

**Coalition for the Transformation of Conservative Judaism**

20 Shevat 5770  
February 4, 2010

**VIA EMAIL**

Dear Colleagues,

We, who have been actively involved up to this point in Hayom, are writing to you now for two reasons. First, we want to make sure that all of our Rabbinical Assembly colleagues are fully informed about Hayom and what its activities have achieved to the present moment. And second, we want to invite every one of our colleagues to be part of this critical ongoing effort.

Hayom was formed early in 2009, when it became apparent to us that several factors had created a “perfect storm” that was both a threat and an opportunity. Discontent with the work of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism – among both our rabbinic colleagues and our congregations’ lay leaders – had been rising sharply for some time. There was also a professional leadership transition in progress at the USCJ. And, we were all experiencing the blunt edge of a general economic downturn that continues to affect all of our communities. At a time of financial austerity, in which every dollar has to be made to count, how were congregations going to justify budget lines (which could rise for some communities into the high five figures) devoted to supporting an organization that was at a low ebb of confidence, with an uncertain future? Many, if not most, of you surely have had, or are currently having, just such conversations in your own communities.

It would have been a simple matter to stay on the sidelines during this convergence of events, on the theory that USCJ is our Movement’s lay organization, and to let the accumulated disgruntlement with its work run its inevitable course in this era of tight budgets. The creation of Hayom sprang from the conviction that this simpler course was not the wisest one. We all know that the Conservative Movement suffers from somehow being “less than the sum of its parts”. Many wonderful and innovative things happen in our communities, and yet there has not been an effective interweaving of all that energetic local work into a more global and compelling presence and message. To do that, an efficient and visionary congregational organization is needed; one that will be able to tap the great talent that we all know exists in our communities in abundance. Letting the USCJ wither, without a concerted and joint rabbinic-lay effort to reshape and retool it, seemed to us a dereliction of our duty to one another. And we had one more serious concern, related directly to the economic recession: If budget lines for the USCJ were to begin to be unilaterally eliminated at congregations throughout North America – or if they were to disappear because of a demise of USCJ – how easy would it be to get our congregations to reinstate such lines for any new organization that might be formed as a successor?

All of this pointed us in the direction of a strong, insistent, and uncompromising project, that we have called Hayom, in order to underscore its urgency. The objective was to enlist the USCJ leadership in what would have to be a true and equal partnership, with a shared seriousness and firmness of purpose, to reimagine the mission and the very structure of the USCJ so as to meet the challenges of our still young new century. We urged, in the strongest and most unequivocal of terms, that serious conversations would have to take place without delay at this moment of opportunity. These were to be conversations in which no visionary idea would be excluded simply because it has not been done in the past, conversations that would involve leaders from all arms of the Movement, conversations that would have as their goal the emergence, within a reasonably limited period of time, of a strategic plan for our synagogue organization, and ultimately the renewal of the Conservative Movement. This would ensure that our enormous resources and potential do not go unfulfilled. As we will indicate presently, these urgings have elicited a positive response that gives us some real hope. But first, another issue needs to be addressed.

As you all know, the professional transition at USCJ has taken place, and our colleague Rabbi Steven Wernick is tackling the many daunting challenges before him. We have offered him all of our support in every effort that promises to address those challenges as they must be addressed. He has taken some steps, as you also know, to begin a streamlining of the regional structure, to create some structural reforms in the USCJ leadership, and to improve the delivery of youth programming. Frankly, we have heard from some members of the RA the view that these various steps are “too little too late”, and because this view has engendered some skepticism, we would like to clarify the situation for all of our colleagues. These initial steps being taken by Rabbi Wernick do not constitute the vision for which Hayom was created. They are no doubt necessary steps in an emergency situation, and Rabbi Wernick himself has repeatedly described them as “triage”. But what Hayom has pressed for, and what is now underway – as the next paragraph will describe – reaches far beyond these small steps, and is in no way circumscribed by any temporary or interim measure being taken at USCJ.

This now brings us to the cautiously good news. In the late spring, it became clear that the USCJ lay and professional leadership was listening carefully to our critical concerns, and were hearing us. They agreed to our adamant call for a joint, equal, and transparent strategic planning process. As a result, six (6) representatives each from the senior USCJ leadership and from Hayom have formed a Planning Commission, whose life span would be no more than one year, which would engage and work with an outside consulting firm, and which would be funded by both the USCJ and by Hayom. This is truly unprecedented in the life of our Movement, and although we want to be very deliberate in our expectations and projections at this preliminary stage, we have much more hope than we did back in March. We note with appreciation the openness that Rabbi Wernick’s and the USCJ leadership have shown in partnering with us on this project. Most important, we are confirmed in our belief that this effort was exactly the right thing to be ventured at this crucial moment.

The Planning Commission has already met twice, and it has decided, after a serious consideration of several serious proposals and bids, on the consultant to be engaged. Contract details have been finalized and a joint announcement will be made in the next few days. **Our goal is to discern what the synagogue organization of the Conservative Movement must be for today and for the future. In**

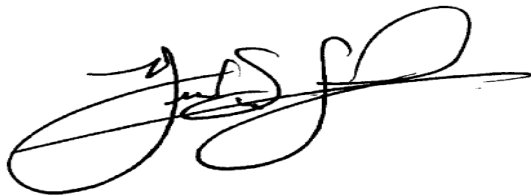
**order to accomplish this we will first engage in a “clean piece of paper approach”. The consultant will conduct a professional assessment of the needs and the desires Conservative Jewish communities have of their synagogue organization. Once the report’s imagined entity emerges the USCJ will have the opportunity to become that dynamic agency.**

For this unprecedented and critical process to succeed, the support – *in every way* – of all RA members will be necessary. We invite every one of you to join your name and that of your community to Hayom. We need you to convey the sense of purpose and cautious optimism to your lay leadership. And, understanding that the level will necessarily vary depending on your local circumstances, we will need financial support from your own community or discretionary funds for the time-limited but vital work of the Planning Commission. USCJ has stepped up to do their share, and those of us who have thus far been at the core of Hayom have given up to \$1,000 each for the effort. It is a one-time contribution that we know is well worth it.

We fervently hope that these efforts that we have launched with great effort and expenditure of time will bear significant fruit, from which we will all benefit. But no matter what happens, we will above all need your partnership in working to make our Movement much more than the sum of its parts, as it rightly should be.

We look forward to hearing from each of you that you are ready to stand with and support Hayom, and we will keep all of you informed as this historic process proceeds. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to email us at [hayomcoalition@gmail.com](mailto:hayomcoalition@gmail.com)

In Abiding Friendship and Partnership,



Rabbi Michael S. Siegel  
*Anshe Emet Synagogue, Chicago*

Rabbi Alan Lucas  
*Temple Beth Shalom, NY*

Rabbi Elliot J. Cosgrove  
*Park Avenue Synagogue, NY*

Rabbi Alan Silverstein  
*Congregation Agudath Israel*

Rabbi Daniel Cotzin Burg  
*Anshe Emet Synagogue, Chicago*

Rabbi Elon Sunshine  
*Congreg. Bnai Shalom, Walnut Creek*

Rabbi Edward Feinstein  
*Valley Beth Shalom, Los Angeles*

Rabbi David Glanzburg-Krainin  
*Beth Shalom Congregation, Elkins Park*

Rabbi Alex Felch  
*Congregation Bnai Tikvah, Deerfield*

Rabbi David Lerner  
*Temple Emunah, Lexington*

Rabbi Eric Solomon  
*Beth Mayer Synagogue, Raleigh*

Rabbi Alexander Davis  
*Beth El Synagogue, St. Louis*

Rabbi David Rosen  
*Congregation Beth Yushurun, Houston*

Rabbi David Steinhardt  
*Bnai Torah Congregation, Boca Raton*

Dr. Alisa Rubin Kurshan  
*UJA-Federation of NY*

Rabbi Felipe Goodman  
*Temple Beth Shalom, Las Vegas*

Rabbi Avis Miller  
*Adas Israel Cong., DC*

Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl  
*Beth Tzedec Cong, Toronto, ON*

Rabbi David Wolpe  
*Sinai Temple, Los Angeles*

Rabbi Bill Hamilton  
*Cong. Kehillath Israel, Brookline*

Rabbi Debra Newmin Kamin  
*Am Yisrael Conservative Cong., Northfield*

Rabbi Gil Steinlauf  
*Temple Israel, Ridgewood*

Rabbi Bruce Dollin  
*Hebrew Educ Alliance Syn., Denver*

Rabbi Gordon Tucker  
*Temple Israel Center, White Plains*

Rabbi Harold Kravitz  
*Adath Jeshurun Cong., Minnetonka*

Rabbi Harold Lifshitz  
*Cong. Beth Judea, Long Grove*

Rabbi Jack Moline  
*Agudas Achim Cong., Alexandria*

Rabbi Irvin Wise  
*Adath Israel Cong., Cincinnati*

Rabbi Menachem Creditor  
*Cong. Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA*

Rabbi Joshua Kalev  
*Tiferet Bet Israel, Blue Bell, PA*

Rabbi Joel Rembaum  
*Temple Beth Am, Los Angeles*

Rabbi Joseph Krakoff  
*Cong. Shaarey Zedek, Southfield*

Rabbi Stephen Weiss  
*Bnai Jeshurun Cong, Pepper Pike*

Rabbi Murray Ezring  
*Temple Israel, Charlotte*

Rabbi Gilah Dror  
*Rodef Sholom Temple, Hampton*

Rabbi Toni Shy  
*Cong Ohev Shalom, Marlboro*

Rabbi Amy Wallk Katz  
*Temple Beth El, Springfield*

Rabbi Rachel Ain  
*Cong. Beth Shalom-Chevra Shas, DeWitt*

Rabbi Wayne Franklin  
*Temple Emanu-El, Providence*

Rabbi Phil Scheim  
*Beth David Bnai Israel Beth Am, Toronto*

Rabbi William Gershon  
*Cong. Shearith Israel, Dallas*

Cantor Jacob Mendelson  
*Temple Israel Center, White Plains*

Cantor David Propis  
*Cong. Beth Yeshurun, Houston*

Hazzan Alberto Mizrahi  
*Anshe Emet Synagogue, Chicago*

William "Bill" Lipsey  
*Cong. Agudath Israel, NJ*

Frank D. Aronson  
*Temple Emanuel, Newton Centre*

Hylton Jonas  
*Congregation Sheirth Israel, Dallas*

Diane Shapiro  
*Temple Beth Am, Los Angeles*

Rabbi Michelle Fisher  
*MIT/Hillel, Cambridge*

Ned Gladstein  
*Agudath Israel, NJ*

Marshall Lehman

Irwin Shipper

Nina Paul

Larry Sklar

Linda Fayne

Stuart Wilson

Rick Rubin

Bonnie Sender



## Coalition for the Transformation of Conservative Judaism

### FACT SHEET

1. To maximize chances of success for the Strategic Planning Committee [SPC] in re-engineering the USCJ, Hayom has provided seven (7) appointees committed to "think out-of-the box," with no "sacred cows."

The 6 appointees to the SPC by Hayom plus 1 Ex Officio are --

*Rabbi Edward Feinstein -- Valley Beth Shalom in LA, a member of faculty of the Ziegler School*

*Hylton Jonas -- Past President of Congregation Shearith Israel in Dallas, Chaired the SPC of his synagogue*

*Rabbi Menachem Creditor - Congregation Netivot Shalom in Berkeley, CA, Chair of Shefa Network*

*Alisa Rubin Kurshan - Senior Vice President of the UJA/ Jewish Federation of New York, expert in Best Practices, Huntington Jewish Center in Long Island*

*Rabbi Gila Dror - VP of the RA, Rodef Sholom Temple*

*Ned Gladstein -- JTS Board Member with Portfolio of Strategic Partnerships with Conservative Movement Organizations, VP Masorti Olami, Past President Congregation Agudath Israel in Caldwell, NJ*

*Rabbi Michael Siegel—The Anshe Emet Synagogue, Chicago, IL, National Co-Chair of Magen Tzedek, Chair of Hayom, Ex Officio*

These seven (7) are joined by an equal number of appointees by the USCJ elected leadership:

*Dr. Raymond Goldstein -- [President of USCJ] as Ex Officio*

*Rabbi Steven Wernick--USCJ President*

*Richard Skolnik--USCJ International Vice President for Community Relations*

*Dr. Jacob Finkelstein--USCJ Board of Director, Council of Regional Presidents-Empire Region*

*Richard Helfand – Chair of USCJ Council of Regional Presidents*

*Dr. Marilyn Lishnoff Wind— USCJ Vice President of Youth and Education*

*Alan Weissman--Chairperson for USCJ By-Laws Committee*

2. Hayom insisted that an outside professional firm be engaged to shepherd this crucial 10 month process. Hayom has committed to raise \$55,000 to insure the success the team of outside consultants. This equals 50% of the total cost, with the USCJ accepting the other 50%.

Congregations comprising the Hayom Coalition are encouraged to donate \$1000 per congregation [or less, if \$1000 is not possible] toward this \$55K objective, The funds should be sent to: "Hayom," c/o Rabbi Michael Siegel, Anshe Emet Synagogue, 3751 North Broadway Street, Chicago, Illinois 60613.

3. Hayom will be seeking to maximize input from members of the Hayom Coalition and throughout the Conservative Movement, enriching the range of opinions and insights to be considered by the SPC and its process.

In sum, this is a historic and substantial opportunity to restructure, renew and revive the USCJ into an effective congregational association for Conservative synagogues.