

RESOLVING ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER

NORMAN LINZER, PH.D.

Professor, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University, New York

The Center's pluralistic stance veers it away from a one-dimensional doctrinal observance of Jewish law toward a more inclusive centrist position. Conflict is thus inevitable among diverse value systems that comprise the constituencies served.

In an earlier article, this author offered a theoretical approach to help practitioners identify and resolve ethical dilemmas in Jewish communal service. Three cases from a Federation, a Jewish family service, and a senior adult vacation center were analyzed according to the theoretical base.¹ The present article represents a continued exploration of those ideas, with particular emphasis on the Jewish community center. The theoretical base will not be reviewed, as it has already been explicated. Instead, a brief historical summary of major trends and ideological issues confronting the Center field will be presented, followed by a discussion of two cases of ethical dilemmas. The discussion locates the cases in Jewish and professional ideologies and elaborates their conflicting value and ethical polarities. The purpose is to demonstrate a method of identifying and analyzing ethical dilemmas as they arise in professional practice in Jewish community centers.

AN HISTORICAL GLANCE

Jewish communal institutions, particularly the Jewish community center, have gone through two phases of development in relation to Jewish values. They are now in the midst of the third phase where the rationale for sectarian services is being

heavily based on the Jewish heritage.

The first period, 1850-1910, was marked by the large number of European Jews who brought with them Jewish values, traditions and institutions from the world of the *shtetl*. The second stage, 1910-1950, was characterized by the children of the immigrants who avidly adopted American culture and with it, the values and knowledge of the majority group. Many of them tended to discard the traditions of their parents. The third period, from 1950 to the present, is the generation of the grandchild and great-grandchild of the European immigrant who demonstrate a tendency to recall their origins and plumb the values and traditions of the Jewish people.²

These three periods mirror the phases in the development of Jewish social services and particularly the Jewish community center in America. At first, Jewish immigrants organized literary societies for recreation, *landsmanschaften* for mutual help, synagogues for their spiritual needs and other functions on a voluntary basis. In the Centers, the immigrants studied literature, learned the English language, and came together to discuss common issues. It was a period in the history of the Centers of the Americanization of the Jewish immigrant.

1. Norman Linzer, "Resolving Ethical Dilemmas in Jewish Communal Service," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol 63, No. 2 (Winter, 1986), pp. 105-117.

2. Manuel G. Batshaw, "Jewish Values in the Operation of Jewish Communal Institutions." Presented to the Executives of Small Cities, August 1961.

In the second period, there developed professional knowledge about individual and group behavior and community organization. The Jewish community adopted the knowledge and skills offered by social workers whose goals in the Jewish Centers were personality and community development. This period enabled the children of the immigrants to professionalize their agencies in order to meet a variety of needs in their acculturation to American society. Center services, however, were secularized and not related to Jewish values or to the Jewish philosophy of the center.

During the third period which began with the Janowsky report,³ and which continues today, emphasis has been placed on defining the "Jewish" in Jewish community centers. Over the years efforts have been devoted to enunciating the philosophy and programs of "Jewish content" in Jewish community centers through an integration with professional methods. Social group work has been the host profession in Centers since the late fifties and its philosophy, methods and skills were utilized to achieve the Center's purposes and programs.⁴ In a study of social work and the Jewish community center, Levy found that "the values which tended to guide respondents in their practice were frequently seen by them as influences of their social work ideology."⁵

As Centers expanded their services, other professions found their niche there. Jewish culture specialists, physical education workers, early childhood educators, and business administrators limited the central role previously played by social workers. The delimitation of social work paralleled the development of the Jewish communal

worker, an identity to which all Center professionals could subscribe, along with their colleagues in other fields of Jewish communal service. The establishment of graduate schools that offered an M.A. in Jewish communal service and thereby tried to grant this field of service a professional status has succeeded in competing with social work and other professionals in Jewish communal service.⁶ In the last decade, Korobkin argues, "Center work has moved from a field almost exclusively staffed by social workers, with some educators, to a field which is primarily staffed by everything but social workers."⁷ A plethora of competent and highly skilled people in different professions have entered the Center field.

The diversity of professional staff is not the only major development that has recently taken place in the Center field. The JWB study on Jewish education⁸ has reemphasized in a bold way what the Janowsky report had urged years ago, that the goals of the Jewish Center should include concern for Jewish content and the Center should serve as an agency of Jewish identification. It went further in that it encouraged Centers to become Jewish educational institutions. This direction was echoed by Dubin who offered multifaceted conceptions and implementations of Jewish content in the Center,⁹ Chazan¹⁰ who presented a Jewish educational philosophy for

3. Oscar I. Janowsky, *The JWB Survey*. New York: Dial Press, 1948.

4. Norman Linzer, "The Contribution of Social Work to Jewish Survival," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring 1964).

5. Charles S. Levy, "Social Work and the Jewish Community Center," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 53, No. 1, (1976).

6. Gerald B. Bubis, Bruce A. Phillips, Steven A. Reitman and Gary S. Rotto, "The Consumer Reports: Hiring of Entry-level Jewish Communal Workers," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Winter 1985), pp. 103-110.

7. George A. Korobkin, "Reflections on the Field of Jewish Community Centers," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 65, No. 1, (1976).

8. *Maximizing Jewish Educational Effectiveness of Jewish Community Centers*. New York: JWB, 1984.

9. David Dubin, "On Jewish Renaissance: Reflections and Renewal," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Fall 1986).

10. Barry Chazan, "A Jewish Educational Philosophy for Jewish Community Centers." *Journal*

Centers, and Rosen¹¹ who viewed the fulfillment of Jewish educational goals in Jewish cultural arts.

THE CENTERS' IDEOLOGY

This brief historical glance into a central professional issue of the Jewish community center movement serves as the backdrop for the following question: What is the dominant ideology of the Center movement—is it social work, Jewish survival, or both? Excerpts from the Code of Ethics of the Association of Jewish Center Workers,¹² the professional association, seem to indicate that social work ideology takes precedence. The Code begins with a statement of purpose:

The Association of Jewish Center Workers is committed to helping individuals and groups develop to their fullest capacities, to affirm and interpret the enduring values of Jewish tradition, and to make a positive contribution to the greater community of which they are a part.

Several clauses indicate a parallel with social work in the priority of ethical responsibility:

1. I regard as my primary obligation the welfare of the people being served. This obligation imposes upon me the necessity of working to improve social conditions, the quality of life, and to assure Jewish continuity.
2. I respect the human rights of the persons I serve or employ.
3. I am committed to a concept of Judaism based on Jewish ethics, morals, culture, history, tradition and values.

The mention of the welfare of the people being served, the development of

their fullest capacity, and the improvement of social conditions attest to the social work goals of the Center movement. The promotion of Jewish values and the assurance of Jewish continuity attest to its Jewish goals.

Excerpts from the Code of Ethics of the Conference of Jewish Communal Service,¹³ seem to stress the priority of Jewish goals over social work goals: "Professional/communal practice in the Jewish community is based upon Jewish values, humanitarian consideration, democratic ideas and professional knowledge and skill."

Several clauses indicate that the primacy of ethical responsibility is toward the Jewish people:

1. I regard as primary my obligation to the continuity, well-being, and survival of the Jewish people, and to the welfare of the Jewish community, its organization and individuals.
2. I am committed to a concept of Judaism based on Jewish ethics . . .
3. I recognize the special relationship between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora . . .
4. I support the principle that Jewish communal service requires appropriate professional training and continuing education .

It is apparent that the professional association of Center workers, established and led by social workers throughout its existence, tends to emphasize the social work values of personality development and community welfare. The umbrella organization, representing a more diverse group of professionals in different fields of service that include Jewish educators, vocational counselors, synagogue administrators and community relations workers, seems to stress the Jewish purposes that unite them rather than the purposes of their distinct professions that may splinter them.

The dual emphases on the ethical responsibilities of professionals in the Jewish community center field—personality devel-

of *Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Spring 1987).

11. Bernard T. Rosen, "The Role of the Jewish Community Center and Jewish Continuity." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Winter 1985).

12. Code of Ethics. Association of Jewish Center Workers, 1984.

13. Model Code of Ethics. Conference of Jewish Communal Service, 1984.

opment and Jewish continuity—give sanction to the dual focus in the analysis of ethical dilemmas to follow.

The analysis comprises social work values and ethics as well as Jewish values and ethics. The potential for value and ethical conflict is always present when these two systems of thought are juxtaposed because of the particular focus of their ideological base.

DILEMMA NO. 1
SERVING THE
MENTALLY RETARDED ON
THE SABBATH

This dilemma is related to the program for the Jewish mentally retarded.

When we started our service to the retarded, we had a Monday night program for moderately retarded adults and a Friday night program for severely retarded adults. We made a decision that the program for the severely retarded would be on Friday evening because it had to be experiential, on a gut level, and not didactic learning in a classroom. Our feeling was that the best way to do that was through repeating the experience of Shabbat.

In order for this program to exist, we had to have transportation because the group comes from all over the city. Either we brought them here or we could not have the program. The reaction from the Orthodox community was strong. We were visited, written to, and called. Our decision was to go ahead with it. If we thought that we were excluding the retarded Orthodox members of the community, then we would see if we could start another program on another night. But we never got such a phone call. Most of these people were living in non-denominational or group homes run by Catholic Charities. At that point, there were few, if any, group homes run under Jewish auspices. That is not as true now. The people whom we were seeing were being served by secular agencies or by Catholic agencies. Since it was Friday night, if they hadn't been here they would have been at the movies or out bowling. They weren't going around the corner for Shabbat services. It was never a problem for the population itself.

We made it very clear that we would work with any synagogue in any neighborhood that wanted to begin a program for people within walking distance of their synagogue. We even suggested a buddy system where a member of the synagogue would pick someone up from his home and walk him on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. Nobody ever picked up on that either. We made ourselves available to serve the Orthodox retarded community, but we didn't find them because they were probably being served by group homes.

Resolution

It was our choice to proceed. We recognized there are many Jews who ride on the Sabbath and who observe the Sabbath in many different ways. As long as this part of the community wanted the service, we felt an obligation to bring them back into the community.

Ultimately, we decided that we would have a program on Wednesday evenings for the severely retarded as well. It has never been as good as the program on Friday nights. I truly believe that I was right, that programmatically the Sabbath is the best way to experience the celebration of Jewishness and being a Jew.

Discussion

This complex issue touches upon Jewish law and its pluralistic interpretation in modern times, the role of the Center as a Jewish institution serving the Jewish community, the social work philosophy that undergirds its group services, and the needs of the group being served.

The Sabbath is one of the pillars of Judaism. It attests to the belief in God as the creator of the world (Exodus 20:7-10) and as the God of history (Deut. 5:11-14). In its weekly recurrence, it is a constant reminder of the spiritual being brought into relations with the physical, of the Jew's relinquishing control over nature to the creator of nature.¹⁴ On one day a

14. I. Grunfeld, *The Sabbath*. London: Sabbath League of Great Britain, 1956.

week, Jews turn away from mundane concerns to sublime thoughts, from matter to spirit, from worries to relaxation. Heschel described this "turning away" process eloquently:

In the tempestuous ocean of time and toil there are islands of stillness where man may enter a harbor and reclaim his dignity. The island is the seventh day, the Sabbath, a day of detachment from things, instruments and practical affairs as well as of attachment to the spirit.¹⁵

Ahad Ha-am captured the Sabbath's significance for Jews in his pithy statement: "More than Israel has kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept Israel."¹⁶

The laws of the Sabbath are varied, complex and far-reaching. The thirty-nine major categories of prohibited work and their extensive offshoots derive from the juxtaposition of Sabbath observance with the building of the Temple (Ex. 35:1-21). Among them are such prohibitions as kindling a fire, sowing, reaping, building, and carrying a burden from one place to another.¹⁷ The Talmud and subsequently Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* and the Code of Jewish Law—*Shulkhan Arukh*—are the major sources of the interpretation, application and codification of the Sabbath laws. Questions regarding Sabbath observance that arose in the course of centuries that were not codified in these books were directed at leading rabbis of the day. Their responses comprise an extensive responsa literature that addressed the observance of the Sabbath along with other *mitzvot* in conjunction with the technology of the times.¹⁸

Pluralistic interpretations of Sabbath laws arose in modern times particularly over the

use of electricity and driving a car. The central question is: Does the Torah's prohibition against kindling a fire (Ex. 35:3) extend to using electricity and driving a car or are these not in the category of "fire?" The Orthodox maintain that these are extensions of the biblical injunction. The Conservatives prohibit driving a car except for attending services in the temple. The Reform do not consider the biblical injunctions of the Sabbath as applicable to modern times; instead, the positive observances are stressed.¹⁹ Because of the pluralistic interpretations of biblical law in modern times, institutions and individuals decide on their own whether and how they want to abide by the Sabbath laws, and the form that their activities will take on that day.

The Role of the Center

The Center, since its inception, has never been ideologically identified with any particular religious movement of Judaism. It was and is an institution that strives to create a "secular Jewish culture."²⁰ This means that it is not a religious institution, but it does not mean that religious elements that are part of popular Jewish culture do not have a place in the Center's policies and programs. For example, many Centers maintain a kashruth policy to the extent that all food served at any of its functions must be certified as kosher by the local rabbinate. While there are many variations of this policy in terms of in-building *vs.* outside facilities, the food that groups may purchase while on trips, which rabbis are invited to attest to the certification, etc., the policy is widespread not because of the Center's obligation to uphold Torah law but because of a fundamental principle undergirding all Center services: Each member of the Jewish community should be able to partake of any of the Center's activities where food is served, and should

15. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Young, 1951, p. 29.

16. Cited in Abraham E. Millgram, *Sabbath: The Day of Delight*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1965, p. 253.

17. Grunfeld, *op. cit.*

18. David Feldman, *Birth Control in Jewish Law*. New York: New York University Press, 1968, pp. 3-18.

19. Millgram, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-182.

20. Marshall Sklare, *America's Jews*. New York: Random House, 1971.

not feel rejected because it is not kosher.

Since each Center is autonomous, the complexion of its Jewish practices varies, depending on the degree of the influence of community groups. In a community where the Orthodox are dominant and are active members of the Center and its board, the likelihood is that *halakhic*—Jewish legal—practices would be more extensive than in a community dominated by Conservative and Reform Jews.

During the 60's, in the debate whether to open the Center on the Sabbath,²¹ many rabbis representing the range of the religious spectrum were opposed because they believed that the Center's activities would detract from Sabbath attendance at their synagogues. Some were concerned about the profanation of the Sabbath—*Hillul Shabbat*—due to the weekday activities that the Center would sponsor. Others felt that Jews would have to drive to the Center to participate and this too constituted a violation of the Sabbath.

Solender has written:

Such matters as the Sabbath practices of Centers are local community problems which must be dealt with by the local community. They are issues around which there are an infinite variety of views, even within the religious community. JWB as the national body of the Centers has reaffirmed the original recommendation of the Janowsky report that Centers should be open on the Sabbath only for those activities which are in consonance with the day. JWB has urged that the determination of a given Center's policy within this framework should be made with the fullest consultation with all affected local groups.²²

21. Norman Linzer, "Should the Jewish Community Center be open on the Sabbath?" *Jewish Social Work Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1963).

22. Sanford Solender, "The Vital Future of the Jewish Community Center in America." *The Turbulent Decades*, ed. Graenum Berger. New York: Conference of Jewish Communal Service, 1981. Also: *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 39, No. 1, (Fall 1962), pp. 42-54.

Over the years, many compromises were introduced by different communities. While in some, the Center is completely closed, in others it is closed only during the times of services in the synagogues. When it is open, it attempts to offer activities that are in consonance with the spirit of the Sabbath. In some Centers this includes physical education activities and in others it does not. Centers that open on Friday evenings point out that the people who utilize the facilities do not normally attend synagogue services. Hence, by providing *Oneg Shabbat* programs, Centers argue that they afford these individuals an enriching experience of the Sabbath which they would typically not have.

In the case of serving the Jewish mentally retarded on Friday evening, the Center claims that this group ordinarily does not attend Sabbath services and, in fact, the services the individuals receive are rendered by Catholic Charities. The Center believes it is enhancing their Jewish identity by providing a Jewish experience of Sabbath appreciation. The Orthodox concur with the ends but disagree with the means. Since the group would be required to travel on the Sabbath to reach the Center, this constitutes a violation of Sabbath law and is prohibited. The Center, for its part, does not view itself as an Orthodox institution but instead as a Jewish communal institution whose mandate it is to serve the entire Jewish community. It insists that the Jewish needs of the mentally retarded should be served as well, and it has selected the Sabbath as one of the means for achieving this goal.

Conflicting Values

The value conflict is apparent from the foregoing discussion. The Center's primary value, as enunciated by the respondent, is service to the entire Jewish community. The Center is a community-based institution, supported by the local Jewish Federation and public funding, as well as the program fees and membership dues of an ideologically wide spectrum of Jews. Ser-

vice to the entire Jewish community is strongly preferred and held with affective regard.²³ It is the *raison d'être* of its existence.

Another Center value is pluralism. The Center believes that, in fact, there are many ways to express and live one's Judaism. It rejects a monolithic approach to Jewish life. The Center views itself as the one institution in Jewish life where Jews of all religious and ideological persuasions can join together to forge a united community.

It is for this reason that the Center does not take an *halakhic* stance on any religious matter, particularly on issues where there are differences among the rabbis in the community. Since it represents the spectrum of Jewish life, if a community need arises that requires the Center's services, in this case the mentally retarded, the Center attempts to meet that need, though it may not be sanctioned by all segments of the Jewish community.

A third value is the client as the primary responsibility of the social worker.²⁴ Among the tasks that social workers in Centers perform is the provision of services to special populations where professional knowledge and skills are required. The values undergirding these services impel social workers to seek ways to bring these groups into the agency in order to meet their social needs.

In this case, the needs of the mentally retarded are not only social but Jewish, too. As the social worker's primary responsibility, the group should be afforded the opportunity to participate in programs that strengthen their Jewish identity, even as the Center helps other Jews to achieve this goal.

A contrary value is represented by the Orthodox rabbis' opposition. They argue that the Center should uphold the sanctity of the Sabbath precisely because it is one of

the central institutions in the Jewish community. While the Center is not a religious institution, it should not adopt policies nor sponsor activities that offend an important segment of the community.

Conflicting Ethical Stances

Since ethics is based on values, it would appear that the Center staff would be acting ethically if it sponsored Sabbath activities for the mentally retarded, based on the values of community, pluralism, and primacy of client needs. This is the right and good thing to do. The decision appears to be consistent with the deontological and consequentialist positions.

The deontologists espouse an action to be right if it is inherently right; it requires no external justification such as positive consequences. Consistency with one's values makes an action deontologically right. The consequentialists determined an action to be good if it leads to good consequences, or ends.²⁵ In this case, the Center staff has judged the program to be beneficial to the group being served; hence, ethically, it was the good thing to do in the circumstances because it leads to positive ends.

On the negative side, the Orthodox would argue that a decision that violates Jewish law cannot be deontologically right, nor lead to good consequences. A *mitzvah* that is fulfilled through a sinful act is invalid, according to Jewish law. In this case, the decision to sponsor an *Oneg Shabbat* that requires the retarded to be transported to the Center on the Sabbath is unethical.

Resolution

The Center's professional staff resolved the conflict by proceeding with the program. This was consistent with the Center's values and ethics. The decision reflected the Center's primary self-image as a communal institution serving all segments of the Jewish community. There was no in-

23. Charles S. Levy, *Values and Ethics for Social Work Practice*. Silver Spring, MD: National Association of Social Workers, 1979, p. 1.

24. Code of Ethics. National Association of Social Workers. 1980.

25. Luther Binkly, *Contemporary Ethical Theories*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1961.

tention to offend the Orthodox, only to meet a need which would help a group of handicapped Jews to celebrate their Jewishness.

DILEMMA NO. 2
SERVING HOMOSEXUALS
AS A GROUP

Our guiding principle at the "Y" over the past few years has been that we should be open to all members of the Jewish community. Our quest for serving the whole Jewish community started with the easier populations, such as singles and the disabled. We developed programs for the retarded and learning disabled, the orthopedically handicapped, widows, widowers, divorcees and single parents—all kinds of family groups, including adopted children. We recently decided to serve the Jewish alcoholic with Alcoholics Anonymous and Alanon groups. We really feel that we should make it very clear in every way that we are a community center for everyone.

Then we considered the homosexual group that is not recognized nor accepted by the organized Jewish community or by the religious community. We had two questions: Whether we would serve the entire population, and if so, what services should we provide? Another is self-help groups. There, too, what would be the focus—to try to dissuade, to change behavior? That didn't seem to be something that we should be getting into. We would not run therapy groups because therapy is not our mission. A socialization group just seemed to be totally out of the question.

Q. What would be the purpose of your serving that group?

A. We reviewed the purpose of our serving any group which is that we are here for the whole community. Since this group is a large segment of the Jewish community, to deny it or to ignore it seems phony to us. The dilemma was really how do we serve this part of the community, while recognizing that there is a Jewish prohibition against their activities. We discussed it quite a bit in a board-staff process. We obtained literature on the Jewish attitude toward homosexuality. Staff also did a lot of

research by going to the gay synagogues, speaking with members there and asking them what kinds of services would be most helpful to them.

Very often when we look at a new service group, we look at what Federation and the Jewish Welfare Board say are the needs of the Jewish community that should be addressed. No one has ever said that this is a population that the Jewish communal agency should be addressing. No one has ever said we should not, but no one has ever said that we should. It has been a totally ignored population that is screaming for recognition. According to Jewish law, we cannot recognize them; we cannot give communal dollars. No one has said that, but no one has said, "You are our sons and daughters and we are going to make you comfortable, we are going to make you part of us. We hope and pray that you will change your ways, but we will accept you as you are, and you are part of us." The whole population has been ignored so no one knows what the service needs are.

Resolution

What we decided to do, and it is not a great resolution of the problem, is to offer programs to the families of gays. We are going to have a support group run by a qualified leader who, in fact, is the mother of a gay son. We want to show that there is a place to talk out these questions and issues within the Jewish community. But this is only for the families. We are keeping our options open and will continue to evaluate events around us.

I would love to see the organized Jewish community address the question and this population. It is difficult for each agency to do it alone and it certainly was difficult for us. It is not a great resolution, but there was a recognition that this population exists and we have to determine what the service needs are and how to provide them.

Q. It is not really difficult to find out what the service needs are. It seems to me that you are being held back because of the inertia, resistance or opposition of the organized Jewish community. No one is urging you to reach out to this group.

A. Over the past 8 years there have certainly been other groups that had never been addressed either, including the re-

tarded, the alcoholic, gamblers and domestic violence. Jewish domestic violence is a very difficult subject for the community to recognize as a reality, but this is not being touched with a ten-foot pole.

Q. You probably have gay members, though.

A. I am sure we have gay members and we have certainly gay staff members, but that would never be questioned. The question is whether to serve them as a group.

Discussion

The subject of homosexuality is emotionally laden and very controversial. It has achieved more notoriety in recent years due to the rapid spread of AIDS among the homosexual population. The caution expressed by the respondent is indicative of the gravity of the issue and the religious, ethical, and political ramifications of the decision to serve this group of Jews.

The gravity of the issue stems from the Torah's proscription of homosexual relations between males as sexual perversions (Lev. 18:22). Such acts are threatened with capital punishment (Lev. 20:13). Talmudic law extends the prohibition to lesbians who are cautioned not to indulge in the abhorrent practices of the Egyptians and the Canaanites.

Rabbinic sources advance various reasons for the strict ban on homosexuality. It is an unnatural perversion that debases the dignity of man; such acts frustrate the procreative purpose of sex; there is damage to family life. Jewish law rejects the view that homosexuality is to be regarded merely as a disease or morally neutral.²⁶ This stance, advocated by an Orthodox rabbi, is not unanimous as it has its detractors.

Lamm had advocated that homosexual deviance be regarded as a pathology. He has tried to reconcile the insights of Jewish tradition with the exigencies of contemporary life and scientific informa-

tion. After discussing different types of homosexuals and attitudes toward them, he concludes that "Judaism allows for no compromise in its abhorrence of sodomy, but encourages both compassion and efforts at rehabilitation."²⁷ He disapproves of the establishment of separate gay synagogues but instead encourages regular congregations and other Jewish groups "to accord hospitality and membership, on an individual basis, to those 'visible' homosexuals who qualify for the category of the ill."²⁸

The extant gay synagogues are affiliated with the Reform Movement. Its rationale is that they are Jews with Jewish needs and should be welcomed into the Jewish community.²⁹ Rejecting them as individuals and as a group will only succeed in alienating them further from the Jewish community whose support and affection they so desperately need. Here, then, are two opposing views regarding the extent of the Jewish community's responsibility toward homosexuals.

There also appears to be a silent group that does not look with favor on the morality of homosexuals. This group consists of major Jewish organizations who have not sponsored conferences nor institutes regarding the needs of this group and the community's responsibility to it. The respondent is keenly attuned to the Jewish community's lack of response to the needs of this group qua group. No clear signals have been received that would encourage the Center's professional staff and board to take the bold step to offer group services to homosexuals.

Value Conflict

The ethical dilemma faced by this Center is based on a conflict of values. The

26. "Homosexuality." *Encyclopedia Judaica* Vol. 8. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1972, p. 961.

27. Norman Lamm, "Judaism and the Modern Attitude to Homosexuality." *Encyclopedia Judaica Yearbook*. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1974, p. 204.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

29. Judaism and Homosexuality." *CCAR Journal* (Summer 1973).

primary value of the Jewish community center is the service to all members of the Jewish community without regard to age, gender, race, socio-economic status or sexual orientation. A second value stems from the Center's social work orientation which places primacy on the client and the client's needs. Both are fundamental values that would ideally commit and direct the staff to provide services for this group.

In contrast, there is wide diversity and general avoidance by the organized Jewish community toward this group. There has not yet been a genuine reaching out. The negative value stems from the Torah's sanctions against homosexuals whose behavior is deemed to be immoral. Their needs are devalued because their life style is considered abhorrent. It is difficult for the Center to counter this pervasive attitude.

Ethical Dilemma

The ethical question for the Center is whether *not* serving the homosexuals in groups is the right thing to do. All other groups are served, so why not this one? The central value of the Center should impel it to reach out to homosexuals, even as it does to alcoholics, retarded, singles, etc. Deontologically it is the right thing to do. Consequentially, it may lead to good results as individuals gain support and acceptance in the group and feel a sense of belonging to the Jewish community.

Contrariwise, it can be argued that it is the wrong thing to do because the behavior of homosexuals is deemed to be immoral and the Center should not serve such groups. Moreover, serving them may not lead to beneficial results because it would sanction and encourage their behavior in the eyes of the community. The presence of AIDS in this group makes it more susceptible to community sanction and ostracism,

and raises ethical issues for professionals and caretakers.³⁰

Resolution

In weighing the sides of the ethical dilemma, it appears that the obligation to give service should have greater claim on the Center staff because it represents the dominant value in the Center's hierarchy of values. Yet, the staff hesitated and compromised by starting a group for the families of gays, but not for the gays themselves. The compromise could reflect an inclination toward the use of discretion in ethical deliberations, rather than adherence to absolute principles. Toulmin urged the use of discretion in the ethics of intimacy.³¹ Accordingly, the staff could argue that the group to be served—Jewish homosexuals—are in the category of intimates rather than strangers. They are members of the Jewish people, the Jewish family writ large. They are the children of center members. As such, even if the negative value was deemed to be dominant, the ethics of discretion would permit their families to be served so that they can be helped, albeit vicariously.

This case supports the principle of compromise, wherever possible, in ethical deliberations.

CONCLUSION

Two cases have been presented that serve to illustrate the complexity of ethical decision-making when two different value systems coalesce in the service situation. From a professional social work perspective, the Center should offer programs to the mentally retarded on Friday nights and to the gay population according to their needs. The social work Code of Ethics, based on the values of the profession, mandates this policy unequivocally. From a Jewish perspective, the policy directive is not clear, due to the ideological diversity of the Jewish

30. "AIDS: Public Health and Civil Liberties." *The Hastings Center Report*, Vol. 16, No. 6. (December 1986).

31. Stephen Toulmin, "The Tyranny of Principles," *The Hastings Center Report* 11:6 (December 1981).

community. The Center's pluralistic stance veers it away from a one-dimensional doctrinal observance of Jewish law toward a more inclusive centrist position. Conflict is thus inevitable among diverse value systems that comprise the constituencies served.

In the case of the mentally retarded, the

Center took a firm stand and in the case of the gays, the Center compromised. This lack of consistency illustrates the complexity of ethical deliberation and decision-making, and the avoidance of absolute principles in favor of principles applied with discretion to individual situations.