



EMANUEL CONGREGATION

Brotherhood

A member of the Men of Reform Judaism

News From The Brotherhood

The other day, a woman friend of mine pointed out that, while progress has been made, pay for a woman, doing the same job as a man, still is only a fraction of what he earns. Furthermore, she said that women represent a much smaller percentage, compared to the percentage of women in the workforce, of the top leadership positions in far too many fields.

I could not, and I would not dispute what she said, but I did say that it is no longer valid to generalize this in all areas. Here in America today, most men, and certainly, the great majority of Reform Jewish men, agree that women should be paid the same as a man for doing the same job and that the best person should be the criteria for promotion to top leadership positions, regardless of gender. Also, almost everyone here agrees that women and men have the same levels of intelligence, concern, and motivation.

However, it is also true that everyone is different in some ways. It is in these differences that we have the opportunity work together for the growth, improvement, prosperity, and happiness of all. The sum of our strengths is certainly greater when we work together than all of our strengths when we work alone.

The question is how do we work together.

If I step forward in every situation and grab the mantle of leadership, believing that my judgment and skills are better than anyone else, then I am being arrogant. If I shrink from contributing in any way in every situation, then I am being self-debasing. It is obvious that both of these two extremes are undesirable and that a moderation of both is the goal we should have.

In his book, *Everyday Holiness*, Alan Morinis says that arrogance and self-debasement are two extremes on the same line as the soul-trait humility. He defines humility as “having the right relationship to self, giving self neither too big nor too small a role in your life.” He goes on, “If you’re unsure whether humility is a soul-trait you need to work on, ask yourself this: Do you leave enough space in your life for others, or are you jamming up your world with your self? Or is there space you ought to rightfully occupy that you need to stretch into?”

At Shavuot services last year, the confirmands each talked about what it meant to them to be a Reform Jew. Each one of them recognized that an important characteristic is that we must acknowledge that we are not the sole repository of correct answers, that others, with different opinions and paths, are also right in



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their own lives. They were also ready to take responsibility for their actions and beliefs. The confirmands truly had the Jewish soul-trait of humility.

What is true for individuals is also true for groups. Different groups of people have different characteristics and can contribute different strengths and skills. Some of these differences are environmental and some are instinctual. Young adults are different from middle-aged or elderly primarily because each group generally is faced with different needs that are due to the relationships they have with their families. Men are different from women due to both physical characteristics and natural tendencies.

Just as individuals have soul-traits, so do groups. For Reform Jewish men, we have always believed that the women in our lives should be recognized for the contributions they can make in our religious lives and should be encouraged to learn and do as much as they can. In the last generation, this has extended to encouraging them to take leadership roles both inside and outside the synagogue.

Surely, we Reform Jewish men are displaying the soul-trait of humility. We allow women to have space in our lives. We no longer try to dominate the space in our lives.

However, we must always remember that humility is just a point on a continuum that ranges from arrogance to self-debasement. If we withdraw from an active role, from a partnership with the women in our lives, in the life of the synagogue community, then we are losing our humility and we must do the things that are necessary to regain it.

The challenge for the Brotherhood of Emanuel Congregation is to provide a place where men can get together to share their collective strengths for the benefit of the congregation and to allow the Emanuel men to share their thoughts, ideas, dreams, and fears with each other. Within the Brotherhood, the health of our group is dependent on our willingness to find strength with each other and our willingness to contribute our time and efforts to its continuing evolution.

I challenge the young men of Emanuel to tell us what you want, what you need, what you can do for each other and the congregation, and to participate in our efforts, programs, and events.

This article will be posted on the Emanuel Brotherhood Blog *Hineini*, <http://emanuelbrotherhood.com>, and will be linked to the Emanuel Brotherhood Home Page and to the Emanuel Brotherhood Facebook Page.

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