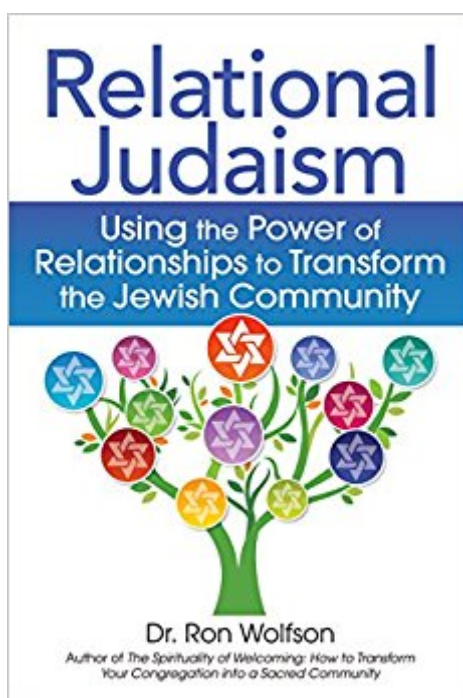


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# Relational Judaism: Using The Power Of Relationships To Transform The Jewish Community



## Synopsis

How to transform the model of twentieth-century Jewish institutions into twenty-first-century relational communities offering meaning and purpose, belonging and blessing."What really matters is that we care about the people we seek to engage. When we genuinely care about people, we will not only welcome them; we will listen to their stories, we will share ours, and we will join together to build a Jewish community that enriches our lives." —from the Introduction

Membership in Jewish organizations is down. Day school enrollment has peaked. Federation campaigns are flat. The fastest growing and second largest category of Jews is "Just Jewish." Young Jewish adults are unengaged and aging baby boomers are disengaging. Yet, in the era of Facebook, people crave face-to-face community. "It's all about relationships." With this simple, but profound idea, noted educator and community revitalization pioneer Dr. Ron Wolfson presents practical strategies and case studies to transform the old model of Jewish institutions into relational communities. He sets out twelve principles of relational engagement to guide Jewish lay leaders, professionals and community members in transforming institutions into inspiring communities whose value-proposition is to engage people and connect them to Judaism and community in meaningful and lasting ways.

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## Customer Reviews

"Catalogs endless ways to revitalize Jewish life through deep, on-going human connections.

Effective twenty-first-century lay and professional leaders will need this road map for the journey ahead." —Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president, Union for Reform Judaism "Lively ... shows us how to transform our institutions by focusing on how we connect to one another. A must read for anyone

who cares about the future of American Jewish life." —Alisa Rubin Kurshan, senior vice president, UJA-Federation of New York —"Judaism is about relationship with others, with God, with the tradition itself. There is no more sure-footed guide to the relationships in our lives than Ron Wolfson, teacher extraordinaire. Here is his latest gift to the seeking soul." —Rabbi David Wolpe, Sinai Temple, Los Angeles —"Skips the self-flagellation and offers a people-to-people paradigm that individuals and organizations can embrace." —Wayne Firestone, president and CEO, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life —"With passion of insight and humor of experience, Ron Wolfson weaves a vision for our future." —Rabbi Elyse Frishman, editor, Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur —"Had Martin Buber written a practical guide, it would be Ron Wolfson's book. It is filled with theory, practice, successful examples and, most importantly, hope for the future of the American Jewish community and its institutions." —Dr. Kerry M. Olitzky, executive director, Jewish Outreach Institute —"Consecrate the new: rejuvenate the old. With these two imperatives, Ron Wolfson demonstrates that without belonging, believing and behaving are orphaned.... His writing confirms the insight of the philosopher of relationship, Martin Buber: 'all real living is meeting.'" —Rabbi Harold Schulweis, Valley Beth Shalom, Encino, California —"A highly readable description and analysis of the most exciting and innovative programs and personalities in North American Judaism today.... This book should be read and studied by all concerned with the modern American Jewish condition." —Rabbi David Ellenson, president, Hebrew Union College —"Jewish Institute of Religion —"Any book that quotes Steve Jobs and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in the span of a few pages knows how to apply some of the best thinking from the business and non-profit sectors, along with the wisdom of Jewish text and tradition, to address the question of how we can live lives of meaning and purpose. A must read." —Rachel Levin, executive director, Righteous Persons Foundation —"Open[s] doors of engagement and learning that make life more profound and wondrous. Takes a theology of relationship and translates it into lives well lived, and communities more vibrant!" —Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, dean, the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, American Jewish University; author, Passing Life —"Tests: Spiritual Reflections on the Trial of Abraham, the Binding of Isaac —"A needed dose of truth from someone who has done his homework. An honest tour through today's Jewish landscape, skipping the all too familiar nostalgia in favor of concrete ideas, commitment and hope." —Rabbi Noa Kushner, The Kitchen, San Francisco —"Challenges the Jewish community to embrace a wholly new and boldly different paradigm.... Brings much-needed fresh thinking to a Jewish

community striving to reinvent itself, and seeking to engage new generations with renewed depth, vibrancy and relevance.

“Larry Moses, senior philanthropic advisor and president emeritus, The Wexner Foundation

“The definitive account of how Jewish institutions are moving from programs, turf and walls to relationships, openness and engagement. A must read for anyone serious about transforming today into a successful and significant tomorrow.

“Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD, author, *Rethinking Synagogues: A New Vocabulary for Congregational Life*

“An invaluable resource full of common sense wisdom.... What emerges is a vision for a Jewish future full of meaning and purpose and most of all engagement. A must read for every Jewish leader.

“Rabbi Naomi Levy, author, *Hope Will Find You*; spiritual leader, Nashuva: The Jewish Spiritual Outreach Center

“Combines a clear understanding of purpose and meaning with a detailed and useful description of how relationships empower all of our institutions.

“Barry Shrage, president, Combined Jewish Philanthropies, Boston

“Essential reading.... It calls to all of us in leadership: Reclaim that which is sacred in Jewish life by encountering the other!

“Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, senior vice president, Union for Reform Judaism

“Hits on the key challenge for us as Jewish leaders

“engagement of Jews with each other.... Reading this book will serve to focus all of us on our common work in today’s new reality.

“Allan Finkelstein, president and CEO, Jewish Community Centers Association

“A superb organizational roadmap for any synagogue willing to put substance behind their aspiration to be warm and welcoming.

“Rabbi Peter J. Rubinstein, Central Synagogue, New York City

“If you worry about the Jewish future, read this book and then send a copy to every Jewish leader you know.

“Rabbi Ed Feinstein, Valley Beth Shalom; author, *Tough Questions Jews Ask: A Young Adult’s Guide to Building a Jewish Life*

“With compassion, stark honesty and enduring hope, tells the story of the next chapter of institutional Jewish life.... Any person, team or community struggling with creating and practicing a relevant Judaism in this very consumerist day will benefit tremendously from the transformative dialogue ... stories and well-articulated challenges woven throughout the pages of this book.

“Rabbi Stephanie Kolin, co-director, Union for Reform Judaism

“Just Congregations

“Groundbreaking ... call[s] us to return to the central mission of Judaism and offer[s] practical guidance on how to get there. A must read.

“Rabbi Baruch HaLevi, co-author, *Revolution of Jewish Spirit*; spiritual leader, Congregation Shirat Hayam, Greater Boston

“Exemplifies how Judaism and its institutions will only grow stronger if the focus is on

the personal relationships they create. I hope Jewish leaders across the board read this book and allow for the transformation to happen within their organizations.

—David Cygielman, CEO, Moishe House

“A must read if you want to learn how to make the tikkun that the Jewish community is desperate for: places that will nurture real relationships, human connectedness, personal engagement, holy community.

—Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon, Congregation B’nai Jeshurun (BJ), New York City

“Challenge[s] every congregational leader, seminary educator and community professional to rethink how they will reshape their institutions and embrace twenty-first-century Jews.

—Steven Windmueller, Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk Emeritus Professor of Jewish Communal Service, Hebrew Union College

—Jewish Institute of Religion

“With his usual charm, humor and intellect, Wolfson provides us with the next steps following welcoming.

—Rabbi Steven C. Wernick, CEO, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

“A must read for anyone who cares about the future of Jewish life in America, or anywhere for that matter.

—Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel, Temple Micah, Washington, DC

“Eloquent and persuasive ... provocative and practical, [this book] can be the spark for a revolution in Jewish organizational life that is both sorely needed and enormously exciting.... I guarantee that you’ll be glad you found this book.

—Dr. Jonathan S. Woocher, chief ideas officer and director, Lippman Kanfer Institute, JESNA

“A must read for all professionals and lay leaders who want their Jewish organizations to succeed in the age of networks ... [and] a roadmap for the new Jewish leader, one who listens and gathers Jewish people and their families to create meaning, purpose, belonging and blessing.

—Lisa Farber Miller, senior program officer, Rose Community Foundation, Denver, Colorado

“A vital resource for rabbis, cantors, educators and lay leaders striving to transform their communities into places where people care about one another, and where powerful internal relationships can be catalyzed into a force for creating a more just world.

—Rabbi Jill Jacobs, executive director, Truah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights; author, *Where Justice Dwells: A Hands-On Guide to Doing Social Justice in Your Jewish Community*

“Important ... captures the spirit and drive behind the most profound transformation of American Judaism in a century.... A must read for rabbis, professionals and lay leaders who steward the Jewish community.

—Rabbi Noah Farkas, Valley Beth Shalom, Encino, California

“Readable and usable ... it is about how to ensure Judaism’s and the Jewish people’s contribution to the world as we near completion of the fourth millennium of Jewish history. As he asks on the last page, ‘What are we waiting for?’

—I, for one, will not.

—Dr. Bruce Powell, head of school, New

Community Jewish High School, West Hills, California

“Brilliantly takes the emphasis [on our communal nature] and shows how it can become a reservoir of meaning in our lives, a strong tie to God and to the Jewish community, and a way for Jewish institutions to regain the allegiance of Jews of all ages.”

— Rabbi Elliot Dorff, rector and distinguished professor of philosophy, American Jewish University

“An extraordinary resource.... No one will ever think about the significance of building enduring relationships in quite the same way.”

— Rabbi Peter S. Berg, The Temple, Atlanta, Georgia

“Codifies what would seem to be uncodifiable, the secret of how to rejuvenate Jewish life.... Gives practical and inspiring advice on how to build relationships in every sphere of life and at the end we will not only have happier people, happier friends and happier synagogues, but we will also have a vibrant Jewish community. We will no longer be asking ‘Will Judaism in America survive?’ as we will be too busy thriving.”

— Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, author, Jewish Literacy and A Code of Jewish Ethics

How to transform the model of twentieth-century Jewish institutions into twenty-first-century relational communities offering meaning and purpose, belonging and blessing. "What really matters is that we care about the people we seek to engage. When we genuinely care about people, we will not only welcome them; we will listen to their stories, we will share ours, and we will join together to build a Jewish community that enriches our lives." from the Introduction

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Relational Judaism is the book many lay leaders have been waiting to read for years. It's about growing relationships Jewishly, within the Jewish world. For years, synagogues, the world over, have had the problems of members & membership. They have spent the better part of their monies recruiting new members, especially "young families", only to have older members, or those who are

now past b'nai mitzvah stage, leave. Many synagogues have gone broke with the motto "if we spend it, they will come". If they only had this book to teach them the value of RELATIONSHIPS. Rabbi Ron Wolfson takes them through many different levels & kinds of relationship & helps both rabbi's & lay leaders work on REAL MEMBERSHIP RELATIONSHIPS. No more should we hear "this temple is for our dues-paying members only". Putting people & their relationships, using Shabbats, Jewish practices & some healthy common-sense advise, Rabbi Wolfson reflects on "best practices" of many different houses of worship. His views, advise, examples, & research of different houses of worship - from the megachurches to Chabad - strongly reflect his mantra "put people first". A MUST READ FOR PULPIT RABBIS & THEIR LAY LEADERS!!!

Ron Wolfson has hit a grand slam! Jewish communal leaders, board members and clergy of small and large organizations need to carefully examine the key principals outlined in this book. Unfortunately, too many organizations prefer to continue to focus primarily on developing and presenting stimulating programs. They continue to fret about budgets, marketing, branding, clever titles, outdated membership recruitment programs and membership financial models. Unfortunately, these efforts rarely lead to a stronger and relevant organization. Ron reminds us it is, and always has been, about RELATIONSHIPS! Strengthen your relationships first and the programs, and other activities will eventually grow and thrive! Business as usual, or repackaged OLD processes and thinking, will not revive the synagogue or Jewish organization in trouble. All organizations require a clear relevant vision, alignment of resources and staff and, finally execution. A complete reworking of an organization's vision and culture, with an emphasis on the multi levels of relationships Wolfson describes, is critical to survival. A focus on relationships gives a Jewish communal organization an excellent chance of transforming itself into a dynamic and meaningful Jewish institution for the for the thousands of unconnected Jews in our communities. The organizations that don't incorporate a relationship focus are doomed to a continued a downward spiral resulting in mergers and possibly the ultimate death of the organization. It all starts with strong committed leaders ( lay and professional ) who put the institution's, member's, and community's current needs first, instead of doing things they way they have always been done. The days of running the organization exclusively the way your Zaydie or Bubbie did are over. .Yasher Koach to Ron Wolfson! His book is a must read for anyone who cares about their Jewish communal organization and their community. He gives your organization a fighting chance to not only survive but to actually thrive! Mark W. Zalkin Zalkin Coaching and Training Denver, Colorado USA

A great follow-up to Prof. Wolfson's excellent read, *The Spirituality of Welcoming*. As a Jewish 20-something, I read this book and kept finding myself nodding in agreement. Prof. Wolfson is seemingly one of the few members of the leadership (of American Jewish thought) that has figured out that the way towards building a strong Jewish identity in individuals and a strong Jewish community overall is through relationships - not membership fees, not mediocre Hebrew school, but through personal relationships. He quotes Steve Jobs, talks about his experiences at a megachurch, and relates stories from both the past and present about mistakes that were made - and more importantly - how the Jewish community can avoid making such mistakes in the future. This book is an essential read for - If you are a Jewish professional or a congregational rabbi, and you have not read this book, my only question would be "why?"

This is an easy-to-read book about transforming the Conservative Jewish movement. Dr. Wolfson's premise is that, the dues paying, pay-to-pray synagogues are no longer a viable model for today's Jews. Whether it is the younger generation's lack of interest, intermarriage, a feeling of disconnect with the past, or not attending service past bar/bat mitzvah and confirmation, Conservative Judaism in America is in trouble. Wolfson offers the successful model of the Orthodox Chabad movement as an answer to engaging these 'lost' potential members of the Conservative Jewish community. He incorporates best practices of other religious organizations, anecdotes, and interviews. Essentially, it all boils down to creating solid, steadfast, committed relationships. He explains why this foundation is of paramount importance and how others have gone about following this roadmap to a new paradigm. Dr. Wolfson's book addresses a specific problem within the religion, but the lessons can be applied to almost any organization. If you are searching for a new model for your club, organization, church, etc., and you are open to new ideas, this is worth your time to read.

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