

The Jewish Community Center's Responsibility for the Needs of the Jewish Family*

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THREE elements must be considered in the pursuit of Jewish excellence in regard to the family. These are: (1) emerging family patterns; (2) the changing responsiveness of the Center as an institution and (3) the professional as role model. I will conclude with some specific programmatic directions.

Emerging Family Patterns

We are faced with the emergence of new patterns of the family. The Center must identify them and decide whether or not it is equipped to serve them *as they define themselves*, rather than the way the community defines them.

Some permutations will suffice to make the point as will a few practice concerns related to each. In addition to the traditional constellation of parents and sibs, we are now confronted by at least seven other models: (a) the serial family, (b) the non-married family, (c) the non-child family, (d) the group family, (e) the experimental family, (f) the mixed married family, and (g) the single parent family.

(a) The Serial Family

The divorce rate among Jews has risen precipitously within the last decade. A substantial percentage of children will be raised in the decade ahead with blood fathers and mothers and second sets (and third in many instances) of parents growing out of re-marriages. Are chil-

dren with different last names than their "parents" in need of differential kinds of services? Does the family see itself as unique? Can the Center help in sorting out roles, relationships, and changed identities?

(b) Unmarried Family

A new phenomenon is the couple's wish to form a household and yet remain unmarried. The openness of the relationship establishes its reality. The duration often establishes its seriousness. Both definitions being, in short, that of a family. The couple may or may not have children. How does the Center view them? Are they given family membership? Can the child be taken into the nursery school if such there be? Are there different conditions or expectations at work as a result of the views toward marriage which are held by the couple? Can the Center help in delineating the new kinds of "contracts" involved? Should it?

(c) The Non-Child Family

Countless numbers of couples are responding to Zero Population Growth by having vasectomies or employing a variety of uterine devices. Others vow they will not have children for philosophical reasons. Is this "normal"? Is it desirable? Does the Center, can the Center, relate to the philosophy stated? Should the philosophy be challenged? Can people in their early twenties weigh the life-long ramifications of surgery? Is there an outreach counselling role to be taken with this potential constituency?

(d) The Group Family

To date, no Center to my knowledge has made contact with any such grouping. The accident of non-contact is not the same as a conscious policy of service. Does an outreach service have any special role to play with families such as these?

(e) Experimental Family

I use a separate category as a place to but mention new family forms just emerging. Homosexual alliances are becoming institutionalized. There are now at least four Jewish homophilic congregations. To my knowledge, homophiles have not yet turned to Centers. Will they? Should they? Is a couple a family couple? For other institutions other questions arise. Will a rabbi marry a homosexual couple someday? Can they adopt children? Should they be used as foster parents for homosexual youngsters?

A few instances have been reported of young women who consciously decide to have children without benefit of matrimony and outside of a "permanent" living arrangement. Will the child's status as a legal bastard (even though not one under Jewish law) have an impact of concern to the Center? And what if the mother was formerly married so that one child has a father of record and the other does not?

Older adults live together without marriage in order to save the social security check. Does the Center grant them couple status to further aid them in their fiscal difficulties? Are sessions needed to assuage guilt? Is social action indicated to change the law? Is there interpretation needed to shocked children?

(f) Mixed Marriage Families

The most "normal" of the new families

may be the intermarriage where one parent has not converted (more properly the mixed marriage¹). The child may be named Goldberg, yet not be halachically Jewish. Thirty to forty percent of marriages involving Jews in the last decade were intermarriages. A high percentage of them remain mixed marriages.

While these families may not, in most instances, be Jewish from a traditional formulation, they often are sociologically Jewish. They identify themselves as Jews and wish to be part of Jewish life. Does the Center have a particular responsibility to these families? Do they need special program services including group discussion opportunities? Are they to be seen, in short, as a special constituency?

(g) The Single Parent Family

Perhaps the least esoteric of all the new family models would be the single parent family. With sexual taboos less restricting, many men and women openly satisfy their sexual needs after divorce and no longer find the need for a second marriage. The parent often still wishes a role in the community for himself or herself and for the children. Still others actively desire marriage but find traditional singles' clubs at the Centers and Temples a dreary and demeaning experience. A few cities have started computer dating for Jews. Parents Without Partners geared to Jews provide another service also.

Have Centers sufficiently appreciated the ramifications of this explosively growing population segment? Day care services on a year-round basis for working mothers with a Jewish environment are few and far between. Fortunately, conferences on serving the single parent family have recently been convened to

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¹ Gerald B. Bubis, "Intermarriage, the Rabbi, and the Jewish Communal Worker," this *Journal*, Vol. I, No. 1 (1973), pp. 85-97.

help gear agencies and temples to the unique needs of this group. Does the Center react or anticipate? Are fees realistically set when services are available or must they be high enough to cover the cost of service?

I opened this short discourse with the bizarre and aberrational. If the Center has done little to anticipate dealing with the new, what has been its record in serving the old?² The answer must be spotty. The philosophy for serving families arose after the reality of using family membership as a device for raising dues. Today, however, it is our job to concentrate upon the future and not criticize our past. To best accomplish the task of better relating to the Jewish families in their varied forms, the Center must radicalize its response to the family.

Changing Responsiveness

The Center is often a serving Center. It is a place where people are served up dishes of activities to taste and enjoy. The cafeteria approach is the outgrowth of fiscal bind and communal perception. A Center needs money and so it offers the popular as a way of attracting participants. The participants in turn too often view the Center as a source for the popular and the passing. The constituency is thus both self-defining and self-confining because of this vicious circle.

The Center is actually a powerful idea. It should be less a place to serve and more a service with portability and potency. The Center must break out from being primarily an associational organization and become once more an instrument for communal and individual welfare. Membership cannot alone define who gets served and when, without regard to larger communal concern and needs.

² Gerald B. Bubis, "The Modern Jewish Family," this *Journal*, Vol. XLVII, No. 3 (1971), pp. 238-47.

Creative and experimentally evolved programs to serve families are critically needed but must be available to those who need them regardless of where they are, what it costs, and who is affiliated. Centers now spend too much of their energy on institutional maintenance. Federations must be helped to respond to the special project approach. They will increasingly underwrite creatively conceived and targeted services to Jews. Centers must come to be the vanguard in designing such programs for the families and urging support outside of the regular sources for budgetary maintenance.

The Center then is seen as an instrument of the community which transcends in its power and permanence the day to day response to ephemeral membership interest. It has a role to perform with and for all kinds of Jews precisely because it must represent Jewish continuity and community expectations for K'lal Yisrael.

We face today a confrontation of two philosophical positions. There exists in Jewish life both individual anarchy and institutional oppression. The Center often is attacked by individuals for its lack of responsiveness even as community leadership may feel it is too avant garde in its role while serving a too atypical constituency. This comes to the fore in sorting out roles as an organization dedicated to continuity and change simultaneously. It becomes especially important in regard to the question of contributing to the quality of Jewish family life.

I suggest then that the Center must define its potential constituency. It must decide which prototypical families it can best serve in light of where the families' needs and the community's needs intersect.

Professional Role

A creative and at times contentious

process will keep the two sets of needs in balance. Ongoing expectation, exhortation and explanation by the professional to both the constituencies, potential and actual, and to the community leadership, contribute to the Center's viability and flexibility in responding to the changing needs of both communities and families.

The professional has an additional responsibility. He cannot ask his constituency to do what he himself is not prepared to. Jewish life is important. Qualitative and purposeful Jewish life is even more important. It can't be important for Centers and their constituencies and not be important to the lifestyle of the worker. The worker as role model thus must say with his behaviors that being a Jew and living Jewishly in a significant way are important for me. The breadth of possibilities for this is great. The depth to which a family involves itself are nearly limitless. The styles, philosophical and theological possibilities are many. No one approach is "better" than the other. Culturally oriented staff are neither inferior nor superior to traditionally committed staff. Judaism has many options, but one must opt for a Jewish lifestyle to be a successful Center worker. Thus for the worker there must be a blending of knowledge, value, skill, coupled with personal commitment.

Programmatic Linkages

Any or all of the family models mentioned at the beginning of this article are potential clients for the Center if they see themselves as needing a Jewish context and approach to their lifestyle. The quality of Jewish family life must be intensified through specific sets of experiences which are found to be emotionally satisfying, intellectually edifying and Jewishly authentic. What follows is one specific suggestion which can be utilized with any kind of Jewish family.

I recommend that in every city in the

United States Jewish community center professionals take the lead in forming *Chavurot*. I suggest groups of no more than ten families come together and use the *Jewish Catalogue*³ as the basic text for a year-long living experience. The group should have a mixture of members and staff. It can set specific goals for itself for the year; learn to bake Shabbat bread; build a Sukkah; discuss Jewish books; make candles for Shabbat, Chanukkah, Havdalah, or Yahrzeit; celebrate Shabbat; write a Haggadah; in short, take five or ten or fifteen or twenty of the hundred Jewish opportunities covered in the *Catalogue*.

Think of it: one group of families — any kind of families — established in each Center in the country with lay and professionals dedicating themselves to a year of qualitative Jewish living, however defined and refined. Think of it, 350 groups of ten families each — Reform, Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, unaffiliated, young, old, with some mix of the kinds of families mentioned earlier bound together by their commitment to Jewish living. 3,500 families, perhaps 10,000 Jews, in this country, doing, not talking about, their Jewish thing.

Let us start with ourselves and those we can influence. Let us move from the rhetoric to the real, from exhorting to doing. And then, if we act, we can come together in a year to report on our experiences, our successes, our failures, our frustrations, our accomplishments, that come out of living Jewish lives. We will then once again reaffirm Morris Adler's insight: "Judaism begins at home. It doesn't begin at a meeting or a conference. It doesn't begin at a synagogue service or a philanthropic campaign. It begins in homes where Judaism lives in the atmosphere and is

³ Richard Siegel, Michael Strassfeld, and Sharen Strassfeld, *The Jewish Catalogue* 1973. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1973.

integrated in the normal pattern of daily life. It begins in homes where the Jewish words re-echo, where the Jewish book is honored and where the Jewish song is heard. It begins in homes where the Jewish etching or painting and the Jewish ceremonial objects are visible, and eloquently though silently exercise their influence upon those who uphold them. It begins in the home where into

the deepest layers of a child's developing personality are woven strands of love for, and devotion to, the collective life of the Jewish community. No advance in group techniques and administrative skills can compensate for the loss of home training and inculcation."

We can do no more and hardly dare we do any less. Let us begin.

Errata

In the article, "Contrasting Models to Community Welfare: Plato and Mamonides", by Jacob Kellner, an absurd meaning was imparted by printer error to the sentence "The Platonic view is unrealistic (appeared in print as "realistic") in that it perceives society as fully rational in all its aspects". Vol. LI, No. 1 (Fall 1974), p. 69.

Not content with this blooper, your journal production staff went one better in the next issue, Vol. LI, No. 2 (Winter 1974), p. 177. Charles S. Levy in his article, "Putting the Social Work Back into Social Work", after making some observations about distinctive social work functions, goes on to discuss implications for diagnosis. The editor will refrain from repeating the jumble that regrettably occurred at this point in the printed text. Instead we reproduce the paragraph as Dr. Levy intended it:

Implication for diagnosis

What does all this do to the concept of diagnosis which has been fondly employed by generations of social workers? For one thing, it taints the medical version of the concept which undoubtedly has colored social work usage. This version, according to one reputable dictionary, characterizes diagnosis as "the process (notice the *the*) of determining by examination the nature and circumstances of a diseased condition . . . the decision reached from such an examination."⁴ I suspect that this version of the concept has perpetrated considerable mischief for the social work profession, and has been used by social workers to add some. The biological version of the concept of diagnosis offers some advantages: ". . . scientific determination; a description which classifies precisely . . . a determining or analysis of the cause or nature of a problem or situation . . . an answer or solution to a problematic situation."⁵