

THE CHARLOTTE JEWISH NEWS

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Editorial

Who Is A Jew?

Some people only recognize someone as being a Jew if the parents are Jewish, or at least the mother is Jewish. Others have the belief that only if they have been converted by an Orthodox rabbi then they are a Jew. Still others believe that if there is any Jewish bloodline (Hitler's theory) then one remains a Jew. Those converted to Judaism by Conservative and Reform rabbis feel that they are now Jews. Personally, I believe that all of the above should prevail. However, this is only my opinion and unfortunately has not been the prevalent one in Israel.

The Israeli parliament recently rejected the controversial "Who is a Jew" bill last month, at least temporarily resolving an issue that threatened to estrange many American Jews from those in Israel.

The Knesset voted 62-51 to defeat the bill, which would have recognized only those conversions to Judaism performed by Orthodox rabbis.

Under the measure, people converted to Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis would not have been considered Jews or allowed to become Israeli citizens under the Law of Return. A centerpiece of Israeli legislation, the Law of Return guarantees citizenship to any recognized Jew.

Introduced by elements of Israel's religious parties, the bill was actively opposed by leaders of Judaism's Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist movements. They, and even some supporters, soon dubbed it the "Who is a Jew" bill.

Much of the opposition came from the U.S., where many Jews asserted that the bill's passage would divide the worldwide Jewish community and damage Israeli fund raising efforts.

Under Israeli law, a defeated bill cannot be re-introduced to the Knesset for at least six months, and some supporters of the measure said they might resubmit it. Let us hope not!

-R.M.

**From the Desk of Marty Schneer
-JCC Executive Director**

As the new Jewish Community Center facilities take shape, our attention becomes increasingly focused on the emerging role and function of the JCC. Based on my contacts with the Jewish community over the past year and a half I feel there are a number of expectations that we all share. It's my opinion that we would all agree that we want the physical plant to be properly maintained. We all would like the Center to offer a wide variety of programs and services for all age groups, and we also want the Center to serve as a meeting place for the entire Jewish community. On these basic points there must certainly be a great deal of unanimity. Our goal over the next year is to develop a more far-reaching 'vision' of what the Center can be and to translate this vision into an operational plan.

I submit that our two main tasks are one, to create an environment where individuals are encouraged to fulfill their potential and two, that the Center be a place where our sense of Jewish identity can be

strengthened and helped to flourish. There are some very concrete steps that we can take to begin to accomplish this first task. In developing our schedule of programs and services we need to seek a balance between providing programs that the community requests with a smattering of new initiatives from the professional staff. It is absolutely essential that we employ and train the kind of instructors and group leaders who possess a variety of skills and who are able to communicate and nurture the creative and physical talents of our members. In structuring the evolving program areas at the new 'J' (i.e. drama, dance, athletics) we need to provide participants with an opportunity to advance to a higher level of skill development. Perhaps our most important goal in bridging both tasks is to instill a feeling of acceptance, enabling people to feel comfortable and at home in the JCC.

Enhancing one's Jewish identity seems to me to be the more difficult of the two tasks

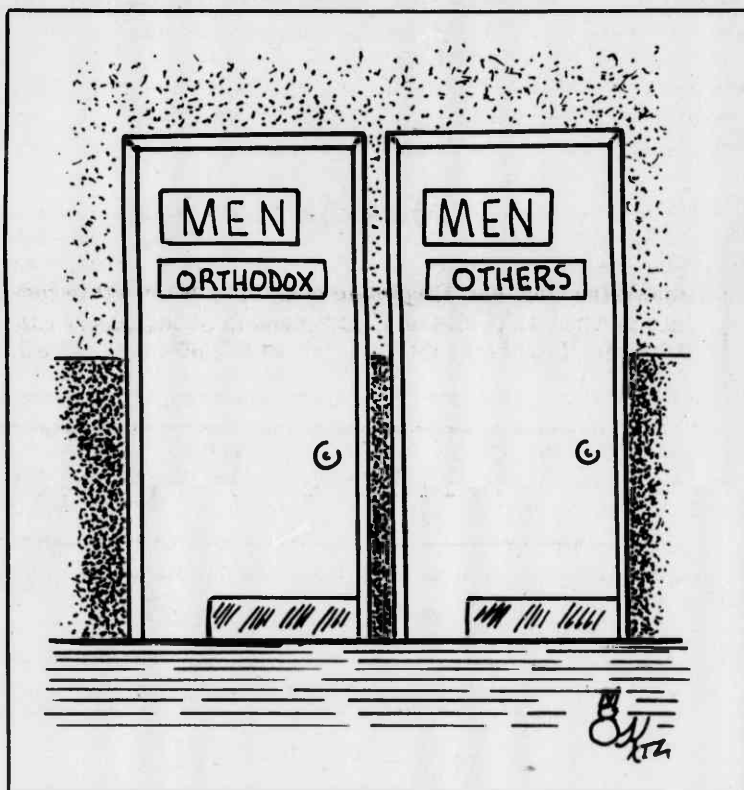


to accomplish and measure. Our goal in this regard must be to create opportunities for positive Jewish experiences. I would agree with many who stress the importance of Jewish education and content as a means of helping people get in touch with their own Judaism. I also feel that there is intrinsic value in enabling Jews to socialize and participate in a whole range of activities with other Jews. Our building must be so obviously Jewish that one is struck by this pervasive feel and tone as soon as one steps into the Center. Jewish programming and holiday celebrations should be key ingredients of our overall program and wherever possible joint programming with the synagogues and other Jewish institutions and organizations should take place.

We recognize at the JCC that we are in the 'people' business. Our goal is to provide people with quality programs and services that enhance their lives. There is great excitement at the JCC as we engage in this continuing dialogue to crystalize our 'vision' for the Jewish Community Center. I look forward to hearing from other members of the Jewish community as we determine what we are all about and where we need to be at this time next year.

As you may be aware the JCC conducted a random survey of the membership last month to help us better define the needs and expectations of the membership for the new JCC. We plan to follow-up our telephone sampling with a questionnaire to the rest of the membership. Our preliminary findings have been quite enlightening and we look forward to publishing our results in a future issue of the *Charlotte Jewish News* after all the data has been tabulated. I would like to thank the following individuals who helped us complete the random telephone sampling: Ann Abel, Meg Goldstein, Vicki Hopkins, Lila Josephson, Harold Josephson, Sandy Rosenberg, Lynne Sheffer and Cheryl Spangenthal.

THE CHARLOTTE JEWISH NEWS encourages its readers to submit articles and letters expressing their opinions on matters of interest to the Jewish community. Such submissions should be typed and double-spaced. They may be edited in order to fit the available space. Mail to CJN-P.O. Box 13369, Charlotte, N.C. 28211.



On The Issues.....Ira Gissen, Director NC/VA Region Anti Defamation League

Before The Supreme Court

The Anti-Defamation League, together with the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council have submitted a "friend of the court" brief to the United States Supreme Court. The issue on which they stand united is their opposition to an Alabama law providing for a moment of silence for meditation or voluntary prayer in school.

Whatever way the decision goes, the case, *Wallace v. Jaffree*, will become a landmark in the history of religious freedom in America.

A constitutional challenge to the Alabama law was dismissed in the District Court. The Court of Appeals held the moment of silence statute to be unconstitutional because it violated the religious establishment clause of the First

Amendment to our Constitution. It was then appealed to the Supreme Court.

By way of background, Alabama law provides two prayer statutes: one with a prescribed prayer and another which allows teachers to require a period of silence "for meditation or voluntary prayer." Mobile County, Alabama teachers conducted various prayer activities including Bible readings and prayer songs. Parents filed complaints in District Court against the state's statutes and the teacher's prayer activities. A preliminary injunction was issued against the school prayer statute, but subsequently Federal District Judge Hand dismissed both actions because, in his view, the First Amendment establishment clause only applied to the Federal Government!

The plaintiffs immediately

appealed to the Court of Appeals and to the Supreme Court for a stay of the District Court's decision and an injunction.

Justice Louis F. Powell ordered a halt to the prayer sessions in Alabama public schools and reinstated an injunction outlawing the prayer sessions pending the ruling of the Court of Appeals.

The Court of Appeals decided in favor of the plaintiffs, ruling that both the prescribed prayer statute and the silent prayer statute were unconstitutional. It was then appealed to the Supreme Court which summarily affirmed the ruling on Alabama's vocal prayer statute and agreed to hear an appeal on the silent prayer meditation statute.

The brief filed by the Jewish Agencies points out that the Alabama law is unconstitutional because it uses a

government activity for a religious purpose. In addition, the agencies maintain that the prayer and meditation statute tends to establish religion in violation of the constitutional prohibition. Further, the agencies assert the statute provides for a "religious exercise" which in fact is a ritual performed in an organized group every day at the same time. In addition the Alabama law requires school authorization and teacher supervision of a supposedly voluntary religious activity which in fact has already been found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in the 1960s.

The brief submitted by the Jewish agencies points out that there are many alternatives to the method used in Alabama. There is no restriction against prayer by individual students during the school day or at any other time.