

THE JEWISH SPHERE

Spread out across five continents, the Jewish world shares cultural, political, social, and traditional values and elements. Nevertheless, these elements are practiced and lived by in various forms and ways. The sessions at the Presidential Conference attempted to create a comprehensive look at the tomorrow of the Jewish world. We debated the issue of *Tikkun Olam*, looked into Jewish life on college campuses, examined the place of women in Judaism, discussed the future of Jewish leadership, and viewed the development of Jewish societies outside Israel and the US.

Changing of the Guards: The Tomorrow of Jewish Leadership

The challenges faced by the Jewish People in the Diaspora require leadership of the highest caliber. These challenges include cracks in identity and identification, assimilation, individualistic tendencies, and "multiple identities," the decrease in donations towards the maintenance of community infrastructures, Jewish education, and more. What can be done to ensure that the finest of the Jewish people's sons and daughters take on leadership roles?

Shmuel Rosner¹ introduced the panel by saying that the new leaders of the Jewish world will need to help their communities adapt to changing realities and challenges that lie before them in the future. He asked the panelists to recommend what qualities such a leader will need in order to succeed.

Johanna Arbib Perugia² pointed out that if a need for such a discussion exists, we, the Jewish nation, are "not one hundred percent sure and confident about the Jewish future." She addressed the term Jewish leadership and differentiated from the general concept of leadership saying that "without a deep understanding of who we are and what we stand for as a people, no Jewish leader can provide real direction," she said. She added that being a Jewish leader means "acting in accordance with moral values placing them at the heart of a vision of a better [Jewish] future."

Eliana Rudee³ supported Arbib Perugia's idea and identified two key issues facing Jewish leadership today: Jews in leading positions who are not Jewish leaders (e.g. Mark Zuckerberg) and leaders are torn between wanting

to be as objective as possible, but are fearful of publicly criticizing Israel for its political actions. She added that she would like to see Jews 'provoked' into leadership roles and applauded Jewish organizations for providing funding to students to create their own initiatives and become leaders.

According to **Malcolm Hoenlein**⁴ the challenges of today are not new; we must look to history in order to know how to respond today. "The greatest dangers to the Jewish people are ignorance, apathy and indifference; those are the things we cannot overcome. The greatest asset of the Jewish people is unity." He added that a leader must have the conviction and the courage to act upon it, as well as passion (which is impossible to teach).

Rabbi Elie Kaunfer⁵ stressed the need for Jewish organizations to have a clearly defined mission. "The crisis is always framed as how will we find the next generation of leaders to lead these institutions and I think the real question would be which of these institutions are inspiring some of the mission driven passion that you would want to find in the next generation of leaders." He also lamented the fact that the older generation of leaders don't mingle with and mentor younger leaders as much as they should, leading to an unnecessary dichotomy between generations.

Jeremy Newmark⁶ discussed his experiences with anti-Jewish activities in UK universities, and said that leadership is serving as a role model. He believes that a successful leader must be able to work in a team, have vision, be knowledgeable of Jewish texts, believe in the people he is working for, have a sense of pace, be optimistic and not shun fundraising as dirty work. "Leadership is partly about role models," Newmark concluded, and "leaders must internalize the key imperative of leadership: nurturing other leaders."

The Campus as a Crossroads in the Life of a Young Jew

The panel explored the period of time young Jewish adults in the Diaspora spend on campus and how it is possible to create a Jewish anchor in a liberated student environment that is far from home. It also discussed how young students can deal with the de-legitimization of Israel on campus.

A major challenge on college campuses is the strong anti-Israel sentiment. According to **Natan Sharansky**⁷, it now appears that "there is less and less energy in the anti-Israel campaigns and more and more energy in the positive pro-Israel campaigns." An important part of fighting the negative

image is having students visit Israel; they inevitably return to their campuses with a strengthened Jewish identity and more confident in their ability to defend Israel.

Gidi Mark⁸ furthered the latter point and proudly reported that since its inception in 1999, 330,000 youth have visited Israel through Birthright. Mark stated that studies have shown how Birthright cuts intermarriage rates by 46% and emphasized that participants "feel much more engaged and closer with Israel than before, but very few if at all change their political views, which is good."

Rachel Greenspan⁹ shared her own experience of being a Jewish student and defined the challenges that she faced as "balancing sensitivity towards the individual while still remaining a community." "When [students] get to the huge university environment they want to feel part of a community again and that's where fostering a Jewish identity is really important. Instead of focusing so much on Israel on campus, maybe just talk about Judaism on campus," she said.

Prof. Mark Yudof¹⁰ agrees that the delegitimizing of Israel on campuses is certainly a problem, though says that "our strategy is not the book burning business, the censorship business: it is building up Jewish institutions, Jewish studies programs and Israeli studies programs and promoting vibrant free expression. In the long run we will prevail on these issues." He supports the idea of strengthening Jewish organizations: "Building up Jewish and Israeli institutions will help the Jewish people prevail."

Andi Gergely¹¹ compared this age of Jewish activism in Europe to the years that followed the Cold War, when Jewish traditions were oppressed. She feels that Europe is generally a good place to live for Jewish people, but sees room for improvement: "What we need is a platform to speak on." She believes that European Jewish youth need to be heard on international platforms more often than they are.

The Tomorrow of the 20%: Jewish Communities outside Israel and the United States

The panel discussed the 20% of world Jewry that lives outside of the US and Israel. Representatives of Jewish communities across the world described the nature and characteristics of their communities and the challenges they face.

Prof. Sergio Della Pergola¹² updated that percentage of world Jewry that lives outside of Israel and the US has declined to 17%. A majority of these communities, which are mainly in France, Canada and the UK, are shrinking.

Pierre Besnainou¹³ focused on the situation of French Jewry, stressing that the survival of Jewry is dependent on two pillars: the synagogue and Israel for religious and secular Jews alike. He commented that "without a strong Israel, there is no way for other Jewish communities to survive." He believes that if Jews living in the Diaspora would have the right to receive Israeli citizenship without making *aliyah*, it would be a way to keep them close to Israel.

From the far side of the world, **Philip Chester**¹⁴ claimed that the positive factors contributing to the success of the Australian community include its high Jewish day school participation, the active Zionist youth movements, and the fact that the high amount of Holocaust survivors produced great leaders. Future challenges facing the Australian Jewry are intermarriage, the dwindling number of Holocaust survivors, the cost of Jewish education, and the corrosive effect of anti-Israel activities in the media and on university campuses. He, as Besnainou, sees Israel as "the connector," and emphasizes the importance of it being at the forefront of the community.

Representing one of the larger communities, Russian speaking Jewry, **Alexander Levin**¹⁵ points out that a large portion of world Jewry originates in Russian speaking countries and this gives them a unique ability to unify Diaspora Jewry and become a leading force in the Jewish world. He labeled the challenges of the community as assimilation, a lack of Jewish knowledge and a lack of communal and philanthropic endeavors. He believes that the Jewish world also needs to let Russian Jews integrate more, since there is still a good deal of cynicism and lack of inclusion.

Prof. Judit Bokser Liwerant¹⁶ feels that for Latin American Jewish life, the 21st Century poses a paradox of shrinking communities and expanded and revitalized Jewish life. She said that "we need to look at ourselves as a global community" indicating that a wide public dialogue of all the Jews is needed. She discussed the high rates of emigration from Latin America due to economic reasons and said that those immigrants are fulfilling their potential elsewhere.

Alan Hoffman¹⁷ focused on Israel as the common thread and talked of two axes that relate to the 20%—the question of how much Jews feel *at home* in their countries today and the role of Israel as a *homeland* in the consciousness

of these Jewish communities. He called Israel the "civil religion" of these communities and commented that, "the connection with Israel has been at the heart of these communities."

Judaism and Women's Equality

Jewish women have already taken on leading roles both in Israel and in the Diaspora, yet there is a long way to go in our efforts to achieve full equality. The obstacles are institutional, social and cultural. The questions remains - what is the relationship between Judaism and the status of women?

Prof. Menahem Ben Sasson¹⁸ pointed out that "there was no period in Judaism in which people agreed on one way of life." Therefore each community will have to find their own way to express the equality of its members and one cannot think of a Jewish future where 50% of its people are on the outside.

Nancy Kaufman¹⁹ said that the National Council of Jewish Women is "joining the struggle against gender segregation and advocating zero tolerance for those who attempt to separate women from men in the public sphere where discrimination has raised its ugly head." According to Kaufman, awareness must also be raised as to how the Jewish textual tradition has marginalized women, who have been excluded from the interpretive process in all streams of Judaism.

Rabbi Rick Jacobs²⁰ brought attention to the discrepancy between Judaism's ideal of equality, as embodied in the phrase *Tzelem Elohim*, and the daily reality. Education for girls is not enough. Women must take leadership roles in every area. He emphasized that Israel must allow all forms of Judaism to flourish and not harm natural development. The goal is not for women to take on male roles; Jacobs stressed, but rather add a different voice to Judaism.

On the other end of the Jewish spectrum, bringing the ultra-orthodox perspective, **Adina Bar Shalom**²¹ said that studying Torah remains the highest possible value and *Haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) women freely choose to support their husbands' full time study. She pointed out that *Haredi* women have been successful in fixing problems they see in their community, and that they particularly step-up when action is necessary for the sake of religion, for example when dealing with men who refuse to grant religious divorces.

Rabbi Mordechai Neugroschel²² echoing the ultra-Orthodox take on the matter, differentiated between custom and *Halakha* (Jewish law): the former may change with time while the latter is immutable. While in the past it had been the custom not to educate girls, this is not in *Halakha* and was therefore changed. However, Neugroschel cautions, "A reformed Torah is like a dry rain because one of the principles of our faith is that the Torah will not be replaced."

Prof. Ruth Gavison²³ concluded that there are three levels of discussion concerning equality for Jewish women, which are distinct but not exclusive: religious, social, and legal. She argued that there is no legal system – even one which is divine – that does not change. The question is how to change law without offending the sense of tradition; and in the State of Israel, laws must be created to protect the rights of a pluralistic society. But while laws can help social change they cannot bring it about and if we wish to remain a united group we must be sensitive to all forms of Judaism, not only the liberal ones, Gavison concluded.

Other than the status of women in Judaism, there are additional issues concerning the Jewish tradition and heritage today, many of them revolving around the Chief Rabbinate in Israel. When asked about such issues during "Talk of the Day" with **Ilana Dayan**²⁴, **Rabbi David Stav**²⁵ expressed his determination to confront real issues, such as the hardships immigrants undergo in order to prove their Judaism and the alienation secular people feel from religious organizations. To him that "these issues have been raised as topics, is already a victory."

'Tikkun Olam': A Passing Trend or a New Judaism?

Many young Jews today seek to shape their Jewish identities according to contemporary values and therefore choose to take part in initiatives that are designed to make the world a better place. Is this just a part of a larger global phenomenon or a new expression of Judaism?

Gary Rosenblatt²⁶ asked what does the term *Tikkun Olam* mean: for many, it is synonymous with being communally vocal and involvement in environmental and universal projects. However, there are those who say that liberal Jews have distorted its meaning for their own agendas and that Tikkun Olam is about saving mankind and is no longer about God.

Dyonna Ginsburg²⁷ explained how she was born into a free and privileged Jewish society as opposed to her grandparents' generation. With a radically new world there are radical new responsibilities, including the responsibility of privileged Jewish communities to other Jewish minorities and the responsibility of Jews to the world at large. She claimed that while it is astounding how *Tikkun Olam* has entered the general discourse, we still have a long way to go in translating it into concrete action.

Jude Williams²⁸ opined that *Tikkun Olam* is neither a passing trend, nor a new Judaism. She feels that we must take our deep Jewish tradition and reach out beyond our community and our own people to more global issues. If the idea is not based on Judaism's full narrative, it runs the risk of becoming a shallow, superficial act.

Michael Siegal²⁹ quoted Ecclesiastes "there is nothing new under the sun" and explained how, as Jews, we have always been told of liberties and social justice. While in his generation, young Jews marched for Soviet Jewry, in today's generation, young people march for social justice.

He said that the term "never again" does not belong to the Jewish people and that, as Jews, we have to understand that it has ramifications for the whole world.

Alma Zohar³⁰ spoke about the Israeli view of *Tikkun Olam*, suggesting it is not so popular as in the Jewish communities abroad because Israelis have an immense fear of strangers. This fear is caused by the Jewish history of exile and persecution as well as the current political threats that the country is facing. She admitted though that change is gradually occurring, influenced by the experiences of post-army Israeli backpackers traveling the world and volunteering. This leads them to understand that can contribute to changing the world.

Gal Lousky³¹ shared her personal experiences that were the motivation for the establishment of the Israeli Flying Aid (IFA) which operates in hostile countries where local regimes prevent entry to formal international humanitarian organizations, and countries with no diplomatic relations with Israel. Lousky concluded by saying that it is your choice whether you build walls or you build bridges.

1 Mr. Shmuel Rosner (Israel) is the Political Editor of *The Jewish Journal* and a columnist of the *Ma'ariv* daily newspaper and *The International Herald Tribune*. He is the editor and writer of the blog, *Rosner's Domain* as well as non-fiction editor for *Kinneret-Zmora-Bitan-Dvir* Publishing House.

2 Ms. Johanna Arbib Perugia (Italy) is the Chairperson of the Keren Hayesod-UJA World Board of Trustees. She is a Senior Advisor to a London-based international real estate fund, Patron Capital Ltd., as well as Head of External Relations for AFI, an international real estate group.

3 Ms. Eliana (Ellie) Rudee (USA) is currently participating in the Career Israel program and interning at the Institute for Terrorism Research and Response (ITRR) in Jerusalem.

4 Mr. Malcolm Hoenlein (USA) is the Executive Vice Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the coordinating body on international and national concerns for 52 national Jewish organizations.

5 Rabbi Elie Kaunfer (USA) is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of *Mechon Hadar*, an immersive Jewish educational institution in New York City.

6 Mr. Jeremy Newmark (UK) is the Chief Executive of the Jewish Leadership Council.

7 Mr. Natan Sharansky (Israel) is the Chairman of the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel.

8 Mr. Gidi Mark (Israel) is the CEO of *Taglit* Birthright Israel. He was the first employee of Birthright Israel and served as the COO of the project's planning stage and as International Director of Marketing and Community Relations.

9 Ms. Rachel Greenspan (USA) is a participant in the Israel Government Fellows and a research assistant at the Shalom Hartman Institute.

10 Prof. Mark Yudof (USA) is the President of the University of California. Previously, he served as Chancellor of the University of Texas System and as President of the University of Minnesota.

11 Ms. Andi Gergely (Hungary) is the Chairperson of the European Union of Jewish Students, an umbrella organization for 34 national Jewish student unions in Europe and the FSU.

12 Prof. Sergio Della Pergola (Israel) is the Incumbent of the Shlomo Argov Chair in Israel-Diaspora Relations and a Professor at the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

13 Mr. Pierre Besnainou (France) is the Co-Chair of the Anti-Semitism Taskforce Committee of the Jewish Agency for Israel and a member of their Board of Governors. He is the former President of the European Jewish Congress and the Founder of AMI, the French *aliyah* organization.

14 Adv. Philip Chester (Australia) is the President of the Zionist Federation of Australia.

- 15 Mr. Alexander Levin (Ukraine/USA) is the founding president of the World Forum of Russian Jewry and serves as President of Kiev's Jewish religious community and as President of Keren Hayesod in Ukraine. He is one of founders of the largest commercial real-estate group in Kiev, KDD Group.
- 16 Prof. Judit Bokser Liwerant (Mexico) is Professor of Political Science at the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM) and a Distinguished Visiting Professor at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
- 17 Mr. Alan Hoffmann (Israel) is the Director-General and CEO of the Jewish Agency as well as the Chief Executive of the Jewish Agency worldwide. Previously, he was Director General of the Education Department of the Jewish Agency.
- 18 Prof. Menahem Ben Sasson (Israel) is the President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In the past, Ben Sasson served as the Director of the Ben-Zvi Institute, Rector of the University, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and was a Member of Knesset for the *Kadima* Party.
- 19 Ms. Nancy Kaufman (USA) is the CEO of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW).
- 20 Rabbi Richard 'Rick' Jacobs (USA) is the President of the Union for Reform Judaism.
- 21 Mrs. Adina Bar Shalom (Israel) is the Founder, CEO and Chair of the Board of the Directors of the *Haredi* College of Jerusalem.
- 22 Rabbi Mordechai Neugroschel (Israel) is one of heads of the *M'orot HaTorah* Yeshiva in *Telz-Stone* outside Jerusalem.
- 23 Prof. Ruth Gavison (Israel) is the founding President of *Metzilah* – a Center for Zionist, Jewish, Liberal and Humanist Thought and the Haim H. Cohn Professor emerita of Human Rights Law at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She was one of the founders of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) and served as both its Chairperson and President.
- 24 Ms. Ilana Dayan (Israel) is the host of the investigative journalism series, *Uvda* (Fact), on Channel Two Israel. She is also a lecturer on freedom of speech at Tel Aviv University.
- 25 Rabbi David Stav (Israel) is the Chief Rabbi of the City of Shoham and Chairman of the *Tzohar* organization.
- 26 Mr. Gary Rosenblatt (USA) is the Editor and Publisher of *The Jewish Week of New York*.
- 27 Ms. Dyonna Ginsburg (Israel) is the Director of Jewish Service Learning at the Jewish Agency for Israel. She served as the Executive Director of *Bema'aglei Tzedek*, and was one of the founders of *Siach*.
- 28 Ms. Jude Williams (UK) is the Chief Executive of *Tzedek*, a NGO that inspires and empowers the British Jewish community to fight global poverty and to better the lives of those less fortunate regardless of race or religion.
- 29 Mr. Michael Siegal is the Chair of the Board of Trustees of The Jewish Federations of North America and Chairman and CEO of Olympic Steel.
- 30 Ms. Alma Zohar (Israel) is a singer, songwriter and social activist.
- 31 Ms. Gal Lousky (Israel) is the CEO and Founder of Israeli Flying Aid (IFA), a non-profit, volunteer-based, non-governmental organization that delivers lifesaving aid to communities affected by natural disasters and human conflict.