

Kenissa Konnections

March 2022

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Message from Rabbi Sid



Re-Thinking Religion

About a year after I published *Jewish Megatrends: Charting the Course of the American Jewish Future* (2013) I began to look for some non-Jewish partners that might be interested in joining me on my exploration of the future of religion in America. In the course of researching and writing the book, I became convinced that we were entering a period where more and more explorations of faith and spirituality by Americans would have a multi-faith cast. New expressions of faith and spirituality would not necessarily follow the organizational models created by the national umbrellas of the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim (and other) faiths communities.

I spent over a year in meetings with an array of national religious organizations during which I shared my analysis and inquired about the way they saw the future of faith in America. I left each of those meetings more than a bit disappointed. Despite the fact that I was meeting with people in senior leadership of national religious groups, I did not find that they were ready to ask hard questions about the way their organizations were functioning nor why they were experiencing a significant loss of market share.

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Each month our *Kenissa* Meet-Up features the author of that month's How We Built This column. This month we feature Deborah Meyer, founding executive director of Moving Traditions, a national organization based in Philadelphia. Deborah just stepped down as CEO of Moving Traditions. Her column, and our conversation with her, will be a reflection of what it took to build such a successful Jewish organization from scratch.

Topic: *Kenissa* Meet-Up
 Time: Mar 24, 2022 01:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
[https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88261969061?](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88261969061?pwd=a0FqeUJZqL3BvUkZaaVlhb2lWR1NMUT09)
[pwd=a0FqeUJZqL3BvUkZaaVlhb2lWR1NMUT09](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88261969061?pwd=a0FqeUJZqL3BvUkZaaVlhb2lWR1NMUT09)
 Meeting ID: 882 6196 9061
 Passcode: 860497

Braver Leadership

Dr. Erica Brown



To be a member of the *Sanhedrin*, the highest legislative court in Jewish law during the Talmudic era and earlier, the Talmud came up with certain criteria. Maimonides codified these in one of his books of law:

Every conceivable effort should be made to the end that all members of the Sanhedrin be of mature age, imposing stature, good appearance, that they be able to express their views in clear and well-chosen words and be conversant with most of the spoken languages, in order that the Sanhedrin may dispense with the services of an interpreter.

These requirements may be regarded as ancient image management. How others view leaders is a significant factor in Jewish leadership. There are harsh Talmudic words reserved for Sages who had stains on their clothes, tattered sandals or appeared in public with people of dubious character. These requirements beg the question of what role internal values play in grooming a leader if external factors are so strongly considered? In the very next set of laws, Maimonides points us to these requirements for every judge, in a small or large court:

...it is essential that every one of its members possess the following seven qualifications: wisdom, humility, fear of God, disdain of financial gain, love of truth, love of people and a good reputation.

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*Excerpted from *Inspired Jewish Leadership: Practical Approaches to Building Strong Communities* (Jewish Lights, 2008) by Dr. Erica Brown. Reprinted by permission of distributor, Turner Publications, from which you can also [buy the book](#).

Dr. Erica Brown is a prolific author and leading Jewish educator in North America. She is the new Vice Provost for Values and Leadership at Yeshiva University and the director of its Lord Rabbi Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership.

Jewish Megatrends and Responses

Editor's Note: Libby Parker wrote this piece in February 2020. She continues to lead Jewfolk, expanding its offerings in amazingly creative ways in the Twin Cities. Check out [its website](#).



I see my work aligned closely with Rabbi Sid's proposition about with community/*kehilla*. He writes: – "At a time when technology has made meaningful social intercourse much harder to come by, the Jewish community must offer places where people can find support in times of need, communal celebration in times of joy, and friendships to make life fulfilling."

In the deep relationship-based engagement work that Jewfolk does, we connect Jews to one another, to Jewish community and to ideas and ways for Jews to express their own Jewish identity. We do this using the human-centered design mentality of first listening and then responding to what individuals tell us they need and want. We use new media tools like digital and social media and resource-intense 1:1 relationship-building because we have seen that it works. The long-term impact is far greater than comes from traditional happy hours or other social gatherings with little context, depth, or follow-up.

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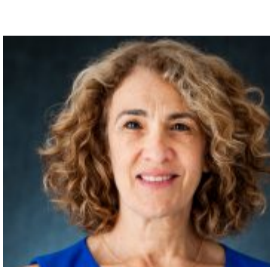
How We Built This

Editor's Note: Every Kenissa Network member was asked to explain how they launched their new enterprise, a feature we call "How We Built This". We'll feature one organization in each issue.

Moving Traditions

Deborah Meyer

At the still point of the turning world...
 There the dance is...
 ...Except for the point, the still point,
 There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.
 T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, "Burnt Norton"



To lead a changemaking organization, I've learned to keep my eye on the still point, advancing with my colleagues and partners toward our north star as the world evolves.

As co-founder and CEO of Moving Traditions since 2005, two activities stand out as central to success: defining a clear vision and building strong relationships. When I have done so, I've been able to move everyone together toward our shared goals.

Vision is key. I've learned the importance of determining our north star, defining the change we want to make. Vision requires initial inspiration, certainly, and strategy—and making progress requires researching, listening to the people whose lives we hope to impact, experimenting, gleaning, analyzing, and refining.

Deborah Meyer (she/her/hers) has dedicated her career to building change-making organizations focused on gender and Jewish life. In 2005 she founded Moving Traditions with then Board Chair, Sally Gottesman, and led the organization into 2022. She serves on the boards of the Covenant and Hadassah Foundations, and on the Executive Committee of Philadelphia's Women of Vision. Deborah loves sharing her homemade soup with friends and family, dancing, and exploring Philadelphia's streets and green spaces.

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