



What's My Line?

Rabbi's Report
Temple Aliyah Annual Meeting
Rabbi Carl M. Perkins
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As a rabbi, I am blessed, for I have multiple responsibilities. One day is never like the next. Life is never boring. It is a curious fact that although I'm often meeting or speaking with groups, both within the congregation and in the larger community, much of what I do is not particularly public. Periodically, then, it is helpful for folks to get a sense of what I do, so let me provide a sketch in this report.

Primarily, one might say, my job as rabbi of this congregation is to lead it in the right direction. But what does that mean?

Let me remind everyone that our congregation has two parallel leadership structures: we have a professional staff -- which, incidentally, is growing every year; and we have a lay leadership structure.

These two leadership structures work in tandem. We are partners. Each and every activity in our community is planned and organized and executed by a combination of professionals and lay leaders.

I just returned from the Fisher-Bernstein Lay/Professional Laboratory in New York created by Professor Carl Scheingold at Brandeis University. On two separate occasions, for three days, I was part of a group of ten lay leaders and ten professionals in the Jewish community, flown in from different parts of the country, who discussed ways to work better with our counterparts.

Why did Brandeis invest tens of thousands of dollars organizing this "laboratory" or "think tank"? The reason is that good relations between professionals and staff in Jewish institutions are absolutely critical. A Jewish communal institution such as a shul can only succeed when its lay and professional leadership work together; it *fails* when they don't. I am grateful not only that within our congregation

we have such a strong tradition of service to the community but that the *culture* of our lay/professional relations is cooperative rather than competitive. There's really no other way, if we hope to move forward, but not every congregation is so fortunate.

We are blessed with active, intelligent, devoted lay leaders who are committed to working together as a team with our professionals to accomplish our community's goals.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all of you and the many other men and women who serve our community as lay leaders. Believe it or not, many members of our congregation do not know how many hours officers, board members and other lay leaders contribute. Whether it is preparing or reviewing financial reports, negotiating staff contracts, troubleshooting our information technology system, planning and executing programs, accepting donations, assigning honors on Shabbat morning, participating in the nitty-gritty work of committees, or any of the other tasks that "need to be done;" -- whatever it is, whether in the public eye or not, lay leaders are vital to achieving our goals. Particularly in a congregation of our size, lay leaders are indispensable. Forgive me, but I hesitate to name names, for it is impossible to do so without leaving some people out – and everyone's contributions deserve acknowledgement. I will have a few words to say about the unique contributions of Beth Moskowitz, who is concluding four years of service as president of the congregation, but I'm going to share them at the installation that follows this program.

Our professional staff also deserves recognition, and here I will name names. It is my privilege to work with a skillful, creative, hard working and inspired group of professionals. **Cantor Gelman** (to whom we extend a hearty *mazel tov* on his upcoming marriage to Phyllis Cohen) continues to teach, to prepare many of our young people for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah and to lead us in prayer with devotion and commitment. **Dr. Beverly Schwartz-Katsh** ("Dr. **Bev**") has brought greater depth and sophistication and a renewed spirit to our religious school. **Terri Swartz Russell** remains a highly organized, thoroughly dependable, master programmer who brings a deep commitment to Jewish practice to her work. The newest member of our professional staff, **Alison Adler**, has worked hard, and with great caring, in her two capacities, as Youth Director and Ritual Assistant. We are also indebted to **Rabbi Leslie Gordon**, who teaches, conducts services and contributes enormously to our community in many ways, large and small.

Last, but not least, I wish to acknowledge **Jan Zidle**. Jan is our synagogue administrator and office manager. She is our Bar/Bat Mitzvah coordinator, our Program Director, the guardian of our calendar. She is also guide and counsel for many. Whether faced by crashing computers, impatient vendors, or other challenging circumstances, Jan retains her cool, and exercises leadership and good judgment from which all of us benefit.

I hope it is clear, then, that I lead as a member of a team. Together we seek to promote our congregation's mission. But what is that mission?

Temple Aliyah's Mission

Let me remind everyone that the Temple Aliyah of 5761 (2000-2001) is not the congregation that was founded in 1964, nor the synagogue by that name that will exist, God willing, thirty-six years from now. This is so, because a congregation is an open system and, as such, is dynamic: Our lay leadership is constantly changing. Our organizational, financial and computer systems are constantly evolving. Some of our members are moving away or resigning while new members are joining. And, though we may not realize it or believe it, all of us are constantly getting older!

On the other hand, there *is* continuity over time within every community. Traditions -- of governance, of practice and of culture -- are passed on. Even more essentially, there are the fundamental principles that define a congregation, which it inherits and, hopefully, passes on to the next generation. Consider the words of our mission statement:

Temple Aliyah is a Conservative, egalitarian congregation serving the Jewish community of Needham, Massachusetts and its surrounding environs. It is our purpose to provide opportunities for religious worship and assembly, lifelong study, affiliation and community building, social action and the enhancement and preservation of Jewish identity. We embrace a commitment to Torah and Jewish values in an ever-changing world.

As I think we can all hear from the words of that mission statement, our congregation is a *Beit Midrash* -- an institution that promotes Jewish education for young and old; a *Beit Tefillah* -- an organization

that promotes and facilitates worship; and a *Beit Knesset* -- a community center, an institution that creates and furthers community and helps its members fulfill community goals, such as *tzedakah* (financial support for the less fortunate), *gmilut hasadim* (acts of lovingkindness, such as visiting the sick and comforting mourners), and social action projects both within and beyond the congregation.

My charge as rabbi is to supervise our professional staff and to work with our lay leadership to keep us moving forward along each of these axes. To that end, I regularly meet with the president of the congregation to review on-going matters, discuss new initiatives, and monitor progress on long-range goals. (Generally, we meet weekly, though additional meetings and consultations are often necessary.) I meet periodically, on an as-needed basis, with our other officers and board members. I meet with Jan, in her capacity as Synagogue Administrator, at least twice a week. I regularly attend the monthly meetings of the Board of Trustees, the Executive Committee and the Ritual Committee, and generally attend the monthly meetings of the School Committee as well. In addition, I confer and consult with the chairs of other committees in our congregation and attend committee meetings on an as-needed basis. Approximately every two weeks, I conduct a meeting of the full professional staff. In addition, I periodically meet with individual members of our staff.

Let us look at each of the areas of congregational activity in turn.

Temple Aliyah as Beit Midrash

As a *Beit Midrash*, we are actually a very complex institution. We seek to educate children and adults of all ages, and in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, the centerpiece of our educational programming is our religious school. Our school is vital to our overall health as a congregation. We are committed to providing a high-quality primary Jewish education to all our children who are enrolled in our school and we have much to be proud of.

A great deal of my time is devoted to our school. I meet regularly with Dr. Bev to oversee the affairs of the school, develop our curriculum, enrich our classes and provide support to our teaching staff. In addition, several times a year I lead seminars for our faculty. Usually, as a follow up, I go into our religious school classrooms to answer questions or to lead discussions. I generally try to enter every classroom in our school (of which there are now 24) at least once a year.

Our school is thriving and currently serves **278** students in grades K through 7. This past year, we brought the kindergartners into our religious school and we doubled the frequency of our children's Shabbat services. (They are now offered weekly whenever school is in session.)

We've also put into place a special needs program to begin in the fall, the product of several years of hoping and planning. Up until now, unfortunately, we have not been able to serve children with special needs in our Religious School. Several of our families, over the past few years, have had to become members in other congregations in order to enroll their children in appropriate educational programs. More recently, such families have been able to remain members of our congregation but still have been forced to bring their children elsewhere for weekly instruction. We hope that our new special education program will begin to change that. There will still be limitations: we will not be able to serve every child with special needs. (Dr. Bev and our School Committee have prepared criteria for participation.) But this marks a very exciting advance in helping our congregation be ever more inclusive.

Our faculty is strong and growing stronger. Let me give you just a few examples: of the four kindergarten teachers at our local Solomon Schechter Day School, who among them have about sixty years of teaching experience, three of them teach here, and we're negotiating with the fourth. We also have on our staff one of the top Judaica librarians at Brandeis University, who has generously given of his time and expertise to improve our library. Finally, we've just hired one of the finest Jewish special needs teachers in the Boston area. Some of our teachers are native Israelis; some have fifteen years or more of experience; some are camp counselors. All are hard-working, enthusiastic and caring. We have much to be proud of.

As I mentioned above, our educational focus – and thus my responsibility -- extends beyond our Religious School. For example, our Sisterhood runs a monthly program for our pre-schoolers, known as Holiday School; as noted above, we run childrens' services for kids of all ages; and we are also the site for a branch of Hebrew College's Prozdor program for the graduates of our religious school – in which **37** of our students are currently enrolled, a number that we anticipate will grow to **60** by September.

Moreover, we have a substantial number of children of our members who are getting their Jewish educations at one or another of the local Jewish day schools. As of today, we have **77** children enrolled in Jewish day schools: 50 at the Solomon Schechter Day School, 23 at Rashi, 2 at the Jewish Community Day School and 2 at the New Jewish High School. And that number will increase next year.

It wasn't that long ago that our entire religious school was not much larger than that!

We have responsibilities toward all of our children. I meet periodically with Dr. Bev and with the rest of our professional staff to try to coordinate our many educational offerings, both within our school and beyond. We don't want any of our children, whether they're being Jewishly educated here or elsewhere, to feel that this isn't their spiritual home. Whenever we hold a grade-level educational program, for example, we try to involve our day school students as well as our religious school students. In other ways as well we try to be fully inclusive.

Our congregational educational energy, moreover, is not simply focused on kids. We try to maintain an educational program that provides multiple teaching opportunities, for adults as well as for children. This is a critical component of our mission. We do this because Judaism has always been a faith tradition that promotes – indeed, requires – study on the part of everyone. Fortunately, this is a congregation that lives up to that expectation.

Our Family Education program is constantly expanding. I meet regularly with Terri Swartz Russell to plan our programs and to best direct our energy in this area. Because we receive substantial funding from CJP to support family education, we are required each year to review and document our efforts, and to submit an application to renew our grant. (The same is true of our CJP-sponsored "Yesod" grant that helps fund our Youth Director's salary.) I participate in the grant application and program review process.

Our adult educational offerings are also increasing, year by year. I work with our adult education committee to develop each year's programming and to identify and engage prospective scholars in residence.

This past year, in addition to offering our annual Shabbaton and a new series of Sunday morning programs, we dramatically increased the

number of weekly adult education courses. These included (1) our second Me'ah class, consisting of about 15 members of our congregation and about 10 members of Temple Beth Shalom. (This class met at Temple Beth Shalom in 2000-2001, and will meet at Aliyah during the coming year. As sponsoring Rabbis, neither Rabbi Sonsino nor I teach in our congregations' Me'ah class, but we consider it a critical responsibility to meet with the class periodically. In addition to hosting the opening and closing sessions of the class, Rabbi Sonsino and I met once during the year with the class together. In addition, I met with the Temple Aliyah Me'ah class participants two additional times during the year.)

Our second offering was our Tze'adim classes for Me'ah graduates, taught by Yohanan Petrovsky. I taught the last two sessions of the spring course in Pirkei Avot, and hope to remain involved as well next year.

Our third offering was to have been an Introduction to Judaism course taught by Rabbi Leslie Gordon. The core constituency for this course was to have been a group of men and women pursuing their adult Bar or Bat Mitzvahs. Unfortunately, we had to cancel this class because of insufficient enrollment. It is possible that, because of the large number of those who've become adult Bar or Bat Mitzvah in the last several years (13 in the past three years) we should wait another year before offering this program again.

Our fourth offering was Rabbi Gordon's weekly parashah class, which continues to attract about a dozen participants.

In addition to my role supervising, coordinating and promoting our educational programming, I also, of course, teach within our congregation, in a variety of contexts. One of these is my regular Tuesday evening class, which was our fifth weekly adult education offering this year. In the fall, I offered a course in Jewish Theology, which attracted over thirty students. In the spring we studied the stories of Samuel I. Because we have many more stories to study, we hope to continue this course in the fall.

There are many opportunities to teach within our congregation, but to me the most important is in our sanctuary on Shabbat morning. That is the time and that is the place when every Jew is expected to study, and therefore that is when and where we study. Each week we read from the Torah and each week we have the opportunity to reflect upon

it. I put a great deal of my energy into preparing a sermon, dvar torah, or discussion.

An amusing story. One Shabbat I led a discussion that involved a psycho-drama. Because of the novelty of the form, it was different, it was fun, it was engaging. Because of the challenges of the medium, it took a bit more than the usual amount of preparation. After services, someone came up to me and asked, "Did you just think that up on the spot?"

I liked that question, because it suggested that, despite the fact that I had easily spent between ten and twelve hours preparing for that particular discussion, it didn't seem like I had!

The fact is, teaching in the congregation on Shabbat morning requires a great deal of preparation. It requires reviewing the parashah, selecting a topic to discuss, thinking through how it should be conducted, ... and all that takes time.

I do much teaching in the context of our family education programs. I am the primary teacher for our sixth grade pre-Bar/Bat Mitzvah programs; I teach a four-part course in text study to our fourth grade parents (entitled, "Beginning with Genesis"); and I conduct a monthly seminar for the parents of our Holiday School students. Annually, I conduct the Share a Shabbat preparation session, which instructs participants how to celebrate Friday evenings in their homes. In addition, I led the pre-High Holiday program and taught during our Torah Day program last fall. Next year, I hope again to teach as part of our Pre-Pesach Preparation Program.

I occasionally teach in other contexts in our congregation as well. This year, I led a program on Kashrut for the Sisterhood; last year, I conducted a Ritual Committee program instructing people how to serve as gabbaim in our congregation; and I delivered divrei torah on various occasions and at various meetings. Next week, I will again be the scholar in residence for our annual congregational retreat (as I was in 1998 and 1999).

Temple Aliyah as Beit Tefillah

Let's look at our congregation as a synagogue, a *Beit Tefillah*. What do we do in this capacity, and what do I do in my capacity as religious leader of the congregation?

First, of course, we hold services: daily, Shabbat, festivals, High Holy Days. This is the second year that we've offered not only weekday evening minyans, but a Monday morning minyan as well, in addition to our weekly Shabbat and Sunday morning services, and monthly Friday evening services. Developing our worship services is a critical responsibility. Fundamentally, unless we are a *davenning* (worshipping) community, it is hard to say that we are fulfilling our mandate as a congregation.

Now, of course, for many of us, that is a challenge. We may never have learned how to *daven*. We may find synagogue services intimidating. I believe, therefore, that it is essential for us as a community to offer many opportunities for members to learn these skills. Everyone should be able to aspire to participate fully in services and to gain spiritual fulfillment from them. To that end, we have periodically offered Learners' Services, tutoring programs and mentoring opportunities.

I work with our Cantor and our Ritual leadership team to help our shul provide the religious services we've come to take for granted, and to help make them as participatory as possible. I'm very pleased to say that the level of participation has increased rather dramatically. Our average attendance on those Shabbatot on which we are not celebrating a Bar or Bat Mitzvah is about 100. One very exciting development is the fact that many members of our congregation participate each Shabbat by reading Torah or Haftarah. During the past several years, several members of our congregation have learned how to lead the Shabbat Shaharit, the Shabbat Musaph and the High Holiday Shaharit services. Several others have learned how to chant the Megillah on Purim. As mentioned earlier, we conducted a gabbai training session last year in order to increase the number of congregants who can serve in that capacity. I hope in the coming year even more of our members will learn the traditional system of cantillation (trope) so that they can become regular Torah readers.

During the past year, **40** of our young people became bar or bat mitzvah in our congregation (and we expect a similar number in 2001-2002). Our preparation for these kids and the members of their families begins three or four years prior, when we determine the dates of their simchas. I conduct the initial meeting with parents and give them a sense of what to expect during the next two or three years. We meet periodically with the families during the subsequent years in order to help them make this period of time as educationally and spiritually fulfilling as possible. We conduct a series of family

education programs, a cantillation class for sixth graders (currently taught by Alison Adler), and individual lessons with either the Cantor or Alison. During the six months prior to a child's bar or bat mitzvah, he or she meets with Alison to study the *parashah* and prepare a *dvar torah*. I meet individually with each of our celebrant families approximately six weeks before their simcha to go over details and to confirm that all is in order. We devote a great deal of time and attention to this preparation process, but I think it is absolutely essential.

In order to keep things running smoothly, I meet weekly with the Cantor and regularly with Alison to discuss the progress of our bar and bat mitzvah candidates and how they will participate in our services. (I share with other members of our staff the responsibility for supervising Alison: the Cantor supervises her Torah or Haftarah tutoring; I supervise her preparation of the children's divrei torah; and Dr. Bev supervises her teaching of the cantillation class.)

As religious leader of the congregation, I have additional responsibilities. For example, I am occasionally called upon to act as a *posek* (render a rabbinical opinion), both for our congregation and for individuals. Through consultation with colleagues and review of the periodical literature, I try to keep abreast of new developments in *halachah* (Jewish law) and congregational practice.

On a more practical note, I meet regularly with Nell Whittemore to discuss our *kashrut* policies and their implementation. Nell is doing much more work in the kitchen than she ever did: in addition to preparing and serving most of our Shabbat morning kiddushes, she prepares our monthly Friday evening dinners. Also, this is the second year that, under my supervision, we have kashered our main kitchen for use during Pesach. This has gone well and we hope to continue doing so in the future.

In reviewing our congregational activity in this area, am I satisfied? Well ... I think we can go further. I would like us not only to educate more members of our congregation to *daven*, but to give them the opportunity to do so as well. The summer is a good time for this, but we can also try to expand opportunities throughout the year. Eventually, I'd like to expand our monthly Friday evening services to take place weekly; I'd like to start a Thursday morning as well as a Monday morning minyan (even though 6:45 am is awfully early!); I would like us to expand our davening offerings in the summer. I would like our seventh graders to attend Sunday morning minyans with one

or both parents, and gain experience putting on tefillin during the year of their bar/bat mitzvah. I would like to see them reading Torah at our Monday morning minyan. These are just a few of the areas that we can continue to develop ... and should.

Temple Aliyah as a Beit Kneset

What about our function as a *Beit Kneset*, a community center?

As a *Beit Kneset*, we offer a variety of programs and opportunities to promote community. In this regard, I see my role as helping to direct our focus, to further coordination, and to provide enrichment. The work of our Sisterhood, our Men's Club and our 45+ group in this area is vital. I try to provide support to the leaders of these organizations and to help coordinate their efforts. Unless a synagogue is a community (or, more precisely, a community of communities), it can't really live up to its mandate. My own belief, of course, is that every activity of our congregation can and should be social as well as religious and educational.

Incorporating and socializing new members remains an on-going responsibility. For many years, I would meet regularly with new members in the fall, but several years ago, I helped establish a series of such programs. These now include a session with me, two sessions with Rabbi Gordon (in which the group is given an introduction to Conservative Judaism and exposed to the basics of synagogue skills), and one session with the president of the congregation, in which new members are introduced to our lay leadership structure and encouraged to become involved.

Developing our youth programming is an increasingly important priority. The number of our post-Bar/Bat Mitzvah students continues to increase. Needless to say, expanding our participation in the Passport to Israel program, becoming a site for Prozdor, hiring Alison Adler as our first half-time Youth Director have been important steps. One pleasant consequence of having Prozdor meet at our congregation on Monday evenings is the opportunity to see some of our teenagers. I teach a one-semester course to eighth and ninth graders, and occasionally drop in to the monthly pre-Prozdor dinner as well.

Periodically, I lead our congregation on a trip which has educational components but is also a community building experience. For example, several years ago, we traveled to Washington to visit the Holocaust Museum. Last year, more than sixty of us traveled to Israel

on our first-ever congregational mission. This year, about a dozen of us went to the Jewish Theological Seminary of America on a “spiritual vacation.” We hope to repeat this trip next year.

During the past year, I am delighted to say, we created our Hesed (Caring) Committee, which had been a dream for many years. We now have a group whose mission is to reach out to our members in need. We have always, of course, supported members who have suffered a loss, by visiting them during *shiva* (the one-week period of mourning immediately following a death); by providing, when requested, a minyan in the home; and by gifting them with a book (a task assumed by our Men’s Club); but it is becoming more and more difficult to reach out to all of our congregants in need, in the absence of a formal group of volunteers. I recently gave a presentation on the *mitzvah* of *bikur holim* (visiting the sick) to our Hesed Committee and was delighted to see the range of ages represented, and the strength of the commitment of our members to helping one another.

There has been yet another important development during the past year that has the potential dramatically to enhance our ability to address the needs of our membership: the establishment of our intra-office computer network, the installation of a DSL line permitting high-speed internet access, and the development of our web page. We have by no means concluded this process, but we are beginning to communicate within our congregation by e-mail, and our web page is beginning to attract notice. (A few months ago, a newcomer who lives in Wellesley approached me after services: she had learned about us through our web page and was “checking us out.”) I hope that, before long, our office will be able fully to utilize the potential of an interactive web page to communicate with members and to carry on shul business.

As a community, our mission includes reaching out to others beyond our walls. I am very proud of our social action efforts. I confer with our lay leaders and staff involved in our continuing efforts, such as Miracle Kitchen, Family Table and One Family Initiative.

Where do we need to go to further develop our membership services? Are we ready for *havurot*? We’ve talked about that for some time now. We’ll have to see.

Other Rabbinic Activities

Having spoken about my role as a congregational leader, what else do I do?

I strive to be a spiritual, educational and religious resource to every member of our community. It may be around the time of an illness or a loss or a *simcha*, but it may not be. I meet with people throughout the year. Most are members of our congregation, but occasionally someone who is not a member will seek me out. I believe it is important to be as responsive as possible, within the constraints of my other responsibilities, to all, whether or not they are members -- indeed, whether or not they are Jewish.

An important component of my pastoral responsibilities is visiting the sick. Periodically, I visit people in the various hospitals, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes and hospices in our area or in their homes. Last August, I participated in a two week intensive training program for rabbis, sponsored by the Jewish Institute for Pastoral Care in New York. This included clinical work at Memorial-Sloan Kettering Hospital and Beth Israel Hospital in New York. Although I hope to continue to visit the sick, I am hopeful that our Hesed Committee will be able to assist me in this regard, in helping to support and encourage our infirm congregants.

Occasionally, I am called upon to officiate at one or another of the life cycle events that do not necessarily take place in the synagogue: *britot milah* (brisses), baby namings, weddings, and funerals.

In addition, I meet with individuals exploring conversion to Judaism. These may be couples who are contemplating marriage, and wondering what role Judaism will play in their lives; they may be inter-faith couples with a newborn; they may be parents who've adopted a baby whom they wish to raise as a Jew. In all of these cases, I meet with the individuals and, if conversion is pursued, arrange for an appointment at one of our local mikvahs and convene a *Beit Din* (a rabbinical court) to supervise the conversion. (Needless to say, I also try to make myself available to colleagues when they call on me to join a *Beit Din* that they are convening.)

Last year, I gave a talk at the Rabbinical Assembly convention about the challenges of doing *keruv* work -- (i.e., outreach to interfaith couples and individuals exploring Jewish.) It's enormously important, it's enormously gratifying, ... but it's also enormously time-consuming. At any one time I can only take on one or two or perhaps three students. I don't have the time to do the bulk of the teaching myself --

though, fortunately, there are several fine courses in the Boston area. But even so, meeting with individuals or couples during the many months (and sometimes years) during which they're considering conversion takes time.

I believe passionately, however, that this is important work. And if I and my colleagues who are congregational rabbis aren't going to do it, who will? This almost always involves working with individuals who are not members of the congregation, but who, in many cases, come to make substantial contributions to the Jewish community. I am grateful that this congregation affords me the opportunity to do this kind of work.

As a representative of our congregation, I believe it is important to maintain contacts with and to become involved in the broader community. I am currently a member of the board of the JCRC (Jewish Community Relations Council). I am a member of the Synagogue Council's Kashrut Commission. I am a member of the Rabbinic Advisory Committee of the Solomon Schechter Day School in Newton, and occasionally speak or teach at the school (where, more often than not, I will encounter children who are members of our congregation). I am a member of the Religious Practices Advisory Committee of the New Jewish High School in Waltham. I try to visit the Rashi School and the Jewish Community Day School at least once a year. I recently completed two terms as a member of the board of the Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center. I am currently the Treasurer and the Chair of the Keruv Committee for the New England Region of the Rabbinical Assembly of America, the local organization of Conservative rabbis. I am a member of the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis, and the Needham Clergy Association, of which I served as President for three years. I participate in an interfaith clergy dialogue group sponsored by the American Jewish Committee. I regularly participate in interfaith outreach educational programs sponsored by the Jewish community's Interfaith Collaborative.

I am often called upon to speak in the community. For example, in the past year I gave a presentation, under the auspices of Jewish Family & Children's Service, on Death and Mourning in the Interfaith Family and spoke at an inter-faith clergy conference (convened by UAHC) devoted to the same theme. I recently addressed a Bible study group at the Carter Methodist Church here in town. A number of years ago, I was asked to provide Jewish perspectives on labor relations at a Labor Day gathering sponsored by the Jewish Labor Committee. Following the publication of the revised edition of *Embracing Judaism*

last year, I was asked to give a presentation on the book during the Jewish Book Fair at the Leventhal-Sidman Jewish Community Center.

As an alumnus of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship program, I attend periodic retreats. I occasionally teach current fellows at the graduate fellowship institutes, helping to train future Jewish leaders.

Being a rabbi requires one to continue to study and to learn. To that end, I participate in a weekly rabbinic study group attended by about a dozen Conservative and Reform colleagues. I try to keep up with current scholarship by subscribing to a range of journals and communicating with colleagues in cyber-space. I also participate in the Rabbinic Training Institutes jointly sponsored by the Massachusetts Board of Rabbis and Hebrew College.

Finally, I try to show support for a host of important Jewish communal institutions. This includes attending the annual meetings and/or other celebratory events for, among other organizations: the Bureau of Jewish Education, the Synagogue Council of Massachusetts, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the Jewish Community Relations Council, Hebrew College, the Leventhal-Sidman JCC, and Israel Bonds.

Conclusion

I began by saying that as a rabbi I'm blessed. Let me conclude by saying that, as a rabbi of this congregation, I'm doubly blessed. This is a *menschlich*, caring, hard-working congregation constantly striving to live up to its full potential as a *kahal kadosh*: a community that aspires to be a "holy congregation."

This week we begin reading Sefer B'midbar, the Book of Numbers, in which is contained many stories of our people's wandering in the Wilderness. As many of us can recall, one of the great defining features of our people in the Wilderness was that they often complained! In contrast, this is not a complaining congregation. This is a congregation that reaches out to one another, reaches out beyond ourselves to help others, reaches back into our tradition to learn and to grow, and reaches upward toward God for inspiration and direction.

May we continue on our journey to the Promised Land ... for many more years to come.