

movement. We need to examine texts as living documents and determine their meaning and application in today's world. As chancellor, you have the ability to inspire the passion and struggle that come with Jewish learning. If we want Conservative Judaism to see a vibrant future, we must teach people how to look into the texts of our faith with an open heart and a critical eye. This can happen by bringing intensive learning into mainstream environments such as Ramah camps, USY conventions, day schools, and synagogue events.

As the prophet Isaiah teaches, "When all your children are taught of the Lord, great will be the peace of your children" (54:13). In this verse, the second mentioning of the word *banayich* (your children) is typically interpreted as *bonayich* (your builders), as we read before the *Aleinu* each Shabbat. Those who study and engage with Torah are the builders, the ones who will bring peace to the world.

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Walking the Walk

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WHAT SHOULD the motto of Conservative Judaism reflect today? What would express the aspirations, needs, and best impulses of 21st-century American Jews? It was the genius of the movement in the mid-20th century to capture the mood of a generation past the first shock of immigration but not yet totally at home in America. It often made few demands but fed individuals and families a dose of familiar and comforting traditionalism; it was moderation with authenticity.

But a movement can't succeed without those who are "*meshuga ladavar*," wholly committed. And it may be impossible to nurture a substantial leadership cadre that is passionate about moderation. Or, perhaps, the issue isn't the lack of passion about being in the middle, but rather a lack of clarity about the ideological positions of Masorti Judaism and a hesitation by leadership to make demands for fear of losing members.

Can a movement have one of its leaders stand up at a national convention and demand that the claim and commitment to being a halakhic movement be abandoned while others posit fealty to it? The time has passed when both "some of us think that X is correct and some of us don't" can be kosher. Today the movement must take a position and retain its committed core even if it loses some members. The Orthodox movement can teach the rest of U. S. Jewish leadership that having a smaller membership with strong convictions and maximum education generates more creative energy than the retention of large numbers of nominally committed, non-practicing adherents.

Making demands, having clearly demarcated boundaries, demanding sacrifices from

members, and investing heavily in human capital nurtures fervor. Excitement is generated, and less committed followers — "free riders" — are attracted to the group. But when the free riders begin to predominate, the committed core loses heart, and excitement dissipates. This may have happened gradually to the Conservative movement over the last quarter of the 20th century.

Laissez-faire attitudes, lack of clear group norms and expectations, minimal demands, and unclear boundaries do not make compelling associations. The mitzvah system has always been predicated on strong, intense, frequent interactions of Jews nurturing the organic solidarity so well described nearly a century ago by Emile Durkheim in his important work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

To be compelling to 21st-century Jews, the Conservative/Masorti movement must have leaders who publicly and privately spell out its principles, group norms, and expectations of members whether they are at home, work, or in the synagogue or broader community. A movement that makes demands may lose some individuals along the way — or encourage them to explore other streams. This may sadden some, but it is better to lose them because of demands than because of boredom or lack of meaning. Acceptance of the legitimacy of a pluralistic Jewish community (*arevut* or *ahavat Yisrael*) together with devotion to a clearly spelled out *Derekh Masorti* (Conservative path or way) — one enunciated with confidence and without fear — is the way to a rejuvenated movement. The new motto might well be "*Derekh Masorti*: We talk the talk and walk the walk."

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