

# Jewish Values for Jewish Programs\*

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*It is not possible to introduce every activity with a preview of its Jewish roots. Further, it is not necessary to be conscious of Jewish uniqueness in the performance of a mitzvah or enactment of a value. Through education, awareness and confidence the connection between activity and Jewish roots is naturalized without effort.*

As I believe we often use terms casually, if not flippantly, let me begin with a definition of value and Jewish values.

I define value as a concept, an ideal translatable into desirable behavior, creed becoming deed, an idea made flesh and activity that simultaneously contributes to the development of both "self" and "community." I refer to the adjective Jewish, not to suggest that these values are the inventions or the exclusive preserve of Jews. Basic to all the leading religions are ideals that correspond closely to those called Jewish. I refer to *Jewish* values because they receive a special kind of emphasis in the Jewish tradition and are colored in our tradition by the typical reactions of Jewish thinkers and teachers who operated within the parameters of Judaism. They are also *Jewish* values because they are not remote ideas but real, vital forces in the lives of Jews.

They have become so deeply rooted in the Jewish consciousness that they are generally referred to by their original Hebrew names. To this day it is exceedingly likely that even an ordinary Jew with no pretensions to learning will be familiar with the original Hebrew terms. Thus he will use, or, at least know, the term *limmud ha-Torah* for

Torah study, *'ahabhath ha-Shem* for the love of God, *yirath shamayin* for the fear of God, *kiddush ha-Shem* for the sanctification of God's name, *bittahon* for trust in God, *kedushah* for holiness, *'anivuth* for humility, *rahamanuth* for compassion, *ahabhath re'a* (or more commonly *'ahabhath yisrael*) for love of neighbour, *emeth* for truth, and *shalom* for peace. This not only demonstrates the force of these ideals in Jewish life, but daily use of the terms by the Jew over so long a period has imparted to them a homely character, making them dynamic principles of action rather than abstract academic ideas.<sup>1</sup>

## Jewish Values Translated Into Program

The following are illustrations of five Jewish values, that, if understood and appreciated within the context of Judaic sources, can be applied meaningfully to Jewish education and program services within the Jewish community center.

### *Education—the Study of Torah—from the Sources*

Elijah Ben Solomon, the Gaon of Vilna (1720–1797), is said to have spent eighteen to twenty hours a day absorbed in his books, allowing nothing to distract him from what he considered to be the

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Jacobs, "The Book of Jewish Values." New York: Rossel Books, 1950.

highest pursuit of man, the concentrated study of the Torah.

"Why is it necessary," his disciples were asked, "for your master to spend so much of his time in Torah study?" "If the Gaon studies eighteen hours a day," they replied, "the average Polish or Lithuanian Rabbi will study ten hours. If the Polish Rabbi studies ten hours the German Rabbi, in an environment less conducive to such diligent application, will study for six hours, and the English Rabbi for two hours. And if the English Rabbi spends two hours a day in Torah study there is a likelihood that his congregants will, at least, keep the Sabbath. But if the Gaon lowers the standard and spends no more than ten hours in Torah study, the Polish Rabbi will be content with only six hours, the German Rabbi with two, and the English Rabbi with only half an hour. And if that happens what will become of the Sabbath of English Jews?!"

Appreciation of Torah study as the greatest of the Jewish values was typical of Eastern Jewry in the past centuries, of French and German Jewries in the Middle Ages, and of Palestinian and Babylonian Jewries in the Talmudic period. The Mishnah, the great Code of Jewish Law, compiled by Rabbi Judah the Prince at the end of the second century, states that of "things which have no fixed measure" there are deeds of loving kindness and the study of Torah. "These are the things," the Mishnah goes on to teach, "whose fruits a man enjoys in this world while the capital is laid up for him in the world to come: honoring father and mother, deeds of lovingkindness, making peace between a man and his fellow; and the study of the torah is equal to them all." Our rabbis stressed that Torah study is particularly crucial because it leads to the incorporation of other Jewish values and the performance of other mitzvahs. Rabbi Akiba gives priority to study over practice because study leads to practice.

Maimonides said the following; Every man in Israel is obligated to study the Torah, whether he is firm of body or a sufferer from ill-health, whether a

young man or of advanced age with his strength abated. Even a poor man who is supported by charity and who is obligated to beg at doors and even one with a wife and children is obliged to set aside a period for Torah study by day and by night, as it is said: "Thou shalt meditate therein day and night."

It is reported that the Gaon of Vilna once said that if he were offered infallible instruction in the Torah by an angel from heaven he would refuse the offer for he wanted to arrive at the truths of torah through his own efforts.<sup>2</sup>

Most importantly, the study of Torah is a manifestation of still another Jewish value, *ahavath Hashem*—love of G-d.

#### *Program*

Most Centers offer classes in Jewish subjects, cultural programs, holiday celebrations and the like and these programs are important and praiseworthy. But to maximize the value of education and learning we must begin to think beyond the traditional program formulas and begin developing study groups with Jewish texts that focus on the roots and sources of our beliefs. People need the security of documentary material to appreciate that special emphasis within the Jewish tradition. We have learned that one need not be a yeshiva student to be able to learn Talmud, Commentaries, Medrash and other Jewish texts.

Further, I would encourage all Centers to consider the resident-scholar concept. It is important to differentiate between the episodic and environmental approach to the Jewish education mission. The episodic module is periodic, the environment module is permeative. Having experienced the impact of a competent resident-scholar, I can confidently declare that in terms of range and depth of program—and most of all

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

for impact—there is no comparison between our traditional forms and this deeper environmental track. If we are committed to translating the Jewish value of education and Torah study, within the context of our pluralistic ethnic, then our agencies must become Learning Centers as well as Community Centers. Further, the resident-scholar concept, designed purposefully and applied creatively, approaches study as a means of changing behavior and mentality.

### *Family Life—from the Sources*

The Talmud teaches us that the family unit is the basic carrier of Jewish tradition; that parents are role models, links to the past; they represent our memories and are the links to our heritage. The family is also the central political institution in Jewish life as it ensures a source of legality to values—as a counterbalance to the state which puts accent not on community but on the individual. Laws on the sanctity of marriage, on bearing children, on honoring father and mother, on the spiritual strength of families, and the like, are perpetual themes throughout our sources. It is important to study these sources to understand, with more depth, how and why the family concept is such a fundamental “value” within our tradition.

### *Program*

Many Centers have achieved excellent results in communicating the importance of this Jewish value through family programming. I would suggest greater emphasis on the following two tracts:

1. A study group on the Jewish family. The most obvious approach to teaching people about the Jewish value of the family is to teach people about the

Jewish value of the family with members of the family participating together as a family unit. Not every Jewish value needs to be communicated experientially through program. In fact, activity does not always lead people to embrace values and when executed uncreatively without connections being drawn, the message often gets lost. We offer courses in Hebrew, Yiddish, History, Mysticism, and so forth, but we often overlook courses in singular Jewish values as if the topic is not broad enough to fill a syllabus. If we really want people to understand and embrace the Jewish value of family, then let us teach them what our sources have to say about the subject. I believe we need not worry about any dearth of material.

2. Experiential Activity. Some excellent program models have surfaced in this area. Havurah groups, family friendship circles, family shabbat groups, etc. offer our members meaningful Jewish activity within the context of the family unit as a learning group for self identification, Jewish expression and Jewish education. New and varied models of the family cell as a program unit need to be developed. One Center recently sponsored a family trip to Israel with eight families and thirty people included. It was the first time for all of them and they shared the inspirational experience together and with a senior staff professional. With the kind of intimacy that evolved, efforts at follow-up activity met with easy access.

### *Holiness—Shabbat—from the Sources*

It is interesting to note that the only holiday mentioned in the Ten Commandments is the Sabbath. There is also an entire tractate within the Talmud devoted to the laws of the Sabbath. In the *Mechilta*, a *Medrash* on the Book of *Exodus*, we learn that the Sabbath teaches us not to idolize ourselves and to

distinguish between creator and creations. On six days we acquire things and develop our bodies, on the seventh day, we develop our soul. On the seventh day, the emphasis shifts from what we have to what we are. The Sabbath also refutes Paul, the originator of Christianity, who claimed that Judaism represents circumcision of the flesh and not circumcision of the heart. Judaism creates concrete forms of spirituality by developing objective carriers of that spirituality, not by talking about "communal love" but by concretizing our commitment with specific days, holidays and most of all with the Sabbath.

The beauty and awesomeness of the Sabbath is best captured by the following quotes from Abraham Heschel:

The seventh day is the armistice in man's cruel struggle for existence, a truce in all conflicts, personal and social, peace between man and man, man and nature, peace within man; a day on which handling money is considered a desecration, on which man avows his independence of that which is the world's chief idol. The seventh day is the exodus from tension, the liberation of man from his own muddiness . . . All week we may ponder and worry whether we are rich or poor, whether we succeed or fail in our occupations; whether we accomplish or fall short of reaching our goals. But who could feel distressed when gazing at spectral glimpses of eternity, except to feel startled at the vanity of being so distressed?

The Sabbath is no time for personal anxiety or care, for any activity that might dampen the spirit of joy. The Sabbath is not time to remember sins, to confess, to repent or even to pray for relief for anything we might need. It is a day for praise, not a day for petitions . . .

. . . the Sabbath is endowed with a felicity which enraptures the soul which glides into our thoughts with a healing sympathy. It is a day on which hours do not oust one another. It is a day that can soothe all sadness away.

What we plead against is man's unconditional surrender to space, his enslavement to things. We must forget that there is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things.

The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the

Sabbath we try to become attuned to *holiness in time*. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.<sup>3</sup>

### Program

Over the years, the Sabbath has been a dominant issue in the life of the Jewish community center. Unfortunately, it has been discussed and debated unendingly, not in relation to its beauty and significance, but primarily in regard to our policies of opening or closing on the Sabbath. I propose that Centers begin offering courses on the Sabbath away from the heat and battle of controversial policy. The Jewish value of holiness as reflected in the Sabbath does not get communicated to members in acrimonious policy confrontation. One would think with all the history of debating the Sabbath issue in Centers, we would have become alert to the need for studying, in depth, what this awesome and complex concept really is all about. I have seen few Center brochures that carry the Sabbath as an adult education class. Perhaps it is so controversial, we withdraw from it altogether. I urge that we activate the Tractate of Shabbos and other related Judaic sources to help establish a course on the Sabbath as a mainstay within our Jewish education program.

I would also encourage Centers to maximize the experiential opportunities of the Sabbath to communicate the Jewish value of holiness through the holiness of the Sabbath. In Sabbath retreats man withdraws from industry and in savoring the glow and tranquility of Shabbat acknowledges G-d's creation as superceding his own. Our Centers can do so much more in suffusing our pro-

<sup>3</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Sabbath," New York: United Synagogue of America, 1951.

grams with the spirit and joy of the Sabbath. For example, a Friday night Shabbat meal for nursery school parents and children, planned by committee with roles preassigned, can lead to a magnificent Shabbat experience that is both instructive and inspiring. All of the constituent program cells in the Center, from singles to seniors, can be nourished with creative models of experiential Sabbath activity.

### *Charity—from the Sources*

Throughout the ages and throughout our texts, Jewish people have been confronted with the responsibility of giving Tzedakah. From Biblical concepts to Rabbinic teachings to Maimonidean principles, the Jewish people have been instructed in the science of charity and always with the "dignity of the human being" at the heart of this mitzvah. The Shalom Hartman Institute issues these thoughts on the Jewish value of charity:

Tzedakah should not be measured by the quality of physical effort extended to those in need. Although the physical effort required to assist a person after a fall may be greater than before his fall, it is often easier psychologically to come to a person's aid when he is desperate and visibly in need than when he is only partially in need of support. As the medrash quoted by Rashi indicates, many people would wait for the situation to become critical before responding. Helping a person in such a way as to prevent his becoming helpless may not seem appealing since others may not notice how wonderful you were. Your contribution may not stand out in full glory for all to see. We sometimes prefer to help orphans, widows and destitute people rather than those whose needs are less visible. We prefer giving to the needy in situations where we expect others to notice our actions and remark: "Look what he did! If not for him, so and so would still be in desperate need . . . if not for him, so and so's family would have nothing to eat . . . if not for him, so and so would have no roof above his head . . ."

One may refer to the cases cited by Rashi as preventive Tzedakah: anticipating the needs of others and responding in a manner which

forestalls total failure and helplessness. Preventive Tzedakah may lack the drama and glamour of crisis Tzedakah, yet because of this it ranks as a high and refined level of Tzedakah.

Hillel fulfilled the norm of Tzedakah by acting as a chauffeur for a poor person who had previously been wealthy. According to Hillel, Tzedakah requires that one give a person what that person lacks. The question may be posed: Are there universal criteria of human needs? Does Tzedakah involve a fixed standard of need or must welfare agencies personalize Tzedakah relative to individual needs and differences? The Talmud clearly articulates the bold principle of apportioning Tzedakah on the basis of individual needs. What a person lacks and needs may not be defined by some absolute standard but rather by what the person in question was accustomed to.

These four principles are essential for understanding the scope of the notion of Tzedakah involves: 1) helping a person in such a manner as to forestall his becoming utterly dependent, 2) not infantilizing the recipient of Tzedakah by ignoring the needy person's own capacities to cope with his problems, 3) listening with empathy to those whom we cannot help and 4) not forgetting that we are dealing with human beings who have problems and that in dealing with poverty, helplessness and deprivation we must guard against the tendency to depersonalize the human being in need.<sup>4</sup>

### *Program*

To echo earlier comments, I would urge that we offer our members an opportunity to study the concept of Tzedakah as it is taught in our sources and texts. The nuances and sensitivities of this concept escapes the average Jew and the casual reader. The act of giving Tzedakah would be truly enriched and perhaps increased were people to understand the weight placed on this value by the Torah which strives to teach us the fundamental ingredients of Judaism.

<sup>4</sup> Shalom Hartman Institute, *On Tzedakah*. Mimeo, Jerusalem, Israel.

In connection with Hillel's acting as a chauffeur for a poor person who was once rich because he believed in the relativity of charity, I recall a staff discussion on Center scholarship policies. It appears that Hillel was saying the previous life style is a major consideration in giving charity and no less significant than needs that appear more desperate. Thus, said one staff member, scholarship for single-parent mothers with diminished incomes, although not destitute, may be just as important in prioritizing limited camp scholarship monies as mothers on Aid to Dependent Children. Imagine a Jewish value being studied to clarify a Center policy! This is but one illustration of what could be discussed in a course on Jewish charity.

The Jewish value of charity is imparted not only by teaching but by doing. Centers should continue to engage in program projects to support charitable needs. It is meaningful for children and teenagers to be involved in raising funds for Ethiopian Jewry, Soviet Jewry and Israel. Tzedakah is an acquired habit and the more it is learned as a standard for Jewish behavior, the greater will be the impact on both the giver and receiver.

Let us remember, however, that programming to teach the Mitzvah of Tzedakah need not only involve Jewish recipients. In prioritizing needs and emergencies, and to demonstrate the inclusiveness of the Jewish character of the value of charity, we must also relate our efforts to such concerns as shelters and soup kitchens and non-Jewish Ethiopians. In fact, when groups are helped to decide on Tzedakah projects, the discussion on targeting the need and the population could only serve to enrich the process and ultimately elevate the experience.

One final thought on program and the Jewish value of charity: in writing

about the concept of charity and fund-raising, Reuven Kimelman comments, "it has been found that solicitors are most effective when functioning both as fund raisers and Jewish consciousness raisers."<sup>5</sup> Having been involved in campaigns to build two Center facilities, and in training solicitors to interpret the role of the Center, the writer treats as fact that in stimulating the expression of Tzedakah, one can achieve greater results when associating that expression with fundamental Jewish beliefs. Thus, we have another illustration of the importance of both the education and practical implementation of the Jewish Value of Charity.

#### *Social Justice—from our Sources*

The Torah is rife with teachings of social justice. The Bible, Prophets, Ethics of the Fathers, etc., give special textual flavor to the Judaic commitment to social justice. They include themes related to dignity of man, human rights, the principle of self-determination, concern for the downtrodden, treatment of strangers. In our Sabbath prayers, we are taught that "G-d will bless and reward all those who involve themselves in the affairs of the community." Jeremiah the prophet urges that "we seek the welfare of the community, for in its welfare we shall find our peace." In the tractate *Kiddushen*, the Rabbis question which is preferable, study or action. Their resolution-study is more important when it leads to action. Judaism is a religion of involvement as well as scholarship, a faith which requires that we do justly in addition to probing the concept of justice. Albert Vorspan reminds us that "being Jewish is not merely an acci-

<sup>5</sup> Reuven Kimelman, "Tzedakah and Us," A Solicitation Manual, Brandeis University, Massachusetts.

dent of birth but, rather, a high calling, a moral challenge, an eternal refusal to copout on the scene, and an ever new mandate to take the world in our hands, as copartners with G-d, and beat it into better shape in the anvil of life."<sup>6</sup>

*Social Justice—Program*

In the sixties and early seventies, many Centers sponsored public affairs committees giving guidance and encouragement to appropriate social action programs and board resolutions. This thrust mirrored the social consciousness of the times, particularly as reflected in the idealism and disaffection of our youth. The problems and injustices in our society have not abated but our values and priorities have changed. Our institutions have moved inward and our youth is more concerned with mobility not mission. To bring to life our Judaic commitment to social justice, I urge that Centers resurrect the public affairs-social action thrust of earlier days. The causes are still there and though the mentality might be tougher to penetrate, the responsibility to stimulate change and ignite the social conscience is still basic to our commitment and purpose. How many teenagers in our Centers have been mobilized to protest the evil of apartheid? How many camp, nursery and children's groups have discussed this issue? How many public affairs committees are there in Centers now and when was the last time our boards adopted a resolution that reflected a gutsy statement on a social justice issue? Activity for Israel and Soviet Jewry is laudable and should be encouraged. But to create an environment which reflects commitment to the Jewish value of so-

cial justice that is less safe than Israel and Soviet Jewry requires a broader and bolder thrust into social action.

Another area of program that relates to social justice can be found in the sphere of experiential activity. Some very creative and effective value clarification programs with youth and adults have been sponsored by Centers and other youth-serving agencies. Provocative exercises are employed to probe attitudes and prejudices. The LAVE (Life and Values Experience) program of the National Conference of Synagogue Youth is one such example. Through fables, graphs, multi-media techniques, and the like, youngsters are helped to develop positive values by being confronted with moral dilemmas. In one adult consciousness raising program, adults were asked to react spontaneously to a series of "free association" questions. One question was, "what do you think of the term *shvartze*?" In discussion, all kinds of attitudes and issues emerge regarding Black-Jewish relations, language switching for the work Black-as a symptom, why Jews should not be involved in civil rights activity, etc. Invariably, women comment on how they find the term *shvartze* repugnant, but somehow have never confronted their husbands, until now, on their use of this word.

Other meaningful discussion techniques are utilized within the context of a values-clarification program concept specifically designed to affect and change attitudes. These kinds of programs need to be expanded and professional staff need further training to feel comfortable in organizing these groups. It is particularly important to develop programs for attitudinal education because activity on behalf of social justice cannot take place unless people are motivated by their own values and commitments.

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<sup>6</sup> Albert Vorspan, "Jewish Values and Social Crisis." New York: Union of Hebrew Congregations, 1968.

**Linking Behavior to Jewish Values**

In this presentation, emphasis has been placed on education in Jewish values to convey a linkage between activity and Jewish motivation. It is not possible to introduce every activity with a preview of its Jewish roots. Further, it is not necessary to be conscious of Jewish uniqueness in the performance of a *mitzvah* or enactment of a value. Through education, awareness and confidence, the connection between activity and Jewish roots is naturalized without effort, into the bones, if you will, and the owner of the value understands the role of his identity. Learning also takes place experientially. When teachers use words like *Torah*, *mitzvah* and *tzedakah* in

nursery school, children assimilate these words and soon they too become naturalized in recognizing their behavior not only as children but as Jewish children.

In summary, it is important we progress from an indistinct application of the term values to a deeper appreciation of what we mean by Jewish values. We must spell these values out more explicitly and learn and teach how they are rooted in our history and texts. Through education and creative use of ourselves as professionals, we can translate these values into meaningful Jewish program so that our membership can strengthen their identity as Jews by knowing there is a relationship between their behavior and their heritage.

**Twenty-five Years Ago  
in this Journal**

Those who have adopted Lewin use him for justification of an assertive, almost aggressive, in-group approach. They call for a return to traditional values, customs and religious practices as a means of promoting Jewish identification and preventing or blotting out self-hatred. They advocate a forceful effort to reach people and militantly to inculcate in them an appreciation of Jewish values and practices. They make a division between those Jews who are "positively" or strongly identified and those who are not. Those who are "positive" are liberated from self-hatred and those who are "negative" are saturated with self-hatred. At this time we would like to demonstrate that those individuals who project such a viewpoint find no ally in Lewin, although he is called upon for scientific confirmation of their views.

JACK ROTHMAN  
Fall, 1960