

**Convention 2002:
Five Pillars of
Conservative Judaism**

February 10-14, 2002

Marriott Wardman Park, Washington, D.C.

For the first time, five major organizations of the Movement will meet together in one assembly to worship, dialogue, and deepen commitment to Torah and *mitzvo*.

Ten good reasons to attend:

1. Meet with the leadership of the Conservative Movement
2. Confront from many perspectives the challenges facing American Jewry
3. Analyze mutual concerns in a congenial, constructive atmosphere
4. Strategize ways to revitalize synagogues, schools and community
5. Learn techniques of advocacy to make our voices heard
6. Participate in seminars and workshops about Torah, liturgy, synagogue management, and skill development
7. Study with outstanding Jewish teachers
8. Determine policy at plenary sessions
9. Relax and socialize with other Conservative Jews
10. Return home invigorated and ready to address the challenges of our ever-changing world

Participating organizations include The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, The Rabbinical Assembly, Jewish Educators Assembly, The North American Association of Synagogue Executives, and the Cantors Assembly.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Founded in 1913 by Dr. Solomon Schechter as the association of Conservative synagogues in North America, the USCI, through its numerous programs and publications, serves as a resource to its affiliated congregations and works to formulate a Conservative Jewish response to pressing social and religious issues.

The United Synagogue, which works actively in the areas of educational programming and youth activities, also maintains an active presence in the State of Israel. Among other activities, the USCI offers

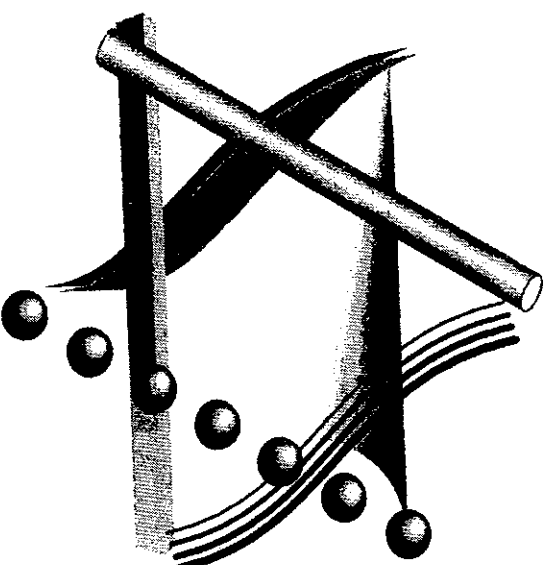
- USY and Kadima for teens -- KOACH on campus for college-age members
- Curricula development, administrative assistance, and teacher training for Solomon Schechter Day Schools and congregational schools
- Programming and guidance on public policy issues including child welfare and the environment
- IMLUN and SULAM leadership programs

Copyright 2001, The United Synagogue of
Conservative Judaism.

ובחרת בחיים

CHOOSE THE LIFE

by Rabbi Jerome M. Epstein



THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF
CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM
Rapaport House, 155 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10010
Tel: 212-533-7800 Fax: 212-353-9439
E-mail: info@uscj.org / Website: www.uscj.org



CHOOSE THE LIFE

Although **בְּיָמֶיךָ בְּיַדְיָךָ** (Deuteronomy 30:19) is frequently understood as “choose life,” the translation is really a mandate to “choose the life.” The Torah tells us that God has presented us with “the good” and “the evil” – with the hope that we will make the appropriate choice. We live our lives rarely conscious of the need to make choices. For many of us, life happens. At this time of year, it is important to choose who we will be, how we will live, and what we will do.

Our challenge is to choose the life we want to live: a life that is meaningful; rewarding; fulfilling. God has given us an array of choices. It is our task to determine what we will do. In choosing the life we are to live, there are questions to consider:

1. How will we spend the time that God has given us? Time is a precious commodity. Once it passes, it is gone. Spending time in front of the television or on the Internet will bring a different result than spending it interacting with family or participating in the community.

In choosing the life we will live, we must decide how to spend the limited time that we have.

2. How will I spend my resources? How we spend our money reflects our priorities. God intends us to take care of our own needs – but, as Jews, we are also commanded to pay heed to the needs of those around us.

In choosing the life we will live, we must decide how to allocate our resources.

3. How will we enrich the lives of God’s creatures? God looks to humanity to help improve the lives of all men, women and children by regarding them to be just a “little lower than the Angels.” As God’s partners, we have the ability to contribute to those in need. It is not always about material gifts; sometimes,

it is more important to give the gift of the soul.

In choosing the life we will live, we must decide how we will enrich the lives of others.

4. What will we learn? Being a learned Jew is important. But being a learning Jew is essential in defining the life God wants us to live. We change each day. And, thus, the texts we learn today – even if we have learned them in the past – bring new perspectives to the life we confront.

In choosing the life we will live, we must decide what we will learn.

5. How will we grow as Jews? As Conservative Jews, we proudly place ourselves on a ladder of observance. We profess our desire to become closer to God and to affirm our commitment to personal growth in Jewish living. The life that God wants us to choose is defined by *Shabbat* and by major days on the Jewish calendar; the laws of *kashrut* and regular prayer. For many, these behaviors do not come naturally. They must be consciously chosen.

In choosing the life we will live, we must decide how we will grow as Jews.

6. What values will I teach my family? Judaism enjoins us to teach our children. We transmit messages by what we say and do -- and by what we refrain from saying and what we refuse to do. In transmitting values, we may have to take an unpopular position with those we love. Nevertheless, teaching the next generation is our responsibility.

In choosing the life we will live, we must decide what values we will teach our families.

7. What will our legacy be? It is natural to live our lives in the “here and now.” As Jews, we are encouraged to enjoy each day that God gives us. But at the same time, we are mandated to leave the world improved. What will be our contribution? What will be different in the world because we have inhabited it?

In choosing the life we will live, we must decide what legacy we wish to leave.

8. How will we become more God-like? As Jews, we are taught that we are created “*b’ tzalem elohim*, in God’s own image.” But what does that mean? It means that we have the capacity to act in a God-like fashion. We can emulate God’s compassion as we reach out to the needy, model God’s sensitivity as we reach out to those in pain and imitate God’s justice as we regard each human being fairly.

In choosing the life we will live, we must decide how we will strive to live in the image of God.

9. What memories do we want others to have of us? Memories are created by the engagement of one person with another. We create the memories that the world will have of us. As we live our lives with others, the bonds of memory are slowly traced, with each encounter adding color to the outline. What we do and the encounters we have determine the brightness and the quality of the memories we will leave.

In choosing the life we will live, we must decide what memory we want to create.

10. What will I do to make this truly a New Year? Each year provides us with a new opportunity. But unless we make it different, this year will merely be a repetition of the past. Each day we experience the world from a different vantage point. We are not the same. Unless we change, we squander the opportunity that God has given us – a privilege to become who we want and what we can. In essence, being granted entrance into a New Year gives us a new opportunity to renew the life that God has given us.

In choosing the life we will live this year, we must decide how we will make this truly a New Year.

Shanah Tovah!

Rabbi Epstein is the Executive Vice-President of The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.