



***Israel-Diaspora Relations***

**Commission on a New Jewish  
Vision/Agenda:  
Some Guidelines as to Purposes and  
Procedures**

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This commission is in many respects an act of hutzpah. Who are we to suggest to the Jewish people what their vision and agenda should be? At the same time, all of those who have been asked to be part of this body understand the need, and if there is anyone within Jewish life today capable of articulating a new vision and/or a new agenda we have at least as much capability for doing so. Difficult as the task may be, each of us as individual Jews undoubtedly feels some obligation to do the best we can with regard to both the vision and the agenda or at the very least one or the other. All of us have been associated with one another in Jewish affairs for a significant number of years. Why then should we not pool our thoughts and efforts to see if we can produce something collectively that is better than what we might produce individually without the benefit of each other's counsel and discussions.

Nevertheless, our mission is formidable. By addressing these agenda and vision problems we at least continue the task of reconstituting world Jewry as an organized entity with a state and numerous diaspora communities and as a covenantal civilization with an appropriate belief system to energize it. I see our task as reaching out to the entire Jewish people, not merely to one or another set of Jewish institutions. Obviously, in such a situation we cannot be a formal body so much as an informal generator of ideas that we hope others will incorporate and enlarge. The task may be a task demanding hutzpah, but I see us as approaching it as modestly as possible, as a group of people who know how to talk with one

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another and to act together, trying to address a critical problem that needs addressing, not through formal bodies and formal proclamations but through serious thought.

I would suggest that we can begin with an understanding that Jewish life, which since time immemorial has had three dimensions from which their visions and agendas have been drawn: religious, halakhic, and political, where each contributes to defining or shaping both the visions and the agendas. We need to recognize that from the religious dimension we must develop the basis for Jewish unity and community and must make the civil institutions of the Jewish people more Jewish in the other two respects as well.

I suspect that we all agree that practically we are confronted with at least three groups or three problems:

1. The division between those Jews who are Jewish first and those who say about being Jewish "convince me."
2. The existence of conflicting beliefs and practices among contemporary Jews and, perhaps even more important, different capacities for belief and practice.
3. Finally, a vision must inspire and uplift. Therefore, it must avoid the lowest common denominator approach.

Our group is, more than anything else, an experiment. Can we among ourselves, among people who speak the same language more or less, get sufficient agreement as to what the Jewish vision for the next while should be and what the agenda should be that flows from it? If we are successful in our own modest discussions, we will have achieved something that will justify the next step of developing a larger group to get the word out to bring our thoughts to the attention of others and bring them into the discussion. At that point we will begin to convince individuals, groups, and their institutions. If this second stage in the effort has some success, we can proceed to the third stage, developing practical programs, and ultimately to the fourth, the operationalization of those programs. At each stage, our little group will be merged into larger circles, hopefully carrying with us the satisfaction of having started a process that inevitably would start sooner or later and had better start sooner rather than later.

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