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## On Jewish Peoplehood

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### Foreword

In two recent conversations with colleagues, the subject of relations with *haredi* Orthodox Jews arose. The first colleague responded, "I see them frequently on public transportation, shopping malls, etc. I have very little to say to them, but I feel they are my people." The second colleague answered bluntly, "I despise them!"

Both attitudes are real and coexist within Jewish life. Some, like my first colleague, uphold peoplehood as a bedrock of Jewish communal existence. Others, like my second colleague, permit the internal tensions within the Jewish body politic to overwhelm remaining ties of history or common fate.

In reviewing twentieth century Jewish history, the cause of peoplehood in many ways was a mainstay of Jewish life. The two dominant events of the century, the Holocaust and the birth of Israel, drove home the message of common Jewish fate and destiny. By century's close, however, the communal bonds of peoplehood had been badly frayed. Trends of mixed marriage and assimilation had blurred the very definition of membership in the Jewish people, while currents of Jewish renewal—often expressed through spirituality and individual identity—frequently underscored personal narrative and self-development rather than links with the larger collective of the Jewish people. For example, a 2002 UCLA study found that of children of mixed marriages, only one-third of the children of Jewish mothers and but 15 percent of the children of Jewish fathers even claim to be Jews once they've reached age 18. As Jewish theologian Emil Fackenheim argued two decades previously, the definition of Jewish peoplehood was sustained for three millennia by the simple fact of commonality of understanding of who was at Sinai—past, present, and future generations of Jews. That assumption of commonality could no longer be sustained when the definition of who was a Jew had been so badly blurred by the realities of mixed marriage.

Several turning points in recent Jewish history illustrate the duality of peoplehood as both bedrock of Jewishness and as fissure between Jews at the same time. The birth of Israel in 1948 fundamentally changed the map of Jewish peoplehood. The return of the Jews to sovereignty and statehood constituted the most hopeful event in two thousand years of Jewish history and the most unifying event of modern Jewish history. These ties of

peoplehood were further evoked by the month of May 1967, which eerily echoed the isolation and vulnerability of the Jews during the Holocaust, but this time culminated in victory in the Six-Day War of June 1967. Jews appeared no longer powerless in the face of threats of extermination. Rather the Israeli victory constituted a bonding experience for Jews worldwide.

At the close of the century, however, three other historical events have illustrated how badly frayed the concept of Jewish peoplehood has become. The decision by the Reform movement in 1983 to alter the definition of who is a Jew to include children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers shattered a two-thousand-year-old consensus on membership in the Jewish people as including children of Jewish mothers and converts to Judaism. By the same token, the decision by Orthodox parties to press for Knesset legislation to insure adoption of *halachic* criteria in defining a Jew for purposes of the Law of Return threatened to draw deep wedges between Israel and the liberal movements, which constituted nearly 80 percent of North American Jewry. Perhaps most importantly, the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 by an Orthodox Jewish nationalist exposed deep divisions within the Jewish people—contrasting mutually exclusive conceptions of Jewish identity, peoplehood, and statehood.

Thus, as a people today, Jews are sorely divided over questions of religion, culture, and politics. Hebrew, once the common heritage of Jews everywhere, no longer serves as vehicle for international Jewish discourse. Perhaps the greatest divide, at least in the Diaspora, exists between those for whom Jewishness lies at the center of their existence and those for whom it is irrelevant at best.

To be sure, positive signs also exist. The renewal of Jewish life in former Communist lands inspires Jews everywhere with a message of common peoplehood and mutual responsibility for the fate of all Jews. Similarly, one of the finest pages in the history of Zionism consisted of the rescue of Ethiopian Jewry undertaken in 1984 and 1992—a rescue that ought to lay to rest the canard of Zionism as racism.

What, then, needs to be done? How do we nurture a common base of peoplehood that can unite Jews and be transmitted to the next generation? In the following paper, Dr. David Harman argues that peoplehood cannot be taught formally, as in a curriculum. Rather, informal settings need to be created for experiencing the idea of common Jewish peoplehood. Moreover, Harman argues that the concept of peoplehood may be transmitted only if we create environments that truly value the idea and make it relevant to the real lives of Jews today. In particular, he urges Jewish educational institutions to harness the barely tapped potential of modern technologies to create "virtual communities" of Jews across international borders. It is our hope that this paper will catalyze educational thinking both about restoring the concept of peoplehood in a meaningful way to Jewish education and identifying vehicles that transmit that content effectively.

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Throughout the ages, Jewish cohesion was fed by many factors, including a common history and religion, common languages that set Jews aside from their non-Jewish neighbors, an independent school system with its own curriculum, distinctive dress, segregation from host country societies, and separate living areas. Anti-Semitism that often flared into diverse forms of persecution, and the lack of full rights of participation in the social structures of their countries of residence, kept Jews a people apart. Against this backdrop, Jewish experience was largely internalized and communal life flourished. Institutions were formed, internal structures developed. These, on the one hand, provided many important services and eased daily life while, on the other hand, also served to perpetuate separatism and cohesion.

To be Jewish meant that one was a member of a people, an *Am*, and that Jews everywhere were kin—far more so than were fellow countrymen. In contemporary terms, Jews were "resident aliens," more often than not with "temporary resident" status only. While continuously seeking recognition as "permanent residents" and, later, full citizenship in their countries of abode, Jews also maintained extensive communication networks with each other. Peoplehood was not an abstraction; it was realized through unceasing interaction and communication, tempered, of course, by prevailing technologies. Movement of individuals from one community to another was not uncommon, while the transfer of whole communities from one location to another, at times voluntarily, often forced, also occurred.

**The Twentieth Century: A Jewish Watershed**

Over the past century, Jews have continued their age-long propensity to migrate, seeking new, more socially and economically secure havens in which to sink anchor. Over the past few decades alone, the Jewish community of the Former Soviet Union has virtually relocated to Israel, the United States and—in lesser numbers—to other Western countries as well. Large numbers of South African Jews have migrated, and are continuing to move to Australia, Canada, and England. The Jews of Argentina are currently contemplating emigration to escape the economic collapse and social upheavals in their country. The Jewish community of Ethiopia has been transported almost in its entirety to Israel. These population movements come on the heels of earlier mass emigrations from North Africa, mostly to Israel and in significant numbers to France; from the Muslim countries of the

Middle East, chiefly to Israel. Over the past sixty years there have been immigrations from the United States to Israel, albeit in small numbers, and much larger migrations from Israel to the United States. Preceding these shifts, the course of Jewish history was dramatically altered with the annihilation of European Jewry during the Holocaust and the relocation of the surviving remnant to North America, Israel, and elsewhere. Migrations during the first half of the twentieth century saw major population transfers of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe to North America, and in smaller numbers to West European countries and to Mandatory Palestine. In the year 2000 the map of the Jewish world is altogether different than it was in 1900.

It is not just geographic spread that has changed beyond historical recognition: Each move has presaged a change in language, culture, lifestyle-and in forms of Jewish expression and affiliation. Few young Jews today speak the languages or live lives even remotely similar to those of their grandparents and great grandparents. The two largest Jewish communities in today's world-Israel and the United States-have struck roots and developed in regions where there were but a few Jews only a century ago. And they are different in most ways from preceding generations. In Israel, the first sovereign Jewish state since antiquity, Hebrew has been revived as the lingua franca after being dormant for two millennia. Jews who arrived in the country from the four corners of the world are forging a new Israeli culture. American Jews speak English, again not the language of their forebears. They have integrated well into the fabric of American society and have attained full and unfettered membership, in a manner unparalleled in Diaspora Jewish history.

At the same time, demographic projections indicate a steady diminution of Jewish populations everywhere except in Israel. Low natural increase rates coupled with high levels of assimilation and intermarriage have combined to stem any substantial Jewish growth, as was anticipated by some in the post-World War II era. Even the rosier of future growth predictions envisions a worldwide Jewish community of only 18 million fifty years hence, while the more pessimistic view predicts no growth at all.

Vast numbers were never a Jewish characteristic, nor for that matter, a Jewish objective. Jewish strength, resilience, and historical longevity derived over the ages from other traits: the deeply embedded concept of Jews constituting a people-*Am Yisrael*-membership in which transcended geographic and political boundaries, and the resulting strong ties that bound Jews everywhere with each other, coupled with both religious and temporal malleability that enabled Jews to adapt to constantly changing local conditions while maintaining the quintessential bonds of peoplehood. To be sure, not all Jews at all times sustained their membership either in the Jewish people or in the Jewish religion; many succumbed to local pressures and joined other groups. Many were annihilated. But a strong, committed mainstream persisted, keeping the Jewish people alive and viable from age to age. Not all forms of Jewish religious expression were either universally adopted or accepted by all Jews at all times. Jewish history, indeed, relates numerous instances of deep fissures from the earliest of times down to modernity. Throughout, however, the concept of peoplehood served as a powerful and abiding sustaining force.

Now in the fifth millennium of Jewish existence and entering the third millennium of the Common Era, it is precisely that concept of Jewish peoplehood that appears to be showing distinct signs of weakening.

For Jews, the twentieth century was a roller coaster. While Jews uprooted themselves from countries and homes in which they had lived for centuries and sank anchors in new environments, they evolved new forms of Jewish expression and forged new organizational structures and communal institutions. World events gave rise to urgent Jewish challenges to which world Jewry responded with alacrity. Two new forms of Jewish existence were forged: independent, sovereign Jewish statehood-Israel-and, in parallel, full integration with full rights and responsibilities of participation for Jews in countries of their citizenship. Two centuries-long Jewish quests had been achieved.

The seminal Jewish events of the century were the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel-each transforming Jewish peoplehood dramatically and decisively, and each underscoring the continued vitality of Jewish peoplehood, the responsibility of Jews everywhere for one another, and Jewish cohesion in the face of urgent need. These and other significant events, such as the need for rehabilitation of communities and people in distress and the plight of Soviet Jewry, among others, served as bonding Jewish experiences. Identified Jews could not but see these events as engaging them directly. Indeed, to no small degree, such engagement itself became a form of Jewish identification and expression, more often than not transcending Jewish religious affiliation and devotion.

The twentieth century provided an increasingly secularized Jewry with a string of cogent Jewish events that sustained-even strengthened-Jewish peoplehood while at the same time enabling individuals to assert their Judaism despite the weakening of the more religious and ritualistic aspects of participation. For many, religious observance, or at least membership in synagogues and religious communal institutions, continued to be a mainstay of Jewish affiliation. For others, participation in Jewish causes became a paramount means of assertion and attraction-with a significant degree of overlap between these two groups. And yet others, assimilated into the fabrics of their respective host societies without having to renounce their Judaism, felt their distinct Jewish connections beginning to unglue and becoming less important. With far greater ease than ever before in Jewish history, individuals could remain Jewish to the extent they wished, while participating fully in the cadences of local social, cultural, economic, and civil societies.

These three groups exist in all communities of the contemporary Jewish world, albeit in differing proportions. Arbitrarily labeling them "the religiously identified," the "causes focused," and "the drifters," one finds patterns of association heavily influenced by events. With the breakdown of many Jewish nostrums, fewer and fewer areas of consensus pertain.

Particularly at this time, one such previously consensual arena is especially significant: Israel, its fortunes, trials, and tribulations. Prior to its establishment in 1948, there was debate in the Jewish world regarding the desirability and viability of an independent,

sovereign Jewish state. Following the Declaration of Independence, that debate was transformed into a collective, virtually universal Jewish concern for Israel's safety and welfare. Manifestations of support were legion, and the prevailing wisdom in the Diaspora was that this newborn Jewish adventure should be supported and unconditionally coddled. To be sure, there were voices of dissent, but they were clearly a small minority. In the aftermath of the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars, of 1967 and 1973 respectively, the overarching consensus began showing cracks. More critical attitudes and a growing feeling that criticism was both legitimate and desirable gradually replaced blanket approval of Israeli policies. Israel's growth and economic successes contributed to fostering this trend, as without doubt did voices emanating from Israel calling for a change in the nature of Israel-Diaspora relationships.

At one extreme, disengagement began to grow, occasionally assuming a broader characteristic of general disengagement from active, overt Jewishness. The "drifter" segment of the Jewish world increased, in some communities most significantly. Members of the "causes-focused" group began adding new causes to the roster engaging them—some international in nature, such as freeing Soviet Jewry or, later, transporting Ethiopian Jewry to Israel; and some more domestically focused, such as "Jewish Continuity" or later "Jewish Renaissance." Yet others, the "religiously identified," have continued in their quest for religious Jewish expression, in both traditional and new forms. The balance between these overarching groups has never been fixed; a myriad of events impact it constantly.

### **Looking to the Future: The Under-Eighteens**

Some idea of the Jewish future can be gleaned from focusing on those now under the age of eighteen—tomorrow's adults. Extrapolating from available demographic data, there are approximately three million Jewish school-age youngsters in the world today, evenly divided between Israel and the Diaspora. While the United States continues to be home to the largest Jewish community, its younger generation is only three-quarters as large as its Israeli counterpart: Israel contains about half of the world's young Jews, the United States around 35 percent. All six-to-eighteen-year-olds spread around the rest of the world constitute only 15 percent of the total. If present rates of intermarriage prevail and other factors do not intervene, these proportions will change dramatically when today's youth cohorts attain majority. Only half of the American Jewish group and only 35 percent of those living in other Diaspora communities can be expected to remain in the fold. By contrast, almost all of the Israelis in these cohorts will remain Jewish.

In Israel, the entire group, numbering approximately 1.5 million receives some Jewish education through the state school system; in the Diaspora about half of the roughly 1.5 million youngsters are engaged in some form of Jewish education; about half receive no Jewish educational inputs whatsoever. Of those who do participate in educational activities of all sorts, an estimated 30 percent have but limited exposure through supplementary schools, which they attend up to bar and bat mitzvah age, while the

remaining 20 percent benefit from more substantial inputs in day schools and combinations of different informal educational programs.

These data, disconcerting enough, offer only a partial picture: They do not indicate what "being Jewish" means to these youngsters. In the absence of adequate research findings, one can only offer educated guesses. Israeli youth, regardless of their religiosity, live intensely Jewish lives by dint of being part of Israel's life cadences and ethos. While there appears to be a diminution in both Jewish knowledge and practice among many in the country's "secular" majority, there is also a parallel increase in the numbers of those living in families and participating in schools with Orthodox orientations. Jewish issues are daily fare, and one cannot grow up completely oblivious to them. Even more ambiguous is the attitude of Israeli youth to notions of Jewish peoplehood. The term "Am Yisrael"-the people of Israel-is certainly part of daily public discourse and all Israelis are aware of it, and most, it would seem, resonate with its implications. However, when asked to define themselves, most Israeli youngsters would probably respond that they are foremost Israelis and then Jews. It is highly unlikely that they would then go on to note that they are members of the Jewish people, although they clearly feel a deep affinity for Jews living elsewhere. *Ha'am HaYehudi* (the Jewish people) and *Am Yisrael* (the people of Israel) are very real and pervasive concepts.

Assessing attitudes of Jewish youth in the Diaspora is more difficult. Depending upon the community, general environment, and family orientation, among other factors, Jewish bonds range from intense to wholly absent. The extent of intermarriage in Western countries provides ample indication that Jewishness, in all its manifestations, is not a central self-definitional attribute of the majority of Diaspora youth. For many, however, being Jewish carries real meaning and commitment. Is that commitment focused on lore, religion, group particularity, a concept of peoplehood, or some combination of them all?

Jewish education, broadly defined, clearly constitutes a significant input into the formation of one's Jewish consciousness, identity, and self-definition. Just which content contributes most to the formation of Jewishness remains unclear, and is more than likely variable for different individuals. For some, it is more formal and structured knowledge of traditional Jewish subject matter such as history, religious studies and texts, ritual, and the Hebrew language. For others, it might be the traditions, history, and lore that are defining features of a community of affinity. Yet for others, it might be Jewish causes-Israel and the plight of communities in distress, for example-that motivate involvement.

Formal and informal educational frameworks-family environments, schools, camps, community centers, youth movements, and organizations, as well as organized youth travel-are the mainstays of the arsenal available for the provision of Jewish education. There is, of course, no compulsory Jewish education outside Israel: All participation is voluntary. It is presently estimated that about half of all Diaspora children and youth engage in some form of structured Jewish education, often of dubious value. There are substantial differences between communities: In some the percentage of participation is relatively high. Half receive no Jewish educational inputs at all.

## **Jewish Education**

In one very central arena of Jewish concern and activity throughout the ages there has been a definite diminution everywhere: Jewish education. Historically, Jewish literacy was acquired through an amalgam of formal and informal educational frameworks. Jewish schools were effective because they reflected the intensely Jewish character of the communities they served. Families and communities reinforced the substance and the messages of the heavily Jewish curricula, and the curricula, in turn, reinforced the Jewish identities and lifestyles of the communities. This symbiotic relationship, pertaining over centuries, made for a potent school system and engendered widespread Jewish functional literacy. To be sure, this literacy was at times very rudimentary, especially among girls, who generally did not attend schools, but more often than not, it was more advanced and sophisticated. Young girls for the most part acquired their Jewish knowledge through an effective informal process of osmosis rather than from formal instruction. Their school was their home and community environment; their teachers significant members of both. Though manifest in differing degrees, Jewish literacy was, for all intents and purposes, universal.

With greater access to the outside world beginning in the nineteenth century, Jews began a gradual process of moving into "mixed" neighborhoods and, inevitably, of enrolling their children in Jewish schools with "mixed" curricula and in non-Jewish, "regular" schools. This tendency grew substantially with the great migrations of the latter part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, especially among those immigrating to the United States. Ever higher proportions of Jewish children began receiving increasing amounts of "general" education and, simultaneously, decreasing Jewish educational fares. The latter became progressively more supplementary and progressively less substantive—certainly less central to an individual's overall education. Most significantly, as Jews integrated more fully into their local environments and as assimilation grew, the age-old symbiosis between Jewish education and the life patterns of Jews began eroding. Jewish life and Jewish education were decreasingly reinforcing mirror images of each other. In consequence, and not surprisingly, Jewish literacy began a decades-long process of diminution.

The Jewish educational experience has differed in different communities. As a rule, the better and more accessible the public education systems, the greater has been the Jewish propensity to enroll their children in them. Where availability of good public education is limited, and where members of the socio-economic strata to which Jews tend to belong eschew public schooling, preferring various private school arrangements, Jews have often established their own private educational networks. In more Orthodox Jewish communities people are more likely to direct their children to "full" Jewish schools—that is, day schools.

Where general schooling is preferred, Jewish education is either provided through a network of supplementary or complementary arrangements, or not at all. In earlier days,



during the transitional era of the first generation of great migrations, Jewish supplementary schooling was manifest in a very full, five-day-a-week after-school program that, while not compulsory, was very widely attended. Over the years, the Jewish school week gradually shrunk, as did the period of attendance and rates of participation, until at present, depending upon the community, after-school structures usually offer between ten and four weekly hours of instruction to student bodies between the ages of nine or ten to thirteen. These programs are generally considered chiefly bar and bat mitzvah preparation and seek to impart a modicum of Jewish knowledge. Although found in communities around the world, the supplementary school is essentially an American creation. With the overwhelming majority of participants "graduating" upon becoming bar or bat mitzvah, there are serious doubts as to this educational format's long-range efficacy in imbuing its charges with either Jewish knowledge or positive identity.

Available data, admittedly sparse, indicates that some supplementary Jewish education experiences can actually be counterproductive. Youngsters enrolled in afternoon and Sunday schools, at times not willingly, cannot help but compare themselves to classmates in their "regular" school who are spared this "inconvenience."

Jewish day schools, thought to be the apex of Jewish educational accomplishment, face difficult challenges. On the one hand, as good private schools competing for a college-bound clientele, they must offer high-level instruction in general subject matter—the normative curricula of the school systems in which they function—while at the same time providing an adequate Jewish fare. As the school day is elastic only up to a point, compromises must be found when striking the balance between general and Jewish subject matter. In head-on clashes between the two, Jewish subjects always lose. Indeed, with increasing demands for more diversity and depth in secular studies, coupled with heightened competition to secure places in desirable institutions of tertiary education, pressures for reducing the amount of time devoted to Jewish subject matter in favor of more general instruction only mounts. In many Jewish day schools, the result has been a greatly diminished Jewish curriculum, at times reduced to as few as six to ten weekly hours. It is not an exaggeration to state that some Jewish day schools have become day schools for Jews.

The exceptions to this trend are day schools serving the very Orthodox Jewish population. Day school enrollment in those communities is virtually universal. Jewish content is favored and general studies given short shrift, reflecting a very conscious choice to limit the mobility of graduates outside the community and particularly to discourage secular tertiary education.

In the United States, far more than in any other community, Jewish education in all of its forms is largely focused on the primary and middle-school years—grades one to eight or nine. Secondary level Jewish education tends to be the exception rather than the norm. In practice, young Jews who have attended either day or supplementary Jewish schools during their prepubescent and early teen years go on to schools with no Jewish content at all during their adolescence. For the majority, there will be few if any Jewish inputs during that all-important period of identity formation and self-definition. Just how far the

influences of earlier Jewish educational experiences can extend, absent reinforcement, is highly questionable.

Yet another disconcerting aspect of Jewish schooling is the quality of instruction. Teaching, in general, is a complex and difficult profession that is not well regarded or remunerated. It is not surprising that retention rates for teachers are often low and early burnout common. Jewish teaching is no exception to the rule. Turnover is high and competence levels often questionable, with the situation particularly exacerbated in supplementary schools, where it is difficult to offer teachers full-time employment. Moreover, the incentive for teachers to engage in further training aimed at improving their performance is limited. It is important to note that there are many exceptional, dedicated, and effective teachers everywhere. Unfortunately, they are the exception rather than the norm.

### **Informal Jewish Education**

Informal Jewish educational experiences-especially camps and youth movements and organizations-have become significant and effective avenues for obtaining Jewish inputs. Summer camps for children have evolved into a finely honed form of educational recreation for the general population, predominantly in the United States. Jewish camping has also flourished. Overall, assessments indicate that youngsters participating in these undertakings respond positively. Curricula tend to emphasize ruach (spirit) rather than systematically designed instruction, and those participating tend to be from the more committed segments of communities-from families that provide their children formal Jewish education, attend synagogue, and are more strongly and actively identified. The programs and their approach have proven to be effective, their outreach limited.

Another rather unique form of informal Jewish education that has evolved over decades is that of organized Jewish travel. Organized groups of young Jews, usually adolescents and young adults, have been participating in a wide range of programs based on travel, most frequently to Israel. At their height, youth trips to Israel-known as "The Israel Experience"-enrolled around 20,000 people annually. The typical Israel trip is planned as a four-to-six-week experience during which participants tour the country from north to south, seeing its archeological and historical sites, drinking in the views, camping out, walking in the Negev or the hills of the Galilee, on occasion meeting with Israeli peers, and in general having a good time. Beginning in the 1980s, side trips to Jewish historical sites in Europe were added to the basic Israel tour, enabling planners to visit locations associated with the Holocaust, as well as towns and cities in which Jewish life had once thrived. Participation has waned greatly over the past several years, largely due to security conditions in Israel and numerous official travel warnings. However, even at their height, participation from the United States never exceeded 5 percent of the total, while from European countries and most Latin American communities, participation figures were in the 80 to 90 percentiles.

An innovative new version of the Israel trip is the "Birthright" program, conceived by a small group of philanthropists who believed in the potential of well-planned trips to Israel to have a long-lasting positive Jewish impact upon their participants. The initiators of the program convinced the State of Israel and local Jewish communities to join them in providing full funding for intensive ten-day planned trips to Israel-such trips to be considered a "birthright" of all Jews. Focusing its attention on college-age youth, Birthright is now in its fourth year and has brought over 25,000 youngsters, most for the first time, to Israel. Initial assessments are showing that these trips do have significant impact, at least in the short term. Longitudinal data, once it becomes available, will show just how lasting that impact is. Unfortunately, current security conditions are serving to dissuade many potential participants from attending the program and are forcing programmatic changes in the itinerary itself. Nonetheless, Birthright-known in Israel by its Hebrew name, *Taglit* (discovery)-is continuing to bring groups to the country.

In post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe, informal educational frameworks-camps, in particular-have been playing a different role than elsewhere: They have become in no small sense introductions to Judaism and Jewish peoplehood for a generation deprived of any Jewish inputs. Although participation is relatively small as a percentage of the potentially available group, the programs have been important contributors to the revival of Jewish consciousness and Jewish life. That revival has also been marked by a reestablishment of Jewish schools, both day and supplementary, that have begun attracting a clientele interested in the combination of a "good" education with links to the West and a Jewish connection.

### **Adult Jewish Education**

A form of informal education that has grown over the past decade but remains poorly documented is adult Jewish education. Largely anecdotal evidence indicates a growth in educational activities directed at adult populations, evidently satisfying a desire to "reconnect." It appears that participation is heavily weighted toward younger adults beginning their own family lives and perhaps searching for a combination of roots and identity. The phenomenon is not widespread and is certainly not a mass movement, but it is distinct and warrants attention. In the United States, for a new Jewishly committed generation of adults for whom the Israel connection is waning, it is possible that such programs, often emphasizing Jewish textual learning and Hebrew language, are replacing Israel and world Jewish causes as a curriculum.

In the Former Soviet Union adult *ulpan* classes-emphasizing Hebrew language instruction peppered with Jewish history, literature, and instruction on modern Israel and Jewish holidays-mushroomed during the decade following *glasnost*. Over 250 *ulpanim* were established, with an average annual enrollment of 20,000 at their height-a most impressive figure that did not, however, exceed 15-20 percent of the adults in any one city or town. For many participants, these classes offered an opportunity to reestablish a Jewish tie and at the same time to explore emigration options. Enrollments have dropped

over the past several years, most likely due to the drop in emigration, the greatly diminished numbers of Jews in various communities, and the availability of other educational options for those interested in pursuing Jewish knowledge.

One of the more interesting developments in the FSU has been the establishment of Jewish institutions of higher education. With mixed fortunes, seven such institutions have been created, attracting a student body consisting mainly of young students with little or no prior Jewish exposure, for a very broad range of instructional offerings. Understandably very uneven in quality, these institutions have begun striking roots and satisfying what appears to be growing demands for a more sophisticated intellectual connection with Judaism. Reaching out, some of these new centers have sought and are beginning to forge ties with more established Jewish studies departments in Israel, the United States, Canada, and England. A national organization of higher Jewish studies, called Sefer, was established and, with several hundred members, has fast become an active focal umbrella for Jewish higher education interest and activity.

Jewish studies have also experienced rapid growth and some popularity in many Western universities. A relatively new phenomenon, over 300 departments and programs have been established in American universities and well over a score elsewhere. While there are still very few Judaic studies majors, nonetheless it has been estimated that well over 4,000 students attend courses. While some participants are not Jewish and most likely are motivated by intellectual curiosity, the majority indicate that they are interested in enrolling precisely because they are Jewish and would like to broaden their knowledge of Judaism.

While Jewish education, troubled as it may be, presently offers a-possibly the most-significant vehicle for the transmission of knowledge and attitudes from one generation to the next, one must bear in mind that participation is very limited and whatever positive effects may accrue impact on too small a segment of the Jewish people.

### **On Content, Teaching and Learning**

Jewish education today offers its students a curricular cocktail consisting mainly of Hebrew language instruction, Jewish history, Bible, Jewish law, Jewish thought, prayers, holidays, and perhaps some familiarity with modern-day Israel-a syllabus that has changed little over the past century. Explicit curricula seek to impart knowledge of Jewish law, lore, and ritual along with Hebrew language skills. In addition, most Jewish education also has an implicit agenda: the development of a Jewish connection, a sense of belonging and membership. The cognitive objectives are addressed through the formal program of studies; the affective goals are usually achieved through the school environment and informal educational activities.

The time available for instruction renders it virtually impossible to delve into any of the subject matter arenas to any substantial depth, with the result that, at most, students

receive a smidgen of information. If the intention of such basic instruction is to whet the appetite and create a demand for more substantial learning, Jewish education can hardly boast major success: Overall, attitudes to Jewish studies tend to range from negative to neutral and only very rarely to a burning desire to learn more. This situation is clearly exacerbated when Jewish instruction is limited to the primary and middle grades of schooling. In Orthodox day schools as well as in full secondary schools, where more time is devoted to Jewish studies, the duration of attendance is prolonged, and the surrounding environment tends to be more supportive and reinforcing; thus it stands to reason that the depth of learning and retention is greater.

Longitudinal retention studies in education are few and far between; in Jewish education they are absent. It simply cannot be assumed that what is taught in Jewish schools is retained over time without ongoing connection to the subject matter-and that reinforcement does not exist for a great many Jews. A curriculum is the basis of that which is taught; it does not necessarily translate into that which is learned. Clearly, the environments in which young Jews live, their family, community and peer interactions, influence both the acquisition of knowledge and its retention perhaps more than does explicit instruction.

Educators differentiate between the cognitive and the affective domains of learning. While the former refers to the acquisition of knowledge, the latter is far more complex and relates to learning that forms and influences attitudes. Curricula mostly address the cognitive domain; they seek to organize subject matter and present it to students, with teachers as intermediaries, in an interesting manner in the hope that the knowledge imparted will be acquired and, as it were, deposited in one's "memory bank" to be available when needed. Just how schooling affects the affective domain, however, remains one of education's central questions. "Experiential" teaching, that is, the creation of experiences that serve to engage students and trigger learning-often participatory-around designated subject matter has become an important, oft-employed instructional strategy. In informal educational frameworks, experientially designed activities are the backbone of practice. In formal school settings, where a syllabus "has to be completed," instruction tends to be more structured and straightforward, less experience-based. While many decry what they consider to be "touchy-feely" education as "soft" or insubstantial, it is often the less structured and information-laden aspects of schooling that leave the greatest lasting imprint.

There is, however, no quantifiable study of the efficacy of Jewish education with regard to its affective objectives. Just which feelings are generated and what attitudes are instilled-to the extent that such questions are addressed at all-remain, at best, at the level of subjective speculation.

As Jewish observance at home and in the community has waned, and Jewish links weakened, Jewish education has been tacitly charged with accomplishing that which was traditionally the domain of families and communities: connectivity to the Jewish people. Parents would like their children to "be" and "remain" Jewish, and they view the various forms of Jewish education as the main vehicles for instilling in youngsters the tools

necessary for that to occur. Parental and communal roles in this process—for a process it certainly is—have often been arrogated to these sorely equipped educational arrangements. Moreover, the reinforcement function that environment traditionally played, and through which it made its most significant contribution to learning, has very often been abdicated.

The essence of Jewish education is not merely the imparting of knowledge of the subject matter of the Jewish curriculum. That is but a component of learning that cannot, on its own, hope to have lasting impact either on the cognitive or affective domains. As a "stand alone," most Jewish education doesn't stand a chance. As part of a larger strategy consisting of a weave of inputs, including a supportive family and community environment, replete with "significant others" who serve as positive, reinforcing role models, and a similarly oriented peer group, it can be significant.

Reinforcements are necessary for both the cognitive and affective objectives of the educational enterprise. The notion of peoplehood and the sense of belonging to a people are presented to youngsters in both the formal course of studies, albeit more often implicitly rather than overtly, and through informal activities. The concept itself is difficult to concretize, often remaining hazy and abstract—too hazy perhaps and too abstract to be thoroughly grasped. Absent reinforcement and additional, ongoing inputs from the child's wider environment, it is highly questionable whether any acquisition and retention can be assumed.

For most Jews today, the threads that, when interwoven, traditionally laid the basis for a continuous, mutually supporting educational experience with more certain outcomes, have unraveled. Changes in family life and structure—well-documented and researched—coupled with a sea change in communal arrangements, patterns and rhythms, the ease of access to "the larger world," and the intrusion of multiple external influences have irrevocably altered age-old paradigms of naturally coordinated and mutually reinforcing elements.

Just a few regularly occurring examples follow to illustrate the discontinuities that, for all intents and purposes, are widely accepted as normative: People belong to synagogues that theoretically require attendance and participation in accordance with a known cadence, but at the same time they have other affiliations that pose conflicting demands on both their time and substance. The manner in which such conflicts are resolved can only serve to sow dissonance in youngsters seeking consistency and stability. Young children attend schools in which they are taught the laws of *kashrut*, only to go home to be served nonkosher meals: again, a dissonance-causing event. Affinities and connections between Jews are extolled, but so is participation in general civil society, inevitably raising issues of prioritizing loyalties. Jews have long had to cope with questions of dual, even multiple, loyalties that have evaded simple, clear-cut resolution. Youngsters are regularly provided with difficult-to-balance, conflicting messages insofar as peoplehood is concerned: They are told that they are members of the American or French or English people, while simultaneously belonging to the Jewish people. Can one have dual peoplehood memberships? How are the two manifested? How can they be rationalized?

Almost everyone can list a great many such contradictions, both large and small, that underscore inconsistency and discontinuity.

Discontinuities create dissonance, which in turn, is difficult to tolerate over time, and naturally seeks resolution and consonance; in classic push-pull fashion, consonance is usually restored in the direction of the stronger influence. Complicating matters is that at different times, under differing circumstances, the various influencing factors carry unequal weight. Insofar as education is concerned, and Jewish education in particular, a youngster's immediate environment of family and friends generally exerts more powerful influence during the period of school participation. To the degree that messages emanating from the school curriculum conflict with those being broadcast by environmental influences, dissonances are most often resolved in the direction of the latter.

Further complicating matters, but at the same time offering a "window of opportunity," is yet another known syndrome: the differential impacts of some experiences. Simply put, irrespective of the logical significance of several influences on an individual's life, some experiences may be more powerful than others. Thus, for instance, while it may be assumed that family interactions exert greater influence over very young children, some experiences are capable of "overriding" their impact. A simple, but nonetheless cogent example is that of a family that maintains and covets pets, in which the family dog inexplicably bites a child. The resulting trauma can cause an "override" and serve to instill a negative attitude toward dogs, ostensibly in conflict with prior messages, but powerful and enduring. Equally influential in forming attitudes are a host of either traumatic or pleasurable experiences, the essence of which may not necessarily be environmentally reinforced.

Educational practice is rich with examples: A child connects with a particular teacher, whose influence transcends the subject matter being conveyed; youngsters bond with each other in relationships that become very significant and influential; items of content so enrapture and capture some individuals as to have undue and unexpected influence. Indeed, instances of this nature are not dependent upon explicitly educational structures; they can occur anytime and anywhere. An important lesson to educators is that one can plan and engage in educational activities, but cannot always plan the outcomes.

If anything, modern living renders the maintenance of controlled environments virtually impossible. Opportunities and freedoms that hitherto were limited and subject to greater control abound. Today's younger generation has whole worlds available to it that previous generations did not. Historically, the combination of the ability to read and to have access to varieties of written matter was thought to be potentially dangerous. The Catholic Church was adamant in its opposition to widespread literacy because it feared the consequences of individuals having access to "seditious and heretical" influences. Literacy did, indeed, set people free by vastly expanding the world in which they lived. Gutenberg's great accomplishment was not merely the invention of moveable type, but the incredible expansion of people's horizons that resulted from it. Many of the central events of the modern era, beginning in the sixteenth century, were triggered by the ability

to read and write-something most people today take for granted. Other similarly potent developments include telephony, simplified travel, radio and television, to name but several very obvious examples. Each has served to expand horizons and to extend the range of potential influences on people.

### **The Internet and the Potential for Connection**

Over the past several years yet another such revolutionary development, the full impact of which has yet to be realized, has been launched and is still being refined: the Internet. The possibilities opened up by the Web-to maintain instantaneous communication regardless of location, to access seemingly endless sources of information, to "roam" or "surf" unexplored terrain, all with relative ease and little expense-are transformative events. Accessibility, freedom, and the introduction of a vast array of potential connections and influences are already having a profound impact. The Internet is not merely an advanced iteration of literacy; it constitutes a new breakthrough with as-yet-unknown consequences. The written word set down in books lends itself to a measure of control: Libraries can determine which books line their shelves; publishers can exercise judgment regarding what to print; booksellers can decide what to offer their clientele. Such controls, of course, are not absolute, but they can, to a degree, influence who reads what. The Internet, by its very architecture, allows easy and unfettered access to anything that has been placed on the Web, and at the same time enables anyone to deposit anything on it. Some attempts to impose limitations on content and access have been initiated, but they remain largely ineffective. All those with access to the Internet-and their numbers are multiplying daily-for all intents and purposes have access to virtually anything it contains.

The Internet, not unlike the effect of the printing press on reading in the past, makes it possible to open new and exciting vistas and to launch new avenues and directions for stimulating learning. The possibilities are exciting; the terrain barely explored. Experimentation with approaches labeled variously distance learning, distance education, and e-learning has begun to illustrate some potential benefits to education although, thus far with mixed results. Educators, perpetually wary of innovation and predictably change-resistant, have tended to view the newly available technologies as aids to instruction rather than as harbingers of entirely new educational strategies and practices. Technological breakthroughs, some already available, some still on drawing boards, portend new forms of both teaching and learning-forms that might well reshape the manner in which people learn, interact, form and sustain relationships, and experience the world. In thinking through possible future directions for education in general and Jewish education in particular, the potential inherent in this new world and newly opened opportunities should be paramount. The few applications that can already be found in education systems, such as distance courses (usually text-based) offered on the Internet, chat rooms and discussion groups around specific topics, broadcasts, and others remain rudimentary in conception and execution. The opportunities are vastly more sophisticated and exciting; realization of this potential is presently in its infancy.



History is replete with tales of societies that proved inadequate to the task of cultural transmission: Over time, they ceased to exist, their members absorbed into stronger social and cultural entities. Education alone, however, has been neither the sole hero of cultural continuity, nor the sole purveyor of cultural identity. Environments have proven far more potent in this regard. Where environments have been more receptive and embracing of members of diverse groups, individual group continuity has always been threatened; where the surrounding culture has been unwelcoming, suspicious and exclusive, the excluded group's self-definition has been shaped by external forces as much as through internal transmission.

Jewish education thrived and achieved its greatest successes under conditions of cultural exclusivity and lack of environmental acceptance. It has sunk to its nadir in a world that has removed virtually all barriers to full Jewish participation in all aspects of national and social life. Jewish exclusivity is now self-imposed rather than externally dictated. Unaided by external factors, Jewish education faces a new and complex challenge: to transmit Jewish culture, Judaism, and the concept of Jewish peoplehood in an environment that does not-either positively or negatively-support its efforts.

This telescoped discussion of educational theory as it pertains to the acquisition of knowledge, the forging of attitudes, and the determination of behaviors as well as to the architecture of educational practice suggests vital parameters for consideration of future directions and efforts. It is to those that attention is now directed.

## **Whither?**

Looking ahead, it is abundantly clear that creative interventions are urgently needed to preserve Jewish cohesion, Jewish identity, and Jewish peoplehood in future generations. Absent aggressive action, allowing current trends to play themselves out, the Jewish future looks bleak. Action is essential-and it is essential now.

Despite their incomplete coverage and inadequate record, Jewish educational frameworks present themselves as appropriate arenas for launching new initiatives because they attract larger numbers of Jews in groups than any other framework; because during the period of attendance participants are more or less a "captive audience"; because they are malleable to a degree; and because they are potentially significant avenues for impacting identity. In addition, should programs of various types prove extremely attractive to their participants, it is possible that broader enrollment and participation can be elicited through such frameworks.

Jewish educational frameworks are referred to in the broadest sense: They include schools of all types, community centers, synagogues, adult education activities, camps, youth movements, and organizations, as well as organized Jewish travel programming.

There is no one approach and no single activity that can be a panacea. Different individuals react differently to the same stimuli. The age-old adage that has informed educational practice throughout the millennia-*si duo idem faciunt, non est idem* (when two people do the same thing, it is not the same thing)-should at all times be kept in mind when approaching the present challenge. To be sure, educators have all too often ignored this message while accepting it in theory. Generations of students have paid the price. Thus varieties of activities suitable for diverse palates need to be devised, in some cases building upon existing programs and in others launching new efforts.

In addition to structured educational frameworks, there are other vehicles that educate, inform people, and contribute to shaping their attitudes and opinions. In today's media-suffused world, news travels instantaneously, media mavens offer immediate- often inaccurate-commentary, and public opinion is molded by a combination of words and images that flash before one's eyes almost as soon as an event occurs, and then are repeated continuously. When these events relate to Jewish issues-such as the current "intifada" and Israel's incursion into West Bank cities and towns, or instances of overt anti-Semitism in Europe-the manner in which they are reported both educates and influences Jews as well as non-Jews. Even though accuracy and truth are all too often compromised in the media, the images and impact endure. In looking at the broad educational map, then, mass media are clearly an important element.

The World-Wide Web is yet another educating force. Surfing the Web, individuals have access to a multitude of sites, with a seemingly endless range of content. There are a growing number of Jewish sites. While it is possible to know how many visits, or "hits," each of these sites receive, it is not known just what influence they actually have or, for that matter, what occurs during the log-on sessions. Due to the ease of access and rapid spread of Internet usage, it is a medium that warrants serious attention, as it can be assumed that Jewish content may potentially attract increasing numbers of people.

It is not sufficient to tweak existing educating mechanisms so that they will perhaps be somewhat more efficient or a tad more effective. Yet another new or revised curriculum, another teacher training seminar, another Web site, important as each may be, does not constitute the kind of change likely to dramatically alter or improve outcomes. Tedium is the enemy of excitement and stimulation, and, unfortunately, a great deal of what transpires in Jewish education is tedious, or at least perceived to be so by much of its clientele. The necessary changes need to be conceived in bold brush strokes, not in small etchings-a tall order, but necessary: If too much time is allowed to elapse before action is taken, additional generations of Jews may be lost and Jewish peoplehood continue to erode.

### **Some Essentials of Planning**

Much of organized Jewish activity is segmented in many directions and rarely coordinated. Schools are segmented by age and grade level; camps direct their attention

to a given age group; adult programming focuses on specified groups; youth movements and organizations have their target audiences, and so on. Segmentation is also institutional, as some agencies and institutions affiliate with given umbrella agencies and organizations, some are independent, and some are purely local in nature, while others are part of national and international movements and organs. While there is a measure of interaction between institutions and occasional efforts at concerted action, the cooperation usually remains at the rhetorical rather than the proactive level. Overall, fragmentation mitigates against coordinated action and planning.

The old story about two Jews on a desert island requiring three synagogues, one for each and one in which neither would set foot, assumes that both would be *shul*-goers. While underscoring and caricaturizing Jewish divisiveness, the story neither challenges nor considers debatable the underlying premise of the Jewishness of the two. Fragmentation might occur with regard to modes of observance and worship, possibly with forms of governance, or any number of friction-causing issues-but all within a Jewish context. In contemporary Jewish life around the world, organizational and institutional splintering is common, but unlike the story, the basic assumption is no longer valid: Affiliation and connection can no longer be taken for granted. Insofar as planning Jewish life is concerned, a fundamental change in organization and structure is indicated. Harmonization has to replace the existing cacophony. That is the first and quintessential requirement of planning for the Jewish future.

Disjointedness also typifies much of education. Kindergartens develop activities for their young charges and upon their graduation discharge them, at best assuming that primary schools will continue providing inputs that build upon the basics they feel were imparted. Primary and middle schools, however, more often than not assume no prior inputs and predicate their programs on the assumption-correct in many instances-that their pupils are Jewish *tabulae rasae*. Those continuing to Jewish high schools-only a very small proportion-begin yet a new course of study. Day schools with classes K-12 are an exception. Normative in most Diaspora communities but not in the United States, they are better positioned to rationalize their Jewish studies program over a twelve-year period and, as a result, are usually more effective. Overall, however, the lack of curricular coherence that typifies most school-delivered Jewish studies programs is a source of severe discontinuities in learning.

Schools are most often also programmatically unconnected to other educational activities, both horizontally and vertically. For example, if pupils in a given school are simultaneously active in a Jewish youth movement or organization, or spend summers in a Jewish camp, there is rarely any planned continuity in content between them. Similarly, school programs are not usually coordinated with adult education activities directed at parents of school-goers, nor to educational activities offered by Jewish community centers. In more traditional communities and families, the connections and linkages, as well as general Jewish orientations, are provided in the environment. Where those social superstructures don't offer such supports, Jewish educators are forced to assume that responsibility to complete the "learning loop." By not planning efforts with this in mind-that is, by not viewing the educational enterprise within the Jewish environmental

contexts of its participants-the opportunity to develop educational inputs and experiences that are both connected and continuous, in which the several components serve to reinforce one another, is compromised.

Several principles for planning Jewish education can be posited.

- First, there ought to be a holistic approach to planning in which the target of education-the child-is addressed within his or her total Jewish environment over the entire formative span of years from early childhood through adolescence;
- Second, linkages between and among the several forms and formats of educational input need be considered and planned as integral elements of the total educational experience;
- Third, environmental inputs aimed at creating the necessary reinforcing elements are essential for effective education and, hence, should also be addressed in the planning process.

### **On Setting Goals**

All planning should occur around clearly articulated goals and objectives, both cognitive and affective. Unfortunately, much of Jewish education proceeds without such articulation, or at best, with only limited definition. Education contains within its arsenal a plethora of mechanisms for influencing knowledge, attitudes, and practices. But it can only be effective if what it seeks to accomplish through the application of its diverse tools constitutes a clearly spelled-out agenda to which participants and their parents agree and subscribe. Clearly, this is the most complex aspect of charting Jewish educational practice, and therefore, unsurprisingly, it is often glossed over.

A review of the stated objectives of nearly one hundred Jewish schools around the world made immediately apparent that the affective domain is largely ignored. Most curricular and programmatic objectives are expressed in purely cognitive terms, such as: "enable students to acquire the basics of Hebrew," "understand the rhythms of the Jewish lifespan and Jewish yearly calendar," "gain an understanding and appreciation of central chapters of Jewish history," "learn the prayer book and know how to conduct oneself in a synagogue," "gain an understanding of Torah," "understand the cadences of Jewish life," and "appreciate Jewish contributions and the contributions of Jews to the world." There is a tacit assumption that attainment of such goals will directly affect attitudes and practices; that the more Jewishly knowledgeable an individual is, the more likely that he or she will take pride in being Jewish and will ultimately establish a Jewish lifestyle. It is significant to note that the term "Jewish peoplehood" does not once appear in any of the documents surveyed. One oblique statement posits that participants should "understand the trials and tribulations of the Jewish people over the centuries, in the Golah and in Israel"-not quite the same thing.

Absent agreed-upon objectives, Jewish education simply cannot be expected to achieve that for which it is sponsored, all other factors being equal. Thus, it should be a *sine qua non* that the starting point of all planning processes should be a determination of

objectives that elicit agreement and support from the membership of the communities to be served by educational programs. There is no suggestion here that a single set of objectives should be established for all Jewish communities everywhere. Schools do not serve all communities; they serve individual, distinct communal entities and should mirror their agreed-upon Jewish desiderata. Therefore, plans rather than a plan are indicated, with each plan reflecting agreement within its community of association.

Goal-setting in the manner proposed flies against current practice in most communities. Parents, desiring some Jewish exposures for their children, generally enroll them in institutions they believe can "do the job." It seems that it is the act of enrollment itself rather than the specific contents and experiences the school conveys that motivates most parents. "My youngster participates in a Jewish educational program or activity; ergo, my child is being Jewishly educated; therefore I, the conscientious Jewish parent, am executing my responsibilities insofar as my children's Jewish preparation is concerned." This logic is not uncommon. A somewhat more substantial approach might be along the lines of "I belong to a Conservative or Reform congregation and the 'brand' of Judaism I wish to have my child exposed to should conform to my affiliation." Orthodox parents have an easier time and far less of a dilemma. Their Judaism is a way of life, and it is that paradigm that they seek to perpetuate through a series of interlocked inputs of which structured educational experiences are but components.

Developing a notion of objectives reflective of broader community beliefs and desires requires that the members of communities themselves discuss the pertinent issues in some form. Thus a planning process can begin with a prepared set of proposed goals that, in the first instance, are presented to, and discussed by, the adult members of a community. In this regard, the community can be delineated in different ways. Parents who express interest in an institution or program, those who have applied for admission, or those who make up the parent body all constitute communities, as do members of congregations, community bodies, and other organized structures. Community leadership, including spiritual, lay, and professional leaders, are natural and necessary participants in such processes. Knowing, understanding, and agreeing to the educational goals of these institutions or programs, as well as accepting the support and reinforcement functions their attainment requires, would be one way of tackling this task.

Many schools would argue that they routinely assemble parents-prospective as well as those with enrolled children-and explain their educational objectives. However, describing goals and explaining school content and procedures are not the same as conducting open discussions about goals with the discussants themselves having a grasp of the alternatives. The issue of Jewish peoplehood, for example, is one that in most current discussions of objectives either receives short shrift or is not addressed at all, as it is not manifest in a discrete curriculum. Perhaps a tool laying out the broad parameters of Jewish educational goals (possibly in the form of a booklet, presentation, or film) in both substance and form would be a useful guide and input to such interactions.

Should it be possible to initiate the kinds of communal interaction suggested-itself an educational process-the outcomes would be more accurate reflections of both how people

view their own Judaism and what they would like to see instilled in the next generation. In addition, by participating in goal-setting, participants become partners in the educational enterprise and not merely its clients. A distinct benefit of this approach is that its participants are forced, willy-nilly, to examine what Judaism and Jewishness mean to them.

The more cogent and detailed the objectives, the better the educational plan that can flow from them. The more engaged a community, family members, and parents are in discussing the essence of education as reflected in its objectives, the more likely that they will offer the supports and reinforcements essential for the educational enterprise to succeed. Yet another outcome of the process is that it provides benchmarks against which efficacy can be monitored and effects measured. The ability to do so, in turn, makes it possible to introduce modifications or course changes in educational practice when and if it becomes apparent that they are necessary.

Planning itself is not, of course, a panacea for the ills of education. It is an important tool for enhancing the forms, content, and outcomes of educational activities and, as such, is a desirable point of departure.

## **On Content**

In all forms of education, formal or informal, there are four central learning arenas, each of which conveys content. The first is the formal interactive arena, manifest in classrooms and curricula, and in varieties of informal educational structures through diverse structured activities, such as lectures, presentations, discussions, and others. The content in this arena is curriculum-driven, that is, determined by a syllabus that details the subject matter to be taught. The second consists of varieties of informal activities that are extracurricular, but are usually deliberate and planned. The third is environmental and relates to the physical surroundings of educational activities, the stage props of educational programs. It is possible to design and choreograph environments-school buildings, grounds, classrooms, outdoor facilities, utilization of other available settings for certain activities-so that they convey a wide diversity of messages and enable another vehicle for learning. This arena, too, can be deliberate and planned. The fourth arena is amorphous, but most significant in its impact: the interactions between and among peers throughout the course of the educational activity. A great deal of learning is triggered during the course of any educational program from the modes, forms and substance of these interactions. What transpires during recess in school, in the bunks in camp at night, in surreptitious note-sending during classes, in locker rooms, on hiking trails-indeed, anywhere-in the interactions of participants can have a very potent impact on learning. These interactions cannot be sculpted, but they can, to a degree, be influenced by the nature of the other activities.

Learning can occur in each of the arenas and in all of them. However, educators usually concentrate their planning energies on the first-on what is taught. In the same way that education has to be integrated into the larger environment it serves, so too, all of the

activities that take place within learning environments have to be integrated with each other. From the point of view of pupils, students and participants, the programs they attend are whole, unsegmented environments. They do not limit learning to only one of the activities, but are impacted by the totality. In schools, then, students are taught by teachers in classrooms, participate in informal activities, roam the local environment, and interact informally with each other. Stimuli are broadcast in each of the arenas, and the learning that is triggered emanates from all.

Participation in educational activities, of course, is only one aspect of the things in which young people engage. They are, at the same time, family and community members, have independent relationships with friends and peers, attend other educational programs, read, watch television, and surf the Net. They are subject to multiple stimuli, emanating from a wide range of sources, and learn from them all. However, since dissonance cannot be tolerated over time, learning has to be selective. Consequently, choices have to be made among this continuous bombardment of inputs. Some stimuli, especially those that cause excessive conflict, will be rejected. That rejection will translate into not internalizing or learning what has been perceived as extraneous messages.

A vital conclusion to be drawn from this is relevant to planning Jewish education: The content of Jewish education has to be relevant and connected to the other elements of students' lives. It should aspire to mesh with the youngster's world, rather than stand aside, separated from it and possibly even conflicting with it.

Take as an example the Hebrew language. Youngsters grow up in environments in which no Hebrew is spoken, or for that matter even known, yet they spend much of their Jewish educational time being taught the language. All Jews, they are exhorted, have to know Hebrew, which is, after all, the Jewish language. Funny, think the youngsters, the Jews in their lives—parents, family members, parents' friends, and their own friends—don't know Hebrew. True, the prayers in synagogue and the Torah reading that is chanted during services are in Hebrew, but then synagogue is only rarely attended, if at all. In the larger world, Hebrew doesn't seem to be useful. True, it is the spoken language in Israel, but then Israel is far away and not visited. The argument that knowing Hebrew facilitates communication with Jews around the world (a peoplehood concept) ignores the obvious: English is far more widespread. Knowing Hebrew doesn't help in other pursuits, either. It doesn't have much value as a significant attribute when applying for admission to another school or college. What earthly reason can there be to learn the language? Yet Hebrew is taught in all Jewish schools, even though only a tiny fraction of those to whom it has been taught learn it. The language is simply not relevant. If the acquisition of Hebrew is considered important, planners must address the issue of how Hebrew can be made relevant as a precondition to teaching it. Pedagogic questions as to whether the language should be taught using one or another of the many instructional methods available are secondary. The same logic holds true for all substantive components of educational endeavors.

Jewish peoplehood, many would argue, is not a "subject" that can be taught. The concept of peoplehood can be inserted, they suggest, into "normative" subject matter such as

Bible and history, or possibly be learned from delving into "roots," genealogy and "Jewish geography." All of these approaches, to be sure, do lend themselves to teaching about the Jewish people, but the very concept of peoplehood remains so abstract and irrelevant to so many Jewish youngsters as to be exceedingly difficult to learn. It doesn't connect to the larger environment. It conflicts with messages broadcast by almost every other reference grouping to which the youngsters relate. How, for instance, can one simultaneously be a member of the American people, who are, after all, multicultural and multireligious, and a member of the Jewish people, who may be multicultural but are certainly not multireligious? Jewish peoplehood then has no real meaning, and if these conditions are prevalent, then Jewish peoplehood cannot be taught or learned.

But if the peoplehood concept is considered important-and the premise put forth here is that it is vital-then teaching and absorbing the notion can only be accomplished by creating an environment that would renders significant, real, and relevant. It has to be concretized. Easier said than done. Can the concept of Jewish peoplehood be inserted into environments inhospitable to it? A change of such magnitude in the many interlocking components of the environments in which people live appears unrealistic. Education can, however, create an environment that is concrete, that has meaning and relevance, and that does not conflict with other existing environmental components. It does so all the time.

Science teaching is one example. Very few youngsters "have science in their blood" or relate to communities and reference groups in which science is on the everyday agenda. Nonetheless, schools are expected to teach science, and students to learn it. Effective science teaching is accomplished by creating an environment that relates to, and doesn't conflict with, all the other influences; an environment in which science is the central agenda item and becomes its own world; an environment that is engaging, possibly even titillating, for the student. Connections to the immediate, more familiar world in which youngsters live are constantly made. Youngsters are sent outdoors to collect samples, are shown phenomena that exist all around them in a new and different light, and are transported to a nonthreatening, exciting world of experimentation and laboratories. Learning is triggered. All this can effectively take place on a stage in which science is largely absent, but that is supportive of the effort. Science teaching would fail if the backdrop were hostile.

Through approaches not dissimilar from those applied to science education, Jewish peoplehood can become an integral and significant aspect of Jewish education. The precondition to this happening is that the surrounding environment, or at least significant elements of it, be accepting and supportive of the effort. The approach needed to concretize the concept of Jewish peoplehood would entail the creation of a new environment that both connects with and extends the existing, familiar one, and at the same time expands the world in new directions.

Designing content in any educational undertaking is a highly complex activity. It has to be constantly borne in mind that what is planned is ultimately directed at youngsters whom, it is hoped, will learn and absorb what is taught. For the learner, it is essential that there be a rationalization of all the various inputs being delivered; they have to cohere



into a larger, integrated picture that makes sense. That which doesn't is rejected, not retained, not acquired, not learned.

Take the teaching of reading as an example. Despite all efforts, the spread of universal literacy has eluded educational practice. In most societies reading and writing are considered to be necessary basic skills; environments are supportive of literacy and encourage both the teaching of literacy skills and their acquisition. And yet attainment of the goal has proven disturbingly elusive. If youngsters being taught how to read and write live in environments that don't actually employ these skills, a strong message is transmitted that they are superfluous. Reading becomes valuable only within the narrow environment in which it is taught-school-but appears to youngsters to have little relevance to the real world. Parents don't read; friends don't read; reading as an activity is not encouraged. If reading is not really required, why acquire it? It is not surprising that functional illiteracy in as advanced a country as the United States characterizes almost 40 percent of the population-all of whom have attended schools. Over half the population, it is currently estimated, may know how to read, but don't. People who don't read, the alliterate, cannot provide environments in which reading is valued. It is not surprising that their children reject reading, either by not acquiring it or by not retaining it. Alliteracy and illiteracy are effectively first cousins.

In confronting this sorry situation, educators have long since relegated the debate about the preferred method for the teaching of reading to a back burner. They are, instead, seeking approaches to making literacy environmentally relevant and important as a precondition to effective teaching and successful learning. One direction that has evolved and appears promising is "family literacy." In essence, it posits that if the concept of reading and the application of reading skills were to become normative in family environments, the need to acquire those skills would become importantly relevant to children in those families. The approach, then, is to create an environment in which support is real and not just manifest in lip service, where the uses of reading and writing are concretized and rendered significant.

Jewish peoplehood is clearly a concept and not a skill, but internalization of the concept is in many ways similar to the acquisition of basic skills. The specific contents can be determined when the conditions exist that will support the concept in a real and meaningful way, and when youngsters can feel that being part of the Jewish people is not only accepted, but is encouraged and even expected.

### **On Modes and Methods**

Education's version of the search for the Holy Grail is the search for the perfect method of instruction. Just as the Holy Grail has never been found, so, too, perfection in teaching approaches has eluded education. Fads abound in teaching approaches; "excellent" and "foolproof" methods are developed, only to be discarded and ridiculed by others who

believe they have authored the correct approach; then others criticize their products, and the saga repeats, ad infinitum.

Far too many factors are involved in teaching; indeed only a fraction can be taken into account when designing teaching approaches. There are no absolutely correct instructional approaches-nor can there be, because people learn in different ways. There are some approaches that are effective for some people, and others effective for other people. In good educational practice, identifying instructional methods appropriate for specific learners, not for the universe of students, is the key. Ultimately, individuals determine for themselves what they will learn and how they will learn. Education's role should begin with the design and development of learning environments in which learning can occur and then continue with the provision of the stimuli that can trigger it. The overall mode in which education is delivered-the combination of environment and methodology-will ultimately determine its efficacy.

Creation of a congenial learning environment is probably the most important aspect of educational architecture. A learning environment, in turn, is a multilayered stage consisting, in the first instance, of the physical and atmospheric elements of both the immediate, local environs and significant elements of the external environments to which students relate. In a school setting, the local environment can include the instructional areas (classrooms, laboratories, etc.) and the school plant (public spaces, libraries, recreational areas). External environments can consist of families, homes, community institutions, media, and other educational institutions and programs attended by students. A learning environment also relies upon the supporting actors on the stage to reinforce a program's agenda. Some of the required support may be substantive-help in understanding unclear content-while some might be simple encouragement or additional emphases on the essence of content and its importance. The actors are most often not actually physically present, but their presence can be pervasive.

The classroom itself is just a location where certain transactions occur, but the classroom in which learning takes place is a greatly extended and expanded space that includes many other locations and interactions of significance to learners. It is to this larger classroom that attention need be devoted.

In planning educational programs and approaches, a holistic approach is needed. Thus, it would be appropriate to chart the significant reference groups to which program participants relate and to include activities directed at them as an integral part of the planning process, as well as of efforts to be undertaken in its implementation. One can point to many examples of this approach being adopted. In the teaching of Jewish holidays, for instance, direct classroom instruction is frequently connected to one or another relevant external activity: a practical, hands-on, experience (e.g., preparing foods connected to the holiday); a family or community event (e.g., conducting a model Seder); a program connecting to a wider Jewish world (e.g., viewing films showing celebrations in other Jewish communities or twinning with other institutions to conduct a joint event) or to local media (e.g., a television program focusing on that holiday). In practice, unfortunately, many attempts at macro-planning and conduct are limited to the younger

age groups participating in the learning enterprise. Without follow-up over time, the impact attained through these events can easily and rapidly erode. All education for all age groups would benefit from such an approach. Clearly, it is more difficult to accomplish in some substantive areas. But difficult is not impossible: Imagination and creativity are the keys to effective planning and delivery.

Teaching that doesn't engage students is nonproductive. Teaching that bores or causes disengagement can be counterproductive. Under either condition, what is learned and retained is the disenchantment itself, rather than the substance that was intended to be taught. Ultimately, it is the student who serves as the best arbiter of the value of any one approach or method of instruction, so that listening to students becomes a critical attribute of sound teaching. All too often educators are insufficiently sensitive to distress signals emanating from their charges, to the detriment of all those involved in the enterprise. The conclusion that should be drawn-but more often than not is ignored-is that methods of instruction are never to be consecrated; rather they should be malleable at all times so that they can be adjusted to suit the needs of diverse learners in different learning situations.

Messages being regularly broadcast by participants in many Jewish educational programs point to the flaws in the system. Other messages indicate positive elements. Everyone-parents, principals, camp directors, counselors, teachers, communal leaders-should be listening to these messages, absorbing their import, and introducing changes accordingly. To some extent this is happening; to a very large extent it is not. Most educational practice continues on in its forms and formats, oblivious to the vital feedback coming its way. Many of those messages indicate that there are problems with both the content being conveyed and the methods employed in its conveyance. Today's youth are engaging through mechanisms that were nonexistent in past generations. They are growing up in environments that are inundated with new and readily available technologies, of which they are avid users. They function in a world that has greatly expanded horizons and showers them with many more stimuli than did the worlds of their earlier counterparts. Educational practice must take heed of these new conditions, and adjust accordingly if it is to remain relevant and effective.

Newly available technologies coupled with the dramatic appearance of global orientations open new vistas for the educational enterprise. Notions of global classrooms and interactions on the broadest scale are no longer in the realm of science fiction.

Years ago it was thought that pen pals would be an excellent mechanism for developing "live" contact between youngsters in different communities. Projects were launched whereby children in one community would correspond with their peers elsewhere. After the first few postcards traded hands, most of these efforts rapidly fizzled, and the idea was largely abandoned. It took too long for a letter to travel from place to place; there were insurmountable problems of language, and the whole endeavor, largely due to these factors, was too acontextual to have any chance at continuity or impact. Similarly, it has long been recognized that the expertise of local teachers could be effectively supplemented by introducing expert instruction from afar. Additionally, it was correctly

surmised that many people who did not have direct access to courses in which they were interested could enroll in desired programs from a distance. Correspondence courses were introduced and gained in popularity. This, too, was a short-lived educational mode. Attention spans were difficult to sustain, given the long gaps between one communication and another; the exigencies of daily life intervened and acted to relegate the learning venture to the sidelines; and dropping-out became rampant. To be sure, there were many who enrolled in correspondence courses and completed them, but the majority of these who embarked on such pursuits never did.

The basic ideas underlying these two early examples of distance education were sound. The necessary technologies and supportive mechanisms were unequal to the task. All of that has changed: Instantaneous communication and the ability to engage in full interactive dialogues where participants see each other and communicate freely and directly across distance offer new opportunities and possibilities. Imagine a bi- or even multicontinental classroom where youngsters in one country and those in another participate in sessions with both groups seeing and speaking to one another. The instructor can be anywhere-in one of the classes or in a remote studio-and be "transported live" into the learning situation. Imagine a session presented in Washington, D.C., devoted to, say, the history of East European shtetlach-a topic that could be remote, abstract and irrelevant-where the facilitator with a camera in hand roams around a European town that once was a Jewish center, showing and explaining points of interest from earlier Jewish life, all the while conversing with the youngsters in the class. Imagine a Hebrew course taught in Mexico City, where participants are connected, live and in real time, with a parallel group in Jerusalem, with whom they communicate in the Hebrew language. Imagine an educational program on Jewish roots in which youngsters in Oklahoma communicate directly with their peers living in the very cities and towns from which their forebears emigrated, both showing and describing life as it is today. Imagine a course in Jewish history delivered by a very charismatic and knowledgeable instructor residing in London, but interacting simultaneously with participants in Budapest, Moscow, Sydney, and Boston, all of whom can see and communicate with each other. Imagine a blackboard on which a teacher in Rome, a student in Paris, and others in Johannesburg, Prague, and Tel Aviv can all write at the same time, in real time. Imagine a teenager in New Orleans exchanging photographs of his local environment with a friend in Toronto and another in Dnepropetrovsk. And then imagine, following the interactive activity, participants continue communicating, "chatting" with each other, without limitation at any time. All of these scenarios are currently possible within today's technological environment. Broadband transmissions, the Internet, computers, sophisticated telephony, and mobile studios all combine to render them possible-now, not in some faraway future.

## **Global Classrooms**

The illustrations given above indicate potential applications of new technologies in enhancing current educational practice. A far more stirring vision is one that utilizes these

technologies as tools from which entirely new educational environments and practices can be created. Available technologies can be used to create a global classroom: a class consisting of groups from different cities, different countries, and even different continents. Such a classroom would not be formed for one-time interactions only, as part of a local course of study, but would become a permanent and regular feature of schooling. To illustrate: Five classes in each of five schools located anywhere are connected to one another via broadband connection in a manner allowing for live, fully interactive give-and-take, all with high quality resolution. A new class is formed consisting of the members of all participating classes: Jack and Jane in New Haven are classmates with Yaakov and Yehudit in Afula, Jacob and Sarita in Buenos Aires, Jacques and Helene in Marseilles, and Anatoly and Alexandra in Kiev. The new class is taught a full course of study by a master teacher, who may be in a studio in yet another location. Everyone sees everyone, and all participants can talk to one another, mostly in English, and in Hebrew for the lower grades. Homework assignments and cooperative projects are engaged in across distances; discussions occur across time zones and cultures; real bonds are forged. The students cement friendships, exchange confidences, and discover that they are members of the same large community of the Jewish people—a community that is international, multifaceted, multicultural, horizon-expanding, fascinating, and attractive. It is, hopefully, a community to which they will want to belong.

There are ample opportunities to develop regular and ongoing communication and interaction, thereby solidifying the connections. This process can be extended indefinitely. It can be applied to adult education—a class meeting regularly with participants from different cities and countries—as well as to virtually all aspects of informal education. To be sure, implementation of this new global education system will require the development of educational and didactic approaches appropriate to the media used as well as the appropriate technological infrastructures, but these are imminently surmountable tasks. These new classrooms—global learning communities—are, for all intents and purposes, new Jewish environments that underscore Jewish peoplehood, strengthening the bonds needed to transform that concept into a very real and current one.

The implications for education are already enormous and could be greatly expanded. New and significant environmental components can be created; new reinforcing and supportive elements can be introduced into the educational process; new and charismatic teachers can be engaged; new horizons can become available for exploration. The individual's world can be dramatically enlarged. The means are there and, indeed, are constantly being enhanced. Global classrooms can become a potent means for educational activity.

In the Jewish context, yet other benefits can accrue. Jewish peoplehood can be transformed from being an abstract, substantively vacuous concept into a very real and important notion. Incentives to acquire Jewish literacy can be magnified. Word-of-mouth remains probably the most significant vehicle for transmitting news, thoughts, motivations, and ideas. Should Jewish education embrace these directions and word "got around," it is highly probable that people who currently distance themselves from

participating in its frameworks might be attracted to join. The new frameworks offer an educational fare that is truly unique.

It is, of course, not enough that it is possible to revolutionize education through the imaginative application of available tools. For such possibilities to be realized, it is necessary to adopt and implement them. There are several substantive constraints to moving ahead, two of which stand out. The first constraint that looms large is that of cost. The introduction of new technologies and the development of more effective educational activities will require budgets substantially exceeding current expenditures. The outlays required are not astronomical and fall well within the means of the Jewish world, and even within relatively easy reach of independent communities and individual schools. The hurdle to be crossed is more psychological than budgetary: Are Jews and Jewish communities willing to invest the necessary resources to transform Jewish education into a viable and effective force, one that has clear potential to affect the Jewish future?

As one traverses the Jewish educational world visiting schools, community centers, and camps, it becomes abundantly clear that funding has not been curtailed insofar as physical plants are concerned. There are exceptions to the rule, but the norm seems to be that Jewish educational activity should take place in as inviting a physical environment as possible. Such facilities are not inexpensive to establish, and very often require substantial maintenance expenditures. When one enters the various facilities and reviews outlays on professional salaries, materials, and equipment, the picture changes—at times dramatically. Delving further, it usually becomes apparent that participation fees are not insubstantial, and subventions and community supports for budgets are typically limited. What then, one must ask, is available for innovation and change? Funding priorities need to be examined carefully, and resources directed to those efforts that can impact the essence of education: teaching and learning. The resources are there, in the institutions themselves and in the communities they serve, but priorities may need to be reordered, if any significant change is to occur.

Educational institutions in Israel tend to be run differently than their counterparts in the Diaspora. The system is a public one, attendance governed by a compulsory and free education law, so the bulk of the outlay for both plant and program is drawn from the public purse. As education, by definition, is a labor-intensive activity, salaries consume most of the funds made available for its conduct. While facilities are not meager, they are not elaborate. Despite the fact that Israel's education budget is second only to its outlay for defense, the amounts available for innovation are sorely limited. In that regard, Israeli education seems to be as taxed as its Diaspora counterpart. Change can, however, be adequately financed from available funds, subject to a reordering of priorities not unlike that required elsewhere.

Another constraint is that of the traditional reluctance of educational systems and institutions to introduce change. Convention and familiar practice are often the stumbling blocks to innovation, and change-resistant institutions, in concert with change-resistant teachers and equally change-resistant boards, stop many an effort to innovate at the front gate. In public education systems, unions are powerful blockers of change. Jewish

education is in a relatively fortunate position in this regard. Jewish educational institutions-Israel excepted-are not unionized; schools and educational programs are subject to community direction. Independent school boards, local and national umbrella agencies, and congregations all hold sway over school practice and could be the harbingers of change-if they wish to do so and remain steadfast in their resolve.

The sorry state of Jewish education is not a fixed and irrevocable condition. If it were, Jews and Judaism would be forced to surrender the future to forces beyond our influence. Jewish peoplehood could become as vibrant and compelling as it has been throughout most of history. A combination of will, means, imagination, daring, articulation and application of new ideas, concepts and mechanisms, resources, and a great deal of creative energy could arrest current trends and restore prospects for a bright new Jewish dawn.

"If there is a will, there is a way," says the old adage. Theodor Herzl expressed the same thought somewhat differently: "If you will it, it is no dream." First must come the will.

### **Dorothy and Julius Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations of the AJC**

The Dorothy and Julius Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations, founded in 1982 as an arm of the American Jewish Committee, is an interpreter of Israeli and American Jewry to each other, and seeks to build bridges between the world's largest Jewish communities.

Specifically, its goals are achieved programmatically through a variety of undertakings, including:

- Exchange programs over the years bringing Israeli politicians, academicians, civil servants, and educators to the United States so that they may learn about the religious pluralism and political dynamism of the American Jewish community. Hundreds of Israelis have participated in these dialogue-oriented missions cosponsored by the Institute and its Israeli partners, the Jerusalem Municipality, the Oranim Teacher Training Institute, and the Ministry of Education, Government of Israel.
- Studies of the respective communities, particularly of their interconnectedness, published in both Hebrew and English, in conjunction with the Argov Institute of Bar-Ilan University. These have included monographs, among others, on "Who Is a Jew," "Post-Zionism," and Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel.
- Public conferences to study, discuss, and report on the American Jewry-Israeli relationship. A recent conference was cosponsored by the Institute and Tel Aviv University on the emergence of a new generation of Israeli revisionist historians and the interpretation of this phenomenon by Israeli and American Jewish society. Similarly, an annual public dialogue on the ties and tensions between American Jewry and Israel is sponsored by the Institute.

The Koppelman Institute has succeeded in reaching out to leaders who ultimately will shape the minds of thousands of followers in developing a more positive and productive relationship between Israel and the most significant Diaspora community.

Harold T. Shapiro  
Chairman

Seven Bayme  
Director

**Professor David Harman**

Professor David Harman is CEO of Teachlink, a distance learning company. He has served as professor of education at the Hebrew University, Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Teachers College of Columbia University. He previously headed the Joint Education Authority of the Jewish Agency for Israel and the World Zionist Organization. He has published numerous books and articles on education, educational planning, literacy, and learning.