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# The Jewish Week

SERVING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF GREATER NEW YORK

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## Under One Roof

**Steve Lipman**

Uri Cohen, a young Upper West Side Jewish activist, has a new idea for fostering Jewish unity — have members of the three major denominations worship at the same time under one roof. Actually, one roof and three ceilings.

As the first activity of his newly formed Tikvat Yisrael (Hope of Israel) organization, three separate Kabbalat Shabbat minyans will be held tonight at 6 p.m. at the Abraham Joshua Heschel Lower School on West 89th Street, followed by a joint, catered kosher meal.

Cohen, a recent graduate of the University of Pennsylvania who works as a fund-raising consultant for nonprofit organizations, says he hopes to duplicate, the mutual respect that members of the various denominations often share on campus — he was active at Hillel in college. He calls the kickoff event the first such program that brings Jews together under the rubric of prayer.

Cohen, 24, is “traditional egalitarian”; the dozen members of the independent, grassroots organization’s steering committee come from the Conservative, Orthodox and Reform movements.

Tonight’s services, in separate rooms, will be separate seating (Orthodox), traditional egalitarian (mainline Conservative) and liberal (Reform).

“While many other Jewish organizations that look to bridge denominational gaps often shy away from prayer, considering it an issue that divides ... Tikvat Yisrael focuses on commitment to prayer as a fundamental tie that binds Jews together,” Cohen says. “Our mission is to reinforce the aspects of Jewish life that link those individual parts to form the larger community to which they belong.”

Members of each minyan tonight will deliver short divrei Torah on the same subject, which Cohen will address at the meal.

“We’re not doing dialogue. We’re not doing debate. We’re not doing discussions” about unity, he says. “Something I don’t want to happen is the people coming away saying that was forced.”

Tikvat Yisrael, Cohen says, appeals to “people who have the vision of a more-unified Jewish community.” He promoted the event through on-line notices and flyers. “We’ve had nothing but positive responses.” (For information: [646] 382-1500 or [www.tikvatyisrael.org](http://www.tikvatyisrael.org).)

“Community meals are not enough,” he says — worshipers coming from various congregations, passing on the street, don’t get a sense of their neighbors.

Neighbors who belong to different denominations usually go to their own congregations on Shabbat, then return to meals in their own homes, Cohen says. Tonight, “we’ll see each other coming out of the

davening services. That commonality will bring us to the same place.”

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