

Rabbi Lewis' Message for April, 2012

I walked up to the registration desk at the 123rd annual convention of the [Central Conference of American Rabbis](#). This was the first CCAR Conference (other than the atypical Jerusalem Conference in 2009) I had attended since San Diego in 2006. I learned quickly how things have changed. “There is an app for the convention schedule,” said the pleasant young man who processed my registration. “I don’t have a smart phone,” I replied. He looked at me (was that pity in his eyes?) and handed me a printed program schedule.

This convention only contributed to my sense of inevitability that a smart phone – or at least an iPad – lie within the near future. There will simply be no choice. At this convention, text materials referred to by speakers were flashed up on large screens or downloaded onto iPads and iPhones. *Mishkan Tefila* has its own app so you didn’t need to hold a prayer book in your hands if you had your iPad. While I was taking notes on paper pads, the people sitting next to me were taking notes on their iPads (I also noticed colleagues - not to be named - who were checking Facebook during speakers and services).

I don’t consider myself a Luddite; I am not opposed to technological change. I just like to make judicious use of these changes. I don’t get my e-mail on my cell phone because I am usually near my desktop computer. I don’t give out my cell phone number because I am usually near a land line. I don’t tweet because I don’t think my minute-to-minute thoughts are all that special that they need to be shared. And yet I see the value in reaching congregants, especially those under the age of 30, through Facebook (nope, don’t do that either). I see how technology can be used to support teaching and enhance worship. I am pleased that I can get rid of my old tape recorders because I can make and e-mail mp3s of Torah portions on my computer. And I do think that having computers in our classrooms would allow for wider curricular possibilities.

These amazing technological changes do not obscure the deeper issues of our CCAR conferences. We are always concerned with the spiritual and practical welfare of the Jewish people. We are also concerned with our own spiritual practice and quality of life as rabbis. This year, I attended the Conference for three particular reasons:

First, I was invited to a special meeting for “Coaches,” a loose term for professional consultants, lawyers, spiritual directors, and therapists/supervisors (that was the hat I wore) who work to help rabbinic colleagues have successful and meaningful rabbinates. We talked about the challenges that face rabbis and how we can offer professional support. At these conferences, rabbis can sign up for pro bono 30 minute

consultations with any of these coaches and can decide whether they want to establish ongoing working relationships with those people.

Second, I also sit on a five-person Board of Appeals for colleagues who have been charged with violations of our ethics code. We are the final court of appeal for colleagues whom the CCAR Ethics Committee has recommended for censure, suspension or expulsion from the CCAR. We usually meet on the phone but were able to meet in person at this conference. While there are times I find myself wondering why on earth I said yes to this position (both because of the time involved and also because of the pain of the process), at the same time I understand the importance of the process and the honor of being asked to serve.

Third, this year marked the 40th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Reform rabbinate. We celebrated with the CCAR at large and within our [Women's Rabbinic Network](#). For the moment, I can answer a question I usually can't answer: the answer is 611. The question is, how many women rabbis have been ordained by the Reform movement since 1972. (Don't ask me to answer this after June when a new class will have been ordained.)

When I attended my first CCAR convention in 1980, the registrars directed all us women rabbis to the "wives' line." Now these conferences are fully integrated male and female and representative of our membership. The Old Boys' Club and the smoke-filled rooms are long gone. The CCAR is a more inclusive welcoming place, a place to catch up with old friends and meet the newer ordinees. That is the best learning of all; no matter how advanced we get technologically, no app will ever replace time spent with old friends.

As I write on the eve of the month of Nisan, I pray that your Pesach celebration be filled with fluffy matza balls, love, laughter and personal redemption.

Rabbi Ellen Lewis