

Jewish Educational Leadership and Priorities for the Eighties: A Jewish-Zionist-Humanist Perspective

I. The Jewish-Zionist-Humanist Perspective

In my view, the challenges facing Jewish education and the types of educational leadership needed to confront them in the eighties are rooted in a Jewish-Zionist humanist perspective. This perspective is humanist in its commitment to the modern echos of human freedom and responsibility, Jewish in its view of Judaism as a part of human culture and of Jews as a unique people within humanity, and Zionist in its unequivocal affirmation of the active and creative role Jews should play in participating in the cultural, social, economic and political spheres of contemporary life. The dyadic Jewish-humanist relationship is conceived in terms of the right and duty of the Jews to survive — physically and cul-

turally — while integrating their historic religio-cultural tradition with their lives in modern times. This entails perceiving Judaism as a religious culture concerned with all aspects of human life from the most mundane to the most spiritual. The Jewish-Zionist-humanist triad is founded on the belief that the Jewish realization of the modern ethos of freedom and responsibility is generically tied to the exercise of political sovereignty. Only Israel offers a real opportunity to Jews to integrate fully participation in all spheres of human culture with the Jewish religio-cultural heritage.

II. Challenges Facing Jewish Education — Description and Analysis

With this perspective in mind, let us examine the challenges facing Jewish life and education in the Diaspora today, and then consider the educational leadership needed to meet them.

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1. *The Discontinuity Between General and Jewish Culture (Humanness and Jewishness)*: Most Jews living in democratic countries of the Diaspora, the largest being America, experience radical discontinuities between their interest and active participation in the life and culture of their societies and their involvement in Judaism. These discontinuities, while understandable, eventually produce either complete assimilation (Americans of Jewish origin) or peripheral, superficial, inspirational Jewishness (Americans of Jewish inspiration). Achad Ha'am claimed that Jewish culture would disintegrate the moment Jews would be allowed to integrate fully with cultures of non-Jewish societies they inhabit. Among the Americans of Jewish origin, being Jewish is such an inconsequential part of one's identity it is rendered virtually irrelevant. Judaism is no longer part of the assimilated Jew's "plausibility structure." According to recent estimations intermarriage is as high as 40%. The Jewish demographer, Sergio della Pergola, estimates that only approximately one third of Jewish children receive some form of Jewish education.

The inspirational type of Jewishness manifests itself in phenomena such as:

a) Jewishness of emotional highs and vicarious enjoyment (week tours to Israel; Jewish identification through reading headlines about Israel) and emotional lows (Holocaust commemoration days, board games and "you were there" experiential programs). Arthur Hertzberg has claimed that the reading of newspaper headlines concerning Israel has replaced the traditional study of the daily Mishna page. The relationship between Diaspora Jews and Israel is characterized by a double paradox. Their bond with the Jewish State is limited to financial and political

support but the option of *aliyah* is rarely considered seriously. Nevertheless, this restricted relationship constitutes, according to Charles Leibman and others, the central aspect of Jewish identity in the Diaspora. The Alternatives in Religious Education staff recently produced a Holocaust Board Game, *Gestapo*, in which pupils using playing cards are asked to trade work permits or food rations for lives. The winner of course is the one who holds the most life cards. This and similar abuses of the Holocaust tempt one to agree with the cynical quip that "there's no business like shoa business." These highs and lows probably do indeed provide Jews with heightened Jewish consciousness and identification. Yet, they are not accompanied by serious Jewish knowledge or understanding and rarely obligate those undergoing them to more than feelings.¹

b) Jewish parents "who want Jewish education but not too much of it."

c) The Jewish education generally provided to children is fragmented and sporadic, unprofessional, and unsophisticated and trivial in comparison with the content and methods of general education.

2. *Humanist Judaism Severed From Zionism and the State of Israel*: The second major challenge — the more serious one, I believe, with ramifications both for the possibility of confronting creatively the first challenge and for determining the future of the Jewish People in general — is that a growing significant number of the Jewish minority committed to Judaism as a serious life style are not only not making *aliyah* but are making an ideology of not doing so. This severing of

1. See Cynthia Ozick "Full Stomachs and Empty Rites", in *Congress Bi-Weekly* (23/1/67).

Judaism and Jewish life from Israel expresses itself in various ways: 1) The recent resolutions of the World Jewish Congress in which Israel is viewed as just another Jewish community; 2) The portrayal of America as the New Babylon; 3) Recent articles in *Response* denying the centrality of Israel for Judaism and Jewish life; 4) The presentation of Judaism as an aesthetic spiritual sensibility and the Jews as a non-territorial, non-political people whose responsibility is to be an anti-majoritarian voice criticizing the sins of the powers that be.

One of the reasons for this phenomenon lies in sincere resentment at the superficial type of Jewishness described above. Another is the real possibility of living a Jewish life through home, community and synagogue (without the necessity of exercising Jewish political sovereignty and socio-economic responsibility). After all, the claim goes, Jews lived that way for over 2000 years, and the Orthodox anti-modernists seem to be succeeding quite well.

Whatever may be the reasons, this type of Jewishness poses a great threat to Jewish education and life in the eighties. First, it encourages disunity and an ominous schism between Israel and the Diaspora. The same, of course, can be said of the ideology of radical normalization and denial of the *Galut* that has recently gained some ground in Israel.² Secondly, a false and un-Jewish dichotomy is abetted between the spiritual and real, the cultural and the political, the metaphysical and the empirical. Thirdly, without Israel, those who hold this position are in danger of becoming a Jewish intellectual elite

without a real people. And, finally, without their support the chances of utilizing the existing sociological potentialities of Israel to create a fully modern human Jewish culture are lessened.

III. Educational Leadership and Priorities to Meet These Challenges

The types of educational leadership needed for the eighties arise out of the crucial tasks that should be undertaken to meet the two major challenges described above. Each type is a necessary but insufficient condition of the possibility of success. Only when combined together will they become ultimately effective. These tasks and types of leaders necessary to achieve them are:

1) Locating ideas, views, approaches within the Jewish religio-cultural tradition and applying them to the burning concerns of contemporary man. These ideas and approaches must compete with general or non-Jewish ones on these issues. They must be translated into sophisticated educational materials and programs for formal and informal youth and adult frameworks. To achieve this there is a need to develop:

a. Philosophers of Jewish education who can both explain the contemporary significance of Judaism to man and translate this into Jewish educational theory. The doctoral dissertations of Dr. Mike Rosenack and Dr. Oded Schremer are pioneering efforts in this direction. In the first, J. B. Soloveitchik's and Emil Fackenheim's philosophies of Judaism are translated into educational theory, and that of Martin Buber in the second.

2. See e.g., A. B. Yehoshua, *In Praise of Normalcy*.

b. Educationally oriented Jewish scholars who can bring the fruits of their research to bear on the contemporary issues and quests of modern man. I believe that Prof. Daniel Elazar's work on the Jewish Political Tradition and Prof. Moshe Greenberg's work on the Religious-Moral-Ethical Ideas of the Bible are examples of the type of scholarship needed.

c. Jewish curriculum experts and teachers of teachers who will be able both to translate the educational theory and subject matter into sophisticated educational materials and to train teachers in their utilization. I believe that the curriculum staff of the Jewish values project of the Melton Center in Jerusalem and that of the Melton Center in New York are examples of such leadership.

d. Jewish teachers and youth and community leaders who will be able to implement these materials into the actual educational settings of the Diaspora.

2) Creating a set of in-depth study programs and tours in Israel, preceded, accompanied and followed up by a serious course on the Modern Jewish Historic experience (with special emphasis on Zionism, the Holocaust and Contemporary Jewish communities). The underlying purpose of this course and Israel study tour would be to expose the types of Jew described above (assimilated, inspirational, and non-Zionist Jewish humanist) to the diverse and often opposing models of Jewish humanness in Israel, and to make educational use of the actual and potential integration that exists in Israel

between the spheres of modern human creativity and culture and Jewish tradition and values. For example, the *kibbutz* as a living and real life expression of modern socialism and at the same time related to Jewish notions of *K'hilla*, *Tzdaka* and *Tzedek*. The study course would deal with the crucial issues that faced and continue to face the Jew as an individual and as a member of a people in the modern period and the diverse responses made to them, e.g., the diverse ways in which Jews have understood and responded to anti-Semitism.

To achieve this goal, types of leadership similar to those described above are needed. Specifically: a) educationally oriented modern Jewish historians, sociologists and social-psychologists; b) curriculum experts and teachers of teachers; c) teachers and leaders to implement these materials and programs.

These two major tasks are essential but insufficient to meet the challenges outlined above, even if implemented in formal and informal educational settings. The heart of the problem of Jewish education in the modern world is ultimately the sociological reality of a minority culture producing discontinuities between Jewish and general life. Even if Judaism succeeds in competing and winning the battle of ideas and views, it still can lose the battle of everyday living. Moreover, even if Jews of the Diaspora come to appreciate the excitement of being Jewish in Israel and benefit from the types of Jewish human integration which exist there, many will return to their homes in the Diaspora. Is there a solution to this sociological dilemma? I do believe it can be modified, if not completely resolved.

3) This modification brings us to the third and final task: creating a Jewish sub-

culture and ecology of Jewish education within the pluralistic non-Jewish societies — without exploiting the latter or adopting an anti-modernist cultural stand; eliminating the distinction between formal and informal education; integrating home, community and school; weekend retreats, Jewish communal winter seminars and summer camps; adult Jewish education; and Jewish family life education.

Needless to say, the types of educational materials outlined above, as well as professional and committed teachers, will be extremely helpful in this educational venture. But the degree of success will depend upon a new type of community

leader required as educational director of such a program. He must be an educational personality *par excellence*, with effective administrative and communicative talents and a deep knowledge of Jewish and general culture.

In conclusion, I am convinced that the program outlined above can meet the challenges confronting Jewish education in the eighties. Israel must continue to play a central role in this process, but the Diaspora will also be viable if, together with Israel, it creates within its respective general societies its own models of Jewish humanness and Jewish educational ecologies.

*MAIMONIDES' PARABLE**Leo Schneiderman*

Some are outside the gates
 Of the ruler's palace
 And some have found their way
 Inside the walls.
 Others, more fortunate,
 Have entered the inner part
 Of the habitation
 And even walk about
 In the antechambers
 Or dare to venture
 Into the inner court
 On the way to the king's
 Remote council chamber
 Where the worship of the heart
 Takes place in solitude.
 Where, then, is the ruler?
 He is a seeker, too,
 And has wandered far from
 His inner sanctum, leaving it deserted
 while
 He searches for lost souls
 Outside the gates of the celestial city
 His heart filled with divine pity
 And a sense of immeasurable solitude.

*THE MOUNTAIN BENEATH
THE SEA**Leo Schneiderman*

There is a mountain
 Beneath the sea
 Where the holy vessels
 Of the fallen Temple
 Are stored under
 The primordial waters
 But the sacred objects
 Will not surface all at once at
 Messiah-time, as some suppose.
 On the contrary,
 First, deep-sea divers
 (Who can stand the pressure
 At the lower depths)
 Will descend to bring back
 The sunken treasures
 One at a time over the centuries
 Until all the pieces are in place
 Then the Temple will be rebuilt
 To house the relics
 But people will look in vain
 For silver candlesticks and such
 Because God's house will be
 Miraculously filled with
 The invisible ornaments
 Of the human spirit.