

ing a problem with a client, searching a way with him together, transcending knowledge to commitment and engagement?

There has been more in our group's discussions and our experiences. This is only suggestive of some of the content and issues and our responses and thinking concerning them which evolved. However, it brings out how rich a professional undertaking it can be if the Jewish is considered as part of the helping process of a clinical service. The

dynamics of such helping are not thus denied, but are enriched and broadened, and our understanding of ourselves, of the client, of the process is enriched and broadened. We have begun to speculate that there may be a meaningful contribution to various elements of the theory of personality, personality development, of the family, family process, and of the process of helping. This, of course, will require further substantiation.

What's Jewish About It?*

A Perspective on American Jewish Community Reactions to Public Issues

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"... in the period of about a generation, roughly since 1945, American Jewry, in an institutional and organized manner, has 'gone public' on a range of issues which on the surface, at least, appear to have something less than a direct connection to our security and well-being as Jews. Beyond that, they are sometimes issues on which individuals, acting as citizens, might have legitimately differing views."

THE phenomenon of Jewish organizational and community response to public issues on the general American scene, issues which seem to have no immediate or apparent connection with what we take as proper and conventional concerns *as Jews*, should some day be worth at least a chapter in the history of the American Jewish community and of its accommodation to American life. I want to direct my comments to this phenomenon, to the factual record and, with considerably less certainty, to elements of it that may be of interest to historians of the future.

There is, of course, a record, which I am not dealing with here, of the Jewish community — or at least of Jewish spokesmen — going before the American public to demand action or government support on problems that had a very direct connection with the well-being of Jews: the Damascus Incident in the 1840's, the abrogation of the 1832 trade treaty with Czarist Russia, the formation of a delegation to the Versailles Conference, the mass meetings and public response to the Kishinev pogrom. These, and I'm sure many other episodes, demonstrate the willingness and ability of American Jews to demon-

strate their particular and particularly personal concerns to the American and world publics.

The premise on which I want to base my remarks, however, is that in the period of about a generation, roughly since 1945, American Jewry, in an institutional and organized manner, has "gone public" on a range of issues which on the surface, at least, appear to have something less than a direct connection to our security and well-being as Jews. Beyond that, they are sometimes issues on which individuals, acting as citizens, might have legitimately differing views. Literally and figuratively, we have witnessed an "explosion" of organized Jewish involvement and position taking on such issues. Topsy-like it has grown; to the point, perhaps, where it might be speculated that an average and reasonably well informed member of a Jewish organization might not himself realize the positions on public issues to which his organizational affiliation commits him, in a theoretical sense in any event.

There is a qualitative difference, I submit, between a Jewish organization writing to a public official on behalf, say, of Soviet Jews, or Israel, an action we can easily understand, as compared with making representations, as a Jewish identified group, on, for example, the boycotting of California grapes or on

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gun control, or on amnesty for war resisters or on abortion or revenue sharing.

Within my own professional experience, many of those who opposed this kind of steady movement into the whirl of controversial American issues invariably raised the question, often in these identical words: "What's Jewish about it?" Thus the title I have chosen for these remarks — a somewhat facetious title — and, as an inside joke, sometimes a phrase used to describe the attitudes of those you knew in advance would be against one proposal or another which would appear to broaden our community interests beyond the immediately understandable and obviously relevant. In a way, you might say that this question, "What's Jewish about it?", is this generation's successor to the older one we knew so well: "Is it good for the Jews?"

Let's examine, in a little more detail, the kinds of issues I'm discussing. I use for my source, in this instance, some of the Program Plans published by the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council. I do so because these Program Plans make an easy, and authentic, reference source. The Program Plan published by the NJCRAC is a thoughtfully developed and very convenient document. It represents, in my view, some painstaking research and highly competent staff work. Presumably, it represents also, except where a specific organizational dissent or contrary opinion is noted, the thinking and consensus of nine important national Jewish agencies and of ninety-plus local Jewish communities, a consensus arrived at through a deliberative and open process. In sheer number, the list of issues with which the Program Plans deal is overwhelming; although in all fairness it must be noted that each Program Plan itself assumes, and states, that not

every Jewish group or community will be disposed to take action on every one of the issues it catalogues. However, the Program Plan implicitly recognizes that any one or all of these issues can become appropriate Jewish community concerns. And, *just in case* they do, recommended positions are offered.

I am omitting some very impressive and informative sections of these documents that relate to Israel, Soviet Jewry, the Holocaust, the Genocide Convention — matters that we need not regard as arguable in the sense of their being direct and demonstrable Jewish concerns. But consider the range and scope of other issues on which recommendations have been formulated for possible action by Jewish communities: additional public service jobs, accelerated public works programs, federally funded youth training programs, prison reform, the Equal Rights Amendment, home rule for the District of Columbia, federal assumption of welfare responsibilities, federal support of education, comprehensive national health insurance, compulsory energy conservation, affirmative employment and educational efforts, school desegregation across district lines, the practice of mortgage "red lining," housing for the low and moderate income groups in the suburbs, expansion of voting rights, capital punishment, amnesty for war resisters, public financial aid for non-public schools, public school prayers.

What I have recited is only a partial list, and it is not my purpose to try to consider the rightness or wrongness of any of the positions that are set forth on any specific issues. Our purpose here would be better served by trying to develop at least the beginning of a perspective on this ongoing, and expanding, process of position-taking on American public issues on the part of the Jewish community. Will historians

of the future consider it of significance as they reflect upon and probe into the development and adaptation of the American Jewish community? Obviously without knowing the final answer to this question, my opinion and my inclination lead me to the belief that this will be found historically noteworthy; that, in fact, as we have witnessed the growing involvement of the American Jewish community in American public issues, we have witnessed something that is unique in the experience and history of Jewish communities anywhere in the free world. In my view, it may be regarded as a singularly *American-Jewish* phenomenon. In no other national setting, to my knowledge, do Jewish communities involve themselves in general public issues in so institutionalized a fashion — or in any fashion.

In my own analysis of this development, I have tried to identify those elements which I think that future historians might find to be of interest and importance. I would like to suggest them to you, with the recognition that there are probably many other elements that I have overlooked.

In the first place, while I regard this American-Jewish involvement in public affairs as something unique in the unfolding of Jewish and American history, it is not without roots and background in Jewish life. I go back, of course, to the political activity of Jews, particularly their identification in large numbers with European Socialist parties, in the post-emancipation nineteenth century. Their affinity with, and support of, politically liberal forces were understandable since these forces gave the promise of ushering in a new era, so longed for after the centuries of oppression. The fact that there were Jewish sections of the European Socialist movement, and that many of this politi-

cally activist group eventually found their homes in this country, is an element that probably should be considered.

But at best, this particular background factor is only a piece of the answer. We have to examine other elements in trying to develop some perspective on why, in the United States and within the current generation, this Jewish involvement in affairs of the state has burgeoned on so impressive a scale.

While it may be an overly easy explanation, and certainly is not a total explanation, I think that it's logical to suggest that it's more than coincidence that this development parallels the emergence on the American scene of the first American Jewish generation that is predominantly native-born. More than ever, Jews are "at home" in America. They study at its best schools, serve in the armed forces, occupy important professional, government, and business positions. They are familiar with American issues and American ways of responding. As an ancillary comment, I take note of what I accept as a fact, and that is the attraction that so-called liberal political movements have had for individual Jews seeking to express activist political philosophies. I mention this, because it leads to another point that I believe might be properly made and that helps to explain, at least to myself, why *Jewish organizations* were moved to adopt positions that were once thought to be within the exclusive domain of political parties or the many non-sectarian semi-political groups.

The answer that I have in my own mind, and this too is a part of the perspective I am suggesting, is that we cannot underestimate the influence, upon this generation of American Jews, of the Holocaust and of the creation of Israel. One, the Holocaust, traumatized

every surviving Jew, wherever he lives, and simply had to intensify the fear of illiberal forces turned loose upon the world. The other, the creation of Israel, buttressed the confidence and assertiveness of Jews everywhere. I think that one of the consequences of these events was a growing readiness on the part of Jews to find security with each other, in the midst of a world which had rejected them — and it is this, I am suggesting, that helped influence the direction that Jewish organizations took in involving themselves in public affairs.

Another element that I see as important to our perspective is the civil rights revolution which has agonized America. Particularly since this problem burst upon the scene, it has become acceptable, even fashionable, for denominational bodies to take public positions on social issues. Catholics and Protestants have spoken with force on race relations, on Vietnam, on social justice, on inequities of the economic system. In a manner of speaking it has therefore become acceptable, within the context of American practice, for religious groups to assert themselves on these matters, so that Jewish groups did not have to feel self-consciously alone in expressing their views.

Another element that goes into my thinking is what I would refer to as the changing technology of Jewish efforts to combat anti-Semitism. This work, once known as civic defense, but now labeled "Jewish community relations," has been financed and carried on for decades by American Jews through a number of national organizations and in local communities. In its earlier, or classical, phase the mandates that applied were fairly simple, if not always effective. The job was simply to investigate incidents of discrimination or evidences of prejudice against Jews, to appeal for recourse where appropriate, and to expose or-

ganizations and individuals guilty of fomenting prejudice or practicing discrimination. Immediately after World War II, these efforts began to take on a much broader aspect. "Prejudice is indivisible" became one of the slogans of the times, and the idea gained increasing acceptance that the ultimate weapon against anti-Semitism was an American society free of the tensions caused by any kind of racial or nationality discrimination, or by unemployment or economic hardship, or by inequities in the social system. If any group was threatened, the reasoning went, then no group was safe; and a crisis ridden society was more likely to look for scapegoats than one which was prosperous and serene and which guaranteed justice for all. It was this concept which moved the Jewish community into pioneering alliances with black civil rights groups, long before the civil rights movement became fashionable, and into legislative campaigns for the first anti-discrimination laws. Inevitably, and here I have the luxury of perfect hindsight, this involvement simply had to lead to many more and much more complex involvements. Anti-discrimination laws in the field of employment were merely a first step. What about the proper enforcement of these laws? What about the many other problems that prevented blacks — and later, it was perceived, other ethnic minorities — from enjoying the fuller life that might guarantee an internally peaceful America? Housing, the quality of criminal justice, education, decent health care? Again with the advantage of hindsight, I believe it is clear that this expansion of our fight against anti-Semitism, which really became our pursuit of the more perfect American society, had to lead to the present, and quite stunning, list of Jewish community positions on American public issues.

In examining further the elements that underlie American Jewry's involvement in American public affairs, I want to take note of what I regard as an interesting corollary to the development, and one that certainly goes beyond whatever credentials that I may have as an observer or commentator to explore. I refer to what I see as an increasing tendency to characterize these positions as an expression of Jewish ethical and moral values. Whether this is or is not a valid claim is beyond my ability to say, but as a rationalization it is one that is very fitting to the American scene. While there may be some tendency to look askance at the idea of denominational groups adopting public positions on what many may consider political issues, the opposition is blunted when the expressions are made on behalf of a religious morality. Thus, for example, when a group of California rabbis declared that non-union picked grapes were "non-kosher," or when Jewish groups joined with others at one point in the Vietnam tragedy to insist upon U.S. withdrawal by a certain given date and under certain political conditions, who, other than an authority in matters theological or traditional would be in a position to say whether such statements were indeed expressions of an authentically Jewish moral position or were merely tactical statements invented to authenticate a view that their authors were seeking to advance. Times without end, it seems, the wisdom of Hillel has been quoted to justify some Jewish position or other on very contemporary American social problems, making him sound like a partisan on problems he could never have known. For me, all of this represents a somewhat murky area although I would think that it might be one that would eventually be worth examination by properly qualified scholars.

I believe that I draw a reasonably accurate picture of the situation of the American Jewish community in respect to American public issues, as of the present moment, when I say that in all likelihood there is still internal uncertainty and conflict as to the wisdom of our moving as far and as fast as we have into general public affairs. "What's Jewish about it?" becomes a kind of philosophical rallying cry for the forces which resist this trend and which claim, in effect, that the job of Jewish groups is to serve the religious, cultural and welfare needs of Jews and that plenty of opportunities exist in America to express social and political views from other platforms. And those who push for intensified social action make the argument that to justify its existence as a self-respecting entity within the American pluralism, the Jewish community has a civic obligation to contribute to the solution of American problems, to make its teachings and experience "relevant" to contemporary situations.

I don't propose to solve this dilemma, at least not here. Indeed, my personal reaction, if it is of any importance, is to follow the example of the befuddled rabbi in the old story and say a ringing "you're right" to both sets of arguments — and to keep in mind that the worrisome job of the responsible Jewish leaders is to keep a sense of balance, even though the fate of these leaders, of those who make the decisions, is to live in a Jewish world that may not always be right, but in the Jewish world that is.

My thesis, then, and I hope that these comments may at least be adequate as a launching pad for a more organized scrutiny, is that in our lifetimes we have witnessed a development in American Jewish life that is really without precedent in the history of Jewish communities anywhere in the world. That this development has been influenced

by several elements, including our coming of age as a native born community, the Holocaust, the creation of Israel, a tradition of political activism, our concern with anti-Semitism, the actions of other denominational bodies; and that no one of these elements, but probably a

combination, plus others unspecified, may be of interest and of considerable importance to historians of the future in chronicling and in developing a perspective upon the accommodation of the Jewish community to the American scene.

Historical and Contemporary *Havurot*: A Comparison

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"Using the paradigm of the ancient havurah, its applicability (is developed) to the formation of a contemporary havurah in a suburban community, wherein the temple is seen as the center of Jewish life."

Purpose

IN the past decade there has been a surge of activity within the Jewish community in forming *havurot* on college campuses and, more recently, in synagogues. This is a result of the growing feelings of isolation and anonymity experienced by Jews in suburbia. Little has been written about its conceptual framework and its theoretical design. The purpose of this paper is to present the model of the ancient *havurot* and to explore the similarities and differences between a contemporary *havurah* and its historical predecessor.

Believing that such groups are an important part of a preventative model for mental health care, Jewish Family and Children's Service has become actively involved in establishing such groups. In Spring, 1974, JFCS co-sponsored a Bar-Bat Mitzvah discussion group for parents in a suburban Boston temple. One of the major issues raised by members of this group was their feeling of personal isolation and lack of meaningful involvement with the Jewish community as represented by the temple. In response to this need, a collaboration between JFCS and the temple was begun. Our intention was to develop a design for a *havurah* at the temple.

Historical Precedent:

But, what is a *havurah*? Much has been written about *havurah* in the past

decade. The earliest reference found in the literature was by Jacob Neusner.¹ In this book he describes *havurah* as being formed in the 1st century C.E. by the Pharisees. They called their fellowship of Jews a *havurah*. There were two forms of these fellowships. One emphasized the study of Torah. The second type was created by individuals who wished to carry out the neglected details of Jewish law, particularly those related to the rituals of tithing and ritual purification as seen in clothing and kashrut. As Neusner suggests, the tasks of the ancient *havurah* were:²

1. To create a fellowship within the larger community.
2. To define its "concerns" and goals. The purpose of the group was limited to the achievement of these specific social and religious goals.
3. To create rules for its members' behavior within the *havurah* and with people in the broader community who were not members of the *havurah*.
4. To teach the broader community its principles while always remaining a separate entity within the larger community.

¹ Jacob Neusner, *Fellowship in Judaism, The First Century and Today* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell and Co., 1963).

² *Ibid.*, p. 65.