

PEARL: Providing Education and Resources for Leadership

**Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof: Actively Pursuing Social Justice:
Congregational Based Community Organizing
and Congregational Advocacy**

April 15, 2008 • 12:00 – 1:00 pm EDT



Jewish Reconstructionist Federation

Transformative Judaism for the 21st Century

101 Greenwood Avenue

Beit Devora, Suite 430

Jenkintown, PA 19046

215.885.5601 / fax: 215.885.5603

<http://www.jrf.org/>

CONTENTS

- 3 Introduction: “Congregation-Based Community Organizing”**
the Jewish Funds for Justice and the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
- 5 Article: “The Power that Makes for Righteousness”— Congregation-Based Community Organizing: *A Reconstructionist Approach to Living a Godly Life***
Rabbi Shawn Israel Zevit with Brian Fink
- 7 Article: “A Step by Step Guide to Community Organizing”**
Brian Fink, JRF Tikkun Olam intern
- 10 Resources for CBCO**
- 12 Profiles from JRF Congregations**
- 16 “Labor in the Pulpits” Service**
Congregation Shir Hadash
- 18 Yom Kippur Haftarah D’var - Isaiah**
Kathy Kaufman, Chapel Hill Kehillah
- 20 “Spirituality is Over-rated” – Rosh Hashanah Sermon**
Rabbi Jen Feldman, Chapel Hill Kehillah
- 26 CBCO Newsletter Article and Flyer for Upcoming Program**
Chapel Hill Kehillah

Introduction: "Congregation-Based Community Organizing"



Today, increasing numbers of synagogues are engaging in interfaith campaigns on vital issues of local concern, from expanding health coverage for low income workers to building affordable housing. Since 2006, The Jewish Reconstructionist Federation has been partnering with the Jewish Funds for Justice (JFSJ -

<http://www.jewishjustice.org/>) helping to develop a network and resources for Reconstructionist communities in Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO) work. As well, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (<http://www.rrc.edu/>) began offering training in the model of CBCO activism in the winter of 2007.

Information on community organizing can be found in

- the Summer 2007 edition of ***Reconstructionism Today*** (<http://jrf.org/files/RT%20Summer%202007%20v-web.pdf>),
- the January 2007 issue of ***Shma*** (http://www.shma.com/jan_07/archive.phtml),
- from the Jewish Funds for Justice

In 2002, JFSJ launched a national initiative to encourage and support synagogues as they deepen their social justice efforts through CBCO. Their goal was to address the lack of sustained engagement in activities beyond direct service programs and to challenge congregations to address systemic issues relating to domestic poverty and social injustice. The CBCO model of activism unites a diverse range of people, primarily through religious congregations, in the shared goal of building a civic power base capable of making change to promote the public good.

What is congregation-based community organizing?

Three core components of the synagogue organizing model are essential to the process:

- congregants engage in one-to-one conversations within their synagogue, and often with other congregations, about their social justice passions.
- leaders engage in extensive clergy and lay leadership training and development.
- Synagogue leaders work side-by-side with dozens of faith institutions and progressive organizations in their community, across lines of race, class, and faith.

What is the impact?

Each of these components strengthens lay leaders, is a vehicle for congregational development, and builds strong bridges between Jews and other community leaders and institutions. Eventually, as this model grows deeper roots in synagogues across the United States, we hope it will create a strong synagogue-based voice for creating healthier communities. Examples of this work could include calling for universal health care, a higher minimum wage, or more affordable housing.

In preparation for a workshop delivered at the November, '06 JRF Convention in Philadelphia, we collected Jewish texts (<http://www.jrf.org/cbco-texts>) relevant to these efforts.

For more information please contact Rabbi Shawn Zevit at JRF, <mailto:Szevit@jrf.org>, 215-885-5601, ex.24.

Jewish Funds for Justice Video on CBCO

7 min 33 sec video clip

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dr3K8vxKw1c>

Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you. - **Deuteronomy 16:20**

"Rabbi Hama... said: What does the text mean, 'You shall walk in God's paths?' Surely this does not imply that a person may actually walk behind the Divine presence. Rather the meaning is to walk after the attributes of the Holy One. As God clothes the naked... so do you... clothe the naked; as the Holy One visits the sick... so do you visit the sick; as the Holy One comforts mourners, ... so do you comfort mourners; as the Holy One, buries the dead, so do you bury the dead." - **Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 14a**

Jewish civilization is a means to greater ends – the fulfillment of the individual, the responsibility of individuals to treat others as reflections of the divine image, and the responsibility of each community to seek global justice and peace among all communities...

Many Reconstructionists have their most profound experiences of God through tikkun olam: working together, fighting injustice, acting to help others. It is not out of charity that they ally themselves with those who are oppressed or less fortunate, but rather out of the teaching that all human beings are worthy of respect and opportunity."

- Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach, Rebecca Alpert and Jacob Staub, p24, 59-60

“The Power that Makes for Righteousness”— Congregation-Based Community Organizing: A Reconstructionist Approach to Living a Godly Life

Rabbi Shawn Israel Zevit with Brian Fink

“The function of the belief in God is to make us aware of the moral and spiritual context of our conduct, so that we come to move within the orbit of the ‘Power that makes for righteousness.’ Judaism uses the belief in God to make Jews aware of the natural conditions that have to be established and the human relations that have to be maintained for the Jewish people, if it is to achieve their potential collectively and individually.”

—Mordecai M. Kaplan, “The Way I Have Come”
(in *Mordecai M. Kaplan: An Evaluation*, Ira Eisenstein and Eugene Kohn, eds.)

THE VISION FOR A VIBRANT Jewish peoplehood that embodies the integration of social justice and religion has always been present in the Reconstructionist movement — from the publication of Mordecai Kaplan’s *Judaism as Civilization* in 1934, through the founding of our congregational movement in 1955 and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) in 1968, right up to the present. In this vision, Jewish civilization is, as Rebecca Alpert and Jacob Staub have expressed it, “a means to greater ends” — a means to achieve individual fulfillment, to cultivate our responsibility to treat others as *b’tselem Elohim*, reflections of the divine image, and “to seek global justice and peace among all communities” (*Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*).

In 2006, the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation joined a new initiative in fulfillment of this vision. In formal partnership with the Jewish Funds for Justice (JFSJ), JRF received a grant to help develop a network and resources for Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO) in Reconstructionist communities. The CBCO model of activism, as described on the JFSJ website (www.jewishjustice.org), “unites a diverse range of people, primarily through religious congregations, in the shared goal of building a civic power base capable of making change to promote the public good.”

Three core elements are involved:

- Congregants “engage in one-to-one conversations within their synagogue, and often with other congregations, about their social justice passions.”
- Leaders “engage in extensive clergy and lay leadership training and development.”
- Synagogue leaders “work side-by-side with dozens of faith institutions and progressive organizations in their community, across lines of race, class, and faith.”

Reconstructionist Rabbis Mordechai Liebling, Toba Spitzer, and Elliot Tepperman had already paved the way to CBCO in their organizations and congregations and were catalysts for JRF's involvement. Beginning this winter, RRC will be offering training in this model of activism. In my capacity as JRF director of outreach, external affiliations, and *tikkun olam*, and with the support of CBCO intern Brian Fink and our movement's professional, rabbinic, and lay leadership, we are beginning to lay the foundations for a CBCO network within and beyond the Reconstructionist movement's 100-plus congregations and institutions.

CBCO enables synagogues to engage powerfully in public life by bringing them through an organizing process that confronts issues of self-interest in their own community and in the Jewish community as a whole. This process of defining the community's relationship to power, self-interest, and action can help strengthen and grow a synagogue. It very much embodies the Reconstructionist approach to Jewish life by melding *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world, with *tikkun hanefesh*, the healing of interpersonal relationships. The CBCO model provides an understanding of where the impetus for *tikkun olam* comes from — from the individual *neshamah* (soul) and its longing for repair — and of how to put into larger service both our altruistic and our self-serving motivations. CBCO also provides opportunities for networking both within and beyond the synagogue community. Through the various models of CBCO training, individuals and communities are transformed.

A Step-by-Step Guide to CBCO

Brian Fink, JRF Tikkun Olam intern

Your congregation is interested in community organizing — now what?

In CBCO, existing institutions, mostly religious congregations — which already have leaders, established interpersonal relationships, resources, a shared culture that facilitates group action, and community connections and commitments — are recruited to join a citywide or regional organization.

The local affiliate and national networks train leaders in creating winnable campaigns on local issues that affect the day-to-day lives of their members. In focusing on the “winnable,” CBCO blends idealistic values with pragmatic self-interest.

Although CBCO avoids direct participation in electoral politics, organizations position themselves to become power players by thoroughly researching issues; building alliances; developing strong relationships with leaders in the public and private sectors; and staging large, dramatic public meetings to demonstrate grassroots support to targeted decision-makers.

Step #1: Investigate what's happening locally

There are four international CBCO networks:

- 1) Direct Action Research and Training (DART),
- 2) The Gamaliel Foundation,
- 3) Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)
- 4) People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO).

On each of these networks' websites, there is a listing of local affiliates, organized geographically. You can investigate whether there already is one in your area.

“It’s very difficult for a synagogue to build power and do change-work on its own,” says Benjamin Ross of the Jewish Funds for Justice. “It’s important to be part of a larger interfaith organization.”

Step #2: Make contact

You can use the CBCO affiliate’s online directory to contact the community organizer associated with the local affiliate. The organizer will probably want to schedule an initial “one-on-one” conversation with you or with someone else from your synagogue.

During this conversation, which lasts from 30 minutes to an hour, the initial focus will be on each person learning something about the other. A more “nuts and bolts”

discussion about the CBCO affiliate and the potential process for becoming involved will likely occur only toward the end of the meeting or at a subsequent follow-up.

Organizers spend a good part of their time meeting with clergy and key leaders of prospective congregations in order to discover a congregation's perceived self-interest and determine how that might fit with the self-interest of the other member organizations and the affiliate. The organizer may invite you to have a similar conversation with members or clergy of other congregations that belong to the affiliate, and/or invite you to observe a local "action" occurring in the near future. Both of these would be excellent strategies for learning more about the organization and for making personal connections with others who are already involved.

"It's key to connect to leaders who are doing this work," says the JFSJ's Ross. "Discuss what it has meant to them and to their congregants."

If there is not a local CBCO affiliate in your area, the first step toward establishing one would be the creation of a sponsoring committee made up of interested clergy, lay leaders, and other members of the community. This would typically happen in coordination with an organizer from one of the four CBCO networks.

Step #3: Lay the groundwork

Formally joining a CBCO affiliate involves a substantial annual financial commitment, depending on the size of your institution. Since this model of organizing teaches that the power to make change comes from organized people and organized money, paying dues represents a congregation's seriousness of commitment. Affiliates are expected to raise at least two-thirds of their money from member dues and fundraising events, and only one-third from foundations and other large donors. Some affiliates offer a reduced-cost "initial" or "provisional" membership.

Especially due to the degree of financial and human resource commitment, the entire board of the congregation, not only the *tikkun olam* committee, should be involved with the ongoing process at this stage, if not earlier.

Many congregations engage in an internal "one-on-one" or house-meeting campaign within their congregation before formally joining an affiliate. Regardless of the ultimate decision whether or not to join a CBCO affiliate, one-on-ones and house meetings can be extremely valuable tools. One-on-ones connect disparate segments of the congregational community, reintegrate alienated and unengaged community members back into the life of the community, and help leaders learn how best to meet the varying needs of the community.

For these reasons, the membership and programming committees of the congregation should also be involved by this stage. "If this work is something that you're interested

in,” advises Ross, “you should think beyond the *tikkun olam* committee and the typical people who tend to do social justice work. The CBCO approach is about tapping into and expanding a relational culture. Through the community organizing process, you need to bring in new people and develop new leaders, which often means creating structures that are parallel to previous and other ongoing social justice work within your communities. You need to build a strong core team that understands the arc of organizing work and what’s ahead.”

Step #4: Move into action

Once you've joined an affiliate, organizers will train your congregation’s leaders, not just in political skills, but also in how to build relationships of mutual understanding and trust. Through this process, participants find ways to identify and act on common problems effectively. The CBCO networks have developed a very deliberate and skilled process for doing so, which occurs locally or at regional trainings. “You must work with skilled trainers,” Ross emphasizes. “This is one of the benefits of being connected with a local organizing group and their national affiliate. The goal of CBCO organizations is to transform congregations and communities, investing them with leadership development and training. If you have a good trainer, it’s a blessing to work with them.”

Through this process, often in conjunction with community house meetings, issues emerge that can be acted upon publicly. A successful example of this is congregation Dorshei Tzedek’s involvement with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization.

“Taking things slow is often fruitful,” Ross suggests. “Don’t rush ahead. Take a second to check your long-term goals. If community organizing is only an exercise in building community, it can be very frustrating,” Ross continues. “Make sure that there’s an understanding that there’s an action component at the end of the work. The *takhlis*, the justice/change work, needs to be there.”

Step #5: How JRF can help

In partnership with your congregation, JRF can provide Web resources and Jewish texts for study and reflection, and facilitate networking with Jewish organizations already involved with CBCO.

We at JRF look forward to helping our member communities deepen their social justice work in the years ahead, in partnership with the Jewish Funds for Justice and CBCO networks around North America. This coming year, supporting our member communities to explore the CBCO model, along with our work in reducing hunger and poverty, developing sustainable synagogues, partnering with our external affiliates, and generating resources for our growing *tikkun olam* resource library, will all be part of JRF’s commitment to social justice and personal transformation in the world.

Resources for CBCO

JRF website on Congregation-Based Community Organizing

<http://www.jrf.org/cbco>

Jewish Funds for Justice Video on CBCO

7 min 33 sec video clip

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dr3K8vxKw1c>

To contact the **Jewish Funds for Justice**, go to:

<http://www.jewishjustice.org/jfsj.php?page=2.5>.

For **DART**, go to <http://www.thedartcenter.org/affiliates.html>.

For **Gamaliel**, go to <http://www.gamaliel.org/CRI/DIRECTORY/default.htm> then browse through the regional directories on the left-hand side of the page.

For **IAF**, go to <http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org/iaaffiliates/iaaffiliatesnat.htm> and then browse through the regional directories on the left.

For **PICO**, go to <http://www.piconetwork.org/>, and then use the pull-down menu on the right side.

Read Ari Lipman's article on Dorshei Tzedek's involvement with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization in *The Reconstructionist*, Fall 2003, available at <http://www.therra.org/Reconstructionist/Fall2003.pdf>.

Success Stories from Synagogues Engaged in Community Organizing

<http://jewishjustice.org/jfsj.php?page=2.5.2>

- Featuring Bnai Keshet, a Reconstructionist congregation of 260 membership units in Montclair, New Jersey

Articles from January, 2007, issue of Sh'ma:

Will Synagogues Organize for Justice?

by Rabbi Jonah Pesner, Founding Director of Just Congregations, an initiative of the Union for Reform Judaism

http://www.shma.com/jan_07/will_synagogues.htm

Hillel's Questions: A Call for Leadership

by Marshall Ganz, PhD, professor at Harvard University: Kennedy School of Government

http://www.shma.com/jan_07/hillel_questions.htm

Justice Manna: Leadership and Torah Entwined

by Benjamin Ross, Director of Organizing, Jewish Funds for Justice

http://www.shma.com/jan_07/justice_manna.htm

Developing Rabbinical Leadership: New Ways to Measure Success

by Jeannie Appleman, director of the "Rabbinical Leadership for Public Life" project ,
Jewish Funds for Justice

<http://www.jewishjustice.org/download/section42/Shma%20Rabbinical%20Leadership%202.07.pdf>

Tikkun Olam Issue Resources

<http://www.jrf.org/tikkun-olam-issues>

This collection of programmatic resources was gathered to aid congregations in their pursuit of tikkun olam, and is organized by issue, and type of resource. It includes articles, curriculum, Divrei Torah, holiday supplements, text studies, and youth programming. The initial issues are:

- Anti-poverty/Hunger
- Homelessness/Housing
- Public Education
- Healthcare
- Public Safety/Crime
- Immigration/Immigrant Rights
- Economic Development/Living Wage
- Environmental Issues
- Voter Registration/Mobilization

Profiles from JRF congregations

Rabbi Brant Rosen

Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation, Evanston, Illinois

“I’m thinking of the term ‘organic community,’ coined by Mordecai Kaplan, which defines Jewish identity and self through belonging and connections with other people. CBCO reflects a new way of harnessing this energy. It is very Reconstructionist.”

Rabbi Toba Spitzer, President, RRA

Dorshei Tzedek, Newton, Massachusetts

Dorshei Tzedek has been involved with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO) for approximately six years, and a formal member for three..

Members of Dorshei Tzedek began attending GBIO events before we officially joined and before we started our own series of house meetings and one-on-ones. One of our members, a professional organizer, pushed it. Through her leadership, other people eventually became excited and involved.

It’s very important to involve the board of your congregation in this process. You can’t just depend on the rabbi. If only the tikkun olam committee is involved, with the same five or six people running around and doing things, you won’t be successful.

Formally joining a CBCO organization is a sizable commitment. We contribute approximately 1 percent of our annual budget as dues. Formal affiliation usual requires a vote because of this financial commitment. In our case, at a critical point in the process, as a sizable number of people were involved, we joined through majority vote of the synagogue’s membership.

There are various ways for members to be involved. These range from one-time commitments – to attend a large action where a local politician is held accountable, or a house meeting in which congregants share a brief personal stories and meet other members of the community – to more involved commitments.

In Reconstructionist communities, we tend to talk to each other anyway, so this model may end up being less transformative than it would be in synagogues with a rabbi-driven model of leadership and decision-making. However, the process can be very transformative in other ways. By having members talk about things happening in their lives, in context of the greater congregation, the process can bring to the forefront issues of the middle class, in ways that otherwise don’t happen.

At Dorshei Tzedek, many of these conversations happen during communal Shabbat dinners. Members are given an opportunity to share a personal story with public implications. Even with the preconception that we are a largely middle and upper-class community, experiences were raised that both touch and surprise people.

Especially regarding our efforts to win affordable healthcare, we discovered that there are really no issues that Dorshei Tzedek is going to win by itself. Taking a bus to Washington D.C. is nice, but won't be enough to pass a bill. Yet we did pass a health care bill through GBIO. It's hard to imagine any other type of activism that would have the same type of concrete actual results.

At Dorshei Tzedek, this is our main Tikkun Olam activity right now. It isn't displacing other initiatives. Before our involvement with GBIO, there really wasn't much else happening.

Each new member has a 1-on-one-one with a member of the membership committee, and the tikkun olam leaders reach out to new members for actions and other GBIO-related activities. Ultimately, though, this type of relational approach to tikkun olam happens best in person and by phone, with email used only to announce events.

The point is to strengthen our communities in service of greater transformation. We're not honoring the internal coherence of this work if we don't talk about social justice's relationship within the community.

CBCO is about power – relational power. It helps us develop leaders; we then work together to take action.

From the house meetings that we completed almost a year ago, we began to develop a new elder-care initiative. Now, a year later, we've defined a need to do a Torah of Hesed (kindness) process – to figure out how we can better support/care about each other. This process is similar to our previous Torah of Money process, which has transformed our dues structure.

"One-on-ones are countercultural in our society. These interactions create a deep sense of connection. We become aware of each other on another level, leading to internal actions. We become able to create structures in our own community that can respond to people's stated needs. The level of contact with one another increases and transforms the community and people's level of connection to the community." Lisa Schneier DTz.

Rabbi Elliott Tepperman

Bnai Keshet, Montclair, New Jersey

I first became excited about this approach by attending the first K'hilot K'doshot conference two years ago in New Jersey. Shortly afterwards, I called everyone in the Reconstructionist movement that I could think of and told them, "This is our model!"

This fall, I attended a seven-day training sponsored by the Gamaliel Foundation, the national network to which our CBCO organization belongs. I found this training to be one of the most transformative and profound training experiences for my rabbinate (apart from rabbinical school which lasted six years).

Initially, there were some frustrations that we didn't immediately dive in to working on local community tikkun olam issues. We first need to understand what our problems and interests are, and then these eventually lead us to issues to address. The more relationships we have, the more redemptive the process will be. Developing and strengthening the relationships amongst members of our community is valuable regardless of whether we ever bring any issues into action through the CBCO process.

This is a spiritual process – you need to enter into it with an open mind. Initially, we had no idea of what would come from the involvement and participation of our own members. As we build momentum through the one-on-one and house meeting process, we find out what is in my individual self-interest and what is in the self-interest of my congregants. Through this process, we've been able to identify challenges and issues unique to our congregation. From there we can discover how to address these issues, finding the appropriate mechanism, whether within the context of CBCO or through other vehicles.

Through our one-on-ones, we discovered a need for Israel programming of which we had not been aware, and now have developed the infrastructure to address through member-sponsored programming. Integral to this approach of tikkun olam is the importance of doing things in community. At Bnai Keshet, we've found it to be extremely important to always be bringing people along.

The best way to understand congregation-based organizing is by doing it. The process itself changes the dynamic of the conversation, changes people's desire to buy-in, and has the potential to impact other aspects of the congregation.

Members of Bnai Keshet initially had an expectation of high levels of transparency and high levels of process. Since we found this to be of higher importance for us than it was for the other members of the CBCO organization, we became willing to advocate for it. However, we came to understand that while it was imperfect that our CBCO may not have been as democratic as we wanted, we are still willing to be engaged, since it does

so many other things right. We also believe that our efforts to democratize the organization will be beneficial to the organization as a whole.

At Bnai Keshet, our involvement with community organizing happened alongside our pre-existing tikkun olam committee framework, and didn't replace it. We came to understand that we ultimately needed to bring in more people than just the members of the tikkun olam committee in order to be successful. The current Bnai Keshet president is planning on attending the next Gamaliel-sponsored seven-day training.

Karen Greenberg-Perkus

The Society for the Advancement of Judaism (SAJ), New York, New York

"I did a number of one-on-ones with SAJ members and found them to be very rewarding. But before that, I was interviewed by Maddy Lee of our congregation who made me feel very comfortable by taking a keen interest in everything I had to say my Jewish background and my commitment to social action. I was then able to approach other people in the same manner, and I learned a lot about who they were, what really mattered to them, why they were members of SAJ, and what their aspirations were.

"A couple of lasting friendships developed out of this. I think the one-on-ones are a wonderful way to bind people together and make them feel like they're a community and important to one another, which merely labeling the membership "a community" cannot do. This is important nowadays and in a big city, where it is easy to feel disconnected. Also, a number of suggestions for making our synagogue more responsive to members' needs were forthcoming and very useful. I would recommend that all synagogues do it."

Michael Ramberg, RRC student

Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

"The CBCO focus of examining the contrast between 'the world as it could be' and 'the world as it is,' I find similar to the Reconstructionist contrast of living between two civilizations."

"Labor in the Pulpits" service

Congregation Shir Hadash

<http://www.cshmilw.org/>

Each year, as part of a community-wide (and national) effort, Congregation Shir Hadash (Milwaukee, WI) has participated in Labor in the Pulpits (http://www.iwj.org/outreach/labor_day.html). Congregation members plan a service that connects to a current campaign for economic justice in our community. Past topics have included the plight of low-wage workers; exploitation of immigrant workers; and community benefits.

For Labor Day 2007, the service connected to MICAH's (*Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope* - <http://www.micahempowers.org/> - our CBCO organization) campaign for increasing local hiring opportunities in city-subsidized projects. Initially, our planned speaker was Rev Joe Jackson, a MICAH leader and pastor of our "sister" congregation, Evergreen Missionary Baptist Church. When Joe was called out of town, Rev Dennis Jacobson, national chair of Gamaliel's clergy caucus, agreed to fill in.

An interesting aspect of this year's service was the section in which congregants talked about their personal family history as workers in the US.

The "Ten Commandments of Economic Justice" in the service are part of MICAH's campaign to expand local hiring in Milwaukee.

Outline for "Labor in the Pulpits" service 2007

- Labor music playing quietly as people arrive
- Intro - reading (10 commandments of economic justice)
- Shalom Aleichem (p. __) - welcoming Shabbat angels
- p.31 Or zaruah latzadik (light is planted for the righteous)
- p. 41 Lecha Dodi
- p. 740 Teach me my God, a blessing, a prayer
- Barchu p.57
- Ahavat Olam p. 61
- Shema p. 64
- reading below th line p. 71 - calling us to be witnesses
- reading above line p. 76 followed by Mi Camochah

- Hatzi kaddish
- Memories of our parents/grandparents work (conversation)
- Amidah p. 90/alternative reading
- Oseh Shalom p. 107 (be sure to include kol yoshvei tevel in version)!!
- Speaker (introduced by John)
- Aleynu p 121
- p. 742 A long time ago, before anything had a name
- Kaddish Yatom p. 131
- Song - Which Side are you On?

Yom Kippur Haftarah D'var - Isaiah 57:14 through 58:14

Kathy Kaufman, Chapel Hill Kehillah

<http://www.chkehillah.org/>

The haftarah for Yom Kippur is an entreaty from God, through the prophet Isaiah. God calls to Isaiah to take the children of Israel to task.

The children of Israel are immoral. How are they immoral? They are materialistic. They oppress their workers and ignore the needs of the poor. Their everyday actions are the actions of the oppressor, or at the very least the actions of those who are fortunate in their lot in life, and at the same time care nothing for those less fortunate.

The children of Israel are pious – they pray diligently, but it is not enough to pray diligently. Their piety is a false piety; it is the hypocritical piety of those who mouth the prayers but act immorally.

Talk is cheap, G-d says, when actions are morally dubious. Your piety is a blasé and self-satisfied piety. It is hypocrisy, and it is reprehensible. So G-d instructs Isaiah to castigate the people, to call them to task –loudly and harshly - for their uncaring ways.

The path to righteousness – to redemption -- must be cleared. We must not oppress, or participate in oppression. We must actively work to heal others, and only then will our spirits be healed, and only then will the children of Israel be redeemed.

So how does G-d want us to change our ways? This haftarah clearly cries out to us in the present day, as loudly and strongly as it did in Isaiah's day.

G-d requires us to ask ourselves, and to answer with actions:

- How are we hypocritical or uncaring, as individuals, as a community, and as a nation?
- Do we participate in oppression as individuals, as a community, and as a nation?
- Do we work for justice, as individuals, as a community, and as a nation?
- What can we work to change, right now, as individuals, as a community, and as a nation?

Isaiah's call is tough stuff. I suppose if you are a prophet, you have enough moral authority that you can, with a straight face, try to shame your flock into changing their ways, though I don't know that it will work. But if we mere flawed but well-intentioned humans want to heed Isaiah's call to pursue justice, and if we want to bring others along, how do we do that?

I believe that one way to respond is to break down Isaiah's call into basic actions that are not only doable, but are positive and interesting and hold out real promise for success.

Let's start with our local community. On Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Jen talked a bit about a new, exciting interfaith effort starting up in Orange County. Building on the very successful model followed in many other communities, including Durham, we are beginning to help put together a multi-faith, multi-ethnic broad-based organization in our community – one that will allow people from diverse backgrounds to work together to better people's lives in very direct ways. Durham, for example, has such an organization. It's called Durham C.A.N., or Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods, and it has had some big victories, for example successfully pressing the local powers that be for, lead abatement in public housing, Spanish language 9-1-1 operators, and a living wage for Durham city, county, and school board workers, as well as for contract workers at Duke.

We hope to build an analogous organization in Orange County that can identify and achieve common goals. Rabbi Jen has made sure to put the Kehillah on the ground floor of this effort. If you are interested in helping build it, please contact either of us. Our nascent community organization is holding several "equipping" sessions in October that we can all participate in, and the sessions will include a broad range of faith communities representing the different ethnic groups in Orange County. It's an exciting and wonderful way to heed Isaiah's call to build bridges with our neighbors and work for a more just community, so come on out.

G'mar chatimah tovah. A good sealing in the book of life.

"Spirituality is over-rated" - Rosh Hashanah Morning Sermon

Rabbi Jen Feldman, Chapel Hill Kehillah

<http://www.chkehillah.org/>

Shanah Tovah. Good Yontiff. Welcome to everyone. It may seem shocking to say on Rosh Hashanah morning, and I don't mean to offend you, but lately I've started to think that spirituality is over-rated. Let me explain what I mean.

When we talk about 'spirituality,' we're often talking about the experience of deep connection between ourselves and the Essence of All, or God, or Unity or Ultimate Reality. It is intensely personal, internal, overwhelming and affecting. But these experiences and feelings, powerful as they are, on their own are not enough. From the Jewish perspective, they must serve as means to an end.

Rabbi Sandy Sasso explains:

When Moses ascended Mt. Sinai, he had a spiritual experience. For forty days and forty nights he lived in the constant presence of the Divine. It was an encounter of indescribable magnitude. The Biblical text tells us that when Moses descended from the mountain his face glowed. The container for Moses' vision was the ten commandments, the covenantal relationship between a people and God. Moses' forty days and nights on Sinai was a spiritual encounter; the decalogue was the embodiment of that spirit, in other words, religion.

Rabbi Sasso elaborates on the differences:

Spirituality.... is a recognition of the transcendent, an apprehension of the interconnectedness of all life. The spiritual life is rooted in experience, encounters with the self, others and the world.

Religion is the container for this life of the spirit. It is the gravity that anchors spirit to earth, translating the vision of the soul into the responsibility of the individual.

In the best of all possible worlds, spirituality and religion are handmaidens. The soul's most profound experiences with a presence greater than the self are given form and articulation through liturgy, ritual and moral law. Religious forms, in turn, remain constantly open to the renewal of sacred moments.

Friends, think of Moses earlier in his life. When he turns aside to see the burning bush, God calls out to Moses by name and Moses responds Hineyni – here I am. I am fully present to you. And God then reveals to Moses God's own name, God's very essence, the Hebrew tetragrammaton: Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey.

Where does this transcendent moment lead Moses? Not to sitting in isolation reflecting on the experience, but to confronting Pharaoh in order to end the suffering of the people. Moses, raised in the luxurious isolation of the king's palace, responds to God's command and casts his lot with the suffering of the multitude. This act – rooted in spirituality – is about confronting power to create justice. It is, of course, political, but it is more than that. It is moral. It is religious.

This morning, I would like to explore the ways in which Judaism insists that spiritual experience must lead us to action on behalf of others. Let's begin with a brief exploration of the tension between the particularist interests of Judaism and the Jewish call to the universal. We'll move on to a discussion of how responsibility for others is not only a religious mandate but a deeply spiritual experience. Finally, we'll conclude with what all this means to us here, now, this year as a Jewish community in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

In his new book, Judaism and Justice: the Jewish Passion to Repair the World, Rabbi Sid Schwartz discusses Jewish consciousness on a continuum between what he terms "Exodus consciousness" and "Sinai consciousness." Exodus consciousness is typified by concern with the creation and maintenance of Jewish identity and Jewish survival. Its spiritual touchstone is the experience of escaping slavery, giving the disparate tribes who fled Egypt a common history and a sense of shared destiny.

In contrast, Sinai consciousness is about the call to be a Holy people, to have a sacred purpose. Whether we believe in Divine revelation at Sinai as factually true or as a myth that teaches deep truths, it transforms the *Israelites*, bound by common history, into *Jews*, bound by purpose.

On closer analysis, though, Exodus and Sinai are not opposites. Each contains elements of the other. We became bound as a people by our shared history of slavery and escape. And, from that experience also arises the ethical touchstone, repeated no less than 36 times in the Torah: Be kind to the stranger "for you know what it feels like, you were once a stranger in Egypt" (Exodus 23:9). Remember you were once oppressed, so do not oppress the other. Remember you were once marginalized and abused so take care of the stranger, the weak and the vulnerable. From the particular experience of slavery and Exodus arises a universal concern.

Similarly, the covenant at Sinai would have been useless had there not been a distinct people to receive the covenant and to stay in existence to carry it forward. We have a universal charge but we understand it through our specific sacred language, texts, history and traditions. We have the Passover *seder*, the giving of *tzedakah*, the understanding of *tikkun olam*. In short a Jewish sense of justice that would not exist without the survival of a Jewish way of doing and being. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks expresses it well in his book, To Heal a Fractured World: "Judaism is a particularist faith that recognizes the universality of the human condition."

It is true that, in many places and times – confined to ghettos, or the Pale of Settlement, or worse – we have focused more on caring for and supporting each other than on working for the peace and welfare of the non-Jews around us.

In our semi-autonomous communities we maintained, out of necessity, our own judicial, political and social welfare systems. Yet even though we have lived in exile for the majority our history, often marginalized and despised, we also held up the value of *darchei shalom* (literally, the ways of peace), a mandate to be concerned for the common good, to reach out with compassion to those outside of our own community and to act on an awareness of our common humanity. As Rabbi Sacks points out, our tradition showed us the *way* even if our political and historical situation stopped us from fully realizing it. These words of the Rabbis, written in the first or second century after the destruction of the Second Temple form the cornerstone of *darchei shalom*:

Our Masters taught: for the sake of peace, the poor of the non-Jew should be supported as we support the poor of Israel, the sick of the non-Jew should be visited as we visit the sick of Israel, and the dead of the non-Jews should be [provided the financial resources for] a burial just as we provide a burial for the dead of Israel.

So then, you may be wondering, “Which is more important: my commitment to Jewish continuity, or my doing good in the broader community?” To which I say: they are both necessary for a vibrant Jewish life. In America we live in a time of unprecedented wealth and integration. We have the resources to follow both our Exodus impulse of Jewish survival and also our Sinai mandate to live a life of holiness. We build Jewish institutions such as the Kehillah not only to protect and transmit Judaism, but to serve as a base from which we can reach out and do Jewish in the world.

What is Judaism without the call to engage in acts of ultimate value, to create communities that encourage life, health and human dignity for all their citizens? If some form of ethnic “Jewishness” survives, but Jewish actions to repair the world don't, what's the point? There is a popular Israeli children's song, *Dundai*, that bears quoting here: *Eretz yisrael b'li Torah he k'guf bli n'shamah*, “Israel without the Torah is like a body without a soul.”

So there is the religious mandate. But where is the heart of the matter? What compels us to reach out to one another from the depths of our souls? How and why do we feel with immediacy this commitment to helping the other? How does our tradition name this calling?

Two Jewish philosophers who have wrestled with these questions are Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas. Buber discusses the “I-Thou” relationship – one built on mutuality and respect, and seeing other people in their fullness, rather than only in terms of ourselves and our own desires. When we experience others not merely as instruments

for our own satisfaction, but open ourselves fully to them as full and separate beings, Buber says, such encounters bring us into relationship with the Source of All.

Levinas, however, goes further, and it is his philosophy that calls to me most strongly. My colleague, Rabbi Ira Stone of Philadelphia, summarizes this perspective beautifully in his book, *A Responsible Life: The Spiritual Path of Mussar*.

Levinas's thought emphasizes not the primacy of the self, but the primacy of the other – that is, other human beings. He taught that the self comes into existence by virtue of the other; therefore, the self comes into being indebted to the other.... This other, the other person, is presented to the individual through a face-to-face encounter that commands a response in action. For Levinas, this face-to-face encounter shatters the self-containedness or insularity of the self...the Question "what is being" is asked only after we ask the question "What is my responsibility in being?"

To say that each of us exists because of our responsibility to others may seem like a statement solely about human relationships. But Levinas says the trace of God's presence is to be found in the face of other people, too. He liked to quote Exodus 34:6, in which Moses asks to see God. Instead, he is permitted to see God's "back," and hears the Divine voice proclaiming, "The Eternal, the Ever-present is a compassionate and gracious God, patient, abounding in devotion and truth, assuring steadfast love for a thousand generations..." In other words, Moses experiences God indirectly, a "trace" of God. Similarly, says Levinas, we experience the trace of God on the faces of other people. In Rabbi Stone's words, "The face of the other is not the face of God, but rather it is the place of the *trace* of God's having passed by, thereby leaving **us** responsible."

Claire Katz, scholar of Judaism and Levinas sums it up this way in her book *Judaism. Levinas and the Feminine* :

Levinas discusses our relationship to God in terms of our relationship to the other: to respond to the other is to respond to God. He [Levinas] reiterates this view in his claim that to follow the "Most-High is also to know that nothing is greater than to approach one's neighbor, than the concern for the lot of the 'widow and orphan, the stranger and poor' and that to approach them with empty hands is not to approach them at all..."

So, the encounter with the Divine takes place in the context of our encounters with other people. And our encounters with other people demand a response – demand that we take responsibility. How do we, as a Kehillah, respond when the presence of others calls to us, "Where are you?" What is our "Hineni/Here I am?"

Over the past few years, we have made a start. Thanks to the efforts of committed co-chairs Marion Robboy, Brenda Ginsberg and David Wohl, as well as all who volunteer,

we have strengthened our Caring Committee so that systems are in place for people to support each other during times of illness or transition. And now we are enhancing our Social Action efforts as well under the leadership of Jackie Resnick and Irene Zipper, to meet our responsibility to those outside of the walls of our own Jewish community.

What is the next step? Levinas liked to say that the material needs of others are our spiritual needs. Here are some facts: The IFC reported that, in 2005, 5,500 Orange County households are spending 50% or more of their income on housing. The average monthly household income, over a three-month period, of those requesting food and other IFC services was \$690. Fifteen percent of Orange County residents have no health insurance. The report concluded, "In Orange County, with housing rent levels twice what they were in 1990, gas prices escalating and "living wage" jobs hard to come by, many families are just one crisis away from homelessness."

We – and I of course include myself-- encounter people who clean our health clubs and our homes, take care of our children, handle our landscaping, and work the grills at our local restaurants all the time – but do we really see them? My husband, Ben pointed out to me that our almost four year-old son comments on the panhandlers at the exit ramps of I-40. I have learned to keep driving.

To address this -- to see and to know others in the County where we live so that we can respond as our tradition tells us we must – Kathy Kaufman of the Social Action Committee and I began our involvement, on behalf of the Kehillah, with a wonderful initiative called the IAF Orange County Sponsoring Committee. The group is creating new networks of relationship across economic, racial and religious boundaries, and seeks to use the power of these networks to create a more just, compassionate society in Orange County. We've been meeting with over 20 ministers from many denominations, as well as groups representing the Latino and African American communities.

This initiative is based on the model of the Industrial Areas Foundation – an organizing campaign started by Saul Alinsky in the 60's -- that has been very successful in seeding the grassroots, interfaith Durham CAN organization.

Here is how it works: Each participating congregation or organization meets on its own to identify what will make our County a better place for everyone to live. The diverse groups then come together to create a shared agenda for change, and commit to funding and staffing a formal grass-roots organization to address this agenda.

That's the beginning. So that you get a flavor of what can be achieved, here are just some of Durham CAN's accomplishments:

- helped to motivate Durham government agencies and Duke University to implement Living Wage policies.

- Created a coalition of major health care providers and insurers to bring healthcare to underserved populations
- created broad-based community coalitions that have tested over 2,000 children for lead poisoning, and removed lead from public housing and parks.
- leveraged \$1.2 million in public and private funds to provide daycare to needy families.

It has been powerful for me to see so clearly that the foundation of large and positive social change is one-to-one relationships with other people. For example, recently through this program I got to sit down to lunch with Rosita, a mother of three whose husband is a manual laborer. She told me about her harrowing trip to the United States to be reunited with her husband, and how she and her toddler son almost lost their lives on the journey. As she recounted her story, she began to weep and told me that she had never before shared the details of her ordeal with anyone. She told me of her brother who died here because of inadequate access to medical care. And she told me of the work she was doing to help other young mothers in her community raise healthy children.

I walked away from that lunchtime conversation feeling connected to Rosita, concerned for her, and strongly motivated to correct the injustices that she had experienced.

These simple face-to-face meetings -- that leave us figuring out what we stand for, what to do, how to help, how to listen – are transformative, and the first step in transformative work.

Our IAF program is just in the beginning stages. We have had starts and stops. It takes time to build bridges of trust and understanding between groups that have not always worked together. Our success is hardly guaranteed. But in October we will have our first round of meetings between different lay leaders from each member congregation and organization. These lay leaders will have opportunities to hear each other's stories, to see and know each other and to form new connections. Our weekly announcements will share with you how to contact Kathy Kaufman, our member who is captaining this effort. I urge you to learn more about how you can get involved in this effort, and to participate in the October trainings.

When we recognize the trace of God in the faces of other people, the experience is a deeply spiritual one. But that alone is not enough. We must respond as Judaism calls us to, with compassion and righteous action. When we do, we transform the spiritual moment into a religious one, and we, too, are transformed.

Hineyni. Here I am. Here we are. May this be for all of us a year of blessing, a year in which we see – and in which we respond. *Shana Tova.*

Newsletter article on CBCO

Rabbi Jen Feldman, Chapel Hill Kehillah

<http://www.chkehillah.org/>

Last week I pulled into a gas station near my house and noticed that behind the station there was access to a paved road. Always on the lookout for little-known shortcuts, I filled up the car and eagerly took my newly discovered “back way,” hoping it would take me home. To my surprise, the road led instead to an extensive network of closely packed trailers in varying states of disrepair. These living conditions looked decidedly different from those in my own nearby neighborhood. They brought to mind a recent IFC report about the lack of affordable housing in Orange County and the daily struggles of the working poor to make ends meet.

How could I have been blind to this reality in my own backyard? Our tradition calls us to work tirelessly for social and economic justice. How can each of us as individuals, and all of us as a synagogue community best live out these values in our own county?

Some dedicated Kehillah volunteers have begun to address these questions, and soon their initiative will be expanding to include participation of our full Kehillah community. In the past month under the aegis of the Orange County Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) Sponsoring Committee, Kehillah members met with lay leaders from 15 other churches and civic institutions, laying the foundations for an organization to work for change in Orange County. We received leadership training. Even more importantly, we began to develop relationships across economic, social, ethnic and religious boundaries – hearing each other’s stories about the social, economic and cultural pressures in our daily lives.

Now, it’s time for us to bring this opportunity to the full Kehillah. In January, Kehillah members involved in the IAF initiative will hold house meetings where we’ll learn each other’s stories: What do you want to see different about our community? What are the pressures—social, economic, and educational—that affect you and your family? How could life here be better? What do you think the role should be of the Kehillah in working for social and economic justice in Orange County?

Each participating institution will be having similar house meetings. We’ll then come together, and, based on the information we’ve gathered, form an organization with a shared agenda for progress in Orange County.

Please plan to take part in this important work!

What is the Orange County IAF initiative? It is a group of churches and civic groups coming together to create an organization that will work for social and economic justice in Orange County (see <http://www.durhamcan.org> to learn more about a similar initiative)

How can I be involved? We are having house meetings to hear what Kehillah members feel could be better in our county, and to discuss what role the Kehillah can play in working for social and economic justice in our broader community.

When will the meetings be? House meetings will be held in January (dates to be announced). If you would like to attend or host a house meeting, please contact Kathy Kaufman at kknarotsky@yahoo.com.

Invitation to the Orange County Organizing Committee's first public delegate's assembly:

Event to be held April 28, 2008

<http://www.chkehillah.org/downloads/IAF%20April%202007%20mtg.pdf>