

## Professional Trends in Jewish Communal Practice in America\*

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Professional trends in Jewish communal service in America can only be understood in context. The trends respond to the realities of Jewish life in America, and these, as always, are shaped by the external and internal forces which buffet and inform the Jewish condition as it enters the last quintile of this century.

The most complex and least overtly identified issue is one I call a meta-issue; that is the ability of an American Jewish community to transmit to a fourth generation American native-born community the will to continue as Jews.

Each time in the past that reality confronted Jews in America, the assimilation of the fourth generation was hidden by the infusion of new Jewish energies through significant in-migration. Thus the near-disappearance of the early Ashkenazic and subsequent near-disappearance of Sephardic and Central European Jews into mainstream Jewish life were masked, each one, in turn, by the replenishment of the other.

We stand at the threshold of the 100th anniversary of what proved to be the greatest migration of people in the world's history up to World War II—the "invasion" of millions of Jews into America between the 1880's and the early 1920's.

I begin thus to suggest that professional

trends today are to be understood in the context of dealing with a community which is now over 85 percent native born and of high secular educational achievement (perhaps matched only by Jews in certain parts of Soviet Russia), having become the richest community of Jews (and perhaps people) in the world's history, living in a society which allows them access to the highest levels of political decision making and, simultaneously, for the first time, allows them to be as assimilated or as Jewish as they wish without penalty or negative consequence for either path insofar as their individual status is concerned.

The professionals in Jewish communal service are both products and reflections of the communities they serve, and I use the plural form advisedly. They are strong in number, perhaps as many as 15,000,\* (one for every 346 Jews in America) forming the most comprehensive, sophisticated and voluntarily based structured Jewish community in the world's history. As much as three billion dollars annually are expended through the Jewish sponsored organizations in which they work; more of it increasingly provided by government allocations for services rendered to Jews and non-Jews under Jewish auspices. There is a body to which all communal workers can belong, the Conference of Jewish Communal Service, but which 75 percent of them choose to ignore.

The workers, in turn, being products of

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an assimilated Jewish middle-class society, have middle-class aspirations which moderate the roles they play in shaping trends as they see them in America.

With this brief backdrop, an examination of trends is now indicated. For convenience, I would classify them as 1) changing educational emphases within the Jewish community and within communal service; 2) geometrical growth of private practice; 3) increasing attention to governance within Jewish life with its attendant structural ramifications, 4) growing efforts to "normalize" Israel/Diaspora relations, 5) growing consensus on developing support systems for the Jewish family with all of the above evolving with a consciousness of the changed demography of American Jewry.

#### Changing Educational Emphases

The two contradictory trends in Jewish education highlight the tensions which communal professionals confront. There is a marked decrease in numbers of Jewish children receiving *any* Jewish education (293,000 in 1977 compared to 525,000 in 1967) at the same time that a sharply increased proportion of those receiving a Jewish education are now in all-day Jewish schools (90,000 in 1977 compared to 60,000 in 1967). This fact alone has radically changed the funding needs of Jewish education and has resulted in changed budget priorities, with proportionately fewer dollars being available to social services than was previously the case. This changed emphasis reflects a growing consensus in the decision-making bodies that Jewish education must be a higher priority in the allocation process. Equally important is the increased expectation by lay people that the Jewish communal worker be the product of some serious Jewish educational experience so as to infuse practice with Jewish values, attitudes and knowledge. This helps to explain the marked growth of professional educational programs specifically geared to Jewish communal services.

There are now seven programs whose primary mission is the preparation for careers in Jewish communal service. All of them offer professional preparation, essentially using a social work education model fused with course work and case material drawn from Judaic and Jewish sources and experiences. They graduate between 250-300 people a year and increasingly these graduates receive preferential treatment in the hiring processes.

These two trends, one within the community and one within the profession, in turn, present a synergism of sorts. For, in response to the changing emphases and involvement in Jewish education, a number of innovative approaches to the Jewish condition and educational appetites have evolved, often encouraged by the "new" Jewish professional. But two examples will suffice. The Conference on Alternatives for Jewish Education (CAJE) and the *havurah* "movement" are best understood as manifestations of a change from the business-as-usual attitudes which seemed to paralyze the Jewish educational establishment for so long.

CAJE brings together in an informal and voluntary network representatives from almost every trend and organization in Jewish life. Annually over 1,000 people congregate to share innovative educational methods and techniques, conduct workshops, show movies, demonstrate technological breakthroughs, exchange curricula, attend classes, sing, dance, create and celebrate; in short take part in perhaps the greatest Jewish happening in sharing Jewish riches in America today. Begun as an anti-establishment protest, it now seeks and receives funds from all manner of establishment sources and still brings participants as diverse as Lubavitch and secular school representatives together in common cause and fervor.

The *havurot* which now exist in the thousands, sometimes with no official relationship to any Jewish organization,

oftimes sponsored by synagogues, Centers and/or other Jewish organizations, have sprung up to offer opportunity for fellowship, friendship, learning, celebration and creating, in a Jewish milieu. The most serious emphasize the learning; the least serious may, at times, overemphasize the friendship. Most importantly, many havurot are turning to Jewish communal professionals. They are needed to help havurot continue creatively after often stormy and emotionally infused beginnings. The challenge for the professionals is to minimize the bureaucratic entanglements that often accompany the institutionalization of new forms and ideas, while helping havurot to prosper.

In both instances, CAJE and havurot, the reality has been that establishment Jewish professionals were under-represented in the formative stages of these significant new developments. This reality underlies the need for the professionals in Jewish communal service to remain open to innovation from the most unlikely of places, and thus make every opportunity to nourish the experimenters. For their efforts foreshadow that which the establishment will inevitably co-opt as its own when the experimental proves worthwhile.

#### **Private Practice**

It has been demonstrated that differing personality types are attracted to various forms of social work and communal service practice. Those who chose to work as therapists *tend* to be less committed to and/or interested in some of the larger issues enumerated in the beginning of this paper. Products as they are of an individualistic and psychologically sensitized America, they often seek to emulate a model worthy of their values. In entrepreneurial America there is one figure who has successfully fused the acceptable pursuit of affluence while still helping people in socially desirable ways: the doctor. The push for licensing in America,

the affluence of Americans in general and Jews in particular, the leisure time for individual therapy, the search for happiness and adjustment have opened the flood gates to all manner of private therapy practice and practitioners, as in the practice of medicine. Those who work in Jewish counselling agencies often use their agency work as a base upon which to build a private practice after hours. This allows them a secured income upon which to build and the security of a job which allows them the hours to devote to private practice. For one of the anomalies in Jewish communal work is that those engaged in group work and community organization work as much as 15 to 20 hours a week more in their agencies than their casework colleagues and rarely receive over-time pay or compensation for these hours. Their salaries tend to be higher than caseworkers but their options for ancillary incomes are severely limited compared to their casework colleagues.

In turn there is some evidence to suggest that affluent Jews are often loathe to turn to community sponsored counselling services when they are available under private auspices. Recently research has uncovered the existence of certain social problems long denied as existing among American Jews. The consequent stigma may keep those involved from turning to Jewish agencies for help. There is even some evidence that when those involved turn to help they often first turn to a rabbi who in many instances denies the existence of the problem because Jews "do not engage in that kind of behaviour." I refer here to three problems recently identified as existing with growing frequency: alcoholism, wife abuse and child abuse.

Private practice and non-Jewish sources devoted to these concerns thus, in some instances, provide a "proper" outlet for help, while keeping the problem from Jewish community view.

The focus of counselling practice, under

private or agency auspices, is a source of increasing dialogue and dispute and represents a subtrend within Jewish communal practice. At question, with no resolution in sight, is the responsibility of counsellors and therapists, if any, to encourage clients to adopt strategies in keeping with the Jewish community's priorities. The issue of the tension between "self-determination" and the "right" of the therapist to suggest strategies is not new. The intensity and extent of the dialogue in the journals and at conferences are on the upswing. With the advent of more research on the place and importance of ethnic self acceptance, new therapeutic modalities are evolving, including ethno-therapy which brings into the therapeutic relationship the premise that ethnic (group) goals are important and must be shared with clients as a tool to seeking health. This approach, if adopted more generally, would lead to more ease in raising questions with clients who are engaged in "anti-Jewish" behaviour, e.g. not marrying, not reproducing themselves, intermarrying, etc.

#### **Governance and Structure**

Some identifiable changes are to be seen which affect practice in this area. Decades of lip service have been dedicated to the premise of self-determination and representativeness, especially in boards and committees so uniquely evolved in the American communal structure. A great body of literature has been developed dealing with lay powers and responsibilities in the operation of agencies.

Jewish communities and their agencies have long been wedded to the ideal. The reality seems to be, more often than admitted, however, that the base of involvement is a narrow one. It is not hard to see why. Historically, some 80 percent of the money raised in America for Welfare Fund/UJA activities comes from 15 percent of the givers. The community leadership tends to come from the 15

percent with the measure of leadership being most frequently equated with the capacity and willingness to give large sums of money. Increasingly those professionals closest to this aspect of practice, together with enlightened lay leadership, have realized that leadership programs would have to transcend their original intentions, namely to maximize giving through a series of emotionally intensive experiences with Israel as the final "sales force" for these experiences. Energetic efforts are to be found throughout the country which attempt to involve leaders in a more intensive and longlasting Jewish experience in the hope that personal Jewish life style would become as important as commitments to give money for Jewish purposes.

Increasingly this seems to arouse in more people the realization that new approaches need to be developed which will somehow engage more Jews in the governing and policy-making roles so necessary in the voluntary structure in America. It remains somewhat ironic that those in America who insist that neighborhood residents be given decision-making responsibility in Project Renewal neighborhoods in Israel do not insist that neighborhood counterparts in America be actively involved in comparable community councils in America. Project Renewal may thus have a very salubrious and unanticipated outcome—legitimizing the rights of all manner of Jew to be involved in running the American Jewish apparatus. Increased efforts are to be found to delegate power, authority and responsibility within centralized federations to neighborhood groups and regions. Some professional staff have worked assiduously to develop open and public elections through mail ballot in choosing some board representatives. Given the reality of the uniqueness of a community federation board in America (a subject for a lecture by itself) the act can be seen as one of great bravery, or stupidity, depending on one's masochistic tendencies.

Aiding in this trend of "opening up" Jewish board activities and selection processes has been the measurable increase of more responsible and provocative Jewish newspapers. In growing instances, communal professionals have encouraged the development of these papers even as they have been aware of the increasingly uncontrolled consequences of encouraging a truly free and questioning Jewish press.

These developments are not to be found everywhere but indeed are to be seen for what they are—trends. They represent stirrings of forces of change which foreshadow what I take to be radical changes in the making in the area of governance.

Yet another trend within the rubric of the community is concerned with relationships to government. As greater government support has been forthcoming for services historically funded by Jewish communities the need for increased sophistication in grant writing and lobbying has come to the fore. This has underscored in turn the business managerial skills increasingly needed by executives in all agencies but certainly especially in Federations. A consequence of this, when poorly integrated or too late appreciated, has been the proliferation of involuntary retirements and outright firing of executives. This has happened with sufficient frequency to bring forth a new concern in the field—executive jeopardy. It is the rare executive today who does not try to equip himself with the necessary tools to acquire new sources of government income and learn the managerial skills necessary in the accountability process. It should be noted that increasingly the previously mentioned board members have acquired the selfsame managerial skills at a very sophisticated level and, in turn, transfer their business oriented measurements for accountability from the board room of their companies to the agencies' board rooms. Their standards increasingly will be the measure against which satisfactory job performance will be judged.

The complications in these instances will be many and varied for in the field of human services measures of productivity and accomplishment are frequently not as easily evolved as in many other fields.

The turning inward of American Jewry presents great practice challenges to those who are active in inter-group relations. It is too early to take the measure of neo-conservation and withdrawal from civic issues and inter-racial alliances evident within most Jewish communities. The communal workers must provide a delicately orchestrated leadership role, for the most sophisticated of lay people and professionals realize the long term ramifications of an isolated approach to solving problems which confront many ethnic groups in America. Dealing, for example, with the problems of poverty among Jewish elderly inevitably involves government intervention. Alliances and coalitions are needed with others who share the problem and need a solution from the same source.

The dilemma for Jewish communal practice remains. Fidelity to responding to the meta-issue, namely, evolving strategies to heighten Jewish identity leading to intensified commitment to the creative continuity of Jews, Judaism and the Jewish community, must permeate the consideration and actions which set the Jewish agenda in America. Among the greatest of these is the ongoing examination and evolution of Israel-Diaspora relations.

### **Israel-Diaspora Relations**

In my opinion, we may be at the beginning of a new period in these relationships.

It is important to accept the reality of tensions in the relationship. Some of them are grounded in premises rarely articulated while much of the tension is ideological. A few examples may suffice.

Over the past decades the image of Israel was modified by the purveyors of that image and the ends for which the images were intended. With the advent of the

State, the Zionists' roles in America were sharply limited and the social welfare needs of Israel rather than the ideological imperatives for an Israel became the dominant frame for shaping American attitudes towards Israel. The consequence has been that Israelis continue to view Israel as the center of Jewish life, while American Jews view it as a large social welfare system devoted to taking care of the rejected Jews of the world which could not exist without the largesse of American Jewry. This is a result of innocent idealism and an outcome of a mentality which measures success in the relationship in terms of the increased percentage of giving which will result from a "successful" mission to Israel. Thus, while Israel has been busy sending its message to *Galut* Jews with their system of missionaries, the *schlichim*, American "missions" have been sending dollars as their message of support, not for the ideological premises, but out of a sense of *noblesse oblige*, so often at the heart of the Christian missionary process in reaching out to the benighted. This has all been in a context of ambivalence; for through the veil has been perceived the greatness and accomplishments of Israel and Israelis which managed and still manage to provide a great source of pride in being Jewish precisely because Israeli Jews have escaped their own past as downtrodden and helpless rejects of the Western world.

Still at its heart has been an unstated use of Israel as object or tool rather than end or goal. The cause of Israel is right. It helps Jews everywhere feel better and puts into place the chemistry which helped produce the rich and affluent American infrastructure. From the American Jewish perspective, it is perfectly legitimate to strengthen Jewish life in America, if for no other reason than to face the geo-political reality that Israel needs America as an ally much more than the reverse, and an American Jewish community provides a vehicle for pressing the American establish-

ment to maintain its commitment to Israel as fervently in the future as it has in the past.

The changes with relationships, I see, arise out of the changing nature of the Jewish professional. The changing of the guard is in full swing. The next decade will see the retirement of the last of the pre-World War II and early post World War II professionals, most of whom were shaped by American social welfare values and concerns as their frame of reference in working in the Jewish community.

The new Jewish professionals will increasingly be post 1967 products and, as such, increasingly products of Jewish Hebrew-speaking camp experiences, Kibbutz Ulpan, *Machon Le Madrichei Chutz La'Aretz*, Israel university year course programs and the like. They will know Israel in a different way and be molded by Jewish sources and concerns in a more authentic historic context. As such, the chance for the relationship to move to a more health-seeking one has never been better. This trend is evident in the increased concern for Israel on the Conference of Jewish Communal Service agenda, the growing number of professional staff seminars (not missions) in Israel, the increasing sophistication of the International Conference of Jewish Communal Service, to identify but some of the trends.

Two grave issues will affect the contacts and understandings between professionals in America and Israel. Soviet Jews and Israelis in America present issues which in turn affect practice trends. It is clear that both groups represent upwards of 10 percent of all Jews in America and will be seen and treated as Jews as time goes on regardless of Israeli government protestations. The professional trend which will be more evident will focus on increased attempts at outreach and integration within American Jewish life of both Israeli and Russian Jews. The rationale will be a source of tension between Israeli and American pro-

professionals. The "new" professional will be more open to entertain and encourage strategies to encourage aliyah in America but not at the risk of alienating a pool of Jews who can conceivably help deal with the meta-issue, namely providing a new source of infusion for Jewish life in America.

Simultaneously there will be increasing emphases on utilizing Israel as a source and resource for Jewish values and culture which will become more and more the agenda for Jewish organizations in America and, as already evident, including U.J.A.

### Support for the Jewish Family

If Israel is somehow on the agenda of the Jewish community in America in a permanent way, it is moving over to share a concern now being addressed by practically every Jewish body and lay and professional in America for the future of the Jewish family.

All manner of strategies and alliances are evolving which transcend auspices and philosophical differences. Conferences, dialogues, workshops, seminars, weekends, lectures, by the hundreds are focused on analyzing the problems, and more importantly, trying to evolve strategies to strengthen Jewish family life.

All is not bleak and, contrary to the pessimists who are busily writing of the Jewish family in America, it can be stated that the bulk of Jewish families are leading essentially healthy and harmonious lives. Having said that, one would be a fool to ignore the many signs of hemorrhaging of the family as an institution. The professional trends which seem to be emerging include increasing emphasis on family life education programs through major Jewish institutes and organizations in an attempt to anticipate and build against future breakdown rather than concentrating just on treatment of difficulties once they are full blown. Inter-disciplinary attempts involving rabbis, social workers and educators are no longer isolated exceptions. These include

premarital courses and courses for converts and their mates, and follow the life cycle passage through widow and widowers groups.

There are some beginning experiments in para-professional and para-rabbinic programs, wherein lay people are given very intensive training under the supervision of a rabbi and psychiatrist, to deal with short term crisis intervention and with Jewish cycle events, their meanings and potentialities for healthful family living.

Some family service agencies view themselves as quasi-educational in their thrust, finding it important to change their priorities with increasing emphasis on trying to deal with families in an educational context.

Organizations such as the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith have taken on the task of evolving materials which can be utilized by families in the creation of *Havurot*, *Shabbat Sedorim*, special services for *Hanukat HaBait*, welcoming a daughter into the family, etc. A new industry has sprung up, much of it independently, but occasionally encouraged by community organizations, in the creation of *ketubot*, wedding services, and other life cycle events. Family camp weekends, Jewish marriage—encounter (an offshoot of the Catholic church) and marriage-enrichment weekends are sponsored by agencies, synagogues and educational institutions. My own research in Los Angeles suggests as many as 15 percent of the adults over the age of 30 and under the age of 65 may be regularly involved at any one time in such efforts.

There are, increasingly, counseling groups for the divorced and some reported instances of attempts in non-*dati* circles to evolve special ceremonies in synagogues to mark the death of a marriage. These go beyond the *get* and allow for the reality of mourning connected with loss. This is seen as therapeutic when viewed in its Jewish context.

On the social policy level, the Council of

Jewish Federations, as a result of intensive professional efforts, is reviewing proposals for recommended action in Jewish communities throughout the continent. These include such recommendations as creating low interest, long-term bonds to finance extensive and intensive Jewish education and housing for young couples, utilizing money in existing Jewish community foundations and issuing bonds for sale to the community as it is now done on behalf of Israel. Some communities issue free annual memberships to newlyweds or to families of *bar* or *bat mitzvah* children. Computer dating is officially sponsored by at least one religious movement within Judaism, and extensive camping and social activities are geared to young adults, the latter with minimum success.

Work with teens, as part of the desire to build the family, has been singularly unsuccessful. Almost all youth groups are in severe decline and professionals have failed abysmally in attracting significant numbers of Jewish teens. Those that are involved are often exposed to discussions and simulations related to choosing a mate, having a Jewish family and the like. Excellent materials have been developed including audio visual tools. In general there is the beginning of a revolution in the use of technological teaching materials, much of which is geared to issues facing the family.

One could conclude that I have described a series of contradictory realities, some of which are very optimistic, others of which are full of gloom. And indeed both would be true conclusions. This in turn brings us full circle and to a concluding comment on how this relates to the meta-issue of continuing a vital community into the fourth generation.

From the perspective of one who has worked in, observed and written about Jewish life in America for over three decades, I can confidently draw two con-

clusions. Never has the organized Jewish community been blessed with so many resources, human, fiscal and physical. The professionals have worked assiduously to help develop a very sophisticated lay leadership which in turn appreciates excellence within the communal profession.

At the same time more and more people turn less and less to the community apparatus for service. As America enters the celebration of a century of Eastern Europe's gift, its millions of immigrants, the leadership is neither blase about its accomplishments nor unconcerned about its next century.

The next decade will find those who work in Jewish communal service trying to define themselves and their functions in clearer ways. There is as yet no agreement as to the reality or desirability of trying to evolve a profession of Jewish communal service even as there is no clear cut acceptance of being a Jewish professional in Jewish communal service. This has great implications for the evolving roles of professionals. The degree to which knowledge, values, and methods are identified and transmitted will establish the degree of power of suasion and direction the professionals will be able to provide to the American Jewish community.

The confrontation of the meta-issue of survival and its larger implications for professional strategies and roles in helping to evolve community policies and priorities will be the area demanding the minds and energies of the best and the highest.

The trends so quickly sketched here should at the least allow the possibility that America's Jews will be alive and well, albeit diminished in number, in the year 2081. Through the ebb and flow of history, the buffeted Jews have honed survival tools. They are in use and will continue to be used to create a dynamic Jewish community in America.