

Toward Enriching the Quality of Jewish Life: After 75 Years, A Look Ahead*

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THE theme of this session and of the entire annual meeting is broad and this broad spectrum is so inviting. However, before looking to the future, it is worthwhile to take a momentary glance at the past. In reviewing the literature of the past three-quarter century, I noted with great interest the words of the first executive director of Baltimore's Federation who, in 1921, in his presidential address to the National Conference of Jewish Social Service, was urging the Jewish community to "Dare To Be Different" by using its social service skills to broaden and strengthen the general community's services and responsibility.¹ This speech of fifty years ago is truly a benchmark of history, because it was the social service leadership of the Jewish community that helped shape, helped lead and helped man the public system in the four decades that followed. I begin with this reflection because in 1973 our community has turned inward. This is essential as I see it and as I will briefly develop this evening. But, just as my early predecessor exhorted the professional leadership, so do I. We must not abandon our role nor our continuing interest in the broader welfare undertaking of our nation. This responsibility, which is at this moment being discussed in Atlantic City just fifty-nine miles from here, is our responsibility.²

One of the tasks then before us is to deal with our internal priority without abandoning the external obligations.

Looking back is not difficult because we have the literature to examine, but to look at where we are today becomes nearly impossible. At best, we can make some generalizations. For example, our Program Committee has made available to us the excellent abstract work of the Committee for Conference Study Materials, under Dr. Solomon H. Green's chairmanship.³ The abstracts, however, are of material developed two and three years ago. Much has happened since. For example, social service programs in our nation are in the midst of confusing and drastic change. Major expressions of concern are being delivered by many leaders, groups and individuals because of religious proselytizing that has been accentuated in the last twelve months. The Institute for Jewish Life has already committed \$90,000 into twenty-one projects and has five additional under consideration for \$150,000. These are just a few examples of the current events that affect any kind of statement on where we are at any given moment.

In looking at where we are and then looking forward, we recognize that we are in the midst of constant change, that out-

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¹ Alexandra Lee Levin, *Dare to Be Different*. New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1972, p. 222.

² Centennial Forum of the National Conference on Social Welfare, Atlantic City, New Jersey, May 27-31, 1973.

³ Committee for Conference Study Materials, *Abstracts*, NCJCS Annual Meeting, 1973.

side forces require our continuing attention and response and that we neither have the luxury nor the privilege of planning in Jewish community life without being prepared for emergencies, modification and even alternate courses.

In looking to the future, we must recognize that all through our history, Jews have sought new approaches to Jewish life. This was necessitated by not only challenges from within, but by the impact of the world in which they lived. So must we view our considerations affected by these forces.

My few remarks this evening obviously must be presented not from the point of view of the philosopher but from the point of reference of one professional involved in defining, planning and implementing in the Jewish community. (The philosopher may be more practical than the practitioner.) What I plan to do is to ask you to think with me about three major areas of concern, to examine briefly these areas, to consider some questions about them and to conjecture about possible change. Yet, even to discuss just three areas will bring us full circle into discussion of the interaction of a large number of other areas of concern. So, let me indicate at the outset that the areas about which I will speak this evening ever so briefly are: the Jewish family; Jewish education — formal and informal; and resources and allocations of the Jewish community.

The Jewish Family

We yearn for what has been called the "Jewish home." Each of us conjures up his own imagery. We visualize the mother and father, the grandmother, the three or four children around the dining room table. We recall that here is where the value system was developed; that here is where cultural underpinning was created; that here is where the joy of re-

ligious tradition was demonstrated; that here is where we proclaimed the practice of Tzedakah. We enjoyed the joyous experience of the Shabbat, and we yearn with nostalgia for the discussion and the debate. Whatever the imagery, recent scientific studies tell us that this is no more. Hostility to the parents has expressed repudiation of Jewish identity.

The simplistic view of the Jewish family will not suffice if we are serious about strengthening Jewish identification and family structure. If we agree that the family is a primary area of concern, then it merits our full attention, resources and skills. We must be engaging in an ongoing process of study and research on the family. The fact that the Jewish population has 5.6 percent less than the general population of young under fourteen years of age and 1.2 percent more who are over sixty-five years of age is only pertinent if we begin to develop projections for the next decade on the Jewish birthrate, deathrate, age distributions — all that are geared to interpretation to our planners and practitioners.⁴ This must be done at the local level because it must be geared to studies of mobility and to projections of communal services.

The nature of the Jewish family must be analyzed for our understanding. How many hours per week is a father in the home? How many hours per week is a child in communication with either parent, if there are two? How many hours a week does a child engage in Hebrew study? Obviously, you and I could list a hundred such questions; but while we are getting the answers, we must be looking at what we already know. How do we strengthen the self-image of an individual as a Jew?

Those of us assembled here today have been credited by many as being among the finest clinicians in casework, group

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 18.

work, community relations and education; but none of us have really put ourselves into a development of a comprehensive program of Jewish family life education. I don't mean the one-shot efforts that have been attempted, nor do I mean some of the programs that have not included the word Jewish. What I do mean is an effort that brings our skills together in an interdisciplinary effort. I mean an effort that has a reaching out to synagogues, organizations, clubs, and so forth to find entry into the families that are seeking answers, answers to questions they cannot even pose.

Let me pose a couple of questions. Does our Jewish education establishment have the resources and the skills to educate our caseworkers and group workers in order to develop their knowledge, skills and sensitivity to Jewish identity issues? Do our caseworkers accept the responsibility or comprehend the responsibility of a major role in Jewish family life education? If so, how do we train these practitioners? As one begins to raise the basic questions, many additional questions emerge. Will a Jewish Federation supply leadership and financing for a total comprehensive approach? If so, where does a community find the human resources to implement such a program?

I think you begin to see the point. This is not simply making a commitment to enhance Jewish family life; it has far reaching implications. Spell them out — education, training, program planning, intervention and financing. Each area is a major undertaking.

Without getting into any detail, I simply want to make a reference to a demonstration project in which we are engaged in my own community of Baltimore. This project is now two and a half years in the making; and, if all goes well, will begin full operation just about a year from now. It has been funded by a special grant of over \$100,000 by our

Federation. Three agencies and the Federation are creating a full-time, eight-week (summer) training center for approximately twenty-five carefully screened and selected college students. They will be trained in both content and methods to relate and bring to families, classrooms, and groups special enrichment material to help participants in each setting evolve to their desire and satisfaction a positive approach to Jewish living.

This is but a demonstration. It will bring agencies together with other agencies; agencies and synagogues together. It recognizes the necessity of an innovative training process. It is but one approach to the whole area of family education. It is not an answer but one approach.

The American Jewish Committee Task Force suggests that programs in family education represent a promising approach for those concerned with the continuity of Jewish identity.⁵ If Jewish family education represents promise, then should we not be viewing this as a priority? It has been said that the Jewish professional guides and shapes the program of the Jewish community. I believe this is so. Then leadership falls upon us to shape the programs. The policy makers are seeking guides and are looking to professional leadership. A priority need usually requires a comprehensive response. This is within the sphere of our leadership. I believe we have the appropriate climate for undertaking such action. Ours is the task of having the priority established in reality. We must advance the program for action. This will require the development of mechanisms for interdisciplinary action. This will necessitate new training for present professionals and new forms of training

⁵ *The Future of the Jewish Community in America*. A Task Force Report, New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1972.

for young men and young women coming into Jewish community work. Attempts are being made at this on several fronts. To the extent that these innovative endeavors succeed will be the underpinning of new program direction.

It appears to me that a large number of Jewish young people of high school, college and post-college age want to be a part of our peoplehood. Even this generation of parents desires to be motivated; to partake of a quality endeavor. If the professional leaders — educators, rabbis, social workers — can advance meaningful alternatives, then the future strength of our Jewish family structure, whatever that structure may be, will be the basic underpinning of the Jewishly identified individual, the Jewish institutions and the quality Jewish community of the future.

If the family is the basic structure of a quality Jewish life, then our Jewish education system must be the generator of light that is sent forth into the home and ultimately into the community.

Jewish Education—Formal and Informal

The subject of Jewish education, obviously, requires more attention than can be given it in these brief remarks. It is, however, essential that its importance and its difficulties be perceived as we look to the future of the American Jewish community.

As we sit here this evening, we actually should be joined by the rabbinate of America. The alliance that is essential is not only inter-disciplinary but also inter-institutional. Our discussion must include the synagogues, for without them, the basic approach to Jewish education in America in the Seventies cannot be improved. It is essential that we view an all-out total community effort.

It is not my intention to set forth a plan for Jewish education for the next

decade, but rather to project some avenues for exploration. I will not repeat the shortcomings and difficulties that exist today, but simply attempt to make an input into one of the areas of highest priority of our time.

Thirteen years ago, I presented a paper in Detroit at the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, at which time I was assailed by some of my colleagues in the field of Jewish education.⁶ The basic assumption that I set forth was the necessity for comprehensive Jewish community planning for a Jewish educational system. I urged that those communities without a truly viable Bureau, one that includes community leadership and has direct access to community funds — in such communities the advocates for quality Jewish education should implore the Federation to become or to create a comprehensive community planning agency for Jewish education. I can well remember the rebuttal to this thesis. It evoked heated discussion and debate.

My argument then and today is that no community agency structure, whether it be such a Bureau, home for the aged, or Federation is sacrosanct. My thesis was and is that no group of leaders, lay or professional, have all of the answers to complicated problems, and that if a planning mechanism or an administrative procedure in one field produces desired results, it is worth examination by another field that is seeking similar advancement. So, today, I once again raise the question: where in a local community can we get a comprehensive thrust at defining the problems of formal and informal Jewish education, development of a pro-

⁶ Robert I. Hiller, "Jewish Education — Community Planning and Financing". Paper presented at General Assembly of Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, Detroit, Michigan, November, 1960.

gram to advance solutions for quality education, coordination of the broadest community interest and the opportunity for the greatest potential of financing? The answer to this question today will, in my opinion, become the underpinning of the quality Jewish education we seek for the future.

Another aspect that I believe must be considered in this age of affluence is the lack of harnessing of existing resources for Jewish education. We bemoan the fact that we are woefully understaffed and undermanned with quality personnel. But have we really explored the use of personnel that may bring another professional base to help resolve some of our problems? How many Jewish educational systems are truly integrated with the Jewish community center in a local community? Does the Center jointly plan and help implement group activities, celebrations, Sabbath observances, nursery school programming, camping, and so on and so forth, with the formal educational structure? Does the advanced education department of the local Jewish education system offer a planned training for the group worker or the caseworker in the community in order to prepare him for maximum community input? I know, for example, that the School for Jewish Communal Service of the Hebrew Union College, has some enrollment for deepening the Jewish education of communal professionals; but how many agency executives, family agencies, Centers, are urging their staff to enroll in this kind of staff development? There are innumerable questions which should be raised. They should be raised because we cannot afford the luxury of not utilizing all of our skills in seeking new methods for learning, additional personnel for teaching, and, yes, in effect, creating a new system for a quality community program.

My purpose in singling out Jewish education for discussion is that it is a com-

pellent priority for our future and that we must begin quickly to undertake an all-out program for quality advancement. It is not alone the priority of the educator, but it is the province of all disciplines and all institutions of the Jewish community.

Obviously, in no way do I intend to slight our efforts on behalf of Israel, the Jewish poor, the sick, the handicapped; but if we seek a viable Jewish community, a quality Jewish life, we must concentrate our effort on the transmittal of our heritage, our values, and find the resources for insuring the just society which is the basis for our being.

Resources and Allocations

In dealing with the question of resources in a forum such as this, very little, if any, consideration is given to plans and programs for enhancing the Jewish community's financial resources. The issue that is advanced is the allocation of our resources, our priorities and how we spend money. Obviously, I will have comment on this; but, before we deal with allocations, we should concern ourselves with the projection of resources and potential for increasing the funds that are available for allocation. This point not only is frequently neglected by communal workers, but is put aside as outside of the individual worker's purview.

If so much of what we are able to do is dependent upon financial resources, then it becomes clear to me that a Center worker or a Jewish educator must be as much concerned with the ability of his financing body to produce, as he is to the allocating of, such dollars.

This matter should be of further concern as we examine the demographic data of our community. There is no reason to believe that the Jewish community's annual fund-raising efforts shall achieve more money each year. There is no reason to believe that the fund-raising effort

will keep pace with the inflation. The demographic data indicates that more and more of our men and women are engaged in professional and technical employment. The opportunity for substantial increase in funds from this group must be examined, while we recognize that this group has never constituted the body of large contributors to the annual campaigns. We must also examine the history of our fund-raising in order to make projections for the future. Here we see in the past twenty-five years peaks and valleys in our attainment, but we know that a new peak was reached six years ago and a slight advance achieved from that period to the present.

Two important external factors affect our fund production—the economic condition of the country and the world events affecting Jews. If we pray that the latter will not be responsible for change in the near future and that the former will be a condition satisfactory for our philanthropic endeavor, then our projections for the future indicate but a very slight rise, hopefully enough to keep pace with the inflation.

This simplified analysis is important because it does two things. First, it places a responsibility upon our community structure to open up new avenues for funds; and, second, it puts into perspective the question of allocation of community funds.

I feel that it is important that we here this evening recognize that there are avenues for increased funds, but there are also detours and possible roadblocks for funds that have been available in the past. Without belaboring either point, let me simply say that those Federations that uncover and develop the new mechanisms and sources for funds will be in a much better position to deal with the difficulties of allocations. Such plus-funds are available through imaginative and enterpris-

ing programming. Some communities are developing these new resources as supplemental to the annual campaign. It is imperative that all communities do this because we cannot meet all of our obligations without these additional resources.

Further, even with our best intentions and our most arduous efforts, it is my belief that we will be fortunate and will be doing our best to keep our United Fund support at its current level. We must also be prepared to take a leadership role in seeing that proper and adequate government funding is made available; if not, we will be in a position of finding ourselves faced with new financial responsibilities that have not been contemplated in the private sector. What is now happening at the national and state level will have an effect on many of our agencies.

It is my hope that this Conference will address itself to some of these matters that I have just ever so lightly touched.

The question of resource allocation *per se* is a subject of lengthy exploration. I am going to limit my comments to three areas: trends in allocations, long-range planning, and Jewish communal workers' responsibility.

We, obviously, cannot isolate one or two areas from a total comprehensive view, so let me express my opinion, which is a basic assumption that as long as our resources are needed for the emigration of Soviet Jews, for Jews whose life or spirit is threatened anywhere in the world, and for Israel's viability—this will and should constitute the priority of all of our communities.

From the study of allocations that I have done and from studies that have been done by others, based upon Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds information, it is apparent that we have been going through a priority shift during

the past six years.⁷ Without getting into the details of this shift, let me briefly summarize what is all too apparent. The study of allocations shows a marked increase for Jewish education, formal and informal; a marked decline for health services; a substantial increase for the aged; an increase for services to the poor, for college and youth programming, for casework services and for community relations. This cursory examination does not show in gross dollars enormous shifts to education or to Jewish family life. The trend is there for the former which could make substantial money possible if proper programming can command it, and the latter indicates little support because we have not provided the program.

The course that we are now on substantiates the literature that indicates a "turning inward." I believe that this will be a growing trend in the years ahead. The desire of the American Jewish community to invest in what many of us call "Research and Development," in the Institute for Jewish Life and in other developmental undertakings, gives us further evidence of this.

While this trend is evolving, we must exercise caution that we are not removed from those activities, those coalitions that advance the general good of the American society. At least three times in this paper I have made a reference to what is developing in the whole area of public welfare. Let me also remind you of the developments in housing, health services, and mental health. We must continue to make our Jewish community structure a major part of the endeavor for social justice.

We have begun to utilize demographic data in a number of ways in the Jewish

community. I visualize the beginning of long-range financial projections being possible with the careful use of our research tools. This is important because allocating of dollars is but a part of planning. If we are to serve effectively, we must be able to plan adequately. With what I believe will be a tightening of resources available, the community that projects a year, or two, or five years into the future will be able to deal most successfully with its resources. Certainly if I am wrong—and I hope I am—in my financial projections, then the communities that have effective planning would be able to move even more rapidly into constructive programming.

This leads me to my final point on allocations. Allocations are affected by many influences. This is part of our voluntary system. Contributors, agencies, groups, as well as goals and directions, are all part of the real world. Each of us has a stake in this voluntary system. Whether we are a caseworker in a home for the aged, a counselor in a vocational agency, a social planner in a Federation, we are a part of the Jewish community service association that in my opinion will guide and shape the destiny of the Jewish community. We are there; we are part of this system. It is up to us to understand that beyond what we do professionally in our assigned tasks, we have a responsibility to the future of the Jewish community. Let me give a very simple illustration of a specific incident. A caseworker in a Jewish family agency refused to give to the local Federation campaign. Her answer was that she had higher priority items. A true story. Is this caseworker really able to provide the kind of professional responsibility we must have for the future? I think not. Our voices must be heard on stereophonic tracks—one guiding and leading in the specific area of our assigned responsibility, and one guiding and leading the laymen and

⁷ Elmer I. Paull, "Financing Local Sciences". Paper presented at the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, Toronto, Canada, November 1972.

other professionals in the areas of priority that we determine are required for a quality viable Jewish community.

Conclusion

As I said at the outset, the broad spectrum of considerations which are implicit in the enrichment of the quality of Jewish life cannot be adequately covered in this short space. I have singled out two main areas—the Jewish family and Jewish education—but I urge this Conference to explore the many others.

Similarly, I have called attention to *financial* resources, but did not touch our other vast resources.

In closing, I want to indicate that during the past seventy-five years our achievements have been enormous, our development as a community unprecedented and our potential unlimited. It is this potential that I urge us to develop fully. For, with our professional skills and our historical understanding, we, the Jewish community's professionals, can well determine the quality of Jewish life in the years ahead.