**Addressing Gays and Lesbians**

The Conservative Movement first took up the topic of gay men and lesbians

in January 1989, when two differing responsa on the issue were presented to its Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. In one, Rabbi Steven Saltzman argued that even though Conservative Judaism believes that Jewish law evolves over time, Conservative rabbis should not change Jewish law on this issue because the Jewish community has a vested interest in procreation, especially after losing a third of our numbers during the Holocaust. In the other, Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson argued on the basis David F. Greenberg’s book on the history of homosexuality, *The Construction of Homosexuality*, that the only kinds of homosexual relations that the ancients knew were coercive (master-slave), cultic, or licentious. Monogamous, loving homosexual sex did not exist in the ancient world. Therefore, we should understand the Torah’s bans on gay male sex in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 to refer to the types of homosexual sex people of that time knew, and treat gay sex by loving partners as falling under the same moral values that *A Rabbinic Letter on Intimate Relations* delineated. After a 4-hour discussion of both responsa, the CJLS tabled them both and asked the then CJLS chair, Rabbi Joel Roth, to find someone to articulate an intermediate position.

Ultimately, Rabbi Roth himself wrote an extensive responsum expressing a position that was, if anything, to the right of Rabbi Saltzman’s. It included the directives that gay men and lesbians should not be rabbis or cantors, and that a local rabbi should determine whether or not they might serve as educators.

This engendered four additional CJLS meetings during the Fall of 1991 and the Spring of 1992 devoted solely to this topic. In the process, Rabbis Reuven Kimmelman and Mayer Rabinowitz wrote opinions concurring with Rabbi Roth’s result but for different reasons. Rabbi Elliot Dorff wrote a fourth responsum maintaining in part that the CJLS rabbis did not know enough yet about homosexuality to issue any official rulings about it. He recommended that the Rabbinical Assembly, Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism establish a Commission on Human Sexuality that would (among other things) thoroughly examine what was scientifically known about homosexuality to date. While the proposed commission was doing its work, he asserted, the Movement should retain the *status quo*. In other words, gay and lesbian Jews could not be admitted to rabbinical school and Conservative rabbis could not officiate at same-sex weddings. At the same time, gay and lesbians were to be fully welcomed in Conservative congregations, youth groups, camps, and schools; and the Movement supported their full civic equality in society (per the Rabbinical Assembly resolution of May 1990, which follows, and the similar United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism resolution, passed in November 1991).

On March 15, 1992, the CJLS approved not only all of the four different responsa on this topic, but also a Consensus Statement on Homosexuality (which follows), this by a vote of 19 in favor, 3 opposed, and 1 abstention.

Behind the scenes, the 19 CJLS members who voiced agreement on the Consensus Statement had wanted the Movement to appear less splintered over this issue as it then was. In fact, although they had voted in seeming agreement with the Consensus Statement, they did not understand its application in the same way. Rabbis Roth, Rabinowitz, and Kimmelman, authors of three of the approved responsa, as well as the Committee members who had voted for the three rabbis’ responsa, intended for these positions to become the Conservative Movement’s permanent stance on homosexuality. However, the Consensus statement language, taken from Rabbi Dorff’s responsum, specifically noted that all of the *status quo* provisions of the Consensus Statement would apply only so long as the proposed Commission on Human Sexuality did its work, after which the CJLS was to revisit its policies.

*Consensus Statement on Homosexuality*

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of The Rabbinical Assembly affirms the following policies:

We will not perform commitment ceremonies for gays or lesbians.

We will not knowingly admit avowed homosexuals to our rabbinical or cantorial schools or to the Rabbinical Assembly or the Cantors' Assembly. At the same time, we will not instigate witch hunts against those who are already members or students.

Whether homosexuals may function as teachers or youth leaders in our congregations and schools will be left to the rabbi authorized to make halakhic decisions for a given institution within the Conservative Movement. Presumably, in this as in all other matters, the rabbi will make such decisions taking into account the sensitivities of the people of his or her particular congregation or school. The rabbi's own reading of Jewish law on these issues, informed by the responsa written for the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards to date, will also be a determinative factor in these decisions.

Similarly, the rabbi of each Conservative institution, in consultation with its lay leaders, will be entrusted to formulate policies regarding the eligibility of homosexuals for honors within worship and for lay leadership positions.

In any case, in accordance with The Rabbinical Assembly and United Synagogue resolutions, we hereby affirm that gays and lesbians are welcome in our congregations, youth groups, camps, and schools.

*The Rabbinical Assembly Resolution*

WHEREAS Judaism affirms that the Divine image reflected by every human being must always be cherished and affirmed, and

WHEREAS Jews have always been sensitive to the impact of official and unofficial prejudice and discrimination, wherever directed, and

WHEREAS gay and lesbian Jews have experienced not only the constant threats of physical violence and homophobic rejection, but also the pains of anti-Semitism known to all Jews and, additionally, a sense of painful alienation from our own religious institutions, and

WHEREAS the extended families of gay and lesbian Jews are often members of our congregations who live with concern for the safety, health, and well-being of their children, and

WHEREAS the AIDS crisis has deeply exacerbated the anxiety and suffering of this community of Jews who need in their lives the compassionate concern and support mandated by Jewish tradition,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that we, The Rabbinical Assembly, while affirming our tradition's prescription for heterosexuality,

Support full civil equality for gays and lesbians in our national life, and

Deplore the violence against gays and lesbians in our society, and

Reiterate that, as are all Jews, gay men and lesbians are welcome as members in our congregations, and

Call upon our synagogues and the arms of our movement to increase our awareness, understanding and concern for our fellow Jews who are gay and lesbian.

*Civil vs. Religious Rights*

On the whole, the Conservative Movement was united in officially welcoming gay and lesbian Jews to Conservative congregations and in supporting civil rights for gays and lesbians. Both the RA and USCJ had voted for “full civil equality for gays and lesbians in our national life.” The respective resolutions, however, never defined what civil rights those encompassed. Those who wrote and voted for them likely intended to voice support for equality in jobs, housing, health care, and inheritance, and, possibly also for equalityininsurance, adoption, custody, and visitation rights. Civil marriage for gay men and lesbians had not yet become part of the national conversation. (It was not until April 2000 that Vermont became the first state to create civil unions for gay men and lesbians, and until November 2003 that Massachusetts became the first state to legally recognize gay and lesbian marriage, per a Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruling that the state’s constitution required it).

Despite these important areas of agreement, serious disagreement continued within the Movement on admission of gays and lesbians to Conservative rabbinical and cantorial schools, and on gay and lesbian couples having a Jewish commitment ceremony or wedding. Even the name of such a ceremony was a matter at issue. Options discussed included "commitment ceremony"; *brit re'im* (covenant of friends) or *brit re'im ha-ahuvim* (covenant of loving friends), based on the description of the couple in the seven blessings for a heterosexual marriage; and marriage or the Hebrew equivalents, *kiddushin* (betrothal) and *nisu'in* (marriage).

The liturgy for such a ceremony, if used at all, was also at issue. Possibilities ranged from ceremonies that were very close to Jewish marriage rites to others that were considerably different.

*Revisiting the Responsa*

Ultimately, in December 2003, the then Rabbinical Assembly President, Rabbi Reuven Hammer, and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism President, Judy Yudoff, jointly asked the CJLS to reconsider its position on both these issues. This provoked three more years of CJLS deliberations on the topic, during which CJLS members interviewed experts on the current science of sexual orientation and heard from representatives of various positions within the movement.

CJLS procedures normally allowed any Rabbinical Assembly member to submit a responsum for CJLS consideration. Making an exception, the then CJLS Chair, Rabbi Kassel Abelson, ruled that only CJLS members were allowed to submit responsa on this one issue. Otherwise, given the contention within the movement and within American society generally, the CJLS was liable to be inundated with responsa and the equivalent of *amicus curiae* opinion papers. His concern was well warranted, for in June 2005, 9 of the 25 CJLS rabbis had already written responsa on the topic for consideration. Rabbi Abelson asked whether some of the authors, now seeing what others had written, could find a way to combine their work. That is how Rabbis Elliot Dorff, Daniel Nevins, and Avram Reisner came to write a joint responsum and how Rabbis Robert Fine, David Fine, and Myron Geller did so as well.

In the end, on December 6, 2006, the CJLS voted on five responsa. Two of them argued for maintaining the bans on ordaining gay men or lesbians and on performing Jewish commitment ceremonies. Reaching that conclusion, Rabbi Joel Roth included and updated his 1992 responsum. From his perspective, closely tied to his theory of law (see chapter 4 of this volume), “extra-halakhic” factors such as new scientific understandings about sexual orientation and the suffering homosexuals endured as a result of societal discrimination were not sufficient to remove a prohibition rooted in the Torah and maintained by Rabbinic tradition ever since.

Rabbi Leonard Levy arrived at the same conclusion for a different reason. Although all the relevant professional organizations opposed attempts to convert homosexuals into heterosexuals, two psychiatrists nonetheless maintained that some forms of treatment could transform a homosexual into a heterosexual. Levy asserted that gay men and lesbians should try this.

On the other end of the spectrum, Rabbis Myron Geller, Robert Fine, and David Fine argued on historical grounds for removing the bans on both ordaining gay men or lesbians and on performing Jewish commitment ceremonies. In the past, they stated, same-sex relations had been prohibited because they were considered an abomination (the English translation of *to’evah,* the Torah’s descriptive word for men having sex with men in Leviticus 18:22). But now that this this was no longer the case, Conservative Judaism should utilize the legal method of *mi’ut,* restricting a law to a specific case, to interpret the Torah’s verse. From this perspective, men today should not have sex with each other when such activity would be considered an abomination—specifically when such sexual activity would be deemed licentious or oppressive. Gay men and lesbians may and should, however, seek to create loving bonds of marriage, celebrated through public Jewish (and, where possible, civil) ceremonies, and otherwise qualified gay men and lesbians should be admitted to rabbinical school and ultimately ordained.

Rabbi Gordon Tucker also argued (in his case philosophically rather than historically) for dissolving the ban on homosexual relations. Jewish law, he said, must also accommodate unusual situations in which contemporary science and people’s own testimony, a modern form of *aggadah*, justify abandoning precedent and striking out in new directions. Homosexual relations, he believed, are just such an instance.

The Dorff-Nevins-Reisner responsum took a middle stance. It argued, first on the basis of scientific evidence, that homosexuality, just like heterosexuality, is embedded in people. All society’s attempts to change homosexuals into heterosexuals had not only failed, but led to high levels of depression and suicide. Moreover, because of a highly discriminatory – and sometimes violent – environment, gay teenagers were committing suicide at 3 to 4 times the rate of heterosexual teens, and they were smoking and abusing alcohol considerably more as well. These alarming realities demonstrated that failure to permit homosexuals to have legitimate outlets for their sexual desires in society had undermined their dignity.

The Talmud asserted multiple times that *kevod ha-briyyot*, the honor due to all human beings, trumped any Rabbinic enactments.[[1]](#endnote-1) Based on that precedent, Rabbis Dorff, Nevins, and Reisner ruled that the Torah’s ban in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, interpreted by the Rabbis to prohibit gay anal sex, would stand, but all the prohibitions the Rabbis had added to that activity, such as oral sex or stroking each other’s bodies to produce pleasure and sexual climaxes, would be removed in the name of restoring dignity to gay men and lesbians. This, then, meant that seminaries affiliated with the movement were at liberty to admit otherwise qualified gay men and lesbians to their rabbinical and cantorial schools, and that Conservative/Masorti rabbis could officiate at Jewish commitment/marriage ceremonies to celebrate such unions.

In the Appendix to the Dorff/Nevins/Reisner responsum, psychologist Dr. Judith Glassgold listed more than 60 studies in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, and social work on homosexuality and cited the research results as articulated in official statements of the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Association of Social Work, and the American Medical Association. Among the organizations’ conclusions were these: Homosexuality was not a psychological disease; homosexuals could not be changed into heterosexuals; efforts to do so were harmful; without discrimination, homosexuals would be able to live perfectly normal lives; the children of homosexuals, whether biological or adopted, were no more likely to be homosexual than the children of heterosexual parents; children raised by homosexuals had no special difficulties in forming their own gender identity; and homosexuals could be just as good at parenting as heterosexuals.

When, on December 6, 2006**,** the CJLS finally convened to vote on the five responsa on the table all 25 CJLS voting members were in attendance, one mark of the contentiousness that had continued, unabated, around this issue. A second mark was the CJLS’s simultaneous approval of three diverging perspectives. .Both Rabbi Joel Roth’s responsum, which banned gay and lesbian ordination and Conservative rabbis officiating at same-sex commitment ceremonies, and the Rabbis Dorff, Nevins, and Reisner responsum, which permitted ordination and officiation, were adopted by votes of 13 in favor and 12 against. Notably, one member voted for them both, in order to strengthen the Movement’s pluralism on this issue. In addition, the CJLS adopted Rabbi Leonard Levy’s responsum by a vote of 6 in favor, 8 opposed, and 11 abstaining—six votes being the minimum necessary for a responsum to become a validated option within the Movement

Meanwhile, the Fine-Fine-Geller responsum vote was six in favor, seventeen opposed, and two abstaining, and the Tucker responsum vote was seven in favor, fourteen opposed, and four abstaining. By the rules then in operation, however, both of these responsa were declared *takkanot* (legislative changes in the law rather than judicial interpretations), and, as such, required a minimum of 13 votes for acceptance. Thus, even though both had received the same or more yes votes than Rabbi Levy’s, neither became an official CJLS position. Instead, to this date both responsa appear on the Rabbinical Assembly website as dissents to the three validated responsa.

Ironically, a few months after the meeting, the Rabbinical Assembly’s Executive Council removed CJLS’s jurisdiction to enact *takkanot* altogether. Had that rule, which has held to date, been in place at the time of the vote, both of these responsa would have been adopted, each having been endorsed by the 6-vote minimum required to make a rabbinic ruling a validated option within the Conservative Movement.

Many years later**,** one of the two researchers cited in Rabbi Levy’s responsum recanted his conclusion that homosexuality could be cured, prompting some CJLS members to ask that this responsum be removed from the official list of validated Conservative responsa. Eradicating a responsum, however, requires an affirmative vote by 20 of the 25 voting members, and this has not happened to date, probably because the Movement’s positions on gay and lesbian Jews shifted dramatically in subsequent years, precluding the need to revisit the issue.

*Ordaining Gay and Lesbian Rabbis*

The Dorff-Nevins-Reisner responsum quickly paved the way for a newfound openness to gay and lesbian Jews as spiritual leaders within the Conservative Movement. Immediately after the December 6, 2006 decision, the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University in Los Angeles opened its doors to qualified gay men and lesbians, and, a few months later, the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary did likewise.

Although some Movement leaders predicted that the December decision would tear the Movement apart, that did not happen. Instead, gay and lesbian rabbis largely found acceptance and good positions within the Movement, and those opposed to ordaining gay men or lesbians as rabbis have simply hired heterosexual rabbis. Just as it took some time for Conservative synagoguges and other institutions to get used to women rabbis, it will probably take time for a number of Conservative institutions to get used to gay and lesbian rabbis, and here too, societal developments are likely to play an influential role in this process.

It took nearly a decade after the December 2006 responsum for the Conservative/Masorti rabbinical school in Israel to admit openly gay and lesbian students.   In 2014, the Schechter Rabbinical School in Jerusalem consented to do so, after an agreement was reached that the Rabbinical Assembly’s Israel Region, rather than the school itself, would henceforth ordain all students, including gay men and lesbians. The Seminario Rabbinico Latin Americano in Buenos Aires also admits gay men and lesbians to its rabbinical school. The newest rabbinical school affiliated with the movement, the Zecharias Frankel School in Pottsdam, Germany, is a branch of the Ziegler School in Los Angeles, and so it too is open to admitting and ordaining gay men and lesbians.

*Officiating at Same-Sex Unions*

After their responsum was approved, Rabbis Dorff, Nevins, and Reisner anticipated that rabbis would create ceremonies and documents celebrating gay or lesbian unions. Once vetted, these materials could subsequently be shared with the Movement, probably within a new Appendix to their responsum.

This did not happen. Rather, rabbis were asking *them* to create a template or two that could be used for gay and lesbian unions. And so, in consultation with a number of gay and lesbian rabbinical students and rabbis, the three authors proceeded to create those ceremonies and documents. The CJLS approved their new responsum, “Rituals and Documents of Marriage and Divorce for Same-Sex Couples,” on May 31, 2012, by a vote of 15 in favor, none opposed, and one abstaining (15-0-1).

In this document, officially an Appendix to their 2006 responsum, the authors called the union of gay and lesbian couples “marriage,” as contemporary society was now doing as well. However, they did not use the standard Hebrew terms *kiddushin*(betrothal)and *ni’su’in* (marriage)for heterosexual betrothal and marriage, because, as they explained, those categories and their legal implications did not fit same-sex couples.

For example, in a traditional heterosexual ceremony, the man “acquires” his bride, but who would “acquire” whom in a same-sex union? In fact, many Conservative rabbis today find it difficult to use the legal category of acquisition (*kinyan*) even in heterosexual marriage. Those who still utilize it do so in the name of preserving the tradition, and often modify it so that each member of the couple “acquires” the other. Nonetheless, the responsum authors did not want to expand this way of thinking about marriage to same-sex couples, where no precedent existed.

A similar problem affected divorce. Because in Jewish law only the husband can divorce his wife, it was unclear who in gay and lesbian marriages would have the right to divorce the other. Moreover, the provision in traditional Jewish marriage law that enables only the husband to initiate a divorce has led to many problems; the three rabbis did not want same-sex married couples to incur those problems as well.

As a result, to describe gay and lesbian unions, Rabbis Dorff, Nevins, and Reisner used the Hebrew term *brit re-im ahuvim,* Covenant of Loving Companions: the only words in the traditional wedding ceremony that describe the couple, and thereby indicate that marriage constitutes a covenant between them.

The parameters of Jewish same-sex marriage ceremonies and documents were also issues of discussion. The gay men and lesbians consulting with the three rabbis were themselves divided on whether these new rituals and forms should be very close to, or different from, those used for Jewish heterosexual marriage and divorce. Ultimately the three rabbis presented templates for both options.

What follows are excerpts from the 2006 responsum, “Homosexuality, Human Dignity, and Halakhah,” by Rabbis Elliot N. Dorff, Daniel S. Nevins, and Avram I. Reisner, that precipitated significant change in Conservative Movement practice, and from its 2012 Appendix, which included ceremonies and documents for gay and lesbian unions. To read the full responsum see [www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/20052010/dorff\_nevins\_reisner\_dignity.pdf](http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/20052010/dorff_nevins_reisner_dignity.pdf) To read the other CJLS responsa from both 1992 and 2006 about the status of gay and lesbian unions and ordinations, see [www.rabbinicalassembly.org/jewish-law/committee-jewish-law-and-standards/even-haezer](http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/jewish-law/committee-jewish-law-and-standards/even-haezer).

Followingthis responsum are portions of the same-sex marriage ceremony that is similar to the traditional Jewish wedding rite for heterosexuals, and the Covenant of Loving Partners, similar to a *ketubbah*. To see the full ceremonies and documents from the 2012 responsum Appendix: <http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/2011-2020/same-sex-marriage-and-divorce-appendix.pdf>

*Homosexuality, Human Dignity, and Halakhah Responsum Conclusions*

Based upon our study of halakhic precedents regarding both sexual norms and human dignity, we reach the following conclusions:

The explicit biblical ban on anal sex between men remains in effect. Gay men are instructed to refrain from anal sex.

Heterosexual marriage between two Jews remains the halakhic ideal. For homosexuals who are incapable of maintaining a heterosexual relationship, the rabbinic prohibitions that have been associated with other gay and lesbian intimate acts are superseded based upon the Talmudic principle of *kvod habriot,* our obligation to preserve the human dignity of all people.

This ruling effectively normalizes the status of gay and lesbian Jews in the Jewish community. Extending the 1992 CJLS Consensus Statement, gay and lesbian Jews are to be welcomed into our synagogues and other institutions as full members with no restrictions. Furthermore, gay or lesbian Jews who demonstrate the depth of Jewish commitment, knowledge, faith and desire to serve as rabbis, cantors and educators shall be welcomed to apply to our professional schools and associations.

We are not prepared at this juncture to rule upon the halakhic status of gay and lesbian relationships. To do so would require establishing an entirely new institution in Jewish law that treats not only the ceremonies and legal instruments appropriate for creating homosexual unions but also the norms for the dissolution of such unions. This responsum does not provide *kiddushin* for same-sex couples. Nonetheless, we consider stable, committed, Jewish relationships to be as necessary and beneficial for homosexuals and their families as they are for heterosexuals. Promiscuity is not acceptable for either homosexual or heterosexual relationships. Such relationships should be conducted in consonance with the values set out in the RA pastoral letter on intimate relationships, “*This Is My Beloved, This Is My Friend”: A Rabbinic Letter on Human Intimacy*.[[2]](#endnote-2) The celebration of such a union is appropriate.

*Same-Sex Wedding Blessing*

Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, creating the fruit of the vine.

Our God and God of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs, look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless these loving companions, who are together creating a Covenant of Lovers. Praised are You, Adonai, who is good and does good.

*Same-Sex Ceremony of Covenant*

Of the following 7 blessings the officiating rabbi offers the couple, blessings 1, 2, 3, and 5 are the same as in traditional Jewish wedding rites for heterosexual couples; blessings 4, 6, and 7 are new.

The couple exchanges rings and each declares: “Be my covenanted partner, in love and friendship, in peace and companionship, in the eyes of God and humanity.”

Together they say: “May it be Your will, Adonai, our God, to establish our life-long household and to bring Your presence into our lives.”

1. Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, creating the fruit of the vine.

2. Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, whose glory is evident in all of creation.

3. Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, Creator of humanity.

4. Praised are You, Adonai our God, who rules the universe, who created humanity in the divine image, who structured us in the image of God, and said, “It is not good for a person to live alone, I will make a fitting helper for each one” (Genesis 2:18). Praised are You, Adonai, Creator of humanity.

5. May Zion rejoice as her children return to her in joy. Praised are You, Adonai, who causes Zion to rejoice in her children.

6. Grant perfect joy to these loving companions, as You did for Your first human beings in the Garden of Eden. Praised are You, Adonai, who is good and does good.

7. Praised are You, Adonai, our God who rules the universe, who created joy and gladness, happiness and blessing, pleasure and song, delight, laughter, love, harmony, peace, and companionship. Adonai, our God, may there always be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem voices of joy and gladness, voices of pleasure and song, voices of those who proclaim “Give thanks to Adonai, for God is good, God’s faithfulness is eternal” (Psalms 118:1). Praised are You, Adonai, who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this joyous time.

*Same-Sex Marriage: Covenant of Loving Partners*

On the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ day of the week, the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ day of the month of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the year five thousand seven hundred \_\_\_\_\_\_, corresponding to the secular date of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, here in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in the country of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ we, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the daughter/son of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the daughter/son of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, before the people and the congregation make this holy declaration: “Let it be known that our souls are bound one to the other with bonds of love and mutual devotion, and that it is our intention, with God’s help, to be exclusively faithful to each other all the days of our lives upon this earth. As our Sages taught: “A person should find a partner with whom to eat, drink, read, study, sleep, and share every secret, secrets of Torah and secrets of life” (*Avot D’Rabbi Natan A,* #8). We shall share from this day a complete partnership, joyfully and wholeheartedly establishing a household in common with moral and financial responsibilities for one another. We shall be loving partners for each other and will cherish, respect, sustain and assist one another in righteousness and faithfulness. With God’s help may our dwelling be filled with love and harmony, peace and companionship, and may we be privileged to nurture together our Jewish heritage, our love for our fellow Jews, and the dignity of every creature.”

We, the witnesses, attest that everything that is written and specified above has been done in our presence and is valid and effective.

(Signature)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, witness

(Signature)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, witness

1. Excerpted from *Modern Conservative Judaism: Evolving Thought and Practice*by Elliot Dorff by permission of the Jewish Publication Society and the University of Nebraska Press. ©2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)