, but why not work on more than one?

*Dan:* Some of the people in the khevra wanted to do that. But our purpose is to build community around common pressures. Here's the Talmud Torah we used for the meeting where we prioritized the concerns we'd heard.

## ONE TROUBLE AT A TIME

"I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE." (Exodus 3:14)

### *Commentary*

Rashi says: "I will be' (אֶהְיֶה) with them in this trouble 'what I will be' (אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה) with them in their bondage (by) other kingdoms. (Moses) said before Him, 'Master of the Universe, Why shall I mention to them another trouble? Sufficient for them is this trouble!' (He) [God] said to him, 'You have spoken well. Thus shalt thou say,' etc. (Berakot 9b)."

To paraphrase, God is saying He will be with us in that trouble as he will be with us in future troubles—one thing at a time.

### *Questions*

- What are other "kingdoms" that bind us?
- Why focus on one issue at a time?

*Martin:* Couldn't you break into smaller groups and be more efficient?

*Dan:* There is that temptation, but we try to resist it. The operative question is, will it help to build confidence? And success is critical in building confidence. That's why there's so much organizing and planning for everything.

*Susan:* What's that got to do with prioritizing?

*Dan:* Many of the things we want most, we can't get for the asking, and it's necessary to make a sustained effort—which requires us to be unified for a common purpose.

*Martin:* How do you avoid creating divisions and conflict?

*Dan:* I think we can, but one of the ground rules of strengthening covenantal community in this process is that we only work on things we can agree on. And

we only work on things on which there is a broad consensus, things that will unify the congregation.

*Martin:* How do you know that people will agree with what the khevra decides to do?

*Dan:* What do you mean?

*Martin:* Well, you know, people sometimes say yes to it intellectually, but they don't have any real interest in it.

*Dan:* The khevra members are listening to a lot of members in the congregation. They picked things that they knew were immediate and deeply felt. And also things that were not available to them for the asking.

*Susan:* Why not?

*Dan:* Because this is about our people learning and developing as leaders. If they can get it for the asking, where's the learning and development? And what do they need the synagogue community for if they can get it for the asking? On the other hand, we're looking for things that are winnable.

*Susan:* How do you know it's winnable?

*Dan:* We'll do research. There's no guarantee, of course, but I think we can assess what we're up against and our own wherewithal.

*Susan:* Including the bureaucratic run-arounds? Aren't you worried about wasting your people's time and energy?

*Dan:* No, I don't think so. We'll be careful about finding out who the decision-makers are, starting with the lowest person who has authority to make a decision—someone with the power to do something about the problem.

*Susan:* How do you avoid making it a personal attack?

*Dan:* Identifying them doesn't mean dehumanizing them or treating them disrespectfully. But we can't have a relationship with an institution. We have to deal with its representatives, who make decisions for it. Can you imagine God telling Moses to go unto the Egyptian government?

*Susan:* Are you trying to get a reputation for the synagogue?

*Dan:* In a way, yes. We're trying to do something that will produce visible results when won. We want people in the synagogue and other Jews in the community to see the results.

*Martin:* How do you deal with people who want to lobby for their own issues?

*Dan:* We looked at a number of areas that might be related around a common theme, a cluster of problems, so to speak. The khevra could see easily that some of the things were related—youth-related or elderly-related. Then we identified which concern was of interest to the greatest number of people.

*Susan:* What did they decide to do?

*Dan:* Well, the broad concern is about youth, about kids being pressured.

*Susan:* I thought graffiti was the issue?

*Dan:* I thought so too, then. Now I realize how little we knew before we did the panim-el-panim visits. A visit I did a few weeks ago with one of our members is a good example. He wanted to know why I was meeting with him. I told him we were trying to get a better understanding of the pressures people are under. So he says, “What kind of pressures?” I say, “Well, I’ve been hearing about tensions between groups of kids at the high school.” He says, “I don’t think so, not where my daughter goes, but let’s ask her.” So he calls her in. She’s fifteen or so. He asks her, “Is there anything going on between the different groups at your school.” And she says, “What groups are you talking about?” And he says, “Like the Hispanics, the Jews, the blacks.” And she says: “Yeah—what’s new?” He was obviously taken aback. “What’s going on?” he asks, and she tells him, “Like in the cafeteria, white kids—not Jewish—draw stick-figure pictures of Orientals, write ‘NO GOOKS’ in big letters on them, and tape them up in the cafeteria where they like to sit.” “Anything else?” he asks her. She says, “Everybody does it to everybody else. At the beginning of school this year, a bunch of Jewish kids found flyers with swastikas on them in their lockers—some of them had been to Auschwitz on a summer trip and they were really upset by it. And when the USY (synagogue youth) group went to the Jewish museum, some of the kids were yelling insults out the bus window at Latino kids.”<sup>110</sup>

*Martin:* Jewish kids?

*Dan:* Yes.

*Martin:* What are you going to do about it?

*Dan:* The next step is to identify the experts and the decision-makers who deal with these problems, and to clarify the questions we want to ask them to make ourselves more knowledgeable. The khevra will have another meeting to do that.

*Susan:* How did the members of your khevra feel about all this?

*Dan:* Good. Not about the problems, of course. But I think they saw how they could deal with this unmanageable list—picking one thing at a time, based on clear, common-sense criteria.

*Susan:* Do they get to have any fun?

*Dan:* Who says they don't have fun? They had a Shabbat potluck dinner at the synagogue after Friday-night services. It gave them a chance to get to know each other better. And some of the people who came hadn't done candle-lighting or other blessings in a long time.

*Susan:* Are you seeing any changes around the synagogue?

*Dan:* Yes. In the beginning it was hard to get people to see that they could do a Talmud Torah or chair a meeting, but now it's understood that anyone can do it, and everyone expects to at some time. For some of them, this was their first experience in which a Jewish text had practical relevance to their life. Also, I've seen people in the *khevra* set aside personal agendas to advocate for the interests of others they have relationships with. I think some of them have begun to experience themselves as leaders.

## NISAN (Late March)

*Susan:* You know, Dan, I've been curious about what the congregation is looking to get out of this.

*Dan:* Well, of course, we want to do something about what's creating pressures on our kids. But long-term, we're also looking to build a relationship of mutual respect with decision-makers. I've got one of the khevra's Talmud Torahs on that point. (HE HANDS HER A COPY)

### MUTUAL RESPECT

"And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and gave them a charge to the people of Israel, and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt." (Exodus 6:13)

Moses told Pharaoh: "And all these your servants shall come down to me, and bow down themselves to me, saying, Get out, and all the people who follow you; and after that I will go out. And he [Moses] went out from Pharaoh in great anger." (Exodus 11:8)

#### *Commentary*

In regard to the first verse above, Rashi comments: "He commanded them [Moses and Aaron] regarding him [Pharaoh] to pay him respect in their words."

Regarding the second verse, Rashi comments: "He [Moses] paid respect to the throne, for in the end Pharaoh himself came down to him [Moses] at night 'and said: "Rise up, get you forth from among my people,"' (Exodus 12:31); nevertheless Moses did not say to him [Pharaoh] in the beginning, 'And you (yourself) will come down to me and bow down to me.'"

#### *Questions*

- Why should Moses treat the throne with respect at the outset?
- Why should Moses respect the power of Pharaoh less as time went on?
- Why should Moses make clear to Pharaoh that he respects him less?

*Susan:* How do you get the respect?

*Dan:* The same way the members get it from each other—support, challenge and accountability.

*Susan:* You're going to hold the politicians accountable?

*Dan:* Probably.

*Susan:* Isn't that like trying to shave a bumblebee in a hurry?

*Dan:* That's why we do the research. Our leaders need the experience in presenting face-to-face challenges to decision-makers in a constructive way. Up until now, most of them have only been doing that with each other. The khevra also needs to gather information, so that they can make a workable proposal.

*Martin:* On what basis do you argue for the superiority of your proposal on a non-Jewish issue?

*Dan:* More research. We talk to experts and decision-makers before deciding on our proposal. And we get second and third opinions.

*Martin:* Aren't you changing the rules of the game?

*Dan:* How do you mean?

*Martin:* You know, we've always worked with politicians behind the scenes—a couple of influential members make a phone call or arrange a meeting or whatever.

*Dan:* Our influential members can't protect our kids from the gang problem, and doing it this way we develop more leaders. And we think that whatever demonstration of power we make, it'll benefit the entire Jewish community. The decision-maker may be more sensitive to the needs of all Jews.

*Susan:* You said mutual respect. Doesn't that mean they'll hold you accountable?

*Dan:* Yes, if we're not knowledgeable about the pressures and potential solutions, we'll be held accountable.

*Susan:* How do you find all that out?

*Dan:* Homework. When we went to decision-makers, we were prepared with thoughtful questions. We got information to make a workable proposal, and we also found out who's who, their connections and commitments.

*Susan:* Suppose it turns out that the city is already doing something about your issue.

*Dan:* We wanted to know that too, and what's planned for the future, so we don't find ourselves advocating discredited ideas.

*Susan:* How did your people know how to do all this?

*Dan:* The organizers led a workshop to help the khevra identify decision-makers and questions we would have for them, and to help them develop a plan for the meeting. With a half-dozen people putting their heads together, we came up with questions about the specific nature of the problem and potential solutions. Here's a generic list we started with.

### PLANNING FOR A RESEARCH ACTION

From your experience of the problem, what questions do you have?

Who are the decision-makers responsible for fixing the problem?

What questions would you want to ask each decision-maker?

What's our plan for this meeting?

- What's our agenda?
- What's our credential?
- Who's going to give testimony?
- What questions do we want to ask?
- How does the decision-maker see the problem, what's been done in the past, what's being done now, and what's the organization's wish list?

What are the "iron rules" for research actions?

- Don't negotiate or respond to proposals. Groups conducting research actions never have authority to accept proposals or negotiate. You're representing the synagogue when you go to meet with decision-makers. You have not been authorized by the congregation or the khevra, yet, to engage in negotiations.
- Don't bring up side issues.
- Follow the agenda and the leader.

*Martin:* Do people really follow these "iron rules"?

*Dan:* Not all the time. I was at a research action last week where one of our khevra stopped the meeting in the middle. She wanted to know whether any of the

gang activity the officer was talking about had happened in her neighborhood, which led him off into a long speech about neighborhoods. But afterwards, in the evaluation, several people spoke up to say that we hadn't stayed with the agenda we had agreed on. We decided that if someone feels we need to make a change, we can caucus, take a time-out to talk among ourselves, but we don't make changes casually.

*Martin:* How'd she take it?

*Dan:* At first, she was a little defensive, but when she saw how the group felt about it, she got on board.

*Martin:* What officials did you meet with?

*Dan:* First, on the graffiti, they went to the city streets department and found out that there was a priority list for painting over graffiti, but that was only on public property. Then they went to the patrol division commander of the police department and found out the number of reported incidents—which the police admitted was far less than the actual number. Apparently, many people don't report it. The patrol commander recommended that they talk to the gang-detail sergeant. The patrol division said they don't have the resources to prevent gang writing, and anyway, it's the responsibility of the parents. That's when we decided to find out more about gangs.

*Martin:* Sounds like a run-around. Didn't your people get discouraged?

*Dan:* No, but some got annoyed.

*Martin:* What'd you finally find out?

*Dan:* It's a lot worse than we thought. The officer in charge of the juvenile division of the probation department told us that with a lot of the gangs it's all business,<sup>111</sup> unless someone gets in the way, in which case, it's all violence. He told us that outside gang members don't come to town to pick fights. They come here to recruit "shorties," junior dope dealers, among wanna-be gang members. The business is dope and what's driving profits is automatic weapons and casual violence. White gangs, drawn from the middle class and wound up on white supremacist ideology and Satanism, are also active and growing in numbers.<sup>112</sup> The worst is, there are so many kids involved. The family and community situations that are pushing these kids into this are so prevalent, and the kids can get so much money and status and security from doing it, it makes it all beyond the probation department's influence. It was pretty depressing. They're losing the battle, they know it, and they're discouraged.

*Susan:* Did they say anything about what's going on at the schools?

*Dan:* Oh, we also talked to the principal at the high school. He thinks too that a lot of kids are drawn into the gangs for identity and security. He says that inter-ethnic tensions are high.



*Susan:* What's being done about it?

*Dan:* Apparently, not a lot. The school board is nervous about making it an issue.

*Susan:* Who was in charge of the meetings? Do you do that?

*Dan:* No. A half dozen people from the khevra took different roles in the meeting. One introduced the group and gave the credential and moved it along. The rest had divvied up the questions. Everybody had a role. I also went along to see the mayor.

*Susan:* How did he respond?

*Dan:* Initially he came on strong—loud voice, projecting presence. Early in his comments he said that his first priority was “to ease fears for safety” in the community. But for most of the meeting he was heavily focused on “limited resources.” He told us that for every two dollars in city services received by residential households, that household only pays one dollar in taxes.

*Susan:* What's that got to do with anything?

*Dan:* That was his way of telling us that gang prevention really isn't a priority for him. When we asked him what he proposed to do about the gangs and graffiti, he declared, “I'm not so creative that I've come up with a plan.” Then, moments later, he confided, “I'm proposing a three year plan.”

*Susan:* What's his plan?

*Dan:* He says he wants street-gang-workers throughout the county, but according to him, it's really the County Supervisors who are the obstacle because they don't want to put them in unincorporated areas, and none of the cities are willing to have them. His point was that the city relies on the county to provide prevention resources and his hands are tied.

*Susan:* How many of these research interviews did you have to do?

*Dan:* Over eight weeks we did a half-dozen, but I understand it varies a lot according to circumstances. It depends on how quickly you can determine where and how to intervene in a way that effectively deals with the pressure.

*Susan:* What do people think about the work they've done?

*Dan:* We realized, myself included, that there was a whole set of things that were needed that we would never have known about without the research. And those things turned out to be much more important than what our people had originally imagined. They evaluated the research actions. Here are the questions they used.

## QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATING A RESEARCH ACTION

Did the decision-maker acknowledge the gravity of the issue?

Did the decision-maker give us the information we asked for?

Was the decision-maker willing to explore policy options?

Is the decision-maker willing to seek more resources?

Is the decision-maker willing to work with us?

What do you think the decision-maker got out of meeting with us?

How was our own discipline?

- Did we stick to our agenda?
- Did we keep to our timeline?
- Did we support our chair?
- Did we challenge the decision-maker when necessary?

I also think they were angered by the behavior of some of the officials.

*Martin:* At what point are you going to take a stand on something?

*Dan:* We decided in our last meeting which mitzvah we would do and how.

*Susan:* I thought you already knew what you wanted do? Something about gangs, right?

*Dan:* Yeah, but we needed to know what, precisely. Let's say that we go into the police chief, and we tell him he has to do something to stop the gangs. What do you think he says?

*Susan:* Let's see . . . something like: "What do you want me to do? I'm doing all I can with the resources I have."

*Dan:* What do we say then? The research gave us different pieces of a picture. Then we looked for places where, as a congregation, we could intervene and make a contribution—where we could do a mitzvah that would affect the pressure.

*Martin:* How did you decide?

*Dan:* We studied all the research findings to see where we might do a mitzvah that would have the greatest effect on the pressure, and which we could manage to do with our resources. We used some of the same criteria that we used for prioritization. Here's one of the handouts we used.

## WHAT ARE SOME CRITERIA WE MIGHT USE FOR EVALUATING OUR OPTIONS FOR ACTION?

Who will favor or oppose what we want?

What's our assessment of the decision-maker's power and our ability to exert influence?

What resources (people) and allies (more people) do we have?

How will the press and other interested organizations view what we're doing?

What's the response we're likely to get from the decision-maker?

What opportunities will this offer for strengthening community?

What other options for action do we have?

*Susan:* What's the decision-maker's power got to do with how you do the mitzvah?

*Dan:* It's a question of, which of the decision-makers might have the power to affect something that's important to us, and which of them we might influence. It's also a question of how much power we have to do what. We talked about the question of power in the Talmud Torah. (HE HANDS THEM COPIES)

## EXCEPT BY A MIGHTY HAND

"And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, if not by a mighty hand." (Exodus 3:19)

### *Commentary*

Rashi says: "If I do not show him My strong hand; that is to say, as long as I do not make known to him My strong hand, he will not permit you to go."

### *Questions*

- Who are the decision-makers in our lives?
- How does our making God's power known get us out of Mitzraim?
- How can we "make known" God's power ?
- What is the difference between making power known and exerting power over someone?

*Susan:* Are you planning to show a strong hand?

*Dan:* Maybe. We looked at several approaches, including self-help, mediation and arbitration, education, direct service, advocacy, and accountability.

*Susan:* How did you choose?

*Dan:* We heard from the experts that early intervention with kids could be very important in doing something about the gang problem. Some people wanted to start an after-school program, which would offer informal counseling, help kids with homework, etc.

*Martin:* That sounds worthwhile.

*Dan:* We decided against it. One thing we could all agree on was that we wanted to have the greatest effect possible on the greatest number of kids. And then there was the question of who would staff it everyday.

*Susan:* So what now?

*Dan:* We found out in the research that there had been this very successful inter-group relations and anti-gang prevention program implemented in the school district. Everybody agreed that it worked. It was developed by the Justice Department and County Probation, as a model program, targeted to reach kids before the group tensions emerge and they join gangs, starting around age nine. The kids call it I-RAG—inter-group relations and anti-gang. As one of our youth-group kids put it, “I rag on you and you rag on me, and we’re supposed to stop doing it.” The probation manager had evidence that the numbers of new recruits had declined markedly during the years when the program was operating. When the Federal money ran out, the County wanted to continue, but needed some help in funding from cities, and our city said no. So, despite the proof that it worked, it died. We learned that it would reach 13 schools, four grade levels per school, adding up to more than 1500 students. We realized we would have much more impact with that than we would with a study hall. We decided that this was a stumbling block that needed removing.

*Martin:* How are you going to do that?

*Dan:* We’re looking at how to get the program refunded, and reinstated in the schools. I think that we’ll be challenging the city to come up with some money to fund the program, and the school district to administer it. The police chief doesn’t want it.

*Susan:* The police don’t want something done about gangs?

*Dan:* He’s got a feud going on with the Probation Department. Anything they want, it seems, he opposes. The chief said, if we wanted to help, we could help with their anti-drug program, since that was his project. He also suggested that we could join the ride-along program, and discover what it’s really like to be a police officer.

## IYAR (Early May)

*Susan:* What's happening with your gang prevention program?

*Dan:* We're getting ready to bring pressure to bear.<sup>113</sup>

*Susan:* How do you do that?

*Dan:* We're preparing to do a mitzvah as a kahal poalei tzedek.

*Martin:* How do people feel about putting pressure on? Aren't you concerned about the possibility of an anti-Semitic backlash?

*Dan:* It came up in the Talmud Torah discussion. Here's a copy.

### BEING CONSUMED

"Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the people of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11)

#### *Commentary*

Rashi says about the following verse: "He [God] answered him [Moses] regarding the former (question) first, and regarding the latter (question) last. That which you have said, 'Who am I that I shall go unto Pharaoh?'—it is not your own (going) but Mine, 'for I will be with thee;' 'And this' vision which you have seen in the bush '(will be) for you the sign that I have sent you,' and that you will succeed in My mission. And I am able to deliver; just as you saw the bush performing my mission and it was not consumed, so you will go (to perform) my mission and you will not be harmed."<sup>114</sup>

#### *Questions*

- Do we also believe that we will be consumed?
- What do we fear in meeting with decision-makers?

*Susan:* Do you really think anti-Semitism is a concern here? In Idaho and Mississippi maybe. . . .

*Dan:* Three months ago I would have agreed with you. But when I started to think that we might do a public action, I imagined that every racist anti-Semitic bigot would come out of the woodwork. I had visions of us being talked about as "pushy Jews" on local talk-radio.

*Martin:* It sounds like you got over it.

*Dan:* What was the choice? We have to do something about the pressures on our kids. And I'm convinced there are things we can do to minimize the risk. For what we're asking, there should be wide support in the community—who's in favor of graffiti and gangs?—and we can ally ourselves with a number of non-Jewish organizations. And like I said, we're working toward a relationship of mutual respect.

*Martin:* "Mutual" in what sense?

*Dan:* It means that if we tell decision-makers we have a problem, they listen, and when we ask what's going to be done about the problem, they propose a workable solution. It also means that when we propose such a solution to them, it becomes the basis for good-faith negotiations.

*Martin:* The synagogue is going to negotiate with the city about the gang problem?

*Dan:* B'ezrat Hashem (with the help of God), yes.

*Martin:* How do you get them to listen?

*Dan:* By showing them numbers, discipline, and the pain of the problem. What it really comes down to is a lot of planning, because people have a lot of questions.

*Susan:* About what?

*Dan:* What will we do *if*? How do we make sure we won't lose control? How will we know what we're willing to take for an answer? What if we don't get a straight answer? Who should do the talking? How do we handle press? How will we be sure that we'll have enough people? The planning helps to prepare people for the challenges they're likely to face in doing the mitzvah.

*Susan:* Why so much focus on numbers?

*Dan:* Without the numbers, we can't hold decision-makers accountable. Part of the relationship that we're building with the decision-maker is that we can be relied upon to bring the numbers of people we say we can. Besides, there's nothing more depressing to our own people than a roomful of empty chairs.

*Martin:* We had a public meeting with the police chief, remember, three months ago, when we had that daylight street mugging two blocks from the Temple? I thought we'd have the place at least three-quarters full. It was three-quarters empty.

*Dan:* What did you do to get people to the meeting?

*Martin:* I announced it from the bimah, it was in the bulletin, and several people were talking it up. How are you getting people to your meeting?

*Dan:* The khevra asks every one of its members to commit to a number that he or she will turn out. It's understood that whether the number is high or low, they won't be judged. But everyone is asked to commit to some number, which the khevra can rely on. By this point the whole congregation is accountable.

*Martin:* But how do they get them there?

*Dan:* They've been visiting with these people all along the way, during the research, etc. They know something about their lives and why this issue is relevant to them. They've been building relationships with them as neighbors.

*Susan:* How is the congregation being held accountable?

*Dan:* We're accountable to bring a lot of people, to present a workable proposal, and to act responsibly. If we don't, we'll have to answer to our own people, to the decision-makers, the press, and the public.

*Martin:* How'd you decide how many people to have?

*Dan:* We wanted to go outside the experience of the officials and we wanted as many Jews as possible to experience the mitzvah.

*Martin:* "Outside their experience" in what sense?

*Dan:* In other words, how many people at one time are they in the habit of ignoring? To influence their decision, we have to go outside that experience. We figured we had to have more than 100, which is the capacity of the city council chambers, and our hall holds 200. So we decided to have 200.

*Martin:* With that many people, isn't there a risk of embarrassment to the synagogue? How do you keep it from getting out of control?

*Dan:* You sound worried.

*Martin:* You know I had a painful experience that I wouldn't want you to have. It's been almost three years now, and I think we're still feeling the effects.

*Susan:* What was it about?

*Martin:* I guess it was before you came here. There was a developer who wanted to put a mega-mall in the middle of the wetlands north of town. There's a trail around the edge where I take my kids to watch the herons. They call them "long-leggers." I wanted the place to stay the same, not only for them, but for everyone. So I led a demonstration, at what I thought was a public turnout in the road. The owner caught wind of our plans and called the police. It wouldn't have been so bad, but some of the kids from the Temple showed up

uninvited, just before the police arrived. One of the officers seemed to take real pleasure in arresting Jews on “private property,” including some of the kids. Of course, their parents hadn’t given them permission to get arrested. A lot of people held me responsible—not to mention that some of the members supported the mall, given the slow-down in business here. It was very divisive, more than I ever imagined it could be. And of course the congregation never did take a stand. It’s embarrassing to say, I thought we were going to be a light to the nations.

*Dan:* Don’t be too hard on yourself. Out of seminary, as an associate, I made a similar gaffe. It took years before I stopped cringing at the thought of it. But the risk isn’t the same now. We know the people who’re coming and the mitzvah represents their interests. And our leaders have spent a lot of time talking with people in the congregation about how we would do it, so people will come prepared. It’s a disciplined event.

*Susan:* What kind of discipline?

*Dan:* We have a detailed action plan and agenda that are agreed to in advance by the khevra. For example, when we say a meeting will start and end at certain times and that there’s a set agenda, that’s what happens. And we actively avoid being rude or obnoxious to the official. We don’t give the person any bad surprises. We share our agenda and questions ahead of time. They should have a chance to come prepared—it’s in our interest, as well as theirs.

*Susan:* That’s sounds good, but how do you get them to listen?

*Dan:* We’ll challenge them to hear the pain of the problem, like the officers of the people challenged pharaoh to listen.<sup>115</sup> They can’t really understand the true nature of a pressure just by reading reports and listening to their staff. And when people talk openly about their pain, if the officials are foolish enough to disregard or disrespect it, they’ll be disdained by the public—and decision-makers understand that very clearly.

*Susan:* How do you communicate the pain?

*Dan:* We have people prepared to give testimony, people who are directly affected by the pressures. The rules are: Talk for no more than two minutes. Show whatever emotion you really feel, but do not attack the decision-maker personally.

*Martin:* How do you keep it from turning into a gripe session?

*Dan:* It isn’t an open agenda. We won’t be accepting motions or questions from the floor.

*Martin:* What if you can’t get a straight answer?



*Dan:* In the planning meeting we voted on what specifically we're asking for. We'll know if we've gotten it or not. We're looking for a *clear* answer. We can work with a yes or a no. If it's a no, then we'll have to plan what our next step is going to be from there. But generally, we assume that when the plagues begin, the bondage will cease.<sup>116</sup>

*Martin:* What do they have to do to avoid the plagues?

*Dan:* We plan to ask the superintendent to reinstate the program in the elementary school district, and to ask the mayor and one of the other council members to support an appropriation to fund it this year.

*Martin:* Who does the talking for the synagogue?

*Dan:* All the khevra members have an active role in doing the mitzvah. But they're divided into two groups. First, those who have formal roles: the chair, leadership panel, and testimony people, who do most of the talking during the meeting, plus the floor team, the media people, the sign-in team, and the arrangements people. Second, those who have informal roles: mainly the people who are prepared to help maintain decorum and to speak up from the audience to keep us on the agenda.

*Martin:* Talk about media, did you see what the *Tribune* did to us after our meeting with the chief? If you believed their article, it was a neighborhood meeting called by the police. The person they interviewed wasn't even a member. They identified us as conservative, small "c"—but confusing to everyone, anyway.

*Dan:* Yeah, I know. I'm hoping we can avoid that problem. Several of our khevra people are prepared to do nothing else except deal with the press, and they'll have a press release to hand out.

*Susan:* What do you think is going to happen when you ask them for the gang program?

*Dan:* I don't know. We know we have two votes out of five. The mayor was more slippery in his positions than I would ever have expected. He told us, "I can't show support for it. I'd be voting outside council chambers."

*Susan:* As if he never did that.

*Dan:* Anyway, there were two no's. We're depending on the numbers and the discipline to help sway at least one of the other votes. We've also been gathering letters of endorsement from organizations throughout the city. We'll be sending a packet of 52 letters to the mayor and members of the council.

*Susan:* That's impressive. How are your members feeling about it?

*Dan:* Excited, now that we have a date and an agenda. I think they're beginning to believe that the congregation can really be a kahal poalei tzedek. It's exciting for me too. I see 40 people learning and working together to create an opening for the congregation to do a mitzvah. I think our leadership capacity has changed.

*Martin:* Who gets invited to do this mitzvah?

*Dan:* We want to have as many Jews in the room as possible, primarily members of the synagogue, but we're also doing panim-el-panim to gather unaffiliated Jews.

*Susan:* Now you're going to get the unaffiliated doing mitzvot?! Do your khevra members really want to reach out to the unaffiliated?

*Dan:* Why do you ask?

*Susan:* I'm wondering if you aren't setting your people up for rejection. Don't most unaffiliated Jews not want to be proselytized?

*Dan:* The operative question is, who are they to us? The answer is, some of the unaffiliated are our family, our children or grandchildren, and Jewish friends. Naturally, we want them to have the benefits we're getting from Judaism and a congregation.

*Susan:* But if they don't join synagogues, why would they want to come?

*Dan:* For the same reason, because we're their family and friends, and because we make it clear how important we think it is, by talking about it with them, panim-el-panim. And because they're under pressure too. It's not much different for them than it is for our members. And we're inviting them to do something with us about it.

*Susan:* If that's the case, why didn't you reach out to them sooner?

*Dan:* We had to create an opening for them. Look, if you're an unaffiliated Jew and I ask you, "How'd you like to join the committee that's trying to strengthen the synagogue?" what would you say to me?

*Susan:* "No thanks, I didn't even want to be a part of the synagogue in the first place, never mind any of its committees."

*Dan:* But wouldn't it be different if I tell you that the synagogue is involved in doing something about gang activity at your son's school? We want to time it so that we're getting ready to do a mitzvah that deals with a pressure that may be affecting them. By this point, we've researched the problem and the potential solutions, and we have a plan for doing the mitzvah. This way we have something to invite people to—an opening.

*Martin:* So what do you say to them?

*Dan:* It goes something like this—I'll be the interviewer. Susan, you be the unaffiliated person.

*Susan:* Okay.

*Dan:* Susan, I know that Joshua will be going to Emerson High next year. Have you heard about the tensions between groups and gang activity there?

*Susan:* Yes, I've read about it. It worries me.

*Dan:* In the past few months a lot of my congregation's members have been visiting and talking with one another, and from those talks we identified a pressure that a lot of people are feeling—gangs at school. We want to do something in the way of prevention, to ease the tensions and protect kids from gangs, and also to keep kids from joining them. We're planning a meeting with two members of the city council and also with the superintendent of the elementary school district. We want to have a couple of hundred people there to impress on them the importance of the problem. Would you be willing to help by coming to the meeting?

*Susan:* I'm not sure. What's the goal of the meeting?

*Dan:* To get an effective anti-gang program reinstated in the schools. We plan to ask the superintendent to work with us to see the program re-instituted in 13 schools, and we will ask the councilmen to support an appropriation to help defray the costs of the program.

*Susan:* What do I have to do if I go to the meeting?

*Dan:* Nothing, except be there so the superintendent and the councilmen know that a lot of us want action on this situation. The leadership has a well-developed plan.

*Susan:* Yes then, if it's at a time when I can go. When is it scheduled?

*Martin:* Are you trying to get more people to join the synagogue?

*Dan:* We're trying to demonstrate the relevance of Torah and the synagogue. We understand the invitation as an opening to do a mitzvah that reduces pressure for many people.

*Susan:* And I'm trying to get an invitation to this mitzvah, so when is it?

*Dan:* In about three weeks. You're both invited.

## SIVAN (Late May)

*Martin:* How was the kahal? Did all the planning pay off?

*Dan:* Yes, we had standing room only in the social hall, 200-plus. Here's the agenda.

**Congregation Beth Israel**  
**May 9, 7:30 p.m.**

Agenda

7:15 I. WELCOME (Herman Eisen)

7:20 II. DEVAR TORAH (Rabbi Dan Feldman)

7:40 III. RESEARCH REPORT (Nate Weinstein)

7:50 IV. TESTIMONY

Rules

- Give your name
- Limit your remarks to 2 minutes
- Stick to the subject

8:00 IV. OPENING STATEMENTS BY OFFICIALS

- Ben Johnson, Superintendent,  
Elementary Education, Unified School District
- David Allen, City Council Member
- Harvey Steele, Mayor & Council Member

8:10 V. QUESTIONS FROM THE PANEL

- Murray Glaser
- Rita Greene
- Judy Segal

8:25 VI. SUMMARY

8:30 VII. CLOSING BLESSING—Tov l'hodot l'shem.

Refreshments

Evaluation

**THE MEETING WILL NOT INCLUDE MOTIONS  
OR QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR.**

*Martin:* Did the officials show up?

Dan: Yes, but the mayor was 15 minutes late. He missed the devar Torah. I made a copy of my notes for you.

### Devar Torah Notes

I want to begin by quoting Nehama Leibowitz: “The Torah teaches us that even by sitting at home doing nothing, by complete passivity and divorcement from society, one cannot shake off responsibility for what is transpiring in the world at large, for the iniquity, violence and evil there. By not protesting, ‘not marking the graves’ and danger spots, you have become responsible for any harm arising therefrom, and have violated the prohibition: *Thou shalt not put a stumbling block before the blind. . .*”<sup>117</sup> According to the *Sefer haHinnuch*, “The root reason for the precept is . . . it serves to improve society and order its communal life. . .”<sup>118</sup> The precept is binding everywhere, at all times, for both men and women.

Who are the blind from before whom we want to remove a stumbling block? Our own children. What is the stumbling block? Our children are under pressure from gangs. You’ll hear about some of that tonight, maybe for the first time. What will happen to us if we do not mark the graves and danger spots? As Gerald Blidstein, professor of Jewish law at Israel’s Ben Gurion University of the Negev asks: “If we condone evil and do not really care about our fellow human beings, what happens to the divine image within us if we remain unmoved by indecency, if we are not outraged by wrong?”<sup>119</sup> And I will add this question: What will happen to the divine image in our children if we do not mark the graves and danger spots?

I want to end by telling you something no one wants to talk about—the injury and death of our children. I’m quoting from the statistics on gang deaths and injuries in our county: last year, 27 killed, and 81 injured.<sup>120</sup> Jewish children have been among the injured that were not counted, because some Jews didn’t want to admit that the problem affects us too.

Martin: I’m sorry I missed it, what happened?

Dan: Actually, I’d be interested in hearing it from your point of view, Susan, especially your experience of what happened with the mayor.

Susan: Okay.

Dan: But let me set the scene first. We had two head tables at the front of the stage, the officials at one, four of our leaders at the other. Nate Weinstein gave the report on the research we had done. Then three young people gave testimony,

two from our synagogue. A youth-group member related her experience of being harassed by white gang members at school. She said, they slowed down as they walked by her, and got in her face, saying, "Hitler was right." She was wearing a Magen David. She said that people had asked her if there was danger in her speaking up publicly. She told them, "It's already dangerous. And nobody's talking about it." A second youth-group member gave testimony about how he and his friends are regularly chased and sometimes beaten up by gang members on their way home from school. The third testimony was from a Latino boy, a former gang member that one of our khevra members had invited. He told what it was like for him, having left the gang. He had been forced to leave his family and move several hundred miles away. Even coming back to visit was dangerous for him and his family. Then the mayor got up to speak.

*Susan:* I do remember the mayor and the councilman sitting behind one of the tables on the stage, but then suddenly, he was coming down to the front of the stage out of turn, dragging the microphone, which wasn't easy—it looked like it was taped down. Then he said something like, "How many of you folks here tonight really know what our record is on the gang issue?" Then somebody in the audience asked a question, I think it was about graffiti, and the mayor called on some department head who was sitting not far from me. The mayor said, "Harry, would you brief the folks on the city's initiatives in this area." Harry stood up immediately and began to talk about budget shortages. When I looked down, I noticed that at the bottom of the agenda was printed in bold, "the meeting will not include motions or questions from the floor."

*Martin:* Sounds like business as usual.

*Dan:* For about 30 seconds or so, l'olam va'ed (an eternity), it was. It looked like the meeting was coming apart. Everyone was tense. Then one of our khevra members, Lillian Klein, spoke out from the back of the room, "Let's get back on the agenda, Mr. Chairman." I think that galvanized Herman Eisen, the chair, because he said, "Mr. Mayor, please take your seat," and rapped his gavel. The room went quiet and the mayor sat down.

*Susan:* What about the superintendent and the other councilman?

*Dan:* Our panel of leaders asked some follow-up questions, and then, one after the other, all three were asked to make a commitment. The school superintendent and the councilman said yes, without blinking.

*Martin:* And the mayor?

*Dan:* Here's the question we asked him: "Given everything that's been said here tonight, are you willing to make a commitment now to schedule an item on the city council's agenda within the next two weeks, to discuss and vote on an appropriation of \$25,000 to reinstate the gang prevention program, and to vote for that reinstatement yourself? Can we count on your support to do that, Mr. Mayor?"

*Martin:* What'd he say?

*Dan:* He said, "No, I will not make that commitment. But here is what I will do: I'll see that it gets on the agenda and I'll personally vote to support an appropriation of \$20,000 in CDBG funds."

*Susan:* I have to tell you, Dan, when it was over I felt really grateful to Beth Israel for what you've done—for Josh's sake. It seems to me you earned the mayor's respect. I think the thing that impressed me the most was how people reacted when they got his support.

*Martin:* What'd they do?

*Susan:* They were on their feet, right away, clapping and smiling. There was a big round of applause. It went on for about half a minute.

*Martin:* You must be feeling pretty good about it, Dan.

*Dan:* And surprised—by who led it. I saw people acting as leaders that I'm embarrassed to say I'd never thought of that way. And I was aware of us acting together in a way I haven't seen before. I think, to put it in Nehemiah's words,<sup>121</sup> the people's heart was in the work.

*Susan:* How did your khevra people feel about it?

*Dan:* Right after the meeting we did a 15-minute evaluation. A lot of people said they appreciated Lillian Klein's getting things back on track and how well-organized the meeting was. Others mentioned how good it was to see members from both our regular service and upstairs minyan<sup>122</sup> working together. A lot of people were excited by the numbers that came and getting the mayor's support. I think they hadn't expected that the synagogue could do anything about pressures like these. In fact, some of the leaders looked kind of stunned.

*Martin:* Stunned? How so?

*Dan:* I've been thinking about it a lot. I think the khevra saw that their mitzvah was able to remove a stumbling block from before their children. They were able to influence the future gang prospects of 1500 students. But it's not just that. People know each other better as neighbors now. They've learned more Jewish, they've developed more respect for Torah, and they've been the cause of many members of the congregation doing mitzvot together to relieve the pressures in their lives. And none of them had ever expected that they would be the ones leading it.

*Martin:* It's impressive.

*Dan:* I think they experienced a moment of awe.<sup>123</sup>

## TAMMUZ (Late June)

- Martin:* Has there been a big letdown since the kahal?
- Susan:* Yeah, how do you hold on to the awe?
- Dan:* Or how do we use the energy to create more openings?
- Susan:* How do you do that?
- Dan:* It has to do with bringing Torah to life in the experience of people who may be Jewishly uneducated and uncommitted, and what we think people are feeling about that.
- Martin:* What do you think they're feeling?
- Dan:* When they did the mitzvah, removing a stumbling block from before their own children, I think the Torah became real for them. It felt to me like the Torah was suddenly standing up for the pain and disappointed hopes of our people. And we were the ones holding it up. Afterwards we asked ourselves, what will we do with the questions that people will be raising?
- Martin:* What questions?
- Dan:* I think we've been in the same position Nehemiah was in when the wall was half-built. The people were in a state of exaltation, although there was much rebuilding still to do, and it was expected that they would come to ask questions about the practice of Torah.<sup>124</sup> Nehemiah organized the people to rebuild the city on that momentum. We faced a similar challenge. We wanted to answer the questions that we expected people would have.
- Susan:* Are you planning to rebuild the city?
- Dan:* We're planning to create one opening after another, a continuous pathway back in. We want to create a momentum that moves the community toward the doing of more mitzvot by more people, in a way that will transform the day-to day world for our neighbors and us.
- Susan:* How do you plan to do that?
- Dan:* Nehemiah gathered the people to read Torah.<sup>125</sup> We used our momentum to learn and teach about the mitzvah we did, and about what mitzvot we want to do in the future. A couple of weeks after the kahal, we gathered people—to read Torah, to give thanks, to remember, to make confession, to covenant about what we'll do in the future, and to celebrate. Here's the agenda.



Congregation Beth Israel  
June 2, 2:00 p.m.

## KRIAT TORAH

### THANKSGIVING:

- Psalms
- Songs of Thanksgiving

TORAH READING: Nehemiah [back side]  
(Harry Luks)

DEVAR TORAH (Rabbi Dan Feldman)

ZACHOR (Remembrance/Evaluation)

- Congregations In America, 1600-1900  
(Tom Silver)
- Beth Israel: 1947 to Date (Sarah Stein)
- Beth Israel kahal poalei tzedek (Everyone!)

CONFESSION [back side]

### COVENANTING

SIMKHA (Rabbi Feldman)

- Priestly blessing
- Kiddush
- Motzi
- Potluck dinner
- Birkhat Hamazon
- Zemirot

## NEHEMIAH 12:27-43

And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres. And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, from the district around Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi; Also from the house of Gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall. Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies who gave thanks and went in procession. One went to the right upon the wall toward the Dung Gate; And after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah, And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, And some of the priests' sons with trumpets; Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph; And his brothers, Shemaiah, and Azareel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them. And at the Fountain Gate, which was opposite them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east. And the other company of those who gave thanks went to meet them, and I after them, with half of the people, upon the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall; And from above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Old Gate, and by the Fish Gate, and the Tower of Hananeel, and the Tower of Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard. And the two companies of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I, and half of the rulers with me; And the priests: Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; And Maaseiah, and Shemaiah, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchiah, and Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah as their leader. And that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy; and also the women and the children rejoiced; and the joy of Jerusalem was heard even from far away.

### CONFESSION\*

Adonai, according to all your righteousness, I pray you, let your anger and your fury be turned away from your cities, your holy mountains; because for our sins, your cities and your people have become a reproach to all those who are around us.

Now therefore, our God, hear the prayers of your servants, and their supplications, and cause your face to shine upon your sanctuary that is desolate, for Adonai's sake.

My God, incline your ear, and hear; open your eyes, and behold our desolations, and the cities which are called by your name; for we do not present our supplications before you for our righteousness, but for your great mercy.

Adonai hear; Adonai, forgive; Adonai, listen and do; do not delay, for your own sake, my God; for your cities and your people are called by your name.

\* Based on Daniel 9:16-19.

*Martin:* What did you do for the devar Torah?

*Dan:* Here, you can have a copy. We ended up reprinting it in the synagogue newsletter.

## Rabbi Feldman's Remarks at Kriat Torah

The historical context for the Jewish people in the period of Ezra and Nehemiah was much like our own time—Torah forgotten, people demoralized, lots of intermarriage.

Nehemiah provides an example of gathering a *kahal poalei tzedek* (then a *community* of doers of justice and righteousness). Once he had seen Jerusalem's destruction, he agitated those who were with him about the city's condition, and then he challenged them to act: "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates are burned by fire. Come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we no longer should suffer insult."<sup>126</sup> We saw an example of that kind of *kahal* in doing our *mitzvah*.

Then, when the walls and gates were rebuilt but few houses had been reconstructed, and the population of the city was still small, Nehemiah began gathering a much greater assembly, including all the leaders and the people, men and women—nearly 50,000 on the first day of Rosh Hashanah (New Year). They gathered "as one"<sup>127</sup> and Ezra read from the *Sefer Torah* (Five Books of Moses) while the people blessed and worshipped God with their faces to the ground. The priests and Levites interpreted and helped the people to understand the Torah, and the people wept as they heard the teachings.<sup>128</sup>

After Nehemiah's *kehila gedolah* (great assembly), they didn't let the energy and excitement of the people die but instead they connected it to further action toward the objectives of rebuilding Jerusalem and the nation. It wasn't just about building the wall, that was only the beginning. Tonight we will be asking ourselves these questions:

1. First, how do we as a community learn the lesson of what we did as a *kahal poalei tzedek*?
2. What is it that we know now about ourselves as a covenantal community that we want to teach to our children and grandchildren?
3. How do we express what we've learned—in classrooms, in worship, in celebrations—throughout the life of our congregation?
4. How will we connect with people who are not here tonight but who attended the *kahal*? And what questions do we want to ask them?

*Martin:* How do you know what people have learned?

*Dan:* We asked them.

*Susan:* Another evaluation?

*Dan:* If we didn't talk about it together, people wouldn't be clear about what happened or about the meaning of the mitzvah for themselves or the congregation. We'd repeat mistakes and waste our resources, especially the energy and spirit of our people. And we wouldn't be clear about what to do next. I've got a list of the questions we used.

### Evaluation Questions

How do you feel now about the mitzvah that you did, removing a stumbling block?

What were the sources of the power that allowed you to do the mitzvah? How did you get that power? How did the decision-makers respond to it?

How did we do on the details of the mitzvah? Did we drop the ball anywhere?

Given the mitzvah that the congregation has done, what do you imagine could be done? What should our next steps be?

What role did the Torah have in our meeting?

*Susan:* How did people feel about removing a stumbling block?

*Dan:* Relieved that something had been done to make it safer for the kids. I think they're also enjoying themselves as neighbors. One woman said she thought it was important for our children to see us working together as a community for our common good. And there was one response I liked so much I wrote it down. He said something like: "I'm a little ashamed to say it, but the last time I studied Torah was for my Bar Mitzvah and I won't tell how many years that's been. I guess you could say that I never really lost it, but it was far away from me, or me from it. But when the mayor fell into line, when everyone else was clapping and celebrating, I was just sitting and thinking that we had *lived* the Torah. I remembered the words of Isaiah, 'You shall be called the restorer of streets.'<sup>129</sup> I thought about the streets near the park where I walk with my grandsons. I wanted to restore those streets for them."

*Martin:* Who did the evaluating?

*Dan:* Members of the khevra did panim-el-panim visits to get those who were a part of the kahal poalei tzedek to come to the Kriat Torah.

*Martin:* What's next?

*Dan:* Our people have a lot of other pressures. We covenanted that we would challenge more people in the congregation to do a mitzvah that will relieve them.

*Martin:* What kind of covenanting?

*Dan:* A number of things. People committed to do more panim-el-panim visits to determine what members of the congregation want to do next, to give feedback to religious practices and religious education committees, proposing an addition to the country and leaders' prayer whenever our congregation is getting ready to act as a kahal poalei tzedek. And several people who are non-Hebrew readers committed to 21 days of one hour per day of Torah study in Hebrew.

*Martin:* An hour a day? How did you get that kind of commitment!?!

*Dan:* I think it's a time when people are open to it. And we're exploring a new method for learning to read Torah in Hebrew—Bible Bio-VR.

*Susan:* Bible what?

*Dan:* Biological virtual reality.

*Susan:* You know, I've heard that term, "virtual reality," but I don't really know what it means.

*Dan:* Virtual reality, VR, it's a computer simulation, like a 3-D movie—you use special glasses with headphones.

*Martin:* And sometimes gloves.

*Dan:* The effect is that you can interact with the simulation, like navigate your way through the movie. If you'd like I can get you a copy of the pamphlet. It's called, "All About Bible & Prayerbook Biological Virtual Reality—A Method for Learning to Read Chumash & Siddur."

*Martin:* What's next for Beth Israel, Dan?

*Dan:* Monday morning I got a call from Morrie Bernstein, the rabbi from the Reconstructionist havurah.

*Martin:* I know him.

*Dan:* I'm looking forward to talking with him. It seems that some of his people might be interested in doing something with us. They're not happy about what's happening in the schools either.

*Susan:* Do you think you have the power now to do what you want?

*Dan:* Yes, in a way. I realize now how essential the relationships are to strengthening covenantal community. When they're weak or absent a whole bunch of other things don't work right. How could they? How can we know what's going on in each other's lives, without knowing each other? How can we agree on things and have common goals? And if we don't, who owns the synagogue and its activities?

*Susan:* Does that mean you do a lot of things differently day-to-day now?

*Dan:* I'm finally learning how to challenge. In the old days, I avoided anything that even remotely looked like it might lead to confrontation or conflict. I realize I was tired a lot then, too. I really think it had a lot to do with the way I was approaching people. Maybe I was afraid that if I challenged them, they would challenge me. It's a big relief to know that in the right setting, with the right preparation, tension can be constructive. And now I consciously spend more time with people who are effective as gatherers. Before I start on anything I ask myself, how many leaders will this develop and how? It comes down to, who am I going to challenge to do what?

*Martin:* Did you ever figure out what you were willing to take risks for?

*Dan:* I decided it was worth taking a risk to help our people experience awe. I also decided I could organize to make it happen.

*Susan:* Organize for awe. . . .

*Dan:* I began to see my work as creating a series of openings to mitzvot, and then gathering people to them. We began panim-el-panim, then in small groups, then in larger ones, then finally as a kahal poalei tzedek. My role was to create openings and help people through them, to do a mitzvah in such a way that it led to the doing of another mitzvah. But ultimately that became everybody's job. I realized that if we challenged more individuals to do a mitzvah, and challenged them to do more than one, we could multiply the mitzvot and the leadership by two factors. Maybe the most important thing I learned was that we have the power to create a moment of awe, that it's in our hands, as Hanina bar Hama<sup>130</sup> said, "Everything is in the hand of heaven except the fear of heaven."<sup>131</sup>

## EPILOGUE

*Dan:* (TURNING TO SPEAK TO THE AUDIENCE) I want to read to you from a poem by Jacob Glatstein, written after the Holocaust.<sup>132</sup> It's called, "Without Jews."<sup>133</sup>

Without Jews there is no Jewish God.  
If we leave this world  
The light will go out in your tent.  
Since Abraham knew you in a cloud,  
You have burned in every Jewish face,  
You have glowed in every Jewish eye,  
And we made you in our image. . . .  
The stars are going out around you.  
The memory of you is dimming,  
Your kingdom will soon be over.  
Jewish seed and flower  
Are embers.  
The dew cries in the dead grass!  
The Jewish dream and reality are ravished,  
They die together.  
Your witnesses are sleeping:  
Infants, women,  
Young men, old.  
Even the Thirty-six,  
Your saints, Pillars of the World,  
Have fallen into a dead, everlasting sleep.  
Who will dream you?  
Who will remember you?  
Who deny you?  
Who yearn for you?  
Who, on a lonely bridge,  
Will leave you—in order to return?  
The night is endless when a race is dead.  
Earth and heaven are wiped bare.  
The light is fading in your shabby tent.  
The Jewish hour is guttering.  
Jewish God!  
You are almost gone.

"Without Jews there is no Jewish God," the poet says. How are we to understand that possibility in our own time when Jews are drifting away from the daily practice of Judaism and from us as a covenantal community? Will our congregations in America survive without religious Jews?

Bar Kappara<sup>134</sup> taught: "God said to man: 'My light is in your hand, and your light is in My hand.' 'My light is in your hand': this refers to the Torah; 'and

your light is in My hand': this refers to the soul. If you guard My light, I will guard your light, but if you extinguish My light, I will extinguish your light."<sup>135</sup>

How are we to feel, then, about the loss of our family members and friends from our congregations? Should we be indifferent?

Why do we allow ourselves and others to drift away, without so much as a l'hitra'ot? (we'll be seeing each other).

Perhaps it's because so many of us feel hopeless in our private solitary thoughts. So often we feel like microscopic chatter in cosmic time and space. Although our tradition teaches us that we are given the power to remake our world, we feel powerless. In the last several decades, economic and political changes have created a social drift in which millions of us are living our daily lives psychologically overwhelmed. For many of us, keeping our heads above water takes exhausting amounts of our time and energy.

Like Solomon, we cry out at the madness of it: "I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind."<sup>136</sup> Like Solomon, when we see the corruption of our time, we despair: "Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun:<sup>137</sup> I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors. . . ."<sup>138</sup> Like Solomon, we console ourselves: "I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly. . . ."<sup>139</sup>

Is it inevitable? Are we on a great downward slide of Jewish, American, or Western Civilization? If so, the challenge we face as a covenant people is nothing less than to transform ourselves, our congregations, and our world.<sup>140</sup>

But if, as Solomon says, "all is vanity,"<sup>141</sup> how can we hope to do that? If the light is fading, how are we to find it? Solomon ends saying, be in awe of God and do the mitzvot.<sup>142</sup> Or, as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught, "Through the ecstasy of deeds, he learns to be certain of the presence of God."<sup>143</sup>

I don't think we "find" the light. I believe our deeds create openings to it—kharakim. The word comes from the Song of Songs (2:9). Its root meaning is aperture—like an opening, in a wall, through which one may see beyond, to the light.<sup>144</sup>

In our allegorical understanding of the Song of Songs, God is "peering" (נִצְיִן) through the lattice or openings to see what is being done to Israel, how our people is afflicted.<sup>145</sup> The root of the word used, often translated as "peereth," is נִצְיִן. It means to blossom or shine or sparkle, as in the gleam of a crown. But it is not only God who is peering. The *Sefer haHinnuch* teaches, ". . . If anyone delves to find their deep counsel in the plain explanations [of the mitzvot] and strives to show something new in their overt meanings, because that person yearns to gain a glimpse through the lattices [or kharakim, חַרְכִּים], in order to find delight in the radiance of their vision . . . it is not proper to put blame on that person, but rather to offer blessing and praise. . . ."<sup>146</sup>



I believe God has given each one of us the capacity to create kharakim, openings to which we may gather others to do mitzvot and see the light of Torah. What must we do to create the openings? The root of the word kharakim (i.e., kharakh) may be thought of as an acronym for remembrance—khet for khozeh (visionary), resh for rabi (rabbi-teacher), and khouf for kohen (priest).

Each of us is called as a khozeh to voice the vision of days of Mashiach, because “without a common [Torah] vision we shall perish.”<sup>147</sup> Each of us is called as a rabi, to teach others the link between the vision of days of Mashiach and keeping the sacred. That link, flowing from God’s blessings and commandments, is the mitzvot that we do as a covenantal community. And each of us is called as a kohen, to keep sacred space and time.<sup>148</sup>

Where do we create kharakim? In the congregation, in the whole community of Israel, and in the larger world.

We Jews are in a crisis of faith that is testing whether as a people we will answer the call of our time. How and where do we begin? We begin by listening to one another—to the pain and the hope.

Has God given us as individuals the capacity to do what is needed? We have our answer in the words of Rabbi Levi Yitzkhak:<sup>149</sup>

“Then God formed humankind, man and woman, and God made them in God’s image. God commanded them to be fruitful and multiply, and to explore and dominate God’s creation. And God gave them the power to sense and to focus God’s radiant light. Each one was given the ability to become aware of and to attenuate God’s presence according to his or her will. Some could transform the light into wisdom, others into life. Some could turn it into God-fearingness, others into love, and some into the goods of this world. Each human being, having been created in God’s image, was of God’s all-encompassing, all-filling light. Each could know God and each could attract and direct that light.”<sup>150</sup>

## QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Aren't there some indications that the practice of Judaism is actually increasing?

While it is true that the middle decades of this century witnessed a burgeoning of Jewish congregational membership, with 70 percent of Jewish families congregationally affiliated in 1950,<sup>151</sup> “it was not matched by a rise in synagogue attendance,” according to Jack Wertheimer.<sup>152</sup> In effect, it may have been a relatively shallow religious revival.<sup>153</sup>

And it is also true that now more people than ever are attending seders, lighting Hanukah candles, and fasting on Yom Kippur. But social scientists tell us we don't know the meaning of this, that is, we cannot reliably assume that it means greater commitment to Judaism. The increase in once-yearly observance has come simultaneously with a massive decrease in weekly and daily observance.

Steven Cohen asks, “How does one evaluate the ‘Jewishness’ of those who ‘merely’ attend a Passover Seder, light Chanukah candles, fast on Yom Kippur, and who have some, if not many, close non-Jewish friends?” His answer is that the most interested observers in the Jewish community—scholars, rabbis, educators, communal professionals, and lay leaders—are “ignorant of the nature of Jewish commitment and involvement harbored by those who may be termed marginally affiliated.” He adds, “Without such an understanding, one cannot be certain about the prospects for Jewish continuity among large numbers of Jewish families.”<sup>154</sup> And in a concluding chapter he states, “It is here that is found one of the more severe limitations of our data.”<sup>155</sup> We wonder why, as Cohen points out, that “. . . no serious historical study has assessed the extent of Jewish religious authenticity in the recent American past and contrasted it with today's levels.”<sup>156</sup>

Jack Wertheimer and others suggest that forms of observance which demand daily or weekly practice and which *continually* set Jews apart from their neighbors, such as dietary laws and Sabbath prohibitions, are much less likely to be followed—and they are in fact declining.<sup>157</sup> According to one major study of New York Jews, there is “clear evidence of erosion of traditional ritual practices associated with each generational transition through at least the third generation.”<sup>158</sup>

Today less than half of those who identify themselves as Jewish are affiliated with a congregation. Gary Tobin's presentation of National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) data shows that when current affiliation is examined by region, rates range from a high of 48 percent in the Midwest to a low of 29 percent in the West, with rates of 43 and 35 percent for the Northeast and South respectively. According to Tobin, “The actual percentage of members is probably considerably lower than reported here because many Jews say they are affiliated when they are not.”<sup>159</sup> Moreover, in the early 1980s when ap-

proximately 44 percent of all Americans claimed they attended religious services every week, only 24 percent of congregationally affiliated Jews claimed weekly attendance.<sup>160</sup>

We believe that the main fact of contemporary Jewish out-migration is that American Jewry is undergoing an historic *crisis of faith*, one that encompasses almost all the country's congregational communities,<sup>161</sup> but with varying external causes and internal dynamics. In a television interview more than two decades ago, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel decried that, “. . . We have religious institutions without religious belief. We have a wave of non-belief.”<sup>162</sup>

Why are we in a crisis of faith? Traditional Jewish authority and its reciprocal, covenantal community, shaped and matured in the shtetl, have not worked well as the basis for congregational life among geographically dispersed and denominationally disparate Jews in the United States. The authority has been undermined and the practices abandoned as archaic, even by most congregationally affiliated Jews.

It is not surprising that under these conditions many Jews have become less observant. (Rabbis in several Conservative congregations have estimated to us that 95 percent or more of their members do not keep kosher, and, in one case, the synagogue's kitchen was not kosher.)

Geographic dispersal has also resulted in a loss of intimacy of association. Leonard Fein writes: “. . . The problem is that the Jewish community does not provide for most of its members the intimacy of association that is required if it is to be a central source of their values. . . . For most Jews, the very notion of community is a euphemism; their actual experience is one of *association* rather than *community*. . . . Nor can the network of Jewish organizations function as a surrogate for the traditional community.”<sup>163</sup> Writing almost two decades earlier, Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver stated, “It is not the individual and routine failings of individual Jews which endangers Jewish survival (as some rousing sermons would seem to indicate) so much as the vagueness, the emptiness, and the limpness of what passes for a corporate Jewish way of life.”<sup>164</sup>

## Are Jews in America really under pressure?

The myth of modern American Jewry, according to one non-affluent Jew, is that all Jews “. . . give tzedakah in large quantities. . . . send their children to camp, to Ivy League schools and to Israel for the year after college. . . . buy annuities, take cruises and retire to Florida. . . . [and] don't worry about paying their health insurance premiums.”<sup>165</sup>

But the practical reality, as she notes, is that more than a quarter of American Jews have annual incomes, as single adults, near or below the poverty line. This group includes elderly living on fixed incomes, immigrants, disabled individuals, homeless people, divorced women with children, and those with AIDS. Not far from them on the in-

come ladder are Jewish white collar workers and professionals working in the public and non-profit sectors, and small business entrepreneurs.<sup>166</sup>

James Besser, a Washington-based correspondent for the Jewish press, has written: “Thousands of Jews in cities like New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Chicago receive welfare benefits like Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and food stamps. . . . In wealthy Palm Beach County, Fla., local officials estimate that 10 percent of the elderly Jewish population is at or beneath the poverty line; the proportion goes up in the oldest age brackets. . . . Elderly Jews receive Medicaid funding that enables them to receive nursing home care; in fact, Jewish nursing homes around the country depend on Medicaid for some 70 percent of their funding.”<sup>167</sup>

In one major metropolitan area, when subsidized housing for low- and moderate-income Jewish seniors became available, more than 1,000 applications were distributed on the first day, with Russian-speaking émigrés from the former Soviet Union constituting three-quarters of the applicants.<sup>168</sup>

A Jewish Family and Childrens Services director told us: “As Jews become more and more assimilated, they take on the same characteristics as the overall society. What we are seeing is the full picture, that there are Jews with alcohol problems, there are family violence problems, and divorce rates are getting closer and closer to the rates in the overall society. We do a lot of work with people who are having financial problems.”

Out-migration from Jewish congregations and Judaism is positively correlated with the more severe social pathologies—divorce, alcoholism and drug addiction, and domestic violence—and their incidence among Jews has been growing,<sup>169</sup> except possibly for domestic violence. As a leader of an up-scale Reform congregation said, “We and our kids are involved in destructive and delinquent behavior like everyone else.”

## Are the out-migration numbers really that bad?

We believe that out-migration—the flight of Jews from Judaism and the influence of Jewish religious life—is the best evidence of erosion of Jewish belief and practice in the United States. We use the term out-migration since the term for the most visible symptom of what is happening—“intermarriage”—views these events through the lenses of social work and religious education.<sup>170</sup> Treating intermarriage as “the problem,” although focusing on a critical situation that demands attention, leads us away from examining the causes of out-migration, and inevitably it limits our options for action. It also puts us in the position of referring to intermarried Jews as a problem.

The demographics of the Jewish population in this century are startling. Barry Kosmin presents evidence of Jews becoming “the least familial group in the nation.” He notes that world Jewry in 1900 was growing at a rate of 1.5 percent per annum. By 1920 the world Jewish population was larger than the Mexican, Vietnamese, Egyptian, or Ca-

nadian populations. “There was one Jew for every five Latin Americans; today there is only one Jew for every 50 Latin Americans.” We have the largest proportion of one-person households and the smallest proportion of households with children.<sup>171</sup> The fertility rate, according to some studies, has fallen below the replacement level.<sup>172</sup>

The effects of the low Jewish birth rate have been compounded by intermarriage (in which one spouse is not Jewish). In the 1940s, about seven percent of Jews were intermarrying; in the 1960s the rate had risen to about 17 percent; by the 1970s the intermarriage rate was about 32 percent.<sup>173</sup> In 1989, Egon Mayer reported that, “among those under 40 years of age about 37% of Jewish men and 24% of Jewish women entering first marriages are marrying Gentile partners. These figures increase to about 55% for men and 42% for women in second marriages.”<sup>174</sup> In 1992 Mayer reported that, “interfaith marriage has increased roughly fivefold in just 25 years.”<sup>175</sup> In some areas of the country, the rates are much higher. For example, the Allied Jewish Federation of Denver Demographic Study of 1983 showed that the intermarriage rate was 66 percent for those in the 18-29 age group.<sup>176</sup>

What are the projections for intermarriage? Some researchers expect that by the end of the decade the intermarriage rate will be 50 percent, rising to 60 or 70 percent within 15 to 20 years.<sup>177</sup> On the other hand, using data from the 1990 NJPS, Egon Mayer concludes that, “Of the Jewish marriages entered into by Jews since 1985 only about 35% are endogamous. Another 10% are conversionary, and the remaining 55% are mixed. In short, *more than half of the nuclear families formed by the most recently marrying Jews are mixed-marriages.*”<sup>178</sup> (Emphasis ours.) Eleanore Judd concluded from the Denver study that, “Jews were delaying marriage while they finished their education and began careers, and when they did marry, many chose partners who were not Jewish.”<sup>179</sup>

While the rate of intermarriage has risen sharply in recent decades, some studies show that the rate of conversion by the non-Jewish spouse to Judaism has fallen. Joan Ephross interprets data from the 1990 NJPS to the effect that the 1965 rate was 23 percent, from 1965 to 1974 it was 28 percent, and from 1975 to 1984 it was 14 percent.<sup>180</sup> Egon Mayer and Amy Avgar, on the other hand, cite surveys made in 1975, 1977, and 1982 to show that there has been a rise in the rate of conversion among non-Jews who married Jews, although they conclude that “the proportion of converts among the intermarried has remained constant at about one-third of the total pool.”<sup>181</sup>

Congregational affiliation among the intermarried is almost twice as *unlikely* as compared to the “inmarried” (in which both spouses are Jewish) or “conversionary marriages” (in which one spouse has converted to Judaism). Overall, 85 percent of those in mixed marriages reported no congregational affiliation; 40 and 44 percent respectively of those unmarried and those in conversionary marriages reported that they were members of congregations. Similarly, attendance at religious services by those in mixed marriages is

much lower (six percent) than for those inmarried (28 percent) or in conversionary marriages (34 percent).<sup>182</sup>

In addition, few children of the intermarried are socialized into Jewish religious life. In the first generation of mixed-marriage families, more than three-fourths of the teenagers never attend synagogue or temple and only 14 percent become bar or bat mitzvah. The proportion of children ages 10 to 13 who are *not* receiving a Jewish education is 59 percent for those from mixed marriages, 16 percent for those from conversionary marriages, and five percent from inmarried couples.<sup>183</sup> In short, “only a small minority of children of mixed marriages are socialized into Jewish religious life and identify their religion as Judaism.”<sup>184</sup>

Moreover, the intermarriage rate increases with each generation. In one study of Los Angeles Jews during the mid-1980s, the intermarriage rate jumped from 11.6 percent in the first generation to 43.5 percent in the fourth generation.<sup>185</sup> Other studies reveal similar patterns throughout the country, although they are more pronounced in the West. Predictably, the proportion of mixed marriages is much higher among those who identify themselves as “just Jewish” (46 percent) than those who identify themselves as Orthodox (six percent), Conservative (seven percent), or Reform (22 percent).<sup>186</sup>

Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, Director of the National Jewish Outreach Program estimates that if present trends continue, four million Jewish-Americans are “likely to totally assimilate within the next 25-50 years.”<sup>187</sup>

#### Distribution of the U.S. Jewish Population<sup>188</sup>

		Number	Percentage of Jewishly Identified Population	Percent/Total Population Qualified Households
BJR	Born Jews—Jewish Religion	4,210,000	62	51
JBR	Jews By Choice/Converts	185,000	3	2
JBR	Jews By Religion	(4,395,000)	(65)	(53)
JNR	Jews With No Religion	<u>1,120,000</u>	16	14
CJP	Core Jewish Population	5,515,000	(81)	(67)
JCO	Converts Out (Born/Raised Jewish)	210,000	3	3
JOR	Jewish Parentage/Background With Other Current Religion (Adults)	415,000	6	5
COR	Children Under 18 Being Raised In Other Religion	<u>700,000</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>9</u>
	Total Jewish Ethnic or Religious Preference	6,840,000		16
GA	Adult Gentiles Living With Total Jewish Population	1,350,000		16
	Total Population In 3.2 M Qualified Jewish Households	8,200,000		100

Considering the trends in relation to the estimated 6.8 million persons who described themselves as Jewish ethnically or religiously in the 1990 NJPS, we tentatively

conclude as a *rebuttable* presumption that at least three million Jews are out-migrating at various speeds from organized Jewish religious life.

## Does anti-Semitism have an affect on the out-migration?

Anti-Semitism may be one of the significant long-term causes of the contemporary out-migration from Jewish religious life.

It is true that overt xenophobia and institutional anti-Semitism, based on status rather than any specific behavior, like comparable racism, is much less acceptable and prevalent now than it was three or four decades ago. Today, acceptance into a professional school or moving up in a corporate or government hierarchy is not inherently more problematic for people with Jewish names than getting motel reservations.

Has there been a similar large decline in *personal* anti-Semitism in the United States? For five years in a row, acts of anti-Semitic harassment against *individuals*—“in-your-face” acts of violence and assault—“far outnumber incidents of vandalism against institutions and other property.”<sup>189</sup> Moreover, recent Federation initiatives to combat anti-Semitism have had strong appeal in some areas.<sup>190</sup>

In recent years there has been a stream of court cases in which Jewish families have sought legal remedies when their children in public school were expected or instructed to participate in Christian activities. The range of these activities extends to songs, prayers, special holiday projects, such as Christmas tree-trimming, and even away-from-school activities, such as choir performances. In virtually all of these cases, Jewish students who stood up for their right to a non-sectarian education, one which would not offend their Jewish beliefs and practices, were vilified and worse by many Christian classmates. Their families were harassed and sometimes threatened by parents of other children, and by local residents when the case was publicized.<sup>191</sup>

The strength of the dominant Christian culture and the intensity of its pressures against overt displays of Jewishness and Jewish preferences are suggested in the comments of a self-described “half-Jew.” She grew up with dreams of living in WASP society and was without any Jewish education or identity. Her singular appraisal of the Hasidim, the only religious Jews she could identify by their open practice of Judaism, was that “they have so many bad qualities. . . . They’re pasty-faced. . . . They don’t get any exercise, which is good for you.”<sup>192</sup>

That even secular, non-affiliated, or “half-Jews” can take on dominant Christian values, interests, and policies that are anti-Semitic in practice is no surprise. The history of Jews internalizing their oppression<sup>193</sup> is well known.

One Northern California Hillel program director has written openly about his experiences of internalized oppression,<sup>194</sup> which we regard as representative of what many Jews have known in the last 50 years or more. He grew up in Berkeley, California and

received “confusing messages about being Jewish.” It was okay to be Jewish at home and in religious school, but there was something uncomfortable and embarrassing, even dangerous, about being publicly Jewish. In public school he experienced verbal and physical intimidation, which he was not prepared to handle. Although the men in his family were loving and sensitive, he never saw them “directly and powerfully stand up for themselves and demand to be treated with respect.” He saw that other Jewish boys were having similar experiences. His life became increasingly “split”—Jewish at home and in religious school and Jewishly invisible at public school—until he finally let go of his Jewishness in high school so he would “fit in.”

He began to understand in adulthood that his hesitancy to acknowledge his own Jewishness and his contempt for other Jews were directly linked to his experiences of anti-Semitism and his not wanting to be the target of “stereotypes and ignorance.” He came to understand that when as Jews we are subjected to social oppressions, “we internalize the messages of those oppressions and turn them on ourselves and other people like ourselves.”

Notwithstanding this case of a return to a religious Jewish life, the “brutal bargain”<sup>195</sup>—trading religious identity and behavior for secular acceptance and success—has had the opposite effect for most American Jews. We believe that the second-generation children of Jewish immigrants were much less conscious than their parents of the bargain’s terms. Their desire for social mobility created pressures for them to be more and more like their Gentile peers<sup>196</sup>—with a declining hold of Jewish tradition on their lives—because that is what the American version of anti-Semitism has required of us.<sup>197</sup>

### How crucial are synagogues to the survival of the Jewish people?

Writing from a Jewish socio-communal perspective, and drawing heavily on historical, social science, and survey findings, Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab conclude that “group identity and cohesiveness are severely eroding for the large majority” of American Jews, which they understand as a response to the “openness of American society.”<sup>198</sup> While they believe a Jewish “core” will survive the present crisis, they also project that within two generations, by the middle of the next century, the community is likely to lose three million members.<sup>199</sup>

Jack Wertheimer proposes that, “. . . Judaism has traditionally provided its adherents with patterns of behavior and reasons for identification that go beyond ethnicity, with a Jewish content that has motivated them to remain distinctive.”<sup>200</sup>

Alvin Reines states that, “Jewish religious institutions are critical for the survival of the western Jewish collectivity. The reason is that only a Jewish religious institution can create Jews and give to a person a sense of authentic Jewish identity. . . . Ethnic organizations are superstructures erected on a religious base: they cannot create and authenti-



cate Jews, neither can they function without the subtle ambiance of religion nourishing their activity.”<sup>201</sup>

Lipset and Raab describe the problem of Jewish continuity as “beyond social engineering.” But they see as an inescapable fact that, “the religious dimension of Jewishness is the key to continuity,” that Judaism is the “intrinsic *sine qua non* of American Jewish durability.”<sup>202</sup>

Can you suggest Torah guides to covenantal community organizing?

Tanakh<sup>203</sup>

*Leviticus 19:17-18*

. . . You shall surely rebuke [הוֹכִיחַ הוֹכִיחַ] your neighbor, and not allow sin on his account. . . . You shall love your brother as yourself. . . .<sup>204</sup>

*Deuteronomy 22:1-3*

You shall not watch your brother’s ox or his sheep go astray, and hide yourself from them; you shall in any case bring them again to your brother.

And if your brother is not near you, or if you know him not, then you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall be with you until your brother seeks after it, and you shall restore back to him.<sup>205</sup>

In like manner shall you do with his ass; and so shall you do with his garment; and with every lost thing of your brother’s, which he has lost, and you have found, shall you do likewise; you may not hide yourself.

*Exodus 23:2-4*

You shall not follow a multitude to do evil; nor shall you speak in a cause to incline a multitude to pervert justice;

Nor shall you favor a poor man in his cause.

If you meet your enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again.

*Leviticus 19:14*

You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God; I am the Lord.

*Deuteronomy 31:11-12*

Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and your stranger who is inside your gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and take care to do all the words of this Torah.<sup>206</sup>

*Jeremiah 29:4-7*

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon;

Build houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat their fruit;

Take wives, and father sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that you may be increased there, and not diminished.

And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace shall you have peace.

*Ezekiel 3:21-21*

Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you have not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at your hand.

. . . If you warn the righteous man not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he was warned; and you have saved your soul.

*Isaiah 57:14*

And one shall say, Build up, build up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block from the way of my people.

*Isaiah 58:11-12*

Adonai will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in sun-scorched places, and make your bones strong. You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of broken walls, the restorer of streets to live in.

Talmud<sup>207</sup>

*Shabbath 55a*

For R. Aha b. R. Hanina said: Never did a favourable word<sup>(7)</sup> go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, of which He retracted for evil, save the following, where it is written, And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark [taw] upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof, etc.<sup>(8)</sup> The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Gabriel,<sup>(9)</sup> Go and set a taw<sup>(10)</sup> of ink upon the foreheads of the

righteous, that the destroying angels may have no power over them; and a taw of blood upon the foreheads of the wicked, that the destroying angels may have power over them. Said the Attribute of Justice<sup>(11)</sup> before the Holy One, blessed be He, “Sovereign of the Universe! Wherein are these different from those?” “Those are completely righteous men, while these are completely wicked,” replied He. “Sovereign of the Universe!” it continued, “they had the power to protest but did not.”

(7) Lit., ‘a good attribute’.

(8) Ezek. IX, 4.

(9) Gabriel, ‘man of God’, is mentioned in the Book of Daniel VIII, 16-26; IX, 21-27. He was regarded as God's messenger, who executes His will on earth.

(10) The last letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

(11) Justice was often hypostasized as an independent being.

### *Sanhedrin 27b*

Is it not written, And they shall stumble one upon another,<sup>(34)</sup> meaning, One [will stumble] through the sin of the other, which teaches that all are held responsible for one another?<sup>(35)</sup>—There the reference is to such as had the power to restrain [their fellowmen from evil] but did not.

(34) Lev. XXVI, 37, lit., ‘upon his brother’. The prefix *b* in *wyhab* is here taken in the sense of ‘because of’.

(35) Shewing that the iniquities of one may be borne by the other.

### *Shabbath 119b*

R. Amram son of R. Simeon b. Abba said in R. Simeon b. Abba's name in R. Hanina's name: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they did not rebuke each other: for it is said, Her princes are become like harts that find no pasture:<sup>(26)</sup> Just as the hart, the head of one is at the side of the other's tail, so Israel of that generation hid their faces in the earth,<sup>(27)</sup> and did not rebuke each other. . . .

(26) Lam. I, 6.

(27) A metaphor for deliberately shutting their eyes to evil.

### *Baba Metzia 31a*

One of the Rabbis said to Raba: [Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart:] hokeah tokiah [thou shalt surely rebuke] thy neighbour.<sup>(28)</sup> Perhaps hokeah means once, tokiah twice?—He replied, hokeah implies even a hundred times. As for tokiah: I know only that the master [must rebuke] the disciple: whence do we know that the disciple [must rebuke] his master? From the phrase. ‘hokeah tokiah’, implying under all circumstances.

(28) Lev. XIX. 17; cf. n. 1.

### *Sanhedrin 102a-102b*

R. Abbahu used to make a practice of lecturing on the Three Kings. Falling sick, he undertook not to lecture [thereon any more]; yet no sooner had he recovered, than he lec-

tured [upon this] again. They [his disciples] remonstrated with him, ‘Did you not undertake not to lecture on them?’—He replied, ‘Did they abandon [their evil course], that I should abandon [my habit of lecturing upon them]?’

#### *Shabbat 54b-55a*

Whoever can forbid his household [to commit a sin] but does not, is seized [i.e., punished] for [the sins of] his household; [if he can forbid] his fellow citizens, he is seized for [the sins of] his fellow citizens; if the whole world, he is seized for [the sins of] the whole world. R. Papa observed, And the members of the Resh Galutha’s [household] are seized for the whole world. Even as R. Hanina said, Why is it written, The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders of his people, and the princes thereof: if the Princes sinned, how did the elders sin? But say, [He will bring punishment] upon the elders because they do not forbid the princes.

#### *Arachin 16b*

Our Rabbis taught: Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart.<sup>(5)</sup> One might have believed one may only not smite him, slap him, curse him, therefore the text states: ‘In thy heart’; Scripture speaks of ‘hatred in the heart’. Whence do we know that if a man sees something unseemly in his neighbour, he is obliged to reprove him? Because it is said: Thou shalt surely rebuke.<sup>(6)</sup> If he rebuked him and he did not accept it, whence do we know that he must rebuke him again? The text states: ‘surely rebuke’ all ways. One might assume [this to be obligatory] even though his face blanched, therefore the text states: ‘Thou shalt not bear sin because of him’.<sup>(6)</sup> It was taught [in a Baraita]: R. Tarfon said, I wonder whether there is any one in this generation who accepts reproof, for if one says to him: Remove the mote from between your eyes, he would answer: Remove the beam from between your eyes! R. Eleazar b. Azariah said: I wonder if there is one in this generation who knows how to reprove! R. Johanan b. Nuri said: I call heaven and earth to witness for myself that often was Akiba punished<sup>(7)</sup> through me because I used to complain against him before our Rabban, Gamaliel Beribbi,<sup>(8)</sup> and all the more he showered love upon me, to make true what has been said: Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee; reprove a wise man and he will love thee.<sup>(9)</sup>

(5) Lev. XIX, 17.

(6) Lev. XIX, 17. Lit., ‘rebuking thou shalt rebuke’. The repetition of the word indicates the obligation to repeat the reproof, even though it was not accepted when administered first.

(7) [Sifre Deut. I, ‘was rebuked’. v. Finkelstein. Akiba p. 113.].

(8) Var. lec. v. Marginal Gloss. The reference is to R. Gamaliel of Jamnia; cur. edd. R. Simeon b. Rabbi.

(9) Prov. IX, 8.

#### *Megilah 26a*

“Benei ha-Ir, the name given to the municipal community in talmudic parlance. In the Talmud, the community is regarded as an aggregate of the individuals who comprise

its membership. The legal definition of this aggregate is that of a partnership. . . . The governing body of the community, known as the ‘seven notables of the city’ (*shivah tovei ha-ir*), was regarded as an agent of the citizenry, and its acts had to be ratified by the citizenry meeting as a body (*be-ma’amad benei ha-ir*).<sup>208</sup>

#### *Baba Bathra 8a*

HOW LONG MUST HE BE IN THE TOWN TO BE COUNTED AS ONE OF THE TOWNSMEN. . . . The one period [twelve months is required], in order to make a man a full member<sup>(28)</sup> of the town, the other [makes him] only an inhabitant<sup>(29)</sup> of the town. . . . But is twelve months’ residence required for all imposts? Has it not been taught: ‘[A man must reside in a town] thirty days to become liable for contributing to the soup kitchen,<sup>(30)</sup> three months for the charity box,<sup>(31)</sup> six months for the clothing fund, nine months for the burial fund, and twelve months for contributing to the repair of the town walls’?—R. Assi replied in the name of R. Johanan: Our Mishnah also in specifying the period of twelve months was thinking of the repair of the town walls. R. Assi further said in the name of R. Johanan: All are required to contribute to the repair of the town walls, including orphans, but not the Rabbis. . . .

(28) Lit., ‘a son of the town’.

(29) And the verse in Deut. speaks of inhabitants.

(30) Tamhui, a kind of dish wherein food was collected.

(31) Kuppah, basket, bag.

## Codes

#### *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 70:4*

“If he be engaged in studying the Torah and the time comes for recital of the *Shema* [“morning prayers”], he shall leave off studying and recite the *Shema* . . . if he be engaged in the affairs of the public, he shall not leave off but complete this work, and recite the *Shema* if there remain time to do so.”<sup>209</sup>

#### *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De’ot*

“Each man is commanded to love each and every one of Israel as himself as [Leviticus 19:18] states: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Therefore, one should speak the praises of [others] and show concern for their money just as he is concerned with his own money and seeks his own honor.”<sup>210</sup>

#### *Kitzur Schulchan Aruch*

“When one sees anyone committing a crime or going on an evil path, it is his duty to cause him to improve by convincing him that he is committing a crime with his evil deeds, for it is said: ‘Thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor’ (Leviticus 19:17).”<sup>211</sup>

*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot*

“It is a mitzvah for a person who sees that his fellow Jew has sinned or is following an improper path [to attempt] to correct his behavior and to inform him that he is causing himself a loss by his evil deeds as [Leviticus 19:17] states: ‘You shall surely admonish your colleague.’ A person who rebukes a colleague—whether because of a [wrong committed] against him or because of a matter between his colleague and God—should rebuke him privately. He should speak to him patiently and gently, informing him that he is only making these statements for his colleague’s own welfare, to allow him to merit the life of the world to come. If he accepts [the rebuke], it is good; if not, he should rebuke him a second and third time. Indeed, one is obligated to rebuke a colleague who does wrong until the latter strikes him and tells him: ‘I will not listen.’ Whoever has the possibility of rebuking [sinners] and fails to do so is considered responsible for that sin, for he had the opportunity to rebuke the [sinners].”<sup>212</sup>

*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah*

“Any wicked person, apostate, or the like, who repents, whether in an open, revealed manner or in private, will be accepted as implied by [Jeremiah 3:22] ‘Return, faithless children.’ [We may infer] that even if one is still faithless, as obvious from the fact that he repents in private and not in public, his Teshuvah will be accepted. . . . It is an utter sin to tell a Baal Teshuvah, ‘Remember your previous deeds,’ or to recall them in his presence to embarrass him or to mention the surrounding circumstances or other similar matters so that he will recall what he did. This is all forbidden. We are warned against it within the general category of verbal abuse which Torah has warned us against as [Leviticus 25:17] states: ‘A man should not mistreat his colleague.’”<sup>213</sup>

## Responsa<sup>214</sup>

*Rashba, vol. 3, no. 417*

“. . . It was not merely a privilege to represent the public but also a duty. Thus in a case where a member of the community was elected to public office, contrary to his own declared wishes in the matter, it was decided that ‘no person is free to exempt himself . . . since every individual is bound in the service of the public in his own town . . . and therefore anyone who has sought to exclude himself from the consensus has done nothing and he is bound to fulfill the duties of his office because the community has not agreed that he be excluded.’”<sup>215</sup>

*Re'em, no. 53*

“At various times extensive discussions and sharp disputes centered around the question of the weight to be attached to the vote of individual members of the community. Many scholars objected to a scale graded in accordance with social and economic standing: ‘and it makes no difference whether this majority was composed of rich or poor, scholars or the common people.’”<sup>216</sup>

*Rosh 6:5*

“. . . In all matters to which the community consents the majority is followed.”<sup>217</sup>

*Ktav Sofer, Orach Chaim, no. 109*

In regard to a Jew who underwent a forced conversion to Christianity and also intentionally transgressed, the responsum was: “A person who has sinned and has become a *baal teshuvah* knows the burning desire he once had for committing a sin. He can apply this same overwhelming enthusiasm to performing mitzvot. . . . We should also bear in mind that *teshuvah* has the power of converting intentional transgressions into merits. . . . Our sages state that even if a person sinned all his life, if in the end he repented, he is forgiven. . . . They should immediately welcome him into their society and treat him as a respected member.”<sup>218</sup>

## Mussar<sup>219</sup>

*Sefer Hayashar*

“One should admonish sinners with the rod of one’s own mouth after first admonishing one’s own soul.”<sup>220</sup>

*Shaarai Teshuvah*

“To turn as many as possible from transgression: as it is said, ‘Return ye and turn aside from all your offenses’ (Ezekiel 18:30), whereby we are taught that this is one of the principles of repentance. And it is said, ‘Thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor, and not bear sin because of him’ (Leviticus 19:17), which teaches us that if one does not offer rebuke, he is punished for his [the other’s] sins.”<sup>221</sup>

*Mesillat Yesharim*

“Saintliness of deed in the relationship between man and his neighbor consists in the doing of good in abundance, in one’s always benefiting his fellow creatures and never injuring them. This applies to the body, belongings and *soul* of one’s neighbor.”<sup>222</sup> (Emphasis ours.)

### *Shaarai Teshuvah*

“Neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him.’ We are hereby exhorted not to spare or be merciful to those who cause others to sin and to stumble. Our sages of blessed memory have said, ‘All who become merciful to the cruel, in the end become cruel to the merciful’ (Yalkut, Shemuel 15:121).”<sup>223</sup>

### *Shaarai Teshuvah*

“Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil’ (Exodus 23:2). We have hereby been exhorted not to strengthen transgressors by verbal encouragement and not to join those who sanction injustice, as it is said, ‘Say ye not: A conspiracy, concerning all whereof this people do say: A conspiracy’ (Isaiah 8:12). It is forbidden to associate oneself with an evildoer in the affairs of the world, as it is said, ‘Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the Lord hath made a breach in thy works’ (II Chronicles 20:37). Association with an evildoer is forbidden even for the purpose of a mitzvah, as it is said, ‘Envy not the man of violence, and choose none of his ways’ (Proverbs 3:21).”<sup>224</sup>

### *Shaarai Teshuvah*

“Nor put a stumbling block before the blind’ (Leviticus 19:14). . . . We have also been exhorted . . . to give appropriate advice to those of our fellows who take counsel with us, and not to lead them astray with senseless advice or to advise them towards the serving of our own ends. . . . We have also been exhorted against putting any stumbling-block of transgression before a Jew, and also before a non-Jew, that one must not offer a goblet of wine to a Nazarite, or torn flesh from a living animal to a ‘son of Noah,’ that one must not even hand him a forbidden thing which already belongs to him.”<sup>225</sup>

### *Mozake Harabim*

“When one becomes aware of as grievous a failing within society as its present educational structure, which has taken such a tremendous toll of our youth—how much more so must he summon up all of his powers to guard the breach, remove the impediment, and raise up the standard of truth. . . . This [is to be] accomplished through the formula of ‘Teach each other,’ by means of which . . . [is] cultivated . . . the goal of community service. . . . Where each is concerned for the spiritual perfection of his neighbor and objectively measures himself against the other to see where their respective strengths lie—there is no basis for propagation of Torah more solid than this.”<sup>226</sup>

### *Mozake Harabim*

“. . . The survival of Torah and the fear of God are at stake. It is incumbent upon us to do all in our power to create outposts of Torah, to be outspoken in its cause, and, for its sake, to harden our faces like flint. . . . We are perforce led to conclude that when



Torah and fear of God are threatened with extinction, so that the very physical and spiritual existence of Israel are at stake (God forbid), there is no claim that can be granted precedence, and no one, regardless of his station, who can allow himself to be solicitous of his honor and repose.”<sup>227</sup>

#### *Shaarai Teshuvah*

“‘Thou mayest not hide thyself’ (Deuteronomy 22:3). We have hereby been exhorted not to be lax in the rescuing of our neighbor’s property, both chattel and land. . . . How much more so are we exhorted to exert ourselves in the rescuing of our fellows and to devise means of helping them in their time of distress, as it is written ‘Neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor’ (Leviticus 19:16). And Solomon said, ‘If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small indeed’ (Proverbs 24:10). That is, if it is within your power to rescue someone by counsel and by exertion, and you feature yourself as lacking in means, your power will be cut off—measure for measure.”<sup>228</sup>

#### *Mesillat Yesharim*

“We see, then, that we are duty-bound in this respect. We cannot exempt ourselves because of our inadequate strength, for in relation to all such things we learned (Avoth 2.16), ‘The work is not yours to complete, but you are not free to abstain from it.’”<sup>229</sup>

#### *Shaarai Teshuvah*

“‘Thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor, and not bear sin because of him’ (Leviticus 19:17). We have hereby been exhorted not to bear sin through the sins of our neighbors by failing to rebuke them. If one man sins, the whole congregation is punished when his sin becomes known, if they do not reprove him with the rod of correction, as it is written, ‘Did not Achan the son of Zerach commit a trespass concerning the devoted thing and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel and that man perished not alone in his transgression?’ (Joshua 22:20). . . . To escape punishment for this sin, it is fitting to select men [and women] of truth and recruit men [and women] of valor from among the populace as chief overseers of every marketplace and living area in their neighborhoods, to look to their neighbors, rebuke them for every offense, and eradicate the evil.”<sup>230</sup>

#### *Shaarai Teshuvah*

“They said further, ‘One who shames his neighbor in public has no share in the World to Come’ (Bava Metzia 59a). The reason for their not saying about a murderer that he has no share in the World to Come is that one who shames his neighbor is not aware of the enormity of his sin, and is not bitter unto himself as is a murderer, and, consequently, is far from repentance.”<sup>231</sup>

### *Shaarai Teshuvah*

“Is a sin’s lacking rebuke not enough for them—as it is said, ‘Thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor and not bear sin because of him’ (Leviticus 19:17)—that they sin even more by saying, ‘You have not sinned?’—as it is said, ‘. . . and they strengthen the hands of evildoers’ (Jeremiah 23:14). . . . This applies even more so when the wrong that his wicked neighbor practices is known to others; for when the flatterer tells him in the presence of others, ‘You are pure and without offense,’ he thereby desecrates and de-means law and judgment. . . . A man [or woman] must expose himself to danger rather than bear upon his soul a sin as grave as this.”<sup>232</sup>

### *Shaarai Teshuvah*

“Our sages of blessed memory have said, ‘All those who are in a position to reprove the members of their household, and do not do so, are held accountable for the sins of the members of their household; those who are in a position to reprove the people of their city, and do not do so, are held accountable for the sins of the people of their city; and those who are in a position to reprove all men, and do not do so, are held accountable for the sins of all men’ (Shabbath 54b). And it is said, ‘And they shall stumble one upon the other’ (Leviticus 26:37), which our sages of blessed memory interpreted as ‘one, for the transgression of another,’ and in conjunction with which they said that all Israel is responsible one for the other’ (Sanhedrin 27b).”<sup>233</sup>

### *Shaarai Teshuvah*

“Our sages of blessed memory have said in connection with the verse, ‘And set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry . . .’ (Ezekiel 9:4)—‘The attribute of justice said, “Although these men are perfectly righteous and have fulfilled the Torah, they should have protested and did not.” The Holy One Blessed be He said, “It is perfectly known to me that if they had protested, their words would not have been accepted.” The attribute of justice answered, “Lord of the World, though perfectly known to You, they did not know whether the people would pay heed to them or not,” after which the Blessed One commanded, “And begin at my sanctuary,” referring to the righteous holy ones, who were punished for not having protested” (Shabbath 55a).”<sup>234</sup>

### *Shaarai Teshuvah*

“And it is said, ‘Thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor, and not bear sin because of him’ (Leviticus 19:17). But if it is evident to all, and known, and tested and confirmed that the sinner hates instruction and will not listen to the voice of his teachers or give ear to those who would instruct him, about such a one it is said, ‘Reprove not a scorner lest

he hate thee' (Proverbs 9:8). And our sages have said, 'Just as it is a mitzvah to say what will be heeded, so is it a mitzvah not to say what will not be heeded' (Yevamoth 65b).<sup>235</sup>

*Mesillat Yesharim*

"A person's good, then, is to seek honest friends, who will open his eyes to what he is blind to and rebuke him with love in order to rescue him from all evil."<sup>236</sup>

## Modern Commentary

*Rabbi David Novak*

"According to the Talmud, one is not to help or save the life of a 'provocative sinner.' (Avodah Zarah 26b.) By the Middle Ages the category was limited apparently to those ' . . . whose deeds actually endangered the lives and property of the entire community, most notably, informers.'<sup>237</sup>

*Rabbi Moshe Feinstein*

"Another factor that enlarges the obligation on those who are capable of bringing others closer to Torah is the fact that many people who are far from a Torah life can be categorized as a *Tinokos Shenishbu*, people held captive by Gentiles since infancy (*Yoreh De'ah* 159:6). It is a *mitzvah*—an obligation—to bring such individuals back to the Torah and Judaism (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Mamrim* 3:3). When there is no one else to accomplish this, then one must even take time from his Torah studies to do so. . . . How much time can and must one devote to this task? . . . As in charity, where one has an obligation to give a tenth of his income to the poor, so must one spend one tenth of his time working on behalf of others, bringing them close to Torah. If one is endowed with greater resources, he must correspondingly spend more of his time with others."<sup>238</sup>

*Nehama Leibowitz*

"The Torah teaches us that even by sitting at home doing nothing, by complete passivity and divorce from society, one cannot shake off responsibility for what is transpiring in the world at large, for the iniquity, violence and evil there. By not protesting, 'not marking the graves' and danger spots, you have become responsible for any harm arising therefrom, and have violated the prohibition: Thou shalt not put a stumbling block before the blind. . . ."<sup>239</sup>

*Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel*

"Religion has suffered from the tendency to become an end in itself, to seclude the holy, to become parochial, self-indulgent, self-seeking; as if the task were not to ennoble human nature but to enhance the power and beauty of its institutions or to enlarge the

body of doctrines. It has often done more to canonize prejudices than to wrestle for truth; to petrify the sacred than to sanctify the secular. . . . Judaism is forever engaged in a bitter battle against man's deeply rooted belief in fatalism and its ensuing inertia in social, moral, and spiritual conditions. Abraham started in rebellion against his father and the gods of his time. His great distinction was not in being loyal and conforming, but in defying and initiating. He was loved by the Lord not for ancestral worship but because he taught his descendants to 'keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right' (Genesis 18:19).<sup>240</sup>

*Rabbi Emil Fackenheim*

“What does the voice from Auschwitz Command?”

“Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world, and to escape into either cynicism or otherworldliness, lest they cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish.”<sup>241</sup>

## Footnotes

The footnotes that follow, like the brief parenthetical explanatory notes included throughout the book, are provided as an aid to readers who may be Jewishly uneducated. We have sought to quote sources that are widely available in English translation, and to provide simple explanations for Jewish concepts and practices.

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<sup>1</sup> In most instances we use “Torah” in the broadest possible sense, to include not only the Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch), the additional books of Tanakh (or Hebrew Bible, i.e., Neviim or Prophets and Ketuvim or Hagiographa), and the Talmud, but the entire body of halakhah and aggadah, including contemporary Jewish religious texts. [Halakhah refers to “the way” or “the path” in Jewish life—based on a body of Jewish oral and written law—formulated first by the scribes, developed later by rabbinic authorities, and described primarily by the legal portions of the Talmud (in contrast to the aggadah). Aggadah (lit. narrative or telling) refers to the non-legal portions of the Talmud (and other Jewish religious texts), which includes historical descriptions, commentaries on the scriptures, biographical information, prophetic reproofs and expressions of hope, visions, legends, ethical maxims and proverbs. Aggadah is not authoritative in the same way as halakhah, which is to say that it is not obligatory.] There are a limited number of instances in which we are referring specifically to the Sefer Torah (Torah Scroll of the Five Books) or we are quoting commentators who are referring only to the corpus of halakhah contained in Tanakh and Talmud.

<sup>2</sup> Mitzvot (sing., mitzvah) ordinarily refer to the 613 commandments in the Hebrew Bible that traditionally have been acknowledged as given by God to Moses and received by the Israelite people at Sinai.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of contrasting views on this question, see Steven M. Cohen, *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 10-18.

<sup>4</sup> In Exodus 18:20, Yitro tells Moshe: “And you must also make clear to them the Laws and Teachings and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the deeds that they are to do.” R’ Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) comments: “So here it would mean: Cause the Law and the Teaching to shine clearly and brightly into their eyes and make them so important to them that they guard themselves against transgressing them.” R’ Hillel Rachmani teaches in the name of Rav Avraham Yitzhak Kook (1865-1935, chief rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in Palestine) that there are “. . . two routes by which a soul’s connection to the supernal divine light can be improved.” The first is to be found in the Eastern mystical traditions that focus on consciousness, thought, and spirit. The second, common to Western traditions and grounded in Judaism, emphasizes behavior and ethics. Rav Kook taught that we approach God by “choosing the path of Good.” Our behavior is not simply an external affectation but creates an internal transformation: “What a Buddhist attains with meditation, argues Rav Kook, should be arrived at by living a just life. . . . By choosing the path of God, you influence others and perfect the whole of surrounding existence. . . . Rav Kook feels that the genuine route to God is

paved by the freedom that God grants to mankind. . . . It is this that will lead to ‘tikkun olam’—perfecting the world.” See “Introduction to the Thought of Rav Kook,” Lecture #17: Heresy V (Yeshivat Har Etzion Virtual Beit Midrash Project, yhe@jer1.co.il, June 6, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> In our model of covenantal community organizing we use the word “challenge” in its sense of “a call to confrontation” and “a calling into question,” which closely approximate the spirit of rebuke. The Hebrew root of the word ordinarily translated as “rebuke” is כִּי, which also means to decide, adjudge, prove, appoint, show to be right, convince, convict, reprove, and correct. According to Proverbs, “Better is open rebuke than hidden love; well meant are the wounds a friend inflicts, but profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (27:5-6) and “Whoever rebukes a person will afterward find more favor than one who flatters with the tongue” (28:23). Rashi comments (Gen. 24:44) that every time כִּי occurs in Scripture, it denotes “the clarification of a matter.” The importance of rebuke and reproof is suggested by the extent to which they are repeatedly affirmed, in Proverbs 3:12, 6:23, 9:8, 10:17, 12:1, 13:18, 15:10, 15:15, 15:31, 15:32, 17:10, 24:25, and 29:15. See also Baba Metzia 31a, Arachin 16b, and Tamid 28a. We have learned from R’ Doniel Neustadt that reproof or challenge is “not merely a ‘nice idea’ . . . . It is actually a halacha L’masse [a law to do] which is agreed upon by all of the Poskim [legal authorities]. . . .” See “Selected Halachos Relating to Acharei-Mos—Kedoshim,” (Cleveland Heights, Ohio: Harbotzas Division of Congregation Shomre Shabbos, 1996—24 April 96, 16:07:04 EDT, halacha@jer1.co.il). We do not credit the fashionable expressions of modesty that one should not challenge others because each of us lives our life far from moral or ethical perfection. The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir haKohen, 1838-1933) comments pointedly on the less attractive motivation for such false modesty: “When people encounter such mitzvos they are known to delude themselves by saying, ‘I am the least important person in town and my words surely will be rejected. Why should I talk in vain?’ If a person looks inward, however, he [or she] will conclude that this is just the Evil Impulse talking. After all, if while thinking such humble thoughts, this person was insulted by someone even slightly, our ‘humble’ individual would breathe fire and arouse many to take his side against the offending party. Yet when it comes to defending God’s honor, he makes himself out to be modest and humble of spirit.” See (Raphael Blumberg, tr.) *Let Them Serve Me*, The Chofetz Chaim on Chumash Vayikra (Jerusalem: Machon Bais Yechiel Jerusalem, 1995), p. 23. We are equally directed, however, to do nothing that shames, slanders, or unnecessarily discomforts our neighbor. See Berachot 31b, Pesachim 118a, Yoma 4b, 75a, and 87a, Kethuboth 67b, Sota 5a, Baba Metzia 31a, 58b, and 59a.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Azzai was an early second century Palestinian scholar.

<sup>7</sup> Pirke Avot 4:2

<sup>8</sup> In virtually all quotes from *Tanakh* we have used the translation sponsored by the Computronic Corporation of Israel and supervised by Yechezkel Schatz, winner of the 1987 International Bible Quiz, which is available in the U.S. on CD from Davka Corporation of Chicago.

<sup>9</sup> Kosher refers to animals that are “fit to eat,” the method of their slaughtering, the preparation of meat, the prohibition of mixing milk and meat products, and utensils that are fit to use by Jews—according to Jewish dietary law.

<sup>10</sup> Tefillin are phylacteries or prayer-boxes strapped to the head and arm, which traditionally have been worn by men at daily morning services, except on the Sabbath and holidays.

<sup>11</sup> B’nai mitzvah refers, literally, to “sons [and now daughters, too] of commandment,” i.e., when a boy at age 13 becomes a bar mitzvah or a girl at age 12 becomes a bat mitzvah, at which time they are initiated into the Jewish religious community and assume moral responsibility for obeying the commandments.

<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew יהוה is used in place of the Tetragrammaton and is usually translated as Adonai (our Lord). See Eirubin 18b and Pesachim 50a.

<sup>13</sup> Numbers 11:14

<sup>14</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 11:16

<sup>15</sup> Solomon Yitzhak ben Isaac (1040-1105), the preeminent Bible and Talmud commentator, was also well-versed in the agriculture and trades of his native France, and the founder of a successful school.

<sup>16</sup> See Rashi, Numbers 11:16.

<sup>17</sup> Numbers 11:4

<sup>18</sup> Psalms 78:19

<sup>19</sup> According to Nehama Leibowitz, “. . . he nevertheless, tried his utmost to minimise their guilt.” See (Aryeh Newman, tr.) *Studies in Bamidbar*, Numbers (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1980), p. 108.

<sup>20</sup> Leibowitz cites Isaac Arama regarding discontent and rebellion among the people, concluding that there was a “. . . gradual spread of discontent from inner to outer rebellion.” See *Studies in Bamidbar*, Numbers, p. 107.

<sup>21</sup> Numbers 11:4-6

<sup>22</sup> Rashi cites *Siphre*. See Rashi, Numbers 11:5.

<sup>23</sup> See Leibowitz, Numbers, p. 101.

<sup>24</sup> In regard to יהוה’s commitment to provide meat for the people, Rashi’s interpretation of יהוה’s answer is: “. . . let not My hand be considered short before them even one hour.” See Rashi, Numbers 11:22.

<sup>25</sup> Numbers 11:16-18

<sup>26</sup> See Rashi, Numbers 11:17.

<sup>27</sup> We have learned the following from the Chofetz Chaim: “The expression ‘brother’ includes every Jew, as we find in *Avos DeRabbi Nassan* (Ch. 15): ‘Do not say, “I hate this Jew and love that one,” or “I love the wise and hate the ignorant.” Rather, love all and hate only the heretic.’” See (Raphael Blumberg, tr.) *Let Them Serve Me*, The Chofetz Chaim on Chumash Vayikra (Jerusalem: Machon Bais Yechiel Jerusalem, 1995), p. 123. Moreover, *Sifre*, Piska 222 asks: “Whence do we learn that it applies to your enemy’s ox as well?” And answers: “From the verse, *thine enemy’s* (ox) (Exodus 23:4), indicating that this applies in all cases. If so, why does Scripture say here *thy brother’s*? Because the Torah speaks in opposition to the Inclination to evil.” See (Reuven Hammer, tr.) *Sifre, A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 233.

<sup>28</sup> Deuteronomy 22:1-3

<sup>29</sup> That our obligation reaches beyond returning our “neighbor’s” possessions to the actual person of our neighbor is made clear in *Sifre*, Piska 223: “And *thou shalt restore it to him* (22:2): You must also restore him (to his home) if he himself is lost.” See *Sifre*, p. 234.

<sup>30</sup> “Accordingly, everyone must feel it his responsibility to come to the aid of anyone who, to his knowledge, finds himself in spiritual danger. . . .” See R’ Joseph Hurwitz of Navaradok (Shraga Silverstein, tr.), *To Turn the Many to Righteousness*, from *The Stature of Man* (New York: Feldheim, n.d.), p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> See Moshe Chayim Luzzatto, *Mesillat Yesharim* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1966), pp. 220-21.

<sup>32</sup> “. . . How much more so are we exhorted to exert ourselves in the rescuing of our fellows and to devise means of helping them in their time of distress, as it is written ‘Neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor.’” See Jonah ben Avraham of Gerona, *Shaarai Teshuvah* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1967), pp. 188-91. According to the Chofetz Chaim: “If a person sees someone drowning in a river or facing any other danger, it is a mitzvah to save him. To stand idle in such a case is forbidden (Vayikra 19:16). If one lacks the ability to save the person himself, he must pay others to do it. A person violates this prohibition if he is negligent in this duty (*Choshen Mishpat* 426). . . . This is true as well when we see people so mentally enfeebled and preoccupied with the trivialities of the times that they have forgotten G-d’s Torah and their great obligation to keep His mitzvos and have thereby come to violate commandments for which one incurs *kareis*. Surely it is forbidden to be negligent about encouraging them to fulfill G-d’s word lest they become objects of his anger.” See *Let Them Serve Me*, p. 121. According to Exodus Rabbah 27:9: “The Sages explain ‘*My son, if thou art surety for thy neighbor*’ as referring to Israel who are responsible for one another to God. Israel are beloved for they are called friends, as it says, For my brethren and friends’ sakes (Ps. CXXII, 8).” Neighbor here may be understood as friend and, as the Talmud teaches, “Each Jew became respon-



sible for the other when they exclaimed, ‘We will do and we will hear.’”(Sota 37b) A variation on this theme in modern Orthodox Jewish life has been articulated by R’ Moshe Feinstein: “Another factor that enlarges the obligation on those who are capable of bringing others closer to Torah is the fact that many people who are far from a Torah life can be categorized as a *Tinokos Shenishbu*, people held captive by Gentiles since infancy (*Yoreh De’ah* 159:6). It is a mitzvah—an obligation—to bring such individuals back to the Torah and Judaism (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Mamrim* 3:3). When there is no one else to accomplish this, then one must even take time from his Torah studies to do so. . . . How much time can and must one devote to this task? . . . As in charity, where one has an obligation to give a tenth of his income to the poor, so must one spend one tenth of his time working on behalf of others, bringing them close to Torah. If one is endowed with greater resources, he must correspondingly spend more of his time with others.” See Yitzchak CooperSmith, *The Eye of a Needle* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1993), appendix.

<sup>33</sup> See R’ Yissocher Frand, “*RavFrand*” List—*Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayeishev* (ravfrand@torah.org, December 13, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> \_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>35</sup> Current President of the Reform movement’s Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

<sup>36</sup> See *Tikkun*, 11(4):49 (July/August 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Nationwide, far less than half of the 6.8 million people who identify themselves as Jewish religiously or ethnically are affiliated with a congregation. There has been a six-fold increase in intermarriage over the past three decades. Approximately 20 to 30 percent of the non-Jewish spouses among the intermarried seek conversion to Judaism. Of the children born to intermarried couples, more than 90 percent of them intermarry. In a 1983 Philadelphia study, none of the grandchildren from intermarried parents and grandparents considered themselves Jewish. In a 1982 study of eight communities, Jewish children of intermarriage were much more likely to intermarry and much less likely to raise their children as Jewish—and today’s numbers are much higher. See Meir Abehsera, “The Seduction of a Nation,” *Nefesh*, 3(1):21-23 (5755/1995), p. 23. See also Jack Wertheimer, “Recent Trends in American Judaism,” in (David Singer, ed.) *American Jewish Yearbook 1989* (New York & Philadelphia: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp. 83-85. See also our discussion, “Are the out-migration numbers really that bad?” pp. 98-100.

<sup>38</sup> Numbers 11:14

<sup>39</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 11:28

<sup>40</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 11:29

<sup>41</sup> R’ Hirsch (1808-1888) was the leader and foremost exponent of Orthodoxy in Germany in the nineteenth century.

<sup>42</sup> Exodus 3:10

<sup>43</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 3:11

<sup>44</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 4:10

<sup>45</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 33:11. According to *Midrash Rabbah*, Numbers 14:20, “When He spoke with Moses the latter stood on his feet; as it says, *But as for thee, stand thou here by Me, and I will speak unto thee*, etc. (Deut. V, 28). With Balaam, however, He only spoke while the latter lay prone on the ground; as it says, *Fallen down, and his eyes are opened* (Num. XXIV, 4). With Moses He spoke mouth to mouth; as it says, *With him do I speak mouth to mouth* (ib. XII, 8), while of Balaam it says, *The saying of him who heareth the words of God* (ib. XXIV, 4), which teaches that He did not speak with him mouth to mouth. With Moses He spoke face to face; as it says, *And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face* (Ex. XXXIII, 11), but with Balaam He spoke only in parables; as is confirmed by the quotation, *And he took up his parable, and said*, etc. (Num. XXIII, 7).” We also learn in *Midrash Rabbah*, Numbers 45:2, “the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face. God said to him: ‘Have I not made a condition with thee that when thou art angry, then I will appease thee, and when I am angry, thou wilt appease Me! Turn back now and go back to the camp!’ Hence it says, ‘And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face.’”

<sup>46</sup> Exodus 33:11

<sup>47</sup> Numbers 12:8

<sup>48</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 14:14

<sup>49</sup> Exodus 3:12

<sup>50</sup> According to *Midrash Rabbah*, Numbers 21:15, “For seven days the Holy One, blessed be He, tried to persuade Moses to go on His mission. . . .” Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) quotes Jehudah Halevi to the effect that Moses prayed, “‘Let the sin be upon me,’ i.e., I am ready to submit to any punishment rather than be sent to plead with Pharaoh.” (Exodus 4:10) See also *Midrash Rabbah*, Exodus 3:4, and Rashi, Exodus 4:10.

<sup>51</sup> Exodus 4:11-12

<sup>52</sup> See Anson Laytner, *Arguing With God, A Jewish Tradition* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1990).

<sup>53</sup> Exodus 32:11

<sup>54</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 32:12

<sup>55</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 32:14

<sup>56</sup> Numbers 11:17

<sup>57</sup> See Rashi, Numbers 11:17.

<sup>58</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ .

<sup>59</sup> R' Bill Lebeau is the current Vice Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

<sup>60</sup> See Debra Nussbaum Cohen, "Looking for leaders, rabbis explore a changing society," *Jewish Bulletin* (June 23, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> These figures are based on a 1993 poll conducted by the Jewish Outreach Institute, which also found that 75 percent of the Orthodox Jews who were polled wanted more outreach programs to the intermarried. See David Belin, "Guest Columnist," *Moment* (June 1995), pp. 22-23.

<sup>62</sup> About the verse, "And he said unto him: I am the Lord," Rashi comments: "(I.e., I am) faithful to pay a good reward to those who walk before Me and not for nought have I sent you, but to fulfill My words which I spoke to the first fathers (Patriarchs)." (Exodus 6:2)

<sup>63</sup> Jack Wertheimer writes: "From their inception to the present day, such congregations have never attracted more than a scant minority of members to prayer services on a regular, weekly basis. This was the case during the periods of greatest expansion, and it remains so to the present day. . . . Sparse synagogue attendance is a characteristic of the Conservative synagogue." See "The Conservative Synagogue," in (Wertheimer, ed.) *The American Synagogue* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 1987, 1995), p. 139

<sup>64</sup> Yiddish word denoting a Jewish village or small town in Eastern Europe in which the way of life was bounded by traditional rules of observance, learning, and lovingkindness.

<sup>65</sup> See Rashi, Exodus 3:14.

<sup>66</sup> In a *New York Times* op-ed piece, Bob Herbert describes testimony given by six high school students before the New York City Police Commissioner. He relates: "Tom Brokaw, who hosted a panel at the forum, asked a teen-ager how easy it would be to get a gun if he had \$100. The teen saw no need to spend that much money. He said he could give a 10-year-old \$40 and feel assured that the youngster would return in 20 minutes 'with a loaded .22.'" All of the teen-agers indicated that they had been hurt in a violent encounter, they had lost friends to violence, and they had been in a situation in which they thought they would die. See Bob Herbert, "Trouble After School," *New York Times*, (March 4, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) was a Spanish poet, grammarian, biblical commentator, philosopher, astronomer, and physician.

<sup>68</sup> See Ibn Ezra, Exodus 2:25: "He [God] saw the violence perpetrated upon Israel openly and took cognizance of the oppression they suffered in secret."

<sup>69</sup> "R. Elazar, the son of Azaryah, said . . . where there is no meal, there is no Torah; where there is no Torah, there is no meal." (Pirke Avot 3:21)

<sup>70</sup> Rashi explains that “Whoever is troubled, his wind (רוח) and his breathing are short, and he cannot breathe a long breath.” (Exodus 6:9)

<sup>71</sup> See commentary on Nehemiah 2:17 in (Judah J. Slotki, tr.) *Daniel•Ezra•Nehemiah* (New York: Soncino Press, 1951, 1985).

<sup>72</sup> Although Nehemiah had been appointed governor by the Persian king, Professor Hayim Tadmor points out that it is possible to see behind the larger events of the story to the “calculated acts of a skilled statesman.” Accordingly, Tadmor suggests that for Nehemiah, “His first concern was to rebuild the city wall. This work, described in Nehemiah 3-4, aroused enthusiasm among the populace, which formed *volunteer* teams, each of which rebuilt one section.” (Emphasis ours.) See Hayim Tadmor (in H.H. Ben-Sasson, ed.), *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 176.

<sup>73</sup> On the verse, “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, that he shall pursue after them, and I will get Me honor through Pharaoh, and through all his host” (Exodus 14:4), Rashi comments: “When the Holy One Blessed Be He avenges Himself of the wicked, His name is exalted and honored.”

<sup>74</sup> Nehemiah 5:3-5

<sup>75</sup> “. . . You shall surely rebuke [הוֹכִיחַ הַיְּכִיחַ] your neighbor, and not allow sin on his account.” (Leviticus 19:17)

<sup>76</sup> “One of the Rabbis said to Raba: [Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart:] hokeah tokiah [thou shalt surely rebuke] thy neighbour. Perhaps hokeah means once, tokiah twice?—He replied, hokeah implies even a hundred times. As for tokiah: I know only that the master [must rebuke] the disciple: whence do we know that the disciple [must rebuke] his master? From the phrase. ‘hokeah tokiah’, implying under all circumstances.” (Baba Metzia 31a)

<sup>77</sup> Genesis 1:22

<sup>78</sup> See Rashi, Exodus 5:14.

<sup>79</sup> I.e., giving of the Torah, which required that the people receive it.

<sup>80</sup> R’ Jonathan Slater reports how several contemporary Conservative rabbis perceive their authority as mara d’atra: “[The mara d’atra] is the person or authority that’s been looked to in terms of Halacha, Jewish Tradition, how and what to do in particular situations. . . . Whereas I’m willing to have open meetings and discuss issues, it was built into, in essence, my contract and job description that I am the one who makes decisions. I have the final say.” Another says: “I base my authority on my knowledge and on my acceptance by the community. I have been authorized by the community to act in this way. If I ever feel not authorized by the community, I will no longer be the mara d’atra. ‘Either you accept my authority in this matter, or we have no relationship.’ And this relationship is constantly negotiated.” See Jonathan Paul Slater, *The Source, Nature and Extent of*

*Rabbinic Authority: The Perceptions of Conservative Rabbis in Northern California* (Berkeley: Pacific School of Religion, doctoral dissertation, May 1992), p. 64.

<sup>81</sup> See Rashi, Genesis 1:26.

<sup>82</sup> Literally, “a word of Torah,” it ordinarily refers to a teaching, usually in relation to a sacred text.

<sup>83</sup> Deuteronomy 29:9-12

<sup>84</sup> Professor Gerald Blidstein states: “This change in historical and sociological reality carries a number of implications. Obviously, it is now possible to act in ways which were inconceivable before; and this possibility creates responsibility. But the matter cuts more deeply. Since the Jew is able—as individual and perhaps as community—to participate in the processes which govern democratic societies as a whole, his [or her] silence and inaction reflect an acquiescence in the evils and abuses to which other human beings are subject.” See Gerald Blidstein, “Tikun Olam,” *Tradition*, 29(2):5-43 (1995), p. 35.

<sup>85</sup> From R’ Abraham J. Heschel (1907-1972), *The Prophets*, Vol. I (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 16.

<sup>86</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:1

<sup>87</sup> See Berachoth 34b, Shabbath 63a, Pesachim 68a, and Sanhedrin 99a.

<sup>88</sup> Exodus 6:6

<sup>89</sup> If one cannot even breathe a long breath, then how can he or she be expected to “carry” the burden of the people. Rashi describes their de-inspiration, their enervation as a people. In regard to the verse, “And Moses spoke so to the people of Israel; but they listened not to Moses because of their anguished spirit. . .” (Exodus 6:9), he says: “They did not accept consolation. Whoever is troubled, his wind and his breathing are short, and he cannot breathe a long breath.”

<sup>90</sup> On Exodus 2:11, Rashi comments: “And at night he awoke him (the Hebrew) and took him forth from his house, while he (the Egyptian) returned and he entered the house and lay with his [the Hebrew’s] wife, she thinking that he was her husband. And the husband returned to his house and understood the matter. Now when that Egyptian saw that he realized the affair, he smote and punished him all day.”

<sup>91</sup> On Exodus 10:22, “And there was a thick darkness three days,” Rashi comments: “And why did He bring darkness upon them? Because there were in Israel in that generation wicked people, and they did not want to go out (of Egypt), and they died in the three days of darkness. . . .” They were so affected by the slavery that they did not want to leave it, they had come to identify with their oppressors so much. Slavery reduces people to utter dependency. But there are also references to affliction that contradict popular conceptions. For example, one such reference is to worship of the Golden Calf, about which the footnote in the Soncino Midrash Rabbah remarks, “there is no greater affliction than spiritual degeneration.” In this vein, the Midrash explains that Judah went into exile

“because of affliction”—to wit: (1) “because they seized the pledge of the poor within their houses,” (2) “because they robbed the poor of what was due to them,” and (3) “because they worshipped idols.” We have in Tanakh and Talmud a number of references to the “affliction” of the people. In some cases the references are to what we would commonly think of under the heading of affliction, e.g., blindness (Genesis Rabbah 17:3), inability to conceive a child (Genesis Rabbah 45:2), leprosy (Numbers Rabbah 7:4), and imprisonment (Deuteronomy Rabbah 4:7).

<sup>92</sup> “Our Rabbis taught: Concerning a man who loves his wife as himself, who honours her more than himself, who guides his sons and daughters in the right path [בדרך ישרה] and arranges for them to be married near the period of their puberty, Scripture says, And thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace. Concerning him who loves his neighbours, who befriends his relatives, marries his sister's daughter, and lends a sela' to a poor man in the hour of his need, Scripture says, Then shalt thou call, and the Lord will answer; thou shalt cry and He will say: 'Here I am'.” (Yevamoth 62b-63a) “Rabbi says: Which is a right way [בדרך ישרה] that a man should choose? Let him love reproof [תיכחורת], since as long as there is reproof in the world ease of mind comes to the world, good and blessing come to the world, and evil departs from the world, as it says, But to them that are reproved shall come delight; and a good blessing shall come upon them. Some say: Let him have scrupulous honesty [i.e., “abundant faithfulness”—Rashi], as it says, Mine eyes are upon the faithful of the land that they may dwell with me, etc. R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: Whoever reproves his neighbour for a purely religious motive is deemed worthy to be in the portion of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says, He that rebuketh a man is after Me. Not only so, but a thread of favour shall twine about him, as it says, He shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue.” (Tamid 28a) We have learned from R' Shaya Karlinsky that, according to Rebbe, a derekh y'shara requires “a starting point, an end point or goal, and a way to get from the beginning to the end.” Such a path is one in which “every step is a continuation of the preceding step, related to both the preceding step as well as the coming step.” See *Maharal*, Ch. 2 Mishna 1, Pt. 1 (msbillk@pluto.mscc.huji.as.il, December 31, 1995).

<sup>93</sup> “. . . Who shall abide in your tent? Who shall dwell in your holy mountain? He who walks uprightly, and *does what is right* [ויפעל צדק], and speaks the truth in his heart. He who does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor.” (Emphasis ours.) See Psalms 15:1-3. R' Yosef Yozel Hurwitz (1848-1919) provides a mussar lesson on the idea of a community or congregation doing justice and righteousness, particularly “when the survival of Torah and the fear of G-d are at stake” (pp. 28-29)—not unlike our own times. See (Shraga Silverstein, tr.) *To Turn the Many to Righteousness*, from *The Stature of Man* (New York: Feldheim, n.d.). The immediate objective must be to train “community servants” or leaders. The method is to create a “united fellowship” (התאחדות הברים) whose members can “teach each other” (pp. 16-19). R' Hurwitz goes on to say, “. . . There is a specified measure of divine assistance which is granted those who wish to band together for the service of G-d. . . . (pp. 98-99) Experience teaches us that a community which seeks [such] perfection is the beneficiary of continuing miracles, and that nowhere is Divine providence more in evidence” (pp. 100-101).

<sup>94</sup> Professor Tadmor describes the period before Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem as one of "social polarization." While nobles, high officials, and priestly families were prosperous, "drought, famine, and taxation hit the peasants and small landowners, so that bondage and enslavement became a common phenomena." According to Tadmor: "Nehemiah resorted to a radical solution: the cancellation of debts and the restoration of fields to their impoverished owners. These acts were carried out by virtue of his authority as the Persian governor of Judah, which apparently permitted him to take extreme measures at critical moments. However, in this case Nehemiah shunned the easy method of simply imposing the reforms, preferring to use another means of persuasion. He convened the people in an extraordinary 'great assembly' (Nehemiah 5:7) in Jerusalem, where the richer segments of the population were apparently in the minority. By verbal persuasion and by *relying on the will of the people* and his own authority, he was able to proclaim the . . . reforms." (Emphasis ours.) See Tadmor (in Ben-Sasson, ed.), *A History of the Jewish People*, p. 176.

<sup>95</sup> Nehemiah 2:17-18

<sup>96</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 5:7

<sup>97</sup> \_\_\_\_\_.

<sup>98</sup> I.e., a large assembly or congregation.

<sup>99</sup> Nehemiah 5:9

<sup>100</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 5:12

<sup>101</sup> See David A. Karp, *Speaking of Sadness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). He states: "America in is the grip of a depression epidemic. . ." (p. 167). In excerpts from his book included in a review by The Utne Lens (<http://www.utne.com/lens/bms/13bmsdepression.html>, January 16, 1996), Karp notes: "Happy people feel connected to others at work and through their intimate relationships. When those connections are threatened, diminished, or broken, people suffer. . . . Those in double trouble have neither meaningful work nor sustaining intimate ties. The withering of community life in both these domains fosters a rootlessness and social disintegration that unquestionably contributes to the growth of emotional disorders." In the book he concludes: "Along with a growing number of social scientists, I am fully persuaded that we need to rediscover community as the best medicine for our ills, including the sadness of depression" (p. 187).

<sup>102</sup> An elevated place in the synagogue on which the reading desk is placed and at which the Torah is read.

<sup>103</sup> Akiva ben Joseph (c. 50-135 CE), a shepherd until his middle years, became one of the great tannaim (teachers), with a pivotal influence on the development of the halakhah, and was tortured to death by the Romans.

<sup>104</sup> Known as "our holy teacher," Judah haNasi (c. 2nd-3rd cent. C.E.) was the political and religious head of the Jewish community in Judah and redactor of the Mishnah. He promoted Torah learning and observance of mitzvot among all classes.

<sup>105</sup> See Song of Songs 2:9: “. . . Behold, he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice [i.e., kharakim]” [הַרְרָכִים]. See also footnotes 144 and 145.

<sup>106</sup> I.e., service to God, or prayer.

<sup>107</sup> Regarding the verses: “Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him. And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the Tent of Meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle” (Numbers 3:6-7)—Rashi comments: “Every appointment (office) to which a person is appointed, and it is incumbent upon him [or her] to do it, is called מַשְׁמֶרֶת (‘a charge’) throughout the Bible. . . .”

<sup>108</sup> See (Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds.) *Sefer HaAggadah* (Chicago: Davka Corporation, 1995; Schocken Books and Zmora Bitan Publishers, 1992), p. 727.

<sup>109</sup> See Rashi, Exodus 18:21.

<sup>110</sup> This example is based on our experience as congregational organizers. We believe it is not atypical. For example, see Beth Panitz, “Can We Talk? Parent-Teen Dialogues Help Families Discuss Difficult Issues,” *Jewish Monthly Online* (B’nai B’rith International, 1996): “In the separate groups [of parent-teen dialogues], the facilitators give participants hypothetical scenarios involving anti-Semitic events and ask them how they would react. In one situation a group of kids in the high school cafeteria is telling Jewish-American Princess jokes, or JAP jokes. ‘What’s the difference between a JAP and a pizza?’ one says. ‘The pizza doesn’t scream when it goes in the oven.’ One of the teenage girls [in the dialogue group] pipes up: ‘I’ve heard that exact joke’ from a boy who claims he’s a Nazi. ‘I felt nervous and scared and didn’t know how to handle the situation,’ she says. But, she adds, she mustered the courage to confront her classmate and let him know that what he said made her uncomfortable. These types of conversations make parents aware of problems in their children’s lives that they might not know otherwise, says Dubin [one of the group facilitators]. ‘Sometimes, the parents are totally untuned into what’s going on. (When they hear what their teenagers say) their eyes and ears will open up wide, and they’ll say, ‘What? I didn’t know these types of anti-Semitic events were going on.’ It’s a real surprise [for them] to hear that.’”

<sup>111</sup> This understanding, that many of the gangs are mainly business enterprises, is borne out in a recent *Newsweek* report on a Chicago street gang. The gang’s “chain of command,” starting with its imprisoned leader and reaching through several levels of “directors,” “governors,” “regents,” “area coordinators,” and “enforcers,” finally ends on the street level with “shorties”—“new members or youngsters who staff spots and execute drug deals.” See John McCormick, “The ‘Disciples’ of Drugs—and Death,” *Newsweek* (February 5, 1996).

<sup>112</sup> The current Anti Defamation League audit of anti-Semitic incidents reports: “Neo-Nazi Skinheads first appeared on America’s streets in the mid-’80s, and have since shown substantial growth. From a membership of only 1,000 to 1,500 in 12 states in early 1988, their ranks swelled to between 3,300 and 3,500 in 40 states by 1993. These numbers have



held essentially steady since then.” One example of skinhead gang activity reported in the audit was the case of four youths who assaulted the son of a rabbi in Cincinnati, Ohio. At his sentencing, one of the youths was asked by the judge why he did it. He replied that this attack and others were part of a gang initiation. When the judge asked how the victim was chosen, the defendant replied, “He was Jewish.” It is also noteworthy that there have been at least 40 skinhead-related homicides in the United States since 1987. The ADL report cautions that “the relative availability of guns in the United States has made American Skinheads among the most dangerous and violent in the world.” See *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents, 1995* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1996), pp. 12 and 15.

<sup>113</sup> “. . . Why did Hashem have to bring the 10 plagues on Egypt and Paroh [Pharaoh] when he could easily have forced Paroh to let Bnay Yisrael go much more readily and quickly? The Rav explained that Hashem was manifesting the concept of ‘Kophin Oso Ad Sheyomar Rotzeh Ani,’ we apply force to someone until the individual in question comes to the self-realization that what is demanded of him is correct and he expresses his desire to comply. Hashem wanted Paroh to recognize on his own the need to send the Jews out of Egypt and to comply with the demand of Hashem. . . . The Rav further explained that Hashem wanted Paroh not only to allow Bnay Yisrael to leave Egypt, but to come to respect them as well.” Dr. Israel Rivkin & Josh Rapps, “Shiur HaRav,” *Toras Aish* (Bo, 5756/1996).

<sup>114</sup> See Rashi, Exodus 3:12.

<sup>115</sup> Exodus 5:15-16

<sup>116</sup> See the Sforno, Exodus 6:6.

<sup>117</sup> In (Aryeh Newman, tr.) *Studies in Vayikra* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1980, 1983), p. 178.

<sup>118</sup> *Sefer haHinnuch*, Volume III: Leviticus, Part 2 (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1984), pp. 56-59.

<sup>119</sup> See Blidstein, p. 35.

<sup>120</sup> See “Editorial—Killing the children,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 14, 1995.

<sup>121</sup> Nehemiah 3:38

<sup>122</sup> Quorum of 10 male Jews (13 years or older) required by traditional Jewish law for communal worship, but which now includes women (of bat mitzvah age) in many Conservative synagogues.

<sup>123</sup> David W. Weiss writes of “A Mystique of Action” in *The Wings of the Dove* (Washington, D.C.: B’nai B’rith Books, 1987), pp. 20-23: “Judaism is permeated by a mystique of action. The archetypal concept for the Jew is *mitzvah*; the medium of redemption is action. . . . It is the *mitzvah* that transforms, not declarations of faith. . . . Man is obliged to reflect and reciprocate the attributes of the Divine in the thrust of doing; for the Jew

the ground of action is the *imitatio dei of mitzvot*. The mystery is that in their course, man is transformed.”

<sup>124</sup> See (Slotki, tr.) “Nehemiah” (8:13), *Daniel•Ezra•Nehemiah*, p. 231.

<sup>125</sup> “With the cooperation of Ezra he proceeded to establish the Jewish national life on the basis of Torah. By making it the possession of all, he brought to an end the condition in which the knowledge of it was restricted to a privileged class.” See (Slotki, tr.) “Introduction,” *Daniel•Ezra•Nehemiah*, p. 181.

<sup>126</sup> Nehemiah 2:17

<sup>127</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 8:1

<sup>128</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 8:9

<sup>129</sup> Isaiah 58:12

<sup>130</sup> Hanina bar Hama was a third century Palestinian scholar.

<sup>131</sup> “R. Hanina further said: Everything is in the hand of heaven except the fear of heaven, as it says, And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear.” See Berachoth 33b.

<sup>132</sup> Glatstein (1896-1971) was an American Yiddish poet, novelist, and critic, who was born in Lublin and emigrated to the U.S. in 1914.

<sup>133</sup> From “Without Jews,” in (Milton Teichman and Sharon Leder, eds.) *Truth and Lamentation, Stories and Poems of the Holocaust* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), pp. 429-30.

<sup>134</sup> Bar Kappara was a third century Palestinian scholar, a disciple of Judah ha-Nasi, who was the author of a compilation of Jewish law.

<sup>135</sup> Deuteronomy Rabbah 4:4

<sup>136</sup> Kohelet 2:17

<sup>137</sup> “Under the sun” refers to human activities that are vain and empty, in contradistinction to activities that are “above the sun,” such as “Torah, repentance and meritorious deeds, which are of eternal value.” See R’ Yitzhak I. Broch, *Koheleth* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1982), p. 28.

<sup>138</sup> Kohelet 4:1

<sup>139</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 2:3

<sup>140</sup> On the verse “And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous inside the city, then I will spare the whole place for their sakes” (Genesis 18:26), Ibn Ezra comments that the words “inside the city” connote that the piety and awe of God of the righteous had to

be expressed openly, publicly, if the city was to be saved for their sake. Nehama Leibowitz comments: “In other words, the few can turn the scales and save the place, if the righteous individuals concerned are ‘within the city,’ playing a prominent part in the public life and exerting their influence in its many fields of activity. But if they merely exist, living in retirement and never venturing forth but pursuing their pious conduct unseen and unknown, they will, perhaps, save themselves, but will certainly not possess the spiritual merit capable of protecting the city. The same city which forces the righteous few into retirement so that their scrupulous moral standards should not interfere with the injustice dominating public life, that same city is not entitled to claim salvation by virtue of the handful of righteous men [and women] leading a secluded life within it.” See (Aryeh Newman, tr.) *Studies in Bereshit* (Genesis), (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, n.d., 4th ed.), pp. 185-86.

<sup>141</sup> I.e., useless, worthless, and empty. “Solomon . . . explains hevel [i.e., vanity] as **הַבֶּל הַבְּלִים**: that man’s price and attainments are completely devoid of substance.” See Broch, *Koheleth*, p. 14.

<sup>142</sup> He adds, “this is all of humankind” (**כִּי-זֶה כָּל-הָאָדָם**). One lesson of Solomon is that we are not alone in this struggle to keep God’s commandments. Regardless of our station in life, we all share some of the pain of the present moment.

<sup>143</sup> See Abraham J. Heschel, “Toward and Understanding of Halakhah,” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook, 1953*, Vol. LXIII, p. 403, quoted in David Golinkin, *Halakhah for Our Time* (New York, United Synagogue of America, 1991), p. 6.

<sup>144</sup> The potential for us to create **הַרְפָּיִם**—openings to the Divine Light—is pointed to in Scripture and traditional commentary. The interpretation of Malbim (R’ Meir Loeb ben Jehiel Michael, 1809-1879) regarding the character of this light was: “that the lover sent her [Israel] his message behind the wall and the door, through the windows and the lattices, means that the Most High Lover longed to pour out upon her His holy spirit, to enable her to understand Him fully.” See “The Midrashic Approach to the Song of Songs,” in (A. Cohen, ed.) *The Five Megilloth* (New York: Soncino Press, 1984), p. 32. Rashi also comments that one interpretation of why talit fringes (**צִיצִת**) are so called is because, as with “looking through the lattice [**הַרְפָּיִם**]” in the Song of Songs, the reference is to the verse, “that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of יה.” It is then, according to Rashi, the light of Torah that we may see through the kharakim. See Rashi, Numbers 15:38-39. Rabbi Levi Yitzkhak taught that “God gave . . . [each human being] the power to sense and to focus God’s radiant light.” See *God at the Center, Meditations on Jewish Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) by David R. Blumenthal; a translation and exposition of the theology and divre Torah of Rabbi Levi Yitzkhak ben Meir.

<sup>145</sup> See “The Midrashic Approach to the Song of Songs,” in (A. Cohen, ed.) *The Five Megilloth*, p. 32. According to Rashi’s commentary (Song of Songs, 2:9), the verse “My beloved . . . behold, he is standing behind our wall, observing through the windows, peering through the lattices,” refers to יה “peering through the windows of heaven at what was being done to me [Israel], as it is stated (Exodus 3.7), ‘I have indeed seen the afflic-

tion of My people, etc.” See (Avraham Schwartz and Yisroel Schwartz, trs.) *The Megilloth and Rashi’s Commentary with Linear Translation*, Song of Songs 2:9 (New York: Hebrew Linear Classics, 1983), pp. 76-77.

<sup>146</sup> *Sefer haHinnuch*, Volume II: Leviticus, Part 1 (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1984), pp. 168-69.

<sup>147</sup> Proverbs (29:18)

<sup>148</sup> According to the Chofetz Chaim: “When a Jew declares wood or stone, dust or dirt in his possession to be holy to G-d, thereby by mere words attaching to them the name of the Master of the Universe, they become holy. Then, whoever treats them as he would non-consecrated objects has trespassed and needs atonement, even if his act was inadvertent.” See (Raphael Blumberg, tr.) *Let Them Serve Me*, The Chofetz Chaim on Chumash Vayikra (Jerusalem: Machon Bais Yechiel Jerusalem, 1995), p. 80.

<sup>149</sup> R’ Levi Yitzkhak ben Meir of Berditchev (1740-1809) was a Polish Hasidic leader who founded Hasidism in Central Poland.

<sup>150</sup> From Blumenthal, *God at the Center, Meditations on Jewish Spirituality*.

<sup>151</sup> See Howard M. Sachar, “The Growth of the American Jewish Community,” in *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 725.

<sup>152</sup> Jack Wertheimer, “Recent Trends in American Judaism,” in (David Singer, ed.) *American Jewish Yearbook 1989* (New York & Philadelphia: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 75.

<sup>153</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, pp. 86-92.

<sup>154</sup> See Steven M. Cohen, *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 57.

<sup>155</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, p. 117.

<sup>156</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, p. 118.

<sup>157</sup> Wertheimer, “Recent Trends in American Judaism,” pp. 86-92.

<sup>158</sup> See Cohen, *American Assimilation or Jewish Revival?* p. 48. The study also noted: “There is little we can say conclusively about the expected ritual behavior of as yet immature fourth generation Jews. There is neither evidence of stability, let alone resurgence in ritual practice, nor is there evidence of continuing erosion in the passage to the next generation” (p. 52).

<sup>159</sup> Gary A. Tobin, “Rethinking the Synagogue” (Waltham, Mass. and San Francisco, Calif.: Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and Institute for Community and Religion, January 1995), p. 6.

<sup>160</sup> See Wertheimer, pp. 83-85.

<sup>161</sup> Mainline Protestant denominations have lost 15 to 25 percent of their members in the last two to three decades. Catholic losses probably would be comparable except for the influx of new immigrants. For a review and analysis of the causes of decline within mainline Protestant denominations, see Benton Johnson et al., “Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline,” *First Things* (March 1993), pp. 13-18. The authors conclude that of all the theories and explanations of church decline, the weakening of the church itself as an institution fits most closely with the responses they received in more than 500 telephone and in-person interviews. Among their findings were the following: More than 95 percent of those who had dropped their congregational affiliation no longer believed in some of the central tenets of their religion; likewise 68 percent of those who maintain a congregational affiliation no longer believe in some of those tenets. The authors conclude as follows about the drop-outs: “They see no real point in getting involved” (p. 17). “Religion is not important for them, although [they are] believers for the most part. But they do not consider it necessary to attend church to nourish what faith they have” (p. 15).

<sup>162</sup> See “The Eternal Light: A Conversation with Doctor Abraham Joshua Heschel,” publication T205 (National Broadcasting Company, 1973), p. 17.

<sup>163</sup> Leonard Fein, *Where Are We? The Inner Life of America's Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 174-75.

<sup>164</sup> From “Beyond the Apologetics of Mission,” (in Silver, ed.) *Judaism and Ethics* (KTAV Publishing House, 1970), p. 334.

<sup>165</sup> See Marion Neudel, “Guest Columnist,” *Moment*, 13(4):24 (August 1994).

<sup>166</sup> For a more definitive treatment of this subject, see Steven Huberman, “Jews in Economic Distress,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, 62(3):197-208 (Spring 1986).

<sup>167</sup> James Besser, “Why Jews Should Care About Cuts in Welfare,” *Jewish Bulletin* (January 20, 1995), p. 25.

<sup>168</sup> See Natalie Weinstein, *Jewish Bulletin* (March 17, 1995).

<sup>169</sup> For example, “divorce patterns” among American Jews “increasingly appear to resemble those of non-Jewish Americans in certain respects. . . . [and] the rate of increase over the last two decades is similar to the rate of increase for the entire society.” See Chaim I. Waxman, “The Emancipation, the Enlightenment and the Demography of American Jewry,” *Judaism*, 38(4):488-501 (Fall 1989) p. 491; Judith S. Wallerstein, “Children of Divorce, Challenge for the 1990s,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, 70(2/3):100-108 (Winter/Spring 1994); and Steven Bayme, “Changing Perceptions of Divorce,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, 70(2/3):120-126 (Winter/Spring 1994). In regard to family violence, specifically spousal, elderly, and child abuse, see also: Abraham J. Twerski, “The Problem Is Ours,” *Jewish Action*, 55(3):25 (Spring 5755/1995); “Forum: Family Violence IS a Jewish Issue,” *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, 68(2):94-139 (Winter 1991-92)—including: Lynn Jacobs and Sherry Berliner Dimarsky, “Jewish Domestic

Abuse: Realities and Responses,” (94-113); Sandra Jaffa, “A Model Child Abuse Prevention Program,” (114-122); and Lillian Stern, “Sensitizing the Community to the Problem of Elderly Abuse: A Community Education and Public Awareness Approach,” (133-139).

<sup>170</sup> We refer to *assimilation* as the final step in out-migration, that is, when an individual no longer self-identifies as Jewish.

<sup>171</sup> Barry A. Kosmin, “The Demographic Imperatives of Outreach,” in (Egon Mayer, ed.) *Jewish Inter-marriage, Conversion and Outreach* (New York: Center for Jewish Studies, Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, 1990), pp. 10-11.

<sup>172</sup> From a 1984 unpublished article, “The Jew in the 21st Century,” by Donald Feldstein, cited by Joan Ephross in “Professional Practice With Inter-married Couples,” in (Egon Mayer, ed.) *The Imperatives of Jewish Outreach* (New York: Jewish Outreach Institute & Center for Jewish Studies, Graduate School of the City University of New York, 1991), p. 76. Overall, there is a wide divergence of opinion among demographers, from a projection of less than one million American Jews within a century to a projection of no change by the end of the next century.

<sup>173</sup> See Egon Mayer and Amy Avgar, *Conversion Among the Inter-married, Choosing to Become Jewish* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1987), p. 1.

<sup>174</sup> See Mayer, “Inter-marriage, Outreach and a New Agenda for Jewish Survival: A Perspective on the American Jewish Community,” in (Mayer, ed.) *Jewish Inter-marriage, Conversion and Outreach*, p. 6.

<sup>175</sup> See \_\_\_\_\_, “The Case for a New Jewish Inter-marriage Policy,” *Long Island Jewish Week* (September 4-10, 1992).

<sup>176</sup> See Sandra Heller, “Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me,” in (Mayer, ed.) *Jewish Inter-marriage, Conversion and Outreach*, p. 52.

<sup>177</sup> See David W. Belin, “Putting Human Values First: Universalism and Jewish Affirmation in Outreach to the Inter-married,” in (Mayer, ed.) *Jewish Inter-marriage, Conversion and Outreach*, p. 12.

<sup>178</sup> Mayer, “American Jewish Marriage in the 1990s and Beyond,” in (Mayer, ed.) *The Imperatives of Jewish Outreach*, p. 41.

<sup>179</sup> Eleanore Judd, “Using Demographic Research for Program Development,” in (Mayer) *The Imperatives of Jewish Outreach*, p. 104.

<sup>180</sup> Joan Ephross, “Professional Practice With Inter-married Couples,” in (Mayer, ed.) *The Imperatives of Jewish Outreach*, p. 76.

<sup>181</sup> Mayer and Avgar, *Conversion Among the Intermarried, Choosing to Become Jewish*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>182</sup> See Peter Y. Medding, et al., "Jewish Identity in Conversionary and Mixed Marriages," in (David Singer, ed.) *American Jewish Yearbook 1992* (New York & Philadelphia: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society, 1992), p. 55

<sup>183</sup> See Medding, et al., pp. 55, 56, and 66.

<sup>184</sup> See Wertheimer, "Recent Trends in American Judaism," p. 96.

<sup>185</sup> Reported by Neil C. Sandberg in *Jewish Life in Los Angeles* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986) and cited in Chaim I. Waxman, "The Emancipation, the Enlightenment and the Demography of American Jewry," *Judaism*, 38(4):488-501 (Fall 1989), p. 496.

<sup>186</sup> See Medding, et al., p. 54.

<sup>187</sup> R' Ephraim Z. Buchwald, "It's Now Or Never, The Future of American Jewry," *Jewish Action*, 55(1):33-34 (Fall 5755/1994), p. 33. See also the comments of Hershel Shanks, "No Galvanizing Issues," *Moment* (August 1995), p. 4, in which he states: "A frighteningly powerful case has been made that the American Jewish community is on its way to extinction or insignificance in a generation or two."

<sup>188</sup> Based on findings of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study conducted by the North American Jewish Data Bank and reported by its director, Barry A. Kosmin, in "Diversity in American Jewish Family Life," in (Egon Mayer and Luann Dragone, eds.) *The Imperatives of Jewish Outreach*, p. 29.

<sup>189</sup> This commonly held viewpoint, nonetheless, may be misleading. For example, the Anti-Defamation League's annual audit for 1994 shows that anti-Semitic acts rose more than 10 percent in the U.S., surpassing 2,000 for the first time, a record high for the audit's 16-year history. The report also describes an increase in violent, destructive, and deadly incidents, with shootings, arson, and firebombings "far more prevalent than in recent years." See *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents, 1994* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1995), p. 1. In 1995 there was an 11 percent decline in the total number of incidents reported. The decline is thought to be the result of "enhanced security awareness by Jewish institutions, steadily improving law enforcement action, and passage of hate crimes legislation." On the other hand, for the fifth year in a row, incidents of personal harassment outnumbered incidents of vandalism. The report notes: "While it is encouraging that the number of harassments is down from previous years, a troubling trend has been maintained in the 1995 totals. As in past years, incidents of harassment are significantly more common than incidents of vandalism. While any expression of anti-Semitic behavior is troubling, the high number of these more personalized attacks is a cause for particular concern." See *Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents, 1995* (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1996), pp. 1-2.

<sup>190</sup> For example, see Gary Tobin, *Bay Area Jewish Community Study*, Special Report: Philanthropy and Volunteerism (Waltham, Mass.: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, December 1988), p. 18.

<sup>191</sup> See Rob Boston, “Jewish Students Teach Their Schools A Lesson,” *Jewish Monthly Online* (B’nai B’rith International 1995). We note parenthetically that the instances of anti-Semitic reaction to Jewish students’ claims for non-sectarian education are occurring within institutional settings, albeit they are mostly under local control and direction.

<sup>192</sup> From an interview reported by Sara Bershtel and Allen Graubard in *Saving Remnants, Feeling Jewish in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 57.

<sup>193</sup> Modern sensibilities tend to associate “affliction” and “oppression”—they share the same Hebrew root, עָנָה—with slavery and other drastic limitations on one’s freedom. The traditional Passover Haggadah also refers to affliction, however, as the “enforced separation of husband and wife.” See Philip Birnbaum, *The Birnbaum Haggadah* (New York: Hebrew Publishing, 1976), pp. 80-81. Rabbinic commentary on Scripture also suggests a more inclusive definition. In one case, affliction is defined as being wrongly suspected of willfully deceiving one’s spouse. See (R’ Raphael Pelcovitz, tr.) *Sforno, Commentary on the Torah*, Genesis 29:32 (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1993), p. 143. In another case, the prohibition against oppressing another is applied to afflicting an orphan with discipline or instruction greater than is required for the child’s own good. See the Sforno, Exodus 22:21. Oppression includes verbal threats against us by those more powerful than ourselves, such as someone saying, “you’ll get yours in the end.” See Rashi, Exodus 22:22. And traditional conceptions of oppression include wasting the time, energy, and money of one’s neighbor. See Proverbs 3:28 and Bava Metzia 111a.

<sup>194</sup> From Michael Taller, “Yom Kippur Sermon, 1994: Jewish Men” (unpublished, 1994) and “Jews, Anti-Semitism and Alliance-Building” (unpublished, 1993).

<sup>195</sup> This bargain in the modern world undoubtedly reflects the bargain Napoleon made with the Jews of France. They were to become “Frenchmen of the Mosaic persuasion,” full-fledged French citizens, but without “their own internal jurisdiction under the rabbinic courts, their historic claim to be a distinct people, and their hope of return to their own land.” See Howard M. Sachar, “Emancipation in the West,” in *The Course of Modern Jewish History*, Ch. 3 (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 38-61. According to William Nicholls, “Jews had to make a severe sacrifice of identity, and take on a concept of religion and its place in society that was novel for them, and inherently Christian, not Jewish.” See *Christian Antisemitism, A History of Hate* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1993), p. xxi.

<sup>196</sup> For example, see Mayer, “Intermarriage, Outreach and a New Agenda for Jewish Survival: A Perspective on the American Jewish Community,” in (Mayer, ed.) *Jewish Intermarriage, Conversion and Outreach* (New York: Center for Jewish Studies, Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York, 1990), p. 5.



<sup>197</sup> Arthur Hertzberg writes in “United States Jewry—A Look Forward,” in (Wigoder, ed.) *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book 1990/91*, pp 26-29: “Anti-Semitism continues to exist, even in America, at a time when Jews are freer and more equal than they have ever been anywhere in the Diaspora. . . . My own research on college students has shown that those of the young whose Jewishness is primarily a fear of anti-Semitism are significantly more likely to want to intermarry—to live permanently among the anti-Semites! What explains this paradox is that such young people really want to ‘pass’ into a society in which there is neither Jew nor Gentile” (p. 27). He goes on to say that “ethnicity is not forever; anti-Semitism can, at least in logic, chase Jews out of their Judaism rather than make them rally together, and our deepest held religious convictions are ill defined and splintered” (p. 28).

<sup>198</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *Jews and the New American Scene* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 47-48.

<sup>199</sup> Lipset and Raab, p. 74.

<sup>200</sup> Wertheimer, p. 161. See also Jack Wertheimer, Charles S. Liebman, and Steven M. Cohen, “How to Save American Jews,” *Commentary*, 101(1):47-51 (January 1996).

<sup>201</sup> Alvin Reines, “Ontology, Demography, and the Silent Holocaust,” *Judaism*, 38(4):478-87 (Fall 1989), 483-84.

<sup>202</sup> Lipset and Raab, pp. 71 and 200.

<sup>203</sup> Tanakh refers to the Hebrew Bible, comprised of Torah (Pentateuch), Neviim (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Hagiographa).

<sup>204</sup> Rashi said in the name of R’ Akiba, “This is a fundamental principle in the Torah (Sifra).”

<sup>205</sup> According to *Sifre*, Piska 223, you must also restore him (to his home) if he himself is lost.

<sup>206</sup> According to Ibn Ezra, the “stranger” was included so “that he might perhaps embrace the faith of Israel.” See *The Soncino Chumash* (New York: Soncino Press, 1983), pp. 1150-51.

<sup>207</sup> All text, and footnotes in parentheses, are from *The Soncino Talmud* (Brooklyn, New York: Soncino Press & Judaica Press, 1990).

<sup>208</sup> Quoted from *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 13, p. 1568.

<sup>209</sup> See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 13, p. 1352.

<sup>210</sup> In (Rabbi Za-ev Abramson & Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, trs.), *Maimonides Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot De’ot and Hilchot Talmud Torah, Vol. 2 (New York: Moznaim Publishing, 1990), pp. 120-23.

- <sup>211</sup> In (Hyman E. Goldin, tr.), *Kitzur Schulchan Aruch*, Vol. 1 (New York: Hebrew Publishing, 1927), p. 95.
- <sup>212</sup> In (Abramson & Touger, trs.), Vol. 2, pp. 126-29.
- <sup>213</sup> In (Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, tr.) *Maimonides Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Teshuvah, Vol. 4 (New York: Moznaim Publishing, 1990), pp. 90-91, 172-73.
- <sup>214</sup> Responsa refer to written replies by rabbinic authorities to questions of Jewish law.
- <sup>215</sup> Quoted in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 13, p. 1351.
- <sup>216</sup> See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 13, p.1356.
- <sup>217</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, Vol. 13, p.1356.
- <sup>218</sup> Quoted by Avraham Yaakov Finkel in *The Responsa Anthology* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1990), pp. 136-37.
- <sup>219</sup> The Mussar movement arose in the nineteenth century, continuing into the twentieth, “for the education of the individual toward strict ethical behavior in the spirit of *halakhah*.” It was grounded in the Jewish culture of Lithuanian *mitnaggedim*, who were originally opponents of the Hasidic movement. It was inspired by R’ Josef Sundel ben Benjamin Benish Salanter, as a community movement, in response to the destructive effects of mid-nineteenth century enlightenment ideology that were undermining fear of God and Torah learning. The Mussar movement quickly turned to “forming the personality” of young yeshivot students. The movement is considered a “civic movement,” one that gradually developed an entire educational apparatus geared toward “integration and subjection of the youthful emotions to a deeply-instilled emotional defense system of a rigorous Jewish life according to *halakhah*.” See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 12 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, n.d.), pp. 534-37.
- <sup>220</sup> In (Seymour J. Cohen, tr.) *Sefer Hayashar* (New York: KTAV Publishing, 1973), p. 232.
- <sup>221</sup> See Jonah ben Avraham of Gerona, *Shaarai Teshuvah* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1967), p. 66-67.
- <sup>222</sup> See Moshe Chayim Luzzatto, *Mesillat Yesharim* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1966), pp. 220-21.
- <sup>223</sup> See *Shaarai Teshuvah*, pp. 162-163.
- <sup>224</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, pp. 176-79.
- <sup>225</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, pp. 178-79, 198-99.
- <sup>226</sup> See Joseph Hurwitz of Navaradok, *Mozake Harabim, To Turn the Many to Righteousness*, from *The Stature of Man* (Jerusalem & New York: Feldheim, n.d.), pp. 9, 17, and 35.

- <sup>227</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, pp. 29 and 49.
- <sup>228</sup> See *Shaarai Teshuvah*, pp. 188-91.
- <sup>229</sup> See *Mesillat Yesharim*, pp. 260-61.
- <sup>230</sup> See *Shaarai Teshuvah*, pp. 190-93.
- <sup>231</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, pp. 240-41.
- <sup>232</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, pp. 294-95.
- <sup>233</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, pp. 304-05.
- <sup>234</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, pp. 306-07.
- <sup>235</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, pp. 306-07.
- <sup>236</sup> See *Mesillat Yesharim*, pp. 308-9.
- <sup>237</sup> David Novak, *Jewish Social Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 111.
- <sup>238</sup> In (Yitzchak Coopersmith, comp.) *The Eye of a Needle* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1993), appendix.
- <sup>239</sup> In (Aryeh Newman, tr.) *Studies in Vayikra* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1980, 1983), p. 178. According to the *Sefer haHinnuch*, Volume III: Leviticus, Part 2 (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1984), pp. 56-59: “The root reason for the precept is . . . it serves to improve society and order its communal life. . . .”
- <sup>240</sup> Excerpted from *The Insecurity of Freedom* (New York: Schocken Books, 1959).
- <sup>241</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, *God’s Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), p. 84

## About the Authors

Moshe ben Asher and Khulda bat Sarah formerly served as the "rabbi-and-wife team" for Congregation Beth Israel of Chico, California, and Kehillat Kharakim of Los Angeles.

Moshe has an MSW in community organizing from UCLA and a Ph.D. in community organizing and social development from UC Berkeley. He began his community organizing in the late 1960s, when he co-organized the Southern California Council of Free Clinics during his tenure as Drug Abuse Coordinator for Los Angeles County. Over the next decade and a half he was a neighborhood organizer for a number of projects, including a national organization (ACORN) and a statewide organization (Citizens Action League of California). He was also Statewide Training Director and Director of Neighborhood Organizing for Citizens Action League. Following private smikha (ordination) from Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and a stint as a volunteer prison chaplain in upstate New York and the San Francisco Bay Area, he became a staff organizer for the Orange County Congregation Community Organizations, part of the nationwide PICO network of interfaith congregational organizing projects. He subsequently became Assistant Director of Organize Training Center in San Francisco. He has taught courses on community planning, organizing and development and related subjects at San Bernardino Valley College, California State College at San Bernardino, California State University at Hayward, the School of Social Work and Community Planning of the University of Maryland, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the School of Social Work at the State University of New York in Albany, and California State University at Long Beach, Los Angeles, and Dominguez Hills. Moshe was founding Co-Editor of *The Organizer*, a journal for organizers, published by the ACORN Institute for Social Justice, and he has authored and co-authored numerous published articles on community and congregational organizing, many of which are available at <http://www.getCited.com> (by entering as a Visitor, selecting the People option, searching "ben Asher, Moshe," and selecting the Publications tab).

Khulda bat Sarah is certified as a Magidah and Rabbinic Pastor by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. She is a magna cum laude graduate of the California State University at Fresno. After two decades as a mother and homemaker, she was trained in community organizing by Organize Training Center of San Francisco and the Pacific Institute for Community Organization in Oakland, California. She was a staff organizer and Associate Staff Director for the PICO-affiliated North County Community Project in Santa Maria, California, a congregational community organizing project.