

My Changes of Heart and Mind
I: The Role(s) of the Rabbi
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 Temple Israel
 Omaha, Nebraska
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Asked, "What are you going to do?"

Easy and delicious: I do not know.

More serious questions? What changes have you seen in the rabbinate? How have your thoughts changed in the years that have passed?

I share my thoughts: Remember, I make no case for any other rabbi, I will tell you honestly what my feelings are--no pretentions to correctness. Subjective, no urging for others to adopt my positions.

First, the rabbi and his role or roles. Preoccupied with the rabbinate from youth. At the same time, preoccupied with medicine. Two role models: Doctor and rabbi.

Story of point of no return, chemistry, etc. "Make up your mind!" -- Englander *Professor was wrong*. I made the decision. My vision of the rabbinate far different from the reality for three reasons:

1. Rabbinate of my rabbi and that of rabbi even five years after my ordination far different.
2. HUC faculty then and now are naive about the *practice* of the rabbinate. Some had varying lengths of experience and then taught from that circumscribed point of view.

3. The rabbinate has without doubt the most inept, erroneous and vague public relations of any profession. Few know who we are and what we do.

Now details: In the course of the years, change is demanded by both external and internal forces. When I looked at my rabbi, practice, almost totally services, preaching, Sunday school teaching, and pastoral visiting and counseling.

Today those activities only scratch the surface. Beginning in the rabbinate, especially in a smaller congregation, those areas of expertise would suffice. *But not for long.* Even though those areas of preaching and teaching were my primary interest, they are certainly not now. Rather ironic that time and effort on preaching, English style, structure, rabbinic content of sermons was striven for most of my life. I do not now believe that superlative preaching can be the rabbi's preemptive goal. Time and effort spent not consistent with results. Majority never hear the rabbi except on High Holidays. I believe now, contrary to previously, that there is no justifiable mandate to require the rabbi to speak every week even if he has nothing to say.

However, I believe more strongly than in earlier years in the potential power of the American pulpit--free pulpit and absolute:

moral issues - defensive subjectives - education

Most pulpits are silent. Too many are verbal massages. (Chambers and Christian

pulpit). Today a rabbi is better advised, I think, to develop more than surface knowledge of such things I never dreamt as part of the rabbinate: Administration, accounting (budgets) group work, counseling techniques, folk music and guitar (!), interfaith public relations, the processing of ideas through the power structure of the congregation, and many other practical areas.

Do these matters sound like requirements for the rabbi? **Not to me they don't.** The realities are that the rabbi so equipped will do better than the rabbi, however well schooled in Judaica (which were and are my goals) in congregational life. Others: Adolescent education, adult education, Hebrew school, pre-school, classes or discussions in mental health were all unknown to former generations or rabbis. I think now, *against* my personal preferences, a rabbi ought to know these things even if only as a part of a survival course in the jungle of unrealistic expectations on the part of laymen.

Against my better judgment, I have a far different image of the rabbi of today and tomorrow than formerly--and it is a pity that must be so.

In another area: When I was in the Hebrew Union College, there were now and again women students. I never knew what they were doing there. Along with others I resented them in a man's world. Our dormitory was comfortable, and the rabbi was *per se* a man. (*wrong*)

You know what has happened to that view. My mind has gone further than merely

the admission of qualified women. I think some roles can be played better than men--counseling, children's education, and a feminine dimension to preaching, prayer, ideals and a ministry to single parent families.

Most of all I wrestle with my change of mind and heart about how the non-rabbinical world, i.e., the laymen perceive the rabbi. I have come to the view that the lay people view the rabbi only in terms of their *immediate* needs.

The rabbi is the quickest, most available resource--and the cheapest--to meet immediate need, far ranging problems. Well, maybe--depending on the rabbi and his/her qualifications.

In any case, I perceive now of the rabbi not primarily as the teacher (who is there to study and to learn) or as preacher (who is there to listen) or as leader in prayer (who is there to worship) as the *big parent*. The rabbi is indeed spiritually and psychologically the parent to his congregation. He is the one who cares, who listens, who comforts, who suffers and rejoices with anybody and everybody. He counsels from the point of view of Jewish knowledge. That is a tall order. An exhausting order and certainly in today's world a divine order of great magnitude. Thus, the needs of today's Jews are different, and the rabbinate is different.

Our public relations has never given anybody a clear picture of what we do, and militating against clarification is the unavoidable circumstance that no one in a congregation

ever sees the rabbi in even a fraction of his roles.

My last change of mind and heart: I was passionately eager to enter the rabbinate. I am glad I did. I have had a great career with great teachers and friends. Would I do it again? Frankly my change of heart and mind would say to me, "I do not know." It is a new world, and to young people thinking about the rabbinate, I would hope there are those now as passionate as I once was. Knowing the facts as they are, I was blessed in my rabbinate. I hope they will be in theirs.

I also pray for more precise understanding between today's rabbi and the congregation to rid both of false expectations. I believe it is beginning to happen. May it happen soon.