

# THE RALPH I. GOLDMAN FELLOWSHIP

## Its Impact on the World Jewish Community and on the Individual

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I vividly remember my first meeting with Ralph Goldman in 1979. It was in his office—he was then serving as executive vice-president of JDC—and he put me immediately at ease. I observed the photo of David Ben-Gurion on the wall and the small *Tanach* (Bible) on his desk, and I sensed the warmth of Ralph's personality. Our conversation involved the concerns of the Jewish people. We discussed Israel from which I had recently returned and the Soviet Jewry cause. I recall how surprised I was at the time to hear Ralph's strong conviction that we would live to witness the "opening up of the doors" and the exodus of Jews from the Soviet Union. Ralph's vision, his ideals, his strong commitments to the Jewish people, his optimism, and his caring—all these qualities struck me indelibly at that first meeting. It was a snapshot of Ralph Goldman whom I, among many who share the privilege, have come to know and love.

On Ralph's retirement from his first term as JDC's executive vice-president in 1985, the JDC board honored him by establishing a special fellowship that would embody both Ralph's life's work and his deep interest in nurturing future generations of Jewish leadership. It created the Ralph I. Goldman Fellowship in International Jewish Communal Service as a tribute to this visionary who has served so many of us as a mentor and a role model.

This prestigious fellowship is awarded annually to one individual in the early stages of his or her career from anywhere in the Jewish world, with a master's degree or equivalent, who has demonstrated strong leadership ability and a commitment to communal service. The always difficult task of selecting one Fellow from among the many

talented applicants falls to a special committee comprising top Jewish communal professionals, JDC board members, and one former Fellow. This committee looks for such qualities as flexibility, integrity, personal warmth, creativity, a pluralistic outlook, and the inclination to devote these talents to the good of the Jewish people.

Offering a stipend, as well as professional support and guidance, the fellowship allows for a full year of involvement—through work and study—in the work of JDC and overseas communities. Once selected, each Fellow begins the fellowship year with an orientation at JDC headquarters before embarking on one to two custom-designed overseas assignments that focus on the cutting-edge issues that JDC is addressing and the interests and talents of the Fellow.

Fellows become involved in critical issues facing Jewish communities. Assignments have ranged from developing a Jewish Resource Center in post-communist Hungary to involvement in a food distribution program in the early days of *glasnost* in the Former Soviet Union to refugee relief during the war in Bosnia. The exposure they gain greatly expands their worldview and reaffirms their sense of responsibility to preserve the well-being of international Jewry.

One of the program's great benefits is the opportunity to get to know Ralph Goldman and become, in effect, part of his extended family. For the Fellows, the encounter with Ralph Goldman is, as it was for me, inspiring and humbling. Ralph has made each Fellow feel and understand the power of the individual to accomplish great things and that each has an important role to play in pursuing the ideals of the Jewish people. He challenges Fellows to think big, but to remain modest.

*Mi Samcha?*, he urges each to remember as they embark on their careers in Jewish community work: Who are you to tell others how to live their lives as Jews?

In 2004, the fellowship celebrated its *chai* (18<sup>th</sup>) year. Among the eighteen talented Fellows—drawn from Israel, Ireland, Slovakia, Canada, as well as from the United States—many have since become leaders in their own Jewish communities, whether in a lay or professional capacity. They stand as a continuing living tribute to Ralph Goldman.

During these 18 years in which I have directed the fellowship program, the Fellows and I have been immeasurably enriched by a man whose love of the Jewish people extends to all sectors and all communities. His benevolent and open outlook allows him to embrace all and to optimistically see community and leadership foibles as fleeting and capable of transformation and change. He is able to see events and circumstances in context and has a long-range view that begins deep in the Jewish past and spans to the present and well into a future full of progress and vision. His wisdom, his dreams, and his ideals are those of the Jewish people, and his

love and work have been the expression of *Kol yisrael areivim zeh l'zeh*, the expression of this sense of oneness of the Jewish people.

Ralph Goldman has played critical roles in major developments in modern Jewish history. He was involved in the purchase of the Exodus ship that carried survivors of the Holocaust to Palestine, he served as David Ben-Gurion's advisor, and he was among the architects of Israel's social service network. In 1989, he negotiated JDC's return to the former Soviet Union with the Soviet authorities, helping bring about his vision of a free Soviet Jewry. At the same time, Ralph Goldman, the human being, has always had time to listen, to console, to celebrate, to support, and to have fun with his colleagues and staff. Ralph's humility and humanity are part of what makes him special.

Ralph Goldman represents the essence of Jewish values and true leadership. Intense, unwavering, enduring, and contagious, that dedication has touched and inspired so many Jewish lives. And through the Ralph I. Goldman Fellows, it reaches a new generation and into the Jewish future—a future that Ralph Goldman has done so much to secure.

*Editor's Note: In the next three pages, three Ralph Goldman fellows—one from the 1980s, one from the 1990s, and one from 2003—share their experience as fellows and how it transformed them both personally and professionally.*