JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE TODAY
Paradoxes and Problems

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Forty-five years in the field as practitioner, teacher, and consultant, as well as ongoing involvement in the Jewish Communal Service Association (JCSA) and through its Affiliated Professional Associations and the JCSA itself, have enriched my life. I have had the opportunity to observe much and think a bit about ourselves as professionals. This article attempts to analyze the issues we in the field of Jewish communal service face as we continue to confront our possibilities as professionals.

These issues — among them, the degree to which Jewish communal service is a profession and different models of professionalism — assume greater importance in the face of the increasing financial constraints under which Jewish not-for-profit organizations (NPOs) operate today. The velocity of change in society, the impact of what is euphemistically called downsizing — in truth, letting staff go — and changing job requirements increase the saliency of these issues for the programs of Jewish communal service that are training future Jewish communal professionals (Boeko, 1992; Paller, 1992; Solender, 1992; Solomon & Shevins, 1992). What is it they should teach? What are they preparing their graduates to be and do? And when they graduate, what do people share in terms of knowledge, values, methods, and skills, which are the classic components of all professional educational enterprises (Pins, 1963)?

The first attempt to develop an educational program to train Jewish communal professionals for the American Jewish community was made as early as 1908 when the New York Kehilla began a short-lived training program. Another short-lived program sponsored by Hebrew Union College followed in 1913. The graduate School of Social Work, which at one time prepared half of all the Jewish communal professionals in the United States, was created in 1925, grew during the 1930s, and died in 1940. The Training Bureau for Jewish Communal Service was created in 1947 and closed in 1950 (Bubis, 1971).

The mold of short-lived educational programs was finally broken in the 1950s when Yeshiva University in New York established what is now the Wurzweiler School of Social Work. In the late 1960s and early 1970s what is now the Irwin Daniels School of Jewish Communal Service at HUC-Los Angeles, Brandeis University's Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service, the Baltimore Institute of Jewish Communal Service, and Cleveland's Case Western University program in conjunction with the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies were all created. After a hiatus of more than a decade, another growth spurt produced the programs at Spertus College in Chicago, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Gratz College in Philadelphia, Los Angeles' University of Judaism, and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. Efforts to create educational programs in Columbus at Ohio State University and in Denver at Denver University are now underway (Elazar & Bubis, 1993).

In addition to the creation of several specialized Jewish communal education programs, the 1970s and 1980s saw the development of a recruitment infrastructure supported by sizeable financial allocations. The Council of Jewish Federations' Federation Executive Recruitment and Education Program (FEREP), the Jewish Community Center Association's increased allocation of scholarships, and the Wexner Foundation Fellowship program for communal service were tangible expressions of the Jewish community's commitment to Jewish com-

munal service educational programs. At the same time, these institutions, as well as the Association for Jewish Family and Children's Agencies (AJFCA), developed increasingly sophisticated and specialized continuing education programs for professionals in the field.

The important role played by Jewish communal service educational programs in producing graduates who will serve the NPOs in American Jewish life is now taken for granted. Between $5 and $8 million are expended annually for the education of some 80 to 120 graduates entering the field each year from the programs mentioned above. Of the 12,000 to 14,000 professionals employed by Jewish-sponsored NPOs, about 15% have attended those programs.

Such specialized training has an impact on retention. Over two decades ago Scotch and Lauffer demonstrated that those who came into Jewish Community Centers with a primary dedication to social work were less likely to remain in Jewish settings than those who came with a primary dedication to the Jewish community (Scotch & Lauffer, 1969). Later research suggests that a high proportion of graduates of specialized Jewish communal programs remain in the field for at least 5 years (Bubis et al., 1985, 1990). It is likely then that people receiving a focused professional education will be more likely to remain in Jewish communal service than those with other educational backgrounds.

IS JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE A FIELD OR A PROFESSION?

For more than 30 years, Jewish communal leaders have engaged in dialogue — on the campus, in professional meetings, and in the pages of the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* — about whether Jewish communal service is a field of service or a profession. In the 1960s, many thoughtful leaders in the Jewish community emphasized the need to sponsor educational programs focused specifically on Jewish communal service while not suggesting directly a turning away from the MSW as the primary degree. The most frequently argued position was that the Jewish communal education programs should be developed in partnership with schools of social work (Gold, 1963; Lauffer, 1969; Pins, 1964; Shapiro, 1960).

The debate continued during the 1970s. Bernard Reisman, director of the Brandeis University Hornstein Program in Jewish Communal Service, argued that Jewish communal service is a *profession* and that the purpose of Jewish communal educational programs is to produce a *Jewish communal professional* (Gold, 1972; Reisman, 1972). Others took the opposite position — that Jewish communal service is a field or setting (Pins, Ginsburg, 1971) — while I vacillated trying to bridge both conceptions (Bubis, 1969, 1972, 1976, 1978).

In 1981, Ralph Goldman presented a very important and prescient monograph to attendees of the International Conference of Jewish Communal Service (now the World Council of Jewish Communal Service). He reminded us that the roles, tasks, and titles of Jewish communal professionals have changed over time and continue to change, often in response to the external environment. On the assumption that professionals "share a common direction of development, as we strive to harness the forces of technical knowledge and professionalization in meeting Jewish needs," he identified the skills and knowledge essential to Jewish communal service — "Jewish commitment and knowledge, management skills, and leadership ability."

In the conclusion to the monograph, he charged *all* professionals with personal responsibility in five areas:

1. to develop and deepen Jewish consciousness based on knowledge as well as emotional commitment
2. to strive for excellence in professional competence — management, interpretation, and planning
3. to demonstrate leadership qualities

through initiative and to serve as educators and models for emulation and inspiration
4. to promote participation of laypeople and consistency and balance between the roles of laypeople and professionals
5. to make effective use of human and financial resources available to the community (Goldman, 1981)

Two international conferences later, in 1989, I presented my observations of the status of Jewish communal service, noting how uneven the process of professionalization had been in the 8 years since Goldman's monograph. I concluded that Jewish communal service was not a unitary profession but that what bound Jewish communal professionals was a series of shared attributes. As in the field of science, in which professionals with varied backgrounds still call themselves scientists, these following attributes bind together Jewish communal professionals, whether educators, youth workers, or federation planners.

1. *Expertise,* the result of prolonged special training
2. *Autonomy,* the right to decide on means and ends most appropriate in one's work
3. *Commitment,* being devoted to work and profession
4. *Identification with others,* casting one's lot with the profession and one's colleagues
5. *Ethics,* aspiring to be unselfish in the conduct of one's activities
6. *Collegial maintenance of standards,* taking responsibility for setting and enforcing standards of one's professional setting (Kerr et al., 1977)

PROCESS OF DEPROFESSIONALIZATION

The professional status of Jewish communal service is no longer an academic question as it is coming under increasing threat in today's cost-cutting environment. JCCs and federations, which used to require a MSW degree for most of their positions, are now engaging in the three L's — local, less, and lower (Ellen Deutsch Quint, Council of Jewish Federations, personal communication). That is, these agencies are more often hiring (1) staff from within their own communities, (2) former volunteers, most of whom are female, and (3) at lower salaries.

At lower staff levels feminization is a reality. Although this is desirable as a statement of egalitarianism, two realities must be recognized: the Jewish executive suite is still closed to women, and few women are physically mobile. Thus, the lower middle-management and staff slots are filled in a buyer's market. Salaries are depressed, and the ultimate outcome is the process of deprofessionalization (Bubis, 1990).

Another factor contributing to deprofessionalization is the growing gap between entry-level and middle-manager salaries and executive salaries. In law, medicine, accounting, and business, the most successful professions in attracting candidates, the norm for entry-level salaries is four times the tuition of one's graduate education (Fallow, 1985). *Not one graduate of a Jewish communal service program is paid that amount.* Indeed after 5 years in the field, fewer than 40% of professionals earn more than $40,000 a year (Bubis et al., 1990), and beginning salaries average under $30,000.

At the other end of the scale, executive salaries have continued to escalate. The median executive salary of health and welfare agencies exclusive of fringe benefits is $122,500 (Weeks, 1993). Although data on executive salaries of Jewish agencies are not available, they are probably higher than that figure. The lack of rationalization of salaries and benefits hinders recruitment and retention of qualified professionals.

Another factor leading to deprofessionalization is the lack of agreed-on standards for practice. In most professions, the professionals themselves develop (1) the criteria and certification procedures used to de-

termine who can call themselves a member of that profession, (2) continuing education requirements, (3) placement procedures, and (4) practice standards. Adherence to these standards is then monitored by a combination of the professionals, consumers, and community members. For example, in the Reform movement, placement of rabbis is done jointly by a professional association, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), and an organization of the hiring agencies, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). Continuing education is provided primarily through the CCAR in close cooperation with the rabbinical school, Hebrew Union College.

Yet, in Jewish communal service, Jewish-sponsored NPOs can hire anyone they wish for any position they wish, except where the law requires the hiring of "certified" staff, such as for teachers in schools and medical personnel in homes for the aged. And Jewish agencies can use the placement services of several national organizations, such as CJF, JCCA, or the AJFCA. Continuing education is now primarily in the hands of those national agencies, and not the field's professional association, the Jewish Communal Service Association.

IMPACT OF DEPROFESSIONALIZATION ON THE JEWISH COMMUNAL SERVICE ASSOCIATION

In existence since 1899, the Jewish Communal Service Association (JCSA, formerly the Conference of Jewish Communal Service) is *the* professional association for Jewish communal professionals. However, it has not been immune to the complexities of today's cost-cutting environment.

Although the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* remains the primary address for published discussion of professional concerns, the Annual Conferences of JCSA are no longer the primary address for continuing education. Increasingly, professional self-definition is tied more to one's field of specialization and setting than to the field as a whole. In turn, a plethora of specialized groupings have developed, which now provide very focused continuing education opportunities; for example, the quarterly meetings of large city planners, endowment directors, JCC directors of large centers, and so forth. In general, continuing education has come to be seen as the function of national agencies, such as CJF, JCCA, and AJFCA.

In addition, the trend of hiring "locals" for "less" and "lower" levels of compensation has contributed to an increase in the mobility of beginning workers out of the field. These professionals are less likely to see themselves as being part of the profession of Jewish communal service. As a result, fewer of them are interested in joining the JCSA through one of its seven affiliated professional groups (APAs), each representing a field of service.

The attractiveness of JCSA to these beginning workers is diminished even further by the fact that the APAs are being led by the executives and subexecutives in the field. Their enlightened self-interest, however unconscious, must be to identify with management. As a result, any sanctions or salary standards that might seriously affect their agency budgets may not receive full consideration.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We in the field must move to develop a clearer model for Jewish communal service that would clarify the essential attributes of Jewish communal professionals, rationalize salaries and benefits, including setting an appropriate entry-level salary standard, and establish new ways of certifying and monitoring practice. Although CJF has recognized the importance of these issues by establishing a Commission of Professional Personnel, it has focused little on content, on that which professionals must know and be able to do (CJF, 1987). We must develop a consensus around just that content or there will be little to bind together those of us who consider ourselves professionals in

the field of Jewish communal service.

As a first step, the name of JCSA should be changed to the Association of Jewish Communal Professionals. In turn, it should be seen as *the* headquarters for all the present APAs and any future ones. Each of the APAs should then use a unitary organizational model, which would enhance consistency. For example, the Center workers currently define their organization by its setting, whereas the community organization APA is seen as representing all community organization personnel, regardless of setting. It is this latter model that should be followed: *each APA should define itself by what its professionals do.* This process of redefinition will be a painful one, which cannot be done unilaterally but only after interdisciplinary and intersetting consultations and discussion.

Each of the APAs would then work together with the JCSA to clarify their roles in fulfilling the following tasks and functions:

1. Developing certification procedures and standards for professionals wishing to join the APA
2. Developing certification procedures for the agencies that hire professionals
3. Developing ways of working with the appropriate national agency
4. Developing a code of ethics that would be geared to both agencies and their professional employees
5. Aiding the continuity of the Jewish people through professional practice that emphasizes sectarian auspices and goals
6. Identifying the knowledge, values and skills basic to anyone who serves in a professional capacity in any Jewish communal agency, using Goldman's (1981) five areas of professional responsibility as a frame of reference

As part of this process, national agencies would be called upon to ensure that the pursuit of Jewish purposes and aiding Jewish continuity were essential parts of the mission statements of each local agency under their umbrella. This action would counteract the recent trend in which increasing numbers of Jewish agencies are defining themselves as nonsectarian in order to qualify for government or third-party reimbursement. It would also serve to focus local agencies on more energetically developing a funding priority system in which the pursuit of Jewish continuity assumed the highest importance.

Although I do not believe that we are a unitary profession, there is much more we can do to clarify what it means to be and act as Jewish communal professionals. One way to start this process is to use the model of professional attributes, as discussed earlier in relation to the field of science, as a structured framework for further discussion of the paradoxes and problems faced by the field. Let us take these steps to flesh out that model:

1. Each APA should be asked to prepare a short document describing how the criteria — development of *expertise,* demonstration of *autonomy,* identification of matters of *commitment,* preparation of measures of *identifying* with the field of Jewish communal service, and enunciation of a *code of ethics* and procedures for the *collegial maintenance of standards* — can be applied to Jewish communal service.
2. In consultation with the executives of major national agencies and the directors of the Jewish communal service educational programs, the JCSA President should appoint a blue-ribbon committee to review the submitted material from the APAs with the charge of producing a unitary document outlining the essential attributes of the Jewish communal service profession.
3. The next step is to involve lay leaders of all major Jewish organizations in reviewing the essential attributes of Jewish communal service, with the goal be-

ing the adoption of the attributes as the entry criteria into the field and their use as measures for hiring and placement. The APAs would then become more deeply involved in the hiring and placement process.

4. At the same time, the schools of Jewish communal service should form a national coordinating body, as has been done by the schools of Jewish education. This national body would guide the cooperative development of foundation courses coupled with focused and appropriate skill enhancement seminars.
5. The schools of Jewish communal service, in cooperation with the national agencies, must help local agencies respond innovatively to the needs of Jewish communal professionals so as to facilitate the recruitment and retention of capable staff. Some of the issues that must be addressed include flextime, job sharing, free or discounted tuition for Jewish day schools and memberships in Jewish institutions, parenting leave, continuing education, and sabbatical periods for professional development.

CONCLUSION

The image we hold of ourselves and our visions for our future as Jewish communal professionals must be infused with passion for our community and our people. This passion must be grounded in our ability to find and keep those with the skills needed to accompany it. Our community, our people, and our agencies need no less.

The year 1998 will mark the centenary of JCSA and its predecessor organizations. Will we be celebrating the beginning of a second century of shared destiny and commitment as Jewish communal workers, or will we be observing the burying of an honorable organization, which having served honorably, was unable to adapt to a new future? The answer, as usual, is in our hands.

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