In October 2007, we opened our Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Our goal was--and still is--to promote an Orthodox Judaism that is intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive. Our Institute is a strong--and often lonely--proponent of an Orthodoxy that eschews authoritarianism, extremism, and religious coercion.

The same day that we opened our Institute, I phoned my colleague Rabbi Avi Weiss. Both of us shared the feeling that Orthodoxy was growing narrower, that authoritarian bureaucracies were undermining the status of local synagogue rabbis, that the "Modern Orthodox" movement and institutions were veering further and further to the right.

Rabbi Weiss and I met...and we decided to call a conference of Orthodox rabbis. Our Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and Yeshivat Chovevei Torah were our institutional sponsors. Thirty five rabbis met in West Palm Beach...and the meeting was extraordinary. We framed the conference as a "safe space" where rabbis could speak freely, honestly and confidentially. It was very clear that Rabbi Weiss and I were not alone in our concerns about the direction of Orthodoxy. In 2008, we sponsored another gathering--this time attracting over seventy rabbis--and the group decided it was time for us to establish a new rabbinic organization for Orthodox rabbis.

This was the founding moment of the International Rabbinic Fellowship.

On Sunday night June 17, the International Rabbinic Fellowship (IRF) held a dinner as part of its tenth annual conference, at which Rabbi Weiss and I had the opportunity to share our thoughts on the state of Orthodox Judaism in general, and about the IRF in particular. For Rabbi Weiss and me, it was a memorable evening.

During the past ten years, the IRF has grown into an organization of nearly 250 Orthodox religious leaders...and it continues to grow. Unique among Orthodox rabbinic groups in the United States, the IRF is proud to count women religious leaders among our membership. The discussions at the conference sessions were enhanced by the participation of men and women who brought their perspectives to the issues under consideration.

Rabbi Weiss and I are gratified that the IRF has become a vital, creative, inclusive rabbinic organization that stands for the best in Orthodox Judaism. We are gratified that the younger generation has taken on leadership with enthusiasm, wisdom and optimism.

I personally am pleased that our Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals was a catalyst in bringing the IRF into existence. We had--and have--a lot of hurdles to climb. But we have held firm...and we have
seen that our vision of an intellectually compelling, emotionally satisfying, and spiritually elevating Orthodoxy is a vision that finds resonance among so many.

Hazak uvarukh to the IRF on its 10th anniversary. Hazakim uvruxhim to all supporters of our Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. You have been, and continue to be, partners in our important work. If we stand together, we can accomplish great things.

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