

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

The following cases illustrate the potential of part-time Jewish education to provide an arena in which limits can be challenged and excellent practice can flourish. The first two case studies occur within the synagogue setting. Sharon Morton and Rabbi Harold Kudan focus on the role of the synagogue educator and the partnership between educator and rabbi that results in the integration of the educational program into congregational life. Cyd Weissman and Rabbi Marc Margolius outline the implications of a paradigm shift toward seeing the congregation as a system, within which both synagogue and school function as interrelated elements.

From the communal setting, Nadav Caine and Nechama Tamler report on the achievements and special issues facing a community-based supplementary high school, while Linda Echt and Aviva Richman describe an unusual after-school Hebrew school. Both of these programs embrace diversity. Each is marked by a unique vision that drives the institution and serves as a centripetal force keeping its diverse constituencies together.

The Rabbi-Educator Partnership

SHARON MORTON AND RABBI HAROLD KUDAN

A good educational program will shape the identity of a congregation by touching the hearts and minds of members within every age grouping at the synagogue. It has power because it leads to the understanding that Jewish education gives life to study, worship and religious action for all temple members. An excellent rabbi-educator-congregation partnership nurtures this vision.

A strong partnership between a congregation's rabbi and educator leads to an educational program that is woven into the very fabric of the congregation. Such a partnership creates and reinforces the fundamental understanding that Jewish education is a part of every facet of the congregation. It models an expansive and integrated view of congregational life. It comes about through careful work of the congregants on the search committee and hard work, luck and commitment on the part of the rabbi and the educator to instill the excitement of education within the total congregation.

In 1976, only four years after its founding, Am Shalom was ready to engage its first full-time educator. After several lengthy interviews, Sharon Morton was asked to take the position. When she asked why the search committee chose her, she was told, "If we closed our eyes and listened to your words, but not the sound of your voice, it

was the rabbi speaking. Therefore, we knew it would be a good partnership." And so it began.

Rabbi Harold Kudan was the founding rabbi of the congregation. Having majored in Religious Education in rabbinical school, he sought an educator who would be open to new ideas, enthusiastic about looking at new models of education, and willing to risk trying them out. He wanted an educator who would understand his/her role in Jewish education in the broadest sense. He felt that Sharon Morton could be that person. And so it continued.

Shared philosophy, beliefs, vision and commitments are essential cornerstones of a successful partnership between a congregation's rabbi and educator, specifically:

- belief in the integrity of the learner at any age, that nothing should be taught that must be unlearned at a more mature age.
- belief that respect for all – the parent, teacher and child – is paramount.
- belief in the challenge and the excitement of a Jewish life nourished through Jewish education.
- belief that involvement of the congregation in the wider community is essential to the success of the educational program, and vice versa.
- belief in a systems approach to Jewish education reflect-

ed in a life-long education committee that oversees the task forces related to various departments of education.

- belief in a holistic education program for all members of the congregation reflecting their age, interests, needs, and abilities.
- belief in the awe and wonder of education and the learner.
- belief that education is an intrinsic part of every program and project of the congregation.

As in all successful teams, each partner must complement the other. At Am Shalom, the educator:

- is willing to ask, to question, to help build conceptual goals and programs alongside the rabbi.
- is willing to enlist the help of the Rabbi, the staff, the teachers, and the congregants.
- is willing to listen to the voices of temple members and other experts, in order to see the big picture.
- holds a vision that the position of educator extends beyond the school, to all aspects of the congregation.
- is self-confident as a person and as an educator.

The rabbi at Am Shalom:

- is willing to ask, to question, to help build conceptual goals and programs alongside the educator.
- actively functions as an integral part of the school, the adult education programs, even the education committee.
- holds the view that the position of educator extends beyond the school to all aspects of the congregation.
- is self confident as a person and as a Rabbi.
- consistently provides honest support and feedback.

The involvement of the rabbi in the educational program is only one side of the dynamic partnership; the involvement of the educator in a range of aspects of congregational life is equally important. At Am Shalom, Ms. Morton sits with the Rabbi on the worship committee in order to look at educational components of worship. She staffs the social action committee, which discusses issues based on awareness, education, activism. It created a life long education committee with task forces for the school, the adult education program, family programming, and youth committee.

What are the actions of a congregation that recognizes the valued role of the educator in the congregation?

- The educator is sometimes asked to sit on the bimah, read *Torah*, and deliver the sermon.
- The office of the educator is in a prominent place in the building.
- The congregation finds opportunities to highlight and honor the educator.
- The educator sits on the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee of the congregation and has a voice in their deliberations.
- Temple board meetings sometimes highlight educational issues and the work of the educator.
- The salary and benefits of the educator are on equal par with other members of the congregation's senior staff.
- The successes of the educator are noted in congregational publications.
- The educator's name is listed on all publications, bulletin boards, and newsletters of the congregation.

As a result of the active partnership between the rabbi and educator at Am Shalom, the whole congregation sees the educator and Jewish education as an integral part of congregational life. Educational issues and decisions permeate the work of many committees. The open collaborative relationship between the rabbi and the educator is reflected throughout the congregation and characterizes the way the congregation functions. It allows exciting new projects and ideas to be passed or shared by whichever committees and organizations are appropriate. Examples of the collaboration of rabbi, educator and congregational leaders follow.

- Joint meetings of the education and worship committees inform decisions about family worship services. Joint efforts of the social action and the education committees have resulted in raising \$55,000 to purchase an ambulance for Magen David Adom. The project began with the wishes of a grade in the religious school to raise funds for the ambulance. The adult social action committee picked up the idea and through the hard work of the committee and the school, a child and an adult, and the generosity of the congregants, the project succeeded.
- The congregation holds an "all-committee" dinner and meeting at the beginning of each year. The dinner provides a wonderful opportunity for all of the programming groups within the congregation to meet together,

to discuss the summer, and to ready themselves to return to a full schedule in fall. Each year, an annual theme is announced at the dinner, such as the Year of Education, the Year of Social Action, or the Year of Sacred Moments. Each committee decides on ways to integrate its work into the major theme of the year. During the Year of Education, the library planned a series of book displays. The worship committee incorporated educational information in the weekly *Shabbat* newsletter. The communications committee focused on raising the educational value of the congregational bulletin by adding educational features.

- Chairs of each of the programmatic committees of the congregation meet with the rabbi and the educator three to four times a year. It is an opportunity for the lay and professional leaders of the congregation to share and to learn what is happening in each arena of congregational life, to reflect on how they are fulfilling their responsibilities, and to become reinvigorated. The meeting is also a forum for addressing challenges and seeking solutions.

When an educator and a rabbi see that they are partners in the same endeavor and when they are able to share a common vision not only for the religious school but also

for the congregation as a whole, then both the educator and the rabbi are fulfilled in their roles within the congregation. This situation comes about through mutual trust and respect and an openness to learning from one another. It comes about when the rabbi and educator are willing to discuss frustrations, failures, and problems as well as successes. It comes about when the rabbi and educator can deal with issues with flexibility, humor, enthusiasm, and willingness to share responsibilities.

After writing this paper together, we sat down and I, the educator, said to the rabbi, “Why do you think it really works here?” He thought for a minute and then said, “Because neither one of us cares who gets the credit or the attention for a particular program. We work as a team.” Perhaps that is the whole article in a nutshell.

Rabbi Kudan has been the rabbi of the Am Shalom in Glencoe for 30 years and will retire in June. Sharon Morton has worked successfully with him for 26 years. A new rabbi has been chosen for the congregation. Both Sharon and Rabbi Kudan believe that the search committee has exercised great wisdom in choosing the new rabbi. And everyone looks forward to the coming years with hope, anticipation, and excitement.

A Systems Approach to School and Synagogue Change: The Case of Beth Am Israel

CYD. B. WEISSMAN AND RABBI MARC J. MARGOLIUS

In recent years, Jewish supplemental schools have begun reimagining themselves not only as transmitters of Jewish knowledge, but as builders of Jewish identity. However, despite efforts to reform supplemental education through family education, revised textbooks, and innovative curricula, such initiatives have not sufficiently transformed supplemental schools into effective instruments for the construction of Jewish identity.

Efforts to reform supplemental schools through programmatic change have overlapped with the current trans-denominational movement for synagogue change. Jewish educational leaders, including Jonathan Woocher and Isa Aron, have challenged the Jewish community to look at the issues of supplemental education and synagogue change in tandem. Congregations and their schools are

being asked to re-envision themselves holistically, focusing on systemic transformation rather than “additive change” such as new and innovative programs. Synagogues and their schools are seeking ways to operate as an integrated whole, creating communities which focus on imparting Jewish knowledge in a way which strengthens their members’ core sense of Jewish identity.

Congregation Beth Am Israel, a Conservative synagogue in suburban Philadelphia, is one congregation laboring toward the intersection of school and synagogue change. Over the past decade, Beth Am Israel has begun to think of itself as an integrated community in which the synagogue and supplemental school are interrelated and interdependent. As a result, the congregation has become a community of shared practice, celebration, and