

**Q& A: More than a Name Change: Why is ‘NFTB’ becoming
‘Men of Reform Judaism (MRJ)’?
by NFTB Executive Director Doug Barden**

PART I: Overview

Question: Why the Name Change?

Answer: The new name accurately and better reflects our stated mission as the Reform Jewish Men’s organization operating in the 21st century.

Question: What is the Mission of MRJ?

*Answer: The mission adopted at the 1998 NFTB convention remains unchanged:
“To Serve Jewish Men, Reform Judaism and its Local Congregations”*

Question: What is MRJ’s primary purpose?

Answer: The primary purpose of this organization is identical to NFTB’s current Constitutionally- stated purpose: To Stimulate men’s fellowship, men’s interest in Jewish worship, Jewish studies, tikkun olam, and service to the temple, Jewish Community and the Community at large;

Question: How do we achieve this?

Answer:

- (A) By Promoting the establishment of local, organized men’s groups in congregations, preferably ‘brotherhoods’ or ‘men’s clubs’, affiliated with URJ that are committed to the principles we have established* (see Guiding Principles Statement below); and*
- (B) By Providing on-going programmatic resources, leadership assistance, and networking opportunities to such MRJ organized men’s groups.*

The proposed name change reflects our recognition that in many current Reform temple environments, especially in smaller congregations, there is little likelihood of establishing a traditional ‘brotherhood’ or ‘men’s club’; and therefore, MRJ will actively promote, encourage, and support local organized men’s groups of other formats in those settings.

Question: What are MRJ’s ‘Guiding Principles’ that every ‘MRJ sponsored’ men’s group will be asked to adhere to?

Answer: Men of Reform Judaism (MRJ) has been organized to:

- A. Promote the establishment of affiliated brotherhoods and other local organized men’s groups in congregations affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ);*
- B. Stimulate men’s fellowship, interest in Jewish worship, Jewish studies, tikkun olam, and service to the congregation, Jewish Community and the Community at large;*

Organized groups affiliated with MRJ are committed to:

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- ***Meeting the social and spiritual needs of our brothers.*** We recognize our diversity. Some of us are young and some old. Some of us are straight, others gay. Some of us are gifted with intellectual abilities; others are blessed with physical or artistic talents. Some of us are wealthy and some are not. Some of us were born Jewish, others chose to become Jews. With all our diversity, we are brothers.
- ***Transmitting our religious values to future generations.*** As biological or adoptive fathers and as teachers in our community, we fulfill the ancient commandment...you shall teach them to your children. We seek to teach future generations of Jews through our words and our deeds.
- ***Fulfilling the ethical and ritual mitzvot of Judaism.*** We search for ways to express our uniquely masculine spirituality through meaningful rituals, both ancient and contemporary.
- ***The right of Jewish women to full and equal participation*** in all aspects of Jewish life. We recognize the uniquely feminine spiritual energy women bring to our religious traditions.
- ***The pursuit of knowledge of Torah.*** We study the ancient and modern teachers of our faith. We make the teachings of Judaism the foundation of our moral being.
- ***Supporting the Jewish State of Israel*** and our fellow Jews around the world.
- ***Sponsoring and promoting the "Jewish Chautauqua Society,"*** sometimes herein referred to as JCS. JCS provides knowledge and education about Jews and Judaism, brings about an appreciation of the Jewish people, their history, religion, and culture, and builds bridges of understanding between peoples of all faiths and cultures.

Question: What kinds of local organized men's groups, other than 'brotherhoods', does MRJ envision supporting?

Answer: Currently, there are several alternative organizational models that we anticipate will be more likely to be established in many Reform congregations, especially the smaller ones:

(A) ***Men's Havurah*** – a group of 10-25 men who meet monthly, focusing their efforts narrowly, but intensively, usually on study, ritual, prayer, fellowship, tikkun olam, and/or some combination;

(B) ***Beit Achim or' Men's' Committee*** – functioning like any other temple committee, under the direct auspices of a temple board, it will provide a series of men's-oriented programs to all the men of the congregation;

(C) ***Mishkan Achim (Sacred Tent of Brothers)***, or ***Ohel Achim (Tent of Brothers)*** – a mass membership organization, but with less formal structure than a traditional brotherhood, and focused more on providing a men's-only space for men to celebrate and explore their masculine religious spirit than perhaps service-orientation to the congregation.

Question: Is Men of Reform Judaism (MRJ) 'abandoning' local brotherhoods?

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Answer: Absolutely not! Men of Reform Judaism (MRJ) remains committed to meeting the needs of the leaders and members of our affiliated brotherhoods. Establishing and assisting local brotherhoods will remain MRJ's preferred organizational vehicle. However, by encouraging other types of organized vehicles in hundreds of Reform congregations where a traditional brotherhood is unlikely, MRJ anticipates it will increase the total membership base it serves, which in turn translates into greater financial resources available to better serve all Reform Jewish Men, our established affiliates, and our Movement.