

# EDITORIAL

## The mountain and the sea

Rabbi Sid Schwartz talks about what he calls the Exodus and Sinai impulses. The Exodus impulse, says Schwartz, founder and president of the Rockville-based Panim: The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values, is what drives Jews to respond to outside threats to Jewish survival. The Sinai impulse, he says, is what impels us to help the most vulnerable members of society.

He sees an unfortunate gap between those two identities.

In some ways, that difference was on display this week when the Jewish Council for Public Affairs held its annual plenary in the nation's capital.

Rabbi Steve Gutow, speaking at his first plenary as JCPA's executive director, took the Sinai route, challenging the delegates from throughout the country to create armies of Jews who, while wearing "Jewish hats," will become active in public life.

Whether liberal or Orthodox or secular, he said, "Sinai for us is about going out and performing *mitzvot*; no matter how we view the nature of *mitzvot*, we have to act."

Jack Wertheimer, meanwhile, took the Exodus route. The provost of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, he chastised Jewish activists for worrying too much about the Christianization of America and for spending too much time fighting divestment and anti-Semitism in the declining mainstream Protestant movement.

Lamenting high rates of intermarriage, he challenged the field of community relations to put its efforts toward the "re-Judaization of the

American Jewish community."

We must help Jews as individuals thrive, Wertheimer said, and build "the collective of the Jewish people" in America.

When we look at these Sinai and Exodus tendencies, we see value in both. Certainly, there would be less concern about the growing strength of evangelical Christians in public life if we were more secure in our own Judaism. But, it is not just for ourselves that we worry, it is for all, for non-Christians as well as Jews.

Certainly, we must focus on helping young people see merit in Judaism, in helping them want their own children and grandchildren to remain part of our people.

Though individual Jews may find their own path to a Jewish life, our community needs to strengthen avenues for both Sinai and Exodus.

For some of us, community relations — Sinai, we would argue — is the route. It is taking our Judaism to the public square, working with interfaith groups to help them understand Jewish perspectives, doing government relations work that allows our voices to be heard.

For others, religious and educational institutions — Exodus — provide the pathway.

To be a vibrant and relevant community, we need people on both those paths. And, those roads need not diverge, but should run parallel and, at times, merge and grow stronger together.

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