

JEA 59th annual Conference (January 23-26, 2011)
The Westin, Mt. Laurel, NJ
January 25, 2011

The President's Report to the Conference

Hedda S. Morton

Erev Tov Haverim,

Just as we recite *Modeh ani/Modah ani* at the beginning of each morning's t'fillah, thanking God for the privilege of a new day, I want to begin this evening's remarks with *Modah ani* —*Modah ani* to you, the members of JEA who have come to this conference in search of professional development, collegiality, friendship and rejuvenation; *Modah ani* to the diligent members of the Board, and especially to the Officers: Danny Kochavi, Michael Schatz, Louis Nagel, Fred Nathan, Sharon Wasserberg, Judy Grossbard, and Larry Katz, who have committed unmeasured hours of their time, their talents, and their energies on behalf of the Jewish Educators Assembly. *Modah ani* to Executive Director, Eddie Edelstein, for being a mentor, a guide, a fabulous resource, and a *mentsch*, to everyone one who calls the office in search of advice, guidance, and assistance. He is our treasure. *Modah ani* for the honor you have bestowed upon me thereby enabling me to lead JEA. *Modah ani* to Barry Gruber, Barbara Weisman, and Michael Schatz, Conference Chairpersons, and their fantastic Conference Committee:

Cathy Berkowitz
Peter Eckstein
Yaffa Fuchs
Maxine Handelman
Janice Jumbo
Steve Kerbel
Sherrie Rosenberg Klein
Rabbi Lynn Liberman
Scott Littky
Jon Mitzmacher
Rabbi Barb Moskow
Deborah Nagler
Sherrie Klein
Sarah Shapiro-Plevan
Hazzan Arlyne Unger

Sharon Wasserberg

for this 59th annual conference with its theme "From Sinai to Cyberspace: Exploring the Impact of Technology on Jewish Education." Together you have done an amazing job! Twenty-one years ago, we sent our oldest daughter off to college with a computer, the first freshman class at her college that was required to arrive with a computer in hand. Today, it is taken for granted that not only college students, but younger students as well, will have access to computers and the necessary skills to use them in their academic work. Last month during the December school vacation, I watched with amazement as our preschool and school-age grandchildren ages 3-9 manipulated their parents' ipads as easily and comfortably as I drive a car. In this one close encounter, I suddenly understood how differently my grandchildren approach their learning and interact in their world. This conference with its focus on 21st century technology and its impact on Jewish education is as timely and as cutting edge as any Jewish educators' conference could be! This is further underscored by the fact that this is JEA's largest conference. *Kol ha-kavod* to all of you who nurtured the dream of this technology-centered conference to reality!

I am a list maker—I have a master list at home with short-term and long-term projects, there is always a grocery list and a current to-do list, there is a list of daily work that I prepare at the end of the day before I leave Adath Israel, and there is a list of current projects as well as long-term ideas and new programs I want to implement. Reading this week's *parsha*, *Mishpatim*, I felt right at home with its complex list of laws and *mitzvot* the Jewish people were expected to follow as we set about the task of building and living meaningful Jewish lives. This extensive list caused me to reflect upon the breadth and scope of JEA's work during the past year. Naturally, it's in list form!

1. As JEA President, I am in frequent and at times daily contact with Eddie. Eddie, as Executive Director, oversees the day to day operations of the JEA with support from Judith Pearl, office administrator, Lauren Rappaport, the bookkeeper, and close to conference time, extra help from Anna Edelstein. *Todah rabbah* to the entire office staff for they are the individuals who carry out the daily operations of the JEA.

2. The officers meet monthly through phone conference calls. It is during these calls that we discuss current projects, hear updates on the work of various committees, and address particular issues.

3. The Board and officers meet quarterly: in the spring and fall via web-x conference calls and in person for a 3 day retreat which was held this past summer at Barrack Hebrew Academy outside of Philadelphia.

4. We launched the celebration of JEA's 60th anniversary with a fabulous *Yom Iyun* and Academic Convocation at the Jewish Theological Seminary in NYC on November 1st with 250 in attendance. We learned with Barry Holtz and Carol Ingall, and then heard Chancellor Eisen deliver an inspirational address after which 12 of our senior colleagues were recognized for professional accomplishments as they received honorary doctorates. Both JTS and JEA were thrilled with the success of the day, thereby strengthening the JTS/JEA partnership.

4. Eddie and I represented JEA at the quarterly meetings of the LCCJ, the Leadership Council of Conservative Judaism. The LCCJ includes 17 organizations of the Conservative movement based in the US and Israel, including USCJ, JTS, Women's League, Men's Club, Rabbinical Assembly, Cantors Assembly, Mercaz, Masorti, and Camp Ramah, just to name a few. This gives us the opportunity to develop and nurture relationships with each other and to give us a voice within the Conservative movement.

Eddie also represents JEA on the USCJ/HaYom Strategic Planning Committee. This is the committee that has been charged with the responsibility of shaping the future of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

5. We have begun a partnership with the Cantors' Assembly. The JEA liaison to the CA Board is Hazzan Arlyne Unger. As a result of our outreach, JEA members were invited to participate in the CA summer concert and retreat where JEA member Sharon Brooks gave an outstanding presentation and discussion on a topic of mutual interest: preparing students with learning differences for B'nei Mitzvah. Subsequently there was a sharing of information with the CA on their website. We continue to look for opportunities to further nurture this relationship.

6. I am extremely pleased with the progress of both new and existing committees during the past year. This is where you can become involved. This is the place where each person here can have a personal role in the JEA. JEA can only be as strong and as active as you, our members, choose it to be. Speak to me or the committee chairs during the conference if you would like more information about a particular committee.

a. **Membership** is the life blood of the JEA. Scott Littky, Chair with VP Danny Kochavi and their committee: Michelle Hilburn, Cathy Berkowitz, and Nancy Seifert Gorod actively reach out to potential members. Now more than ever, it is incumbent upon each of us to identify and recruit our colleagues in the field of Jewish education to join us.

b. **Professional Development:** Under the leadership of Louis Nagel, the Professional Development Committee members Peter Eckstein, Larry Katz, Danny Kochavi, Marshall Kupchan, and Samara

Sofian developed the criteria for the new JEA membership category of CJE, Conservative Jewish Educator. This Committee has also reviewed and revised the criteria for the ARI award to encourage action research projects in Jewish education. You will be hearing more about the CJE and the ARI after they have been formally approved at the Board meeting following this conference.

c. **Member Services:** Judy Grossbard, with help from Alysia Gejman brought 2 webinars to our membership with more in the making.

d. **60th anniversary Committee:** Marim Charry, Lonna Picker, Steve Kerbel are the visionaries of the JEA's 60th anniversary year beginning with the Yom Iyun and Convocation and concluding with our 60th annual conference in Israel

e. **Conference Committee** was mentioned earlier

f. **Israel 2012 Conference Committee** will be chaired by Steve Kerbel and Scott Littky

g. **Development Committee** is chaired by Fred Nathan and includes Rabbi Barb Moskow, Steve Kerbel, Rabbi Dan Aaronson, Jon Mitzmacher, Nancy Gorod, and Sharon Wasserberg. They have focused their energy on creating our 60 for 60 campaign.

h. **Nominating Committee** was chaired by immediate Past-President Larry Katz with help from Rabbi Barb Moskow, Sharon Safra, and Arnie Zar-Kessler.

i. **Regions:** We continue to explore ways to develop a JEA presence throughout the country.

Looking forward, I would like JEA to develop its work in 4 areas. One will be the formation of a committee that will focus on the needs of students with learning differences. The second will be for educators of synagogues participating in the Mitzvah Initiative. And the third, recently launched under the initiative of Sara Shapiro-Plevan in conjunction with this conference is the new JEA wikki. The fourth relates to our regions. Plans have been developed in the last several years, but now is the time to actualize those plans so that during our 60th anniversary, every area of the country will have a grassroots inspired local or regional event. This can be in the form of *Yom Iyun* for teachers, a Gala Dinner to recognize outstanding teachers and lay leaders, a festive evening to recognize emerging leaders, or any other creative gathering that will let our communities know how vital we, the Jewish educators are in raising future generations of Jewish leaders. Michael Schatz has already agreed to lead this effort, but for it to succeed, we need each of you to take ownership of these ideas and make them happen!

THE BOOK OF JEWISH SACRED PRACTICES: CLAL'S GUIDE TO EVERYDAY AND HOLIDAY RITUALS AND BLESSINGS contains a beautiful collection of

mediations, rituals, blessings, and teachings for a variety of occasions. It is a text I turn to frequently. Editor Irwin Kula's comments in the preface seemed to capture the essence of my relationship to JEA, to the officers, the board and to each of you. Kula wrote as follows: "What we get from each moment ultimately depends on the attention (*kavanah*) we give to those moments, and the quality of our experience reflects the quality of our awareness. With this awareness comes the ability to know ourselves more clearly, to serve more joyfully, and to love others more deeply—Torah, *avodah, gemilut chasadim*. Sometimes, like Jacob, we may suddenly recognize that "God is in this place, and I did not know it." *Modah ani*, I am thankful and I am grateful for this moment, these moments, as President of JEA. I am mindful of this awesome experience. It is an experience that enables me to know myself more clearly, to serve more joyfully, and to love and respect everyone I come into contact with, more deeply. I invite you to join me so that together we will know each other, we will support and nurture each other and through our unique contributions and collaborations, we will accomplish far more than anything we could do individually.

יברכך יי וישמרך:

יאר יי פניו אליך ויחנך:

ישא יי פניו אליך וישם לך שלום:

May God bless us and keep us.

May God make his spirit shine upon us and be gracious to us.

May God grant us peace.

Amen.