



# Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community

By Dr. Ron Wolfson

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**How to transform the model of twentieth-century Jewish institutions into twenty-first-century relational communities offering meaning and purpose, belonging and blessing.**

"What really matters is that we care about the people we seek to engage. When we genuinely care about people, we will not only welcome them; we will listen to their stories, we will share ours, and we will join together to build a Jewish community that enriches our lives."

?from the Introduction

Membership in Jewish organizations is down. Day school enrollment has peaked. Federation campaigns are flat. The fastest growing and second largest category of Jews is "Just Jewish." Young Jewish adults are unengaged and aging baby boomers are disengaging. Yet, in the era of Facebook, people crave face-to-face community.

*"It's all about relationships."* With this simple, but profound idea, noted educator and community revitalization pioneer Dr. Ron Wolfson presents practical strategies and case studies to transform the old model of Jewish institutions into relational communities. He sets out twelve principles of relational engagement to guide Jewish lay leaders, professionals and community members in transforming institutions into inspiring communities whose value-proposition is to engage people and connect them to Judaism and community in meaningful and lasting ways.

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**Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community** By Dr. Ron Wolfson **Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #712365 in Books
- Published on: 2013-02-15
- Released on: 2013-02-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 22.86" h x 2.24" w x 6.00" l, 1.15 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 288 pages



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## **Editorial Review**

### Review

"Catalogs endless ways to revitalize Jewish life through deep, on-going human connections. Effective twenty-first-century lay and professional leaders will need this road map for the journey ahead."

**Rabbi Rick Jacobs**, president, Union for Reform Judaism

"Lively ... shows us how to transform our institutions by focusing on how we connect to one another. A must read for anyone who cares about the future of American Jewish life."

**Alisa Rubin Kurshan**, senior vice president, UJA–Federation of New York

"Judaism is about relationship?with others, with God, with the tradition itself. There is no more sure-footed guide to the relationships in our lives than Ron Wolfson, teacher extraordinaire. Here is his latest gift to the seeking soul."

**Rabbi David Wolpe**, Sinai Temple, Los Angeles

"Skips the self-flagellation and offers a people-to-people paradigm that individuals and organizations can embrace."

**Wayne Firestone**, president and CEO, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life

"With passion of insight and humor of experience, Ron Wolfson weaves a vision for our future."

**Rabbi Elyse Frishman**, editor, *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*

"Had Martin Buber written a practical guide, it would be Ron Wolfson's book. It is filled with theory, practice, successful examples and, most importantly, hope for the future of the American Jewish community and its institutions."

**Dr. Kerry M. Olitzky**, executive director, Jewish Outreach Institute

"Consecrate the new: rejuvenate the old. With these two imperatives, Ron Wolfson demonstrates that without belonging, believing and behaving are orphaned.... His writing confirms the insight of the philosopher of relationship, Martin Buber: 'all real living is meeting.'"

**Rabbi Harold Schulweis**, Valley Beth Shalom, Encino, California

"A highly readable description and analysis of the most exciting and innovative programs and personalities in North American Judaism today.... This book should be read and studied by all concerned with the modern American Jewish condition."

**Rabbi David Ellenson**, president, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion

"Any book that quotes Steve Jobs and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik in the span of a few pages knows how to apply some of the best thinking from the business and non-profit sectors, along with the wisdom of Jewish text and tradition, to address the question of how we can live lives of meaning and purpose. A must read."

**Rachel Levin**, executive director, Righteous Persons Foundation

"Open[s] doors of engagement and learning that make life more profound and wondrous. Takes a theology of relationship and translates it into lives well lived, and communities more vibrant!"

**?Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson**, dean, the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, American Jewish University; author, *Passing Life's Tests: Spiritual Reflections on the Trial of Abraham, the Binding of Isaac*

“A needed dose of truth from someone who has done his homework. An honest tour through today’s Jewish landscape, skipping the all too familiar nostalgia in favor of concrete ideas, commitment and hope.”

**?Rabbi Noa Kushner**, The Kitchen, San Francisco

“Challenges the Jewish community to embrace a wholly new and boldly different paradigm.... Brings much-needed fresh thinking to a Jewish community striving to reinvent itself, and seeking to engage new generations with renewed depth, vibrancy and relevance.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

**?Barry Shrage**, president, Combined Jewish Philanthropies, Boston

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

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

“Hits on the key challenge for us as Jewish leaders?engagement of Jews with each other.... Reading this book will serve to focus all of us on our common work in today’s new reality.”

**?Allan Finkelstein**, president and CEO, Jewish Community Centers Association

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

**?Rabbi Peter J. Rubinstein**, Central Synagogue, New York City

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

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

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

**?Rabbi Stephanie Kolin**, co-director, Union for Reform Judaism’s Just Congregations

“Groundbreaking ... call[s] us to return to the central mission of Judaism and offer[s] practical guidance on

how to get there. A must read.”

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

“Exemplifies how Judaism and its institutions will only grow stronger if the focus is on the personal relationships they create. I hope Jewish leaders across the board read this book and allow for the transformation to happen within their organizations.”

**?David Cygielman**, CEO, Moishe House

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

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

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

**?Steven Windmueller**, Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk Emeritus Professor of Jewish Communal Service, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion

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

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

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

**?Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel**, Temple Micah, Washington, DC

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**?Rabbi Noah Farkas**, Valley Beth Shalom, Encino, California

“Readable and usable ... it is about how to ensure Judaism’s and the Jewish people’s contribution to the world as we near completion of the fourth millennium of Jewish history. As he asks on the last page, ‘What are we waiting for?’ I, for one, will not.”

**?Dr. Bruce Powell**, head of school, New Community Jewish High School, West Hills, California

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

regain the allegiance of Jews of all ages."

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

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

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

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

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

#### From the Inside Flap

How to transform the model of twentieth-century Jewish institutions into twenty-first-century relational communities offering meaning and purpose, belonging and blessing.

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#### About the Author

**Dr. Ron Wolfson**, visionary educator and inspirational speaker, is Fingerhut Professor of Education at American Jewish University in Los Angeles and a cofounder of Synagogue 3000. He is author of *Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community*; *The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven: Reviewing and Renewing Your Life on Earth*; *Be Like God: God's To-Do List for Kids*; *God's To-Do List: 103 Ways to Be an Angel and Do God's Work on Earth*; *Hanukkah, Passover and Shabbat*, all Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs Art of Jewish Living family guides to spiritual celebrations; *The Spirituality of Welcoming: How to Transform Your Congregation into a Sacred Community*; *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort: A Guide to Jewish Bereavement and Comfort* and, with Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, *What You Will See Inside a Synagogue* (all Jewish Lights), a book for children ages 6 and up. He contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism*?Yizkor, *Who by Fire, Who by Water*?Un'taneh Tokef, *All These Vows*?Kol Nidre and *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism*?Ashamnu and Al Chet (all Jewish Lights).

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Nowadays reading books become more and more than want or need but also work as a life style. This reading behavior give you lot of advantages. Advantages you got of course the knowledge the particular information inside the book which improve your knowledge and information. The info you get based on what kind of reserve you read, if you want send more knowledge just go with knowledge books but if you want experience happy read one along with theme for entertaining like comic or novel. Often the Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community is kind of reserve which is giving the reader erratic experience.

#### Howard Benedict:

Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community can be one of your basic books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this e-book has good vocabulary that will increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort to get every word into delight arrangement in writing Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community yet doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource info that maybe you can be one of it. This great information may drawn you into fresh stage of crucial imagining.

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