

Jewish Communal Work: A Framework for Various Service Professions*

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Jewish communal work must come to personify (Mordecai) Kaplan's description of Judaism, when he said, "Judaism must be more than true, good and beautiful. It must, first of all, be alive, and it is only alive to those who live it as a civilization."

Would that the English language had two words so short, so descriptive, so paired and rhymed, as *gesher* and *kesher*, for the twin focusing of *connection* and *bridge* are at the heart of our discussion at this symposium.

The Schwartz Program, so brilliant in its conception and so creatively implemented by its director, Benny Gidron, is one such attempt to provide connection and bridge between professions, professionals and settings.

Inherent in focusing on the topic is the need for careful definition and delineation of our concerns. Discussions over the decades have tended to be based on differing premises: the first that an emerging profession of Jewish communal service could be identified, while the second held and holds that the settings and the goals to which the settings were dedicated provide a field of service embracing many different professions. Frank Lowenberg's definitions were accepted by many when he focused on the settings and the field of Jewish Communal Service as a context of concern for education and training.¹ Our late, beloved Arnie Pins² held to that position, as has Charles Levy, our esteemed friend and colleague from Yeshiva University.³ Among those who have approached the issue from a different perspective have been the late,

great Judah Shapiro,⁴ our friends and colleagues Bernie Reisman,⁵ Armand Lauffer,⁶ and most recently, Bert Gold,⁷ who has moved from his former position toward tending to identify the elements of an emerging profession of Jewish communal service.

² Arnulf Pins, "Changes in Social Work and their Implications for Practice," *Social Work*, April, 1971.

_____ "Some Trends in Social Work Education," in *Personnel for Jewish Communal Services*. New York: Council of Jewish Federations 1969.

_____ with Bert Gold, "Effective Preparation for Jewish Center Work," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, V. 48, No. 1.

_____ with Leon Ginsberg, "New Developments in Social Work and their Import on Jewish Center and Communal Service Work," *J.J.C.S.*, Vol. 48, No. 1.

³ Charles Levy, "From Education to Practice in Social Group," Yeshiva University, 1960.

⁴ Judah J. Shapiro, "The Current Manpower Crisis in Jewish Communal Service; Its Impact and Its Implications for the Future of the Jewish Community," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Fall 1968).

⁵ Bernard Reisman, "Social Work Education and Jewish Communal Service and Jewish Community Centers: Time for a Change," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Summer 1972).

⁶ Armand Lauffer, "The Future of Social Work in the Jewish Community Center; The Case of the Disinclined Student," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Fall 1969).

⁷ Bert Gold — Conversations with the author plus statements at National Professional Advisory Committee meetings for Hebrew Union College School of Jewish Communal Service. Minutes on file at HUC — Los Angeles.

¹ Frank M. Lowenberg, "Survey of Manpower Needs in Jewish Communal Service." Bureau for Careers in Jewish Service, New York, March 1971.

I would associate myself as a link between the two groups while quickly admitting that indeed a variety of professions are to be found in the field of Jewish Communal Service today.⁸

It is my belief that we are emerging from an era in which we were primarily a field and are now engaging in a hybrid approach, blending elements of various professions together. It is not, and will not be, neat and clean. These new blends will take a number of new forms in the decades ahead.

It is as if we who work on behalf of Jewish community life are engaged in both fission and fusion approaches simultaneously, as we evolve educational models which both implode and explode as a result of the combinations in which we engage and experiment. Most importantly, as the debate and the experimentation go on, there are some informing guidelines which I feel can be identified and utilized.

Uncommon Commonness

Those who work for the perpetuation and continuity of Jewish life share an uncommon commonness. That is to say, we share a set of goals and aspirations which bind us by virtue of those for whom we

have chosen to work. These shared goals and aspirations set us aside and demand of us some unique attributes which must be formally identified and transmitted. We can identify knowledge and values which are needed to accomplish our goals. These are inherent in any definition of a profession. They provide the context for the skills—which are the easily identified hallmarks of any craft—and in theory could be utilized abstractly by many engaged in diverse pursuits. The surgeon and butcher can be seen using a set of skills with many parallels and overlaps. The same parallelisms among many professions and crafts could be identified. The uniqueness, then comes when further delineating the other attributes which accompany our skills.

Essential to the process must be the perpetuation of the central purposes for which we work. Thus, all education for communal service must, without de-emphasizing skills, elevate the *raison d'être* of our work. We are engaged in a transcendent enterprise—helping in the creative continuity of our people. This means, it seems to me, that a body of knowledge which leads to an appreciation of our people's needs and aspirations must be part of all educational efforts preparing people for work within Jewish communal service.

Permeating our purposes and the knowledge we transmit must be a value system which is rooted in our tradition. These values are predicated upon a faith in the capacity for people and societies to change and be changed. *Tikun*, the reparability of the world in its most profound sense, comes to be joined with a sense of the interdependence of our fate and responsibility as a people.

To me, regardless of whether one views communal service as profession or field of service, there is no room for anyone who does not *profess*, in the fullest sense of that word, the need to pursue the consequences of these imperatives. Lest I be seen as too vague, I would insist that a therapist who

⁸ Gerald Bubis, "New Developments in Training for Jewish Communal Service," *General Assembly Papers*, as part of *Personnel for Jewish Communal Services*, Council of Jewish Federations, New York, 1969.

_____ "Birth of a School." *CCAR Journal*, Oct. 1971.

_____ "Jewish Imperatives and Injunctions for Jewish Center Workers," *Viewpoints*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Feb. 1972).

_____ "Professional Education for the Jewish Component in Casework Practice." *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Spring 1976).

_____ "Confronting Some Issues in Jewish Continuity: The Response of the Profession," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Autumn 1978).

_____ "The Jewish Component in Jewish Communal Service, From Theory to Practice," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Spring 1980).

“only” helps a person “adjust” is not engaged in service to the Jewish community until and unless that adjustment is understood within the context of the other concerns I outlined above.

Professing allows for difference in understanding. All of life is based upon a series of dialectics and Hegelian-like syntheses and accommodations. So it is in developing ourselves as professionals and our profession(s).

Those who don't profess, debate, discuss, and help evolve debase the profession. They do so because they contribute nothing to new knowledge, nor new insights into old knowledge, nor insights into the art of applying knowledge, and values which we call professional skills.

In our School of Jewish Communal Service at Hebrew Union College we have taken an eclectic path in pursuing these sometimes ephemeral, oft-times frustrating, almost always exciting, goals. The very process of the pursuit is, of course, the most stimulating and satisfying of all. We have done this by simultaneously presuming some contradictory premises to which we hold in good schizophrenic fashion.

We offer a Master's degree in Jewish communal service. By doing so we state that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that by drawing upon social work, sociology, psychology, Jewish sources, and education we can identify and transmit skills, values and knowledge which can be measured within a context of ethics, written about, conceptualized and practiced.

We do this by blending basic block courses drawn from social work curricula which emphasize human growth and behavior courses and classical social work practice sequences. We graft on courses which identify leadership styles and community structures through the millenia of our existence as a people, study text materials to gain an appreciation of the sources of our value systems, teach research, administrative, fiscal and management

skills and provide field work opportunities to integrate knowledge and acquire skills.

At the same time, and this demonstrates the constancy, if not the normalcy, of our schizoid state, we offer options for five double degree programs, all of which lead internally or in conjunction with other universities to degrees in Jewish communal service *and* in social work, education, gerontology, public administration or rabbinics. To further confuse the field (profession?) we serve, we even make it possible for the master's candidate in Jewish communal service to spend one year in Israel studying Hebrew and text material and an extra academic year in America for additional Judaica and Hebraica studies which, in our opinion, will greatly enhance professional practice. Some call our attempts at education an audacity.

Our move is in consonance with a great philosophic shift in higher education in America where many new joint degree and/or newly synthesized degree programs are being mounted. This in turn is in keeping with the Jewish tradition, for there has always been an audacity of bridging and blending the old *with* the new. Thus we feel we are fulfilling a traditional role.

Our Jewish communal work then is the frame, the home, and context, and it remains so, whether or not one profession evolves. For, all these permutations must accept a premise, as so insightfully put by Rabbi Harold Schulweis, “there is no *kedusha* without *kehillah*, no sanctity without community.”⁹

Schulweis' quote is from an essay honoring the centennial of the birth of Mordecai Kaplan, the genius whose brilliant insights have done much to shape Jewish communal work. Mordecai Kaplan's 100th birthday coincides with the beginnings of the great mass migration of Eastern Europeans to England, Israel and

⁹ Harold Schulweis, Sermon, Valley Beth Shalom, June, 1981.

North America. He has called those migrants "mind-wanderers in search." Surely we are in that tradition and surely our presence here in Jerusalem attests to our search for that which unifies *all* who work in settings which Lowenberg called "those (fields) which by common consent devote their efforts . . . to further(ing) the group identification and group survival goals of . . . Jews."¹⁰

This marks us off. This makes us unique. This must inspire us. This is how we make sense of, and give purpose to, all of the mundane and mendacious which we face at times in our work.

Jewish *communal* work must come to personify Kaplan's description of Judaism, when he said, "Judaism must be more than true, good and beautiful. It must, first of all, be *alive*, and it is only alive to those who live it as a civilization. Judaism is the spirit of a nation, and not the cult of a denomination. When we accept Judaism as a cult, only, we consider it our duty to help

maintain a synagogue to attend services occasionally, and to refrain from intermarrying with non-Jews. But when we accept it as a civilization, we cultivate the knowledge of Israel's past so as to make that past an integral part of our personal memory; we dedicate ourselves to the furtherance of Israel's career, beholding in that career our own personal future; we accept, as far as in us lies, the responsibility for the material and spiritual welfare of all world Jewry. To be a Jew in that sense is to be imbued with a sense of Jewish consciousness that reaches down into the secret places of the unconscious."¹¹

This to me is the framework, the *keshet* and *gesher*, the connection and bridge which binds and bonds us all. If it does not permeate our work and our organizations, we have not succeeded. We cannot rest until it does; we will not rest until it becomes our reality.

¹⁰ Lowenberg — *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹¹ Mordecai Kaplan, quoted from *A New Approach to the Problems of Judaism* (1924), in *Moment Magazine* Vol. 6, No. 7 (July-August 1981), p. 17.