

# **The Jewish Father: Past and Present**

**Chaim I. Waxman**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In Jewish history and tradition, the family is considered to be the most important institution for shaping ethnic and religious identity and transmitting Judaism's basic norms and values.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the family and the synagogue are the only two institutions referred to in traditional Jewish literature as *mikdash me'at*, or "sanctuary in miniature," sharing the responsibility for handing down both Jewish law and Jewish values. The family has been the setting, if not the focal point, for much of Jewish religious tradition. And, in the view of many present-day observers, it is the institution primarily responsible for Jewish continuity.

In light of this emphasis, it is interesting to explore the role of the Jewish father in the Jewish tradition and the historical experience of Jews in different societies and cultures, and to see what elements in that role are particularly pertinent to contemporary Jewish life.

In every society, individuals have a number of different roles—they are male or female, parents, sons or daughters, husbands or wives, and so on. And role carries with it certain defined behavioral expectations that apply to all incumbents, and are internalized, through socialization, by everyone who belongs to the society.

Since roles are socially defined, they often vary from society to society and are subject to change within a particular society over time. Furthermore, in the process of social change, some roles may become less clearly defined than before, leaving the incumbents of such roles uncertain about how they are supposed to behave. If such conditions become widespread, the resulting anomie, or normlessness, can threaten the stability of the society as a whole. Such widespread anomie is, fortunately, very rare; but some uncertainty about roles is fairly typical during periods of rapid social change, and it is helpful, during such periods, to review society's traditional patterns and expectations.

Modern society has experienced a great deal of rapid social change, not only in the United States and the geographical West, but throughout the world. The role of women, particularly, has undergone dramatic change that

bears heavily on marital and family relationships. Given the preeminence of the family in Jewish continuity, it is important to know how these changes affect not only the Jewish family in general, but each of its component parts. These pages will concentrate on both the traditional and the changing role of the Jewish father.

We begin by examining the role of the father in traditional Jewish literature—by reviewing how Jewish law and ethics define his duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges. It should be remembered, however, that real-life experience does not necessarily conform to the ideal set down in the normative literature. On the contrary, our knowledge of human behavior tells us that it is highly doubtful that actual performance ever lived up to these high standards. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that in a highly traditional society, the general patterns of behavior reflect normative definitions, even if few individuals actually manage to live up to the ideal.

## THE RABBINIC-TALMUDIC PERIOD

The Talmud is quite brief in its delineation of the duties and responsibilities of the father. One small passage in the tractate *Kiddushin* declares:

The father is required to circumcise his son; to redeem him [referring to the first-born son, as per the Biblical passages in *Numbers* 18:15-16]; to teach him *Torah*; to assure that he marries; and to teach him a trade. Some say he must also teach him to swim. Rabbi Judah says, whoever does not teach his son a trade teaches him robbery (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Kiddushin*, p. 29a).

Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, 1040-1105), the famous commentator on the Bible and the Talmud, explains that Rabbi Judah meant that a father who does not teach his son a trade is as culpable as if he had taught him to steal, since without a trade, the son cannot earn money to buy food and must inevitably turn to robbery.

Reflecting the clear divisions between sex roles in traditional Judaism, the Talmud briefly notes that the father is required to clothe his daughter and provide her with all she needs in order to get married. Within Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism, study and trade and the public sphere were male provinces, while the female province was the home. According to several traditionalist Torah scholars today, the changes in modern society and culture make it not only permissible but imperative that women be as learned in Torah as men.<sup>2</sup> In that light, it is interesting to speculate whether the father is now obligated to teach Torah to his daughter as well as to his son.

As indicated earlier, it cannot be automatically assumed that all, or most, Jewish fathers in the Talmudic period conformed with the normative prescriptions set down by the rabbis. On the other hand, there is a revealing passage in Tractate *Bava Batra*, which indicates that there were indeed some periods when fathers were the sole teachers of their sons:

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rav: Verily the name of that man is to be blessed, that is Joshua ben Gamla. Were it not for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel (Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 21a).

Apparently, there were times when the children's education was completely and solely the obligation of fathers, and Rabbi Joshua ben Gamla founded a school in order to provide for the education of fatherless orphans. In so doing, he did not free fathers from teaching their sons; he simply established the principle that the community was responsible for boys who had no fathers to teach them.

Except for obligations of fathers mentioned in the passage from *Kiddushin*, the primary focus of rabbinic discussions regarding the role of the father is more on the obligations and responsibilities of children toward their parents—obligations, first enunciated as the Fifth Commandment, repeated several times in the Bible, elaborated upon in many places in the Talmud, and the subject of lengthy discussions in rabbinic codifications and responsa literature throughout the centuries.<sup>3</sup>

When we turn our attention from the role of the father in traditional Jewish literature to his role in historic Jewish experience, we soon discover that very few of a growing number of studies dealing with historic Jewish communities include discussions of family life. The majority are concerned with the development and organizational structure of the communities studied, and their relations with other Jewish and non-Jewish communities. It is interesting to note that where discussions of family do occur, they are most likely to deal with the status of women in the community, leaving the status of men to be deduced from the more general discussions.<sup>4</sup>

It seems farfetched to suppose that the reason there have been so few historical analyses of the father's role in family life is that it was insignificant. The more likely explanation is that his significance was taken for granted, both by the strongly patriarchal communities themselves, and by the researchers studying them. This gap in our knowledge is not unique to Jewish communities; in fact, very little is known about the father role in general history. As John Nash points out, one reason why it is not easy to deduce the nature of child rearing in earlier times is that before the eighteenth century hardly anyone thought there was any reason to single out children as a special group of people.

“Even the extensive history of children by Aries gave few data on patterns of fathering (and little about mothering). It is more a social history of children as part of the economic system than a history of childrearing.”<sup>5</sup>

As a result, we are forced to confine our analysis to two groups of historic Jewish communities—those in Arab countries during the Middle Ages, and those in the *shtetl*, the small town and village in Eastern Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Only when we reach the twentieth century do we find more sources for analysis of the father’s role in various Jewish cultures and subcultures.

### THE MIDDLE AGES

The most complete and systematic historical study of the Jewish family is Shlomo Dov Goitein’s multi-volume work, *A Mediterranean Society*.<sup>6</sup> Based upon documents in the Cairo *Genizah*, the large repository of discarded writings discovered in Egypt in the late 1800s, this work meticulously analyzes the Jewish communities in Islamic countries during the period known as the “High Middle Ages.”<sup>7</sup> In contrast to many historical studies that rely almost exclusively on materials about the elite segments of the society, this one is based on documents that also reflect the middle and lower strata.

In the High Middle Ages, being a Jewish father, and especially having sons, “formed a prominent, central and, so to say, public component in a man’s life to a far higher degree than is customary in our own society.”<sup>8</sup> Reasons for having children were many: religious and moral, utilitarian, and egoistic. Marshall Sklare has referred to “*nachas fun kinder*,” or joy from children, as a feature that distinguishes Jewish parents from other American parents.<sup>9</sup> Self-fulfillment through children, as expressed in the stereotypical American Jewish reference to “my son the doctor,” was even more characteristic of the medieval Jewish communities of the Arab countries. A father would quite typically speak of “my son, the joy of my eye,” and “the dearest to me of all mankind.” Sons, both small and adult, were frequently referred to by their fathers as “the lovely flower,” “the blossoming rose” and “*muhja*” (“lifeblood”). And “the most common word of endearment for son is *hamud*, ‘delight,’ so common that the Hebrew letter *h* stands, in memorial and other lists, simply for ‘son of.’”<sup>10</sup>

A letter from a Tunisian Jew congratulating his brother in Egypt on the birth of his child underscores the central importance of having sons:

Your letter containing the great news and joyful tidings about the blessed, blissful, and auspicious newborn has arrived. We had here much joy, music,

and congratulations gatherings because of this . . . Yes, my brother, you are to be congratulated, and very much so. May God bestow on me that both you and he will live and may God make him a brother of "seven or even eight." May God strengthen your arm through him and establish by him your honored position and fulfill in your case: "Instead of your fathers there shall be your sons, you will make them princes all over the country." May God <sup>אֲדַוְּרָא</sup>avert from you and from him the effects of the evil eye and may He never let me hear anything undesirable about the two of you all my life.<sup>11</sup>

The birth of a daughter in these Middle Eastern communities was not as auspicious an event as the birth of a son; nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that it was not a happy event. The *Genizah* documents indicate that fathers loved their daughters deeply, and some actually preferred them to their sons, possibly because it was acceptable to openly express affection for them.

In keeping with the Talmudic mandate, fathers played the central role in their sons' Jewish education and occupational training. Moreover, although the letter of the law released them from this obligation when boys reached puberty (Babylonian Talmud, *Ketubot* 49b), the *Genizah* documents reveal that, in practice, fathers continued to educate their sons well into their adolescence.

## THE SHTETL

During the nineteenth century, the world of East European Jewry was the *shtetl*, a community which, as Irving Howe points out, was not quite so warm, loving and joyful as the one nostalgically portrayed in *Fiddler on the Roof*.<sup>12</sup> Nor did it have the permanence implied in the anthropological study, *Life Is With People*.<sup>13</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century, the *shtetl* was "a community in the process of disintegration, though the exact degree of disintegration varied from region to region, from community to community, and from group to group."<sup>14</sup> The majority of Jews in Eastern Europe lived in cities.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, most East European Jews who immigrated to the United States between 1880 and 1920, and especially those who emigrated before 1910, did come from *shtetlach*; and it is therefore valid to speak of a *shtetl* culture with a shared religion, language, values, norms, institutional structure, and sense of belonging.

*Shtetl* Jews fully internalized the biblical dictum that "It is not good for man to be alone," and the injunction to "be fruitful and multiply." Marriage, children and family life were among the most important values and institutions, and it was the sacred responsibility of parents *tzu makhen fun kinder mentshen*, to turn children into people.<sup>16</sup> By *mentshen*, they meant obedient,

1312.v

respectful, and refined human beings—*sheyneh yidn*, fine Jews, who would bring honor to their parents. A child's responsibilities toward his or her parents lasted throughout their lives, and the obligation to care for elderly parents prevailed even when, as was often the case, they were reluctant to accept such care.

Marriage was not a matter of individual choice; it was carefully arranged by the parents, often through the intermediary services of the *shadkhen*, or matchmaker. Although it was assumed that "parents always want the best for their children" and children usually went along with a match, the now prevalent notion that the children had no say in the choice of their spouse and were often forced into marriages against their will is not quite accurate.<sup>17</sup> Since traditional Jewish religious law does not recognize a marriage as valid unless both the bride and groom agree to it, Zborowski and Herzog's observation that "those who object . . . succeed in winning their point," is undoubtedly correct.<sup>18</sup>

Sex roles, in general, and husband/father-wife/mother roles in particular, were clearly delineated in *shtetl* culture. The husband's major responsibility involved learning, economic pursuits or, more often, both. While it was true that many men devoted themselves entirely to sacred learning while their wives assumed economic responsibility for the family, this was not true for all, or even most, husbands and wives. Most husbands were either full- or part-time breadwinners, and women who were the sole providers were the exception, though many worked alongside their husbands out of economic necessity, and some worked so that their husbands could spend at least part of each day in sacred learning.

To his son, the *shtetl* father was a remote authoritarian figure and a rather formal teacher, but he was likely to be easygoing, emotional and indulgent toward his daughter, in whose life the mother played the more authoritarian role.

However, while the *shtetl* family was formally patriarchal, it differed sharply from the traditional non-Jewish European family in which patriarchy included the explicit subordination of wives and mothers. In the day-to-day activity of the Jewish home, the mother clearly played the major role, though she often held the father up to the children as the court of last resort. It was the mother who provided the children with affection. "The stereotype of the 'Yiddisheh mamme,' familiar in many lands, has firm roots in the *shtetl*. No matter what you do, no matter what happens, she will love you always. She may have odd and sometimes irritating ways of showing it, but in a hazardous and unstable world the belief about the mother's love is strong and unshakable."<sup>19</sup> The father, by contrast was first and foremost the teacher; it is no coincidence

that there has never been a parallel stereotype of the "Yiddisheh tatteh."

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY UNITED STATES

Although there are no full-scale studies of American Jewish fathers, several limited studies include some enlightening examples. In analyzing the strongly patriarchal traditional Jewish communities, one might easily be led to believe that respect for the father is a function of religious tradition, that patriarchy and religious traditionalism go hand-in-hand. A study by Judson Landis indicates otherwise.<sup>20</sup>

Landis's study of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish families revealed that there was, in fact, a greater relationship between degree of religious observance and the closeness of sons and daughters to their fathers, than between such commitment and their closeness to their mothers. Apparently, the father's central role in establishing religious patterns was a factor in the respect accorded him.

At first glance, these data appear to support the assumption that respect for fathers is a function of religious traditionalism, and that a decline in one may be related to a decline in the other. Landis also found, however, that religiosity correlated positively with egalitarian parental roles, and that those families where either the father or the mother dominated were more likely to be characterized by religious indifference.

In this connection, an earlier study of Jewish and Italian boys in Boston is also instructive. In this study, Fred Strodbeck found that the value the boys placed on independence and achievement correlated positively with egalitarian parental roles.<sup>21</sup> Very dominating fathers, he found, were less likely than strong and assertive mothers to instill a desire for achievement in their sons. As Strodbeck sees it, this finding suggests an American adaptation of the Jewish father's traditional and historic role as the link between the family and the traditional Jewish community. As the Jewish community in America grew more secular, this role was reinterpreted, and it now manifests itself in the father's dedication to his work and to instilling the values of achievement in his children.

Whether or not one fully accepts Strodbeck's interpretation, the evidence concerning the socioeconomic achievement of American Jews<sup>22</sup> suggests that American Jewish fathers are, indeed, zealously dedicated to their work. Apparently, however, the price of this occupational striving has been a weakening of the father's role in the home. In the *shtetl* home, the father was always an authoritative presence, even if he was not there during most of the day. With the help of the mother, the children were constantly reminded of his

importance and socialized to conform to the standards he set. They were taught that he was fulfilling the religious obligation of learning, and that they must honor his wishes that they internalize the norms and values of traditional Judaism. His economic work was seen as a means rather than as an end in itself; it supported the family and made it possible for them to maintain religious-cultural norms and values and be respectable members of the community.



## CONTEMPORARY ISRAEL

The Jewish community in the United States is made up, for the most part, of third- or fourth-generation Americans, overwhelmingly of East European ancestry, and predominantly middle class.<sup>23</sup> Israeli Jewry is composed of two broad ethnic, or subethnic, groupings: the Sephardim, numerically the majority, whose ancestors came from Islamic countries; and the Ashkenazim, numerically a minority but socially and economically dominant, whose ancestors came from northern Europe and the Americas. Another significant subsociety, the kibbutz, is unique in its family patterns.

While it is generally assumed that there are many differences in the family patterns of Sephardim and Ashkenazim, there is little empirical evidence to substantiate this assumption. Virtually the only study of role differences in Israel's urban families was conducted by Rivka Bar Yosef, and it is based on limited samples from two ethnically and class-differentiated areas. The Ashkenazi sample was drawn from the middle-class neighborhood of Rehavia and the Sephardim sample from the lower-class area of Nahalaot, both in Jerusalem.<sup>24</sup> Bar Yosef's primary goal was to discover the patterns of authority in the respective family systems—how husband/father and wife/mother roles are ascribed, and the authority patterns of each. When it came to housekeeping, both groups demonstrated clear sex-role divisions. But in child rearing, there were both differences and similarities between the groups. For example, among both the Ashkenazim and Sephardim, the mother was seen as the dominant agent of primary socialization and the parent responsible for meeting the child's daily needs. However, distinct differences emerged on issues related to the children's education. When it came to choosing a school, 90 percent of the Rehavia parents made the decision jointly, whereas in Nahalaot only 50 percent did so (in the other 50 percent the decision was made by the mothers). Punishment was far more frequently the father's responsibility among the Sephardim of Nahalaot than among the Ashkenazi families of Rehavia, where it was likely to be meted out by mothers, or by both parents.

In sum, while Bar Yosef's study found some clear differences in roles between the two groups, three important facts must be kept in mind. First, the

sample included only 85 families. Second, the subcultural and socioeconomic gaps between the two groups made it difficult to determine whether the differences were rooted in ethnicity or class. Finally, and most important, Bar Yosef's findings reveal fewer differences between the groups than overall similarities.

In another limited study, Shalva Weil interviewed a small number of Ashkenazi, Iraqi and Moroccan youngsters who were part of a larger sample of 168 children of various ethnic backgrounds, in order to see how their ethnic origins affected their perceptions of their families.<sup>25</sup> One finding was that in Moroccan families elder brothers seem to assume something of a father role in relation to younger siblings, whereas Ashkenazi elder brothers do not. Thus, in Moroccan families, the older brother often metes out punishment, and is therefore more feared than the Ashkenazi older brother. Conversely, Ashkenazi younger siblings are more likely than their Moroccan counterparts to turn to their older brothers rather than their parents when they have a problem.

Significantly, in their perceptions of family relationships, Ashkenazi children focused on their parents' trust in them and the attention they pay, especially to progress at school. The Moroccan children, on the other hand, emphasized family harmony especially among siblings, found their elder brothers to be unapproachable, and reported that they enjoyed the family Sabbath celebration and watching television together on weekday evenings.<sup>26</sup>

Among Israel's many ethnic Jewish groupings, the Yemenites, one of the oldest Diaspora communities, stand out for a variety of reasons.<sup>27</sup> Despite centuries of persecution, Yemenite Jews have remained staunchly traditional and religiously observant (except for a brief period around the turn of the eighteenth century), and the Holy Land has always played a central role in their religious and cultural life.<sup>28</sup>

In Yemenite Jewish families, the religious and cultural education of the son within the home always was the responsibility of the father, whereas the mother, usually illiterate, tended to the boys' physical needs. The father was generally strict and harsh. Sons spent many hours of the day in their father's company, engaging in many religious rituals, including daily prayers in the synagogue, circumcisions, Bar Mitzvahs and weddings, visits to the homes of mourners, and so on.<sup>29</sup>

On the Sabbath and holidays, fathers would test their sons' learning, filling in where they felt it was deficient. Since most formal education during the week was by rote, fathers would use the relaxed atmosphere of the Sabbath and holidays to explain and elaborate upon what had been learned in school.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the father was, first and foremost, a teacher to his sons. (There are virtually no references to any relationships between fathers and their daughters.)

## THE KIBBUTZ

Although only a small proportion of Israelis live on kibbutzim, they enjoy a respected position in Israeli ideology, and their unique lifestyle has generated worldwide interest. Thus, the kibbutz is a magnet for social scientists the world over, and is probably the most studied social phenomenon in Israel. It should be borne in mind that kibbutz life is quite uncharacteristic of Jewish community life elsewhere, both historically and today.

On the other hand, something may be learned from an analysis of how the father role has developed in the kibbutz setting precisely because, in its early stages, the kibbutz was opposed to the nuclear family. This position stemmed from both the ideology of social revolution and collectivism that spawned the kibbutz, and the social purpose it was designed to serve. Implicit in the ideologies of the various kibbutz movements was a deep commitment to equality between the sexes.<sup>31</sup> Because the traditional family was seen as fostering and perpetuating sexual inequality, the collective took over many of the roles ascribed to parents, including the day-to-day care of children, virtually from the moment of their birth, as well as their education and socialization.

Unlike other children, for whom parental influence is dominant, at least when they are small, kibbutz children grow up with "an incredibly strong attachment to . . . peer group," to the point of "their willingness to give their lives for the boys and girls they grew up with. This is their deepest, most abiding attachment and the focus of powerful feelings about emotional events they have shared with their group."<sup>32</sup> In earlier years, the kibbutz strove not only to relieve parents of the more tedious aspects of family life, including child-rearing, but to eliminate, as much as possible, the institution of the family. Indeed, children normally address their parents by their given names rather than referring to them as "abba" (father) and "imma" (mother).

In recent years, however, traditional family patterns and sex roles have reemerged on the kibbutz.<sup>33</sup> Even traditional celebrations with extended kin groups are now quite common.<sup>34</sup> And even before young kibbutz children returned to sleeping in their parents' quarters instead of in children's houses, there was evidence of strong emotional and affectual ties between parents and their children. Describing in colorful detail the characteristics of child care in the kibbutz, the late Yonina Talmon-Garber indicated that this was because the main disciplinary aspects of child rearing is the task of the *metaplot*, kibbutz functionaries who care for children's daily needs rather than the parents:

The petty quarrels and persistent disagreements which often pester parent-child relationships in other types of families are quite rare here. Parents endeavor to make the few hours their children spend with them as pleasant

and carefree as possible . . . Their main function is to minister to their children's need for security and love. Both of them interact with their children in much the same way and play a common protective role. Fathers usually take a lively interest in their children and participate actively in looking after them. Mothers have closer contacts with babies and small children but fathers come into the picture very early. Sex of the children has no marked effect either.<sup>35</sup>

Although there is far less difference between father and mother roles in the kibbutz than elsewhere, some differences do exist even there. The mother is much closer to the children and their schools and is more likely to guide their cleanliness and health and, when parental discipline is applied, the mother more frequently takes the lead.

The father is less involved in these problems and the child may find him an ally in cases of exaggerated concern with them on the part of the mother . . . In the eyes of the growing child, the father emerges gradually as the representative of the Kibbutz and its values within the family, while the mother acts primarily as the representative of the family in the Kibbutz.<sup>36</sup>

In a comprehensive study of socialization practices, encompassing interviews with 300 preadolescents from kibbutzim and 300 from Tel Aviv, Edward Devereux and his colleagues found that city parents were more involved than those of the kibbutz in all aspects of discipline especially in meting out such punishments as temporary withdrawal of companionship or threats of physical punishment when children misbehave. But kibbutz parents were no less generous than city parents when it came to general supportive behavior; in fact, they were significantly more involved with helping children with their homework, for example. Devereux and his colleagues concluded that "the overall balance of the parent role in the kibbutz thus tends to be more positive and supportive."<sup>37</sup> But neither their data nor analysis dealt with comparative father roles and mother roles.

## CONCLUSIONS

Depending on historical and cultural experience, there have been and are many variations in the roles of Jewish fathers, but we cannot assume that their role was or is radically different from that of non-Jewish fathers. Nevertheless, one fact does stand out. Until very recently, the Jewish father was expected to, and did, play a distinctive role as the educator of his sons. This duty, moreover, was fulfilled not merely by financing their formal education; he was also expected to socialize his children into the life of the Jewish community, and to represent its values and interests within the home. This

educational component of the father's role appears to have been uniquely stressed in Jewish tradition and culture, and indeed was deemed essential to the religious and cultural survival of the Jewish people.

Perhaps the most concentrated manifestation of this role of the Jewish father is seen in the *Seder* ceremony, the most celebrated of all Jewish rituals among American Jews. More than any other holiday, Passover, and especially the *Seder*, is a family celebration. Everyone is expected to participate actively, and each role is clearly delineated in the *Haggadah*, a microcosm of the roles within the family throughout the year. The father is simultaneously the king, the leader of the service and, above all, the teacher. He transmits knowledge whether asked for it or not, as evidenced in recital of the portion of the *Haggadah* about "the four sons." He also teaches by example, and his children look to him to guide their behavior all through the *Seder*.

The Israeli philosopher, Eliezer Schweid, has succinctly summarized the family aspects of the Passover celebration:

The family is the major theme of the holiday. It is realized through the family. And throughout, the holiday sustains the family because it makes real in an ideal fashion the unity of the family. Each family member has a role which indicates his place (status) within the family, and the family perceives itself as a unit when it fulfills a religious obligation (*mitzvah*) that transcends it. The family bond becomes, thus, a religious bond, and the religious bond a family bond.<sup>38</sup>

But, as Schweid points out, all holidays provide the family a way to express and realize the relationships among its members, thus binding them together and connecting them to the larger community and people.<sup>39</sup>

However, for most of world Jewry today, much of this dynamic no longer exists. There has been a major transformation in the structure of the Jewish community. In the past, the synagogue was the central institution of the organized Jewish community and there was an integral bond between the family and the synagogue. Since World War I, however, a dramatic secularization has transformed the synagogue into just one component among many in the Jewish community.

Formal Jewish education has also fallen to a record low, while secular education among Jews is higher than among any other group of Americans.<sup>40</sup> With Jewish fathers moving increasingly into the professions, and the Jewish community becoming increasingly secular, the historically unique role of the Jewish father has disappeared and Jewish fathers have become like other middle-class American fathers.<sup>41</sup>

It would appear that the prospects for reviving the unique role of the Jewish father range from dismal to nil.<sup>42</sup> However, a number of relatively recent

developments and policy proposals regarding the Jewish family may have some bearing on these prospects. Ironically, the most significant of these developments is the change in the role of women. As Sheila Kamerman points out, the massive entry into the labor force of married women with young children is one of the most significant social phenomena in this century.<sup>43</sup> Women work today for the same reasons men do; that is, mostly to earn a living, and to achieve personal satisfaction. Thus, Kamerman argues, there is an urgent need to restructure the relationship between work and family life. While Kamerman emphasizes the impact on women, I would stress the positive impact of such a restructuring on men.

If, however, the traditional relationship between work and family life is restructured, a restructuring of the traditional sources of identity and status may ensue. There is increasing evidence that the traditional division of men's and women's domains has been unsatisfactory to many men as well as many women. Joint efforts to develop public and private policies, programs and services to strengthen family and community may yet provide the possibility for men to move beyond the occupational realm for their sense of identity and self-worth, as women move beyond the limits of the home to broaden theirs.<sup>44</sup> As American men, in general, reconnect with home and family, Jewish men may have the chance to retrieve their roles as Jewish educators for their children.

To the obvious question, "Where does one begin?" the answer is, "By doing something." Jewish fathers can begin by studying, in adult education groups and/or along with their children; by setting aside the Sabbath and holidays as meaningful Jewish family celebrations used to explore Jewish traditions within the family setting; by engaging, with their children, in Jewish community activities—in short, by thoughtfully sharing Jewish experiences with their children.

## Notes

1. See Chaim I. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), pp. 180-83.
- ② Cf. Saul Berman, "The Status of Women in Halakhic Judaism," *Tradition*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Fall 1973), pp. 5-28; Chana K. Poupko and Devora L. Wohlgeleenter, "Women's Liberation—An Orthodox Response," *ibid.*, vol. 15, no. 4 (Spring 1976), pp. 45-52; and Warren Zev Harvey, "The Obligation of Talmud on Women According to Maimonides," *ibid.*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Summer 1981), pp. 122-30.
3. For a sophisticated and systematic analysis, see Gerald Blidstein, *Honor Thy Father and Mother: Filial Responsibility in Jewish Law and Ethics* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1975).
4. Cf. H. Z. (J. W.) Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa*, vol. I (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), pp. 183-90.
5. John Nash, "Historical and Social Changes in the Perception of the Role of the Father," in

Michael E. Lamb, ed., *The Role of the Father in Child Development* (New York: Wiley, 1976), pp. 68-69.

6. S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 3: *The Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

7. Idem, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 1: *Economic Foundations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967). Introduction.

8. Goitein, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

9. Marshall Sklare, *America's Jews* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 87.

10. Goitein, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

12. Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), p. 10.

13. Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is With People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952).

14. Bernard D. Weinryb, "Jewish Immigration and Accommodation to America," in Marshall Sklare, ed., *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group* (New York: Free Press, 1958), p. 15.

15. Arthur Ruppin, *The Jews of the Modern World* (1934) (New York: Arno Press, 1973), pp. 32-36.

16. Zborowski and Herzog, *op. cit.*, pp. 335-38.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 275.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

20. Judson T. Landis, "Religiousness, Family Relationships and Family Values in Protestant, Catholic and Jewish Families," *Marriage and Family Living*, vol. 22 (1960), pp. 341-47.

21. Fred L. Strodbeck, "Family Integration, Values and Achievement," in A.H. Halsey, Jean Floud and C. Arnold Anderson, eds., *Education, Economy and Society: A Reader in the Sociology of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1961).

22. Waxman, *op. cit.*, chap. 6.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Rivka Weiss-Bar Yosef, "Role Differentiation in Urban Israeli Families," in Rivka Bar Yosef and Ilana Shelach, eds., *The Family in Israel* (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1969) (Hebrew).

25. Shalva Weil, "The Effect of Ethnic Origin on Children's Perceptions of Their Families" (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, 1982) (unpublished faculty paper).

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-11.

27. See Yehuda Nini, *Yemen and Zion: The Jews of Yemen, 1800-1914* (Jerusalem: Hasifriyah Haziyonit [W.Z.O.], 1982).

28. The first of several waves of *aliyah* (immigration to the Holy Land) occurred in 1882. The most famous of these *aliyot* was the last, known as "Operation Magic Carpet," which carried the entire Yemenite Jewish population to Israel soon after the establishment of the Jewish State. See Itzhak Ben Zvi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), chap. 4.

29. Yehuda Ratzaby, *The Yemenite Jews* (Tel Aviv: Israel Defence Forces, Department of Education, 1978), p. 36 (Hebrew).

30. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

31. Muki Zur, Tair Zevulun and Hanina Porat, *The Beginning of the Kibbutz* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad and Sifriyat Poalim, 1981) (Hebrew).

32. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Children of the Dream: Communal Childrearing and American Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 109, 256.

33. See Yonina Talmon-Garber, "The Family in a Revolutionary Movement: The Case of the

Kibbutz in Israel," *Studies of Israeli Society* (Israel Sociological Society), vol. 2: *The Sociology of the Kibbutz*, Ernest Krausz, ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1983); idem, *Family and Community in the Kibbutz* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); Menachem Gerson, *Family, Women and Socialization in the Kibbutz* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1978).

34. Orit Ichilov and Shmuel Bar, "Extended Family Ties and the Allocation of Social Rewards in Veteran Kibbutzim in Israel," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 42, no. 2 (May 1980), pp. 421-26. The reasons for this development have also been discussed and debated by Melford E. Spiro, *Gender and Culture: Kibbutz Women Revisited* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980); Lionel Tiger and Joseph Shepher, *Women in the Kibbutz* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975); Yaffa Schlesinger, "Sex Roles and Social Change in Kibbutz," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 34, no. 4 (November 1977), pp. 771-79.

35. Talmon-Garber, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-70.

37. Edward C. Devereux, Ron Shouval, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Robert R. Rodgers, Sophie Kavanaki, Elizabeth Kiely and Ester Karson, "Socialization Practices of Parents, Teachers and Peers in Israel: The Kibbutz Versus the City," in Ernest Krausz, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 313.

38. Eliezer Schweid, *Judaism and the Solitary Jew* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1974), p. 43 (Hebrew).

39. See Also Chaim I. Waxman, "The Sabbath as Dialectic: The Meaning and Role," *Judaism*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Winter 1982), pp. 37-44.

40. Waxman, *America's Jews in Transition*, *op. cit.*, chap. 8.

41. Cf. Lawrence H. Fuchs, *Family Matters* (New York: Random House, 1972), chap. 5, and *Fathers and Families: The Jewish Experience* (in press).

42. Idem, "The Jewish Father for a Change," *Moment*, vol. 1, no. 3 (September 1975), p. 50.

43. Sheila B. Kamerman, "For Jews and Other People: An Agenda For Research on Families and Family Policies," in Marshall Sklare, ed., *Understanding American Jewry* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1982), p. 149.

44. Cf. Chaim I. Waxman, *The Stigma of Poverty: A Critique of Poverty Theories and Policies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1983), chap. 5, 6.