

Judaism and HIV/AIDS

Resources and Resolutions

August 1994/Elul 5754

The 1991 United Synagogue resolution on AIDS described the epidemic spread of that disease as one of the most devastating public health crises faced in modern times . . . which has the possibility of destroying civilization as we know it." Indeed, AIDS has taken hundreds of thousands of lives already, and infection rates are still on the rise. In the United States alone, there is at least one HIV-related death every six minutes, and the number of people who have died is triple the total number of American casualties from the Vietnam War.

Synagogues can play a vital role in addressing the AIDS crisis by undertaking education and prevention programs, providing welcome and support for people living with HIV/AIDS and their friends and families, and by working with AIDS service and advocacy organizations. The enclosed material is intended to serve as an introduction to Jewish involvement in AIDS work. It includes Jewish source material, programming ideas, and a list of resources.

You may be wondering why we have chosen to focus on HIV/AIDS when so many diseases affect our community. In fact, most of the material in this packet can be applied to addressing other illnesses. But we believe that AIDS demands special attention for a number of reasons. First, unlike cancer or heart disease, we know what causes AIDS and how to prevent it in nearly every case. Thus, the task of saving lives is directly dependent upon our ability to educate effectively about HIV/AIDS and to help promote prevention. By becoming a strong link in the chain of AIDS education and prevention efforts, synagogues can help to avert the tragedy of AIDS altogether.

Second, people living with AIDS and their families have been painfully stigmatized by society. Often, they require a great deal of the comfort and support that synagogue communities can provide. Since much of the stigmatization of people infected with HIV has come from religious quarters, synagogue involvement in AIDS activities can send the message that people living with HIV/AIDS have not been abandoned by the Jewish community. On the contrary, they will discover that the Jewish community is there for them when they need it most.

Finally, confronting HIV/AIDS can be difficult, frightening, and spiritually exhausting. This applies not only to those who are ill, but to those involved in caring for and supporting them within the community as well. By dealing with HIV/AIDS within the synagogue context, congregants can be assured of receiving the *hizuk* -- spiritual and emotional strength -- necessary for the task at hand.

The Commission on Social Action and Public Policy of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism is proud to present this publication, its fourth in a series of resolution implementation packets. We pray that its fruits will be comfort and healing for those who are sick and the saving of many lives.

This material was prepared by David Rosen, a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and edited by Sarrae G. Crane.

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UNITED SYNAGOGUE RESOLUTION ON AIDS (1991)

WHEREAS, the world is currently experiencing one of the most devastating public health crises faced in modern times, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), a disease which has the possibility of destroying society as we know it; and

WHEREAS, confusion, ignorance and denial are among the most common responses to the AIDS epidemic; and

WHEREAS, Jewish law, custom and tradition clearly mandate all Jews to maintain the health of the body, noting that, according to the Bible itself, the body is divine, and legislation was promulgated early in the history of the Jewish people to treat illnesses and curb plagues;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM calls upon all of its affiliated congregations to affirm the mitzvah of pikuah nefesh (the saving of lives) by instituting comprehensive, effective, and age-appropriate educational programs about preventing transmission of the AIDS virus; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in the spirit of bikkur holim (visiting the sick), THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM calls upon all of its congregations to reach out to individuals infected with the AIDS virus, their families and their friends by providing acceptance, comfort, counseling, and sympathetic and empathetic listening; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE

JUDAISM affirms that those infected with the AIDS virus must be protected from all forms of illegal discrimination, such as discriminatory housing, employment, health care delivery services and synagogue services; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that no congregation within THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM shall exclude persons with AIDS (PWA's) from synagogue life; and that the Jewish Theological Seminary of America be urged to train rabbis, cantors, and other Jewish professionals to deal with and counsel people with AIDS and their families.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

AIDS -- stands for Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome, an illness that impairs a person's ability to fight off disease. AIDS itself is not a single disease, but a group of symptoms caused mainly by infections and/or cancers that develop in the absence of proper immune-system defenses.

HIV -- is the virus that causes AIDS. HIV (short for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infects certain types of white blood cells that play an important role in the body's immune system, thereby weakening the body's defense against disease.

HIV Positive -- describes someone infected with HIV. Current research indicates that an untreated HIV infection takes an average of eight to eleven years to develop into AIDS. Most people who are now HIV+ have no symptoms or only minor symptoms. When a person who is HIV+ manifests certain life-threatening symptoms as a result of HIV infection, they are said to have AIDS or full-blown AIDS.

HIV/AIDS AND THE JEWISH TRADITION: CONCEPTS AND SOURCES

The Jewish tradition contains rich resources for dealing with many of the issues we confront when dealing with HIV/AIDS. Above all, the tradition's respect for human life mandates that we do everything possible to prevent the further spread of the disease. Alongside the mandate for education and prevention, there is much that our tradition has to teach about care and compassion for those who are ill. Below is a brief glossary of halakhic and theological concepts related to HIV/AIDS and the sources in which they can be found.

Hatzalat Nefashot and Shemirat Ha-Guf -- Saving Lives and Preventing Bodily Harm: The Mishna declares that one who saves a single life is like one who has saved the entire world (Sanhedrin 4:5). Indeed, Jews must respond to a situation of pikuah nefesh (life endangerment) even at the cost of violating the sabbath or most other commandments (Talmud, Yoma 85b; Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah,

sec. 336). In the case of HIV/AIDS, this means that synagogues must make special efforts to implement appropriate education and prevention programs at all levels of congregational activity, including staff and congregants, young members and old. This is required, despite the fear and discomfort often encountered when dealing with HIV/AIDS. The Bible exhorts, Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of your fellow (Lev. 19:16).

Another biblical passage urges "take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously" (Deut. 4:9), which the rabbis have understood as an obligation to guard one's physical health, especially by avoiding dangerous situations or behaviors (Talmud Berakhot 32b; Maimonides, Hilkhhot Rotzeah 11:4 and Hilkhhot De'ot 4:1ff; and Shulhan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat , 427:8).

Bikkur Holim -- Visiting the Sick: Judaism recognizes that illness affects the whole person, presenting threats not only to the body, but also to one's mental state and financial stability. This is especially true with HIV/AIDS. Bikkur holim -- the mitzvah of visiting the sick -- ensures that the needs of the sick are attended to in all of these areas, creating a spiritual and emotional support system to complement the work of medical doctors (Talmud, Nedarim 39b-40a, Sotah 14a and Berakhot 5b; Maimonides, Hilkhhot Eivel 14:4-5; Shulhan Arukh, Yore Deah 235- 238).

The Bikkur Holim Committee of Congregation Adas Israel of Washington, DC has produced a handbook for visiting the sick. To find out how your synagogue can start a bikkur holim committee or to receive a copy of the handbook, contact Rabbi Avis Miller at 202/362-4433. Also, an excellent guide to bikkur holim by Rabbi Meyer Strassfeld can be found in The Third Jewish Catalog, edited by Michael and Sharon Strassfeld, pp. 140-145. Specific considerations for visiting people living with AIDS are discussed in Being a Blessing by Rabbi Harris R. Goldstein (See Jewish Materials section).

Shituf bi-tza'ar -- Empathizing With a Person in Pain: All Jews are responsible for the fate of one another (kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh --Talmud, Shavuot 39a), and a powerful sign of that responsibility is the willingness to share in someone else's suffering or grief. By visiting and helping people with HIV/AIDS, and by forming support groups for them and their friends and loved ones in the synagogue, we show faithfulness and solidarity with those among us who are suffering among us . We also emulate the compassion of God, who promises When he calls for me, I will answer him; I will be with him in distress (Psalms 91:15).

Hesed shel Emet -- Unrequited Kindness: Just before Jacob died, he asked Joseph to promise that he would not remain buried in Egypt, pleading deal kindly and truly with me (Gen. 47:29). The rabbis ask, would Joseph ever think to treat his father otherwise? No, they answer. Jacob's words teach us that caring for those unable to return the kindness is a higher form of giving, called hesed shel emet ("true kindness" -- Midrash Genesis Rabbah 96:5).

While the tradition singles out burial of the dead as the paradigm of hesed shel emet, all efforts to help and comfort those who are struggling with a life-threatening disease are worthy of special praise. Regarding burial in particular, Rabbi Joel Roth, former Chairman of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, has ruled that since adequate precautionary measures are available, there is no halakhic basis for withholding the taharah process (washing of the corpse) by the

funeral parlor or the hebra kaddisha. (Rabbi Roth s ruling is not an official ruling of the CJLS; a full treatment of the halakhic issues regarding the burial of those who have died from AIDS is currently being prepared by the Committee.)

Program Suggestion: Collecting Things for People Living With AIDS

Adapted from Being A Blessing: 54 Ways You Can Help People Living With AIDS by Rabbi Harris R. Goldstein. To order copies for your congregation, call Alef Design Group at 1-800-845-0662.

People living with AIDS often are completely penniless just a few months after their first opportunistic infection. Those people who had jobs are no longer working. Once they are not working, they lose their access to health insurance. To qualify for Medicaid, a person has to have almost no money and no assets. As a result, in New Jersey more than 50% of people living with AIDS are homeless, not because they're bums, but because there is no way for them to survive financially. Many live on the generosity of family and friends, kindly strangers with an extra room, basement, or garage.

Once a person living with AIDS hits the financial disaster they have to achieve in order to qualify for Medicaid, they can then use the absurdly overcrowded clinics and get minimal health care. The bankrupt and certifiably poor and disabled person living with AIDS can then also qualify for Social Security Disability Income, which is based on a fraction of what they were earning when they became disabled.

If, after a person living with AIDS hits rock bottom financially, that person becomes hospitalized for a month or two, s/he loses what little s/he may have left. Many people are released from hospitals directly to the streets, shelters, or to the kind of near homelessness which they left when they were hospitalized. So if they actually get into a subsidized apartment or room somewhere, they have none of the personal or household supplies they need, and they cannot afford to purchase them.

Obviously, people living with AIDS need help if they are going to survive. But most people are resistant to seeking out charity. Your help with supplying the things people living with AIDS need could make a real and meaningful difference in their lives.

Collect food for people living with AIDS

If you or your congregation are not involved in a food bank, please consider collecting canned and packaged foods for people living with AIDS. (If your congregation is already involved with a food bank, please skip to some of the other action steps below.) Focus on easy to cook food with a high nutritional content, preferably low in salt and fat but high in calories. Cans and packaged foods last a

long time, which may be helpful as you develop a distribution system. Fresh produce, breads, milk products and meats would be great, but first you have to be able to come up with a sure way to get them into the hands of the people who need them before they spoil. The following is a list of suggestions of some of the kinds of foods you might collect, based on suggestions compiled by the AIDS Interfaith Network of New Jersey. It's far from exhaustive. The best rule is, if you'd buy it for yourself, if you find it tasty and nutritious, it's okay to buy for a person living with AIDS.

Canned vegetables
Canned fruit Canned and bottled juices and drinks
Macaroni and cheese "Ensure" or other dietary supplement drinks
Crackers (all kinds)
Instant breakfast drinks
Raisins Brand name cereals
Peanut butter jellies and jams Rice-a-roni meals in a box
Fruit rolls/ fruit snacks Canned or dry soups and bouillon
Nuts (avoid high-sodium soups)
Cookies
Hot cereals in single serving packets
Rice (all kinds)
Coffee (ground and instant)
Beans (all kinds) Hot chocolate in single serving packets
Herbal teas Sugar, salt, pepper, other spices
Jello & instant pudding
Dry packaged pasta and bottles of pasta sauce
Canned tuna (in water) Canned meals (Spaghetti Os, Cup O' Noodles, etc.)

Please Do Not Collect:

Canned meats (too much salt and fat)
Canned pie fillings or cranberry sauce (may clean out your closet, but is of little nutritional value to people living with AIDS)
Home canned items
Anything which will not keep on shelves for a month or more
Out of date or opened packages
Collect over-the-counter medications and personal hygiene products

Over-the-counter medications are a particular problem for people living with AIDS. Many can't be accessed through Medicaid, which pays for prescription medications only. Food stamps also do not pay for medications. So some common items become difficult to obtain. One method for raising people's awareness of this problem and getting them to help is to encourage people to buy two over-the-counter

products whenever they buy one for themselves. Set a collection date every six weeks. Please note all medications are made available for people living with AIDS in consultation with their physicians. The following list is a sampling of some of the needed products:

Tylenol
Buffered aspirin
Antacids (liquid form)
Cough drops
Benadryl
Vicks Vapo-rub or similar
Pepto-Bismol or similar
Monistat 7 or similar
Preparation H or similar
Epsom Salts
Immodium or similar
Milk of Magnesia, Metamucil and/or Colace
Band-aids
Hydrogen Peroxide
Betadine
Cold and flu remedies (non-alcoholic)
Antiseptic creams
Vitamins (multis, C, E, iron, minerals supplements, Di-Gel beta carotene, NAC)
Bacitracine Ointment
Skin creams and anti-itch lotions (hydrocortisone Simethicone creams)
Ibuprofen
Sudafed

Personal Hygiene Products

Toothbrushes
Talcum powder and antifungal powder
Wash cloth and hand towel
Tampons and sanitary napkins
Combs and brushes
Shaving cream
Disposable razors
Kleenex
Condoms
Mouth wash
Dental Floss
Shampoo (hypo allergenic)
Soap (hypo allergenic)

Deodorants

Toothpaste (preferably for sensitive teeth and gums or Mentadent)

Collect household supplies for people living with AIDS

If you can barely afford to pay for food, buying simple household supplies become a real challenge. People living with AIDS need to live in an environment which won't make them sick, yet they may not be able to afford to buy the very items which can help them keep the germs to a minimum. They also need to be able to prepare meals, which means they need basic kitchen equipment. Basic Kitchen Equipment

Frying pan

1 and 2 quart pots with covers

Kitchen towels

Pot holders

Can Opener

Wooden spoons

Spatula and pot stirrer

Sponges

Mixing bowls

Measuring cups and spoons

Rubber gloves (the thick ones, to wash dishes and pots and pans)

Basic Household Cleaning Supplies

Sponges Paper towels

Bleach

Dryer fabric softeners (scent free)

Dishwashing liquid

All purpose cleansers (like Mr. Clean)

Bathroom cleaners

Mop, broom & dustpan, pail

Toilet paper and tissues

Toilet inserts (2000 flushes or similar)

Rubber gloves (the heavy-duty kind for scrubbing)

Laundry Detergent (free of scents and unnecessary chemicals)

To speak with someone at a synagogue that has arranged collections for people living with AIDS, call Rabbi Gerald Zelizer at Congregation Neve Shalom of Metuchen, New Jersey (908/548-2238) or Cantor Erica Lippitz congregation Oheb Shalom of South Orange, New Jersey (201/762-7067). HIV/AIDS RESOURCES For information on HIV/AIDS publications, videos and educational material, call the clearinghouse numbers below. For confidential answers to questions about HIV/AIDS,

emergency counseling, and referrals for local testing, treatment and hospices, call the hotline numbers below.

(Canadian) National AIDS Clearinghouse (U.S.) National AIDS Clearinghouse 613/725-3769 phone 613/725-9826 fax 1-800-458-5231

U.S. National AIDS Hotline 1-800-342-AIDS

Canadian AIDS Hotline numbers (You must call the hotline in your province only):

Alberta: 800/772-2437 Nova Scotia: 902/425-2437 (call collect) British Columbia: 800/661-4337
Ontario: 800/668-2437 French: 800/267-7432 Manitoba: 800/782-2437 Prince Edward Island:
800/566-2437 Newfoundland: 800/563-1575 Quebec: 800/463-5656 New Brunswick: 800/561-4009
Saskatchewan: 800/667-6876 Northwest Territories: 800/661-0795 Yukon: 800/661-0507 Toronto
AIDS Hotline 416/392-2437 or 800/668-2437

The Essential AIDS Fact Book by Paul Harding and Laura Pinsky is an excellent guide to all aspects of HIV/AIDS. Discounts for bulk orders available from Pocket Books at 212/698-7000.

CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT RESOURCES

The Conservative movement has developed the following materials on HIV/AIDS. All are available directly from The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 212/533-7800.

AIDS : A Jewish Response -- A Manual for Synagogue Leaders Includes program suggestions, halakhic discussion, articles and a list of resources. (Commission on Social Action, ext. 2614)

AIDS: A Jewish Response -- A video and discussion guide on HIV/AIDS. (Public Affairs, ext. 2601)

AIDS Hagaddah Supplement Readings that can be incorporated into the seder liturgy. (Commission on Social Action, ext. 2614)

Suggested Guidelines for Policy for Solomon Schechter Day Schools Regarding Students and Faculty with HIV- Infection, HIV-Related Illness and/or AIDS Published jointly by the Solomon Schechter Day School Association and The United Synagogue. (Education Department, ext. 2507)

USY programming material on HIV/AIDS Copies of materials developed by USY Delaware Valley (215-563-8809) and Seaboard regions (301-230-0801) for youth group programs on HIV/AIDS.

AIDS a chapter from the new revised edition of In God's Image: Making Jewish Decisions About the Body by Bernard Novick. Available from United Synagogue beginning January 1995. (Book Service, ext. 2004)

JEWISH MATERIALS ON HIV/AIDS Being A Blessing: 54 Things You Can do to Help People Living with AIDS by Rabbi Harris R. Goldstein, from Alef Design Group at 1-800-845-0662.

Hesed V Emet -- AIDS: Our Responsibility As Jews from the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Learning (CAJE) 261 W. 35th Street, Floor 12A New York, NY 10001, 212/269-4212.

AIDS: We Care from the B nai B rith Commission on Community Volunteer Services, 1640 Rhode Island Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, 202/857-6580.

UJA-Federation HIV/AIDS Reference Library 1993-94 ; Trainer s Manual: Coordinated AIDS Education and Training Program ; and HIV/AIDS: A Guide for Developing Policies for Community Centers and Camps from the UJA-Federation of NY AIDS Project, 212/836-1483.

PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS FOR CONGREGATIONS

1. Reach out to people living with AIDS and to their families and friends through sermons, programs, bulletin articles and let them know that the congregation will be supportive of and caring towards them.
2. Display Jewish AIDS education materials in the synagogue lobby.
3. Hold education and information sessions on HIV/AIDS for the synagogue Board, staff, school, and youth groups.
4. Organize volunteers to work with AIDS service organizations. For example, synagogue members can volunteer to cook and/or deliver meals to homebound people with AIDS.
5. Develop HIV/AIDS policies for the synagogue, using examples in the United Synagogue AIDS Manual for Synagogue Leaders and Solomon Schechter Day School AIDS Advisory.
6. Hold a service of comfort and hope for people living with AIDS or a memorial service for those who have died from AIDS. Publicize the event widely.
7. Open the synagogue to local AIDS service organizations if they need space to hold training programs, support groups, and the like. Start an AIDS support group in the synagogue.
8. Establish a support group for family members of people living with AIDS.
9. Organize a visit by synagogue members to AIDS patients in the local hospital. Encourage members who are interested to make these bikkur holim visits a regular activity.
10. Start a buddy program t hat brings together synagogue members and people living with AIDS.

Contact the local Jewish Board of Family Services to find out how.

11. Create a host program to assist people from out of town who are visiting relatives or loved ones with AIDS. Prepare information about accommodations and transportation in your city, arrange home hospitality for showboat meals, and offer to accompany visitors to the hospital.

12. Give tzedaka to an AIDS organization. List the donation in the synagogue bulletin.

13 Encourage other synagogues and local Jewish organization to address HIV/AIDS issues.

ORGANIZATIONS

The Jewish Healing Center 141 Alto Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94116, 415/387-4999 (In NY, 212/580-0099). Many resources for meeting the spiritual needs of Jews dealing with illness.

AIDS National Interfaith Network 300 I St., N.E., Suite. 400, Washington, DC 20002, 800/288-9619. Brings together religious groups responding to AIDS

HOW YOU CAN AND CANNOT BECOME INFECTED WITH HIV*

You can become infected with HIV in two main ways:

- Having unprotected sexual intercourse -- vaginal, anal and perhaps oral -- with an infected person
- Sharing drug needles or syringes with an infected person

Also, women infected with HIV can pass the virus to their babies during pregnancy or during birth. In some cases, they can pass it on when breast-feeding. Some people have been infected while receiving blood transfusions, especially before 1985, when careful screening and laboratory testing of the blood supply began. You cannot be infected by donating blood.

What are ways by which you cannot get HIV and AIDS?

- HIV infection doesn't just happen; you can't simply catch it like a cold or flu. Unlike cold or flu viruses, HIV is not spread by casual contact.
- You cannot get HIV through every day contact with infected people at school, work, home or anywhere else.
- You cannot contract HIV from clothes, phones or toilet seats. It can't be passed on by things like cups, spoons, or other objects that someone infected with the virus has used.
- You won't get AIDS through a mosquito bite. HIV does not live in a mosquito and is not transmitted through a mosquito's salivary glands like other diseases such as malaria or yellow fever. You won't get it from lice, fleas, or other insects either.
- You won't get HIV from sweat, tears, or

sneezes. Even in the rare event that they contain any of the virus, they don't contain enough of the virus to infect you.

Not all of the answers are in.

You won't get HIV from an ordinary kiss. Experts are not completely certain about HIV transmission through deep, prolonged, or "French" kissing. While scientists believe that it is remotely possible, there has never been a case of HIV transmission through kissing.

Experts are less sure about HIV transmission through oral sex. It may be possible. The virus is present in semen, vaginal secretions, blood, and occasionally, in low concentrations, in saliva. During oral intercourse, the person who receives semen, blood, or vaginal secretions is at greater risk of becoming infected. These substances might enter the bloodstream through cuts or sores in the mouth. These cuts can be so small you don't even know they're there.

* Based upon information from the U.S.. Centers for Disease Control. For more information call 1-800-342-AIDS in the U.S. or 1-800-458-5231 in Canada

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE FORM

Please take a minute to fill out the form below and mail it to: The USCJ Commission on Social Action and Public Policy c/o Sarrae G. Crane, 155 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010.

Synagogue Name and Address:

Contact person for HIV/AIDS Programming:

_____ Tel: _____

How did you receive this publication?

Do you plan to use this publication in your synagogue?

_____ How? _____