Jewish Survival
The Study of a Unique Community
Temple B'nai Brith
Somerville, Mass.

A Senior Project
By
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Introduction

I have been fascinated by the variety of small and offbeat Jewish synagogues and study groups (havurot) that I have encountered since I started my own spiritual journey almost twenty years ago. I've been involved in a number of small rural synagogues, attended the Northeastern Conference for Rural Synagogues in Vermont and been a participant in any number of courses and retreats at Elat Chaim. The synagogue I claim as my personal spiritual home is B'nai Jeshurun, another spiritual phenomenon. Yet, all around me, I hear that Judaism is dying. The National Jewish Population Survey of 1990 estimated the core Jewish population at 5,515,000 and by 2001 it had declined to 5,340,000.[1] The percent of Jews who are marrying non-Jews has increased to more than 50% and only about 40% of Jews claim to believe in God and are affiliated with a synagogue while 80-90% of American Christians claim membership in churches. There is however, another element in the Jewish population that gets less attention and is referred to as those of Jewish descent or to use an older term 'Jewish extraction." This population is growing and "is estimated to have increased from 1.332 to 2.350 million persons between 1990 and 2001."[2] This population includes those who may self identify as Jewish by religion and those who may not be halakhically Jewish but have Jewish parentage or upbringing. Most of these people are the products of intermarriage and as the rate of intermarriage increases there will be more and more of them. If this group is added to the core Jewish population numbers the total Jewish universe in the United States reaches almost 8

[1] American Jewish Identity Survey, 2001, Egon Mayer, Barry Kosmin and Ariela Keysar: Center for Jewish Studies; The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, Reissued 2003 The Center for Cultural Judaism
[2] Ibid, page 21.

million and if one adds non-Jews who reside in Core Jewish households the number rises to almost 10 million.[3]

This larger Jewish community has accepted modern American cultural values as normative and at the same time the Core Jewish community has also accepted many of these changes. Sidney Schwartz in his book, "Finding a Spiritual Home," identifies three stages in the development of American Synagogues: the Immigrant Synagogue, The Ethnic Synagogue and the Synagogue Center. Each of these synagogue forms addressed the needs of the Jews who made up their membership and over the years as those needs changed the synagogue structure also changed. However, a new phenomenon developed after World War II, the growth of the Jewish Center, which separated spiritual teachings from ethnic identification. The history of the Jewish people has made the need for Jewish identification and protection a paramount force in the Jewish world, but throughout most of Jewish history in the diaspora the community handled both spiritual and civic concerns within the structure of the synagogue, this paradigm changed in the 1950's as large numbers of Jews moved to the suburbs and began to build Jewish Centers. The Jewish Center focused on ethnic survival, social needs, philanthropic causes, cultural events, while the synagogue retained the spiritual agenda, and education of the children, often seen as less important. The emphasis had shifted to ethnic survival and the needs of the inner life got only secondary attention.

Jews were enjoying the fruits of assimilation in a country that had accepted them and allowed them to succeed in an unprecedented way and although they wanted some continuity in the religious patterns of their childhood, the religious communities "they created were far more significant as markers of social status than as institutions of serious

[3] Ibid, Exhibit 6, page 25

Jewish learning, observance, and spirituality."[4] Too much commitment to religious matters was seen as an obstacle to economic success and acceptance into the broader American community.

Then came the 60's and the counterculture and a wave of moral, ethical and spiritual indignation spread over the country. Jews participated in the antiwar movement and the beginnings of the youth counterculture in large numbers and within the Jewish world the havurah movement began to take form. This movement was a response to a synagogue structure that no longer met the needs of this young Jewish-American generation. It replaced a rigid, conformist organization with a loose assembly of young singles and families who ran their own services, without the help of a rabbi or cantor, in each other's houses or in rented space for the High Holidays or other special occasions. They created new kinds of prayer services, wrote new songs and developed small Jewish fellowships that provided its membership with a strong sense of community and with the possibility of high levels of participation within a completely egalitarian and democratic ethic. They also brought a new sense of religious spirituality to the prayer service. Along with the havurah movement came Jewish Renewal, Reconstructionism, Secular Humanist Judaism and in general, a new quest to make Judaism serve a growing and changing Jewish population. The structure and organization of the synagogue has not yet been redesigned to meet the needs of this population. Sidney Schwarz writes that, "The synagogue-community is a paradigm that is just now beginning to emerge as synagogue-centers realize that time is passing them by."[5] Many synagogues have undertaken this task with various degrees of success although the majority of synagogues are still following the old

[4] Sidney Schwarz, Finding a Spiritual Home: Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 2000
[5] Ibid, page 46

model. In "Finding a Spiritual Home" Schwarz documents four synagogues, one from each of the major Jewish denominations, Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstruction, and Reform, that he thinks are in the process of making the transition from synagogue-center to synagogue-community. These are large, well- funded synagogues with lots of resources, both economic and intellectual to draw from, but there are many smaller synagogues that are also making changes in the way they function and have invited many of those Jews who do not neatly fit into the definition of Core Jews, to be members.

I have chosen to document the journey of Temple B'nai Brith of Somerville, Massachusetts. This one hundred year old synagogue has successfully made the transition to synagogue-community if we define success as a vibrant Jewish community that serves a growing though small population and maintains a philosophy of strong community participation within a democratic, egalitarian structure. The path that this group of people chose may not be the path that will suit other communities but I think that the problems they faced are universal in the American Jewish world and that examining the ways in which they chose to solve those problems can be instructive for all of us who face the same issues every day.

Problem Statement

The question I have asked is why and how did this synagogue successfully make the transition from a failing synagogue with a 1950's philosophy and organizational structure to a democratic, egalitarian synagogue-community that is able to reach out to young people in the community. Although Temple B'nai Brith is in a community that has unusual demographic characteristics in that there are a large number of universities within a short distance and therefore a large population of intellectual and artistic people in the surrounding communities, it still shares many of the problems that older synagogues have in trying to maintain themselves and while synagogues in neighboring communities were closing their doors, the doors of Temple B'nai Brith have remained open.

Temple B'nai Brith's problems are endemic in older synagogues and I have tried to identify the main problems to see how the congregation addressed them and whether they were successful in doing so, hopefully their answers will be transferable to other synagogues. The questions I addressed were:

1. How did Temple B'nai Brith attract new membership?
   a) Did they have any formal programs?
   b) Who was in charge?

2. How was power transferred from the older generation to the younger generation?
   a) How did they prepare new members to take on synagogue responsibilities?
   b) How did the transfer of power happen?

c) How was leadership potential identified?

d) Who made the decisions?

3. What were the problems they encountered?

a) Intergenerational conflict

b) Maintaining an old facility

c) Raising money

d) Creating new programs for the new membership

4. Governance

a) How did the new membership respond to the old model of governance?

b) How did they develop a new structure?

5. What were the worship and religious issues they faced and how did they change?

a) Traditional minyan

b) Alternative minyan

c) Who is a Jew?

d) Kashrut

6. Did the provision of children's education play an important role in the revitalization of the synagogue?

I focused my research on the period of transition, which started in the mid 80's and was more or less complete by the mid 1990's. It was in the early 80's that a decision was made by the membership of Temple B'nai Brith to try and attract younger people to their congregation. My methodology was simple; I created a questionnaire that I administered to some of the people who had been identified as the main actors during this period of transition. Prior to the development of that questionnaire I visited the synagogue and went through some of their archives to acquaint myself with their history. I also spent a lot of time talking with my project advisor Cherie Koller-Fox, who had suggested this synagogue for study. She had been involved with the synagogue during the early days of the transition and good friends with Morris and Ada Kleiman, who were the prime movers from the older generation during this period. I interviewed 9 of the 10 interviewees face to face and did the other interview over the phone. I also attended the synagogue's Centennial Celebration in May 2004 and got to see the synagogue in action and meet other members of the community, some old and some new. They were all enthusiastic about the growth and success of their synagogue and those I approached as possible interviewees were delighted to help and very excited about the possibility that someone would take the time to document the history of their community.

The questionnaire is basically an outline that I used to try and uncover the issues that might have arisen during the transition period and was also an attempt to expose the underlying values that supported the process. (See Appendix 2.)

Methodology

The questions were designed after I had made a couple of visits to Temple B'nai Brith and felt comfortable that I had, at least, a preliminary picture of the Temple's personality. I had already read a lot of the material in the archives and had talked, off the record, with the Executive Director, Lisa Gregorman and with some of the membership. I had also spoken, in depth, with Cherie Koller-Fox about her relationship with the Temple and with Morris and Ada Kleiman. Morris and Ada were members of the synagogue who were seen as the prime movers in facilitating the transition of the Temple from a dying organization to a thriving, modern community with a healthy generational mix. It was their initiative and drive that started this process going, they made the synagogue and it's survival, the focus of their lives after they closed their pharmacy in Somerville after 40 years of operation. It is clear that their determination to see the synagogue survive and their personal people skills played a large part in the success of this endeavor. I was determined to see if there were also other factors that would be more transferable to other synagogues in similar straits, since the disintegration of old synagogues is a common phenomenon in the Jewish world and we need to learn all we can from those places that have made successful transitions. Unfortunately both Morris and Ada have passed away and I was not able to interview them but the stories about their involvement with the synagogue and the Congregation are legion, I heard them over and over, some of them repeated many times, like modern mythology. I turned my research questions into the Questionnaire I used to interview members of the synagogue who were active during the transition period which was arbitrarily defined as from the middle 80's to the middle 90's but these were not hard and fast lines.

Each question tried to get at factors that I thought might be important in understanding how and why this process worked. I also thought the questions would expose underlying values, both Jewish and secular:

The first question (see Appendix 2) was designed to see if the people who became members of the synagogue at this time had similar backgrounds and were drawn to this place because of common factors that they were not aware of at that time. The next set of questions (3-5) explore the social and spiritual needs of the members at the time they first encountered Temple B'nai Brith and how the Temple attempted to meet those needs even at a rudimentary level. Questions 6 and 7 test commitment. Questions 8-10 are about conflict and it's resolution. How did the members view and define conflict and what processes did they use to resolve it. Questions 11 and 12 deal with the organizational structure of the synagogue and with appropriate interviewees I asked a number of follow-up questions about their training for leadership in the organization and how that training was given. The next three questions (13-15) tried to evaluate if Jewish religious philosophy and style of worship were issues for the congregants and how these factors influenced their participation in the community. Finally I asked how they felt about the future of this community and whether they thought that they had built something that would continue to grow and change to meet the changing needs of the community, a sort of simple, self evaluation.

The History of Temple B'nai Brith

Temple B'nai Brith celebrated it's centennial this year with a large gathering on May 23rd at the Temple. There were many speakers and a scholarly talk by Professor Sol Gittleman of Tufts University. There was music and good food and a lot of camaraderie as people who hadn't seen each other in years shared stories about their lives. People who had moved out of the area years ago returned to celebrate with the new members of this amazing schul. Only fifteen years ago the survival of this shul was in grave doubt but they have not only survived they have thrived. They started out as the Hebrew Educational Society of Somerville in 1903 when they petitioned the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for a charter to establish a synagogue and a Hebrew School. On Nov. 8, 1915 they were officially named Congregation B'nai Brith. The first building was actually a basement synagogue built at the present location: 201 Central Street. The present building was constructed in 1922.[6]

The congregation at the Temple kept up a lively schedule of activities during all those years. The Sisterhood was especially active and organized many social events from rummage sales and talent shows to annual dinner and dance events. The Sisterhood raised large amounts of money for the synagogue and kept control of these funds in a separate bank account.

There was a full-time rabbi and a Hebrew School and even some adult study programs offered by the rabbi. Most of the business of the shul was taken care of at the monthly Sunday brunches organized by the Sisterhood. After a hearty brunch of smoked fish and bagels and cheese the women retired to a Sisterhood meeting while the men discussed the

[6] Cambridge/Somerville Jewish Community Building Day, article by Ada Kleiman, 1990.

business of the synagogue. The life of the synagogue continued in this vein until the late 70's when the membership began to decline sharply as older members moved out of the neighborhood and were not replaced by younger families. In 1978, Rabbi Leo Shubow retired after 32 years of service and was not replaced by another full-time rabbi. The membership continued to run services that were led by members of the congregation and hired a rabbi for the High Holidays. Morris Kleiman was the president of the congregation during the 80's and he and his wife Ada made the survival of the synagogue their prime concern. Morris led services on most Saturdays and Ada wrote the monthly newsletter, between them they split most of the work of running the synagogue, from financial management to public relations and house maintenance and things were rough. On July 31, 1986 Morris wrote a rebuttal to an article in The Jewish Advocate in which he said: "In your July 17 edition of the Jewish Advocate about the Adams Street Synagogue in Newton, I read of the imminent demise of Temple B'nai Brith of Somerville. May I advise you that this news of our impending death is greatly exaggerated." He went on to list all the activities that were going on in the synagogue and chief among them was the relationship they had built with the Harvard Hillel Children's School. The Children's School did not have a building large enough to hold Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations and was using the Temple for these events and providing much needed revenue as well as the good spirits that go with these rituals. This was the beginning of the transition. I am going to use my interviews to try and tease out the factors that were significant in making this transition successful.

Findings:

Attracting New Membership

One of the issues that comes up in most synagogues is how do we attract new membership, the assumption is that people are not coming because they don't know that the synagogue exists and if the synagogue had the right kind of publicity then people would flock to it. The interviews I did at Temple B'nai Brith tell another story. Most of the interviewees were invited to try B'nai Brith by friends who had already been there for some service or other even though they were not members, one or two seem to have just happened upon the building and realized that it was synagogue. What I find interesting is the sort of magnetic pull the synagogue had on people who did not identify themselves as actively Jewish, but they carefully put the knowledge that a synagogue existed nearby into some special place in their minds, marked for future use. Dan Epstein told me: "We were walking along one day, Rosann was pregnant, we had just moved into Somerville, it was the crest of the hill, in December and we were walking past the deserted, abandoned Temple and some people were coming out of it. Some elderly people and I said, 'what goes on in this building' and they said, 'this is a Jewish Temple and tonight is the Festival of Lights.' I said, 'do people come to this temple? Yes, on Saturday morning, it's the side door.' That was Morrie and Ada." Dan and Rosann didn't return to B'nai Brith until they had a new baby and felt pulled to be part of a Jewish community but they didn't forget that B'nai Brith was only a few blocks away. Lisa Gregorman, the current Executive Director of B'nai Brith said, "I lived around the corner from here, found it charming and stopped in occasionally." She didn't become a member until a number of years later. Larry Miller, who identified himself as either agnostic or atheist at that time

in his life nevertheless, knew that the Temple existed when his friend Dan Epstein suggested that he check it out. "I had seen the building when I was first canvassing the neighborhood when I was thinking about buying this house." Alan Teperow[7] said "I think there's clearly an appeal to younger people to come to these congregations, either *because* they're older congregations and they can look back to their grandparents generation that they remember or they read about or they've seen pictures of Eastern Europe, and they kind of reminisce with their parents and they say: 'This is something that has some real significance to me – historically. I'm part of the Jewish people for generations."

I guess I'm making the case that Jews, for all their complaints and objections to organized religion, still want the comfort of knowing that there is a Jewish community near by and the problem is not publicizing the synagogue but how newcomers are treated once they enter the doors of the synagogue.

The Transfer of Power

All the interviewees' spoke about the role Morrie and Ada played in making them welcome to Temple B'nai Brith. Morris and Ada Kleiman played a pivotal role in making the young people who visited the shul feel at home. They were determined to see the shul continue and to pass their traditions on to the next generation and every new person that walked through their door was evaluated and given the appropriate welcome. Dan Epstein described his first visit to Temple B'nai Brith: "Morrie and Ada were there and they knew their business, they knew how and when to bring in. They knew not to

[7] Tuft's Generation to Generation Project, 1988. This was a series of filmed interviews with members of the Temple B'nai Brith Congregation. Alan Teperow was the Executive Director of the Synagogue Council of Mass.

mess with these young people here, you had to leave them alone." Dennis Fischman described another incident when they attended their first Sunday morning brunch: "Mark sat us down next to Morrie and Ada and they made us very welcome. They had a raffle at these brunches; the prize was a bottle of Manischewitz. I still swear that they rigged the raffle so the new people won it. We're sitting there looking at this big bottle and seeing my confusion Morrie leans across and says 'the custom is to donate the bottle back to the Temple.' So, of course, I did, it's like the stone soup story, you keep raising money on the same bottle of wine." Their talent wasn't just in 'being nice' to people but in knowing how to make each one feel that they were part of the community. Phil Weiss described it this way: "When I came back on Shabbat there was all this welcoming stuff on the part of Morrie and Ada, they always made you feel you belonged and sure to come back. They were hard at work making this place stick and they were welcoming to anyone that came in the door, that anyone who came in the door should feel appreciated and they were very good at that. This was a genuine task of love, this was their retirement task, to make the shul a going proposition and they really took it very seriously, again with a lot of soul. They greeted everyone with 'savor panim yafot' (graciously and with kindness). When I asked how their greeting was different then greetings one would get at other synagogues, he answered: "They told you, you were coming back. They didn't ask. They said, you'll be back, if you said well I'm not sure, they said, no you'll be back. They were very positive, they were very direct, they let you know that there was a great desire for your presence here. They talked to you as though they were interested in what you did and they were." I don't think they actually kept records on each new potential member but they surely kept mental notes. The Kiddush

(coffee hour, after services) was used as an opportunity to find out how much Jewish education the new person had and what he could offer the shul. Could he read Torah, lead some part of the service, etc. Although Morrie and Ada took the lead in making people feel at home, other members of the congregation also played their part. Phil was working on his dissertation and hadn't been to services for a long time, when he came one Shabbot morning Riba Kraft said, "So Phil, where you been, so I said, I haven't been coming so often and she said, 'Not so often, it's been a whole year.' So I started coming a little more often." The older generation at Temple B'nai Brith had discussed the decline in Temple membership over the years and there was a difference of opinion about what to do about the loss in membership. Some wanted to close the Temple down and distribute the assets but Morrie and Ada convinced a core group that they could keep the Temple going and they worked as hard as they could towards that goal. Phil told me that: "When I first started coming, there were between fifteen and twenty... and, there were more who were involved in it, not from a davening (praying) prospective. They were involved in the Sunday morning meetings and they still had their annual rummage sale. They had their annual dinner." This was the scenario when Phil first started attending services in the early eighties, there were still about forty or fifty families that were members of the synagogue but that population declined sharply as the years went by. Morrie and Ada also had personal relationships with the new and prospective members, they invited them to their house, they got to know their children and in many cases they functioned as surrogate parents and grandparents. These relationships were important but there was another agenda and that was to engage the young people enough so that they

would begin to take on the burdens of leadership and the transfer of responsibility from the old to the new generation was one of Morrie and Ada's main goals.

There aren't any records that say that Morrie and Ada had a written plan of how they were going to get these young people involved in the synagogue but it certainly seems obvious that this had to be one of their major objectives. The older generation was less and less able to physically keep the place going and run the services and they needed the younger people if the shul was going to continue to provide even the most rudimentary services. In the early 80's when this process was just beginning Morrie seems to have made an effort to get people involved in any way he could without asking for any permanent commitment, that came later. Phil says that first Morrie asked him to help with the Torah reading and at first he refused but Morrie didn't give up and asked again and again until he finally agreed. One Saturday Morrie and Ada had a wedding to go to and asked Phil to prepare the sermon or d'var Torah. "And Morrie says to me, I had great reports about your d'var Torah, why don't you do that some more. The High Holiday Cantor who had been koreh (Torah reader) couldn't come so I became the High Holiday Cantor and then the Rabbi who we had for the High Holidays couldn't come so Everet and I shared those responsibilities....That was about '86, so he sort of led you step by step." Dan Epstein joined Temple B'nai Brith only after his daughter Jena was born: "after I had been there for a year and a half, going every week...Phil said, does anyone want to do the Musaf service, nobody did...so I went home and kind of learned it by myself...And then for the next ten years I did the Musaf service every week." At some point, although it isn't clear exactly when, probably between 1987-88, Morrie and Ada asked Phil and Dan to commit to taking on the full responsibility for running the

synagogue. Dan reports: "Morrie and Ada basically did everything and they said we can't do it anymore, if you guys can't do it or won't take the responsibility, so we'll close it...Can you folks take on this responsibility, so Phil said yes but there will have to be some changes if we do and the changes are the role of women." Dan became the president of the synagogue and Phil continued as the prayer (religious) leader.

This transfer of leadership was a subtle and sophisticated process; Morrie and Ada were good at recognizing leadership potential and slowly testing their first opinions. There were others who lead services and supported the work of the shul but they didn't all stay and weren't necessarily tapped for leadership posts. Some left because they completed their studies and moved away to new job opportunities, some moved because the synagogue didn't fit their style or offer the other kinds of services they needed but enough stayed so that the synagogue continued to survive.

Intergenerational Conflicts and Problem Solving Styles

When the younger generation got the go ahead to take over and Dan was officially recognized as President they found that there were many problems that they had to deal with but at that point in time the definition of what those problems were was still very hazy. Each actor had his own view of life at Temple B'nai Brith. Phil Weiss who functioned as the rabbi and was not involved in the day-to-day affairs of the synagogue was unaware of any problems. He said: " We were incredibly conflict free for the longest time...it worked like a dream for years. Everything was able to be done with relatively low maintenance, low formality. When something needed to be done someone emerged and got it done and everyone was happy that it got done until we got big....Once we

found ourselves, much to our surprise, a regular institution and not an institution in the recovery process, then all of a sudden we developed regular institutional problems." Dan Epstein had much the same point of view. "There were very few problems because I'm not someone who looks for problems and the community, at that time, was not a community that looked for conflicts....There was relatively little conflict, partially because the real conflicting things we did not tackle at those times. They really hadn't come up enough and the difficult things would be 'who is a Jew' we did not tackle this, didn't tackle by-laws." Dan goes on to say that he was not a skilled administrator and knew his limitations but he was skilled enough to know that the synagogue needed the guidance of a skilled administrator and pressed the Board to allow him to hire one on a part-time basis. It must have been a very hard sell. Dennis Fischman said: "The older generation didn't see any need to have professional staff because they just pitched in and did it. When they were convinced to have a part-time executive director, they were always very critical of that person....Why are we paying for this, we could do it ourselves." The older generation didn't really understand the life-style of their new members who were young couples with small children; both parents often had full-time jobs and were active in a number of other organizations as well as the synagogue. Nevertheless they hired Mark Neidergang, a young member of the congregation who had a lot of experience working with non-profit organizations and he diagnosed the problems immediately. "The main problem was that there wasn't an organizational culture that was able to do planning and the building and developing of the organization. There were no functional committees; the Board itself was completely dysfunctional." In fact there were some informal committees or groups that did things but not in a way that would be

acceptable to the younger generation. There was an official treasurer and a maintenance committee of one who recruited anyone available to help make small repairs and Ada and Morrie picked up the slack, which was significant. Morrie handled many of the financial tasks, from collecting dues and donations to deciding what repairs the synagogue could afford to make and Ada wrote the newsletter and handled correspondence with old members who still gave donations to the synagogue. They even came in every Friday afternoon to set up the kiddush (wine and cake for after services). Mark had a lot of work to do and he started with the basics: "I talked to people and told them the way that I thought things needed to run and I started setting agendas for meetings and trying to get the meetings run effectively and to give the Board a sense of its responsibilities and establish a committee structure so the board wasn't spending twenty five minutes talking about buying light bulbs or something like that. I tried to do some strategic planning so that the leaders of the organization could think about the direction in which it was headed. At that time, in the late 80's when I got involved as executive director, the future of the congregation was very much in doubt. It looked at the time as though it could go either way. I felt positive because we had excellent leadership in Dan and Phil and there was a real magic there, but I felt it could have just as easily failed as succeeded at the time. It was a real challenge to build the organization before the building fell apart." The steps that Mark took at this crucial time in the life of the synagogue set up the structure for the progress the organization was then able to make in handling it's physical plant problems. He opened up the committee structure by suggesting the formation of new committees and encouraged the membership to participate. It was no longer a one-on-one mentoring culture but a more open democratic committee structure that allowed

people to participate without being explicitly invited to do so. The next big test for this congregation was repairing the building before it fell down around them but in order to due that they needed to raise a large amount of money and this community of left-wing hippies needed to face their own feelings about money before they could begin this process.

Fundraising

The need for a big fundraising effort became obvious in the early 90's. There was a problem with water seeping into the building so they had a new roof put on but that did not solve the problem, the experts informed them that the building needed to be repointed and that would cost a great deal of money, more then they had ever raised before. Once the community came to the realization that they had to raise a significant sum the next question was how were they going to do it. Dennis Fischman told me: "Having to raise money created non-generational issues, it was more of business versus social movement kind of feeling. People said, you have to do what it takes to raise the money and there are ways of doing that that are well known and you just do it. Other people said; these ways of raising money are the things that alienated our families from the temples we used to be attached to and we don't want to replicate them here. This is an egalitarian synagogue, not only in a gender sense." Larry Miller explained the discussion in another way: "There were a lot of people like me and we had to struggle with the idea of asking for money. It took an enormous amount of collective therapy to get us to the point that we felt it was ok to ask for money and we put all kinds of restrictions on how it could be done, should be done and we put all kinds of restrictions on brass plaques....It took a year of internal discussion to get to the point of actually being able to do it, a lot of therapy."

This first major conflict was not inter-generational, the older generation knew that the money had to be raised to save the building and they were not in a position to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars by themselves, this was the test for the new generation. It became a definitional challenge that tested their view of who they were and how they problem solved together. How they faced this challenge set the pattern for how they would face other issues as they came up. Dennis Fischman, who was the president of the Board at this time, explained the process. "The Board met with people who did know how to raise money and we figured out how we could adapt some of that stuff to our particular community and culture. One of the things that we did say early and often, 'money will not be an obstacle to a person being a member of this community.' We kept the dues really low and the first year dues were even lower then that, if someone called up and said I can't even afford that, the questions were: How much can you afford and where should we send the thank you note. That's the way it should be in my opinion. We raised money by saying, we're not going to hike dues and we're not going to make a mandatory building fund contribution, we're not going to make classes of members. We're going to have a capital campaign and say this is how much we need. We're going to figure out how to ask people for money and the Board is going to do what it can. My role in that was minor, it was mainly motivational, it was to get up on Yom Kippur and say this is why we need the money. We're not going to build a gym or a swimming pool; we have to preserve this legacy that was handed to us. That stood us in good stead when we had to raise dues later on because we were able to say, we only asked you for money when it was really needed." They did raise the needed funds and then faced their next major challenge using the pattern they had just created.

The financial support of the institution was also handled in a unique way. Both the older generation and the new comers felt it was very important to keep dues low, that was a joint commitment, though not as clearly enunciated by the older generation. They understood the problem from a very practical point of view, having experienced the Depression during their lifetimes. The new generation was very clear about their desire to maintain an affordable fee structure based on their liberal political awareness. Mark said: " I also think, politically, people feel and I'm committed to this too, that a lot of synagogues have priced people out, or made people feel like, if you couldn't pay you had to go beg. I think people bend over backwards in our community to make it affordable." Morrie and Ada supported the shul during the 80's and early 90's when the membership was shrinking by keeping up contact with the membership who had moved away, sometimes years and years ago. Ada kept up a lively correspondence with old members and sent out the synagogue newsletter to all of them. They, in turn, responded by sending checks, not necessarily large ones but a steady stream that helped support the operation of the building. When small emergencies arose there were people they could go to and they did. "I know for example that we needed a new driveway, so this guy Jerry Rosenberg gave $10,000 for the driveway to be repaved. The building was in bad shape, it was leaking, there was water and we needed hundred of thousands and I don't think that kind of money was available."[8] There came a point when the new generation had to assert their authority and their willingness to take on the responsibility for this institution and the need for major building repairs was the catalyst that forced them to make the decision. They were willing to meet the challenge and accept the responsibility and undertake the necessary work. I think that fund raising is a critical issue in many

[8] Mark Neidergang interview

communities not because the money is not available but because people are not committed to the purpose for which they are raising the funds. There are examples of clergy raising funds to build impressive institutions in ghettoes so we know that it can be done. Once Congregation B'nai Brith made the commitment to take on the responsibility for their shul they found ways to raise the needed money. They were and still are sensitive to the needs of the community. Rona put it this way: "The board still has a conflict running along the class and style lines. There are still people who are uncomfortable with the financial burden of the building and there are people who feel you can be as uncomfortable as you want, we still have to take care of the building." She is the person who will lead the coming campaign to raise approximately $200-300,000 to make the building handicapped accessible. The campaign was put off because they felt the recession would make it difficult to fund raise but she expects to start this project this year. I have no doubt they will succeed.

Creating New Programs for the New Membership

The process of creating new programming was relatively effortless in this community. Many of the members had experience working in other organizations and knew how to function in organizational settings and many were trained as teachers and had the skills necessary to set up community programs. The trick was to identify what was needed and find people willing to do the work. That also was not problematic. Dennis Fischman said that after he had decided to join the synagogue he talked to Mark, then Executive Director, about what he could do. "Mark had already said the big need is for adult education and that was something I was interested and qualified to do, so I joined the Program Committee and started doing Adult Education events." There was a Social

Action Committee that was active and when there were enough children to make a Hebrew School program viable the parents organized a School Committee and went about the job of hiring teachers or getting parents to volunteer as teachers. Cultural events were encouraged by the membership and especially by the older generation. One of the keys to this activity was the attitude of the older generation. Mark's take on this process is instructive. "He (Morrie) and Ada left enough room for us to figure out our own ways to do things, to make things flourish. We started holding different types of programs that would attract more young people. They were thrilled, anything that brings people into the building. You want to do an Art Show, great, you want to do photography, great, folk dancing, great. They didn't even care how much Jewish content it had. We cared about that, to them, they just wanted to get young Jewish people into the building. What the Chinese leader Deng Chou Ping used to say, white cat, black cat, what does it matter as long as it catches mice, that was their attitude." There were no stumbling blocks put in the way of the younger generation, no one asked how much it would cost to keep the furnace on high for the event or if they needed to pay the maintenance people to clean up or would do it themselves. They allowed them to work out those problems and applauded their enthusiasm and industry.

Kashrut

Koshrut is often a problem in synagogues that have a membership that represents different levels of halakhic practice; the older generation is more likely to keep kosher homes and to feel that the strict observance of Koshrut in the synagogue kitchen is a most while the younger generation, although they may agree in principle, may find it more onerous. Temple B'nai Brith had a tradition of having annual fund raising dinners that would be catered in by kosher caterers but as the younger generation began to grow they found that formal dinners was not their style. They preferred potluck events where each family could bring something that they had made at home and share it with the group. Food that is not prepared in a kosher kitchen has the power to trief (make non-kosher) dishes and utensils, pots and pans, sinks and stoves that it comes in contact with.
That was the problem in the B'nai Brith kitchen as the time came for them to have, what would be the last big formal dinner in 1991. Rona Fischman explained that: "There were two attempts to kosher the kitchen. The first attempt was about on a $300 budget, just to get enough of everything in there to cover the annual dinner, dishes and everything were just cleaned and that wasn't kosher enough and about three years later we actually went through a full Koshrute, where everything got soaked and things got thrown out and we started over and we blow torched the sink." They also made other changes to their practice, they announced that the kitchen would be vegetarian with the exception of lox and that they would continue to have pot luck events but when they did so they would not use the kitchen, instead the food would be brought directly to the dining area and would be served on paper plates using plastic utensils. There are many synagogues that have adopted the practice of having a dairy or vegetarian kitchen in order to avoid the

problems around having separate sets of dishes and pots and pans but it is unusual to allow people to bring in food from home when the kitchen is officially kosher. Everyone I spoke with about this issue seemed perfectly comfortable with this practice. Phil Weiss explained their practices this way: "We devised a two tier system so that for some kinds of events we require a stricter koshrut and for some kinds of events we still have dairy pot luck, so we just don't use the kitchen when we have those kinds of events so there are places for this and places for that, so there are occasions where you can do that, bring things from home. When we're having an official ritual where anyone walking in the door could see, because we have this interesting dichotomy, at least we did for a very long time, and to a certain extent still. You really couldn't tell our davening from your average orthodox shul's davening. There were people who came and were attracted to us, primarily because of the conservative nature of our davening, so we think with a lot of liberalism but our davening is extremely conservative, so we have to have a kashrut policy that is comfortable for them when we are having rituals."

Governance

I asked every interviewee whether there was an informal as well as a formal structure for governance in the shul and was surprised by the consistency of the answers. Although the synagogue may have had a more formal structure in it's earlier history, by the 80's things were being handled in a very informal manner. There was a formal set of By-laws, that the community is now, finally revising (more about that later) and a Board of Directors, but the Board met in formal session only once a year and most of the

synagogue's business was handled at the monthly Breakfast meetings. The women set out the breakfast and after everyone had eaten they broke into two groups, the men in one room and the women in another. The men discussed whatever problems were then current and anyone who attended could give his opinion and whatever decisions needed to be made were made then and there. The slate of officers was voted on at the annual meeting and the officers themselves had great leeway in making day-to-day decisions. From a practical point of view, Morrie handled most of the synagogue's business and consulted with other Board members when he thought he needed their support for something. The women held their own Sisterhood meeting, deciding what events they would sponsor and recruiting others to help with the work. They actually raised fairly large amounts of money that they held in a separate Sisterhood account. This money was made available to the synagogue on a case-by-case basis and was not used for the daily costs of running the synagogue. When the younger generation took over and Dan Epstein became president, things began to change. The younger generation felt the need for more transparency in the operation of the synagogue and for more participation by the rank and file. Mark said: "Part of what I saw had to happen when I was Executive Director and subsequently when I was on the Board, was that we needed to move from this informal structure that wasn't very democratic to a much more formal Board run organizational structure where there was formal ways for people to have their input heard and which was due process and consideration of things where people could get a fair hearing. That was the transition that needed to happen between the older generation and the younger generation and to their credit, the older generation were willing to let that kind of transition happen." Again we see the unique style of this community and the part that the

older generation played in keeping their synagogue alive, their willingness to share power and to ultimately give their power to the younger membership.

Religious Issues

1. The Worship Service

I didn't have an opportunity to attend a worship service at Temple B'nai Brith but the picture I got from the many descriptions of the main Saturday morning service was that it was a very Conservative service that verged on Orthodox. The service is now held in a large main room on the first floor and they have a movable ark that holds the Torah Scrolls that they had built some years ago. The main sanctuary is on the second floor of the building. When Phil and Dan started coming to this shul in the 80's services were held in a small room in the basement because it was cheaper to heat a small space especially when they often barely had a minyan (10 people). New comers found the space charming, warm and friendly and liked the traditional sound of men praying in Hebrew. The service did not become officially egalitarian until Phil and Dan agreed to take on the roles of Prayer Leader and President. Phil felt very comfortable with this style of prayer and has kept the basic feeling of the service. Many of the people I spoke with were drawn to this service; it reminded them of synagogues they had attended as children or simply of some ideal image of a pious community. Dennis Fischman said the main philosophy of the service could be described as meditative. "He (Phil) sometimes describes it as a groovy counter-cultural service. He likes to elaborate groovy as, you're in the groove, it's kavannah, but in some ways it's just a very traditional service with a different feeling to it." Larry Miller compared the service to a Catholic church that was

"utterly devoted to liberation theology and the Latin Mass." As more people joined the synagogue, the need for change became apparent and the community struggled with how to change it. According to Dennis: "Many people liked the atmosphere of the regular service but didn't know how to connect to it in a way that was personally meaningful...We didn't have a learners service but Phil did have adult education classes in those directions. The ritual committee organized a buddy system. That was partly to improve attendance at the service and also so people could figure out what was going on. Then there was the invention of Shabbat Together. That was designed to be shorter, more English based, a lot more on explanation about what this is about and to have an expanded kiddish so that people who weren't used to being in the Temple would have time to talk to other people."

None of these attempts to "fix" the service have been wholly successful and they established an alternative minyan about three years ago which according to Mark is just beginning to catch on: "It's a lot shorter, it's an hour and a half and probably 20-30 minutes of it is in Torah discussion in English and we just kind of very briefly go through some preliminary prayers and it's completely open, so it can be standard traditional prayers or poetry or songs or niggunim (wordless melodies) and we usually do the Barachu and the Sh'ma and an abbreviated Amidah and then we do a Torah service and we do a kaddish and something after that, but the heart of it is the Torah discussion."

The struggle they are having with their worship services is typical of many synagogues but the way they are addressing it is less so. Mark who was one of the initiators of the alternative service said: "We went to the Ritual Committee and they said fine (when they

first broached the suggestion to have an alternative service.) That's one of the great things about Temple B'nai Brith, people have a live and let live attitude."

2. Who is a Jew?

As the community grew, it attracted many young couples that were or had been part of the counter culture, they were very involved in social justices issues, seeing the world from a particular moral and ethical perspective. The issue of "who is a Jew" came up when they started having children who were of Bar/Bat Mitzvah age and had to decide who and under what conditions could a child take on these new religious responsibilities. Like many other modern Jewish communities, there were many inter-faith couples whose children were being brought up as Jews but had not been officially converted and they had to address the issue. Phil Weiss described this process as being the first in the discussion of issues. "This was the first process that led to people leaving the community over the internal politics of the community. We led two sessions on who is going to count as Jewish. And we had a similar set of meetings and discussion of that (issue) that led some people, who had a more traditional understanding of "who is Jewish" and what the nature of the institution is to people who are not Jewish, to leave. That's the issue of principle on which people moved away." Larry Miller described the process from his point of view and said it took almost a year and a half to come to resolution. "There was certainly a group of people in the community who came from Orthodox and Conservative backgrounds...for whom the traditional answers were not only acceptable but necessary and there were those who had wondered in from a variety of other places because

Reconstructionism and Reform had moved in the other direction, who were not comfortable with the answer that if you had one kind of Jewish parent you were a Jew and if you had another kind of Jewish parent you were not. Because I am an anthropologist by training I insisted on academically correct usage, we talked about it as bi-lateral descent...There were great divisions about the way we should go but it was clear that Phil was on the side of a liberal or more progressive interpretation and that carried a lot of weight. And so it turned out, I think, was Morrie." All the people I spoke with at the shul seemed comfortable with this decision. After the issue was discussed both formally at Board meetings and at specially held meetings and informally over cups of coffee and on the telephone, for well over a year, there was a vote, taken at a congregational meeting and the entire congregation approved this decision. Even though people were sad that some members decided to leave because of this decision, they still felt that the whole community had been consulted and had had a chance to air their opinions and had, in fact, been heard. The final decision was that bi-lateral descent was acceptable without the Reform movement's requirement for Jewish education so that someone who was born to a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother and raised in a secular household would be considered Jewish. They felt that if someone with a Jewish mother, who was raised in a secular household could be considered Jewish then it followed from egalitarian principle that someone with a Jewish father raised in a secular household should also be considered Jewish without any further tests.

This process of conflict resolution had worked for them. They had a way of setting out the issues, allowing all the voices to be heard and were then able to bring the issue to a close through, what they saw as a democratic process. Even though there was some

negative fall-out, the loss of membership, that was seen as acceptable because it was the result of a democratic process.

Children's Education – The School

The common mythology in the Jewish world is that families join synagogues when their children get close to Bar/Bat Mitzvah age and the issue of giving them some kind of Jewish education comes up. My interviews indicate that at least for this group of people this was not the driving force although it was a consideration. Three of my ten interviewees said that the need to attend services became more insistent when they found out they were going to be parents and so they more actively sought synagogue affiliation but only one, Larry Miller, said he actually joined because his son was in the Hebrew School. "I guess I began to feel that if I were sending my kid to Hebrew School, even just once a week, even under the complicated rules that the parents were insisting on, not too much God talk, maybe I should try going to services." Rona Fischman reports that for Morrie Kleiman a Hebrew School was seen as a major goal. "He felt that the minyan was the reason this (the shul) existed and the children's school a close second and all the other stuff was fluff." The school got started in 1986-87 and was a volunteer effort, run like a one room school with mixed ages in the same class. The school population has waxed and waned as the community has grown but there is a complicating factor because there are other Hebrew School opportunities available to this community so they are not dependent on their synagogue to provide a Jewish education for their children. At the moment they have a paid professional teacher who works here part-time and at another Jewish, non-sectarian after-school program the rest of the time. The school is important

to the congregation as a vehicle for providing their children with a feeling of Jewish community but it does not seem to be the main motivator for their affiliation with the synagogue.

Conclusions

In some ways we can think of Temple B'nai Brith as a very unique place with an intellectually privileged constituency but it also represents typical urban Jewish communities all over the United States and as such I think there are lessons here that we can learn. There are certain characteristics of this community that stand out in my mind: first of all the older generation had a clear goal; the survival of their synagogue and it's transfer to a younger community. They were willing to be very flexible to meet this goal and understood that it would require a lot of work on their part. Morrie and Ada Kleiman were undoubtedly the main supporters of this goal and probably were the first ones to consciously enunciate it but they were not alone, they had enough support among the existing congregation to allow them to continue to financially support the synagogue during most of the years of the transitional period I have described. And they did more then just provide financial support, at least in their minds they mentored and supported this younger membership. Even Riba Kraft who is remembered as: "a human being who could be so mean and critical and so warm and magical," [9] thought she was teaching the younger generation how to behave and stayed involved in synagogue events so they could benefit from her knowledge until she died.

Secondly the leadership of the younger generation had the capacity and the patience to focus on process and to carefully assess their problems as they arose and deal with them in a flexible and constructive manner. They didn't panic, they weren't overly concerned with the amount of time it took to problem solve. They were more concerned with democratic process and with airing all the possible opinions about difficult topics so that

[9] Rana Fischman interview

people could express their points of view and be heard even if they were in the minority. Above all they seem unafraid of change although they go about it very slowly, they are willing to address the same issues over and over again until they find a solution that is acceptable to a majority of their community. This fall they have published a revised set of by-laws that will get voted on in the near future, they have been working on it, on and off, for the last fifteen years. Their progress is definitely evolutionary and not revolutionary.

In "Finding a Spiritual Home" Sidney Schwarz identifies eight themes that come out of his study of four synagogue communities, I found that these themes were echoed in B'nai Brith with the addition of their unusual take on the world. They have chosen not to have a rabbi leading them. Phil Weiss has titled himself Darshan and although he functions in many ways as a rabbi, he does not perform all the tasks that a traditional rabbi does. The congregation seems to be very supportive of him and undertake the duties that he is either unable or unwilling to do. He is not involved in the administrative life of the synagogue; the Executive Director and the President of the Board of Directors handle those duties. He's not involved in programming, that is taken care of by the Program Committee and he's not heavily involved in counseling although a list of social workers and therapists who belong to the synagogue has been compiled so that he can ask for assistance when necessary.

B'nai Brith functions more like a synagogue community then a synagogue center. Schwartz defines synagogues centers as the standard suburban synagogues that grew up after World War II. "Seeking to build synagogues comparable to their non-Jewish counterparts, the new institutions offered far more than worship services. The synagogue

center took over the task of Jewish education and the ancillary youth and recreational activities young families desired. It also became the site of most of the Jewish community's social and cultural activities. Wealthier congregations built athletic facilities and swimming pools. Some took on the name 'Jewish Center.' But even more modest synagogues in the suburbs sought a certain grandness of scale and aesthetic. For Jews moving into areas that were no longer predominantly Jewish, the synagogue served as a status marker that the Jews had arrived. It spoke of the new socioeconomic station the Jews had achieved and were eager to show off to their Gentile neighbors."[10]

Certainly the people I interviewed at B'nai Brith were well aware of what a synagogue center was and described it to me as the place their parents went and that they found unsatisfying. They wanted their synagogue to be different. Many of them had had experiences at Havurat Shalom, which was nearby and also felt that the havurah model did not meet their needs.

So the first theme that Schwartz identifies: The Turnoff of the Synagogue Center was clearly also found at B'nai Brith. The second theme he identifies is: A Sense of Exclusion. The leaders of this community did not universally feel this sense of exclusion although probably about half did. What struck me was that 6 out of the 7 men who I interviewed had reasonably good Jewish educations for non-orthodox Jews. Phil, Larry and Dennis went to Hebrew High School or it's equivalent. Mark spent time in Israel in a youth program that paired physical work with Torah study and among the women, all had some Jewish education and certainly had knowledge of the family rituals performed at home. Rosann Kraus had a good Jewish education, is able to lead services and read

[10] Ibid. page 35

Hebrew. What they all have in common is that they were all part of the counterculture and have strong commitments to egalitarian, democratic institutions.

The theme of Spirituality was less well spelled out in this group but was certainly there. Some of them had flirted with Buddhist practice and a number of them practiced meditation at some point in their lives so that the theme of Alternative Spiritual Paths was there and may be stronger for the rest of the congregation. That theme came to the fore in this congregation only after they became more stable and their future was less in doubt. They now have an alternative minyan and a monthly Family Shabbat Service and are still looking for ways to make the services more accessible to less Jewishly knowledgeable members. The theme of Inclusivity is very evident here and is a basic tenet of their public policy process. I think it is a basic factor in their success. The manner in which they process every major decision is amazing. They don't hesitate to hold public meetings about difficult issues and engage in lengthy formal and informal discussion about these issues from fund raising to 'Who is a Jew'. What was stressed to me was that everyone had a right to be heard even if the decision eventually went against some faction of the community. I think that many synagogues could learn from their example. The theme of Social Justice is second nature in this community and not something that they had to work to introduce. The new membership brought this gift to the older generation and I'm not sure that they appreciated it but they didn't reject it either. Mark works professionally with not-for-profit organizations and much of the leadership were active in college in various social justice causes and brought this awareness with them to B'nai Brith. The theme of Belonging and Communal Support is also evident and unselfconscious in this community. They seem to take it as a given that homosexuals,

interfaith couples and converts are welcome. I heard some stories about older generation members being appalled at seeing women wearing pants on the bimah and that Morrie didn't think it was proper to have a lesbian representing the community as a Board member but their policy was to welcome everyone who came through the door and they seemed to do a reasonably good job of it. Once the younger generation was firmly in charge these issues were no longer a topic of discussion in regards to policy as their decision on 'Who is a Jew' clearly illustrates. Schwartz's final theme of Empowerment seems obvious in a synagogue that refuses to hire a rabbi. The 'do it yourself' ethic was also a strong part of the older generation's culture but the younger membership added a new dimension to it. Phil runs the Shabbat morning minyan but invites others to lead all or part of the service. He facilitated that by giving classes on the Prayer Service as did Dennis Fischman. The minyan, itself, is tolerant of learners and is not overly critical of people who are leading for the first time. This has encouraged people to participate. Dan tells the story of his first attempt at leading part of the service. "Phil said does anyone want to do the Musaf Service? Nobody did and I'm a performer, that's what I do so I went home and kind of learned it by myself with whatever tunes I could make up. And so I came back and did the Musaf Service and for the next ten years I did the Musaf Service every week."

At the same time that we hear that our synagogues are not meeting the needs of this generation we are also hearing about other new phenomenon: the growth of the small, non-affiliated synagogue, Secular Humanist congregations, Reconstruction, Renewal, people are seeking their own answers. Temple B'nai Brith is another example of this phenomenon. What I learn from this is that we have to remain flexible, inclusive, loving,

accepting and willing to continue to work and teach so that we can reach all those people who really do want to be included in that group known as The Jewish People.

Some Commentary

This short history of a time of transition in the life of Temple B'nai Brith raises some important questions for all of us who hope to serve other congregations or who are just members of other congregations since we all experience the normal problems of synagogue life and are looking for ways to deal with them. The new generation at Temple B'nai Brith made some important choices early in their work of rejuvenating the synagogue.

The Synagogue

They rejected what Sidney Schwartz characterizes as the synagogue center and they rejected the person who is titled rabbi in that setting. I won't go into a long description of the history of the synagogue but I think it worthwhile to look at Schwartz's definition of the synagogue center. He defines synagogue centers as the standard suburban synagogues that grew up after World War II. "Seeking to build synagogues comparable to their non-Jewish counterparts, the new institutions offered far more than worship services. The synagogue center took over the task of Jewish education and the ancillary youth and recreational activities young families desired. It also became the site of most of the Jewish community's social and cultural activities. Wealthier congregations built athletic facilities and swimming pools. Some took on the name 'Jewish Center.' But even more modest synagogues in the suburbs sought a certain grandness of scale and aesthetic. For Jews moving into areas that were no longer predominantly Jewish, the synagogue served as a status marker that the Jews had arrived. It spoke of the new socioeconomic station the Jews had achieved and were eager to show off to their Gentile

neighbors."[11] Many of the interviewees were very clear about their desire not to build the kind of organizations that they knew in their youth. They consciously work towards having a community that does not look or act like a Jewish Center. They are following the trend that is going back to seeing the synagogue as "a place where Jews learn about and express Jewish values and responsibilities."[12] The Mishnah teaches in Tractate Pe'ah 1:1 that there are things that have no measure: among them is the giving of charity; the performance of righteous deeds and the greatest of all is the study of Torah. The B'nai Brith community has undertaken this task by looking for Jewish content in all the activities held at the synagogue and avoiding activities that are not congruent with Jewish values whether as part of their fund raising efforts or in other ways. They have not resorted to Bingo games to raise funds and abolished the Sisterhood years ago. There are no new plaques on the wall announcing who donated the funds for this or that particular object. They are beginning to look at the worship service because the regular minyan does not serve a large enough portion of the congregation and that will take some time to restructure and may require input from religious professionals, in my opinion.

The Rabbi

But they have also rejected the role of the rabbi and the reason for that is less clear to me. Some described good personal relationships with rabbis while they were studying as young adults but more spoke about synagogue politics and their dislike for it. Maybe it's just a holdover from adolescent rejection of authority but I think it speaks more about the absence of rabbinical influence in their lives. The concept and function of the rabbi has

[11] Sidney Schwartz, op cit pg. 35
[12] Brit Kodesh Sacred Partnership, 2001 Synagogue & Union of American Hebrew Congregations

changed over time. The word itself comes from rav and means great in Hebrew but the title does not exist in the Bible. During mishnaic times rav came to mean master and rabbi, my master. The title was given only to those properly ordained and could be awarded only in Erez Israel. Ordination was not granted outside of Israel in Talmudic times so those who studied in Babylonia were granted the title of rav but not rabbi. In those times the rabbi was an expounder and interpreter of Biblical and Oral law and earned his living at some other occupation. In the Middle Ages the rabbi became a teacher, preacher and spiritual head of the Jewish congregation or community as well as an interpreter and expounder of the law. The great Babylonian communities appointed rabbis as judges (dayyanim) to settle their disputes, as they were, to a large extent, self governing entities within the states where they lived. As Jews moved from the East into Europe the rabbis moved with them and their roles included the concepts of judgeship, scholarship, social-spiritual leadership and exemplar. Some religious authority attached to his person but the title of rabbi did not include priestly or semi-priestly authority or function. The rabbinical office did not include in its functions, prayer, prayer leading, blessing people or officiating at marriage or burial ceremonies. These functions became part of the rabbinical office in the 19th century with the Reform movement. Some people did lead prayer and bless people but it was an individual choice and not seen as a requirement of the position. The rabbi supervised marriage and divorce proceedings because they are complicated legal transactions and because the rabbi could receive payment for them. Originally the function of the rabbi was an honorary one but by the 14th century there are documents that show the rabbi was being paid. Local rulers became aware of the authority and esteem with which rabbis were regarded and

appointed them as heads of local councils and governing bodies. The office of rabbi slowly became institutionalized both in Sephardi and Askenazi communities. Moses Isserles is an example of a royal appointee to the rabbinate in Poland. The concept of the mara de atra (master of the locality) also emerged in the 14th century, other scholars were supposed to submit to his authority. This was not an easily accepted idea. In the 16th and 17th centuries rabbinical office was linked to being a rosh yeshiva. The current concept of the rabbinical office in orthodox communities and Israel dates back to this time. The rabbi is a scholar, teacher, judge and a spiritual leader. He earns his living from a set wage or from fees for the functions he performs and often from a combination of both. His responsibilities are set out in a Letter of Appointment. In Britain there is a chief rabbi for the United Kingdom and the dominions and there is a Chief Rabbinate in Israel. In the United States the concept of mara de atra is vanishing and the rabbi's authority begins and ends at the synagogue door. Hasidic communities have their own traditions and the rabbi is subordinate to the zaddik.

In the modern period: that is since emancipation, much of the rabbi's authority has been diminished, at least, outside of Israel. Marriage and divorce are a civil matter, controlled by the state and so is civil litigation so the role of the synagogue rabbi as judge for all intents and purposes no longer exists. Ritual matters and matrimonial law are dealt with by a central bet din (court) and are no longer in the purview of the local rabbi.

In addition in the West governments began demanding a more secular education before they would recognize rabbis. In Austria in 1848 Emperor Franz Joseph demanded a certain standard of general education. The yeshivot refused to comply and the establishment of seminaries, which provided a more general education, met the need.

The modern rabbi, whether Orthodox, Reform, Conservative or Reconstructionist is a product of these institutions.

The function of the rabbi has changed and varies from country to country but in the West he was expected to preach, devote much of his time to pastoral work, to teach and to officiate at life cycle event as well as participate in the social and philanthropic activities of the congregation. In the United States there are some other unique features. The synagogue became a center for social and cultural activities and the comprehensive Jewish Center developed. It was often the main Jewish institution in the community. The rabbi now became not only the spiritual leader but the main Jewish professional in the community. This is true in all the movements. He not only interpreted Jewish traditions for his congregation but also for his Christian neighbors. Some of the aspects of the rabbi's job have changed as non-movement Jewish Community Centers opened in larger cities, but in smaller communities things are much the same.[13]

[13] Encyclaepedia Judaica, Vol. 13, pp.1445-59. Keter Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd. Jerusalem, Israel, 1972.

Some Modern Thoughts on the Role of the Rabbi

Everyone seems to acknowledge that the role of the rabbi has always been difficult and is getting more so. Women entered this profession in the mid-80's and their contribution to the changing role of the rabbi and the structure of synagogue life is just beginning to be evaluated. Laura Geller[14] gives a short history of women in the rabbinate since that time and describes the experiences of women rabbis and how their congregations experience their presence. She thinks that seeing a women on the bimah forces them to confront God differently since they cannot make a direct transference between the rabbi and God and this causes them to rethink their beliefs and ask new questions about God. Women also bring a different style and set of values to the position and are more inclined to be open to sharing authority and empowering the congregation and to building intimacy into the congregational relationship. However, women are also experiencing the glass ceiling phenomenon in the rabbinical world and are not getting pulpits in larger, more prestigious synagogues or being appointed as faculty in the seminaries or as Board members to policy making bodies in the Jewish world in the numbers their seniority and experience would suggest is appropriate. Her colleague Rabbi Sher believes that women have already influenced male rabbis and that they are beginning to prefer staying in middle sized congregations where they can enjoy continuity and the intimacy of growth with one congregation rather then the power and prestige of a large synagogue. My experience in the business world tells me that women in the religious world are experiencing all the same things that women have experienced as they have entered every other field of

[14] From Equality to Transformation: The Challenge of Women's Rabbinic Leadership," R. Laura Geller, Women Rabbis: Exploration and Celebration, ed. Gary P. Zola, Cincinnati, NY, LA, Jerusalem: HUC-JIR Rabbinic Alumni Assoc. Press, 1996, pp.69-80.

Larry Hoffman in "The Art of Public Prayer"[17] tells us that the worship system is broken for many of us. He says: "prayer is not just for those who attended seminaries. Without consulting with one another, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews have all moved toward more involvement of the people—all the people—in worship. They are invited now to claim their worship as their own: to sing, chant, speak, and even direct and organize their liturgies, rather than let a privileged clerical class do so for them."[18] The problem is the result of a badly functioning system that needs to be changed and he calls on all the members of the system to work together to bring about the needed changes. He does not assume that a congregation can make these changes without the guidance of a rabbi. I have found especially helpful Hoffman's clarification of what the word worship means and how one describes the worship experience. To paraphrase Hoffman; worship is the experience of communicating with God and it is an experience that everyone wishes to have even if they are unable to enunciate it. The full experience requires that an individual can encounter God and be able to recognize that it was a divine encounter. It also requires discussion or communication about the encounter with others. He suggests that the problem of worship rests on a lack of faith in the modern world and shows us how healthy ritual can help faith grow. He says: "Ritual is not the result of faith, but one of its causes—that is why we need good rituals. Ritual's power lies in its artistic capacity to present an alternative world where time and space unfold in structured ways that indicate pattern, plan, and purpose. Faith derives from trusting that the universe in which we live is meaningful and ordered, as opposed to being random, chaotic, and

[17] The Art of Public Prayer, Lawrence A. Hoffman, SkyLight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1999.
[18] Op. cit p. 11

accidental."[19] Faith is derived from seeing how all the little patterns in life build to one divine plan. As Hoffman further defines the issues and their causes as he sees it, he provides us with a blueprint of how to address the problems in our synagogues. So rabbis now have a new task added to all the traditional ones, they have to be the initiators of change in their congregations. They have to encourage the community to work together and fix the system so that it works for them. This is clearly not necessary in every congregation, some seem to be working just fine but those that need help must be able to diagnose the problems and then design their own specific solutions. Rabbis and their congregants have not been trained to address this kind of issue and the various movements are struggling to provide help. An example of the kind of help being offered is the Reform Movements Brit Kodesh.

The Brit Kodesh is a study manual designed for use in congregations. It includes exercises and self study guides to clarify the relationship between the Lay and Professional personnel in the congregation. The manual recommends that at least a portion of three Board meetings be devoted to this study material or alternatively that time be set aside for a Board retreat where this material can be studied in depth. The intent of this material is to convince Board members that they too are involved in a sacred undertaking and need to become partners with their rabbi, cantor, educators and administrators in order to bring our people back to Sinai.

The Exercises are broken into three sections: Unit one is entitled Sacred Leadership; Unit Two is Envisioning Sacred Partnership and Unit three, Chesbon Hanefesh: deals with Self-reflection on the Synagogue Environment. The remainder of this manual consists of a report on the study that was undertaken by the Reform Movement to investigate why

[19] Op. cit. p.117.

there is such a shortage of clergy and the final section: Living in Sacred Partnership, consists of a number of articles that provide advice to clergy and lay people about how to undertake this task. I think that this is a very good beginning for addressing problems that deal with the relationship between the clergy and the Board but it doesn't address the questions that Larry Hoffman raises in "The Art of Public Prayer" and I'm not sure which problems you should tackle first. The role of the rabbi is certainly getting harder and if anything more and more confusing, Rabbi Michael Katz in his "A Rabbi's Heshbon Ha-Nefesh" gives us two choices on how to view our rabbinates: we're either soldiers in a war against ignorance, assimilation, intermarriage and declining observance or medics, whose job is not to win the war but to tend to the casualties. I don't find either choice very inviting. I'd rather see myself as a facilitator on a joint quest.

Rami Shapiro has a set of twelve commandments for a successful rabbinate that are very direct and demand that the rabbi have her own vision of who she is and what she stands for. He stays away from an authoritarian model and opts for limited engagement in the running of the congregation. It is not the traditional model for a rabbi and requires that the congregation take on a major role in running the synagogue. In fact, Rami Shapiro has established a new organization: The Simply Jewish Foundation for reinventing Judaism for the 21st century. The foundation is a think tank "devoted to t'shuva and tikun, returning to God and godliness." The Foundation has developed "The Eleven Irreducible Laws of Rabbinic Leadership." This set of "Laws" is based on the belief that leadership can be taught and learned. These "Laws" have all been discussed in other ways by many other authors although it is good to see them so well organized and clearly set out. They can really be used for any position of leadership and I'm sure that Donald

Trump would immediately attest to their worthiness but I'm not sure that they can be learned in a self- help format. Life's lessons are too complicated and varied to fit into neat little lessons, they require on-going study and commentary, perhaps we should try writing Gemorra for a modern life and including it in a Seminar that meets at a fixed time every year so we could all learn from each other.

I think we can all empathize with Moses when he broke the first set of tablets and had to re-create them in stone (Exodus 32:19, 34:4-6). I take comfort in the way Midrash Tanchuma advises us to behave as it uses Moses as our example: (Parashat Va'yislach 10) "At the time that Moses said to Israel, "Walk in the ways of God" (Deut. 13:5) and then repeated, "walk in God's ways," the people said to him: "Who can walk in God's ways? Is it not written: "God travels in whirlwind and storm, and clouds are the dust of God's feet…'and further, 'Your way is in the sea, your path in the great waters, your footsteps are unknown'" (Psalms 87:20). Said Moses to Israel: "I did not instruct you thus, but rather to walk according to 'God's ways': loving kindness and truth and righteous deeds" (Psalms 25:10). God's first act in the Torah is a righteous deed and God's final act in the Torah is a righteous deed, and in between God's actions are righteous deeds. At the beginning, God clothes the naked, as it is written, "The Eternal God made for the man and woman garments of skin and dressed them" (Gen. 3:21). In between, God visits the sick, as it is written: "And the Eternal appeared to him by the terebrinths of Mamre" (Gen. 18:1), and God's last act is to bury the deceased, as it is written" [God] buried him [i.e. Moses] in the valley (Deut. 34:7)." Thus you too should walk according to the qualities of the Holy One, Blessed Be.

Appendix 1

A Short Description of Members Who Were Interviewed

Dan Epstein
Dan was the first president of Temple B'nai Brith who was chosen from the new generation. He became president in 1988 but had started attending services early in 1985.

Dennis Fischman
Dennis was the second president from the new generation and assumed that position in 1994-5. He and his wife joined the Temple in 1990 and became active immediately.

Rona Fischman
Rona headed a Rosh Hodesh group and spearheaded the group that koshered the kitchen.

Lisa Gregorman
Lisa is the current Executive Director of the synagogue and has held that position since 1992.

Rosann Kraus
Rosann is Dan's wife and has been active in the congregation but has not held any elective positions.

Ada and Morris (Morrie) Kleiman
Ada and Morrie (both now deceased) were members of the older generation. They were instrumental in the revitalization of this community. Morrie was the president of the congregation for many years and Ada acted as Secretary.

Larry Miller
Larry joined the congregation in 1986 and was active on the School Committee. He served as Vice-President for a year or two and then assumed the role of President when Dennis stepped down in 1996.

Charles Munitz
Charlie began attending services at B'nai Brith in the mid 80's and became a **paying** member sometime during 1987-88. He has served on Board of Directors for over 12 years and during that time served as Vice President.

Mark Neidergang
Mark became the first Executive Director of this synagogue in 1990. He worked as the part-time Executive Director for a year or two and later on assumed a position on the Board.

Fred Solberg

Fred was born in Medford, Massachusetts and has been attending services at this Temple since he was a boy. His two sons were Bar Mitzvahed at this synagogue and he served on the Board for many years and was the Chairman of the Maintenance Committee for many years.

Phil Weiss

Phil began attending services at Temple B'nai Brith while he was studying for his PhD in the early 80's and started leading services intermittently in 1983-84 and slowly assumed more and more responsibility. Morrie asked both of them to officially assume more responsibility in 1987-88 when Dan became the president and Phil took the title of Darshan.

Appendix 2

Questionnaire

1. A short personal history including previous religious affiliations, Jewish education, synagogue experience, etc.
2. How did you find Temple B'nai Brith?
3. Do you remember your first visit to Temple B'nai Brith?
4. Who welcomed you to TBB, if anyone?
5. What made you come back?
6. Why did you become a member?
7. How and why did you assume a leadership position?
8. What were some of the problems or conflicts that you encountered as a leader?
9. How were these conflicts resolved?
10. Who helped you resolve them?
11. How did governance happen at TBB? Was there an informal as well as a formal structure?
12. Were the actors the same in both the formal and informal structures?
13. Has the religious philosophy changed since you joined TBB?
14. Has the style of worship changed since you joined?
15. Were religious philosophy and style of worship sources of conflict? How were these issues resolved?
16. Is TBB now a stable community, capable of growth and change? Future?

In some cases I asked follow-up questions to illicit more information from some of the interviewees and when I interviewed Mark Neidergang, the first Executive Director that

the synagogue had ever hired, I asked many questions about goals and methods during his tenure, since as an organization professional he had a unique perspective.

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