



## **The Diminishing Role of Jewish Men in Jewish Life: Addressing the Challenge**

**Rabbi Charles E. Simon**

**2011 Hearing Men's Voices  
Monographs**

**fjmc**

**October 2011**

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# **The Diminishing Role of Jewish Men in Jewish Life: Addressing the Challenge**

Rabbi Charles E. Simon

## **Preface**

Social psychologist Leonard Saxe<sup>1</sup>, observes that “non-Orthodox Jewish men are increasingly absent in volunteer and lay leadership roles in our communal institutions.” Research also suggests that men who are less involved or minimally engaged in Jewish communal life and learning raise sons who are also less involved. Is it surprising that men who drop off their sons Sundays for religious school and go to the gym, are modeling a behavior that will affect their sons’ future religious choices and behaviors?

The Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs is dedicated to building a future in which Jewish men become involved or re-involved in leadership roles and recognize themselves as models for Jewish boys. This challenge can be partly met by applying what behavioral scientists are learning about the differences between the development of boys and girls, men and women. We believe that if parents acquire this information and understand its implications they can learn to be more effective fathers and mothers. The effects of successful modeling and parenting can alter the way men and boys engage in Jewish communal life.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Saxe is Professor of Jewish Community Research and Social Policy at Brandeis University where he also serves as Chair of the Hornstein Program in Jewish Professional Leadership and directs the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and the Steinhardt Social Research Institute.

Jewish leaders need to teach Jewish fathers of all ages how to better understand and utilize their fatherly influence – with their own children, as authority figures outside the home, and as mentors. While adults of both sexes are important role models for all children, this paper focuses specifically on men and boys.

## **The Changing Status of Men in the Secular World**

In recent years, scholars have published research relating to the changing status, role and involvement of men in society. This information, while broadly based, can provide insight into the challenges facing Jewish men at various stages in their lives. It can also help leaders of Jewish organizations and institutions assist men in becoming better husbands, fathers, sons and partners.

According to Michael Gurian, founder of the Gurian Institute, a think tank on education and gender, the craft-apprentice system was well suited to a young man’s developing brain.<sup>2</sup> Since that system is no longer the model, to help boys develop a strong concept of self in the modern world, we need to develop other models in our educational system. Gurian also asserts that we need to teach parents how to best use their ability to influence their children at each stage of their lives.

The change in men’s roles is complemented by a change in the roles women are assuming. Just one example should suffice: Journalist Benedict Carey explained that what began as a male oriented profession - psychotherapy, has evolved into a field that primarily attracts women.<sup>3</sup> As a result of the dearth of men in the profession, women who treat male patients are being trained

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gurianinstitute.com/>

<sup>3</sup> Carey, Benedict. “Need Therapy? A Good Man is Hard to Find.” *The New York Times*, May 24, 2011.

primarily by other women. He adds that psychology, pediatrics, social services, and elementary education are just a few of the fields in which women are dominant and therefore, providing the majority of treatment and education to men and boys. The effects of this shift have not yet been quantified.

The picture of men that is emerging in the secular world is not an encouraging one. At the Second Conference on Male Studies,<sup>4</sup> Tom Mortenson laid out a variety of ways that recent economic changes have affected men and boys and discussed the implications for the education of boys. He noted that more women currently attend college and graduate schools than do men. In the 1980s, approximately one-third of business degrees were earned by women. Today the number is approaching 60 percent. Women also earn a majority of undergraduate degrees in biology, social sciences, history, education and psychology. More importantly, he noted that college women are more engaged in academics than their male counterparts. Women study longer and harder and, as a result, are becoming more successful in the workplace. Women study and men play video games.<sup>5</sup> Men are rapidly becoming the second gender, one that is less successful professionally, intellectually and perhaps even emotionally.

Anecdotal evidence shows that men are less visible in the volunteer world than a generation ago. It seems they have only

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<sup>4</sup> Second Conference on Male Studies: Looking Forward to Solutions held April 6, 2011 at the New York Academy of Medicine sponsored by the Foundation of Male Studies. Presentation entitled “Economic Change Effects on Men and Implications for the Education of Boys.”

<sup>5</sup> According to Mortenson, 22% of 4-year college freshmen men spend more than 6 hours per week playing video games, compared to less than 4% of women. They also spend more time than women exercising, engaged in sports, watching television and partying.

retained their vitality in the gladiator world of contact sports.<sup>6</sup> In order to reverse this trend, parents and other role models need to help boys and young men become more intellectually curious and academically oriented.

Mortenson’s findings belong on the agenda of Jewish communal institutions.

## **Fathers & Sons**

Research also suggests that what is happening to men in the secular world could be related to the relationships between fathers and sons.

Blogger Lance Mannion took issue with the people who presumably have the biggest motive to do whatever it takes to help boys succeed: their fathers.<sup>7</sup>

*Whatever problems boys are having at school is the result of the hyper-masculinization, a weird warping of our concepts of manliness and masculinity that makes being smart and academically ambitious, being studious, being conscientious and being successful at school, a geeky girly thing.*

The importance of the father-son relationship is expressed by Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson in their book Raising Cain;

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<sup>6</sup> According to Mortenson, almost 60% of all male college freshmen spend more than six hours per week engaged in exercise and sports as compared to only 44% of the women. This does not include the number of hours spent watching sports on television.

<sup>7</sup> Blog citation is [www.tinyurl.com/mannion1](http://www.tinyurl.com/mannion1). It is a response to an item in The Sunday Record by Steven Israel “Boys Flunk Life 101”.  
[www.tinyurl.com/SIsrael1](http://www.tinyurl.com/SIsrael1)

Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys,<sup>8</sup> where they point to evidence indicating that the presence of a father, especially an involved one, is like brain food for youngsters.

*Children with fathers who are present and active in their lives tend to be smarter, better psychologically adjusted, and more successful in school and obtain better jobs.*

They cite a study by scholars at Northwestern University and the University of Michigan that tracked more than one thousand men over a ten year period with the goal of identifying the most influential factors in determining their children's level of education level, IQ, occupation and income. The group consisted of men from working class families, many of whom saw their livelihoods vanish as their positions were replaced by machines.

*What they found surprised them, wrote Kindlon and Thompson, A significant amount of young men who succeeded in continuing their education after high school considered their father's attendance at PTA meetings to be the most influential factor in determining their income by the time they reached the age of twenty-seven.*

This response reflects a father's positive influence. It is not a statement about the mothers, as the mothers' level of involvement remained consistent and was expected. A father's involvement added a new dimension.

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<sup>8</sup>Kindlon, Dan and Michael Thompson. *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*. New York. Ballantine Books, 2000.

Describing the same effect, but from the opposite perspective, noted feminist and psychologist Nancy Chodorow argues in Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond<sup>9</sup>

*...since most children are raised by women and the adult one has the most contact with happens to be female, girls have an easier time deciding what it's like to be a woman than boys. This is because either Dad is not around or is working all the time. As a consequence boys have to define what it means to be male as not being female. They are forced to look to the media to define it. Boys like stupid stuff because they don't have a realistic picture of what it means to be a man. Who and how do we teach boys to be men are issues that need to be addressed.*

Similarly, Nick Mansfield, in Masochism: The Art of Power<sup>10</sup> writes,

*All too often the media presents a model of masculinity to boys, many of whom have absent fathers, as men who are strong because they have the ability to overcome obstacles through acts of self-denial and self-mutilation. Gangsters and jackasses both devalue human life. Gangsters trivialize life by threatening the lives of others; jackasses trivialize life by needlessly jeopardizing their own. Gangsters are boys pretending to be men; jackasses are men pretending to be boys. In the end, being a man means that you take yourselves seriously, and you take other people seriously as well.*

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<sup>9</sup> Chodorow, Nancy. *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities : Freud and Beyond*. Lexington, Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky. 1994.

<sup>10</sup> Mansfield, Nick. *Masochism: The Art of Power*. Westport, Conn. Praeger. 1997.

*In order for boys to develop into real men a needed trust between father and son is required. When the trust between fathers and sons is broken, so is the compass that steers them in their relations with other men and women and society itself. Absent Dads leave a void that lasts a lifetime and can never be completely filled.*

Decades of research have demonstrated a strong correlation between fatherlessness and underperformance, underscoring the importance of fathers and a strong male presence. While growing up without a father does not guarantee failure, it is one more hurdle for any boy who hopes to succeed.

Finally, many boys currently suffer from poor imaging (role models), diminished paternal involvement and the failure of their fathers to encourage them to be intellectually curious. This has its parallels in the Jewish community. If we wish to change the attitudes and commitments of boys, to correct the current gender imbalance that is evidenced by the declining rate of male volunteerism and the smaller role that men are now playing in society, then our institutions need to develop and implement appropriate strategies.

### **The Tools: Providing the Data**

What do we know about boys, men and Jewish involvement? The results of several studies reveal an emerging picture.

In *Policy Implications of the Gender Imbalance among America's Jews*,<sup>11</sup> Sylvia Barak Fishman stated that men's feelings of religious incompetence are one of the leading factors that inhibit

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<sup>11</sup> Fishman, Sylvia Barack. *Jewish Political Studies Review* Fall 2008, pp 7-34.

synagogue engagement. A needs-positioned organization understands this and through its programming creates opportunities for men to achieve competence. She lists:

1. Men will become engaged if they feel satisfied something has been gained or something has been learned.
2. Men will become engaged if they feel their "volunteer time" is appreciated and not wasted.
3. Men will become engaged if challenged to rise to an occasion.
4. Men will remain engaged if camaraderie is present.
5. Men will remain engaged if positioned in an environment that balances seriousness of purpose with fun.

In 2001,<sup>12</sup> Tova Halbertal and Steven M. Cohen studied gender dynamics in the Conservative movement. Using data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Study to explore gender dynamics across the Conservative movement, they found several interesting results:

*Jewish men were more engaged than women in liturgical and congregational leadership, while Conservative women were more engaged in social and educational activities. These complex findings led us to suggest that instances of men outperforming women can be explained by the historical residue of male leadership and by persisting differences in education and liturgical competence. The areas where women led men can be explained, we believe, by a greater orientation of women to relational and care-giving activities (p. 37).*

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<sup>12</sup> Halbertal, Tova L. Hartman, and Steven M. Cohen. "Gender Variations in Jewish Identity: Practices and Attitudes in Conservative Congregations." *Contemporary Jewry* 22.1 (2001): 37-64.

However, in the decade since this research was published, with Conservative/Masorti women entering the clergy in large numbers and as a result of two decades of egalitarianism, more women have assumed liturgical leadership and volunteer leadership in their communities. While no studies at this time can fully substantiate this inference, anecdotal evidence suggests that currently more than 60 percent of the volunteers in Jewish communal life are women.

Research involving teenage boys has supported much of this anecdotal evidence. For example, in 2007, *Moving Traditions*, a Philadelphia-based organization, published a study of the Jewish involvement of high school boys and compared it with the involvement of high school girls.<sup>13</sup> Their results demonstrate that teenage boys are significantly less Jewishly engaged than teenage girls of the same age.

In 2009, the Pew Charitable Trust completed a study of male involvement in church and Christian religious activity, focusing on more than a dozen Christian colleges in the United States.<sup>14</sup> The study was a response to the Christian community's concern that college-age men were less involved in church and religious activities than their female counterparts. While the common denominator at first appeared to be religious involvement, further investigation revealed it was actually gender engagement. Just as Christian men in this study were less involved in religious life than their female counterparts (and became more involved as they developed relationships with similar men) so, too, are Jewish men on campus significantly less than involved in Jewish living than women of the same age.

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<sup>13</sup> *Moving Traditions. Engaging Jewish Teenage Boys: A Call to Action.* Philadelphia. 2007

<sup>14</sup> Foundation for Male Studies

If we draw from all these studies, plus the information on intermarriage gleaned from a variety of sources, including the National Jewish Population Survey of 2000 (NJPS),<sup>15</sup> a portrait begins to emerge of the choices made by Jewish men of marriageable age.

NJPS 2000 provided our communities with crucial information about intermarriage, which, when evaluated in light of subsequent studies, indicates that our children, even if intermarried, will initially desire to replicate their childhood religious and family experience. For example, if they were raised in a Conservative synagogue the first place they will look, if and when they desire to establish a connection to the Jewish community, will be a Conservative synagogue. If they were raised in a Reform, Reconstructionist or Orthodox environment, they will initially gravitate to those affiliated institutions.

The studies also indicate that a significant percentage of non-Jewish men and women who have intermarried with Jews choose conversion to Judaism after a decade of marriage. This phenomenon is directly linked to synagogue involvement. In addition, the more socially engaged young adults are in Jewish life and the more engaged they are with Jewish peers, the more likely they are to marry Jewish partners, from Jewish households and raise Jewish children.

Studies focusing on intermarriage and conversion yield important information about how a family's decisions and specifically religious choices are made. Most sociologists agree the family decision-maker in respect to religious choices both in the Jewish and non-Jewish world is generally the woman. A small percentage

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<sup>15</sup> [www.njps.com](http://www.njps.com)

of Jewish men marry non-Jewish women who are willing to go along with their husband's choice of religious identification, assuming he takes the responsibility, but generally speaking, the woman is the decision maker. It doesn't matter if she chooses to become Jewish or remains an atheist, agnostic or practices another religion. If she decides the children will be Jewish, they will be Jewish.

Finally, the data gathered from 250,000 young adults who participated in Taglit Birthright Israel programs over a ten-year period informs us that they are twice as likely to marry Jewish partners as non-participants. These statistics appear encouraging, but shouldn't be misconstrued to lead us to believe they will join synagogues and traditional institutions. It simply indicates that these young adults have a desire to identify with the Jewish people.

Fathers need to understand the implications of this information and to apply it to their own behavior if they wish to more successfully influence their sons' religious development and hope to inspire their connection to Jewish community. This process should begin when boys are infants and toddlers.

### **What does it mean to be a modern Jewish man?**

What does it take to be a Jewish man in an egalitarian world? Many men are no longer the sole or major source of income in their families, and synagogues and business lives are increasingly egalitarian venues. These changes are altering the traditional role that men play in the family and cause many to question what does it mean to be a modern Jewish man? As the role of economic provider diminishes, new questions arise about the role of fatherly instincts and fatherly influence.

Just as a father's participation on school committees had a strong impact on the boys in the Universities of Michigan and Northwestern study, so, too, does a father's influence on both boys and girls have a different impact. Men generally speak less or have fewer conversations of import with their children, yet those conversations, whether long-winded or terse, have tremendous impact on the decisions their children will make. Fathers, consciously or sub-consciously, are continually modeling. Many times, a man will hear himself sounding just like his father. Many times, a man will have powerful memories of what his father told him, no matter how consequential or trivial.

Fathers of toddlers influence their behavior in different ways than they do when the boys reach their pre-teen and high school years, and the influence at each stage is critical to a child's development. The father of a young adult who has left home and is in the process of becoming independent requires a different type of modeling. While a father's influence extends to both sons and daughters, it is particularly important in light of the challenges Jewish young men are confronting for the father to understand how he can influence his sons. Jewish men need to be more aware of the different ways they have the ability to influence their children as they mature. All too often these opportunities go unused. Our institutions can help prepare fathers for this important work. Helping men learn to be intentional positive Jewish role models for their sons is high on the agenda of the FJMC.

A case in point: I was recently contacted by a Men's Club member who was conflicted about reaching out to the son of family friends. The son had intermarried two years earlier. The young couple is now expecting their first child, a boy, and the non-Jewish mother has expressed ambivalence about a brit milah (circumcision). Knowing that the couple had decided to raise the children as Jews,

the man was concerned the new parents would be making a mistake if they side-stepped this mitzvah. He was conflicted, unsure if he should call the young man and offer to help him navigate the path between the concerns of his wife and the weight of Jewish tradition (and the wishes of his parents). Would this cross the boundary between mentoring and interference?

Jewish communal institutions need to encourage and guide positive male role modeling. Every man can and should have the confidence to mentor and to understand how to proactively reach out to others.

Another personal experience provides an example. At a meeting of the board of a Men's Club in a Midwestern city a few years ago, I was invited to begin the meeting by delivering a traditional teaching. Instead, I led the twenty-five men of all ages present in what the FJMC refers to as a "Hearing Men's Voices" session.

I asked how many of them had children or grandchildren in college. A majority raised their hands. "What did you do when they became sexually active?" I asked. Silence. I rephrased the question. "It's the Tuesday evening before Thanksgiving and you receive a call. 'I'm coming home with someone very special.'" I looked at the group and asked, "What are the two questions you and your wife are going to ask?" They all got it. Was he or she Jewish, and where would they sleep?

We went around the room and each man with grown children shared how he had responded when this situation arose. The first few people were specific.

"As soon as I saw him, I said; 'your room is over there.'"

When the fourth person spoke, it was different.

"We just hoped they would do the right thing," one nervous father mumbled.

"You did what!" someone replied, perhaps a bit too harshly.

Discussion followed. It was obvious that this man and his wife had not spoken with each another. The man needed guidance. In this context, the group mentored the nervous father. Everyone needs a mentor or mentors. In the FJMC we describe *Good mentors as "mentsches"*.

What do you think about when you hear someone described as a *mentch*? One might immediately think of one who is respected in the community, who does good deeds, upholds the values of his family, his people and so on. Yet there is one crucial aspect of being a *mentch* that is often overlooked: a man's ability and willingness to reach out and to be available as a mentor.

The book Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance<sup>16</sup> was a big hit in the 1960s because it linked spiritual development to the craft of maintaining a motorcycle. It paralleled a host of Kung Fu movies, many of which highlighted Masters creating meditation gardens or building mundane objects and elevating them to a level of spiritual harmony. The Kung Fu Master who worked as a potter created pottery that was spiritually harmonious. The quality of his craft mirrored his spiritual self.

These films and the literature of the time broadcast a strong message that each individual could find a way, depending upon one's skills, to develop spiritually. The task of the seeker was to

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<sup>16</sup> Pirsig, Robert M. *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance: an inquiry into values*, New York. Morrow. 1974.



learn to recognize individuals who could become their teachers and to learn to mirror their attitudes.

I've met many men who are accomplished in their craft or profession but feel inadequate when it comes to Jewish knowledge or observance. We need to remind these men that they have more Jewish knowledge than they think they and that they have strong moral compasses based upon core Jewish values passed down from generation to generation, even if they hadn't learn to read Hebrew. They are already role models for younger men. We want and need them to become stronger positive Jewish role models.

Mentorship doesn't have to be permanent, nor is serving as a mentor about putting up a shingle on a door or wearing a special T-shirt. It's simply a matter of recognizing that one has the ability to serve in this capacity. More often than not it simply requires a person to step into specific moment, realizing that reaching out just then can make a difference. If one fails to take advantage of that opportunity, both he and the person in need are potentially diminished.

Good mentoring is not always about the outcome; mentors don't have to fix the problem at hand. Sometimes just listening will suffice. Guidance can come in many forms.

Many men are hesitant to reach out to a younger man or a friend's child because they feel they don't have the right or because they don't want to risk taking on the responsibility. I believe we all have the practical wisdom and need to learn that gives us the right to reach out to others. All that is required is courage, good judgment and a willingness to take responsibility.

One of our major challenges is to actively help men to become mentors in their communities. The words "modeling" and "mentoring" need to become part of our vocabulary. Men need to be empowered to be more proactive in making suggestions or in intervening in situations when they perceive the need. They shouldn't be afraid. How many times has one heard or thought: *I wish someone had just been there and offered counsel or advice.*

Jewish tradition is filled with examples of teachers serving as role models because Jewish tradition is also concerned with a person's responsibility to others. Sometimes, by not responding to a mentoring request, the results can be more harmful than had we tried to assist. If we step up to the plate and encourage others to do so, it can result in parents being more effective with their children and men reaching out and engaging young adults more actively in Jewish living. Good mentors make good neighbors, and good mentors model future *mentschen*.

### **A Needed Shift: Increasing men's visibility in the volunteer community**

In order to correct the current volunteer imbalance in Jewish life and increase the participation of Jewish men in their respective communities, we need to shift the way the community perceives, involves and treats men. This shift calls for more a sophisticated understanding of men and appropriate strategies that engage them in a dignified, gratifying manner that responds to their needs.

Each approach must reflect the culture of the community and appeal to the individual's sense of personal need and communal responsibility. While in some instances, the cultivation of religious commitment and involvement might be the desired outcome, the strategy and implementation plan must be created by first

identifying needs and then constructing an appropriate plan and language of engagement which appeals to the target population. The language and strategy need to be positioned within the context of their cultural norms.

For example, one wouldn't introduce a serious program of environmental sustainability in a materialistic consumer-oriented upper middle class suburb by emphasizing a "solution" of not buying any new clothes for a year. A more suitable approach would begin with more modest actions reflecting the community's culture.

Similarly, to engage men imagine them as demographic cohorts: men of marriageable or partnering age, men with toddlers, men with children under 13, men with high school children, men with children of marriageable age and men with grandchildren. Creating these categories is a starting point to begin engaging and cultivating men in a culture that requires volunteer involvement in order to maintain itself. This should not be misconstrued to imply or rule out intergenerational programming. On the contrary, much can be gained through intergenerational programming, but perhaps not at the outset.

Today, most organizations interested in or mandated to involve men do so programmatically. For example, programs that have produced social engagement among men are Build-a -Sukkah and an initiative to distribute Shoah candles for Yom HaShoah. In these instances, the program is viewed as the avenue that facilitates engagement. In order to more successfully engage and eventually enroll men, the program model needs to become more needs-based.

Fathers have been taught to plan for their children's future and, if and when possible, to save enough to afford tuition for camp and post high school education. Some also plan and save to provide their children with gifts in the event they choose to marry. It is now possible to provide fathers with the results of scholarly research about parenting and its relationship to the engagement of their sons in Jewish life. This will lead to their more effectively influencing their children's future Jewish choices.

Synagogue leadership's challenge is to present this information to fathers of toddlers, pre-teens, teens and young men of marriageable age in a manner that allows them to develop their own problem solving strategies, i.e. make decisions that can work for their families.

### **Summary & Future Directions**

Men in the volunteer world are becoming increasingly less visible. This is also occurring in leadership roles in Jewish institutions. This is partly a result of the way Jewish men have been taught to be fathers. Jewish men, like their non-Jewish peers, are studying and applying themselves less than their female counterparts in an increasingly competitive world<sup>17</sup>. Failure to successfully compete with both other men and women in the workplace will have an impact on the future marriage and partnership choices they make. While levels of education remain high among Jewish men, secular research links men's failure to be professionally successful directly to their ability to marry. (Logically one could also assume that successful women will not be attracted to less successful men.)

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<sup>17</sup> Op cit. Guy Garcia, The Decline of Men citing Kindlon and Thompson who quote the Michigan Northwestern Study indicating failure to marry and an increasing divorce rate among men who lost their jobs.

In order to insure future Jewish generations, Jewish men and Jewish women need to teach Jewish boys to become more intellectually curious. Fathers need to learn how to more effectively influence the behaviors and choices their children make. The connection of Jewish men to Jewish life is loosening. In the future, there is an increasing risk of fewer men identifying Jewishly unless the patterns of Jewish parenting and modeling are altered. A needs-based language of engagement linked to empowering men to influence their children is required if existing communities desire to attract and engage modern Jewish men.

In order to instill confidence and competence in emerging Jewish men, different parental/educational strategies need to be developed and taught to men at different stages of parenting. To this end FJMC has created a series of life-stage-based lesson plans that will be field-tested in pilot communities in the coming months. It is our assumption that by providing men at appropriate stages in their lives with the data about fatherly influence and the father/son relationship that generations of men may become empowered to make the necessary decisions to alter the current trend of diminishing male involvement.

Jewish boys and Jewish men are drifting to the fringes of the organized Jewish community and are beginning to disappear on its borders. By shifting the way they are educated and perceived it is possible to help them to re-engage and re-shape the center.

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***Other Hearing Men's Voices Monographs***  
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## The Status of Jewish Men in the Conservative / Masorti Movement

Rabbi Charles E. Simon, January 2011

### **Introduction**

Volunteerism and male volunteerism in particular is an issue of crucial importance to the future of Conservative/Masorti Judaism. It is one upon which our synagogues, camping system, educational, youth initiatives and major training institutions rely; and yet it is has not found its place on our Movement's agenda. Indeed the perception of the place of volunteer cultivation, like that of leadership training, has traditionally been misplaced in the non-profit world. Rather than view it as an ongoing process, synagogues and volunteer organizations implement it as an occasional project created in response to what is perceived as a temporary need. Responses of this sort are inadequate and fail to address what should be viewed as a long-term ongoing concern.

## Developing Our Movement's Message

Rabbi Charles E. Simon

### **Preface**

This paper attempts to suggest a context, a language, and an approach to promoting Masorti/Conservative Jewish life. It was written because I believe that we (rabbis and laity) are failing to provide our congregants and potential membership with a meaningful rationale to live Jewishly. Our Movement's message is a strong one but the system of delivery has been ruptured. It needs to be re-imagined and re-defined or at least, in this case, be re-discovered.

## When Praying Doesn't Resonate – Construct a Spiritual Language

Rabbi Charles E. Simon

***And the rabbi said, "If you are interested in Jewish spirituality you should read, Aryeh Kaplan or A.J. Heschel". And the congregant responded: "Who?"***

If prayer is the music of the soul then in order for prayers and prayer services to be meaningful do we have to be master musicians? Are there other ways to hear God's Voice?

### **INTRODUCTION**

Could we have gotten it backwards?

This essay was written for the people who don't like to pray and in many instances don't enjoy going to synagogue but are looking for a spiritual experience nonetheless. They most likely are well educated and extremely intelligent. If they attend services occasionally or even regularly it's usually because other needs are being addressed. Even if they enjoyed praying one wonders if they feel that praying cultivates their spiritual selves or helps them achieve or maintain some sort of spiritual balance in an adequate manner. In most cases, I think they would say, "I don't think so."

### ***Mission***

**The Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs  
involves Jewish men in Jewish life by  
building and strengthening Men's Clubs  
in the Conservative / Masorti Movement.**



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