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Workshop B:

PERSPECTIVE ONE

"An-Approach to Self Understanding"

Some new insights into the meaning, rewards and possible frustrations of a career in Hazzanut.

Conducted by:

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Dr. Bloom:

You all know those requirements that the sh'liach tzibur be of blameless character, good reputation, modest and popular--all those virtues. You notice how late in the list a good voice comes. Those are the symbolic (and I'm going to use that word again later this morning) requirements of being a pulpit clergy.

In the 16th Century, Moses Mintz described again the ideal hazzan and really, the ideal pulpit clergy. He should be blameless in character, humble (an impossible list) a general favorite, married, he should possess an agreeable voice; be able to read easily and understand all the books in the Holy Scriptures; be the first to enter and the last to leave the House of God; strive to attain the highest degree of devotion in prayers. He should dress neatly and wear a wool garment (I don't know if that is traditional sanction for a robe, or not) and knee breeches, and he should not look about him, nor move his hands restlessly but should keep them folded under his mantle. Outside God's House he should avoid sewing any seeds of anger or hatred against himself by keeping aloof from communal disputes.

All the research that I've done, and I want you to know that it was done first with general clergy, and then, specifically, with rabbis and laity, all of the research is exemplified in those previous quotes--the quotes of the Orach Chayim and Moses Mintz.

In terms of how you are going to live day by day, the most important function of clergy is what I call, a heavy kind of word, being a symbolic exemplar. The clergy is a symbol of something other than himself. He is a symbolic leader who is set apart to function within the community as a symbol of the community and as an exemplar of its desire for moral perfection. The pulpit clergy is a walking, talking, living, breathing symbol. He stands for what people ought to do, but don't have any intention of doing. Compared to what he does on the job, compared to the job function, much more important than that, is who he is and how he is perceived to be. That is really, for the laity, one of the crucial items. This work was done with rabbis, I want you to know that because I think there is one slight difference you can capitalize on, but I'm going to get to that a little later.

The pulpit clergy is expected by laity to be a different kind of person. Again, who he is, is more important than what he does. He's expected to be different in his moral standing, in his caring for people; he's expected to be a different kind of father. He must truly care and fully believe in what he's doing and for the symbol to continue to exist, he must at least be seen, or appear to be these things.

This makes functioning as a clergy technician a very difficult proposition. A doctor may have a bedside manner and behave totally differently at home. We talk about a doctor's bedside manner. A teacher (as witness the gentleman who taught here this morning) may have his classroom presence; I don't know what he is like at home. An executive may be a tiger on the job and a pussycat at home.

But when you get to the rabbinic function and the clergy function and as you become increasingly clergy, you are going to both benefit and suffer from that, how do you measure whether a person really cares or truly believes and how authentic he is? A doctor could get by, even if he didn't care for people, as long as he was a good technical surgeon and his stitches held together right. A clergy--you can visit the hospital, you can say, you can do the right thing, but if people discover that at heart, you really didn't care for them, the whole thing would go awry.

Oddly enough, in discussing the sh'liach tzibur, the tradition set in long before I did. It's embarrassing--you think that you make this original contribution to science and then you go back to the Orach Chayim and they said this about the sh'liach tzibur. What did they say? "Sh'liach tzibur she-ma-arich b'tefilato, you

know the problem, k'day shevishm'u kolo arev, im hu michamatz shesameach b'libo al shenotain hoda'ah l'haShem Yitbarach b'ne'imah, tavo alav b'racha. Aval im mikevan l'hashmiah kolo vesameach b'kolo haray zeh m'guneh." A Sh'liach tzibur who goes on and on, enjoying his own singing--that's not so hot. But if it's because he is authentically giving thanks to God, that's O.K. How do you go about determining that? That is the same kind of thing every pulpit clergy both benefits from and suffers from. The question of authenticity is this person real? And by real, what the baalebos means and the clergy, as well, is he or she different?

In order to create this symbol you have to work at maintaining it. It is, to my way of thinking, the essence of being clergy. It is that symbolic exemplarhood that you have that gives you whatever power and ability you have to affect people. If the symbol gets broken you lose your efficacy. Both the laity and the clergy participate to maintain the symbol. I am not going to say that pulpit clergy are the only walking-talking symbols. Those of you who read "The Final Days" know what happened to the symbol of the presidency when it becomes shattered. Celebrities, royalty and presidents are also symbols. All these people are public property. That is not an illusion. You and I when we function in the pulpit are public property, no question about that. When the public has adopted a celebrity, or the queen of England, or the holder of a public office, you name it, an image of a certain kind, the public expects him to be that image.

There is an interesting story about Vince Edwards (he played Ben Casey on TV). I'm going to read you something about this man and if this doesn't ring a bell with you as it rang a bell with me, I don't know what will. Remember it's about an actor who played Ben Casey on TV. He doesn't go out and cut anybody up. Edwards became uncomfortably aware of discrepancies of his own life, which happened to include a devotion to betting on horse races, which was at odds with the God-like image he had come to represent to the public. "I won't do anything to destroy the image," he said, and he tried to keep his private life subdued and separate. Yet it was not easy--magazines published pictures of his sports playing; the public watched him at every possible moment and even his close friends began to be affected. The next will sound familiar to you: "Some of my old friends begin to weigh their words when we get together now. They don't see me as plain old Vince Edwards. What they see now is the image--they see Ben Casey. It makes a difference, believe me. Their attitudes changed. I can't say I like that and I am not sure I like losing a little privacy. I wish it were

different in some way, the whole success thing. But that's how it is and how do you fight it?"

That's what happens to a man who only plays at being a doctor on TV. Imagine what happens to us who serve a pulpit? And to you who are serving a pulpit when, you in a certain sense, have almost no private life. When that backstage area is very, very vulnerable? Where people see and pay attention to what you do in what for others would be private life.

I think the most difficult public symbol is that of the clergy, because the president and the queen and those outstanding celebrities-- they have some insulation. The president has a whole coterie of people around him. How fortified we are when we hear rumors of Kennedy's private life, when we see the fact that Woodward-Bernstein drew of Nixon--but they have physical distance. And the regular politician, the mayor of your town, the person elected, whoever it may be, he has something very different than you have as a public person. He's not expected to be moral. He's expected to be a little bit of a god, demagogue, that's what got him into public life. It's only the pulpit clergy, only the pulpit clergy who expects to live in the midst of the people without any physical distance, and at the same time to be an exemplary kind of human being.

How do both laity and clergy go about maintaining the symbol? That's really what my research was about. How they go about maintaining this kind of symbol of the clergy as a special kind of human being. Well, let's say how the clergy do it. Some people simply accept it. A lot of rabbis interviewed simply say, yes, that's the way it is. I'm a public symbol, an exemplar, there's nothing I can do about that. Everything I do is public and guys who don't like that should get out of the kitchen. If it's too hot in the kitchen, you get out. You are a public symbol and that's it. Some said, "I wouldn't do anything different anyway. This is what my life is, O.K." Those clergy have very little difficulty. I don't fully believe it but if a person says that's how he is, O.K.

A lot of clergy work hard to try to be consistent, fair, moral and modest. All of the clergy whom I spoke to (and I've been doing work since then with clergy both with the CCAR and I conduct a search group in town--there is incidentally, and this is aside--there is a special sensitivity that clergy have one to another's problems-- When I was in therapy years back, about five years into being a pulpit rabbi, I tried to tell my shrink how lonely the experience was becoming. It was impossible. It wasn't the usual kind of life.

He replied; "You are getting older; you're married now; things aren't the way they were when you were a graduate student. It's different." I said, "No, there's something else going on." He said, "No, it's not so."

He meant a great deal to me; fortified my life during emotionally difficult times. He was a sensitive, progressive man, who helped me in a lot of ways. In this way he couldn't help me, he couldn't understand.

When I would go to my congregants and complain about loneliness, they would say;

"But we love you, rabbi. We don't understand--you are at every bar mitzvah, every wedding, we love you."

Indeed, they did love me. All I was doing was making them feel guilty.

I understood something about my shrink later on: He died three years ago. I haven't been a pulpit rabbi for a number of years. His soon to be widow called me. She said, Seymour is on his deathbed and asked if you would say Kaddish for him at his funeral. I had become *his* rabbi. I realized I couldn't explain my position to him because to him I was the same thing I was to everybody else--clergy. Those who respond immediately to that sense of isolation and loneliness are pulpit clergy, be they Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish anyone who serves as pulpit clergy. A group of Protestant clergy that I am with every week respond to that sense of loneliness, isolation, and indeed alienation. It's a kind of visceral thing that we know once we've lived in that kind of environment.

How do pulpit clergy do it? We all know how we do it. When we're with laity, we edit what we say. We act the role, We ask with some concern about Grandma, Aunt Tillie and how's your brother-in-law in Chicago doing after surgery- how's he feeling. Some of us try to become anonymous for a while. A rabbi I knew grew a beard on vacation an odd way of becoming anonymous. Some don't admit they are pulpit clergy. You've all had the experience of what happens as soon as you admit you're pulpit clergy. All of a sudden, the people you are with change. They start to talk about their Talmud-Torah education, their Sunday school education and you couldn't care less. You've had enough of that all week. You're doing something else and they pounce on you and you can hear the gears...All of a sudden they become very different. I know that's so because for four or five years, while still in the pulpit and also a psychology student, I was able to play it both ways while commuting on the train. I conducted an

informal poll. People would say what do you do? I would say, Rabbi of a congregation and I could hear the gears grind. When I would say, I was in psychology; the gears wouldn't go that way. It was a different kind of response.

We work at trying to be anonymous; we learn to keep some distance. We channel our anger, a little bit afraid of it. We are circumspect as to how we act with laity. Prudence and restraint help to maintain the symbolic image. I would recommend that to every clergyperson, because without that you're not going to be able to do the job. All of us do have a sense that there are limits. It may vary, beyond which we cannot go and still maintain the symbol. It may change for some people but all of us have a sense that there are limits.

The laity also does a great deal to create the symbol. He attributes to the clergy very special kinds of quality, not out of malice. When we present ourselves in the pulpit, we've done that--whether it's rabbi or cantor--we've said, I am your Sh'liach tzibur. Whether the Sh'liach tzibur is of the 16th century, the hazzan, the rabbi or whatever it is, we've projected ourselves that way and the laity cooperates with us, and not out of malice.

Let me tell you. This once happened to my own wife. Malkah decided a couple of years ago to go to a Bat Mitzvah of the daughter of Rabbi Raphael Arzt. When they lived in Fairfield, they were our best friends. Marilyn decided she would go to Israel to the Bat Mitzvah. At that time our shul was just beginning to give aliyot to women. I called the Ritual Chairman and I said, please give Marilyn an aliyah tomorrow; she's going to Israel next Thursday. She had an aliyah. The rabbi had never been told. The Ritual Chairman gave her the aliyah, the rabbi hadn't been told. The first time she goes up, you could hear her knees knock, she was very nervous. She goes up for the aliyah, she comes down. At the end of services the rabbi doesn't say anything, she turns to me and says: "For ten years I sat next to while you did all that crap. You wished people well on their anniversaries, on their going to Israel, etc. I'm nervous about this trip and he better say something and you can't do it because you're not my rabbi." This is a woman who for ten years was a rebbetzin, but at that point she needed a rabbi, a pulpit clergy. She needed someone who was endowed with something different to do it. Luckily, Laybel heard about it and at the Kiddush he gave her the proper blessing that the trip go well, etc., etc. and it was fine. And that was not just an ordinary congregant but also someone who knows that rabbis participate in all human functions, that clergy are no different.

I think that the crucial part of the story is that once clergy have presented themselves in the priestly role, once they've done this, they're set. The laity will participate with you in keeping you clergy. How the laity do this? An anecdote is the best way to illustrate. One of the rabbis, in the study that I did, tells this story.

He would say that around town they would call him the "goofy... rabbi" and that the Orthodox also called him the "goyeshe rabbi." I've heard rabbis called the "tennis playing rabbi" the "flying rabbi," all of that is an attempt to keep the person, stretch the symbol and to keep the person in role. Someone introduced me recently as the rabbi who isn't a rabbi. These are anecdotal, but they represent the attempts by laity to keep the clergy in the symbolic realm. And it's true, once you are a hazzan, once you are a rabbi, you are always that.

It's not accidental. We may object to the laity saying that; "you have bar mitzvahed somebody." Though we may object to that it is their experience of it. You represent all of Jewish tradition going back. Once you appear in that role, you are, once and for all for them, pulpit clergy, and you are therefore different.

The clergyperson is perceived as a different kind of person even if they deny their clergyhood. That's what happened to me; the rabbi who isn't a rabbi. Let me tell you another story which happened in a southern Connecticut town.

During the course of my research, a rabbi shared what follows with me. He said the expectation laity have of the pulpit clergy is a special kind.

"When I arrived at my congregation, I succeeded a man, who had left the rabbinate to go into a field totally unrelated to the rabbinate. He became a stockbroker. I heard that over and over again, and by the way, this is not the kind of community that is loquacious on issues of this type. They tend to be rather discreet. What I heard repeatedly was: "Do you think it is right for a rabbi to become a stock broker?" I asked them what they might have expected as legitimate for a rabbi? They said, social worker, or psychologist or any non-mercenary, or non-profit kind of enterprise. That's O.K, because they see that as an adjacent field, Being a social worker or psychologist might have been some balm to them, but not completely". I asked why they felt that way--that a rabbi should become a social worker and not a stockbroker. They said, "Because you're in the rabbinate; that's a lifetime calling. There's something special about it and people depend on it."

That goes for all of us here this morning, that kind of feeling that pulpit clergy are special kind of people.

The laity use the "he's human, but" routine. They shift gears, constantly edit damn and hell, and on and on. They will say "damn and hell" during or after a board meeting and then apologize when clergy are present even though your mouth, or my mouth may have been much worse than the average laity's mouth, privately. One of the rabbis in the study was chastised by his congregation for singing dirty songs to the teenagers. Listen to what his baalebos (congregant) said:

"I don't think I could tell a dirty joke in front of the rabbi, although I: am sure the rabbi wouldn't object, I don't know; I've never told him one. I would like to be able to have respect for the rabbi both as a human being and as a rabbi; I think that's what I am trying to do. I'm trying to find two people in one and it's not very easy."

That's an example of how the laity stretches the thing, edits what he or she thinks and does in order to maintain the symbol. One of the laity even went this far. One of the questions on my dissertation research had to do with a congregant observing that the rabbi was going to a double X movie. One of the laity said. "He is going in there to prepare a sermon"-and he meant it! He was not kidding! He was trying to preserve the symbol, not to see the rabbi as someone who wanted to go in there to get his kicks. Laity will do a very great deal to prevent the symbol from being broken. Like Humpty Dumpty's egg it cannot easily be put together again.

What are some of the consequences of all that? Number one, there is that sense of "set-apartness" that all of you know, that all of you experience. That sense of living behind a kind of porous, glass wall in which people are just different with you than they are with everybody else. That increases as time goes on. In the beginning my experience was it was very nice to have people treat me with such deference, respect, etc., etc., but as time went on, I wondered about what was happening between me and other people. Beyond the self-apartness that exists between you and other men in the community there is another kind of self-apartness that I experienced as well. I'm going to tell you a story that exemplifies that as well. In Fairfield-Bridgeport there's a Jewish market called, "Sunshine." After I got back from Eretz Yisrael (I spent one year in Eretz Yisrael between leaving the pulpit and coming back to the US. The laity didn't know what to call me: Rabbi-Dr.; Dr.-Rabbi or sometimes they dropped

them all and just used my first name.) I had a very unusual experience going into that market. I went into that market after I came back and discovered that I was doing something differently. I was smiling at some people and not smiling at others. I also didn't care about their grandfathers, uncles, and aunts. I walked right by them, paid the cashier and went out. Those I did care about I smiled at and said, "Hey, how are you, what's new? What's going on?" One of my Reform colleagues, said that pulpit clergy are paid to be professional lovers. When you do that long enough striving to meet the sometimes unspoken demand that you must really care, you lose touch with, whether you do really care or not, You risk getting set apart from your own feelings if you to do that job long enough. That is a very severe risk. For people who really feel caring and loving, for all the people in their flock, that's fine. But for those of us who look for a distinction that's a very, very hard task. That risk of becoming set apart from one's own inner feeling is very, very important. UTH

I only smiled at those people that I cared about and others I just walked by and knew that there wouldn't be any consequences for that. That it would not come up at board meetings, that other people not in my congregation would not say to people in my congregation, "Your rabbi is cold, he's hard, he's this, he's that," to know that I could do that freely, that I did not have to be the professional "lover".

The requirement that he be a symbol in the religious realm does provide the clergy with a larger than life image. There is no way around it. Such an image is at the very core of being clergy. The clergy is designated by others and volunteers to exemplify a caring, nurturing, involved, moral person. He is in a profession, in which it is crucial to both appear to be something more than what one is, while still maintaining on-going contact with other people. The clergy is the willing helper, the good father, the para-familial member of many families. To help him maintain this. role he is given significant protection. He is treated with respect and deference, shielded overtly from others' anger and vulgarity and is not subjected to many of the stresses others are subjected to. Without such protection the clergy could not continue to maintain close contact and to function as exemplar of those attributes that he is expected to symbolize. The price of this protection for the clergy is a sense of (and if this doesn't ring with you you're very different than I am and every clergy that I have ever known) the price of this protection of the clergy is a sense of otherness, difference, loneliness in the midst of a crowd, The barriers erected by both laity and clergy that creates this insulated, isolated existence are made of masks put on, words edited and emotions held in check.

In some ways, I think that as hazzanim you have three distinct advantages in this realm over your co-workers the rabbis, about whom you have one or two feelings, One of the tremendous advantages the hazzan has, and you would do well to exploit that advantage, to build on it, to work on it, is that you have a very specific job function. Music and singing,

leading the congregation in prayer is very important and is a measurable job function. A good choir is a measurable kind of product. Good music is a very measurable kind of product. You would do well to build that job function as strongly and as best you possibly can. To the extent that you get into the other work which will also be inevitable, the hospital visiting and the other things, you will be taken away from that job function and you will be seen more symbolically. But the importance of being a good musician, a good hazzan in that sense is very, very important, I think you would do well to hold on tight to that, to carve that out, to build that so that you have a specific job function. That's very, very important. I think it would ease, in some way, the pressure of the symbolic attributes that you have to carry anyway.

The biggest advantage you have, and please be thankful for it, is that you *don't* preach, Rabbis get themselves into a lot of trouble when they preach. One of the things about symbolic exemplars is that while other people don't expect to practice what they preach, they do expect the preacher to practice what he preaches. You know the rabbi who gets up and gives a wonderful talk against materialism and about two cars and big houses, the next time he faces salary negotiations, he has a much harder time. And he's also caused you some trouble, that's true, because he's made it harder for you, too.

One rabbi that I know got up one year and said that everyone who was going south should instead go to Israel. "Don't go to Miami, the Caribbean, go to Israel." The next year he wanted to go to the Caribbean, you know how much flack there was! So be thankful you don't preach. Preaching only makes the bind harder. I know what it was like. I used to preach about the Jewish Community Center in town. Now I am affiliated and work and am close to the Center. How tied up I used to get in my old position when I had to preach about this item or the other.

The other one is bittersweet. The reality is that as hazzanim you are not at the apex of the power structure of your synagogue. You are the number two person, that's true. That's sad and it creates a lot of conflict. But one thing. There's a positive aspect to that. You are therefore a little bit freer of the

symbolic expectations that go with being numero uno. The Number One person has both the symbolic expectations to an excessive degree, and it's true, the power that goes with that, but also the pain. You should not forget that. It is a fact that something has to be done to work on those relationships but that bittersweet fact creates a lot of pain, that's a source of tremendous pain but also the source of having not quite as much of that stuff, I would imagine. You can correct me if that is not so. I'd like to learn this morning, too. There's as much of that symbolic pressure on you as there is on your co-workers, the rabbis. But the fact is you fought to become clergy and as you evolve to be seen that way, as you increasingly protect yourselves that way, you will be hurt to some extent, with that symbolic role.

I think there are a lot of things that your national organization has to do although I don't really think they are dealing with them at all. I think that the course in pastoral psychology which is taught in many of our seminaries is really a waste of time and effort because it is not really dealing with the painful psychological issues that all pulpit clergy have to deal with. It deals with how to be a good referral source. Believe you me, in my work as a psychologist, I like referral sources now a days but that's not how the seminaries should spend their time,

The national organizations can do a number of things. They can support the creation in our communities of clergy groups in which clergy can get together and share their basic humanity. It would be interesting to know what would happen if a convention went on beyond four days. The first four days of any convention of clergy is--Is my Friday night service as big as yours? Is my rabbi worse than yours? This is what I'm doing, what are you doing? --That kind of thing. What would happen if you really spent three weeks here? And you could get beyond that. You would start to experience each other's humanity, each other's pain. You would be able to support each other. What would happen if in local towns you had groups of clergy, of rabbis and cantors, who had to really deal with the issues between them and the pain that is there. These are two people who should be supporting each other, who could cut down on the isolation. Instead, what happens in every single community, rabbis among themselves are no better, the isolation is allowed to exist and even is encouraged.

I'll tell you true story. A rabbi whom I love dearly, I can use his name, Rabbi Sanford Hahn (I have shared this with him) of Bridgeport. He and I, when I was at Beth El, and he was at Rodeph Sholom, the relationship between us was like

that of porcupines. We were very wary of each other. I was Mr. Beth El; he was Mr. Rodeph Sholom. As soon as I left the pulpit, we became dear and loving, and fast friends. Isn't that crazy? When the two of us could have supplied the best kind of support for each other. We had a tennis game on Friday around lunchtime. Sandy and I played together and I said, "Wouldn't it be great to invite the Reform rabbi over to play with us, forgetting of course, that what would happen was that the two of them would experience each other like porcupines. So the offer was never made. What happened-as soon as it was learned that Rabbi Hahn was leaving Rodeph Sholom, he and the Reform rabbi became close friends. It was not because he was leaving but because they were no longer the symbol of the other places. That happens with rabbis and with cantors. That is a tragedy. So the national organizations need to provide support for clergy groups to get together to stop talking about business issues, the business of the shule and to start talking about their human issues. What it is like to work together. What's it like to be Number Two? How can we work with and alleviate that? We are co-workers. We can support each other. We don't have to be tearing at each other. That would be very, very important.

The Reform movement, under a grant, has begun to do that. What I am doing with them conducting a mid-career review but it's not really a mid-career review. It turned out that I was getting twelve men together for three days, not for comparing what their Friday night services are like, but instead sharing what their pain is like. They leave renewed for the first time in 10, 15, 20 years. They are able to share their guts with somebody else and not have to be open for attack. It's a tremendous experience.

Our national organizations have to start educating our congregations to change what their expectations are. You'll never totally get out of it. If even my wife wanted some public symbol, laity who are not married to clergy are entitled to it, too. I want it too. Now that I am a member of my old congregation, I want my rabbi to be a rabbi. When I go to the inter-faith service where he is speaking, he is speaking, not as my friend, as a former colleague of mine, he can't. He is now speaking as my rabbi. That is how it is. That's just the way it is and there is no way around that, but the national clergy organizations can work educationally to modify the expectations. The central organizations can do something else which is to make the lives of the clergy, rabbis, hazzanim, more like civil servants, with salary scale, promotion schedules, and a lot of things like that.

One final note and then I'll be available for questions. I don't want anything that I have said to take away, denigrate the work of the clergy. I want you to understand that I have a deep abiding love and affection for those who sacrifice themselves in the pulpits of America and that goes for rabbis, hazzanim, educators and all who serve. But symbolic exemplarhood is inevitable. It also is what gives pulpit clergy their power and ability to affect and influence others. I will not in the next 15, 20, 30 years as a shrink have as wide an effect. I will not influence as many people as I did in the first ten years of my career as a pulpit rabbi. Unquestionably, I know that. There are other reasons I changed. That is a very powerful role. When you marry someone, when you "bar mitzvah" them--all of these symbolic roles, are very powerful roles. Don't minimize them. It is my opinion, that the future of the American Jewish community rests on the shoulders of the sh'lichei tzibur, whether it is you, the original ones, the hazzanim or those newcomers who have usurped so much, the rabbis. It is the sh'lichei tzibur who will determine the future of our community. Knowing the burdens, I hope you can deal with them, that is the work I want to do in my life and thus make our work easier.

Hazak ve-ematz--we require strength and courage to do the work we all have to do.

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