

tions studied in *Power and Parity* never had a female president in their entire history. One major incentive for board members to devote resources and time to organizations is to have a chance to compete for the top position. Highly successful women are likely to size up the odds for success in the Jewish communal world, and determine that the most interesting opportunities are to be found elsewhere.

The focus of this effort is to strengthen women's impact on the leadership of national organizations. Creating gender balance and giving women access to top leadership posts are important steps in the process of building a better foundation to support Jewish communal endeavors. Equally important, is to develop an appreciation within the community for diverse voices and varied leadership styles. The results of these initiatives can significantly change the entire community by enhancing communal involvement for all those who wish to infuse fresh perspectives, creative thinking and new vitality into Jewish life.

Notes

1. Barry A. Kosmin, Sidney Goldstein, Joseph Waksberg, Nava Lerer, Ariella Keysar, and Jeffrey Scheckner, *Highlights of the CJF 1990 National Jewish Population Survey* (New York, 1991), a publication of the Council of Jewish Federations in association with the Mandell Berman Institute-North American Jewish Data Bank, The Graduate School & University Center, CUNY, p. 11, Table 3b.
2. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), pp. 208-209.
3. Virginia Valian, *Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 140-141.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

The Endangered Rabbi

Arthur Gross Schaefer and Eric Weiss

Behind the smiles, the warm handshakes and even the embracing hugs, rabbis are sometimes sad, exhausted human beings feeling empty and disillusioned. Many are burning out, consumed by emotions of anger, frustration and loneliness. This mood of despair does not affect all rabbis to the same degree or at the same time. Nor is it necessarily persistent or irrevocable. There are wonderfully giving rabbis whose perspective and experience will be radically different from that offered in this article. However, the phenomenon of clergy burnout is pervasive, affecting veteran and new clergy alike, cutting across all religious movements.

There are varied and enriching opportunities afforded to rabbis. A rabbi's life is often full of wonderful and precious experiences and exciting challenges. And yet, all the worthy activities a rabbi does may not fully ameliorate feelings of isolation and silent desperation. For some there is a sensation of being trapped in a situation that is overwhelming and from which there is no easy escape. Clergy often believe that no one really wants to listen to their pain or that they should not burden congregants with their problems. Many become numb and bury feelings of frustration deep inside over-scheduled lives while trying to help ease the pain of others.

Rabbis need to be role models of a spiritually-balanced life rather than yet another example of a stressed out professional. In many ways, the future of the Jewish people is at risk when rabbis, the front line teachers and facilitators, endure excessive stress and debilitating loneli-

ness. While many careers exact endless hours, few demand that one always be a role model whose actions, and those of the family, are closely and incessantly scrutinized.

In addition, a game of deception is being played as the rabbi preaches the values of family, study and prayer. Look behind the sermons that implore the congregants to place their families first and their careers second, and you will find that often the sermonizers actions betray their own words. Ask rabbis how often they take time for personal prayer or study and you will frequently hear only sadness in their responses. When rabbis believe that they must neglect core values of family and study in order to be "effective," they dilute the quality of their lives.

Rabbi burnout has not been a subject of sufficient discussion in public nor even among the clergy. Rabbis don't like to admit, even to themselves, that they are unhappy and "stressed out." Rather, most clergy, like most other professionals in our culture, take the macho approach and try to tough it out themselves. Rabbis generally believe that they are like other successful people in our society who are able to take on difficult problems stoically and find solutions independently. The rabbi uses whatever support is available (colleagues, family, therapist, selected friends) to learn how to "personally" cope with the given and seemingly unchanging realities. Similarly, lay communities generally treat the situation as "personal to the particular rabbi." If the clergy does not fulfill their expectations or is not feeling fulfilled, then it is that particular rabbi's problem to work out.

This current climate of taking the problem as personal creates a mood of confusion, anger and inadequacy. Most rabbis believe that if only they were better speakers, worked longer hours, were more visible, more politically astute, more efficient managers, they could master the problems and feel happier. This situation of clergy burnout will not be solved by focusing on the individual cleric or particular congregations. There is a critical need to view all of these individual instances of stress and burnout as symptoms of a systemic crisis that is affecting the Jewish community. It is important to realize that the pain each rabbi and congregation is feeling is just a little piece of the anguish that is being experienced by the religious leaders and communities as a whole.

Much of this growing sense of frustration and disillusionment is generated by conflicting expectation on the part of the rabbi, the synagogue's board and the congregation. A good place to begin the analysis is to create a discourse where each constituency can voice expectations of the religious leader.

Expectations of the Rabbi

An old rabbinic handbook provides a definition of the rabbi's function which many who enter into the rabbinate still believe:

- The rabbi has a general knowledge of Judaica.
- The rabbi has techniques for passing on knowledge of Judaica, i.e., can teach and give sermons.
- The rabbi can officiate at life cycle events.
- The rabbi has a sense of mission, i.e., feels that the Jewish people have a destiny that will be manifested through the individual synagogues and through the movement into which those synagogues are organized.

Today's rabbinic curriculum follows this basic agenda as it provides the students with tools to be teachers of Jewish tradition. There is virtually no significant focus on synagogue administration, fund raising or counseling. The role of the rabbi is usually seen through the prism of the texts students study which cast the rabbi's function as a combination of a jurist, teacher, philosopher, healer, priest and prophet. Most aspiring rabbis construct and nourish their vision of their rabbinate on the basis of this understanding.

Furthermore, rabbinic students usually feel a deep religious calling. Their personal relationship with God, while perhaps mysterious and not completely formed is nonetheless of central importance for them. Many enter the rabbinate with a hope that they can share their religious and spiritual inspiration with others, to bring people together by focusing them on their primary relations to God and to God's covenant with the people.

Most students never fully consider or develop the tools, except in the most informal of circumstances, to deal with many of the actual demands that will be placed upon them. The student often does not realize the importance, or formulate a process, of creating a healthy relationship with a board of directors or trustees. Students almost never study the complex dynamics of congregational relations that they are expected to help manage. Rabbis need a more mature understanding of synagogues and their boards. They need to develop the ability to listen to the expectations of the board and the congregation which may differ from their own. They should have learned skills to help the board and the congregation listen to their vision. Consequently, they should be able to facilitate the building of a shared vision based on mutual understanding and partnership.

Expectations of the Board of Directors

It is the board of directors that usually interacts most directly and powerfully with the rabbi. The board ratifies the hire/fire decisions, evaluates performance and decides salary, benefits, convention allowances and other matters that dramatically affect time and focus.

As clergy often do not have a sophisticated understanding of boards, so boards often have no idea how to evaluate a rabbi's skills as a mentor of Jewish tradition. Rather, the directors may feel that they can only judge the rabbi's effectiveness based on the smooth running of the temple as a business organization. Issues of budget, membership numbers, fundraising, employee procedures can be their primary focus. Priorities that may be central to clergy such as prayer, study, observance, social action and covenant with God are too frequently not shared by board members or even considered relevant to the board's function. Accordingly, the board will tend to view clergy primarily in their role as supporting and maintaining the business needs of the operation. So clergy, like other business professionals, are expected to read budgets, direct the other employees, bring in sufficient capital to help the operation continue, and keep things running smoothly. In addition, it becomes assumed that the rabbi will attract and retain members so that there will be sufficient income from dues and donations to support the operation.

This view of the need to keep and attract membership usually translates into many things for the rabbi. The religious leader must be popular. So the rabbi is strongly encouraged to avoid doing things that could lose members and their financial support. The rabbi is forced into a continual popularity contest not only by the concerns of the board, but also by self-interest.

A rabbi's compensation and benefits package is likely to be one of the largest and most conspicuous items in the temple budget. If membership falls off, and revenues decline, board members may eye that seemingly large number in a most critical way. While the board attends to the bottom line out of a sense of responsibility, the rabbi may watch the bottom line out of a need for survival and financial security.

Excessive concern for holding onto congregants for financial reasons will mean trying to retain all the congregants, no matter how superficial their commitment to the institution or how unceasing their demands. The rabbi may be forced to focus time and energy on those least committed, often least appreciative and least understanding of the role of a congregation and a religious movement. Such members may leave if the wrong thing is said, if someone else is given a desired honor, or if the rabbi does not cater to their whims. Rather than strengthening the core of

committed members, a rabbi must often devote an inordinate amount of attention to the periphery of the congregation. And yet, the board expects the rabbi to do what is necessary to keep them as members. If they leave, it is often viewed as the rabbi's failure.

The rabbi may get so caught up in the demands of congregational life that it becomes a continual whirlwind of exhausting activity trying to be successful in all situations and satisfy everyone's expectations. Moreover, the rabbi may be placed in a classic double bind situation. The board needs the rabbi to become sufficiently powerful to accomplish its expectations. However, should the rabbi actually become popular and powerful the lay leaders may become uncomfortable and start to compete with the rabbi for the very power the rabbi thought the board wanted him/her to garner. It is at this point that the rabbi's own needs and vision suffer and are often positioned at such a low priority that they can eventually become lost.

Expectations of Congregants

Perhaps the least definable group of expectations is that of the congregants. Because a congregation is comprised of diverse individuals from varied backgrounds, their expectations will reflect this diversity. It is important to appreciate that many of their expectations were formed by previous experiences. Congregants will often draw uncritically from memories of a previous rabbi to create a model by which the current rabbi will be judged. If their previous clergy person was a great sermonizer, then any "good" rabbi should give great sermons. If they remember their childhood religious leader as having the ability to instantly come up with a good story to fit any occasion, they believe that any decent rabbi should be a great storyteller.

The rabbi is expected to be a teacher, sermonizer, officiant, counselor, healer, advisor, visionary, ambassador, fundraiser and all around fix-it person. The rabbi must be a master teacher, but may not find eager students — either children or adults. The rabbi may end up pretty much alone, but be expected nonetheless to provide the intellectual and spiritual "juice" on which the congregation will run.

The rabbi is called into many families during their most chaotic periods to deal with the happy occasions of birth and marriage, and the grief and terror of divorce, disease and death. The rabbi comforts people, and helps them to struggle with the deep moral and spiritual questions that these radical events bring up. Some of a rabbi's deepest satisfaction may come from this aspect of the work. While this work can be gratifying, it

can be enormously stressful. Rabbis both love and hate the potentially addicting drama of being continually on call as a central player to deal with significant life events.

The rabbi goes from a funeral to a baby-naming, from visiting someone who is in a hospital sick with cancer to a meeting with a family about a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The rabbi is expected to be fully appropriate and empathic in each distinct situation and not carry the emotions from one event to the next. The rabbi who shows up for a Bat Mitzvah planning session is not expected to carry in the grief from a recent funeral. The rabbi presiding at a baby-naming is not expected to show depression over a congregant dying of cancer. The rabbi learns to "manage feelings" and thereby teaches that feelings are to be kept private and not shared by the larger community.

The rabbi does not move in a communal matrix, but rather travels from island to island and bears this burden alone. The rabbi cannot focus the healing energies of the community because congregations don't actually function as communities. The members usually don't live in proximity to one another or work together. Many of them don't even socialize together. Rather than serving a function *within* a community, the rabbi begins to function as a paid substitute *for* community. When a family needs sympathy, they can't go to their neighbors (who may not even be friends) or to their extended families (who probably live far away). So they call the rabbi to represent the extended family.

The congregation can be a difficult taskmaster with its variety of demands. While most rabbis retain a deep love for their work and a caring for their congregants, they are frequently running just a bit scared as they try to meet the unending demands. The rabbi might begin to feel like a solitary vending machine dispensing comfort, spirituality, and wisdom, as desired by the customer/congregant. The basic goal becomes keeping the congregants happy rather than moving the community to embrace concepts important to Judaism such as holiness, covenants and duty.

As the rabbi reaches back to the beginning, the sense of optimism is recalled, the belief that community could be built, that spirit could be raised, that the tradition could be imbued with richness. The rabbi who ran into the conflicting expectations of the board and the congregants may suffer a frustrated or failed vision.

The loneliness that descends on the clergy is reinforced in a number of ways. The rabbi has few peer relationships to sustain inspiration or in which to share confidences. The rabbi needs to respect the confidentiality of congregants. Unlike a psychotherapist who usually does not interact with patients socially, the rabbi must retain potentially disturb-

ing truths about individuals. Also, unlike therapists who can confront their dysfunctional clients and refer them to another professional if the chemistry is not working, a clergy person knows that a particular difficult congregant may always remain a part of the congregation and be a constant source of irritation. In addition, private information about the rabbi or the family is fair game for gossip. This of course makes it difficult for the rabbi to cultivate trusting friendships with congregants, or with anyone who might associate with a congregant. Rabbis are generally advised against having confidential relationships with congregants or using congregants as accountants or for any business purpose. For many rabbis, it is only other clergy (Jewish and non-Jewish) and non-members that they feel comfortable enough with to not worry about what they say or how they act.

So the rabbi's original expectations of creating a supportive community, the sense of mission regarding the Jewish people and the covenant with God, all begin to be compromised. The idea of spirituality seems less and less relevant to the everyday demands of the job. Study becomes purely instrumental, a quick preparation for the next class to be taught, and the idea of study for its own sake becomes an unattainable luxury. The dreams begin to fade, the passion begins to diminish.

Where Do We Go from Here? The Larger Context

The starting point for this discussion was the way our rabbis are suffering and burning out, partially due to conflicting expectations. We believe that it is crucial to look clearly at the disabling situation in which our clergy work in order to gain an understanding of the malaise affecting our indispensable transmitters of Judaism.

The rabbis of yesteryear, at whom we may look with nostalgia, inhabited a world in which religion was not a matter of choice. As Rabbi Harold Schulweis put it; "My grandfather went to synagogue because he was Jewish. His grandchildren go to synagogue to become Jewish." The rabbis of today cannot rely on the "Jewishness" of their congregants. As Peter Berger puts it in *The Sacred Canopy*:

[Religions] can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client populations. Allegiance is voluntary and thus, by definition, less than certain. As a result, the religious tradition, which previously could be authoritatively imposed, now has to be *marketed*. It must be 'sold' to a clientele that is no longer constrained to buy. In this [situation] the religious institutions become marketing agencies and the religious traditions

become consumer commodities. . . . A good deal of religious activity in this situation comes to be dominated by the logic of market economics.

As Jewish professionals begin to realize the need to market the tradition to what had previously been a captive or eager audience, they begin to realize that the product is not that easy to sell. People appreciate the tradition in an abstract way, and feel a sentimental obligation to it. Nevertheless, many people, even affiliated Jews, are not integrating the tradition deeply into their lives. Congregants do not seem hungry for Jewish knowledge or living a Jewish lifestyle. In this situation, the rabbi takes on the ultimate burden, not only becoming the CEO and the chief salesperson, but also the main product as well. The rabbi begins to sell personal warmth, wisdom, presence and attentiveness. Thus the rabbi must be everywhere all the time to keep the institution going. In a sense, the rabbi becomes the community, responsible for everyone and responsible to everyone. Unless the rabbis, the lay leadership and the movements can move out of this rut, rabbi burnout will continue along with the further crippling of Judaism.

Where Do We Go from Here? Four Suggestions

Recognizing the presence and magnitude of the problem is one essential step towards resolving it. While there are rabbis who have made peace with and found healthy ways to deal with the many issues presented here, we assert that the problem is real and it will not solve itself. It is necessary to take a broader view and to consider a variety of remedies.

1. *Dialogues with rabbis, lay leadership, and other Jewish professionals.* Rabbis need to be willing to come down from their *bimahs*, take off their robes, and risk sharing their feelings in open dialogues with their lay communities and with each other. It would be important to bring in other Jewish professionals who work with rabbis, especially cantors, educators and administrators who can lend their insights into what is happening to our clergy and other Jewish professionals. All need to first listen to the pain, anger, frustration and dreams of one another before there is the ability to fully understand the other's expectations.
2. *Creation of a congregational Covenant Committee as a way to help generate a continuity of vision.* A Covenant Committee is intended to develop and safeguard an individual synagogue's stated mission. The

committee's task is to become a path of continuity that helps connect the past to the future by giving active voice to the congregation's mission statement. While the Covenant Committee formed by a previous board would not overrule the current board, it would assist to balance a board's contemporary focus by contextualizing the present with their perspective of the past and a vision for the future.

3. *Rabbinic associations must take a leadership role by asserting and supporting models which allow rabbis to practice Jewish values of family, study, prayer and acts of religious action.* Rabbis need the support of their rabbinic associations to help receive the backing of boards and the congregations to live their lives in harmony with Jewish values. Rabbinic organizations must speak loudly of the rabbis need to live a life of commitment to the family, study, prayer and actions in the community. As long as there is virtual silence in the face of the pressure being placed on our clergy to adopt secular standards of success, values of family and study will be viewed as not significant to advancing one's career. This silence results in rabbis being diminished and the Jewish future undermined.
4. *Rabbinic organizations must take leadership roles and support alternative models of congregational services.* Rabbinic seminaries, the rabbinic community and the placement systems appear to support the notion that the bigger a congregation a rabbi has, the more successful that rabbi has become. This bias continues as rabbis from the bigger pulpits are usually appointed to positions of power within rabbinic organizations. Moreover, if an individual decides to remain in a smaller pulpit for a long time, that is often viewed as being stuck. The rabbi is perceived as unable to move up the "corporate ladder" of congregation success rather than congratulated for having found a congregation which has become home. Rabbis are diminished and some creative and needed leaders feel alienated when it is blindly asserted that bigger must be better. Large congregations are needed for a variety of reasons, but too often their attainment has been given a disproportionately high prominence by the institutions that train and support the rabbis.

Those who choose to be chaplains, serve on college campuses, or serve as rabbis in other than the valued, successful, typical congregational format need to be honored as important and indispensable teachers of Israel and Torah.

Many rabbis place family as a high priority and find that a full-time congregation position may be in conflict with that goal. Movements and congregation organizations should view part-time and shared-rabbinate as creative and viable alternatives. There needs to

be a rethinking of the common belief that two or more rabbis cannot successfully divide and share responsibilities and work out the other challenges to effectively serve a congregation.

Conclusion

The growing despair among rabbis is a pressing problem for the entire Jewish community. The suggestions advanced in this article can be helpful if they are addressed openly to rabbis, lay leaders, rabbinic training institutions and others. Ultimately, the issues will not be raised if the pain and despair are kept hidden. We hope that this article will inspire all to share spiritual pain and spiritual aspirations more publicly. Such a sharing can inspire deep and empowering dialogue. Such dialogues can transform our community.

Charting the Territory of Nonprofit Boards

Richard P. Chait and Barbara E. Taylor

The board of trustees of a nonprofit organization has one responsibility: to keep the organization on a straight course for the long-term good of the whole. In other words, trustees exist to govern the organization — to monitor quality and to see to it that the organization fulfills its mission.

But many trustee boards do not govern. They get bogged down in operating details, matters that are best left to staff, while ignoring the very issues that could determine the enterprise's success or failure. The following two examples illustrate:

- The president of Perkins University (all names in the examples used in this article are fictitious) asked a trustee committee to advise him on a site for a sculpture donated by a professor of art. A week before the meeting of the board's physical-plant committee, the university maintenance crew put the statue on the proposed site and photographed it. The committee, whose members included top executives from major companies, carefully studied the pictures and concluded that the location was too prominent for such a "lascivious" work of art. So ultimately the university returned the statue to the artist along with the photographs. Later the artist informed the president that the committee had placed the sculpture upside down!