

Critical Issues

Getting Pluralism Back on Track: Conversion and the Challenge of Jewish Peoplehood

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WHAT HAPPENED TO PLURALISM IN THE JEWISH community? Twenty years ago, when Rabbi Irving “Yitz” Greenberg wrote his influential essays, “Will there be one Jewish people by the year 2000?”¹ and “Towards a Principled Pluralism,”² he wrote with a sense of fear that the Jewish community would not be able to overcome the impending split between its different ideological streams.

In many ways, his worst fears have been borne out. Rabbi Greenberg correctly perceived that “the balance of power within each movement has shifted toward those who would solve social and religious problems in a manner preferred by and most acceptable for the individual group while, in effect, writing off the concerns or the needs of the other denominations.”³

Rabbi Greenberg also recognized that the central division in the Jewish community would revolve around the defining issue of status. Conversion, patrilineal descent and mamzerut⁴ were identified as the three issues that, without some meaningful solution, would result in the reality that 15 percent-20 percent of American Jewry will be “socially and halachically separated from traditional Jews.”⁵

Today, the four branches that categorize much of Jewish life in America have ultimately seen fit to make policy decisions independently of each other and without primary concern for the Jewish community as a whole. As Rabbi Greenberg predicted, the issue of status is at the center of what divides us.

For example, each of the three largest movements has recently made major policy decisions with regard to the issue of conversion. The Reform and Conservative movements have each put the issue of conversion at the center of their platforms during recent national conventions.

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At the Union of Reform Judaism's 68th biennial convention, held at the end of 2005, that organization launched an initiative that, as its title states, focuses on "Inviting Conversion." In remarks he delivered to the convention, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, president of the URJ, stated that "it is a mitzvah to help a potential Jew become a Jew-by-choice...; we want families to function as Jewish families, and while intermarried families can surely do this, we recognize the advantages of an intermarried family becoming a fully Jewish family, *with two adult Jewish partners.*"⁶ (Emphasis added)

Less than a month later, at the biennial convention of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, its executive vice president, launched that movement's "Keruv/Edud Initiative." Said he, "Our Edud Initiative must carefully craft a language that will encourage conversion. Understanding that non-Jewish spouses are potential Jews, we must learn how to inspire them so they will choose to become Jews."⁷

In the year following these initiatives, the Orthodox community also was forced to address the issue of conversion, in light of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate's further curtailing its acceptance of conversions performed by Orthodox rabbis in North America.⁸ Many Orthodox rabbis from the center to the left already had been referring all conversions to the Rabbinical Council of America's beit din because the Chief Rabbinate would not accept their conversions, at least not readily or easily. Now it appears that even the RCA's beit din is no longer automatically accepted.

Adding to the pressure, the Jewish Agency for Israel in mid-June 2007 joined the fray when its chairman, Ze'ev Bielski, called for the State of Israel to recognize Conservative and Reform conversions. That call came even as controversy raged among Orthodox groups over the appointment of judges to the state's conversion courts who were seen as being anti-conversion. Meanwhile, the Orthodox head of the state-sponsored Institute for Jewish Studies called for the conversion courts to be disbanded and new courts constituted.⁹

At a time when so much attention is being given to the issue of conversion, the Jewish community as a whole has seen its streams waste an opportunity to work together to try to address some of the divisions that have developed in the past decades over precisely this issue.

These divisions, however, have moved far beyond the large defining issues such as status. Over the past decades, even the seemingly simple issue of rabbis from different denominations joining to discuss local communal issues or to simply gather in a collegial fashion seems to be beyond the reach of some.

For example, in cities across the United States it is the policy of some local Orthodox rabbinic groups to bar their members from participating in the community's cross-denominational Board of Rabbis for fear

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that to do so will, in some way, give the non-Orthodox legitimacy. Some rely on responsa from noted halachic decisors that actually forbid such participation.

To be sure, there have been some positive developments. As individuals, a majority of rabbis in the field accept that interaction and cooperation across the streams is an absolute necessity.¹⁰ Of course, this does not include the vast majority of Orthodox rabbis, but they constitute only a minority of the total American rabbinate.

In the past few decades, too, such organizations as CLAL-The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, the STAR program (Synagogue Transformation and Renewal), Synagogue 2000/3000, The Shalom Hartman Institute and others have actively created forums for rabbis from across the ideological canvas to engage and learn from and with each other in a manner that extends respect to all. Such worthy efforts play a role in bringing the larger part of the Jewish community closer together.

As is often the case in these programs, however, the number of Orthodox participants is small and hard to come by. That is a great loss, because in each of these programs rabbis engage with each other as individuals. They come to the table not as members of their respective movements, but as individuals who seek a better path for the Jewish people as a whole by better understanding each other.

For pluralism to succeed in the Jewish community, however, we need to move the discourse from the inter-personal to the communal arena. The movements themselves need to open more channels of communication among themselves. And they need to do so in an open and transparent manner. When any denominational group in the American Jewish community is considering a major policy decision, it needs to invite the ideas and opinions of representatives of the other movements so that together they can serve the interests of the wider Jewish community, as well as their own movements.

This does not mean that movements will always make decisions that will please all Jews, either as individuals or as groups. In those cases when decisions are unpopular, however, they will be made in a way that demonstrates respect and concern for the larger community.

This recognition that there are other voices in the Jewish community that offer an opportunity to learn how to grow and change—not at the expense of the Jewish people, but in a way that takes Jewish unity seriously—is rooted in a fundamental commitment to pluralism. Pluralism is the defining method of engagement that allows and encourages this to happen.

A commitment to pluralism that leads to the acknowledgement of each movement in Jewish life as an equal partner in the shared destiny of the Jewish people will create the conditions for responsible decision-making on behalf of the widest possible group in Jewish life.

Why does this need to happen?

One cannot say for sure whether Judaism has a central message or teaching, or, if there is one, that it stays constant for all time. When the prospective convert came first to Shammai and then to Hillel and asked to be taught the whole Torah while standing on one foot, he received two different and profound answers.¹¹ The very fact that the Talmud records both responses stands as a powerful lesson: that the editors of the Talmud understood that there could be multiple answers to a question that appears to have only one.

Shammai's response—he chased the man away after beating him with a construction ruler—represented his rejection of the notion that one could boil all of Judaism down to a single pithy aphorism. For him, it would seem, there is more than one central message that the Torah yields. After all, if we cannot boil down Judaism to a single, solitary concept or idea, that can only be because there are multiple concepts or ideas that tap into the meaning of Judaism. Such a notion of multiple concepts is by definition an embrace of pluralism.

Whether Hillel actually believed that the Torah could be reduced to a single sentence is unclear, but rather than chase the man away, he said to him, “Do not to others that which you do not want done to yourself; that is the entire Torah and all else is commentary; go and study it.”¹²

Hillel thereby teaches that just as we do not wish our commitment to Judaism to be delegitimized, so too we should not delegitimize the commitment of others who may express their Judaism in different forms; just as we wish to be respected and not scorned for our understanding of our responsibilities as Jews, so too must we respect others rather than scorn them.

Thus, underlying the diametrically opposing approaches of Shammai or Hillel is a basic acceptance of pluralism.

While Jews have no special claim to pluralism—we are no more obligated to it than any other race, nation or religion—we do have a special opportunity. If we are able to model a Judaism that can contain within itself a plurality that ranges from meditation retreats at Elat Hayim to praying in the shteiblach¹³ of Me'ah Shearim and from the teachings of the Jewish-feminist critique to the intricate legalisms of the Talmud and its commentaries, while at the same time maintaining a true sense of unity that respects each of those different approaches, then we truly may be able to create a working model for Tikkun Olam—for fixing our broken world.

Pluralism is important not only for the health of the Jewish people, but also for the world at large, because it holds in its grasp a mechanism to help create the best society possible. How else are we to move closer to Redemption other than through a growing respect for and understanding

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of those who differ from us? The notion that we will all serve the same God, one day, as members of one great global religious realization is a myth. It does not acknowledge the validity of paths other than our own. Pluralism is the key to coming to terms with this reality and turning it into a Redemptive one.

Inter-personal pluralism

The path to pluralism is a most complicated course to traverse. The movements have become enormous entities that often find it difficult to see beyond their own ideologies. If pluralism is to succeed, we must add to the work already achieved on the inter-personal plane.

Oftentimes, major shifts in societal norms are predicated on radical acts. Emancipation, women's rights and civil rights were all achieved only after radical social movements formed to push for change.

For pluralism to succeed in Jewish life, the radical act needed is of a different kind. We do not need rallies and protests. We need to encounter the "Other." Ultimately, it is only through such encounter that we can remove prejudices and correct false conceptions. It is only through the face-to-face encounter of one Image of God with another Image of God that we can be able to create the kind of change so desperately needed.

For Jews from different streams to gain a deeper understanding of and respect for each other, they must engage in a process of exposure to and encounter with each other's experience as Jews.

This encounter demands that Jews cross the thresholds of each other's houses of worship, not only for a bar mitzvah or some other celebration, but also to pray with each other. We must engage together in serious text study. We must find ways to eat in each other's homes and celebrate Sabbaths together.

The last two items obviously pose the greatest difficulty. How can one who observes kashrut share a home-cooked meal in a non-kosher home? How could a Sabbath-observant person observe the Sabbath in an environment that defines such observance in very different ways? For that matter, how can a person whose Sabbath observance is of limited nature be made to feel comfortable in a home where, say, removing candlesticks from a table is considered a Sabbath violation?¹⁴

Resolving such difficulties and pushing the pluralism agenda must be the tasks of community boards of rabbis. As a start, they need to create programs in which members of different synagogues in a given town, over the course of a year, spend a Sabbath together at each synagogue in town and then eat lunch afterwards, with an opportunity to process their experi-

ence. The experiences, however, must be authentic. In other words, there can be no accommodation in a Reform synagogue, say, to the sensibilities and sensitivities of the Orthodox and Conservative guests.¹⁵

Only through this kind of encounter will Jews learn to overcome their assumptions and misconceptions about the “other” and open themselves up to understanding and respecting alternatives in Jewish life. People will find some experiences jarring, others inspiring. As long as there is acceptance of the idea of different strokes for different Jewish folks, each experience will make the participant more fully a member of the Jewish community and the Jewish people.

Other ways to achieve this encounter are through supporting the continued growth of the community/pluralistic day school system. If they are able to be truly successful, these schools will set the standard at an early age for what it means to be a citizen of the entire Jewish people and not just one part of that people. Such schools, however, cannot be “Orthodox schools for Jewish children,” as such schools are often described, but must provide students with both the ideologies of their individual streams and an understanding of the ideologies of the other streams—and it must be done in an unbiased and nonjudgmental way.

At the same time, we need to increase the role Hillel plays in forging a pluralistic environment. Hillel, as the premier Jewish campus-based organization providing Jewish social, cultural and religious programming for college students, has too often become focused on quantity over quality. Hillel must recognize the opportunity it has, as the last pluralistic outpost in current Jewish life, to positively influence young adults before they disappear, and to do so by being the model for the best of what that Jewish people can be.

Communal pluralism

Federations and foundations need to be active facilitators for this kind of work through financial assistance to schools, Hillels or community boards of rabbis; or through the facilitation of pluralistic programming. In supporting local Jewish agencies, Federations and foundations also have the opportunity to use their financial clout to leverage community organizations that are not committed to pluralism to consider alternatives.

These and other opportunities abound for the creation and maintenance of a local Jewish community that is committed to pluralism in serious ways. Each of these function on the “inter-personal” level because they do not act on behalf of entire movements; rather, they are focused on individuals, specific locales, populations or age groups.

These personal pluralistic goals will go a long way toward achieving communal pluralism—but it will be slow, arduous and take many decades to achieve. Frankly, the Jewish people do not have decades left to resolve

its internal problems. Even as the inter-personal approach is ongoing, so must there be a cross-stream communal track.

Successful models for such a track already exist. For almost 40 years, for example, there existed a national organization called the Synagogue Council of America. This was a national body on which official representatives of the various streams sat and discussed issues of common concern.¹⁶

In the late 1970s and early 1980s in Denver, the Rocky Mountain Rabbinical Council operated a still-controversial cross-denominational conversion program¹⁷ that led to conversion by an Orthodox *beit din*.¹⁸

Groups such as these should be revived and resuscitated. We must find more and varied ways to work together, not just as individuals, but also as movements.

The leaders of the major rabbinical seminaries in America (and beyond), and the professional leaders of the movements' representative bodies should convene on a regular basis to share issues facing their movements and, therefore, the wider Jewish community.

Rumors have long circulated that such meetings actually do take place, but in secret. The key to success is that all such meetings must be convened in the light of day and not in secret, such that the leaders of these movements can act as role models for the entire community. We must all be able to affirm the shared and equal value of each of the different groups in Jewish life publicly and proudly.

There is no reason why a respected and respectful Orthodox or Reform scholar could not be invited to share his or her views on an issue being brought before the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. Similarly, there is no reason why the Responsa Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis cannot welcome input from a Conservative or Orthodox colleague reviewing traditional texts. Anyone who has ever read Reform responsa has noticed how often and how heavily they delve into traditional texts before making a decision, so such input would not be a major innovation. Indeed, there is no reason why Orthodox rabbinic bodies would not benefit from input from the other streams. One might even consider it mandatory, because Jewish law requires taking into account the ability and willingness of the majority to follow a particular legislative initiative.¹⁹

The opportunities for each of the movements to create ways to learn from and grow with each other abound. For example, a master teacher from the Renewal movement could come to an Orthodox rabbinical school to help teach students there how to raise their prayers to new spiritual heights.

Blurring boundaries

At this point, let us briefly address the issue of “blurring boundaries.” Many of its proponents have maintained that pluralism must be achieved without the blurring of boundaries. The blurring of boundaries, however, is already happening throughout Jewish life and should be seen as a positive development. Whether it is modern Orthodoxy’s broad acceptance of the bat mitzvah ceremony, or the Renewal movement’s revisiting of classical Chasidic texts, the boundaries are being blurred.

A community that is functioning in a healthy, pluralistic fashion will naturally lose essential value for boundaries in and of themselves. Orthodoxy, for example, in an ideal pluralistic community, will be able to maintain less rigid definitions of who is “in” and who is “out.” The boundaries will become blurred such that, for example, one may have a radically progressive theology and traditionally conservative practice, and this will not appear contradictory.

If we are to be the beneficiaries of the broadest scope of Jewish tradition then we must, by definition, give up our commitments to boundaries and place a commitment to Jewish peoplehood instead.

Reasons for failure

One of the greatest challenges to creating a community that is serious and sincere in its commitment to pluralism is the place of Orthodoxy. Most of what is suggested above seems to be out of reach for even the most liberal and progressive of Orthodox Jews.

Because Orthodox Jews present the law—halachah—as a matter of Revelation and their commitment to its observance as sacrosanct, they present themselves and are perceived by others as unable to budge from their positions on any issue involving Jewish law.

What results in attempts at pluralism that involve the Orthodox community is what Rabbi Greenberg has described as an apparent “Orthodox ploy to force uniformity of practice or personal status on the majority of the Jewish people. In this view, since the Orthodox insist that their approach to the issues of personal status and halachah is a matter of divine revelation, and since they claim that others’ approaches are matters of preference, the ‘unity’ means doing it the Orthodox way.”²⁰

Orthodoxy, however, is not a monolith and never was. It also is not a “movement” in the sense of Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and Renewal. Rather, it is an umbrella for all manner of movements in which one belief is held in common: God dictated to Moses the Torah. That is where the commonality ends, however. Whereas the Written Law (תורה שבכתב, Torah Shebichtav) is universally considered a product of

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Revelation, status of the Oral Law (תורה שבעל פה, Torah Sheb'al Peh) is understood differently by different groups across a broad spectrum. This ranges from willingness of the more liberal Orthodox camp to acknowledge historical forces in the development of halachah, to the so-called “fer-vently Orthodox,” for whom every iota of halachah has revelational import similar in kind to biblical law.

Despite this plurality of opinion, however, no part of today’s Orthodox community has ever agreed to compromise on a matter of Jewish law to achieve a greater communal good. Orthodox individuals have done so, but only in rare, and almost always, undocumented, cases.

This presents the major challenge to the Jewish community if pluralism is to be successful and include Orthodox Judaism. Orthodox Jews must be willing to employ some of the legal creativity that is already so much a part of their system of halachah, much as the Conservative movement (which remains within the halachic system but is more flexible in its approach to decision-making) has done. It must make full use of the numerous legal concepts at its disposal to apply halachah in a manner that allows the Orthodox Jew to hold true to his or her unwavering commitment to Jewish law without, at the same time, abandoning the rest of the Jewish people. Throughout Jewish history, rabbis have employed these legal concepts to rule in innovative and sometimes radical ways, and the same should be done today.

At the same time that Orthodoxy will need to commit to some halachic flexibility for the greater good of the Jewish people, the liberal movements will also have to “compromise,” as it were.

Let us return to the subject of conversion for an opportunity to illustrate how this might happen. Traditional conversion, according to the parameters of halachah,²¹ requires that an individual who wishes to convert (and here we will not address the issue of motive):

1. (if male) have a circumcision (or, in a case where a circumcision has already been performed, *hatafat dam b’rit*, the drawing of a drop of blood from the glans);
- 2) offer a verbal proclamation of acceptance of the obligation to perform the commandments—*kabbalat hamitzvot*; and
- 3) be submerged in a ritual bath (mikvah).

According to traditional halachah, in the ideal case, each of these three steps should be performed in the presence of a *beit din* of three traditionally observant males. Technically, however, a *beit din* is only required for the *kabbalat hamitzvot*, meaning that if the individual had a circumcision performed or was immersed in the ritual bath outside the presence of a *beit din*, he/she would not have to repeat the steps in order to fulfill the halachic requirements for conversion, whereas in the case of *kabbalat hamitzvot* this would be required.

Since 1893, it has been the official policy of the American Reform movement to refrain from making any of these three rituals obligatory upon the potential convert. In recent years, however, there has been a “return to tradition” within Reform circles. In 2001, this led the Central Conference of American Rabbis to recommend to its members that mikvah and, for a male, at least *hatafat dam b’rit* be part of any conversion, and that it be supervised by a beit din. The movement has always required a “declaration of faith,” which could be viewed as a statement affirming *kabbalat hamitzvot* in a Reform context.

It is my belief that if the Reform movement in America today went one step further and made these into requirements rather than recommendations, we would be half way to a solution. Not easily resolved would be the Orthodox requirement that *kabbalat hamitzvot* be done before a beit din acceptable to them, however, because the Orthodox have different standards of what *kabbalat hamitzvot* entails and, from the Reform perspective, having to defer to an Orthodox beit din could be viewed as conceding that its own rabbis lack legitimacy.

Yet it is precisely that aspect that would make a concession on *kabbalat hamitzvot* so meaningful in the effort to restore pluralism to Jewish life. Even though the Reform Jewish community does not perceive itself as obliged by traditional halachah, making such a concession to Orthodox standards would demonstrate a willingness on its part to “compromise” its values, as it were, for the greater good of the Jewish people.

Such a concession, however, requires a quid pro quo. The Reform movement has a right to expect a concession in return and of equal value. This brings us to the other half of the solution, which rests with the Orthodox community. If the Reform movement is prepared to require that a *kabbalat hamitzvot* affirmation be made in the presence of an Orthodox beit din, the Orthodox rabbinate must be more flexible regarding what that means. As has been well documented by Rabbi Marc Angel,²² over the ages, *kabbalat hamitzvot* has been understood to mean anything from “a commitment on the part of the convert to observe the halakha in full”²³ to “a commitment of the proselyte, in the presence of the court, to circumcise and to immerse himself,” and that, in any case, only for the last 130 years has it been interpreted as requiring total observance of the mitzvot.²⁴

In other words, Orthodox tradition and belief are not violated by accepting even the most liberal interpretation of the *kabbalat hamitzvot* requirement. The same holds true for the requirement that the entire conversion be supervised by a beit din, which is the ideal, but not an absolute requirement.²⁵

At this point, hackles are probably raised on both sides of the halachic divide, but perhaps more so on the Reform side. It could be

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argued—doubtless will be argued—that the “concessions” from the Orthodox are not really concessions, because tradition and law allow for them, whereas the Reform “concessions” are, as already noted, concessions of the rankest order and deeply insulting.

Obviously, it is my hope that the approach outlined above would not be misconstrued in this way. The approach here is one of give-and-take. For the Orthodox to cross the divide requires casting aside more than 200 years of rabbinic teachings on all manner of subjects as they relate to the Other within Judaism. It is nowhere as simple as opting for the most lenient opinion.

If the Orthodox community moderated its standards a little while the Reform movement would raise its expectations a little, I believe we could come a long way to closing the gap between these two movements. And if this method of compromise on the part of both parties were employed in other areas and between other movements, I believe we could make great strides in bringing the Jewish people closer together.

Ultimately, for a variety of reasons, there will always be some members of the Orthodox and non-Orthodox communities who will never be able to join such a partnership. Jews committed to pluralism must be respectful and understanding of this reality. We must not shy away, however, from acting on behalf of the vast majority of Jews for the sake of a minority. We must also distinguish between a commitment to pluralism and the resultant respect it must engender for those who choose other paths, and maintaining our right to challenge others when those who disagree with us try to manipulate the community in a manner that favors their particular approach (the current conversion debacle involving the Israeli rabbinate is one example).

This will mean a radical and important step for the Jewish community. It will also represent a shift from being inwardly focused to demonstrating a commitment to the primary value of the entire Jewish community. For pluralism to truly work, it must seep into the very process of halachic and policy decision-making.

Conclusion

At first glance, many readers will see this as an “impossible dream,” but I agree with Rava, who taught that there is no such thing. “This is proven by the fact that one is never shown a golden palm tree or an elephant who can pass through a needle’s eye.”²⁶ Still, to make this a dream come true will certainly never happen if pluralism is not placed firmly back on the communal agenda. To quote Reuven Kimelman:

The symphony of Jewish religious life results when each denomination plays well its own instrument. To create the orchestra, each denomination has to realize that the quality of the richness of the music together will exceed anything they can produce separately. Harmony results from differences coordinated not suppressed. While we may play different instruments, we must be committed to the goals of the orchestra to produce a symphony. As soon as one part starts to do his own thing or to believe that his music will be superior by withdrawing from the whole, everybody loses.²⁷

NOTES

¹ Irving Greenberg, *Perspectives* (New York: CLAL–National Jewish Resource Center for Learning and Leadership, 1986).

² Ibid.

³ Greenberg, *Will there be one Jewish people by the year 2000?* (New York: CLAL–National Jewish Resource Center for Learning and Leadership, 1986) 3.

⁴ The state of being a mamzer (ממזר). In Jewish law, a mamzer is any person born of a relationship forbidden by the Torah, i.e., an incestuous or adulterous relationship. Although “mamzer” is often translated as bastard, children born out of wedlock to a man and woman who are permitted to marry are fully legitimate. The issue of mamzerut here pertains to women who were divorced under civil law, but did not also receive a get, or religious divorce. This would make any subsequent relationship an adulterous one in the eyes of the halachah.

⁵ Greenberg, *One People*, 2.

⁶ <<http://urj.org/yoffie/biennialsermon05/>>.

⁷ <http://www.uscj.org/Beyond_Keruv_to_Edud6908.html?>>.

⁸ <<http://www.forward.com/articles/as-rabbinate-stiffens-rules-orthodox-rites-face-s/>>

⁹ See note No. 18, below.

¹⁰ Based on anecdotal evidence provided by Rabbi Shammai Engelmayer, there appears to be a growing triumphalist sense among some rabbis within Reform that the Conservative movement is collapsing. The fear is that too much cooperation with their Conservative colleagues will only delay that collapse.

¹¹ Babylonian Talmud tractate Shabbat 31a.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ A shtiebl is a small, unadorned prayer room, usually on the first floor of an apartment house. The word, also pronounced “shtubl,” means “small room” in Yiddish.

¹⁴ Orthodox Jews consider it a violation of Sabbath rules to handle any item that has no specific use on the Sabbath. One lights Sabbath candles before sundown, but not after. Therefore, the candlesticks have no Sabbath use. If placed on a dinner table before the Sabbath, they must remain there until after the Sabbath has ended. If the candlesticks were placed on a small table by themselves, even the table may not be moved. It is easy to understand how a person who was not raised to accept such rules would find it uncomfortable abiding by them, even for a few hours.

¹⁵ The practices intended here include such things as women wearing tallitot or the use of microphones and even musical instruments. Obviously, there is an exception to the non-accommodation rule. For Jews who keep kosher, food that is non-kosher to begin with or that is prepared in ways that make it non-kosher is unacceptable. Sharing experiences by sharing a meal does not preclude providing kosher food for the kosher-observant. On the other hand, for Jews for whom kashrut is not an issue, they cannot expect to be served non-kosher food in a kosher home or facility.

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¹⁶ <<http://www.cjh.org/academic/findingaids/AJHS/nhprc/SCA.html>>.

¹⁷ Samuel G. Freedman, *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle For The Soul Of American Jewry* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000) 80-114.

¹⁸ Israel's Ne'eman Commission took an approach similar to Denver's Jewish community. It established the state-sponsored Institute for Jewish Studies, under the direction of Prof. Benjamin Ish-Shalom, who is Orthodox. The Joint Institute, as it is also known, has teachers from all three streams represented in Israel. Ish-Shalom recently accused Israel's conversion courts of putting up all manner of roadblocks to the institute's conversion candidates and called for a new court made up of Orthodox rabbis who are more amenable to dealing fairly with those conversions.

¹⁹ See, for example, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah Hilchot Mamrim* 2:5; also BT Bava Batra 60b.

²⁰ Irving Greenberg, "Towards a Principled Pluralism," *Generation 2*, no. 3 (August 1991): 20.

²¹ Shulchan Aruch, *Yoreh Deah* 268.

²² Marc Angel, *Choosing to be Jewish: The Orthodox Road to Conversion* (Hoboken: Ktav, 2005)

²³ *Ibid.*, p.60.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Shulchan Aruch, *Yoreh Deah* 268:3.

²⁶ BT B'rachot 55b.

²⁷ Reuven Kimmelman, "Judaism, Denominationalism and Pluralism," *Perspectives* (New York: CLAL—National Jewish Resource Center for Learning and Leadership, 1986), 19.