
Shoshana Cardin

1926–, BALTIMORE CITY

I have a sense of bashert, or destiny: I was given special gifts and talents to help carry out God's covenant with the Jewish people. Tradition teaches that God gave us the responsibility of tikkun olam—to improve this very imperfect world. I am carrying out my share of the covenant.

This is not a burden to me, but it is a serious responsibility. Even as a child, I was concerned about people who were impoverished, homeless, or mistreated. Perhaps it was because my parents spoke about what was happening to Jews in World War II and in Palestine that I understood the hatred and insensitivity that can exist between people. I also knew that I could take on a healing role. God gave everyone in this world a role to play that includes compassion, caring, and gemilut hasadim—acts of loving-kindness. I don't think everyone needs to assume the weight of the world's problems, but if we break the world's problems down to those within our own province, everyone can assume some responsibility to reduce the level of hostility, anger, and pain, and increase the level of understanding.

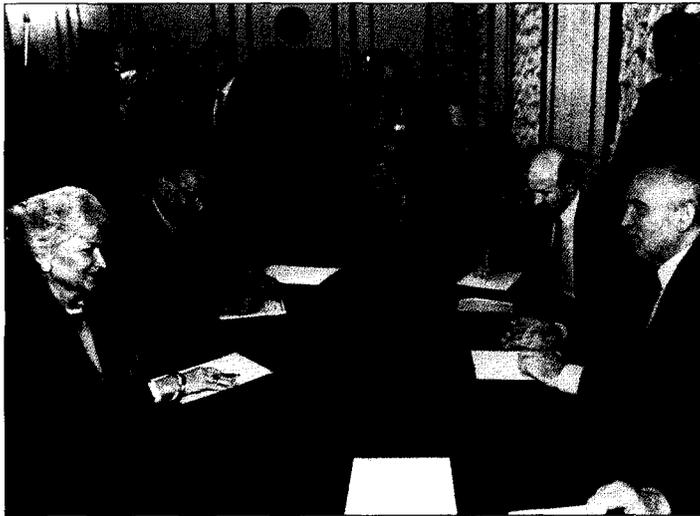
—SHOSHANA CARDIN



COURTESY OF CHARLES L. SMITH, PHOTOGRAPHER

In September, 1991, the philosophy by which Maryland activist Shoshana Cardin lived carried her through imposing Kremlin walls to a personal meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev, premier of the USSR. As she sat across the table from the powerful leader, she thought of czarist Russia's pogroms, the murders of Jewish doctors and writers under Joseph Stalin, the Zionist prisoners' ordeal, and the ruthless KGB. Cardin knew that increasing numbers of Jews were being allowed to leave the Soviet Union under Gorbachev's rule, but a fair emigration law had yet to be enacted. Now she was face to face with the leader of a nation that had caused much Jewish suffering, and it was up to her to say what needed to be said (Segal 94).

Cardin urged Gorbachev to comply fully with international standards for freedom of emigration. Then she raised the subject of anti-Semitism, asking the leader to take a stronger stand against it. Although he refused, only one hour after the meeting, Gorbachev issued a public radio address condemning anti-Semitism, the first such statement ever made by a Russian leader. The news made headlines around the



Representing the Council of Jewish Federations, Shoshana Cardin (left) meets with Mikhail Gorbachev (right) in Moscow in 1991.

areas: childcare, credit, education, employment, the Equal Rights Amendment, female criminals, health issues, homemakers and the family, international interdependence, aging women, rape, volunteerism, women business owners, women in the media, and women in influential positions—elected or appointed.

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During her tenure as chair of the MCW, Cardin recognized the need to assist abused women—to educate them, to offer them support systems and protection. Determined to effect change in a system that too often ignored women trapped in abusive households, Cardin convened the first state conference on battered women. That conference and subsequent coalition efforts culminated in the founding of the House of Ruth in Baltimore and served as the pilot for other shelters and safe houses around the state.

Cardin's voice was influential in other forums too. In 1974, Cardin coauthored the first comprehensive guide to women's credit rights, *Women: Where Credit is Due*. The book explained to women, single, married, divorced, or widowed, what their rights to credit were, how to get credit, and what actions to take to ensure fair credit consideration under the laws.

In all her leadership roles, especially as president of the Council of Jewish Federations, 1984-1987, Shoshana Cardin has met with United States presidents and governors, as well as world leaders. Her six honorary doctorates are testament to the courage she has demonstrated, holding firmly to her convictions and loudly voicing concerns, even in the face of adversity. Never has Shoshana Cardin feared speaking out and taking a stand. *Tikkun olam*. “To remain silent would be wrong.” ❁

world. Cardin reacted to this achievement the way she has responded to others: “Whether I work for the United Way, the March of Dimes, the Maryland Commission for Women, or the Council of Jewish Federations, I believe that each of us has the chance to make the world a better place.”

Born in Israel and raised in Baltimore, Cardin, a 1945 graduate of Johns Hopkins University, never consciously planned a leadership career. However, her abilities, augmented with an M.A. in planning and administration from Antioch University, and her tireless efforts have led her to navigate the shoals of social change in many arenas. During International Women's Year, 1975, Cardin chaired the Maryland Commission for Women (MCW). Her administrative acumen led to seminars attended by thousands of women who identified numerous barriers preventing women from achieving their full potential (Cardin). Maryland women participants created the Maryland Women's Agenda, which grouped recommendations into fifteen

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Carolyn B. Stegman

Edited by Suzanne Nida Seibert