

The Courage to be Conservative

Aaron Brusso

Conservative Judaism has the courage to articulate competing truths without blushing before those who question our consistency. And that is why I could not be anything other than a Conservative Jew. I have a deep appreciation for serious Reform and Orthodox Jews. And though I would count myself as one of them when it comes to larger questions of my place amongst humanity, through a narrower lens I see myself as Conservative.

We have the audacity to unapologetically study the human origins of our texts and still expect that God's voice commands us through them. We appreciate how brilliantly our midrashic tradition infused Judaism with creative change so that we would not come to worship a previous generation's truth. And we have the courage to realize that to hand this aggadic Judaism over to the next generation the same way we found it is almost as bad as not handing it over at all. Change is not only about sociological compromise; it is also about moral imperative. (more on www.shma.com)

Soulful Self-Reflection

Sharon Brous

... In an age of disease, hunger, poverty, and violence, we have lost the luxury of a safe and self-absorbed communal agenda. We have neither the time nor the justification to focus attention and resources on the sustenance of institutions for their own sake. Narrow-minded concern with strategies of self-preservation fundamentally misses the point. Yet few have the courage to shift the paradigm away from building *Conservative* institutions, fortifying *Conservative* organizational structures, raising *Conservative* children.

The future of Conservative Judaism will depend on our ability to embody an ethic of passionate, committed involvement in the world that flows naturally from, and likewise directly informs, humble and courageous encounter with the Jewish tradition. We need to articulate the fundamental connection between a halakhic, Torah-centered life on one hand and a serious concern for and engagement in the world on the other. We need to remember how to dance, how to daven with real intention, how to study text with passion and purpose. If the movement is true to its deepest aspirations, allowing the creative tension between our tradition and modernity to fuel

our religious existence, then it will undoubtedly inspire a new generation to become both actively committed Jews and agents of change on the world stage. (to read the full essay, visit www.shma.com)

Ethically Driven Halakhah

Judith Hauptman

The next chancellor of JTS will succeed in reversing the downward trend of the Conservative movement only if he or she alters the status quo. As compelling as the message of Conservative Judaism was 50 years ago, that message fails to attract adherents today.

People are drawn to places of action. At the moment, the "hot" places are to the right and left of the Conservative movement. If we want to continue to offer people a Conservative option, then we need to develop zeal among Conservative Jews for the Judaism they practice. We need passion alongside Conservative piety. What can we do?

1. Re-articulate the Main Message
2. Educate Conservative Rabbis
3. Offer Free High Holy Days Services to the Disenfranchised
4. Take Cognizance of the Non-Jews among Us

(to read the essay, which fully examines each of these points, visit www.shma.com)

Moving Beyond the Movement

Shoshana Boyd Gelfand

The time has come for the institutions of the Jewish community to transcend denominational boundaries. Choose the prefix you prefer: post-denominationalism, trans-denominationalism, non-denominationalism. Whatever you call it, the trend is growing, and all of the current denominations will soon need to struggle with the reality of a growing population that finds denominational categories irrelevant. Like the proverbial canary in the mine, the future of the Conservative movement may prove to be the test case for all non-fundamentalist movements in the Jewish world; for it seems that the Conservative movement may be the first place where the future of Jewish denominationalism (or rather, its demise) will play out. If so, then the fate of the Conservative movement may depend on its ability to morph into something other than a movement. (more on www.shma.com)

Read and engage the full vision statements begun on this page as well as pieces by:
 Martin S. Cohen
 Daniel Greyber
 Elie Spitz
 Jonathan Lopatin
 Aaron Weininger
 David Wolpe
 and others

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