



UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

Biennial Bulletin

[HTTP://UAHC.ORG/BOSTON](http://UAHC.ORG/BOSTON)

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Even before the opening gavel was sounded, it was clear that the UAHC's 66th Biennial Convention was going to be extraordinary in almost every way.

There was an excitement in the air. Old friends reunited, while first-time participants pored over the Biennial program book and wondered what to do next. And in the end, the convention was an unforgettable experience for the almost 6,000 people who attended, including 269 college students and 229 NFTY delegates and the WRJ women.

What part was most memorable? Was it the stirring tribute to the heroes of September 11? The sight of the Torah, originally brought to America by Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise and given to President Kennedy in 1961, being presented by his nephew Joseph Kennedy for our use during the Biennial? Or maybe it was the sight of everyone dancing in the aisles—even in the balcony!—during the rousing *hakafah*.

Even the weather was extraordinary, as Boston's winter temperatures disappeared and gave way to unseasonably springlike weather. As Jerry Blaine of Winchester, MA, said, "Over 5,000 Jews and warm December temperatures. It feels almost like being in Israel!"

Whatever the reason, the Boston Biennial—the first of the new millennium—will long be remembered as a transforming moment, a time and place when delegates from 568 congregations in 49 states, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands came to Boston to celebrate Reform Judaism.

\$1.5 MILLION DONATED AFTER SEPTEMBER 11 TO UAHC DISASTER RELIEF FUND

In an unprecedented outpouring of generosity, thousands of Reform Jews have given \$1.5 million to the UAHC Disaster Relief Fund to help those affected by the September 11 attacks. When they contribute to the fund, which is activated as needed in times of natural disaster or tragedy, Reform Jews are assured that their donations reach those in need. The UAHC does not take any portion of the donations for overhead and donates the credit card processing fees.

At the opening plenary session of the Boston Biennial, the UAHC presented its highest honor—the Maurice N. Eisendrath Bearer of Light Award for Service to the World Community—to the New York City firefighters, police officers, and rescue workers who labored around the clock to save lives and recover the fallen in the aftermath of the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center.

"Wherever we were on September 11, our souls were lifted by your courage, and our hearts grieved with yours as your losses were recorded," Rabbi Eric Yoffie said. "We thank you for what you have done and what you continue to do for us day in and day out. Your bravery dignifies us all."

The first donation of \$200,000 was made to the September 11 Fund in October; since then, \$100,000 donations have been made to:

- The Families of Freedom Scholarship Fund
- The New York City Coalition Against Hunger
- The New York Police and Fire Widows and Children's Benefit Fund
- Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local 100
- The Robin Hood Foundation
- Structured Employment Economic Development Corporation (Seedco)
- Service Employees International Union
- Uniformed Firefighters' Association Widows and Children's Fund



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION RABBI YOFFIE'S MAJOR FOCUS

Offering a blunt appraisal of Jewish education, UAHC President Rabbi Eric Yoffie called on congregations to mobilize for a major overhaul of congregational religious schools.

"More money is spent on our religious schools than on any other synagogue program," Yoffie said. "Why is it that something as critical to our future is so widely perceived to be such a failure?"

Two years ago Yoffie called for a revolution in worship. This year he is seeking a sea change in education, calling for the implementation of standards because "even the youngest children should know that Reform Judaism makes demands on us; it does not mean doing whatever you please."

In that vein, Yoffie said parents of religious school children should be in school studying with their children six times a year. A new curriculum—the *Chai* Jewish Learning for Life Curriculum—includes materials for children, parents, and families about three topics: Torah, *avodah*, and *gemilut chasadim*, as well as a new Hebrew curriculum, and also calls for greater involvement by congregational volunteer leaders.

"In virtually every congregation with an outstanding school, the most talented lay leader have devoted themselves to education," Yoffie said. "Change is most dramatic in those synagogues where temple boards make the tough educational decisions and where education committees do policy and evaluation rather than classroom snacks and fund-raising."

Yoffie praised the work of the Jewish day schools, but acknowledged that there will never be more than a small percentage of Reform children in them, and so he urged Jewish philanthropists to turn their attention to supplemental schools.

To introduce teachers to this new curriculum, the UAHC is creating additional on-line training and will hold teacher-training events in every UAHC region.

"I am filled with optimism that we will succeed," Yoffie told the delegates. "Jewish education has not failed in North America; it has simply never been tried."

The full text of Rabbi Yoffie's speech is at <http://uahc.org/yoffie>.

JEWISH LEARNING FOR JEWISH LIFE

The *Chai* Learning for Jewish Life Curriculum, a new Jewish learning program for Reform synagogues, is a flexible system that will be introduced in grades 2 and 3 in the fall. The program includes the following components:

- **Volunteer involvement:** Discussion and study guides are available for the Education Committee and Board of Trustees to help them redefine their roles in religious education.
- **Teaching training:** New regional events and on-line courses are available to prepare teachers.
- **Curriculum materials:** Materials will be available for grades 2-7 that teach the core values of Torah, *Avodah*, and *gemilut chasadim*.
- **Mitkadem: Hebrew for Youth:** A new, interactive Hebrew curriculum.
- **Family and parent education:** Parents will be expected to be in school for six sessions every year.

For more information see <http://uahc.org/educate/chai>.

UAHC CONTINUES TO GROW

Nine congregations were admitted into the UAHC this December, bringing the total number of UAHC-affiliated synagogues to 913. We welcome

Temple Beth Shalom, Lake Havasu City, AZ
Temple Gan Elohim, Phoenix, AZ
B'nai Big Bear, Big Bear Lake, CA
Hugat Haverim, Glendale, CA
Stephen S. Wise Temple, Los Angeles, CA
Santa Ynez Valley Jewish Community, Santa Ynez, CA
Congregation B'nai Torah, Sudbury, MA
Congregation B'nai Harim, Pocono Pines, PA
Congregation Beth Israel, Walla Walla, WA

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Rabbi Eric Yoffie, President

633 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6778 • 212-650-4000

For more information contact
Emily Grotta, Director of Communications
E-mail: egrotta@uahc.org



RABBI DANIEL FREELANDER ELECTED VP

Rabbi Daniel H. Freeland was elected vice president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations on Wednesday, December 5. In addition, Rabbi Lennard R. Thal, vice president of the UAHC since 1996, was named senior vice president. Rabbi Thal is responsible for the UAHC's fourteen regions and serves as the organization's second-in-command.

Rabbi Freeland, 49, who has been with the UAHC since 1975, will supervise the work of all the education and youth departments of the UAHC. His appointment is part of a reorganization that will bring together in one unit the Departments of Jewish Education and Adult Jewish Growth, as well as the UAHC's youth and camping programs.

Rabbi Freeland, whom UAHC President Rabbi Eric Yoffie calls "one of the most talented and creative professionals I've known," has served as the UAHC's Director of Program for ten years,

coordinating the departments that create resources for and provide counseling to all UAHC congregations. He has also been the vision behind the UAHC Biennials, overseeing the program from early morning *t'filah* to late night entertainment. In his new position he will continue to assume responsibility for the organization's publishing arms, the UAHC Press and Transcontinental Music Publications.

A native of Worcester, MA, Rabbi Freeland holds degrees in religion and music from Trinity College in Hartford, CT. He was ordained in 1979 at the New York campus of HUC-JIR and lives in New Jersey with his wife, Rabbi Elyse Frishman of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in Franklin Lakes, NJ, and their three children. For almost thirty years, Rabbi Freeland and Cantor Jeffrey Klepper have composed and performed original Jewish melodies as the popular musical group Kol B'Seder.

BURG, TAMIR, AND REGEV TALK TO DELEGATES ABOUT ISRAEL CRISIS

Israel was much on the mind of Biennial attendees delegates during a plenum devoted to Israel with Speaker of the Knesset Avraham Burg, Professor Yuli Tamir, and Rabbi Uri Regev.

Burg was scheduled to meet with delegates in person but stayed in Israel because of the crisis and spoke to the delegates by video-conference. "My heart is with you," Burg said. "I'm a very good friend of yours. We may be on other sides of the ocean, but we're all on the Jewish planet."

Asked about the current crisis, Burg brought a laugh when he said that Israelis are "like an egg. The more you boil us, the harder we become."

Regev, who is well known to Reform Jews for his work with the Israeli Religious Action Center, made his first formal appearance as the newly appointed executive director of the World Union of Progressive Judaism.

He admitted that the events of the past year have given everyone a tremendous sense of confusion. Those in the peace camp realize that there will not be a "60s kind of peace," while the right wing now knows that there is no military solution.

Tamir, director of the Rabin Center, also seemed disheartened. "I don't know if peace can be achieved right now," Tamir said.

And at the close of the day, Rabbi David Ellenson, the president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, spoke, having just returned from Israel, where he was visiting HUC students in Jerusalem.

"We are training a generation of rabbis, cantors, and educators who are steeled by adversity and will be the strongest our people have ever produced," he said.

The complete remarks of all three speakers can be found online at www.seek-peace.org/speeches.

REFORM YOUTH TO RETURN TO ISRAEL

NFTY Israel trips this summer will be "a very safe kibbutz-based program for our teenagers" said Rabbi Eric Yoffie. He also announced special summer trip for parents who wish to visit Israel with their children, and a UAHC Board of Trustees mission in June that is open to all Reform Jews.

For information about upcoming NFTY trips, visit the NFTY Web site at <https://www.nfty.org/summer/>.