

**MATERIALS FROM THE
CRITICAL ISSUES CONFERENCE**

**"WILL THERE BE ONE JEWISH PEOPLE
BY THE YEAR 2000?"**

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**THE NATIONAL JEWISH CENTER FOR LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP
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UNITY AND INTEGRITY

I come here this evening with a troubled heart to speak as an Orthodox Jew about a concern that unites all of us, namely, those issues that disunite all of us from each other.

The predictions of an unbridgeable and cataclysmic rupture within the Jewish community leave all of us deeply distressed.

They serve to agitate all of us who love and care for and worry about our Jewish people and its future. The twin issues of Jewish identity -- the question of conversion -- and of Jewish marital legitimacy -- of proper gittin (divorce) and, in their absence, subsequent adultery and the blemish of mamzerut (bastardy) -- should give us no rest. The non-marriageability of a significant portion of the Jewish people with the rest of am Yisrael is too horrendous to contemplate -- and yet we are forced to do just that, lest our fragile unity, such as it is, be shattered beyond repair.

At the same time, we have to retain a healthy skepticism about such projections. Samuel Goldwyn used to say, "Never make forecasts, especially about the future." Prophecy is a risky business, especially if it is based upon statistics.

Moreover, while it is good to be alerted, it is not healthy to be panicked. Such excessive alarm sometimes leads to medicines which are worse than the disease. Disaster is not inevitable. Even if we are told that it is, then, as Justice

Louis Brandeis once said about inevitability, "I am opposed to it."

Hence, we have to try our very best, within the limits of our integrity, to promote unity and to oppose the seemingly inevitable disaster that looms before us.

Now, let me repeat that phrase that I just used -- "within the limits of our integrity." I am here, amongst fellow Jews, to do what I can as an advocate of enhanced Jewish unity. But, no honorable person can afford to dispense with his integrity.

The issues are too critical to permit us to gather in a Jewish equivalent of the old "interfaith" meetings in which warmth substituted for light, and good fellowship for genuine understanding. It is too late for that kind of good-will posturing. It is a given that we must relate to each other in friendship and fraternity. Now we must also be honest and truthful with each other. And, as the great R. Saadia Gaon pointed out a thousand years ago in the Introduction to his Emunot Ve'Deiot, in analyzing the causes of skepticism and disbelief, the truth is bitter and distressing and it is more convenient to ignore it. But without it we are wasting our time; more -- without it we are lost. So, if what I have to say proves disappointing and unpopular to some or maybe to all, it is because I am trying to be honest in keeping to the truth as I see it, even while attempting to be as accomodating as I can. I accept it as axiomatic that all other participants are doing the same.

It is in this spirit of searching for unity within the

It is in this spirit of searching for unity within the limits of integrity that I address myself first to the issue of pluralism.

I once thought I knew that the word meant. I have a passing acquaintance with pluralism as a metaphysical concept, in contrast to monism. I believe I understand what cultural and political pluralism are. I've written in favor of pluralism within the halakhic context. But I confess to being confused by all the current talk of "religious pluralism" within the Jewish community. It has been used in a variety of ways, both with regard to Israel and the Diaspora, so that I am at a loss to really understand it. Moreover, my perplexity is deepened by the elevation of "pluralism" to the rank of a sacred principle. It has become a symbol, and whenever an idea is transformed into a symbol, it becomes so enmeshed in emotions and so entangled in mass psychology that it is exceedingly difficult to treat it analytically and critically. Sacred cows, like golden calves, inevitably lead one astray. Let me then say what kinds of pluralism I can and cannot accept.

If pluralism is just the newest name for what is a discredited ethical or religious relativism, I will have none of it. Relativism is the proposition that because there are many kinds of "things" or points of view, and all have an equal right to be heard and advocated in a democratic society, they are therefore necessarily equally valid. When pluralism is

My conception of pluralism in the Jewish religious community can best be summed up by reference to a famous dictum in the Jewish tradition -- that there are shiv'im panim la-Torah, there are seventy faces or facets to Torah. No one is more valuable or significant or legitimate than the other sixty-nine. Judaism is not monolithic. However -- there are only seventy (the number, of course, is arbitrary) and not an infinite number of such faces or facets. A pluralism which accepts everything as co-legitimate is not pluralism, but the kind of relativism that leads, as I said, to spiritual nihilism. If everything is kosher, nothing is kosher. If "Torah" has an infinite number of panim, then, as we would say in Yiddish, "es hat bi'khlal nisht kein panim," it has no face at all, no value, no significance.

I too know the Talmud's comment on the disputes between the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai, that elu v'elu divrei Elokim hayyim, "both of these and these are the words of the living G-d." Unfortunately, this profound statement has been abused and turned into a slogan by ignoring the fact that the controversialists were at one in their commitment to the Halakhah and its divine origin, and disagreed only on its interpretation with regard to very specific matters. The dictum implies a pluralism within the halakhic context -- only. It can no more be stretched to cover all "interpretations of Judaism" than "Twinkle, twinkle, little star" can subsume as legitimate all competing astronomical theories -- including the one that the

moon is made of green cheese.

Before going any further, let me address myself to another and similar issue which has the capacity to befuddle rather than clarify. This deals with the terms "recognition" and "delegitimation." The first term, "recognition," has become a red herring in the Orthodox camp, and the second, "delegitimation," is the newest member in the semantic rogue's gallery of the other groups. Let us begin with the first item.

There has been a great deal of talk over the past several years about Orthodox rabbis granting or withholding "recognition" from non-Orthodox rabbis, and the latter, in turn, angrily demanding to know who authorized the former to grant or withhold recognition. So heated has the debate become, so inflamed the personal and political passions, that cool and disinterested analysis has become virtually impossible. But we are not going to make any headway unless we stop simmering for a while, separate our collective egos from the issues, and try to listen to each other and then argue calmly and dispassionately.

Now, my first suggestion is to understand that no Orthodox Jew, if he is true to his faith, refuses to recognize fellow Jews as Jews just because they are non-observant. It is unfortunate that such a denial is at all necessary, but one must give the lie to a canard that has been gaining wide currency, even in an editorial in a recent issue of an "official" Jewish weekly. A Jew is a Jew even if he sins, as the Talmud teaches, and whether or not he thinks he is sinning. He who denies this teaching is

not Orthodox.

My second suggestion, to non-Orthodox rabbis, is to stop worrying so much about whether Orthodox rabbis "recognize" you or not. If you sincerely believe in what you teach and do, you need not be nervous about others approving of you. Your level of anxiety is needlessly high.

However, should non-Orthodox rabbis want to know, out of curiosity, whether I as a Centrist Orthodox Jew "recognize" their credentials, I would be glad to oblige them. I do so not because it is important that you be recognized by me, but because it is helpful that we each know where the other stands if we are to make progress on the truly critical issues of the day.

Now, one premise and three categories:

My premise is that Orthodox Judaism is, by its very nature, tied to a transcendent vision, to a Being who is beyond us; and that vision includes the revelation of Torah and of Halakhah -- a way of life, formulated in terms of legal norms and discourse, which we accept as authoritative. It is the word of God, transmitted from Sinai down through the ages, and it is the backbone of the Jewish tradition. This Halakhah is given over to man to apply to his daily life, but he is not authorized to dispose of it according to his personal taste or whim. The Halakhah, like any formal legal system, has rules that govern its change, amendment, and application; all the more so because its claim is to divine rather than human origin. The central point is

this: the Halakhah is heteronomous, it obligates us, it is above us; we are bound by it and must live within its perimeters even if doing so proves personally, politically, and even spiritually uncomfortable. It is, after all, the Word of God. Where the Halakhah has spoken, therefore, we cannot negotiate, trade, or barter.

Now, three categories we ought to consider in the "recognition" or "legitimation/delegitimation" issue, are:

- a. Functional validity
- b. Spiritual dignity
- c. Jewish legitimacy

Because Orthodox rabbis consider those movements not bound by the traditional Halakhah as heretical, many refuse to accord non-Orthodox rabbis any credibility as leaders of Jewish religious communities.

Now, I consider this an egregious error. Facts cannot be wished away by theories, no matter how cherished. And the facts are that Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist communities are not only more numerous in their official memberships than the Orthodox community, but they are also vital, powerful, and dynamic; they are committed to Jewish survival, each according to its own lights; they are an invaluable part of Kelal Yisrael; and they consider their rabbis as their leaders. From a functional point of view, therefore, non-Orthodox rabbis are valid leaders of Jewish religious communities, and it is both fatuous and self-defeating not to acknowledge this openly and

draw the necessary consequences, e.g., of establishing friendly and harmonious and respectful relationships, and working together, all of us, towards the Jewish communal and global goals that we share and which unite us inextricably and indissolubly.

As an Orthodox Jew, I not only have no trouble in acknowledging the functional validity of non-Orthodox rabbinic leadership, but also in granting that non-Orthodox rabbis and laymen may possess spiritual dignity. If they are sincere, if they believe in God, if they endeavor to carry out the consequences of their faith in a consistent manner -- then they are religious people. In this sense, they are no different from Orthodox Jews who may attain such spiritual dignity -- or may not, if their faith is not genuinely felt and if they do not struggle to have their conduct conform with their principles. Phonies abound in all camps, and should be respected by no one, no matter what their labels. And sincerely devout people exist everywhere, and deserve the admiration of all.

But neither functional validity nor spiritual dignity are identical with Jewish legitimacy. "Validity" derives from the Latin validus, strong. It is a factual, descriptive term. "Legitimacy" derives from the Latin lex, law. It is a normative and evaluative term.

Validity describes the fact of one's religious existence. Dignity refers to the quality of one's religious posture, not its content. It is the latter which, to my eyes, determines what we

are terming Jewish legitimacy. Here I have no choice but to judge such legitimacy by my own understanding of what constitutes Judaism and what does not. And the criterion of such legitimacy is the Jewish lex -- the Halakhah: not a specific interpretation of an individual halakhah; not a general tendency to be strict or lenient; but the fundamental acceptance of Halakhah's divine origin, of Torah min ha-shamayim. And if we become bogged down in definitions of these terms, then let us extricate ourselves from the theological morass by saying: acceptance of Halakhah as transcendentally obligatory, as the holy and normative "way" for Jews, as decisive law and not just something to "consult" in the process of developing policy.

Hence, I consider myself a brother to all Jews, in love and respect, and together with them I seek the unity of all our people. But, I cannot, in the name of such unity, assent to a legitimation of what every fiber of my being tells me is in violation of the most sacred precepts of the Torah.

At bottom, any vision of the truth excludes certain competing visions. And so does the Torah commitment. Under no circumstances can an Orthodox Jew, for instance, consider as Jewishly authentic a view of Judaism which excludes faith in God -- such as "Humanistic Judaism"; or one which condones marriage of Jew with non-Jew; or one which rejects the halakhic structure of Sabbath observance or the laws of divorce or the institution of kashruth. To ask that Orthodox Jews accept such interpretations as Jewishly legitimate in the name of pluralism,

is to ask that we stop being Orthodox. If that is what pluralism and "mutual legitimation" mean, the price is too high.

A distinguished Conservative/Reconstructionist rabbi, writing in a Jewish periodical (Harold Schulweis, "Jewish Apartheid," in Moment, December 1985), recently stated the following:

In the name of the unity and continuity of my people, I acknowledge the right and privilege of Jews of diverse schools of thought to build their own institutions of learning, to support the rabbis they elect to follow, to entrust their children to these rabbis for instruction.

These are words of which I heartily approve. I too acknowledge such right and privilege, and have no argument with that statement in praise of unity. But the rest of the paragraph is one with which, unfortunately, I simply cannot go along. It reads as follows:

For the sake of Zion, I may criticize their methods of conversion or their interpretations of the law, but I am pledged to recognize their authority, to accept their marriages, their divorces, their conversions...

No, I am afraid that I cannot remain a Halakhic Jew and make such a blanket statement. Nor, indeed, can I see how a Conservative Jew can make such a statement. Neither can some Reform rabbis. Are traditionalist Reform rabbis ready to accept the authority of fellow Reform rabbis when and if they marry Jews and unconverted Gentiles? Are Conservative rabbis ready to accept the authority of, and legitimate, a Reform remarriage when there was no divorce other than a civil document? Are they ready to accept

those Reform conversions, which I take to be a majority, in which there was no circumcision, no immersion in a mikvah, no kabbalat ha-mitzvot? If Conservative rabbis are not ready to accept such acts, Orthodox rabbis certainly should not be asked to do so.

Coherent and coordinated action to securing a decent Jewish future for our children and grandchildren, therefore, requires of us that we do away with slogans and buzz-words and reject vain hopes for the kind of "mutual legitimation" that cannot happen without doing violence to integrity.

In a positive vein, it calls upon us to accord to each other what I have called "functional validity" and, where deserved, "spiritual dignity."

Orthodox Jews have not always been as forthcoming in this respect as one might have hoped. We have not always been models of tolerance and openness. For too long we have substituted invective for argument, and have often evoked an equal and opposite reaction. Indeed, in recent months the counter-invective has been very opposite and even more than equal. But Orthodox Jews will have to learn to be more civil in their rhetoric, more respectful in their approach, more conscious of their responsibility towards the mitzvah of "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and of Koheleth's admonition that divrei hakhamim be'nahat nishma'im, "words spoken softly by wise men are heeded more readily than the foolish shouting by an official"

(Eccl. 9:17). And Conservative and Reform Jewish leaders too must learn the same lesson and not adopt the stridency that they have learned from Orthodox extremists. The Neturei Karta style is unbecoming and divisive, no matter who adopts it. Neither abusive rhetoric nor blackmail nor financial pressure is the proper way to conduct Jewish religious discourse.

Moreover, Orthodox Jewish leadership should not have to be dragged kicking and screaming to meeting with their non-Orthodox confreres in order to develop common policy where possible, or mutual understanding where not. In addition to whatever formal communal structures now exist, there is a need for all major religious leadership to consult personally and unofficially, so that we know what we are about without the need to vote, lobby, or issue public statements.

A further point: In facing the future together we must reduce the Kulturkampf taking place in Israel and rearing its head here, by adopting a hands-off policy with regard to all issues that do not constitute an immediate danger to the wholeness of Kelal Yisrael as defined by the ability of any one segment of Jewry to accept as Jewish or as marriageable members of any other segment. Hence, I may, as I do, disapprove of non-Orthodox sanction of women rabbis or general permissiveness on a hundred other issues. And Conservative and Reform Jews may look askance at what they regard as Orthodox sexism or our rigidity on this or that matter. But even while being critical of each other, we must not interfere or allow such differences to break

us apart. Let us argue with each other -- but not fight. Let us be critical -- but never obstructive. Each side needs to give the other "space" to "do its own thing." As former Secretary of Health Education and Welfare, John W. Gardner, used to say: We must love critically and criticize lovingly.

Now, factually, this situation prevails to a large extent. Except for certain pockets of population, there is de facto communication in most areas. There may not be enough interdenominational relationship, but neither is there sufficient intradenominational communication.

Yeshiva University is, in many ways, a microcosm of the Jewish world. Who better than Rabbi Soloveitchik represents the meeting of Jewish learning and Western culture at their highest levels? Our students spend half a day plumbing the depths of the Talmud, no less intensively than any other good yeshivah, and in the afternoon they study the sciences and humanities and business no differently from any quality university. In my own work, I relate daily to the most committed Orthodox who consider me as a Centrist much too much to the left, and with the most Reform of the Reform for whom I am much too much to the right. Yeshiva University is a galaxy that contains several kollelim along with a medical school and law school and their supporting Boards. Yes, there are problems, but they are solvable. There are challenges, but challenges are made to be met and overcome. We are in effect a marvelous bridge, indeed a network of bridges,

connecting many worlds -- Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and secular, Orthodox and non-Orthodox -- in the academic, ideological, and communal spheres.

So, the general situation obtaining in the Jewish community is sometimes taut and tense, but it is not terrible. I do not see the need for radical solutions or apocalyptic fervor. But I do see the need for more concerted efforts than have been made heretofore.

The two areas that do warrant major concern are those which affect the future oneness of our people -- the question of conversion or "who is a Jew," and that of get, the Jewish divorce, without which remarriage is considered arayot, adulterous, and the progeny as mamzerim, illegitimate and hence unmarriageable except to proselytes or other mamzerim.

The conversion/identity issue is the lesser of the two evils because it is reversible. If Orthodox and Conservative Jews, say, cannot recognize a non-halakhic conversion by a Reform rabbi, at least the person involved can later undergo a halakhic conversion. It may be a blow to one's sense of identity and to the Reform rabbi's authority, but it is reversible. The second, mamzerut, is far more grave. It is, as our Tradition puts it, a bekhiyah le'dorot, a tragedy for generations. The remedies are few and difficult.

Let me address the first of these matters. The issue in Israel has become transformed into a symbol and hence is seemingly impervious to a political solution. At another

conference this past year I proposed an amendment to the Law of Return which, I believe, can solve the problem. But this is not the place to discuss Israeli issues.

I am far more concerned by the problem in the Diaspora. In Israel, despite the brouhaha over the "Who is a Jew" legislation, perhaps a half dozen or a dozen questionable conversions per year are in issue. In America, the number is probably more in the order of a hundred thousand. And it is here that the Reform patrilineal resolution of just three years ago is so critical and grave.

It is hard to be dispassionate about the issue, but out of respect to the Reform group we must do so. Such enormously consequential steps are not undertaken by responsible people without powerful need and motivation. Yet, even without considering the effects on the rest of world Jewry, I believe it was not thought through properly, as I shall presently explain, and the Reform groups would be well advised to take another look at it and come up with a more acceptable solution.

Truth to tell, from a halakhic point of view, this proposal makes almost no difference. Most Reform conversions, I believe, do not require tevillah (immersion in a mikvah), circumcision or symbolic circumcision, and a minimum form of kabbalat ha'mitzvot. Hence, whether children of Jewish fathers and Gentile mothers are declared Jewish en masse by a CCAR resolution, or converted individually, the Halakhah does not recognize such people as Jews.

Furthermore, a distinguished Reform rabbi (David Polish) has stated that, "This resolution is a de jure formulation of what has long been a de facto practice in Reform congregations." Thus, both from the point of view of Halakhah and that of Reform practice, the resolution does not change reality to any great extent.

Its importance lies mostly in the area of psychology and symbol. It is painfully reminiscent of an ancient schism which became a turning point in the history of Western civilization. I refer to the attitude of the Tannaim, the Fathers of the Talmud, to Christianity. As long as Christians were Jews who went astray after one they regarded as the Messiah, but otherwise kept their yichus (genealogy) inviolable, they were regarded as minnim -- heretics, apostates, but still Jews. It was when Christianity decided to abandon the halakhic standards for determining Jewish status and declared that effectively one could join the religion by self-declaration, that they were regarded by the Tannaim as a separate religion.

A learned professor at N.Y.U. has recently studied the issue and come to the following conclusion:

Had the rabbis relaxed these {halakhic} standards... Christians would quickly have become the majority within the expanded community of "Israel." Judaism as we know it would have ceased to exist... Christianity would have been the sole heir to the traditions of Biblical antiquity, and observance of the commandments of the Torah would have disappeared within just a few centuries. In short, it was the Halakhah and its definition of Jewish identity which saved the Jewish people and its heritage from extinction as a result of the newly emerging Christian ideology.

The ultimate parting of the ways for Judaism and Christianity took place when the adherence to Christianity no longer conformed to the halakhic definitions of a Jew... The rabbis ceased to regard the Christians as a group of Jews with heretical views and Christianity as a Jewish sect. Rather, the rabbis began to regard the Christians as members of a separate community... -- (Lawrence H. Schiffman, Who Was A Jew? {KTAV: 1985})

The patrilineal resolution has thus touched a raw nerve in Jewish historical memory.

Furthermore, an often overlooked element in this resolution is one which requires of all half Jews, whether the mother or the father is the Jewish parent, that their Jewish status be confirmed "through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people." Thus, the child of a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father will not be presumed to be Jewish by Reform standards if that child shows no signs of such "public formal acts," but will be Jewish according to the Halakhah. Paradoxically, Orthodoxy -- which has been falsely accused of "reading Jews out" -- will accept the Jewishness of such a child, whereas Reform will indeed be reading him/her out of the Jewish people.

Clearly, this matter must be rethought by the Reform group for its own sake.

With regard to the second issue -- gitten and mamzerut -- the problem is more resistant to resolution and far more catastrophic in its consequences.

The only solution I can see -- and it is only a partial

solution -- is reviving the stalled efforts of the 1950's at establishing a national Beth Din. The two leading personalities at that time were Rabbi Saul Lieberman, of blessed memory, and "the Rav," Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (le'havdil bein hayyim le'hayyim). I ask myself: if two such giants failed, how shall we succeed?

The first answer is that we have no choice. Immanuel Kant once said, du kanst weil du must -- "you can because you must." The sheer numbers of potential mamzerim and quasi-Jews is so far greater today than it was 30 years ago, that we do not have the right to desist from a major successful effort -- no matter how much we will be criticized by extremist elements in all camps. We can because we must.

Second, their efforts came to grief because, I believe, they tried for too much, and because they tied their plan too tightly to institutions and organizations. Thus, the insistence on organizational discipline caused the plan to fail when the Rabbinical Assembly felt it could not deliver on getting all its members to agree to the authority of the Beth Din.

What we must now do, I submit, is try to half a loaf -- tafasta mu'at tafasta -- in the belief that partial cures are better than none. We must reach out for nehamah purta, at least for some consolation, some relief.

I do not believe that, despite the aggravated situation that prevails today, it is possible for the various groups to obtain the kind of consensus that can result in universal agreement and

discipline.

What is possible, I suggest, is a more voluntaristic National Beth Din (N.B.D.) which all groups will recognize as authorized to deal with personal status. The N.B.D will, in turn, set up branches throughout the country. All rabbinic and synagogue organizations will not only accept its rulings but will support it and actively urge all their constituents to have recourse to it.

Those rabbis of all groups who subscribe to it will refer all cases to it or its deputized batei din. Hence, such cases will enjoy universal or near-universal acceptance, both here and in Israel. Those who do not subscribe to it will deprive their "clients" -- prospective converts or marriage partners with halakhic problems -- of such wide approbation.

I also endorse a suggestion by Dr. David Berger, a colleague on Yeshiva University's Faculty, that all groups undertake an ad campaign, distasteful as it may seem, encouraging gittèn where a marriage is being dissolved, and perhaps making all gittèn gratis.

All groups, however, will have to undertake to inform those people who do not apply to the N.B.D. that their status and that of their progeny may be in jeopardy in the eyes of a or the major segment of organized religious Jewry. This is the honorable thing to do anyway; anything less is a violation of the moral and halakhic norm of lifnei iver lo titen mikhshol, not ensnaring

one who is unaware of the consequences of his actions.

The critical problem of who will serve on such a N.B.D. or local batei din is not insoluble. The three dayyanim that form the quorum of a court should be chosen on the basis of scholarship and personal halakhic observance, not institutional affiliation. Rabbis who are expert and personally observant, no matter what groups they formally belong to, may be authorized to serve. In addition, a broader-based committee may serve with the beth din, including the referring rabbi or his deputy, provided it is understood that the halakhic act is enforced by the beth din alone.

Now, it is true that such dayyanim will be found mostly in the Orthodox community. But three things should be borne in mind:

a) They will be serving as individuals, not as representatives of organized Orthodoxy.

b) They may well include non-Orthodox affiliated experts. The late Rabbi Boaz Cohen comes to mind. His gittin were accepted by the Rav and the RCA. I too accepted them without question. Surely, some observant members of a non-Orthodox Talmud faculty, trained in these areas of halakhic law, can be found.

c) There is no special pleading here: By no means would all Orthodox rabbis be automatically qualified to serve on the beth din. Indeed, most would not be qualified.

I tell you here and now that I have never written a get or officiated at a divorce proceeding nor will I ever do so. The

reason is not taste; it is competence. My training has not been in this area, and therefore I consider myself totally incompetent to do these things. There are no more than a dozen or two dozen individuals in this country whose gittin I would accept as valid.

Were this idea to be accepted, I would seek to expand the kollel le'horaah at The Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University, the graduate rabbinic program which trains experts in the civil and domestic branches of Halakhah, and I would augment it with special courses to sensitize the young scholars to deal with a large and heterogeneous constituency. There are significant details that have yet to be elucidated. But if the idea is found attractive, we can work out the specifics. Again, I caution that this is only a partial solution and by no means a panacea.

It will not be easy to set up such a N.B.D. Many of my Orthodox colleagues will not go along because of the implied "recognition" of non-Orthodox rabbis. (I have dealt with part of this problem earlier.) But they shall have to acknowledge the need to alleviate untold personal suffering by accepting the purely halakhic standards and not being distracted by organizational/denominational considerations, important as they may regard them. The late Senator Dirksen used to say, "I am a man of unbending and ~~fixed~~ principles, and the first unbending and ~~fixed~~ principle is to be flexible." The "Orthodox-Conservative-Reform" rubric is after all, not a halakhic category. And Conservative and Reform rabbis will have to

surrender some of their professional and communal autonomy for the same sacred cause -- the wholeness of Kelal Yisrael and the integrity of the lives of countless thousands of Jews living and unborn.

Ki yishalkha binkha mahar -- some day our children will surely ask us: Why did you ignore our mahar, why did you not take into account our "tomorrow," our future? That is a terrible question -- especially if one doesn't have an adequate answer.

There are two other requests I would make of the non-Orthodox groups. One, that the Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis explain explicitly to the people they are marrying that they do so according to their understanding of marriage law, and that that is their interpretation of the operative phrase ke'dat Mosheh ve'Yisrael, and that, by clear implication, it is not done so as to accord with Orthodox law, i.e., Halakhah. By these means, those Orthodox Jews who follow the ruling of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein will then be able to accept the progeny of the remarriage of people so married without fear of mamzerut.

Second, again in order to spare grief for future generations, and therefore as an act of moral probity, Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis should insist, when remarrying one who was married at an Orthodox ceremony, (or, for that matter, a Conservative ceremony) that he/she obtain a valid get first. Consistency requires that a status assumed under a specific legal system be abolished by the norms of that same system before a new

status is achieved under a different system.

I have spoken at length -- perhaps too long -- about issues ha-omdim be'rumo shel olam that are of the highest significance in our world.

If my ideas for an accomodation find the minimum resonance to allow for further development, then the proper forum -- a private one, shielded from publicity and posturing -- must be found soon in order to stop the unravelling of the fabric of Jewish unity that is so frighteningly real. If there is enough ground to warrant further work on this or other ideas in this vein, it would be best to call a halt, insofar as it is within our power to do so, to the cycle of mutual recriminations and, as well, to any "new directions" or actions by rabbinic bodies that can only aggravate the situation and add oil to the flames. Now is not the time for further "innovations" that will bedevil our efforts and strengthen those who are less concerned with Jewish unity.

The Talmud tells us that just as we lay the tefillin so, as it were, does the Almighty. And whereas in our tefillin we bear a scroll which reads, Shema Yisrael -- "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, The Lord is Ehad - One," so do His tefillin bear the words, "mi ke'amkha Yisrael goy ehad ba-aretz, "Who is like unto Your people, one nation in the world."

Neither unity has yet been sufficiently achieved or acknowledged. Just as we conclude our prayers (in the Alenu) with the verse from Zechariah, "And the Lord will be King over

all the world, ba-yom ha-hu -- on that day yihyeh ha-Shem ehad u-
shemo ehad, the Lord will be One and His Name will be One," so,
I suspect, does God Himself offer the prayer, "May Your people
Israel again be one people; ba'yom ha-hu, may the day come soon
when Israel will be goy ehad, one unified people in the world."

It is a prayer worth hearing -- and answering with all our
might and main.