

From: Allan Cutler, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies, Department of Religion, Temple University of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Dear Colleague:

Can I get your personal reaction to this proposal?
Would you be willing to support this idea?

ON THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION
OF SCHOLARS IN THE FIELD OF JEWISH STUDIES

The time has come for us to think of joining hands to create a national organization of scholars in the field of Jewish Studies, an American Association for Jewish Studies (AAJS), similar to the American Historical Association, the American Oriental Society, the Society of Biblical Literature, the American Academy of Religion, etc., with a large, enthusiastic and active membership and an ambitious, dynamic and aggressive program of activities on a nationwide scale.

In order to achieve this goal, I suggest that over the next five years we work together to bring about the following:

1. The creation of local organizations of scholars in the field of Jewish Studies in at least the following key cities where there are concentrations of such scholars: New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, Cincinnati. These local organizations of Jewish scholars would hold regular monthly meetings during the academic year, preferably in private homes, at which the members in turn would be able to deliver learned papers on Jewish subjects, historical and theological, followed by discussion and fellowship.

2. The members of these local organizations of Jewish scholars, plus other Jewish scholars from across the land, would then meet together once a year in a national meeting, the site of which would rotate in a six year cycle between New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Cincinnati. This national meeting would last 2-3 days

and would feature papers, panel discussions, special learned addresses, luncheons and dinners, quality Jewish music, dance, drama and art, special motion pictures and slides, book exhibits by the relevant publishers, etc., similar to the national meeting of the American Historical Association and the other national scholarly organizations mentioned above.

3. The new AAJS should take advantage of and strongly encourage the rapidly advancing trend toward appointing professors of Jewish Studies in history, philosophy and especially in religion departments in American colleges and universities across the land. This new trend is the crucial factor in the future of Jewish Studies in America. In order to encourage this new trend, an exhaustive, book-length study of the situation should be undertaken and published and a national "Conference on Jewish Studies in American Colleges and Universities," to be attended by Jewish scholars, prominent rabbis and Jewish community leaders, should be called as soon as possible. The new AAJS should set up a consultation service to assist American colleges and universities in introducing courses on Jewish subjects and a placement service to help find suitable candidates for the new positions that open up. Finally, the new AAJS should launch a massive, nation-wide campaign to hammer home the message in the American Jewish community that the creative survival and growth of the Jewish community in America in the Space Age depends on the rapid and dramatic expansion of Jewish Studies on the college and university level (beyond the elementary and secondary levels), especially in the non-Jewish American colleges and universities, which, after all, are the institutions of higher learning attended by the overwhelming number of our American Jewish youth. Only an American Jewish community thoroughly and creatively educated in its religious heritage on the college and university level can withstand the pressures of the automated and computerized civilization that is rapidly dawning

upon us in Space Age America.

4. The new AAJS would sponsor competitions for pre- and post-doctoral fellowships and research grants in Jewish Studies and offer lucrative yearly prizes for the best books and articles in the field of Jewish Studies published by American scholars. It would also encourage the publication of the catalogues of the libraries of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Dropsie College, Yeshiva University, etc., and see to it that copies of the catalogues of these libraries and other libraries (whose catalogues are already published such as Hebrew Union College and the Jewish collection of the New York Public Library) are widely distributed throughout the major Jewish communities of the land.

5. The new AAJS would publish a massive quarterly journal on the model of the American Historical Review to meet the crying need for a top notch quarterly of Jewish Studies in America.

6. The new AAJS would publish a full, annotated bibliography of the books and articles published by all American scholars in the field of Jewish Studies up to a certain cut-off year, say, 1970. After the cut-off year, it would publish a year by year bibliography of the publications of these scholars entitled The Progress of Jewish Studies in America, similar in some ways to the Modern Language Association of America's Year's Work in Modern Language Studies.

7. The new AAJS would publish a History of Jewish Studies in America up to 1975 and revise it every 25 years thereafter. It would also publish an Introduction to Research in the Field of Jewish Studies for students who want to enter the field.

8. The new AAJS would publish a directory of American scholars in the field of Jewish Studies, containing primarily biographical data, revised every 5 years.

9. The new AAJS would publish a newsletter, 2-3 times yearly, with all kinds of current information on the whereabouts and activities of its

members and on its own plans and projects.

10. The new AAJS would keep in constant and close communication with other Jewish scholarly organizations at home (e.g., the American Jewish Historical Society, the Conference on Jewish Philosophy, the National Association of Professors of Hebrew, etc.) and abroad (e.g., the London Society for Jewish Study, the Paris Societe des Etudes Juives, the World Union of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, etc.).

11. The new AAJS would act as the official representative of American Jewish scholarship in relations with general, non-Jewish scholarly organizations such as the American Council of Learned Societies, the United States government's new National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, UNESCO, etc. It would encourage and help plan sessions on Jewish Studies at the meetings of other scholarly bodies such as the American Historical Association, the American Oriental Society, the Society of Biblical Literature, the American Academy of Religion, the Modern Language Association, etc., because having sessions on Jewish Studies at the meetings of these scholarly bodies is a crucial factor in the struggle to make Jewish Studies a widely respected discipline within American scholarship and making Jewish Studies a widely respected discipline within American scholarship would be of tremendous assistance in combatting the problem of the alienation of our Jewish intellectuals.

12. Finally, the new AAJS would organize nationwide celebrations and commemorations of the anniversaries of (1) personalities crucially important in the history of Judaism, e.g., Hillel the Elder, the 2000th anniversary of whose emergence as leader of the Pharisaic party (30 B.C.E.) is coming up in 1970, and (2) of events of equally great importance in the history of our people, e.g., the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1943), the 25th anniversary of which is coming up in 1968.

Sincerely, Allan Cutler, Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies,
Department of Religion, Temple University, Philadelphia.

Allan Cutler