

EXPLORING THE JEWISH ROOTS OF VOLUNTARISM

A Seminar for Jewish Big Brothers and Big Sisters

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This article describes the development and implementation of a training seminar for Jewish Big Brothers and Big Sisters co-taught by a Jewish educator and social worker. The goals of the seminar were to Judaically enrich the lives of Big Brothers/Sisters and to build a linkage between Jewish values and tradition and contemporary concepts of helping and volunteerism. The seminar helped the participants gain a greater appreciation of the ways in which their volunteer service both carried out and contributed to Jewish values and traditions.

For many volunteers, the Jewish Big Brother/Big Sister Association (JBB/BSA) is their first introduction to Jewish communal volunteerism. Big Brothers and Big Sisters demonstrate a genuine concern for a strong and vibrant Jewish community through their volunteer work with children—the future of the Jewish community. Often, though, Big Brothers/Sisters enter the volunteer role with little understanding of how Jewish tradition promotes and values volunteerism. This article describes the development and implementation of a training program to enable Jewish Big Brothers/Sisters to explore the Jewish origins of volunteerism, enhance their Jewish identity, and learn the value that the Jewish community places on volunteerism.

A training manual and accompanying videotape describe the content and format of the seminar, including session outlines, suggested agendas, exercises, and readings. Rental and purchase information can be obtained by writing Selma Gwatin, Bellefaire, 22001 Fairmount Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44118.

*At the time the project was conducted.

There has been much discussion regarding the need for linkages between Jewish values and traditions and the practice of social work. All too often, religious and spiritual dimensions are neglected in clinical practice (Canda, 1988; Goldstein, 1984; Joseph, 1987, 1988), even though religious values, such as charity, caring, altruism, and social responsibility, have contributed significantly to the development of the social work profession (Siporin, 1986). Gerald Bubis argues that "our practice must be grounded in knowledge—professional and Jewish" (1980, p. 230). Although there is no clear consensus on what type of Jewish knowledge is required for effective practice, Jewish history, ideology, and values appear to be important components. To incorporate this knowledge into practice, social workers must not only understand Jewish teachings but also recognize the applications of these teachings in their own and their clients' lives.

This holds true for volunteers, especially those volunteers, such as Big Brothers and

Big Sisters, who interact with and have an impact on the most vulnerable of children and families. Yet, existing volunteer training programs of the six Jewish Big Brothers/Sisters agencies in the United States did not include a component to help volunteers incorporate Jewish values into their volunteer activities. Where Jewish content was included, it generally consisted of special programs around Jewish holidays. Most notably lacking was training that incorporated Jewish self-awareness and built on Jewish identity. Volunteers often did not understand how and why traditional Jewish values promote the importance of volunteering within the Jewish community.

Therefore, a training program was designed by Bellefaire/Jewish Children's Bureau and the Cleveland Jewish Big Brothers/Big Sisters Association in conjunction with the Practice Demonstration Program of the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, Case Western Reserve University. It had the following goals:

- to enhance the Jewish self-awareness of Big Brothers and Big Sisters
- to Judaically enrich the lives of Big Brothers/Sisters
- to build a linkage between Jewish tradition and Jewish volunteerism in relation to the role of the volunteer Big Brother/Sister
- to improve the Big Brothers/Sisters' skills in communicating and interacting with their Little Brothers/Sisters

The program was intended to directly benefit the volunteers, as well as indirectly benefit their Little Brothers and Sisters. In addition, the Jewish community was expected to receive greater benefit from volunteers who were more aware of the Jewish connection to volunteerism, since many volunteers begin volunteer work at JBB/BSA and then move on to other community agencies and services. Thus, the training program could be expected to affect their participation within the wider community.

An additional program objective was to

develop a curriculum and training handbook describing the program content and format. The handbook would enable Jewish community professionals to implement the program in other Big Brother/Sister programs, as well as in other Jewish volunteer services.

THE SETTING

The program was conducted at Bellefaire/Jewish Children's Bureau, a nonprofit social service agency affiliated with both United Way Services and the Cleveland Jewish Community Federation. The agency helps children and their families of all faiths from birth through age 21 with a continuum of services offered through four program divisions: Early Childhood Services, Community-Based Substitute Care, Residential Treatment, and Community Services. One of the services offered at Bellefaire is the Jewish Big Brother/Big Sister Association, which has been serving children in the Cleveland Jewish community since 1919. Men and women of all ages, many of whom are professionals or businesspeople, volunteer their time to provide friendship and direction for boys and girls growing up without the companionship and guidance of two parents.

The JBB/BSA offers two programs of service: the Individual Project and the Sunday Project. The Individual Project matches a Big Brother/Sister from Bellefaire with a Jewish Little Brother/Sister from the community. The matches meet regularly over an extended period of time, with the goal of contributing positively to the child's growth and development. The Sunday Project serves children from the residential treatment center at Bellefaire. The volunteers in the Sunday Project plan and participate in group recreational activities on Sunday afternoons.

The training program described here was implemented with a pilot group of Big Brother/Sisters during February to April 1990. Invitations were initially sent to a select group of approximately 30 Big

Brothers/Sisters, based on their previous involvement in other aspects of the program. Twelve were willing and able to participate. This pilot group consisted of six women and six men, ranging in age from 24 to 44 years. Primarily professionals and businesspeople, they came to the group with varying levels of Jewish knowledge and observance.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The training program had three sessions, each of which was facilitated by a Jewish educator and a Jewish social worker. The interdisciplinary approach was chosen for a number of reasons. The combination of the disciplines of education and social work seemed uniquely suited to the purposes of the training. The educator was responsible for providing content and background in Judaic training. The social worker was responsible for facilitating group process and for providing training in communication skills. Both worked together to integrate Jewish education and social work group skills.

The educational method employed encompassed reading, study, and discussion of Jewish sources in order to develop connections between traditional thought and the conduct of daily activities. As each traditional source was introduced, participants were encouraged to explore inherent values and teachings and then to apply that information to their relationship with their Little Brother or Sister. Through experiential exercises and small group discussions, participants were asked to consider how their increased knowledge of traditional values would affect what they do and say with their Little Brothers and Sisters.

First Session

The first session examined the similarities and differences among three models of giving: the Christian model of charity, the Greek model of magnanimity, and the Jewish model of tzedakah. The explicit goal

of this session was to provide a linkage between the Jewish tradition of tzedakah and current concepts of helping and volunteerism. A number of Jewish texts were read and discussed, including Leviticus 19 and 25 and Deuteronomy 15. In addition, experiential exercises on the dynamics of tzedakah were conducted to help participants gain a greater sense of the significance of giving in Jewish tradition and of their role in the giving and helping process (Shalom Hartman Institute).

Through discussion, the Big Brothers and Big Sisters began to understand how their volunteer services with even the most troubled of children and families could help prevent future problems from developing or worsening. The notion of supportive and preventive services is highly congruent with the philosophy of the Big Brother/Sister program. Services provided earlier, more intensively, and consistently may enable families to cope with current problems, as well as reduce the likelihood that future crises will occur.

For example, the following talmudic commentary was used in the first session to illustrate the usefulness and efficiency of help that is provided to prevent further problems from developing:

"And if your brother grows poor and his means fail with you"—do not permit him to fail. To what is this compared? To a burden on a donkey. If it is still in place, someone can grab it and make it firm so that it does not fall; once it falls to the ground, even five people can't lift it. (*Torat Kohanim, Sifre Behar*).

The homework assignment following the first session was to write a personal statement of experiences in giving and receiving help. Both positive and negative experiences were to be included, with emphasis on how it felt to give or to receive help. For example, the participants were asked to consider whether the experience was embarrassing, and if so, for whom? Or was the experience rewarding, and if so, in what ways?

Second Session

The second session continued the exploration of the giving and receiving process both within Jewish tradition and on an individual level. The previous session's homework assignment was shared within the group. Discussion focused on how it felt to be a Jewish role model for children—how the helper may feel about his or her role and how the child may feel as a recipient of help. The Jewish texts presented and discussed at this session, such as Maimonides' eight ways of giving charity (*Hilchot Mattenot Aniyyim*), illustrated Jewish values of maintaining dignity, increasing self-esteem, and fostering empathy in the giving and receiving process (Leviticus 15, *Shulchan Aruch* Yoreh De'ah 248:1).

As the volunteers shared their personal experiences of giving and receiving help, the group facilitators integrated the Jewish texts in the context of their volunteer work. The importance of dignity and self-esteem for the recipient of help was illustrated through the story of a Jewish immigrant woman. A few Jewish dentists had volunteered to clean teeth free of charge in the woman's community. The dentists, assuming the immigrants did not speak English, talked openly to one another as they worked about their disgust for their patients. The woman understood English and heard what the dentists said. Knowing how the dentists felt about her and her people made it difficult for her to feel thankful for the dentists' volunteer services. The story points out the problems that develop when the giver feels superior to the receiver; the receiver becomes embarrassed, feels inferior, and as a result is ungrateful for the help provided. Since Big Brothers/Sisters assume a volunteer family-like role, it is important that their help does not undermine the parent's role or make the parent or child feel stigmatized.

The importance of reciprocity, or mutual exchange, in informal helping relationships was also discussed in this session. Participants identified ways in which their Little

Brothers and Sisters could be helpful to them and thereby play a more active part in the helping process. For example, a Little Brother/Sister could help a Big Brother/Sister clean up after a snack. In addition, the difficulty of the giver feeling rejected, inadequate, or inconsequential was explored. Big Brothers/Sisters may be confronted with difficult situations, such as handling behavior problems. Sometimes they may feel inadequately prepared for the task at hand. At other times, they may feel unappreciated for all their efforts.

One of the Big Brothers in the group related a positive example of giving and receiving help, which illustrated the satisfaction that can come from volunteer work. He had been called for an aliyah in the Bar Mitzvah service of his Little Brother. The Big Brother felt validated and gratified for having been a stable Jewish role model for the boy. The Jewish way of giving promotes the building up of an individual's self-esteem. In this case, the Big Brother was asked to be part of a ritual that requires and recognizes growth in the youngster called to the Torah.

The remainder of the second session was devoted to practical skills training in ways to support and nurture Little Brothers and Sisters. The goal was to promote better communication between the matches. Four communication styles, referred to as "Four Ways of Giving," were presented: nurturing, structuring, marshmallowing, and criticizing (Clarke, 1978). Nurturing responses offer help and support, whereas structuring responses set limits and protect; used in combination, nurturing and structuring responses are the two healthiest responses in that they encourage positive self-esteem. These responses are also consistent with the style of giving promoted in Jewish tradition; that is, encouraging dignity and self-esteem on the part of the recipient of help. Nurturing and structuring responses allow Big Brothers and Sisters an opportunity to support their Little Brothers and Sisters in a healthy and confident manner. In contrast, marshmallowing responses,

which suggest the person will fail, and criticizing responses, which ridicule or negate, tend to tear down self-esteem.

The group then discussed several examples of difficult situations which highlight the challenges facing Big Brothers and Sisters in their role as helpers:

- the child who wants to spend every day with the Big Brother/Sister
- the child who wants the Big Brother/Sister to buy expensive items for him or her
- the child who wants to engage in an inappropriate activity with the Big Brother or Sister; for example, seeing an R-rated movie

Discussion and problem solving of such examples enabled the Big Brothers and Sisters to be better prepared and in control of how their messages were delivered. The use of nurturing and structuring responses was taught as a means of fostering dignity, self-esteem, and more open communication.

The homework assignment for this session was to prepare an "ethical will" listing the values and lessons that each participant would like to pass on to the next generation (Reimer & Stampfer, 1983). This exercise provided an opportunity for all the participants to identify and explore the values and experiences that formed the foundation of who they were as individuals and as members of the Jewish community. As a group, the volunteers discussed which values were most important to pass on to Little Brothers and Sisters.

Third Session

The third and final session focused on the study of the biblical story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4), which was followed by viewing and then discussing the film, "East of Eden." The film was used to demonstrate intergenerational patterns in families and the paradigm for sibling relationships.

The discussion in this session centered on traditional Jewish thinking about the family.

FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up phone calls 2 weeks after completion of the training were made to evaluate the program's effectiveness. Of the 12 participants, 10 stated that the training had changed their sense of the relevance of Judaism to volunteerism. They now understood how their volunteer work represented one form of the Jewish tradition of tzedakah. The most significant aspects of the training were the presentation of the three models of giving and the practical communication skills training. Also cited were new perspectives gained about the Jewish tradition of giving; that is, the need to foster self-esteem, reciprocity, interdependence, and dignity. All of the participants indicated that they would recommend the training to other volunteers.

Based on the feedback provided by the participants, several revisions have been made in the training programs offered subsequently. First, only two expanded sessions, rather than three shorter sessions, are now provided. Second, more time is allocated for group interaction and sharing around the practical aspects of being a Big Brother/Sister, such as planning age-appropriate activities, handling behavior problems, and relating to parents. Finally, exercises are included to enable participants to compare their own development as a Jewish person with the development of their Little Brothers/Sisters. Overall, more content on the development of a personal Jewish identity is included.

Several implementation issues must be considered when initiating a training program of this nature. One issue is practical and concerns locating professionals to co-facilitate the sessions. The Jewish educator and social worker need to work together to integrate material and group discussions. Although the training handbook contains

suggested agendas and training materials, it is likely that the Jewish educators would include selections and exercises based on their own interest and expertise. Therefore, the training handbook is only a guide; much of the program must be tailored to the individuals involved.

The format and content of the program evaluation must also be considered. The use of pre-post evaluation measures and comparison or control groups would better document behavior changes that occurred for both the Big and Little Brothers and Sisters as a result of the training. In addition, follow-up evaluations could determine the extent to which changes were maintained over time.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This training program for Big Brothers/Sisters in a Jewish child care agency was designed to build a linkage between Jewish tradition and Jewish volunteerism. The program was carried out in conjunction with a joint university-agency project, the Jewish Communal Service Practice Demonstration Project, to integrate social work practice, studies in Judaica, and field experience in Jewish agencies. Among the goals of this project were (1) to enhance the practice of staff in Jewish communal service work, (2) to help students examine the relationship between Jewish values and social work practice, (3) to provide students with opportunities to develop and test service delivery innovations, and (4) to bring together the practice and research experience of social work faculty and human service agency practitioners. The training program enabled the agency and the volunteers to incorporate Jewish values with social service practice in meaningful and useful ways. As a result, both the volunteer and the service agency may develop a better understanding of the Jewish dimension inherent in the practice of social work in Jewish agencies and with Jewish clients.

Similarly, the training program described

here built upon the notion of the Jewish community as an organization with a mandate of communal service. The participants gained a greater appreciation of the ways in which their volunteer service both carried out and contributed to Jewish values and traditions. The potential benefits to the community are yet to be determined, but the program can reasonably be expected to contribute to a more self-aware and informed group of Jewish communal volunteers. Although the model has been developed in relation to the Big Brothers/Sisters program, it could be adapted for use by a variety of Jewish volunteer organizations. As volunteers and professionals gain better understanding of the significance of traditional values in their practice, their work with vulnerable populations may be both more enriched and enriching.

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THE NEGEV A Community's Failure to Thrive but a Potential Model for Regional Advocacy

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The Negev, Israel's vast arid desert region with less than 10% of the population, occupies nearly two-thirds of the country's land mass. Once considered essential for Israel's development, the region now suffers from neglect. A "New Negev" is discussed here based on regional advocacy that will provide the indigenous population greater involvement and control over funding resources and policy and program decision making. This approach has implications for other regions, such as the Galilee in northern Israel, that suffer from a similar lack of development.

Since its establishment in 1948 as a modern state, Israel has struggled to overcome a wide range of difficulties. However, the configuration of problems that presently exist—absorption of the massive wave of immigrants from the Soviet Union, other East European countries, and Ethiopia; high levels of unemployment; unstable relations and often violent confrontations with Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza; a faltering economy; a lack of unified national mission; conflict between secular and nonsecular interests; and competition among the country's regions for development resources—cause many to question Israel's ability to meet the demands made on a modern society. Clearly, the time and options left for this country's leadership to respond to the current crises are limited. Deferring problems or addressing deteriorating conditions in a stopgap manner has proven to be shortsighted and costly. A new spirit must be generated among Israel's populace; one that is dedicated to the optimal development of the country. Of first importance in any development plans is the vast southern region where "the supreme test of Israel . . . lies in its success and gaining domination through science and pioneer-

ing over the wastelands of its . . . Negev" (Ben-Gurion, 1963, p. 211).

This article examines the history and development of the Negev and presents the concept of regionalization as a means of overcoming the area's stagnation and promoting its future.

THE NEGEV IN RETROSPECT

The Negev is where God first spoke to Abraham and where monotheism, the belief in one divine spirit, began. It is the "land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass" (Deuteronomy 8:9). As early as the fourth century BCE, the Nabateans formed large communities in this area based on artificial irrigation and carefully devised schemes for storing and using available water resources.

From the end of the Nabatean period (106 CE) until Israel's independence, the Negev remained a neglected territory characterized by the existence of nomadic Bedouin tribes and arid wastes. Even the first Zionist leaders attributed little importance to the region's potential contribution to the future of the Jewish state because of its inhospitable, harsh conditions and lack of sufficient water to support agriculture.