

Publisher's Note



WHEN DID “power” become a pejorative in Jewish communal life? The concept seems to have traveled from aspiration to accusation at record speed. Those who have power, whether they are funders and federations or soldiers and statesmen, are viewed with suspicion, if not hostility, in some quarters of the Jewish community. Morality is frequently conflated with the abdication of power rather than its use.

This attitude is so at odds with our understanding of the imperatives of Judaism, and so unhelpful to those who truly wrestle with the obligations and opportunities of power, that a more substantive and thoughtful reckoning with the complexity of power seemed a worthy endeavor for our second issue.

We have a sign in the Maimonides Fund office that states, “We are in the change business.” If Jewish life did not need to change, to improve, to become more resonant, our funders would have chosen a different avenue for their philanthropy. Our resources, financial and otherwise, give us an opportunity to foster such change, to try to strengthen and improve the community we care so much about. We try to be good listeners, to have humility, to not think there is

only one right way forward. But we are not under the illusion that every way forward is equally good.

Power and humility are not easy bedfellows, as many of the essays in this issue make plain. But eschewing power to satisfy some false modesty is folly. The biblical imperative to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19) commands us to act with deliberation, as partners with the Almighty—but to act.

Power provides us with a voice. As a foundation, our grantmaking is our primary means of articulation, and we are proud of the diversity of efforts that make up our portfolio, the range of partners we work with, and the symphony of Jewish ideas that we amplify, even when those ideas are in tension with each other. SAPIR is another way we exercise that voice, highlighting issues, ideas and authors that we believe deserve broad attention. Power can be used unethically, but the abdication of responsibility is a more potent threat to the future of the Jewish community. *