

JEWISH RENAISSANCE

Toward a New Relationship Between the American Jewish Community and Israel

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The Israel/Diaspora relationship must be restructured so to encourage greatly increased involvement, investment, and contact between equal partners. Its goal should be the development of a non-fundamentalist Jewish renaissance both in Israel and the United States. It should be characterized by volunteer energy and creative entrepreneurship.

YHWH said to Avram, after Lot had parted from him:

Pray lift up your eyes and see from the place where you are,

to the north, to the Negev, to the east, to the Sea: indeed all the land that you see. I give it to you and to your seed, for the ages.

I will make your seed like the dust of the ground, so that if a man were able to measure the dust of the ground, so too could your seed be measured.

Up, walk about through the land in its length and in its breadth,

for I give it to you.

Genesis: 13: 14-17

Now YHWH had said to Himself:

Shall I cover up from Avraham what I am about to do?

For Avraham is to become, yes, become a great nation and mighty (in number), and all the nations of the earth will find blessing through him.

Indeed, I have known him,

in order that he may charge his sons and his household after him:

they shall keep the way of YHWH,

to do what is right and just,

in order that YHWH may bring upon Avraham what he spoke concerning him.

Genesis 18: 17-19

A JEWISH RENAISSANCE AND A "GOLDEN AGE" FOR WORLD JEWRY

This is a critical time for our world Jewish community. It is a time for rethinking fundamental ideas about Zionism, Judaism, and the ancient and eternal relationship between the land of Israel, the people of Israel, the tradition of Israel, and the God of Israel. It is a time that will require careful planning and swift action; a time that demands that we set aside organizational loyalties and abandon stereotypic thinking to find new solutions to pressing problems; a time for radical changes in the Israel/Diaspora relationship and the organizational structures and ideologies that have supported that relationship since before

the founding of the State of Israel. Many of these organizational structures and ideologies have become irrelevant at best and counter-productive at worst to the most important challenges facing our people: strengthening Judaism and building vibrant, open Jewish communities; rebuilding the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (FSU); continuing the development of a strong, vibrant, democratic, and economically independent Israel; encouraging the emergence of a broadly based, serious, non-fundamentalist Jewish renaissance in Israel; building strong institutional and human relationships between Diaspora and Israeli Jews; and completing the vital work of ingathering exiles that is at the core of the Zionist ideal.

If these challenges are understood correctly and if we are prepared to reengineer the Israel/Diaspora relationship, we may have a chance to help create a great worldwide Jewish renaissance stretching from Jerusalem to Boston to Kiev. But if we fail to grasp the seriousness of the challenge and maintain our current organizational relationships and ideological rigidity, our struggle will deteriorate into senseless arguments between "fund raisers" and "Zionists" and ridiculous fights over scarce resources between advocates for the "Israel agenda" and those who stress the "Jewish continuity agenda" at home.

In fact, the way we pose the question itself may prejudice the outcome and oversimplify our choices. Is the division of limited resources *simply* a choice between domestic priorities—including the Jewish continuity agenda—and the needs of our people in Israel, or do we have other choices and other alternatives? Is it possible any longer to talk seriously about raising large numbers of "Zionists" in the Diaspora without at the same time raising *Jews* in the fullest spiritual, cultural, and intellectual senses of the word? I believe it is not.

Is it possible to talk about a strong, secure Israel or about meaningful support for Israel's most vulnerable populations if Israel loses its democratic character or becomes hopelessly divided between a westernized, secular, materialistic majority focused mainly on its own economic self-interest and a rigidly fundamentalist minority living within ghetto walls and rejecting work, military service, and secular education? I believe it is not.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, in the absence of widespread virulent anti-Semitism, the only Jews whom we can expect to provide serious moral, political, or economic support for Israel or to make *aliyah* in large numbers are those who have a deep commitment to Judaism within which their love of Israel can flourish and grow. Moreover, only a strong democratic, educated, Jewishly vibrant Israel can meet the economic, political, and military challenges of the twenty-first century and become the true hub of a Jewish renaissance for Jews in Israel and around the world.

THE CHALLENGE FOR AMERICAN JEWRY: REAL COMMUNITIES OF TORAH, TZEDEK, AND CHESED

The priorities of the American Jewish community should be and are changing. In the aftermath of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey and the existential crisis of identity and meaning that followed, we are finally asking ourselves the critical questions that we have mostly avoided since the beginning of the "sacred survival" period of American Jewish history: What will it mean to be a Jew in the twenty-first century? What is the meaning and purpose of Jewish life? Can we have a serious, engaged, open, joyous, and learned Jewish religious life that remains engaged with the world and committed to our biblical and prophetic ideals of *Tzedek*, justice, and *Tikkun Olam*—the repair of the world? Can we create real "face-to-face" communities of engaged and caring Jews at every congregational "gateway" to Jewish life? Jewish education and the development of real "face-to-face" communities of caring, justice, and learning will and must be our highest domestic agendas, requiring vastly more resources and the long-anticipated reordering of priorities that we have promised but failed to deliver for over twenty years.

Shimon Peres spoke for countless other Israeli leaders before and since in his Knesset speech at the closing session of the 1993 Jewish Agency Assembly. Mr. Peres did not, as one might expect, ask the Diaspora delegates gathered before him for increased giving or even for increased *aliyah*. His message, his priority for Diaspora investment was clear:

Your problem, let me be frank, is to keep your children Jewish. If we want something from you, Number one, keep your children Jewish. You know we are divided on the question of who is a Jew. Some people say a Jew is a person whose parents or at least whose mother is Jewish. But other people say a Jew is a person whose children and grandchildren are Jewish. We cannot change our parents, but we have to provide our children with a Jewish message and Jewish identity.

Communities of Meaning

Jewish survival and even Jewish continuity are inadequate rationales for Jewish communal existence. In a world defined by choice, our children will only choose to be Jewish if Jewish life is spiritually alive, intellectually stimulating, and culturally vibrant and if Jewish communities are open, warm, and engaging. Jewish life must stand for something real—for the possibility of learning that can transform our lives and give meaning to our existence; for the potential that Jewish values can help heal and transform the world through action and a deep commitment to our biblical ideal of social justice; for Jewish communities that reach out and reach in with warmth, caring, and welcome. In essence, Judaism must mean something to us as *adults*, filling our day-to-day lives with joy and meaning and purpose before we can hope to provide a meaningful Jewish life for our children.

The Community Matrix

The Jewish conception of learning, caring, and justice can only be fully realized in the context of strong, interdependent “face-to-face” communities. Learning, justice, and caring are the point of Jewish life. They are the seeds of Jewish community. At the same time, Jewish communities are the ground within which these seeds must grow. Too often in the past, strategies for Jewish education/continuity have ignored the need for community, while strategies for community-building have failed to understand that communities require culture, meaning, and purpose to flourish. The need for a strategy that supports both must be a central focus of our vision of the future.

JEWISH RENAISSANCE AND THE ZIONIST AGENDA

The North American Jewish renaissance agenda is inextricably linked to several Zionist issues. Assimilated Jews and Jews with no religious affiliation make very poor candidates for travel to Israel, political action on behalf of Israel, or even fund raising for

Israel, not to speak of *aliyah*. The CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) puts it clearly (Kosmin et al., 1991). While a little more than one-third of synagogue-affiliated American Jews feel “very attached” to Israel (the proportion among younger Jews is significantly lower), fewer than 8 percent of Jews with no synagogue affiliation say they feel “very attached”—a smaller proportion than among Jews who have already converted to some other faith!

The NJPS also discredited the idea that fear of anti-Semitism, love of Israel, fund raising for Israel, or concern for Israel’s survival can support the entire weight of Jewish identity in America. This strategy has failed. Without Jewish culture and learning, without spirituality, without community, Israel is not a strong enough hook to support our Jewish future. We have made Jewish survival our civil religion—“sacred survival” is how Jonathan Woocher (1991) has described the phenomenon—and this god has failed. It is the ultimate paradox. Because of our concentration on survival, many of our own children and grandchildren will not survive as Jews.

This is not to say that secular Jewish experiences cannot move us or our children. A trip to a Holocaust museum or a visit to Israel or the fear of anti-Semitism can certainly have an impact on an individual’s identity. What it cannot do is provide the basis for a transmissible Jewish identity with the philosophical, spiritual, experiential, and intellectual depth and power to pass from generation to generation. Judaism has been a religious/national culture for 3,500 years, encompassing our faithfulness to the people of Israel, the land of Israel, the Torah of Israel—including its absolute commitment to social justice as a principle of Jewish law—and, invisibly, the living God of Israel. Judaism is not likely to survive without its spiritual core, and while belief in God cannot be demanded of anyone in modernity, it is hard to imagine Judaism without Jewish literacy, Jewish community, and a serious intellectual struggle with the core ideas of Judaism, *including* the idea of God.

**A JEWISH RENAISSANCE IN ISRAEL:
THE NEW CHALLENGE FOR ISRAEL
AND ISRAEL/DIASPORA RELATIONS**

For fifty years, the underlying, unstated premises of Israel/Diaspora relations on the issue of Jewish identity have been simple. The Diaspora and its ghetto-born spiritual existence are doomed. Judaism and Jewish national existence are being reborn in secular terms in the land of Israel. Send us your children, we were told, and we will inspire them and return them to you more committed Jewishly and with a new vision of Jewish life.

The premises, however, are changing. The existential crisis of Jewish identity and meaning is increasingly finding a resonance among secular intellectuals and business and political leaders in Israel. The massacre in Hebron and the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin have created a spiritual crisis among a small but growing minority of secular Israelis. Many of the same questions that American Jewry has confronted over the last twenty years are now becoming increasingly common among Israelis: What will it mean to be a Jew in the twenty-first century? What does it mean to be a Jewish State? What is the meaning of our existence, and how can we fulfill our historic obligations as the state of the Jewish people and the heart of Jewish spiritual existence? What are the moral implications of the obligations for Israel to serve as the heart of Torah study for world Jewry and the embodiment of God's dream for Abraham and his children "to keep the way of God to do what is right and just?"

These questions are driving Israelis to redefine the relationships between secular Jews and Judaism. At a recent conference in Haifa, sponsored by the Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) of Greater Boston and the Israeli leaders of our Partnership 2000 projects in Haifa, these questions were raised loudly and clearly. More importantly, there was an increasing reluctance on the part of some secular Israelis to leave all questions of religion, spirituality, and history in the hands of an increasingly insular and right-wing Orthodox minority.

Out of the Haifa conference came a new and important determination on the part of Boston's Jewish community and our partners in Haifa to address these issues together. In fact, a potentially divisive issue—religious pluralism in Israel—was transformed into a unifying issue that bound Boston's Jews and Haifa's Jews in a common struggle to deepen our commitment to Jewish history, Jewish learning, Jewish values, and the potential for an authentic, non-fundamentalist, spiritual encounter among all of our partners in both communities.

The funding strategy that emerged from the conference reflected these concerns and ideas, as well as the direction suggested by a brilliant paper entitled, "The Potential for a Jewish Renaissance in Israel," which was developed for the Dorot and Cummins Foundations by Elan Ezrachi (1997). Ezrachi notes the development of a grassroots movement for pluralism; serious egalitarian, non-fundamentalist Jewish renewal; and Jewish learning among a growing minority of Israelis. This potential renaissance grows from a new consciousness on the part of many Israelis and is being fed by a host of new organizations, from growing Reform and Conservative congregations in many Israeli cities to such organizations like Panim, Kolot, Elul, Geshet, the Tali Schools, the Shalom Hartman Institute, and Hamidrasha at Oranum, the spiritually alive, Jewish education arm of (of all things!) the Kibbutz movement.

CJP allocated about \$100,000 to fund pilot projects sponsored by some of these organizations and others that are native to Haifa, such as the University of Haifa and The College of Pluralistic Judaism. Our Haifa strategy is aimed at strengthening the development of all non-fundamentalist alternatives, bringing these diverse groups together to build the movement for change and ultimately to help foster a broadly based, five-year strategy for pluralism and Jewish renewal in Haifa. On the Boston side our goal is to increase direct connections between the Israeli programs and students and Boston congregations, day schools, and community centers. In the end,

contact between students and “seekers” in Boston and Haifa will, we hope and believe, create a mutually reinforcing cultural/spiritual renaissance.

The connection between pluralism and renaissance should also be quite clear. Israelis who do not care about their own religious/spiritual lives are not likely to care about religious pluralism. Israelis who care enough to develop their own unique Jewish response to modernity will defend their religious rights...and ours!

TOWARD A NEW STRUCTURE, NEW GOALS, AND A NEW RELATIONSHIP

As we evaluate our priorities, it is time to examine the spectrum of services we provide in Israel and decide which must be maintained, which should be redesigned, and which should be eliminated as Israel’s economic strength and independence increase. Of critical importance in this process is the need to avoid stereotypic attitudes and ideologically charged and misleading rhetoric. Reducing allocations to the Jewish Agency is not necessarily abandoning Israel, since allocations to other projects in Israel may at the same time be increasing. Moreover, increasing allocations for Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) projects in the former Soviet Union and decreasing resources for an increasingly prosperous Israel do not necessarily mean that American Jews are not committed to Israel or Zionism since doing so may have long-term benefits for the Jewish people *and* for Israel. I have never been part of any funding decision in which love of Israel was not uppermost in the minds of federation decision makers, even if the decision was to reduce funding for certain programs in Israel.

Properly understood, our overseas and local challenges and our need to strengthen both Judaism and Zionism can be viewed as remarkably unified and consistent:

- In North America, we must reintegrate the sacred and the secular in our communal lives; we must strengthen “real” community at the grassroots of Jewish life, especially through new partnerships with con-

gregations; we must strengthen volunteerism and involvement both locally and internationally; and we must strengthen all forms of Jewish education while at the same time meeting our responsibilities to the frail and the powerless.

- In Eastern Europe and in all the lands of the FSU, we must rebuild Jewish communal and religious life, feed the hungry, and, at the same time, encourage *aliyah* for as many Jews as possible.
- In Israel, we need greater flexibility in the way we use Diaspora philanthropic dollars. Israel is well on its way to becoming an economically vibrant and self-sufficient nation that will require different kinds of support than in the past. Of course, we must continue to support rescue and *aliyah* as the core of our overseas agenda, but our agenda must also begin to shift from nation-building to increased project-oriented support for vulnerable populations, from Ethiopian Jews to the frail elderly to children at risk. This will require a shift to short-term investments in “leading-edge” human service programs—a methodology pioneered by the JDC in Israel—so that we can help create systemic improvements in Israel’s service delivery system.

In the end, we must be able to help Israel with its challenges while at the same time strengthening the Israel/Diaspora relationship by fostering greatly increased involvement, investment, and contact between equal partners. By so doing, we can have real impact in a rapidly changing environment. We can also create a true dialogue on the spiritual/intellectual future of our people and help fund the development of a non-fundamentalist Jewish renaissance in Israel and in the United States.

All of this can and should be accomplished through programs that link Diaspora programs, agencies, and congregations to their counterparts in Israel in ways that build real bridges between communities. This can be done mostly in the context of increased “twinning” between North American and Israeli communi-

ties using the Jewish Agency and the JDC as guides and consultants in areas where their specific expertise can be useful.

BREAKING DOWN WALLS AND BUILDING BRIDGES

The implementation of these goals and the creation of an international system that can meet needs in Israel and around the world, while also strengthening connections among Jews around the world and helping build stronger communities at home, will require a new international structure to better involve Diaspora Jews and Israelis in joint efforts to build our Jewish future. This will require rethinking the roles of such organizations as the UJA/CJF Partnership, the Jewish Agency, and the JDC.

The Jewish Agency has never been leaner; its professional leadership has never been more competent. Its work in the religious pluralism issue at the government level has been brilliant, and the Agency's most important tasks—the work of rescue and *aliyah*—are being carried out with competence and valor.

In each of these areas, the Jewish Agency succeeds quite well, but many of its other priorities are now being questioned. Moreover, as a platform for meaningful dialogue between Diaspora Jews and Israelis, the Jewish Agency, and the WZO/Diaspora partnership on which it is based—which worked well during the birth of Zionism and the early decades of the Jewish state—is now a bleak failure. In fact, if *aliyah* depends in part on building organizational and human bridges between Diaspora Jews and Israelis, then I fear that the Agency and the Assembly, as institutions, are structured more like walls and barriers than like bridges. Over the last ten years, the Agency has undoubtedly become more competent, but it has not created an institutional structure that encourages creativity or meaningful dialogue and exchange or a stronger partnership between Israeli and Diaspora Jews.

Even Partnership 2000, a brilliant idea that is truly helping to transform the Israel/

Diaspora relationship, was flawed in implementation because the Agency seemed at times more intent on building its own bureaucratic agenda than on supporting the creative process of community partnering.

Clearly, our current system is in crisis. Many Jews are increasingly alienated from Israel, and donors are demanding more choice and a clearer sense of how their contributions are used. The federation "market share" is declining, particularly among younger donors, and yet at the same time, there are signs of new interest and even a renaissance in many Jewish communities. More than ever before, our current situation demands a new international system that preserves our capacity to act in concert around our most important international priorities while at the same time allowing for creativity, welcoming individual initiative, and, most importantly, empowering local communities, innovative and motivated donors, and talented volunteers. The development of a system that serves overseas and local needs, while at the same time, freeing human energy and building community at home, is a central feature of our recently completed CJP Strategic Planning Report.

In Boston we have already made a good start in testing many of the ideas outlined in our strategic plan. Our work with our twinned communities in Haifa and Dnepropetrovsk has indeed generated significant new human and financial resources and helped strengthen our federation and our overall relationship to Israel. Most important, our work so far supports an important basic thesis: At this moment in Jewish history, freeing creative energy and encouraging hands-on connections and volunteerism yield a greater impact, better service, more connection, and greater "coverage" than our current system.

MEETING NEEDS THROUGH VOLUNTEER ENERGY AND CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

From the beginning, most of our discussions about the shape of our national system have focused on such issues as priority setting,

collective responsibility, and avoiding overlap and duplication. Clearly, these concerns were critical in a world where the overwhelming goal of our overseas agenda was feeding the hungry, rescuing helpless refugees, and resettling them in the land of Israel. It is clear to most of us that the conditions of international Jewish life have changed and, in fact, the Jewish Agency's latest strategic plan emphasizes a variety of new priorities from religious freedom in Israel to programs that strengthen Jewish identity in Diaspora communities.

These new priorities, however, may require new organizational structures and norms for implementation. For example, our new strategic plan in Boston stresses the need to provide overseas help in ways that meet our most important international responsibilities while, at the same time, wherever possible, strengthening our Boston Jewish community through community-to-community linkages that use as much local effort and volunteer energy as possible. Our work in recent years reinforces the idea that local community initiatives can be provided in ways that avoid overlap and duplication (after all, there really is so much work to be done) and preserve the idea of priorities and collective responsibility, but also increase the quantity and effectiveness of the services provided, their impact on our local community, and their potential to mobilize both human and financial resources through greatly increased community-to-community programming. Some years ago, Robert Aronson, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, called for "reciprocity" in the international system—the development of "connection projects" that satisfy needs in Israel and countries of distress but also promote some real benefit, if only volunteer opportunities, to the members of our own community. We believe that the time has come to create institutional formats that allow us to test this idea out in a much more widespread way.

What is badly needed, therefore, is a system that achieves the following three objectives:

1. Preserves our ability to exercise "collective responsibility" and to act in concert around our most important priorities for ourselves as communities and for the Jewish people as a whole
2. Creates voluntary opportunities for communities to collaborate around secondary priorities
3. Provides lots of incentive for independent action that can free up volunteer energy, strengthen local communities, and lead the way for creative new activity that may flow from the local communities to the international system at some time in the future. It is our belief in Boston that increased volunteer energy always leads to increased human and financial resources and that, wherever possible, our overseas activity should be delivered in ways that strengthen community, as well as providing essential aid.

TOWARD THE BEGINNING OF A NEW MODEL

Allow me to elaborate and outline one person's vision of how our future international system might operate. Our overseas responsibility should have three components.

Part One: Collective Responsibility

Each year, the Jewish Agency and the JDC would prepare "core" funding requests for all federations to be reviewed by the UJA/CJF Partnership before being submitted to local federations around the country. These proposals would focus on primary, urgent needs of the Jewish people—high-priority goals that all of us agree require collective action and responsibility.

For the Jewish Agency at this moment, the choice is actually clear. The core request would include essential funding for the rescue of Jews from the FSU and other lands of distress. The JDC core request would include most of its existing work in endangered communities and especially its expanded community building and feeding programs in the FSU, since nearly all of this work is considered

essential by the American Jewish community. The Partnership would carefully review these requests in close consultation with local federations and assure that they were represented accurately and clearly and that the projects presented were evaluated and prioritized thoroughly.

These requests would then be submitted annually for action to all the federations around the country with the advice of the Partnership on an equitable distribution of responsibility. My guess is that these kinds of clear priorities would receive close to what was requested (or more!), but of course, it would be far better to build the budget a year ahead, rather than a year behind, with clear commitments from each federation each year to assure balanced budgets.

Part Two: Voluntary Collaboration Around Other Priorities

After submitting core requests, the JDC and the Jewish Agency, and perhaps other providers, would highlight a number of areas where they, working together or separately, could make a major impact on Israeli society or world Jewry. These initiatives might include, for example, a major new program for Ethiopian Jews in Israel, a significant project aimed at child welfare, or a concerted effort to expand the boundaries of religious freedom and renaissance. The determination of these priorities would be made on a three-year basis to assure some continuity and focus and would best be done after significant consultation with the Partnership and local community leadership. The size of these projects and programs would depend on the voluntary participation of local federations; their inclusion in local campaigns would provide a powerful, compelling, clear and targeted focus that would surely enhance fund-raising efforts.

Wherever possible, these priorities might be designed to be carried out through local efforts, similar to Partnership 2000, a feature that would further enhance their viability and attractiveness for local investment, expand resources through local volunteer energy,

and help build community while providing better service.

Part Three: Independent Activity, Volunteer Energy, and Community-to- Community Projects

This component would be the biggest challenge for the Jewish Agency/JDC system in Israel and the FSU, but would provide the greatest opportunity for increasing collaboration and commitment to the great cause of our work overseas. In this part of the new model, local communities would set their own priorities and develop their own programs and ideas that they could then pursue on their own, in collaboration with other communities, or through new facilitation units of the JDC (already being developed) and the Jewish Agency.

The key to the success of this component is the ability of the JDC, the Jewish Agency, and other organizations requesting support to be helpful and to provide expertise and experience to local communities. They would influence decisions and provide direction through the power of their expertise, knowledge, leadership, and experience.

Managing short-term funding and projects in overseas locations, for example, is difficult and requires enormous support and expertise in order to assure proper expectations on the part of overseas communities and clear entry and exit strategies when short-term funding ends. The JDC has pioneered the development of short-term projects and has the expertise needed to work with local communities from inception to exit and could therefore be most helpful in assuring excellence and a quality process.

The notion that international organizations need to learn to guide and facilitate is very much in line with the strategic thinking currently being advanced by the JDC and the work they are already doing with many local communities. It also appears as a key part of the objectives beginning to emerge in the new Jewish Agency plan.

Good examples of independent activity

are the Boston projects in Dnepropetrovsk or our Haifa work on behalf of religious freedom and renaissance in Israel modeled on Elan Ezrachi's (1997) ground-breaking study. While the Jewish Agency and all the communities in America might find it difficult to create consensus around this kind of strategy, there is no reason why ten, twelve, fifteen, or twenty-five communities might now want to get together to try to accomplish similar goals through Partnership 2000 or other mechanisms as an example of voluntary collaboration. This being the case, we would look to the Jewish Agency or the JDC to provide expertise and connections to the most innovative groups and individuals in Israel to enhance our ability to stimulate Jewish renaissance in communities throughout Israel. Similarly, any number of communities might decide to create twinning projects with cities in the FSU. As always, the key to success would be volunteer energy and a good understanding of conditions "on the ground." Of course, avoiding duplication is more difficult if decisions are not made by a centralized authoritarian bureaucracy, but the JDC has found a way to guide through expertise rather than through command and the control of financial resources. This is a challenge, but the upside is truly significant as we have seen in our partnership in Dnepropetrovsk.

TOWARD A NEW INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The notion that the Jewish Agency provides a forum for all the Jews of the Diaspora and Israel is a bit grandiose, at least for as long as I have been involved in Jewish Agency assemblies. These Assemblies do not address worldwide Jewish needs (for example, those addressed by the JDC), and it is widely agreed that the current Jewish Agency mechanism fails to bring the best and brightest together from either side. Moreover, most Diaspora leaders find the Jewish Agency structures

impenetrable and frustrating. I suggest an alternative approach.

Biennially, we might convene an international meeting where communal organizations and congregational movements; Jewish intellectuals, artists, writers, and rabbis; experts in Jewish education, human services, and community development; and business leaders, major donors, and community representatives from twinned communities from the United States, Israel, and around the world could come together to share ideas and plan action. Such a mechanism might truly bring new leaders into the dialogue and create new visions and new possibilities.

The Torah of Israel includes an unshakable commitment to social justice, the God of Israel, the community of Israel, and the land of Israel. We are told in *D'varim* (Deuteronomy) and we are reminded twice each day in the *Sh'ma* that the issues of Jewish continuity, Jewish education, Jewish religion, social justice, and Zionism cannot and must not be separated. It is now up to us as a world Jewish community to create programs and structures that will reflect this ancient wisdom as we work to confront our most serious challenges: assuring continued vitality and growth of the state of Israel; strengthening Jewish life and building real communities in the FSU; and creating a meaningful Jewish life and caring Jewish communities for ourselves and our children and our children's children for Jews in America, in Israel, and around the world.

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