

## **We Need to Embrace All Jews**

**One woman doesn't tell me when her grandchildren are born, because she "feels funny about their not being Jewish."**

Another feels angry and awkward, because her husband can't stand next to her and their son on the bimah as the child becomes Bar Mitzvah.

And another is sad, because after a long wait, and a lot of worry, her daughter is finally getting married to a good man, but she can't have the nachas of seeing the announcement in the shul bulletin.

ENOUGH!

These are our Jewish children, and our Jewish families! We may not like all of their choices, but we as a shul, and as a community, and as a people need to support them as Jews, and share in their simchas and their sorrows.

I have written many times in these pages about the mitzvah of Keruv - of bringing close to our people those who are Jewish but have drifted away, and of welcoming those who are not Jewish, but who are part of Jewish families.

I am convinced that now is the time to act. Our Conservative Movement is on the cusp of undertaking major philosophical change - not in "lowering" our standards, or our commitment to halacha - to Jewish law, but in widening our tent to encompass and embrace and strengthen Jews and Jewish families who do not fit the "ideal" mold - particularly the intermarried and families with non-Jewish family members. Our synagogue, Beth David, can take a step ahead of the rest of the movement, and establish facts on the grounds as a welcoming place which is rooted in Jewish tradition, and which strives to increase the Jewish knowledge and practice and engagement of all of our families.

We have established a Keruv committee, which seeks to develop programming and policies which will attract, welcome, and strengthen intermarried families within our Beth David community.

We have begun with a small group for thinking and planning - chaired by Cathy Levinson, David Kaplan as Ritual Committee chair, Susan Nehmen as president-elect, David Altman and myself. We will need to expand the committee considerably as we move along - please let any one of us know if you would like to get involved.

Our plan is to meet with small groups of members of our congregation to get feedback and ideas about how to accomplish our goal. We hope to begin these meetings in February/March.

By Pesach, we hope to have heard people's opinions and have a sense of where our congregation wants to go. We will consider issues of ritual, and membership categories, and young families, of interfaith marriages and in-laws and grandchildren. Although issues of Jewish law are ultimately decided in our congregation by the rabbi, we hope to study some of the halachic questions raised in considering how

best to encourage families where not everyone is Jewish. We will consider encouraging conversion, and non-conversion.

And although we recognize that this is an ongoing evolution, we hope to process what we have learned and make policy and programmatic recommendations to the Ritual committee and to the board of trustees shortly after Shavu'ot.

I am delighted and proud that we are moving forward in Keruv, in bringing Jews closer to our tradition, and in being willing to change in order to be a better and more effective synagogue for our families. I am especially pleased that we are moving forward from a position of strength - because this is the right thing to do, because these are our children and our families, because we believe that living a Jewish life is meaningful and worthwhile. Our goal is to strengthen our families and the Jewish People.

As always, I welcome your thoughts.

Eliezer Havivi  
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