

Jewish Continuity: A Function of Jewish Communal Service*

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IF treated seriously, this topic is a dangerous innovation in the traditional matters reviewed at sessions of this Conference. There has been a long-standing and tacit acceptance that Jewish continuity and Jewish communal practice are two distinct realms, carefully separated from each other, and delineated by a boundary not to be crossed in either direction. Jewish continuity and Jewish survival are part of the rhetoric of Jewish life and are expected to be dealt with by discourse and declamation. Jewish communal service, in contrast, is functional, practical, real, immediate, and a "now" matter. What the committee which formulated this subject is suggesting is that Jewish continuity is a "now" matter, to be a dimension of the functional, the practical, the real, and the immediate. It unveils the existing gap between a rhetoric that is addressed to a long-term future and a decision-making process which is essentially directed to *ad hoc* matters.

The injection of this new temporal criterion into the daily tasks, or into the evaluation of their effectiveness, forces us to consider the implications of incorporating "Jewish continuity" into the motivation of Jewish communal service. What follows is not exhaustive, but is rather an attempt to indicate some guide lines for such consideration. There are surely more items to be included in an inventory of implications, and more flesh required for the items recorded

here. This is, by direction, no more than a discussion-opener, and the members of the profession must, and will, determine the validity of these and other reactions to the challenge of the topic: "Jewish Continuity: A Function of Jewish Communal Service."

It would seem to me, first, that "masters" of social work will need to master social science. Its several disciplines will now become essential tools to deal with continuity. History will reveal the threads of continuity from earlier eras unto our times. Those threads are not determinants of the future, or of continuity, for they will not spin themselves into eternity of their own accord, but they are the only evidence we have of Jewish behavior in reaction to a multiple and complex array of circumstances. Given changes of circumstances and Jewish behavior, in our time, and assuming that there will be additional changes of both in the future, our assessment of the enduring in the prior processes of adaptation may reveal a useable past. There is another side of history related to our discussion of Jewish continuity, for it means not only an extension of Jewish community into the future, but that such an extension should have discernible linkage with the past. Conceptually, "continuity" does not only signify a relation to the future but also carrying into that future that which is recognizably related to a prior existence. We may argue, even if we shall never resolve the issue, as to what is unshakeably basic to a continuous Jewishness, but that it had a past, has a present, and seeks a future cannot be denied. Whenever

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there is an acceptance that Jewish continuity is a dimension of Jewish communal service, the Jewish communal worker will require an awareness of Jewish history to cope with his professional undertaking.

In no less important a place will be the field of political science, especially that special aspect which has come to be called "political modernization." By the criteria of this field, any preoccupation with continuity means a concern with the future. But in relatively advanced societies, we are dealing with an *unknown future*. The great challenge to such fields as education, or socialization, is that they are designed to prepare, and integrate, the individual for that unknown future. Different from previous eras, when it was assumed that the next generation would live in circumstances much the same as the previous generation, we now know that the lives of one's children will be more different than are the lives of their parents from *their* parent's parents. Our greatest competence as professionals, heretofore, was an awareness of the past and the present, which we attempted to utilize to give continuity into the assumed future. Continuity into the *unknown* is a totally new challenge.

So much of social work orientation has been family-based. Within the context of change, and its resulting unknown dimensions, that basic social unit—the family—itself comes into question. Note: "The children of the members of all relatively modernized societies from early stages of development learn not only that their families do not count for everything, but that in an enormous number of contexts neither their family units nor the most important members of them count for much of anything at all. It may not seem too difficult under these circumstances to maintain on the part of individuals of the older generation a sufficient interest in and attention

to the individuals of the younger generation of their family units. It may, however, prove increasingly difficult to maintain sufficient levels of respect by individuals of the younger generation for individuals of the older generation so that the effects of that attention can produce adults capable of operating in non-family contexts for the overwhelming proportion of their time. Increasingly it is characteristic of our kind of societies that the young come to realize not only that their parents do not necessarily count for much outside the family context, but also that even within it they do not necessarily know what it is they are trying to rear their children for."¹ This entire realm of the "unknown future" and the competence of the adults to socialize entire generations for it, must be studied, considered, and placed within the context of any consideration of "Jewish continuity" as a function of Jewish communal service.

There follow two new areas of challenge: accountability and the measurement of effectiveness. We are still largely influenced by late nineteenth century concepts of responsibility for education and all its ancillary services. That is to say, that it was a bourgeois class that maintained education for a future generation which would hopefully resemble the adult generation. Professional personnel was seen to be accountable to that class of employers. The effectiveness of such personnel was also determined by the degree of emulation by an oncoming generation of its predecessors. This simplistic notion has prevailed through almost three quarters of the 20th century. If we accept the earlier challenge—that a future generation is more likely to be different from its predecessors, and that the circumstances of life will also be

¹ Marion J. Levy, Jr., *Modernization and the Structure of Societies*, Vol. II, Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 433.

different—then the present employers are neither model nor determinant of educational programs.

Suddenly, with the above position, accountability by the professional enters into a domain which is both noble and threatening, for he begins to be governed by such criteria as conscience, superior training or wisdom, and what we have been calling "commitment." It is now no longer the source of funds which establishes the work standards or objectives by the observable conditions of life; simultaneously, it detaches the professional from immediate accountability to the current employer. If the existing balance between professionals and communal leadership is not to be catastrophically upset, then there may have to be a totally new interaction of laity and professionals. And such interaction may in turn revise the criteria of eligibility of both professionals and laity.

Essentially, the new relationship will represent the combining of those two disparate realms—the *future* and the *ad hoc*. The envisioned pattern is a broadening of the board make-up and role. There would also be an involvement of the agency staff, the practitioners, as part of the process of establishing goals and the decision-making pertaining to their implementation. Board meetings become seminars and conclaves and eligibility for participation derives from the insights accumulated by the practicing professionals, no less than those whose concern is large enough to move them to support the program. It converts responsibility for an agency from the preemptory determinations of an earlier era, when an employer class knew what it wanted, to a probing, learning experience within which decisions are arrived at with an ample measure of piety, hope, and uncertainty, more fitting to the human condition. In other words, the more uncertain the future and the more prob-

lematical a relationship to it, the wider is the eligibility within the community, for now it is that flash of excitement, that willing sacrifice, that accumulation of experience, and above all, the passion of commitment that have a bearing on continuity but are outside the organized structure.

The chief obstacle to the achievement of such new interaction within an agency and within a community is largely that model of 19th century obsolescence, the executive. He regards himself as still beholden to that group which knows, rather than is uncertain; he sees himself as power-laden in his rule over the *ad hoc*, which hires and fires, pays bills, signs contracts, and in general says yes or no to matters of today, but of today only. Opening the discussion widely to the new eligibility described above often has a shattering effect on his own self-image of omniscience and omnipotence. He is the chief sustainer of the division of rhetoric and decision-making and appears more and more on platforms to engage in the former to offset his total preoccupation with the latter. It is noticeable, for example, that the advocacy of something like "creative dissent," never attacks or defends a person or a doctrine which has a name and a definition. An executive who speaks out on the need to deal with "social change" is rarely the one who grapples with it on the job. But it is unnecessary to belabor this inasmuch as the executive of the *ad hoc* is increasingly of minor importance under the pressure of those who call themselves the "concerned."

There emerges still another consequence of a commitment to Jewish continuity, and that is "tests and measurement" of achievement. The moment the objective is continuity, the time span for measurement is extended. What is needed is what Kurt Lewin called "re-connaissance." No bombing of a military

objective, he used to explain, is evaluated until the effects of that bombing are seen and established. In the social and educational realm, we ignore this concept, even on the basis of the immediate, but certainly with respect to the long-range impact of our current efforts. The methodological techniques of social measurement must be introduced into the Jewish community. Did all the attendance at *chadorim* fifty years ago have a residual effect of any value to Jewish life? Do families that pray together stay together? Are Sunday schools contributory to enduring Jewish identification? Are day-schools? Is Jewish leadership the sole criterion for a successful childhood experience within a Jewish context? What about Jews who hold no office in Jewish affairs, but regard themselves as enriched by their Jewishness? What do we know about these? How many questions come to mind for investigation, not only to satisfy a curious mind, but to evaluate Jewish communal services. We have almost no ongoing research and study programs to illuminate either our rhetoric or our *ad hoc* decisions. Evaluations of effectiveness therefore occur on superficial levels, on the basis of personal whims and predilections, public relations, but really are wide of the mark when Jewish continuity is a component part of our agency and communal objectives.

There is, finally, one additional aspect of the innovative stimulation by the conference committee which determined this discussion. It falls within the realm of the interrelationship of Jewries. To consider Jewish continuity as cellular, a one-room cottage located in America, is to diminish Jewishness and the significance of its continuity. I assume that the committee consciously avoided a delimiting of the subject to Jewish continuity in

America. If it were to occur only in America, we would be living in a world of major catastrophe, and struggling for the survival of Jews, more than for Jewish communal continuity. The implication for me is that Jewish continuity can occur in America only together with its coincidence in other parts of the world. Israel comes to mind at once as symbolic of the longest reach of Jewish continuity, given its physical survival. Soviet Jewry now seizes our attention because of the enormity of the injustice directed at Jews within that domain. But there are other Jewries less known and little celebrated who are part and parcel of any large concept of Jewish continuity. A concern for Jewish life wherever it occurs in adversity, and a pleasure that derives from the communities where it is being lived creatively, become an integral part of Jewish community where we live. To act on concern is usually to give; to share the pleasure of Jewish creativity is to receive. What this means is the broadening of all programmatic efforts here to encompass those capacities of giving and receiving in relationship to Jews elsewhere.

This opening statement studiously and advisedly avoided entrance upon the specific disciplines represented by the members of this Conference in attendance at this session. The manner in which this position can be applied to the daily tasks is best left to the respective areas of professional practice. The more important consideration at this stage is to consider, to challenge, to accept or reject, and certainly, to amend, any of the suggestions made in this opening statement. My respect for my colleagues is too great to tell them what to do; I would rather prefer to think that I have raised some pertinent questions for discussion.