

Saul Kaiserman is a

Jewish Education'

City.

The classroom can become a place where students and teachers together explore the intersections between Judaism (as embodied in the norms of the synagogue) and the daily lives of the individuals who form its community. In such programs, teachers must be both role models who embody the ideals of the synagogue and individuals open to rethinking those ideals in light of the students' challenges. They must ensure that the classroom allows for risktaking and experimenting with new ideas. Through the shared and collective exploration

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of Jewish identity, the classroom itself can become an intentional community formed around a common sense of purpose: the growth of all of its members as Jewish individuals.

As the children become reflective practitioners of Jewish living, the responsibility of the congregational school toward parents grows. The school must empower parents in their role as the primary agents shaping the Jewish identities of their children by supporting their negotiation between the values of the synagogue, those of the home, and those of the other influences upon their children's lives. Teachers can bring parents into a conversation about the connections and disconnections, intentional or not, between the messages in Jewish texts, congregational life, individual family practices, and the world at large.

In many congregations, bar and bat mitzvah has become the point at which students end their participation in the school and the synagogue, and often, Jewish life. But what if the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony were reframed as an authentic demonstration of mastery of the skills that the synagogue expects of all its adult participants? Becoming bar or bat mitzvah would then require the young adult to share in the responsibility for the community's outcomes and practices — not only by attending congregational worship or participating in its social action activities, but also by having a voice in setting its agendas. Teens, no less than any other members of a congregation, should be able to serve on committees, be included in the hiring process for clergy, teachers, and other staff, and share in the leading of worship and organization of congregational activities.

The educational program should be a vibrant, integral component of synagogue life. On the one hand, it should push both the participants and the institution toward experimenting with new possibilities and new directions for Jewish living; on the other hand, it should enable participants to more fully embody the ideals of the synagogue in their daily lives. What is learned will influence how participants express their values not only within the congregation but in the totality of their lives. Education is a key vehicle by which the synagogue can become a change agent in the world.

Letter to the Editor: A Response about Charismatic Leadership

Dear Editor,

ALEPH is keenly aware of the dangers and limitations of charismatic leadership. We have worked to contain its potential for abuse from our inception. Our formal ethics policies create opportunities for addressing significant issues. Ombudspeople successfully address informal complaints on the spot at events. Listserves, event evaluations, and continuous monitoring have all served to almost entirely prevent this negative potential from materializing.

In addition, Reb Zalman's teachings about the "rebbe within" represent only the tip of the iceberg in our work to create a model of shared leadership, as our cadre of over one hundred spiritual, institutional, and congregational leaders attests. Importantly, Reb Zalman sees his role in Jewish Renewal as transitional, from an old paradigm to a still-emerging frame. There will be no successor.

A major learning grew from the episode that Dr. Chava Weissler discussed in the December issue of Sh'ma — the need to educate and empower our members so they do not find themselves beguiled by unsavory characters who could take advantage of them. ALEPH formed a committee that has already strengthened our relevant policies and procedures and developed a "Participants Bill of Rights." It is now compiling theological materials, drafting a curriculum for several workshops, and developing rituals for healing.

We remain firmly committed to the many sensitive souls who seek transcendent experiences. The safety and wellbeing of all will forever be in the forefront of our work. Debra Kolodny, Executive Director, ALEPH

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