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What is a Rabbi's Role Today?

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

The classical role of the rabbi as teacher and philosophical guide persists, but more and more rabbis are taking on additional job duties as community organizer, fundraiser, if not CEO. In some congregations and organizations we can add the job of webmaster.

The Internet has taken over all aspects of our lives, no less our Jewish ones, and we would be remiss to ignore it. It has become a boon, not a threat. If we believe in promoting Jewish literacy for all Jews and not keeping this the private privilege of rabbis who will mediate it for the people, then the web is an incredible tool for spreading knowledge. The wealth of information that is available is staggering and it becomes a ready resource for quick answers as well as learned essays. Our job, no different than it was before, is to point people in the right direction to reliable sources, useful readings, as well as entertaining websites.

The web has also become the portal that newcomers are likely to visit first before even visiting our congregations or organizations. They can "shul-hop" without leaving home. So our own websites – like www.citycongregation.org – are becoming ever more critical to convey the excitement, principles, and unique quality of our institutions to fleeting visitors. These websites also deliver an array of information, including talks by members and the rabbi, not to mention the remarkable research papers of our bar and bat mitzvah students that are worthy of on-going transmission to our own members as well as to learners around the globe.

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