

# **A Detailed History of JACS 1979-2004**

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## **I IN THE BEGINNING...**

***Regrettably, the Jewish community has for too long ignored the danger (of addiction), trusting it would simply go away. Some Jewish leaders chauvinistically refused to acknowledge that Jews use drugs or are alcoholics. Others were simply too ashamed to concede that we have a dilemma... Other lay and professional leaders, rabbis and communal officials have adopted the "ostrich stance." But as Abba Eban once declared, "When an ostrich buries its head in the sand to avoid facing unpleasant facts, it not only presents an undignified spectacle but it also constitutes an irresistible target"... The American Jewish community has finally shed its reticence and is prepared to do battle. And battle we must ...For the crisis of (addiction) is now an American problem; it is a rich man's problem as well as a poor man's problem; it is a Jewish problem too.***

***Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal, Commission on Synagogue Relations,  
Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York,  
Judaism and Drugs, 1973***

JACS was "born" in 1979 as an outgrowth of the pioneering work of UJA/Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York and its Commission on Synagogue Relations under the powerful leadership of Rabbi Isaac Trainin. The Commission had established a Task Force on Alcoholism (and before, one on Drugs) to address the problem of addiction among Jews and the longstanding denial by the Jewish community. One of the Task Force on Alcoholism's most innovative projects was sponsorship of a retreat weekend - in the Catskills - for recovering Jews and significant others.

That first retreat turned out to be a remarkable experience for all who attended. It was a unique and intimate sharing of many profound emotions - anger, rage, love, compassion. It was many different things - a religious experience, a social experience, a spiritual experience. It was a spiritual homecoming- a blending of Jewish tradition and 12 step recovery philosophy - for the first time, anywhere.

Participants spoke passionately about what it was like to be Jewish and alcoholic. Some cried because they had never before seen another Jewish alcoholic or drug addicted person. Others spoke of the tremendous burden of guilt and shame they carried. Still others told of rabbis who said 'if they had been better Jews, they wouldn't have been alcoholic'. Or asked if they were sure they really were Jewish!

They spoke of the difficulty they had going to AA meetings in church basements, saying the Lord's Prayer, "getting down on their knees" as their sponsors sometimes suggested, and finding Jewish spiritual resources to assist them in their recovery. Most painful of all, was the fear that many shared - that Judaism and AA were incompatible and that they would be forced to choose between their Jewish beliefs and the recovery program that had saved their lives. The participants directed their anger and rage at Rabbi Barry Woolf, who had come from Hazelden in Minnesota to be the spiritual leader, the only rabbi we knew at the time who was knowledgeable about chemical dependency.

When the weekend was over we knew that the retreats must continue and the participants, along with the professionals and lay leadership of the Federation, worked hard to see that they did. Participants began to take on a larger role in planning and organizing the retreats while the Federation and its Task Force provided administrative, financial and moral support.

Each retreat forged a new path - and became more successful than the last. At one, we added a group aliyot. At another, Bar and Bat Mitzvot. At still another, Torah study and Jewish ways of meditation. And, as more Orthodox Jews attended, we added formal Orthodox services, in addition to our havurah-like services. And later, even "Why I'm Not at Services."

## **II GOING "ON THE ROAD" WITH THE FEDERATION**

We began to go out into the community, hand in hand with Rabbi Trainin to carry the message and share the odyssey of our disease. We had dispelled the old myths, "There's no such thing as a Jewish alcoholic," Jews don't drink," Shikker is a goy."

We did countless radio, television, and newspaper interviews. We told our stories to all sorts of Jewish organizations - to synagogues, Ys, community centers, family and children's agencies, and to Federation leaders and its member agencies. In the first two years, we did about 30-40 speaking engagements, reaching about 1,000 people in person and probably another 30,000 more through our media interviews and appearances (always in shadow, always anonymously). We started to reach recovering Jews throughout the country and grab the community's attention. Recovering people let us know they wanted to be involved; people in trouble called for help; Jewish institutions wanted to know more.

We, and the Federation, understood that to accomplish this, a new organization using the expertise and experience of recovering Jews was needed. From this, JACS was created in 1980. We adopted a three fold mission: 1) to sponsor retreats and support programs for recovering Jews and their families; 2) to provide community outreach, inform and sensitize Jewish spiritual leaders and communal professionals about addiction; and 3) to act as a resource center and clearinghouse about the effects of the disease on Jewish family life. That mission remains essentially the same today. We called the organization Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically Dependent Persons and Significant Others. Soon after, we became simply, JACS.

One of the most difficult, and unexpected tasks, for early JACS, was convincing Jewish members of AA that we weren't "Jewish AA" or that we were planning to take the place of AA. We dispelled these fears by encouraging more synagogues to establish AA (and Alanon) meetings (there were only four in NYC at the time). We also had a clear statement of purpose that we were not a substitute for AA, and developed an excellent line of communication with AA Intergroup and World Service.

It was no coincidence that we chose the law firm that incorporated AA to incorporate JACS, develop its bylaws, organizational structure, and trademark its name. Neither was it coincidental that our senior attorney, Michael Alexander, was the President of the General Service Board of AA World Service (as one of its non-alcoholic trustees). We also made it clear that JACS did not take the place of "treatment"- of treatment centers or social service counseling. Our purpose was to complement, not duplicate services which were already being provided by others, and to help enhance them.

JACS worked closely with the Task Force and the Commission on Synagogue Relations. Rabbi Trainin was our mentor and guide to the Jewish organizational world. Ellen Bayer, the Associate Director, became one of our "most significant others" - and co wrote the JACS mission statement with Audrey Waxman in her kitchen! "Rabbi T" and Marshall Hochhauser (z'l), the Task Force Chairman, saw to it that Federation made addiction in the Jewish community - and funding for JACS - a priority. We received a start up grant of \$10,000 and became a subvention of UJA Federation (receiving an annual allocation). A short time later, we were also accepted as a United Way agency.

We quickly established ourselves organizationally. We worked with the Task Force, now under the chairmanship of Rabbi Irving Block (z'l) to launch a Synagogue/Y Access program to open Jewish institutions to meetings of 12 step recovery programs. We more than tripled the number of AA and Alanon meetings in synagogues and Ys in the New York area our first two years and opened not only doors, but hearts and minds as well. Together with the Task Force, we developed *Open the Synagogue Doors* as a guide to encourage synagogues to "host" 12 step meetings and help them understand the spiritual needs of Jews in recovery. JACS has continued to distribute *Open the Synagogue Doors* to synagogues and to individual rabbis participating in our clergy training.

We joined with the Commission as it sought to reach beyond the New York area to tell the story of addiction among Jews. Jointly, we spoke to Jewish communal service leadership and at conferences for the larger Federation universe with the Council of Jewish Federations (now United Jewish Communities). Perhaps the most important of these was the 1<sup>st</sup> National Conference on Addiction in the Jewish Community, in Florida in 1986.

The event, which was telecast (in part) on the CBS Television Network, would create awareness and stimulate the involvement of Federations across the country in addressing addiction and recovery in their own communities. It would produce a lasting effect over time. JACS would be invited to address several Federations, Federations would establish Task Forces on Addictions of their own, and a "JACS Rabbi" - a graduate of the JACS Clergy training would become Educational Director of the CJF (now United Jewish Communities). As Rabbi Trainin said at the time:

***"The entire history of our Commission has been highlighted by many firsts...The first of several conferences on alcoholism in the Jewish community was held under the aegis of the Commission...We on the***

***Commission are proud that we have not swept any problems under the communal rug, be it addictions, domestic violence, divorce, Jewish disabled, etc...making the Commission an unusual instrument in the American Jewish community...As I have often stated, we cannot have a healthy Jewish community unless we take cognizance of the psychopathologies which exist in our midst and do something about it."***

The role of Federation in nurturing JACS during its formative years was indispensable. They provided financial backing and operational support. They "presented" us to the public at large and ensured that we were represented in the Commission's books, *Alcoholism and the Jewish Community* and *Addiction in the Jewish Community*, which are still the definitive publications on Jews and chemical dependency. They helped us make enormous strides in putting addiction on the agenda of the Jewish community and through their funding of JBFCS, our "new parent agency" they continue to do so.

### **III ADVOCATING WITH TREATMENT FACILITIES**

One of JACS's unique tasks from inception was to intervene and advocate on behalf of the needs of Jewish patients in treatment. And, to remove barriers - often unintentional - which could discourage Jews from seeking treatment, particularly longer term rehabilitation. We reached out to treatment facilities - rehabs, half way houses and detox units to provide information on the spiritual needs of Jewish addicts and assist them in addressing those needs.

We helped them overcome initial concerns that the "special needs" of Jews patients would be in conflict with a structured treatment program and could not be accommodated. We worked with them to find ways to incorporate "culturally sensitive items" into the treatment process - such as availability of kosher food, and religious release time. As an example, we took a patient's rebbe to meet with a rehab's treatment team to explain what he could do - the daily prayer schedule and religious requirements - and what he couldn't do - co-ed exercise.

One incident stands out, vividly. JACS met with the (Jewish) director of a relatively new treatment program affiliated with a major (Jewish) medical center in NYC. We asked what provisions were made for Jewish patients to attend religious services. She told us that free time was programmed on Sunday mornings for all patients wishing to attend services. Immediately after uttering the words, she realized, with some embarrassment, that they hadn't considered the implications of their policy for Jewish patients. They quickly amended the policy to allow Jewish patients to have worship time on Saturdays! Later on, JACS worked with the NYS Office of Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse (now OASAS) to develop a draft questionnaire on "culturally sensitive items" to meet the needs of "special populations" to be included in treatment protocols for all state treatment facilities.

With presentations at major conferences and conventions of addiction professionals,

JACS was able to reach the larger treatment community such as ASAM (American Society on Addiction Medicine), SECAD (Southeast Conference on Addictive Disease), and COSA (Conference on Substance Abuse. The SECAD address is also part of the NIAAA data base. We were also invited by (Pnina Eldar), then the Director of the newly created Alcoholism Program of the State of Israel, to participate in the Second Annual Congress on Alcoholism in Israel where we made presentations at plenary sessions and small workshops.

We continue to advocate on behalf of Jewish patients in treatment in various ways: through our annual telephone survey of over 70 treatment resources; through working with facilities to develop programs for Jewish holidays and festivals; and in assisting them in finding local rabbis to provide chaplaincy visits and do 5<sup>th</sup> step work. We directly assist Jewish patients in rehabs by working with their facilities to arrange for patients to attend JACS retreats. In addition, some 150 volunteers have made approximately 900 "First Call 12 Step Visits" over the past 25 years

#### **IV REACHING OUT TO RABBIS AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**

JACS established its first headquarters at the New York Board of Rabbis. The choice was both practical and strategic. At the time, The Board coordinated the Chaplaincy functions for hospitals and prisons Director Rabbi Paul Hait, and Assistant Director, Rabbi Allen Kaplan (who had joined us the very first retreat) understood the similar role that JACS was asking rabbis to play in chemical dependency. Positioning ourselves at the Board of Rabbis would thus send a powerful message about the spiritual needs of recovering Jews -- and the key role they needed to play in the healing and reconciliation process of addicted Jews and their heritage.

The Board of Rabbis was welcoming and supportive. Together, we hosted Informational meetings for local chaplains, sent mailings to NYBOR members, and developed informational materials that Boards of Rabbis across the country could use to reach their pulpit rabbis. With the NYBOR's help, we also created the first set of special prayer services for Jews in recovery and conceptualized what Jewish 12 step literature should be like. The Board's media department, headed by Buni Veder, arranged many high profile joint radio and television interviews featuring JACS volunteers (anonymously and in shadow) and the NYBOR President. The Board also arranged participation in and coordinated television network coverage of the historic 1<sup>st</sup> National Conference on Addiction.

The Board also made introductions to the major theological seminaries and started us on the path of recruiting rabbinical and cantorial students for JACS retreats. It provided a wonderful strategy for early intervention in clergy education. These seminarians not only played a role in leading retreat religious services, but they often shared very personally about its powerful influence on their own lives and struggles. One of first to express this was an earnest, but truly overwhelmed

cantorial student who described his retreat experience this way, ***"learning about addiction at a JACS retreat is like learning about bowling by being a bowling pin."***

Rabbi Kaplan, affiliated with UAHC (Union of American Hebrew Congregations), helped us to establish the first link to a major branch of institutional Judaism. He arranged speaking engagements, media programs and JACS participation at interfaith meetings on addiction. At one of these, we were surprised to hear that Catholic alcoholics had been as uncomfortable about going to AA meetings in Protestant churches as we Jews had been going to meetings in church basements. With the UAHC, we collaborated on a major educational effort on an "Institutional Response to Substance Abuse" which arranged for a special distribution of resource materials and the JACS VIDEO to 500 congregations.

We also began to address major rabbinical organizations as well. Rabbi James Goodman, from St. Louis, one of our first Reform "JACS Rabbis" joined by along with JACS members, made our first presentation to the CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis) in 1983. Rabbi Jim would also be among the first to start a JACS group outside NY. Another beloved JACS Rabbi, Judea Miller (z'l) played a leadership role in getting the CCAR to pass an official resolution at its conference in 1984 supporting the work of JACS and acknowledging the problem of addiction in the Jewish community. Rabbi Miller (z'l), along with JACS members, would continue to host a Friends of Bill W hospitality room at CCAR conventions.

Relationships with the Conservative movement were developed and promoted largely through the initiative of our first full time Executive Director, Renah Rabinowitz, whose husband, fortunately, happened to be Dean of Students at the Jewish Theological Seminary. JTS provided assistance and access in a number of ways. They provided space for events - we held our first JACS event, a Hanukkah party there. They regularly recruited seminary students for JACS retreats on our behalf. And, they took a leadership role in the development of the Chaplaincy Training Program.

With their help, we reached out to Conservative congregations on a movement wide level through presentations at Biennial Conventions of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ). We began speaking engagements at Conservative synagogues and addressed B'nai Brith, USY (United Synagogue Youth) youth directors associations, teen summer camps and youth leadership groups. We contributed articles to the USCJ Journal and to publications of the Commission on Substance Abuse and Teens in Crisis. Later, another JTS Dean, Rabbi Sami Barth, would become an active "JACS Rabbi," participating at JACS retreats and spiritual days programs, in addition to teaching JACS Jewish education courses and "study programs" for members and education programs for JTS seminarians.

The Orthodox community was the last vestige of religious institutional denial - and the hardest to reach. The tide turned when we met Rabbi Abraham Twerski, M.D - from a historic and highly revered Orthodox family -a psychiatrist, a founder of a drug and alcohol rehab, an expert in chemical dependency, with a strong

commitment to AA. Rabbi Twerski used those impeccable credentials to challenge the Orthodox community - to dispel their belief that only assimilated and liberal Jews were addicts and alcoholics, and to disprove the notion that Judaism and AA were incompatible. Rabbi Abe made it "kosher" to be "frum" and alcoholic/addicted at the same time.

Rabbi Abe, quickly became the "dean" of all of our "JACS Rabbis," and recruited many other Orthodox rabbis as well. He and his cherished wife Golda (z'l), were special favorites at JACS retreats, providing inspiration and support. Rabbi Abe gave interviews, lectured and wrote extensively on addiction, Judaism and the 12 steps. The Orthodox community began to take notice. Orthodox Jews with addiction problems began to surface, go to rehab, join AA and NA, and come to JACS retreats. Rabbi Abe has become a very prolific author, whose career "took off" when JACS encouraged him to write as a rabbi not "just" as a psychiatrist. He has written more than 20 books - and still counting - on Jewish spirituality and the 12 steps, self help, self esteem, addiction and family abuse, and several books with Charles Schulz, analyzing *Peanuts* cartoons from a 12 step perspective!

Orthodox "JACS Rabbis" have taken Rabbi Abe's lead and have begun to speak out in the Orthodox community, write for its publications and address its institutions. Several, have worked with him, walked the walk" with him and directly followed in his stead, including Rabbis Benzion Twerski, Mordechai (Motty) Twerski, and Hirsch Chinn. Joining them are Rabbis David Steinman, Ilan Feldman, Yeshoshua Kaganoff and Nochem Gringras (z'l) who have collectively: led JACS Havurahs, accompanied JACS members on their Israel mission, facilitated the development of JACS groups, and written for the JACS Journal and other Jewish publications.

Orthodox Rabbis and JACS members have addressed the annual conferences of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) and Annual Conference of Orthodox Mental Health Professionals, as well as other major organizations and associations in the Orthodox community,

## **V TALKING TO SCHOOLS, YOUTH, AND TEENS**

Reaching out to the Jewish school system was difficult. Schools were reluctant to invite us in, because, as one teacher told us **"if we invite you in to discuss addiction, we will be assumed to have a problem with addiction."** So we needed to take another path. That path took the form of a formal prevention curriculum which we developed with the Board of Jewish Education (BJE). Rabbi Martin Schloss, the Associate Director of the BJE, joined with Mitch Wallick, then JACS' Director, to collaborate on the curriculum. The strategy was to approach the prevention of substance abuse, as well as other high risk behaviors, in context of Jewish values and building self esteem.

The Prevention Curriculum for Jewish Day Schools was the first to broach the subject of addiction in the schools and was the start of a longer term effort to carry the message to Jewish children. JACS and the BJE made presentations to Jewish

educators and professional associations to promote the curriculum and offer guidance on its implementation. Later, JACS also collaborated on the development of a Curriculum for Adolescents on Substance Abuse with the Orthodox Caucus.

Through a "twist of faith," when we outgrew our second office at the Educational Alliance, the BJE stepped in and gave us office space for our headquarters. This "stepped up" our ability to access the Jewish school system – as did the JACS members who taught in these schools. Though it had taken quite a while to be invited into the schools, once there, we found receptive audiences. Our strategy was to talk about addiction and prevention primarily through first person stories and qualifications of young addicts and family members. Our format was a full day of learning ("yom iyun") with plenary sessions, small group workshops, and summarizing sessions conducted by teachers, treatment professionals and volunteers. Students were willing to listen and to come forward with questions about themselves, friends and families. Educators were eager to work with us to continue the process. We reached large groups of young people and made a strong impact. We estimate we have addressed more than 3500 students throughout NY and NJ since the program began.

The teens wanted to continue the dialogues that began at their schools. So, we *began a series of informational meetings and social activities designed to promote education and positive socialization. Meetings featured general discussions on alcohol and drug use, smoking, and eating disorders. Specific topics addressed self esteem, self preservation, family issues and intervention. Social events included holiday celebrations.* The JACS Teen Network evolved naturally from these initiatives.

The Teen Network reached its maturity with the creation of the first Teen Retreat in 1998. The teens knew about "adult" JACS retreats, and wanted one of their own. The retreat did for the teens what they had done for adults - it brought them together, crystallized the spirituality of recovery, and helped several to overcome the denial of their own addiction. Teen Retreats continue to provide a safe, sober, supportive self help network for addicted teens and significant others, based on the principles of 12 step philosophy and Jewish tradition. Over 160 youth have already gone to Teen Retreats, - with the support of approximately 60 volunteer advisors.

Between retreats, JACS sponsors supportive program, events, and an active Teen Speakers Bureau. The Speakers Bureau focused on schools, youth organizations, and Jewish summer camps makes as well as presenting at JACS events and retreats, clergy training, and seminars for social service professionals. A major bequest in 2001 from The Fehrer Fund, "***impressed by JACS" recent reaching out to the young people in our community in an effort to nip this dreadful problem (of addiction) in the bud,***" has enabled JACS to hire full time staff for the Teen Network.

## **VI HELPING THE SELF HELP COMMUNITY**

JACS has also been able to provide some special services to the self help community. JACS brings leadership to the Council of Mutual Self Help Groups, a network of special interest, 12 step oriented advocacy groups. The Council, based at Hazelden, was the brainchild of Dr. LeClair Bissell (z'l), a JACS Founding Trustee, former director of Smithers Center and Past President of the American Society on Addiction Medicine. The Council has more than a dozen member groups, representing "special populations" including doctors, lawyers, nurses and clergy. The Council meets yearly to give the groups an opportunity to share information, discuss ways to improve communication among their own members, and expand their individual memberships. They have recognized JACS as the most organizationally advanced and have sought our expertise in areas such as member communications, website and retreat programs.

We have offered assistance to those in 12 Step programs concerned with Gambling, Eating Disorders and Sex Addiction, who would like to address Jewish issues in context of their own programs. We have provided consultations, shared our materials, and hosted a one day Big Book Retreat, open to members of these other fellowships, to demonstrate "the JACS way." We helped a UJA/Federation agency for the Deaf to establish an AA meeting for the hearing impaired. We have translated portions of Alcoholics Anonymous materials into Yiddish, made cassette tapes of JACS members telling their stories in Yiddish and Russian, and translated the JACS Video into Hebrew.

JACS has made some very unique matches of our own. We have linked one recovering Holocaust survivor to another and introduced two chemically dependent rabbis to each other. And, we connected a recovering Jewish woman in Kansas City KS with a recovering Jewish woman in Kansas City MO, just cross town - neither of whom imagined the other existed. And, to date, there have been 25 marital matches at JACS, including one between two of our JACS rabbis!

## **VII CLERGY TRAINING**

Though JACS has "experientially trained" over 300 rabbis at our retreats, it was important to formalize chaplaincy training to reach groups of clergy and actively involve them with chemically dependent individuals and families. With grant support from the Tananbaum Foundation we were able to do so, and, in 1991 we developed the first ever formal training course in addiction for rabbis. "Understanding Addiction" is a four day Certificate Program for Clergy in Chemical Dependency and Spiritual Counseling, combining study of Jewish texts, addiction and treatment information, intervention strategies, the role of the rabbi, plus attendance at open 12 step meetings.

The course, which is offered every few years, was developed and co-sponsored by all the major theological seminaries, with the assistance of the NY Board of Rabbis, addiction specialists and JACS staff and volunteers. Institutional sponsors include Hebrew Union College, Jewish Theological Seminary, Yeshiva University/

Wurtzweiler School of Social Work, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and the Academy of Jewish Religion. Participants receive CEU credits, with each seminary awarding its own certification. It is open to rabbis, cantors, and seminary students. The course has been given three times: in 1991 and 1997, hosted at HUC and JTS. The third course, in 2004 was presented in partnership with the Jewish Institute of Pastoral Care, directed by Rabbi Shira Stern ("a JACS rabbi").

The training programs have had a lasting effect on participants, both personally and professional. Sample comments about their experience:

***"The JACS Rabbinical Training Course ... profoundly changed the direction of my rabbinate... Not only did my congregants benefit from my training and concern, I discovered for my own life the power and message of Jewish spirituality."***

***"I believe that these four days have improved my rabbinate in innumerable ways. Whether or not I become a "JACS Rabbi" I will be open and accepting of those struggling with addiction and those in recovery."***

Through our Clergy Training programs, we have trained over 200 rabbis, cantors and seminary students from all branches of Judaism. Many continue to be involved with JACS - serving as spiritual leaders at retreats and speaking at Rabbis Forums and Spiritual Days. We are proud to have trained hundreds of clergy on addiction who play many roles on behalf of addicted Jews and families.

They have become CACs, social workers and addiction professionals themselves. They have given sermons about addiction, invited Jews in recovery to address their congregations, opened their synagogues and agencies to 12 step meetings and assisted in the organization of recovery support groups. They have made innumerable presentations to communal service and religious groups, published articles in leading journals, and presented papers at mental health and psychological associations and at rabbinic conferences.

Two rabbis helped develop the first rehab for Orthodox Jewish youth, another established a program for Orthodox men at an upstate NY treatment facility, others are rabbinic consultants for treatment centers. Several have organized addiction task forces at local federations; founded inter-faith coalitions and created inter-movement collaborations to provide additional resources for addicts in their local /communities. They have served as consultants to legislators and the White House on problems of special populations, including two of our rabbis who served as members of President George Bush's Faith Based Initiative.

Some 25 years ago, Rabbi Barry Woolf said ***"A rabbi should care about alcoholics....I realize they are very busy ... but I believe that no rabbi, no potential rabbi, no potential communal leader should be allowed to graduate... without having gone through what we call CPE Clinical Pastoral Education."*** Through JACS, there are more than 500 rabbis across the country who have received an education about addiction and recovery. A far cry. indeed,

from the days of the first retreat - when Rabbi Barry was the one knowledgeable rabbi we could count and count on!

## **VIII MERGING FORCES WITH JBFCS**

JACS' close relationship with JBFCS (Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services) goes back as far as the beginning of JACS, long before JACS became a project of JBFCS in 1992. From the start, "the Jewish Board" was JACS' professional partner. Jonathan Katz and Vince Vaccaro were the professionals who most often teamed with JACS members to make presentations to Jewish communal agencies. JBFCS was also the first to hold a chemical dependency training program for its social service staff. In preparation, we asked the staff to survey the extent of the problem in their caseloads. The survey indicated that less than 1% of hundreds of clients had substance abuse issues. Clearly, they knew better, and so did we. Together, we helped restructure JBFCS' core client assessment tool to elicit more accurate information on alcohol, substance and prescription drug use of clients. This instrument has remained in use for over 20 years as part of JBFCS' intake assessments - and estimated to have been given to more than 60,000 people!

The idea of a merger between JACS and JBFCS was a natural outgrowth of our cooperative efforts and mutual respect. "As Dr. Alan Siskind, JBFCS's Executive Vice President and CEO, has said, ***"It provided an opportunity to enhance the character and quality of services that each of us provided...We realized that JACS could add a much needed dimension to the services that JBFCS offers and that we, in turn, could offer them administrative and organizational support."***

JBFCS also assured JACS that its identity, mandate, and direction of its programs would be respected and preserved. It recognized JACS as a self help, volunteer driven organization that was not a clinical treatment program, nor would its role be primarily as an outreach and referral unit for JBFCS. Operationally, the merger would enable JACS to have full access to JBFCS support services, relieve it of the burden of raising all of its operating funds itself and provide a direct link to the Jewish community.

Our affiliation of twelve years has been a productive and rewarding one. As part of JBFCS's Jewish Connections program under the guidance and steady hand of Director Jonathan Katz, and overall direction of Community Services Director, Pinchas Berger, with unwavering support of Dr. Siskind we have continued to flourish. Today, under the rubric of umbrella of the Jewish Health, Healing and Recovery Network, more than 20 JBFCS Jewish Connections programs draw on both spiritual aspects of Judaism and good mental health practice to help people to cope with life's challenges and transitions. Early on, Tamar Crystal (now Rabbi Crystal), then JACS' Director, helped expand in-service trainings for JBFCS professionals and presentations to Jewish communal agencies. Opportunities for JACS to partner with other JBFCS agencies have grown and today, JACS regularly joins other Network

programs such as the Jewish Healing Center, Jewish Family Life Education and Bikur Cholim in community outreach presentations.

## **IX RETREATING .... WITH SPIRIT**

**Retreats** have been the heart of the JACS program for 25 years. They are the best way we know for Jews in recovery to connect with each other, their Jewish roots, and find Jewish resources to support their spiritual recovery. They unite people across the entire spectrum of Jewish background, experience and belief.

They are still "spiritual homecomings" - only larger and broader in scope. At our first retreat we had 47 people from 5 states, at our 50<sup>th</sup> Retreat, there were 250 people from 17 states, 2 provinces of Canada and Israel. After 25 years, almost 10,000 people from 34 states and 6 countries have "come home spiritually." Here is a letter which captures what is still the spirit of the JACS Retreat:

### **A Love Letter to JACS:**

***"They came from Kansas, San Francisco, Ohio, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York. We heard, "I wasn't coming, but everything worked out in a way that I was just supposed to be here." There were many diverse reasons but a common thread was, I'm Jewish, and I'm alcoholic. I'm in AA and it saved my life. Yet I needed more. I needed to bring the two things together.'***

***They sat through a Sabbath service where each remembered aloud people they wanted to mourn. They shared at meetings how they felt about being Jewish alcoholics (and addicts). They ate and sang and danced together. They jogged and walked through the fall crispness. A cantor who played a guitar, a rabbi who didn't believe in organized religion, another with a long black coat and long white beard; people who were available to share, listen and understand.***

***These were some of my memories of my first JACS retreat. I felt I had reclaimed part of the heritage I had lost during my addiction. Friends made, addresses exchanged, strength to go forward in a sometimes hostile world. Memories of saying the Shema at the end of an AA meeting. WOW! Who can say what part this will play in my recovery? And yet it will. That I know. As the last speaker said on Saturday night: I wanted to feel a part of all you people. I love you."***

**Spiritual Days and Spiritual Dialogs** were created to provide programming continuity between retreats, enable JACS members to touch base with each other and allow the public, professionals, and pulpit rabbis the opportunity to experience JACS and Jewish recovery and spirituality. JACS has held 15 annual Spiritual Days since 1988, and 9 Spiritual Dialogs (incorporating the Enoch Deutsch lectures) created in memory of Enoch Deutsch, MD (z'l), one of JACS' Founding Fathers.

Spiritual Days explore the richness of Jewish tradition in a 12-step idiom. Panels of rabbis and scholars share insights on subjects such as *12 Traditions and Jewish Traditions, Self Esteem and Spirituality, The Spirituality of Imperfection*. Rabbis' forums are followed by workshops and Q & A sessions. All of the "JACS Rabbis" mentioned in this essay have been among the many wonderful presenters at

Spiritual Days.

Spiritual Dialogues address themes in recovery and spirituality, as well as the history of addiction and the development of AA and 12 step program philosophy. Topics have included: *Civil Liberties and Ethics in Substance Abuse*, *Getting Chai: Life Without Chemicals*, *Jews in Recovery in AA* and *A Symposium On the Lord's Prayer*. Presenters have included: LeClair Bissell, MD(z'), Rabbi Abraham Twerski, MD, Dr. Ernest Kurtz, Rabbi Judea Miller (z'l), and Rabbi Irving Block (z'l). Recent programs have discussed *Living a Spiritual life*, *T'suvah*, *Addiction and Alcoholism Treatment in America* and *Moments with Bill W.* Presenters have been: Rabbi Harold Kushner, Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman, Bill White and Bill McNiff. We estimate that over 2000 people have attended these programs since their inception.

## **X "STEPPING INTO JUDAISM"**

With its strong commitment to helping members advance their Jewish learning through the lens of the 12 steps, JACS has various kinds of educational experiences and learning programs. For almost 8 years JACS sponsored a bi-monthly ***Havurah***, under the leadership of Rabbi David Steinman, to enable members to "to continue to study their Judaism and let their studies have an effect on their lives wherever it may take them." As part of their study of Jewish texts in relation to recovery philosophy, participants created a Jewish Spiritual Dictionary, which examined the Jewish meanings of words in the recovery vocabulary.

JACS has also offered ***Study Groups and Learning Institutes*** on Jewish spirituality, the 12 steps, and Jewish holiday observance including several courses on "Stepping into Judaism. In addition, JACS has presented ***Special Events*** such as Passover Seder Workshops, sober Seders; High Holiday, Chanukah, Sukkot, and Purim workshops and Women's Day programs. In addition, we also have sponsored a US Holocaust Museum visit, Jewish Museum tour, walking tour of the Lower East Side and even hosted a JACS "Comedy Club" evening.

In 1993, JACS also sponsored a remarkable ***Mission to Israel*** for 45 participants, accompanied by two "JACS Rabbis," Ilan Feldman of Atlanta and Motty Twerski, (then) of Denver, and two special friends of JACS, Dr. Ernest Kurtz and Michael Alexander. We toured Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, Safed, and made trips to Masada, Yad Vashem and the Dead Sea. Our "recovery itinerary" included visits to a treatment facility in Beersheba, AA meetings, one of which was in a bomb shelter!, a recovery kibbutz, and hosting a meeting with JACS members who had made aliyah. Additionally, we met with a deputy of the Ministry of Health, and participated in a seminar on "Spirituality and Substance Abuse" at Hebrew University in Jerusalem with Dr. Ernie Kurtz (author of *Not God, A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*).

## **XI SPEAKING OUT; REACHING OUT**

The **JACS Speakers Bureau** was operational the day after the first JACS retreat. It has remained a cornerstone of the JACS mission with the highest level of commitment among volunteers. Currently, we average about 30-40 speaking engagements and presentations each year. We estimate that we have reached between 75,000-100,000 people in person since JACS began. We've also reached hundreds of thousands countless others through media articles and interviews

Today, as it was 25 years ago, JACS members can be counted on to go out into the community to carry the message – and share their stories of addiction, recovery, and spiritual healing. Community presentations - whether to synagogues, schools, community agencies or civic groups - always have a tremendous effect on the audience. They put a face to the disease and give people a true understanding of what addiction and recovery is all about. Often, audience members will “come out” to the JACS speaker, share their own stories and ask for help - for themselves or a family member. Inevitably, we will be asked back for follow up programs with the same result. Letters like this are typical:

***“...The three panelists, each told their incredible moving stories. It was certainly an emotion filled evening. Our sisterhood felt this an important program and thought if one person attending the meeting was helped it was definitely worthwhile. B told us that three members of the congregation approached her after the meeting for more information. In our opinion this made the evening a resounding success. The principal of (the) middle school approached us for more information on the program with the possibility of doing a seminar one day at the school. We now realize how important and necessary JACS is.”***

***“...I want to thank you - JACS, and all the speakers for providing us with a most inspiring program. We have received nothing but positive feedback concerning the substance abuse seminar held at our center. For your information, we had just over 200 people attending the seminar. People were, of course, most impressed with the very personal and emotional stories relayed by the speakers. A number of people did show a definite interest in contacting the speakers personally, concerned about a particular problem of theirs or of a relative. Due to the interest sparked by the seminar, our center and the two high schools that attended are planning follow-up program in substance abuse.”***

JACS members are passionate about being available to speak to people reaching out for help for the first time, and those who are in crisis. Through our **Crisis Hot Line** we have been able to provide immediate response to those who need assistance. JACS volunteers field approximately 2,500 telephone calls a year from addicts and family members and have answered well over 50,000 calls over the past 25 years.

As the only organization of its kind, JACS was quickly propelled into a national arena and, now, an international one as well. This **International Network of JACS Groups** brings together, informally at present, the various JACS groups under a wide umbrella. We recognized early on, the need to develop a “JACS

template" -a model which could be used by others to build JACS groups in their own areas. The JACS retreats provide the core of that template and are the catalyst for development of many new groups as people want to take their JACS experience home and replicate it in their own communities. Over the past 25 years, 72 groups in 28 states, and 10 groups in 5 countries, have been established.

Currently, in 2004, there are approximately 32 active meeting groups in 20 states and 4 countries. Some "groups" are full fledged' organizations (with membership, staff, funding, community support); others are single meetings of Jews in recovery, still others are local "stringers' assisting individual people who need help. Several groups have speakers bureaus, others run their own Retreats and/or Spiritual Days, and about half have affiliations and linkages with Jewish communal agencies, such as Federations and Family and Children's Services. JACS assists these groups by providing technical assistance and mentoring, sharing proposals, and informational materials and developing starter kits to assist in new group formation.

## **XII INFORMING AND INSPIRING**

The ***JACS Journal***, conceived and edited by Jeff Neipris, one of JACS' Executive Directors, was published from 1984-1992, The Journal was recognized as the first authoritative periodical to address concepts about the relation of Judaism to the 12 Steps and Spirituality. The Journal, (with a run of 2500 copies each issue) was distributed to a wide audience, including JACS members, professionals, clergy, community agencies and treatment facilities. It was also available by subscription and was purchased by many libraries across the country. 2500 copies of each issue were.

Of the Journal, Jeff Neipris has written:

***"The JACS Journal was intended to be the publication of and by the JACS membership... JACS members labored to bring together a representative and meaningful publication. A labor of love turned into not only a communal literary treasure but a historical saga of the Jewish recovery movement. The Journals have become widely used research tools and reference materials for any serious student of addiction in the Jewish community. Many of the earliest, definitive, articles on the subjects written by renowned experts, such as Rabbi Abraham Twerski, MD, have been published first in the JACS Journal."***

Among the articles which appeared first in the *JACS JOURNAL* were Rabbi Carol Glass', *The 12 Steps and Jewish Tradition*, (published as *Addiction and Recovery Through Jewish Eyes*), Rabbi Susan Berman's *Judaism, Jewishness and Recovery* (published title), Rabbi Abe Twerski's *Spirituality, Prayer, The Twelve Steps and Judaism*, and an excerpt from Rabbi Kerry Olitsky and Dr. Stuart Copans' about to be released book, *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery: A Personal Guide to Turning from Alcoholism and Other Addictions*. Several stories, poems and prayers from the Journal were incorporated into the JACS women's book, *Jewish Sisters in Sobriety*

**The JACS Newsletter** was created to be the primary news and information link to JACS members in 1992, filling the void when the JACS Journal ceased publication. The Newsletter was edited by Jay Sokolow, MD and published bi-monthly until 2002, when it appeared intermittently. The Newsletter featured experiences about recovery and Judaism, articles on Jewish themes, news of JACS events and activities, a forum for opinions, and spiritual insights and commentary from rabbis. 3000 copies of each issue were distributed. The Newsletter is in the process of being restructured with the hope of facilitating a simultaneous web/print edition.

The **JACS Video** was produced in 1992, jointly by JACS volunteers and Bob Mack Productions through a grant from the Klingenstein Foundation. If it had a title, it might well have been the same as Rabbi Glass' article, *Addiction and Recovery through Jewish Eyes*. The JACS VIDEO features stories of alcoholism, drug addiction, and co-dependency through the eyes of the JACS members who have lived it, and lived through it. The Video also has commentary by addiction treatment professionals on the nature of the disease and insights by rabbis on the relation of 12 step programs to Jewish Spirituality. The Video was developed in both a short and long format. A Hebrew version was prepared for the JACS Mission to Israel and a special edition was prepared for all Reform congregations. To date, more than 1200 copies of the JACS Video have been distributed/ purchased.

**[jacsweb.org](http://jacsweb.org), the JACS website** - created, developed and managed by volunteers - went on line in 1996 (this website is no longer in use). Under the leadership of Maxine Uttal, JACS Director, the website, which was a massive undertaking, has positioned JACS even more prominently as "the" source of information about Jews and addiction. It has changed not only the way we communicate, but dramatically increased the number and nature of those communications. The website is the 1<sup>st</sup> link referenced on Jews and addiction on Google and the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest on Google's Spirituality Groups list (of over 400 citations), and is listed on Best Sites (Religious/Spiritual) by the Encyclopedia Britannica. In 2000 we began to collect site use data which indicated that we get 35,000 "good hits" per year (about 100 "visits" per day - i.e. move around the site). Over four years of collecting data, we have thus averaged over 140,000 visits.

The website also provides important links to the all sectors of the recovery community - individuals, families, professionals, organizations and facilities. JACS provides links to 125 recovery and addiction medicine sites. Reciprocally, hundreds of recovery, addiction treatment and Jewish community sites link to us. For members, the website provides valuable information such as updates on JACS events, information for those wanting to start groups, as well as JACS recovery stories and articles by rabbis, social workers and addiction specialists. The website included an extensive Bibliography of almost 550 entries on topics such as Recovery, Women, Prayer, Meditation, Mysticism, Jewish Texts and Traditions. Over 40% of new inquiries from addicts, families and professionals come from the net. Our newest JACS group, in San Paolo, Brazil began as a result of an on-line inquiry.

JACS has a Data **Base** of over 5,500 names, with approximately 2800 members and 2700 community individuals and organizations, professional agencies, donors, and clergy. JACS “speaks” to its members, through its website and through community mailings of activities calendars and event invitations. JACS has a **Library Collection** of both print and video materials, including 250 hard copy published works on Addiction and Recovery, 12 steps, self help, and Jewish tradition. Our 65 volume Video/Audio library contains tapes and videos from Rabbis forums and speakers’ presentations, Rabbinic sermons on addiction and 12 step discussions by rabbis and JACS Havurahs and study sessions.

The **JACS Discussion List** had approximately 125 regular members posting approximately 300 messages and letter exchanges a day at its peak. It remains a means of intimate, anonymous sharing and a lifeline for members outside the New York area, who are able to crystallize feelings, find help with particular problems and build bonds with others in recovery.

### **XIII RESEARCH...and PUBLICATION**

Since its founding, JACS has been respected as the single, most significant source of reliable information about addiction and recovery in the Jewish community. We have produced a wealth of materials for use by the public and professionals; been featured in countless newspaper, magazines and journal articles; and served as an important resource for researchers, writers and rabbis.

Scientific and scholarly literature has tended to study issues such as genetic and protective factors as to why Jews “avoid” alcohol problems and/or have low incidence rates. Even Jewish social service literature, trying to bring awareness to the problem, is peppered with statements such as “nobody knows exact statistics” nor “whether or not the problem is growing is unclear.”

Prominent data bases such as The National Center on Alcohol and Drug Information, which has 25 affinity group listings, has none for Jews. Of 60,000 reference works on the Rutgers Center on Alcohol Studies website, only 42 citations are on Jews and alcohol/drugs - with over a third related to JACS and the UJA/Federation books. Today, as much as 25 years ago we actively encourage the development of Jewish spiritual literature, the coincidence of AA and the 12 Steps, Jewish tools in recovery.

#### ***The JACS Study I***

JACS has played a key role in facilitating and promoting scholarly, social science research on addiction in the Jewish community. We have helped researchers “ask the right questions and look in the right places.” In the more than 20 years since Dr. Sheila Blume, with co-researcher Dee Dropkin, published a groundbreaking and influential study of Jewish addicts there have been no significant studies which have looked at addiction among Jews, from “the inside out.”

So, In 1998, JACS decided to undertake its own research to develop accurate information about the nature of addiction in the Jewish community, and, to add to the knowledge base. We put together a JACS member, Susan Lind Vex, a pianist *and* social scientist, with Dr. Sheila Blume, to undertake a survey of 3,000 persons in our data base. The project, called the **JACS Study I** was one of the most comprehensive studies of its kind on a homogenous addicted population.

The study identified the characteristics of chemically dependent Jews and their families and looked at variables such as: education and income levels, gender and religious affiliation. It also considered those results in light of comparable studies, including those by AA and Dr. Blume's earlier research to examine male/female ratios, incidence of dual addiction, dual diagnosis and familial history among addicted Jews. Among the findings: an almost identical number of males and females with a primary addiction to alcohol; no significant differences between rates of recovery among denominational subgroups; alienation from Judaism was not the cause of the alcoholism or drug dependence.

The study was published in the Journal of the American Society of Addiction Medicine in November, 2001 and has been well received. Ms. Vex and Dr. Blume were invited to present their findings at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in Chicago in 2001. JACS hopes to have the opportunity to do follow up research on some of the subgroups identified in the study such as Jewish women, Children of Holocaust survivors, and individuals with dual diagnosis.

The ***Jewish Women in Recovery Book***, (published as **JEWISH SISTERS IN SOBRIETY**) was another way for JACS to share with the public at large and our own communities the harsh realities of addiction among Jewish women and the role of the 12 steps in their lives and recovery. "The Women's Book", was conceptualized as a "mini Big Book" for women, to highlight the experiences of chemical dependent Jewish women and their families.

The book presents two dozen first person stories by JACS women sharing about addiction and recovery, the family disease, Jewish spirituality, invisibility, isolation and shame. It also features poems and prayers, a program glossary, bibliography and list of recovery resources. The book project was initiated by Boni Sussman, former JACS Director, and facilitated through a grant from the Jewish Women's Foundation of NY. The Editorial Committee composed of JACS women, handled all aspects of the book's development - from initially reviewing story submissions all the way through creating the final prototype manuscript.

***"Rabbis Write"*** is the term that JACS uses to describe the Jewish recovery literature created leading rabbis, educators, addiction and social service professionals, whom we have encourage and inspired. They are significant pieces of scholarship and are regarded as the definitive examination of aspects of Jewish recovery in a 12 step idiom.

The most prolific of these, has been the extraordinary body of work written by

Rabbi Abe Twerski. His books on recovery issues, self-esteem, daily guides for living reach well beyond the 12 step community. Some of the most seminal works, among them, "Judaism and the 12 Steps" resulted directly from concerns and questions raised by JACS members at JACS Retreats. Book excerpts, articles and commentaries are posted in the JACS website and appear in JACS publications and informational materials.

Examples of other significant JACS related and inspired books, articles and studies include: *From Bondage to Freedom: The Passover Haggadah* by Rabbi Hirsch Chinn, Rabbi Benzion Twerski and Rabbi Abe Twerski; Rabbi Kerry Olitsky's 12 Step Recovery series, starting with *Twelve Jewish Steps to Recovery* (for which JACS wrote the Afterward); *The Spirituality of Imperfection* by Dr Ernest Kurtz; And *Therefore Choose Life* in the United Synagogue Review; and JACS' own *JACS I Study*.

#### **XIV AS ONLY JACS CAN: THE JACS LEGACY**

JACS, in the person of David Buchholz, was twice nominated and twice a finalist in 2001 and 2002 for the prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Innovators in Substance Abuse Awards. The awards highlight the achievements of individuals who have brought creativity and leadership to the field of substance abuse, in areas such as creating awareness, influencing policy, building constituencies and developing innovative strategies. The laborious nominating process allowed us to examine what JACS is and what it does from a new perspective and gain remarkable insight into its unique niche. Through detailed narrative and outcome based grid analysis, we enumerated JACS' achievements qualitatively and quantitatively.

We recognized that JACS gives the broadest possible definition possible to the concept of mutual aid and incorporates several social service/community models into one. We are self help and as we help ourselves, we help the community. In turn, by helping the community, we help ourselves. The same people who deliver services to members are members who in turn receive services. We provide leadership to our volunteers and in turn, our volunteers provide the leadership of the organization. In short, there is no organization quite like JACS, and JACS is like no other organization we know.

Since its inception, the expectations and demands on JACS have been enormous, and far exceeded what could reasonably be expected from an organization of our size and nature. But the commitment to service we learned in our 12 step programs, and our dedication to the Jewish ideal that "he who saves a single soul it is as if he has saved the world," has continued to drive us forward and to persevere. We have been fortunate to have enjoyed - and counted on - the support of so many over the past 25 years - our supporting agencies, funders and contributors; addiction professionals, clergy, and advisory councils, and our hard working, sometimes overlooked staff. They have all helped to steer JACS in the right direction. The members of JACS, and its leadership, have been its heart - the engine that pushes JACS along, sometimes at full throttle, sometimes chugging

along, sometimes faltering - but always moving forward, looking ahead to the next mountain to climb.

Our record of 25 years is, by all accounts, remarkable:

***By our very existence,***

we have changed public awareness, perceptions and attitudes toward addiction in the Jewish community. We have demonstrated that we are 'no longer immune to addictive disease' - if, indeed, we ever were! And, we have brought addiction in the Jewish community out of the shadows and onto the agenda of Jewish institutional life.

***By our actions,***

we have changed the way the needs of recovering Jews are being met by the treatment and religious communities. We have advocated for new Jewish communal services and for removal of unwitting barriers to treatment for Jewish patients. And, we have developed a unique model and fostered the development of dozens of independent JACS groups nationally and internationally.

***By our example,***

we have demonstrated through our membership the concept of "CLAL YISRAEL" by harmoniously embracing the full spectrum of Jewish belief and practice. We have achieved acceptance by all elements of an often polarized religious community and are respected as "credible emissaries" and "neutral catalysts" for change of attitudes on addiction. And, we have facilitated the involvement of clergy to address the spiritual needs of addicted Jews and further the integration of Jewish tradition into the recovery process.

As Dr. Sheila Blume says on the JACS Video, ***"there have been Jewish alcoholics (and addicts) right along. Addictions in the Jewish community have been there all the while. Whether there are more of them or less of them is less important than recognition that it is there, and getting prevention and treatment to the community."***

This is the heart and spirit of JACS. For, above all, in the final analysis, what is most important is that we have helped thousands and thousands of Jewish people find their way to treatment and recovery from their addiction and the sickness of their Jewish souls. Of that, we are most proud and grateful. This is our most precious accomplishment and lasting legacy.

Written by Audrey Waxman and David Buchholz,  
with the inestimable contribution of Maxine Uttal - March, 2004