

Notes from dual affiliation meeting, Sunday November 16, 2014.

Rabbi Steve Silvern – Dean of Administration of Aleph Ordination program. Went through the ordination program, was on the Board of Aleph. Has been involved w/ Aleph for 14 years.

What is Renewal? I don't know. If you got 10 Jewish Renewal people in a room, you'd get 25 different opinions. Lots of different reasons why people are attracted to Renewal. No judgments. No dogma. Takes people where they are. Isn't a sense "this I believe." More "tell me what you think, and let's see what we can do with it." Many groups of people enriching each other by being in contacts through practice, ideas, discussion, Torah study, silent meditation. Very difficult to define. Attempts to bring meaning to Judaism through very close communal interaction.

Renewal is an attempt to inspire Judaism. Inspire/spirit/respiration. An attempt to bring spirit into Judaism, with the opportunity to leave open the question of what is that Spirit. Tells a story: He belongs to a Reconstructionist congregation in Baltimore. Member there said "we don't believe in angels." Steve said – some of us don't, but some of us believe in possibilities beyond what we can experience. Believes that there is spirit in the world, but we can get away from it, have trouble seeing it. So get a sense of "re-inspiring" of Judaism. Was a time when people, especially young people, were leaving Judaism to go to Indian, buddhist spiritual practices in order to find connection to spirit. How can we bring it back to Judaism?

But how does Renewal help you re-inspire? Rabbis like Leila, who bring to a community the sense of being in touch with something bigger than yourself. Big focus on training of Rabbis, bringing communities together to learn from each other. Biennial Kallah – opportunity to immerse yourself in this spirit – 600-700 laypeople come together. Other opportunities to come together. Learn from other faith traditions – and share with them.

Question and Answer period

Anne: Mordechai Kaplan – wanted to separate superstition from Judaism. How do you reconcile that with the attempts to re-inspire? Kaplan believed that there was a power in the universe beyond us – organizing principal. Steve would call that spirit. Different ways of naming the One. Leila: Kaplan did a recording on "is mysticism superstition?" His answer was no.

Harriet: How much would we have to pay to affiliate? \$54 per family unit. Herb clarified that the number could be lower for a dual affiliated organization.

What about when we look for a new rabbi? Steve: the more that you can explain about what you're looking for

Robin: Having trouble seeing the difference between Renewal and Reconstructionism. Can you compare and contrast? Or are they more complementary? Steve: Can't distinguish between Renewal and reform/conservative/reconstructionist. Orthodox can also see something they

identify with. Leila: Renewal does not see itself as a “denomination.” Number of Reconstructionist Rabbis who are part of the Renewal clergy association has been rising. Leila -- what I do is a hybrid of Reconstructionism and Renewal. Prayerbook is Reconstructionist – lots of the chants, Kavanot we use are Renewal. Prolonged sh’ma.

Robin: given overlap – could say “why not?” But could also say, if we’re already doing all of this, why bother?

Carolyn: what does the trans-denomination mean? Is it only within Judaism or across religions? As a convert, that concerns me. Steve: One of the core principles is deep ecumenism. More than least common denominator – something we won’t fight over. Every tradition brings incredibly rich resources that we can connect over. Example of Benedictines chanting “Kadosh” Leila – how we can understand what we have in common.

Dann: Renewal is like the Shekhina – there but not discussed. Do we have enough energy to face outward? Social, environmental. Have other communities used Renewal affiliation to face externally? Steve: yes.

[Due to time constraints, we asked people to pose all their questions and then for Steve to try to summarize.]

Sam: Leila mentions that we have already some renewal elements. So, why affiliate?

Don: Is there anything that is fundamentally incompatible, tensions that we would need to address?

Susan: Is social action/tikkun olam an integral part of Renewal?

Toby: Is reconstructionist more cerebral and Renewal more emotional?

Toni: How different are the prayerbooks?

Steve: Always a question of what are we going to put our financial support behind. No incompatibilities –everything is open for discussion. Renewal siddur is a three ring binder – designed to be changeable. If you can’t find it in there, find a way to put it in there.

Tikkun olam is the source of our connection with the world. Re-energize the connection with the world to make it less broken than it was. What takes us out of navel gazing.

Honi and the farmer – planting a carob tree – takes a long time to bear fruit. Those other trees were planted by great grandfather, grandfather, father. Why I plant this one.

Member statements

Herb – speaking not as community coordinator, but as member, reported out for Ad Hoc Committee on Dual Affiliation

2013 community meeting appointed an ad hoc committee. Final report submitted in written form. Main points

- Communicates who we are: already both renewal and reconstructionist in practice
- Can help us grow—don't always have minyan
- Opens up to Jewish Renewal resources
- Links us to other Jewish Renewal communities – could participate in joint activities
- Not unheard of to be dual affiliated
- Will it change who we are? Will it turn people off? People come not because of name/tag name, but because of what we do.

Mike White: My Jewish background – rationalist/humanist/secular. Have a strong gut reaction to Renewal services – not my religious. Feels like I have to say a credo. Lot at stake. Identifies not just who we are as a congregation, but as individuals. Most successful congregations are those who have a clear focus on who they are. Dual affiliation would muddy the waters. I have trouble saying “I am a member of a Renewal congregation.”

Janice Cooper-Levy: We are looking for ways to expand our congregation – this could help us attract unaffiliated Jews. Enlarges the pool of Rabbis we could find. Some of the services we've had with Renewal rabbis were

Marcel Infeld: Committee was not legitimate – no attempt to get community input, committee did not meet. Renewal has no definition, no boundaries. Website talks about mysticism, kabbalah. Only appeals to small segment of Jewish population, Hollywood actors. Website is new-age psychobabble. Hebrew words used unrelated to content. Content no relationship to reality. Will restrict our ability to attract Rabbis – If not dual affiliated. Now, after we go through Reconstructionist rabbis, we can go to anyone. Not limited to renewal. Question the propriety of paid staff trying to divide us rather than unite us. I like Kol Ami just the way it is – not broken, why do we need to fix it. Would lose members not gain. Has occupied 3 Kol Ami administrations, drained our energies, need to move on. Divisive.

Toni Popkin: Herb was not paid for many of the years when he has contributed and work for this. Just recent. In my opinion, not appropriate. Came tonight to learn more – wanted to learn more – were they were compatible, what are the differences? Never really got concrete answers. That is the concern. Would want to know more before deciding.

Lynda Erinoff: Confused. Always knew that Leila was affiliated with both Renewal and Reconstructionist. Gone to both Marcel's classes and Herb's services. Never found them incompatible. Don't want to lop off anything – concerned about it. “Strict Reconstructionist” - are we saying we don't want to dual affiliate, or root out what we're already doing? Where

are we going? Very important now, as we pick a new rabbi. Influences both the process and the candidates we'd select. Would it turn off some candidates? Needs to be talked out.

Harriet Epstein: Not so concerned about the outcome. But Renewal services are more inward, more relaxed. Changed how I think in a more permanent way. Hit by the caramel in the head at the Bar Mitzvah. Felt that it was a message. Routinely commutes between different congregations and different denominations – reform, reconstructionist, Chabad, “sneaking off to meditate with renewal.” Blessed that all possibilities are out there.

Susan Freiband: Have a lot to benefit from affiliating with renewal. Broaden the services, and draw on the resources of Aleph.

Don Kraus: Had this experience of building a community with lots of ruach and spirit and creativity and that won't change regardless of what we do about affiliation. Built into our DNA. Affiliating would be supporting the source of a lot of the melodies and themes and ideas that we've built into our life. Shudder at the thought of having to explain both Reconstructionism and Renewal. How do we market ourselves?

Eric Rosenberg: Have been reading about Reconstructionism. Always poll the kids about believing in God. Only a few of the kids do so. With so many Jews unaffiliated.... Looked at the Pew survey.... Worry about the extra adjective – will it turn people away. Came here because Kol Ami wasn't all the other adjectives. If it's not broke, don't try to fix it. Goal as a teacher is to keep them in the Jewish fold... worry that this will make it harder. Coming down on negative at this point.

Rabbi Leila: Has never told students what to believe. But talks about what she believes. Will teach class on the 4 worlds. Says it is not accurate that dual affiliation would restrict our hiring process. Why pay for this if we already benefit from it? What if Rabbi was wealthy – wouldn't we still want to pay for her work? Aleph needs our support. Thriving – more rabbinic students that RRC. Should pay for what we get. Unapologetic about saying we would benefit from affiliation.

Dann Sklarew: Our identity incorporates everything that we, as members, bring to it. In practice, is often pan-denominational. Haven't reached out to the other communities nearby. Regardless of what we call ourselves, we wouldn't stand for being told what to believe. Traditions, regardless of where they came from, are now part of us. Bringing together the social action – how do we make ourselves larger? Or do we want to be internally focused? This could be an avenue to being part of something bigger – not the only one. Expressed gratitude to Rabbi Leila for what she's brought to us – we will probably want some of this in the new Rabbi, regardless of affiliation.

Carolyn Grey: Have spent literally hours reading over the past few months. Tried to temper that with basic values – what brought her to Judaism, and to Kol Ami. What is important to me

is incompatible with Reb Zalman, and Renewal. Comfortable with exploring, but with affiliating. If we affiliate, I will leave.

Sam Barr: Why do we have to affiliate in order to incorporate renewal element? Do we need to replace our books?

Next steps: Contact Elizabeth Lower-Basch (elizabethlb@gmail.com) if you want to sign the petition to move forward on exploring dual affiliation. Deadline is January 11.

Revised process recommendation for dual affiliation – Sept. 2014

1) By end of September, gather and disseminate to the community (via both website and listserv, maybe a few hard copies available at services) the following information:

- Process so far
- Report prepared for June community meeting
- Link to basic background on Renewal <https://www.aleph.org/renewal.htm> and affiliation: <https://www.aleph.org/affiliate.htm>
- Other materials submitted by community members (e.g. Marcel's list of concerns)
- Explanation of this process as a whole.

2) Community discussion scheduled for November 16 where the process is reviewed, people may ask questions, express opinions, etc. Discussion to be facilitated by a member of steering or ritual committees who is general perceived as neutral.

3) Threshold test: Based on what we have done so far, evaluate whether enough of the community is interested in considering dual affiliation to justify. Specifically, have a "petition" process, with a requirement that at least 18 adult members of the community sign on by January community meeting to a request that we proceed with consideration of the proposal. If this test is not met, the proposal to dual affiliate is set aside.

4) If the threshold test is met, the steering committee would solicit volunteers at the January community meeting for an ad hoc committee regarding dual affiliation. Committee to have 3 members, at least one of whom should be on ritual committee. Committee is charged with:

- Soliciting questions from community regarding dual affiliation, locating information to answer questions (either through written materials or asking people), and maintaining a Q and A document to be posted on the Kol Ami website in the members section. Document to be updated as questions come in until the decision is made. (Note: questions regarding the effect of dual affiliation on Rabbi recruitment process to be coordinated with hiring committee to avoid duplication of effort and confusion.)
- Scheduling at least one additional open meeting in for brief review of process, questions and discussions. Committee to conduct outreach to strongly encourage all members to attend at least one meeting.
- Soliciting input from community on what other experiences/information would make people feel ready to make decision on dual affiliation at June meeting. e.g. attending services at Am Kolel, having a phone call w/ someone from a dual affiliated congregation, etc.
- Making a recommendation to steering committee regarding dual affiliation, including a written report that discusses the pros and cons
- Work to be completed in time for report to be sent to the community at least 2 weeks in advance of the June community meeting.

Dual Affiliation Timeline

February 1, 2013 Hill Havurah Jewish Renewal leader Laurie Solnik co-leads Kabbalat Shabbat service with Herb Cooper-Levy. Kol Ami is invited to come to services to experience Jewish Renewal in practice.

April 28, 2013 Aleph Executive Director Joe Laur comes to Kol Ami to provide information about Jewish Renewal.

June 9, 2013 Kol Ami Annual Meeting creates task force to study dual affiliation. The charge to the task force included that any vote on affiliation would not take place at the same meeting in which the task force gave its report.

October 18, 2013 Jewish Renewal Rabbi Jack Gabriel leads Kabbalat Shabbat service. Kol Ami is invited to come to services to experience Jewish Renewal in practice.

March 8, 2014 Jewish Renewal Rabbi Mark Novak leads Shabbat service. Kol Ami is invited to come to services to experience Jewish Renewal in practice.

June 8, 2014 Ad Hoc Committee on Affiliating with Jewish Renewal provides, but does not discuss its report to Annual Meeting.

Report from the Ad Hoc Affiliating with Jewish Renewal Committee

The Ad Hoc Affiliating with Jewish Renewal Committee was composed of V. Susan Cadieu, Herb Cooper-Levy and Susan Freiband. It has looked at whether there are advantages to Kol Ami by affiliating with the Jewish Renewal movement (Aleph) in addition to our continuing our affiliation with the Reconstructionist movement. Its conclusion is that there are advantages in dual affiliation. Rabbi Leila has read this report and fully supports it.

Advantages

1. Dual affiliation clearly communicates who Kol Ami is. Kol Ami is a community whose practices are both Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal. Kol Ami's Rabbi, Leila Berner, is dual affiliated. She has been ordained by both movements and is a leader in both movements. Last year, Herb Cooper-Levy led a service that was explicitly a Jewish Renewal service. The most common remark was that the service had more ruach, but was not very different from a regular Kol Ami service. Kol Ami members attend programs at Elat Chayyim, the Kallah (the bi-annual gathering of the Jewish Renewal movement) and Ruach Ha'aretz, three pillars of the Jewish Renewal movement.
2. Dual affiliation can help grow Kol Ami. It opens Kol Ami to those in Northern Virginia who identify with Jewish Renewal, but have no Northern Virginia community to join or participate in.
3. Dual affiliation opens Kol Ami to Jewish Renewal resources. Joe Laur, Aleph Executive Director, has already come to Kol Ami. Affiliation will give Kol Ami access to the Jewish Renewal Communities Network liturgy bank and provide us access to staff consultations in the areas of fundraising, conflict resolution, board development, membership building, volunteer activation, leadership development and event creation and management. It would also provide discounts on the purchase of Jewish Renewal books and recordings, and attendance at Jewish Renewal events.
4. Dual affiliation links Kol Ami to what other Jewish Renewal communities in the DC area are doing, particularly in social action/tikkun olam projects, giving members greater access and opportunity to participate in a broad range of these projects and activities. Kol Ami has benefitted from the leadership of the other Jewish Renewal affiliated DC area congregations: Rabbi David Shneyer of Am Kolel and Rabbi Mark Novak of Minyan Oneg Shabbat. It can also benefit from connections to the congregations themselves.
5. Many other congregations are dual affiliated. For example, Mishkan Torah in Greenbelt is affiliated with both the Conservative movement and the Reconstructionist movement. Shaarei Shamayim in Madison WI is affiliated with both the Reconstructionist movement and the Jewish Renewal movement.
6. Affiliation is a two way street. Kol Ami's affiliation with the Reconstructionist movement strengthens that movement by providing it a Northern Virginia and Virginia presence. Similarly, dual affiliation supports and strengthens the Jewish Renewal movement. It provides additional visibility for the Jewish Renewal movement, especially in Northern Virginia.
7. There has been some concern expressed about theological differences between Reconstructionism and Jewish Renewal that would make dual affiliation problematic. While theology is important, most community members in congregations choose to join a synagogue because of its atmosphere of welcoming and warmth, educational offerings for children and adults, style of religious services, social offerings, etc. Very few are so firmly set in their ideological or theological positions that they are unwilling or unable to accommodate a diversity of views within one community. Indeed, this is the wave the future. Recent studies of the

American Jewish community have shown that 'denominationalism' as we understand it is on the wane. This can only be good for '*klal Yisra'el*' — the unity of the Jewish people. A good example of this kind of interweaving of different strands, styles and theological positions is that in 2013, the Conservative movement invited Rabbi David Ingber, a rabbi ordained by the Jewish Renewal movement, and rabbi of *Romemu*, a dynamic and rapidly growing Renewal congregation in New York City, to lead its most important religious service at its convention in Baltimore – the main Shabbat morning service.

Dual affiliation could result in paying two sets of dues. The normal dues payment for a dual affiliated congregation to Aleph is \$18 per household per year. Once Kol Ami decides that it wants to affiliate, we can negotiate a dues payment that is within our ability to pay.

October 25, 2014

NO TO JEWISH RENEWAL AFFILIATION

By Marcel Infeld

I am totally and unalterably opposed to Jewish Renewal affiliation. Here's why:

Breach of Trust – When I was looking for a congregation nine years ago, I chose Kol Ami, not a Jewish Renewal congregation. For Kol Ami to affiliate with Jewish Renewal would be a breach of trust, like the Republican Party affiliating with the Tea party.

There is no compelling reason for changing affiliation. Other congregations changed affiliations for financial or demographic reasons. None apply here. We can borrow or discard Jewish Renewal ideas without affiliating.

Incomprehensible is the description of Jewish Renewal on it's own website, see <https://www.aleph.org/fourworlds.htm>. If Aleph can't explain itself, who can?

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, the founder of Jewish Renewal who passed away recently, was a controversial figure. For example, his ordination as a Sufi Sheich, and his claim that the Lubavitcher Rebbe approved his use of hallucinogenic drugs, raised eyebrows in rabbinic circles. See www.pardeslevavot.org/articles/haaretz-2005-10-02.html for more details about his life, or Google his obituary in various publications.

Mysticism is a big part of Jewish Renewal; just listen to the founder's many perorations on YouTube. That's not what I signed up for when I joined Kol Ami.

It would cost additional fees to affiliate. As Rabbi Leila said, we're not a wealthy congregation. Why add to our financial burden?

Herb's committee report is his alone. The committee never met and its members didn't see the report before it was distributed.

Rabbinical selection – some would like to join Aleph so we could select a Jewish Renewal rabbi, perhaps one of Rabbi Leila's students. We started a process with the Reconstructionist movement. This should not take long since we're looking for a part-timer. Once the Reconstructionist candidacies are exhausted, we can select any rabbi anywhere, without joining her/his rabbinic organization.

Divisive – We have nothing to gain except division, acrimony, more fees, and diversion of energies from more important issues. For heaven's sake, let's drop this issue and move on to more important ones, like rabbinical selection.