

**"A Vision for CAI" - Rabbi Alan Silverstein  
Yom Kippur - 2006**

On Rosh Hashanah I spoke about events in Israel - Also, at the forefront of my mind these past 12 months has been the implementation of plans for our exciting new building

NOW WE ALL KNOW that transitions have their challenges -

As Steve Granet humorously summed it up - "Rabbi, do you think that Moses had to appear before the local planning board!"

TRANSITIONS! I remember moving into my home in WC in 1979 --- Interest rates were about to jump from 9.5% to 13% --- Sylvia Sherman [of blessed memory] along with Toby and Roy Shapiro located a terrific house for us

My father-in-law liked the looks of home - but coming from Brooklyn, eye-balling the sprawling house, he wanted to know - "How many families lived there?"

Rita liked the house but did not like the kitchen

12 years later - prior to David's Bar Mitzvah - We were in construction mode

We were out of our kitchen - for months and months

But final product was terrific - I can't imagine 20 Fairmount Road any other way

SIMILARY: I had a brief chat with our late Friday evening minyan -

We looked back upon the blessings that came from our expansion of 1988

The Chapel

The Youth Lounge

Many of the classrooms

The offices for staff

The corridor the connects the sanctuary to the building-at-large

And so much more that did not exist prior

So, too, will this new facility fulfill our dreams

**It will be a welcoming building with a lovely and unified exterior**

**An improved flow of traffic and car pool lines**

**Comfortable interior gathering spaces - spacious lobbies and a wide corridor - ample coat rooms and lavatories**

**Administrative offices that are welcoming - attractive and uncluttered == warm not merely corporate -**

**A building that is flexible, reflecting a willingness to innovate - A "CAN DO" reputation that CAI has earned**

2. Our Executive Committee requested that this morning I present a Vision for the use of our new building --- this is a fitting subject for this sacred moment when all of all are gathered together as ONE

This assignment ties in beautifully with our launch of a Long Range Planning Project - 1 of 3 congregations selected by the STAR (Synagogue Transformation And Renewal) Foundation) - challenging us to plan our future.

In the current weekly edition of the Jerusalem Post, Rabbi Shomo Riskin offers the following related observation

Yom Kippur is a day for putting aside the distractions of eating, drinking and material concerns - It thus becomes a time for focusing upon our spiritual capacities -

For 26 hours, we free our souls to sing and soar - to aspire to be their best

So, too, is the construction of our new building an opportunity to step back and to dream about becoming the best synagogue we can possibly be.

For a conceptual framework - I will turn to another mega issue of this past year

Last October, the JTS announced the retirement as of June 2006 of Chancellor Ismar Schorch --- the lead position in Conservative Judaism

On April 10, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) announced the selection of Professor Arnold Eisen, a wonderful choice to lead our Movement - You will hear more and more about him in the years ahead

1. --- I am proud that he is a fellow alum of my high school - Central High in Phila - He is

a. A scholar's scholar

b. A charismatic speaker

c. A mentsh, a good listener, highly approachable, easy to work with.

d. A consensus builder. Someone who exudes a positive, upbeat message

And relevant to this morning's sermon - **Dr. Eisen's insights about the future of American Judaism - offer a VISION for CAI to become the best synagogue we can possibly be**

**Here are but 6 Points in Chancellor-elect Eisen's remarkable array of compelling ideas**

## **I. DIVERSITY - THE NEED TO INVOLVE ADULTS IN WHATEVER WAY TOUCHES THEIR SOULS**

**STORY: At JTS in my day, all of the students had "elevator stories". They were slow and cramped. Many amusing anecdotes emanated from riding them**

**On my first ride on a JTS elevator I was nervous, on route to my rabbinical school admission interview. --- Mistakenly, I got off at the basement level (the gym) instead of the 6th floor. - Looking with surprise at the JTS gym, as a former varsity basketball player, I thought to myself: "Wow! I can do this. A Rabbinical school with a sports program - What Diversity!"**

**Dr. Eisen's inaugural message stressed the need for Diversity both at the Seminary and in the agenda of the Synagogue**

He cited revered former Chancellor Solomon Schechter's inaugural calling for - "diversity in feeling and variation in thinking"

**Dr. Eisen has tied Diversity to an expanded understanding of "MITZVAH"**

**Mitzvah should be BOTH what God commands us to do - AND Professor Eisen suggests "whatever Jews do in an attempt to express themselves as Jews" - "any sort of Jewishness, of Yiddishkeit"**

**This concept of Jewish Diversity is what we at CAI stress repeatedly in our mission statement as - (Torah)Head, (Avodah) Heart and (Gemulit Hasadim) Hand**

**3 Diverse Ladders of authentic commitments**

**CAI is a non-judgmental sacred community- We serve as an enabler for each person's Jewish journey, helping ascend at his or her own pace in a unique way at each stage of life.**

Diversity at CAI will be facilitated by our new building's rooms of a range of sizes, shapes & functions

And our building no longer will provide merely PEDIATRIC spaces - suitable to children - BUT SPACES GEARED FOR ADULTS AS WELL -

We will be among the few synagogues to construct an --- ADULT ACTIVITIES WING - Adult Library and Learning Center, Adult Conference and Meeting Rooms, Adult Socializing Lounge

**II Some Form of Formal or Informal Torah Learning for every Jewish person**

**Story: Renowned Talmud scholar Dr. Moshe Zucker entered the JTS elevator during my first year. He looked up at me: "What year are you?" Meekly, I responded, "First year." "Ah, to be in first year," he replied - and then with a twinkle in his eye, he added: "I want to be young, not stupid!"**

**Dr. Eisen's survey of American Jewish attitudes - THE JEW WITHIN - reveals that only 7% of synagogue members regard an encounter with Torah Study as "important" ---**

This is a huge problem!

Arnold Eisen reminds us that the survival of Judaism depends upon as many Jews as possible deciding to make himself or herself "a student of Torah"

Torah is not merely the Five Books of Moses, but also all Biblical and subsequent Rabbinic texts, Jewish history, Jewish literature, Jewish Philosophy..

And in Professor Eisen's words - "Torah includes not just texts and ideas but lives and communities" - e.g. both formal and informal modes of education

To that end - in this new era of accessibility of Torah in translation and on-line, for all ages and stages-

The new building will contain a State-of-the-art Pre-School facility--- with parallel Parent and Grand-Parent learning options within the Adult Activities Wing "

The Project will cosmetically upgrade our Elementary School Wing - More rooms singularly dedicated to the use of BOTH our Relig School AND our Day School students, their parents and siblings

More rooms will mean the diversifying of Hebrew language instruction and of all Jewish subject matter. Different levels of Special Education, of Clubs to foster Special Interests in choral singing, Israeli folk dance, the arts, and of all facets of Judaica

The Project also will fortify our Teen Formal and Informal Education Wing - At long last, we will have in-house our amazing area of Teen Options -- Chai/Prosdor, SSDS, USY, Spark, SCEEP, KOLOT (It's a Gril's Thing), NOAM, HAZAMIR, and so forth - More than 250 teens currently are engaged

Moms and Dads arriving early for car pool for any age children's programs - will be able to come inside the building, sip coffee in the Adult Lounge, bring a lap top to the hot zone in the Adult Learning Center, or engage in relevant discussions in the Conference room areas in a new Parenting/Grandparenting Center

Adult Learning, too, will be served in our state-of-the-art Adult Library and Learning Center - Judaica books & magazines, Jewish content computer access, all types of relevant media, courses at diverse times of day and night, both weekday and week-end and online as well

### **III THE GROWING INTEREST in Spirituality**

**Story: Being on the JTS elevator with Chancellor Louis Finklestein required no words. His demeanor, his appearance, his piety, his spiritual power shone forth from his eyes.**

**Dr Eisen rejects the depressing prognosis that "Hadorot Meetmaateem"- e.g. each passing generation is less interested in Jewish religious life than the previous one**

Teaching in the Religion Department at Stanford University - Dr. Eisen observed that "students are no longer approaching religion as something that is absolutely false. They're coming with an open mind..."

His survey data [from The JEW WITHIN] - reveal that a substantial portion of Jewish adults are more engaged in Jewish religious life than were their own parents -

While not totally observant of every detail - Jewish adults of 5767 seem to have an affinity for ritual observances, to value them

And in terms of theology - far more respondents expressed a belief in God than Eisen [and Cohen had] expected -

Their data reveal that more than 80% feel that God exists and 68% perceive that God watches over them in time of danger ----

TO ADDRESS SPIRITUAL SEEKING , OUR NEW BUILDING WILL PROVIDE SPACES for Multiple SPIRITUAL OPTIONS

Our New sanctuary will offer ample seating for 400-500 folks. All in attendance will sit within sacred space - No one will be relegated to secondary seating in the social hall

Upgraded acoustics will enable each worshipper both to hear the sermon and the cantor - and to experience congregational singing as surrounding and embracing

Our enhanced sound system will assist the hearing impaired -

A lapel microphone system will enable me and other speakers to have greater flexibility in interacting with the congregation

PLUS TO ENCOURAGE SPIRITUAL DIVERSITY -:

Additional prayer Spaces will best enable the implementation of "Synaplex" - SYNAGOGUE-PLEX -

It's thesis is that of a Cinema-plex:

Not everyone's spiritual needs can be met via a singular-traditional Shabbat AM format or traditional daily minyanim:

Thus 3 new spiritual spaces will be available:

- \* Our heimisch and comfortable Chapel will be cosmetically enhanced
- \* An intimate Bet Midrash inside the Adult Library and Learning Center - will be used for prayer in combination with sacred study
- \* The sanctuary will be divisible into smaller spaces due to concentrate lighting and attractive dividers

In these 3 attractive new spiritual locations - we will intensify our diversity

*Family Services* - as Susan Werk is conducting so beautifully for HHD

Cantor Caplan's "*Shabbat Neshama*" - choral singing, congregational dance - innovative melodies

*Meditation Services* - and/or *Shal-Om Yoga* - with Karen and Alice Frank as recently written up by The Star Ledger

*Learners Services* - intimate, flexible, interactive - with Rabbi Paula Mack Drill

*Healing Services* and *Spiritual Wellness* ones along with *Spiritual Journey Groups*

#### IV - Building **Friendship Networks & a Sense of Community**

STORY: Rabbi Dov Zlotnick on a JTS elevator in the bitter cold of winter, remarked to be: "You need the warmth of daily minyan" - e.g. a chevrah/friendship network

Arnold Eisen's RETHINKING MODERN JUDAISM: RITUAL, COMMANDMENT, COMMUNITY affirms Jewish living "happens" largely in community rather than inside the self... "

Jews can best gain access to "Torah communities" via friendship networks

In Arnold Eisen's words - we need "a variety of settings in which individual Jews are palpably connected to other Jews"

To that end, our new building will enable CAI to provide adult small group spaces;

For *Havurot*

For *Mother's Groups*

For *Young Couples Clubs*

For *Sisterhood, Women's Rosh Hodesh*

For *Men's Club*

For our *Seniors Adults Lounge* - they no longer will have to sit on Nursery school chairs or meet in the hallways

For *MAROM - Young Singles* - e.g. coffee house or other late-night formats to spend time with friends

For *Single Adults of all Ages*

**To build friendships and community as a Center for Support in Times of Transition - offering Support Groups:**

For the Bereaved, for folks undergoing Marital distress or break-up, for Households coping with chronic illness, for the unemployed, for recently retired, for intermarried folks seeking assistance in raising their children as Jews, for non-Jewish family members seeking to explore conversion into Judaism, for recent converts [so that they are not being left Dripping at the Mikvah]-

**To build friendship and community as a Center for Jewish Culture to meet the need of Jews inclined toward**

*Israeli Folk Dance*

*Choral and General Jewish Singing* - instrumental Jewish musical expression

*Jewish Theatre*

*Jewish Film Festivals*

*Judaic Painting, Knitting,* and other modes of artistic expression

To build friendships and community as **A Center for the celebration of life cycle moments** - arrival of a baby, Bar/Bat mitzvah reception, weddings, anniversaries and so forth

**V - Peoplehood -**

**Story: Solomon Schechter was an pioneer in American Zionism. He supported every worthy cause on behalf of Jewish peoplehood. Solicitors frequently came to his home. One day, a Christian Evangelist came to Dr. Schechter's door, requesting "money for the Lord." Displeased, Dr. Schechter responded: "young man, in all likelihood I will see the Lord long before you will."**

Dr Eisen cautions that "The sense of obligation to other Jews" is not what it used to be.

"[We need to remember that]... each [Israeli and Diaspora Jewries depends upon the other politically as well as culturally... There are too few of us to ignore, or remain ignorant about, any of us. Our interests and imperatives intersect"

To promote Jewish Peoplehood, our new building will designate Spaces within our Adult Library and Learning Wing for Specialized Resource Centers

**An ISRAEL RESOURCE CENTER,** promoting - in Eisen's conception::

1. Youth and Adult Visits to Israel - offering interactions with the people, the society, the culture
2. Hebrew language instruction/clubs/discussions
3. Bring American Jews and Israelis together for dialogue and partnership in problem solving as doctors, engineers, social workers, ethicists, and so forth
4. advocacy on Israel's behalf

**A Holocaust resource center** - to address the implications of the unfathomable experiences of the Shoa

In the words of survivor and theologian Emil Fackenheim - we must teach future generations what happened. Teach them that in spite of threats to our existence, we must never despair. We must confront these threats for what they are and find ways to overcome them.

**A Resource Center for American Jewish Life** - connecting with Jews throughout North America.

**A Resource Center for Global Jewry** - we should partner with CAI's friends in the Jewish communities of the UK, Latin America, Spain, the Czech Republic and so forth - This ever shrinking world - A world of the internet - A world in which our young people frequently spend time abroad as do our business people, and all of us as tourists

VI - Last but not least - **TIKKUN OLAM (Making a Better World)**

STORY: Dr. Eisen's first contact with JTS was as a student reporter for the University of Pennsylvania paper coming to interview AJ Heschel. Heschel's commitment was that we must not only pray with our voices but also "pray with our feet" - e.g. march on behalf of civil rights, of Soviet Jewry, of peace among nations, of Israel's well-being and so forth

**Arnold Eisen insists: "Scholarship has to matter if we are to embark on it with the requisite passion. It must know and address the world."**

**Dr. Eisen's 'aim is...to have us bring the [Jewish] tradition to bear on as many issues as possible, in as many voices as are needed" ---**

**Our new building's diverse spaces will enhance CAI's social activism and acts of loving kindness**

*Molly and George Kaplan Caring Committee*

*Activities of Congregation Nurse*

A "Green Synagogue" - as reflected in our new building's environmental consciousness and advocacy

*Projects for homeless and for the hungry* - in soup kitchens and food pantries, in Habitat for Humanity, in homeless shelters

*Civic activities* within our local community - to whom we so very appreciative for hosting us this HHD, and throughout our construction period

*Public policy advocacy*, with Forums addressing the issues of the day

*Inter-religious Dialogue*. Sharing ideas and collegiality with our neighbors and hosts in Methodist Church, at Notre Dame RC Parish, and other folks as well

**JTS Chancellor-elect, Arnold Eisen, speaks to our quest to be a model synagogue facility with a mission suited to the 21st century.**

In conclusion, I return to Shomo Riskin's aforementioned observation

Because Yom Kippur is a day for putting aside the distractions of eating, drinking and material concerns - it is a time to free our souls to aspire to be their best

So, too, let us employ this period of Transition - temporary withdrawal from our building as a blessing. for us - An opportunity to step back and to dream about becoming the best synagogue we can possibly be.

We engage in this sacred project not just for ourselves.

We do so also for our children and grandchildren, and additionally for all current and future folks who will be welcomed into the sacred community we seek to enhance.

Shana Tova