

The Yom Kippur War and the Jewish Community Center; Some Observations and Questions*

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JUST as the holocaust in Europe and then the establishment of the State of Israel are considered benchmarks of modern Jewish history, the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War might be considered benchmarks of recent Jewish history. Both the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War have had profound effects on the people of Israel. The euphoria of the Six-Day War is now contrasted with the soul-searching of the Yom Kippur War.

My assigned task, however, is to examine not the effect of the Yom Kippur War on Israel, but, in essence, its relationship to the American Jewish community and more specifically to one segment of the American Jewish community, the Jewish community center. The task assigned included three areas:

1. Examining the response of Jewish community centers to the Yom Kippur War.

2. The Center as an institution in the community or, put in another way, what does the Jewish community center provide as an institution which would allow for such multi-faceted use of the Center during the crisis?

3. Can we identify the professional skills used by Center workers during the crisis?

We are all aware of the mobilization of the American Jewish community after that fateful Yom Kippur Day. Jewish community centers played significant roles during those days of tension and anxiety. I do not intend to present a

laundry list of the many activities which occurred at Jewish community centers. Instead I would rather just suggest the range of activities as well as the differential approaches taken in some communities.

Activities included the gamut of all age groups served by Jewish community centers, from nursery school children, to older adults; and included the work of professional staff, board members and other volunteers. Descriptions of specific examples can be found in the *JWB Circle*.

Many normal activities were cancelled. Capital fund-raising drives were postponed on the part of many Jewish Centers.

Each Center reacted to the crisis in its own way, and the overall picture was that of a community mobilized in a crisis. However, I have been asked to examine the situation in retrospect as well as to look at what is happening now vis-à-vis Israel. Since this is an analysis, it should not be construed as a denigration of the surge of activity that took place and the superb response to the crisis.

Modalities of Reaction

It would appear that there were three modalities of response on the part of the Jewish community centers.

One modality might be called the *active-internal* response. By active, I mean that many Center staff members and in many cases all Center staff as well as board and committee members became engaged in the crisis. No one had to urge them to react.

By internal, I refer to what might also

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be called inner-directed. Certain Centers knew that they could develop appropriate programs and responses within their own competencies as an agency of the community. These Centers were not only ready and willing to work out ways of cooperating with their Federations but were also comfortable in the role the Center could play as an agency *in addition* to whatever was necessary to do as part of a total community effort. In some communities some Centers were able to mobilize certain programs even before the Federation was able to do so.

Another modality was what might be characterized as *active-external*. Like the active-internal, those Centers were clear about what Center staff and program could do and were ready to help. However, these Centers waited until the local Federation was geared up and then went to work.

The third modality is the *passive-external*. There were some Centers which waited for the Federation to get geared up and I indicate that they were passive rather than active because what they did was not based on a clear conception of what a Jewish community center might do, but most of what they did was to provide facilities and make phone calls. They may have involved other groups in the Center in doing certain things, but it was on a less planful basis than the active-internal or active-external Centers. In some cases, if a certain department did something it was because of the commitment of someone in that department rather than an overall thrust from the executive.

If we were to compare the buzzing of activity in all Centers we might not have been able to see too much difference between let us say the passive-external and the active-external, but there was a difference. Which means that if we accepted what some of our social work colleagues believe in relation to behavior modification, the behavior was enough

and nothing else matters. However, there are attitudes involved in all behavior even though they might be more difficult to detect.

The modality followed by any one Center is based on one or several interacting factors. I would venture that a few of those factors include:

1. The day to day role of the executive in the community and in relation to his staff.

2. The clarity that the executive, staff, and board perceive as the Center's role as an agency and its role within the Jewish community.

3. The relationship of the Center to the Federation.

4. The role of the Federation in the community as perceived by the Federation executive, the Federation staff, and the Federation board.

I would suggest as an hypothesis that the manner in which the Jewish community center acted in a particular community in relation to the Yom Kippur War is a *reflection of how that Center operates in relation to the community and to the Federation during the rest of the year.*

The Center as an Institution

As an institution we can identify the fact that the Center was used for hundreds of meetings and rallies, large and small. To put it simply, the Center is a facility, a building which is available for such activities. But one might point out that synagogues and temples have social halls and meeting rooms as well. But there is more to it than that. The Jewish community center building is more than a physical facility.

However, even as a facility, it has a meaning which has a different kind of appeal as compared to a synagogue or temple. The Center is not identified with any particular aspect of religious or Zionist Judaism and is therefore the common meeting ground for Jews from all areas of Jewish life.

In addition, as Donald Feldstein pointed out about ten years ago:

The Jewish community center continues to be a vehicle for identification with the Jewish community for a significant minority of people who do not identify through any other institution This can be most meaningful since the places where a Jew can identify as a Jew in a secular way are getting fewer and fewer.¹

Some of the other variables that can be identified which made the Center the logical place for service during the crisis are not related to the Center as a physical facility or building, but are related to the Center because it has a combination of certain unique attributes.

1. The Center is the one agency in the Jewish community which can serve all Jews and serves more Jews than any other agency in the community.

2. More lay people are involved in the operation of the Center as well as in receiving the services of the Center. The Center does not function only with a Board of Directors, it also has a myriad of different committees.

Rabbi Jacob Neusner summed it up just a few years back:

I have always assumed that the synagogue was the most important Jewish institution, because it directly and immediately served the people. . . . I further sympathized with the Rabbis in their criticism of Jewish community centers, for the Centers' emphasis on Jews associating with one another for essentially neutral "un-Jewish" purposes. But experience produced a gnawing doubt. . . . I have observed that the Jewish community centers' programs for nursery school children, for summer day camps and the like tend to be the best in the cities known to me. And I ask myself why.

The answer is that the Centers respond more immediately, more sensitively to what people want than do other Jewish institutions.²

¹ Donald Feldstein, "The Emperor's Clothes," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XLI, No. 3 (Spring, 1965), p. 258.

² Jacob Neusner, "The Jewish Community Centers Face the 1970's," *Proceedings, Intermediate Cities Centers Executive Seminar*, 1971. (mimeographed), p. 5.

3. The Center also has a diverse staff, which allows the Center to respond rapidly in a number of different and significant ways.

4. The Center has local autonomy. It is a disciplined member of the community, but it does not have to wait for word from national headquarters to go ahead with a particular program.

Professional Skills

There are a number of skills which can be identified.

1. The first that comes to mind is *organizational ability*. Centers run many programs which take a great deal of ability to organize diverse individuals and groups.

2. Center professionals are also *program oriented*. Not only conceptually, but based on knowledge and experience with age groups from toddlers to older adults. At times our sensitivity to the psychology of certain age groups is not too appreciated by our colleagues in Jewish Federations, and on the other hand our colleagues associated with Jewish family agencies think we are not knowledgeable enough.

3. In the early days of the development of what came to be known as social group work, the term informal education was used interchangeably with the term group work. However, it is this informal approach and ability to be flexible which is an important ingredient in being able to respond to emergencies. Helen Phillips put it another way by identifying the skill as that of using the *reality of the present*.³

4. Another kind of skill was that of *interviewing*. This would include the ability to identify feelings.⁴ Many Centers became and are still being used as the

³ Helen Phillips, *Essentials of Social Group Work Skill*. (New York: Association Press, 1957), Chapter V.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter IV.

official agency for interviewing prospective volunteers for the Sherut La'am program in Israel.

It is quite possible that some other Jewish agencies might have some of the institutional factors just identified associated with them, and some Jewish agencies might have had staffs with some of the skills identified. However, as I thought about it, I came to realize that the Jewish community center has a range of attributes and skills which when combined are not like any other Jewish agency.

This observation is not made to negate the skills and attributes of other Jewish agencies or to even say that these attributes make the Jewish community center superior to other agencies. However, I do feel that we should be cognizant of these attributes which when taken as a whole do make the Jewish community center as unique in its way as let us say the home for the aged is in its way.

I mention this because I feel that many members of the Jewish Center field do not realize the uniqueness of the agencies they serve. We tend to be very critical of ourselves, and valid criticism is important. But we usually only remember the criticism and not the other side of the coin.

Donald Feldstein put it very well a number of years ago:

It is almost inconceivable that we should not exploit this potential (that of what can be done in the Jewish community center). The fact is that we often do fail. Somehow we have either been so browbeaten by the old attacks upon us, so self defeated by the acceptance of the old attackers, or so caught up in the demands of a multi-function agency, that we too often fail to see or use the potential.⁵

⁵ Donald Feldstein, "The Jewish Center and the Thrust of Social Work," *Conference Papers* (New York: National Association of Jewish Center Workers, 1966), p. 194.

As we all know, many people are interested in examining Jewish communal service as an entity and the skills related to that service. On a less broader scale the same can be applied to Jewish Center work. Are there skills which all Jewish Center workers might or should have in common whether they are social workers, group service workers, physical educators, cultural arts specialists, early childhood educators, or adult educators?

The skills related to working with boards and committees, as well as skills related to supervision should probably be included in such a concept. I would respectfully suggest that the skills listed above might also provide some leads for future study.

Since the Jewish Center field has had a long and historic relationship with the profession of social work, some comments about the skills identified above and their relationship to social work would seem appropriate.

If we examine these skills and attributes we find, to use some old fashioned words, communal components, and on the other hand certain group components as well as individual oriented skills. If we lump them all together we could say that many of the components of what was at one time considered traditional group work can be identified here. I would prefer to use the term classical group work. Depending on where you stand philosophically, and probably more important, dependent on the year you graduated from a school of social work, you will find this statement either heart-warming and gratifying or very upsetting.

As social work is developing at the current time, it would appear that the entity once called social group work is being swallowed up in something identified as social work practice, or is divided between something called treatment or micropractice on one hand, and something

called community or macro-practice on the other.

What is identified as treatment practice, by some definitions would tend to leave classical group work out of the realm of social work. However, what is identified as social work practice or generic practice, if examined independently from the issue of treatment, is not that far removed from what group workers were comfortable with. In this writer's opinion, most group workers were more like generic practitioners than any other trained social workers. Although the focus of their training was work with groups, they were sensitive to the individuals in the group as well as to the groups' relationship to the community.⁶

If we examine some of the concepts being discussed in schools of social work, some of these new concepts are, as one social work educator recently indicated in a book on the various theories in social work treatment, sometimes "old wine in new bottles."⁷

We should also be aware of the fact that the Council on Social Work Education recognizes and in fact approves of the fact that some schools "specialize" in some things, while others specialize in other things. In the past we would ask a student where he was getting his MSW to see if the school he was going to was considered a good school or a school which was particularly good in group work. Now we have to ask a student the school he goes to just to identify what special direction the school is going in.

If Jewish community centers seem to have difficulties in sometime defining where they stand vis-à-vis group work practice, schools of social work should be somewhat sensitive to our predicament

⁶ Alan Klein, *Society, Democracy and the Group*. (New York: Women's Press, 1953).

⁷ Shankar A. Yelaja, "Functional Theory for Social Work," in Francis J. Turner, (ed.), *Social Work Treatment*. (New York: Free Press, 1974) p. 149.

since they are also redefining where they stand as a result of societal flux.

We should also be aware of the fact that a number of theories being advocated by schools of social work are very congruent with what Jewish community centers do. Cognitive theory, existential theory, and general systems theory are all applicable to Jewish Center work. There will be a few other theories referred to below.

I would also suggest that as a result of the Yom Kippur War as well as the continual problems which are vexing Israel and Jews all over the world, that we might want to pay attention to *crisis theory*. Although crisis theory is now used in social work treatment, I would suggest that we might be able to extrapolate that theory as it related to the continuing crisis Israel must face. I would also suggest that the advocacy role which has become part of the social work lexicon, is precisely what we are involved in when we get involved in supporting Israel and other aspects of the Jewish community. We are advocates for Israel and the Jewish community.

The major issue here is to recognize what we are doing. If it is something we are sure is of help, we must attempt to understand it and how it relates to social work and the other helping professions which are part of the Jewish Center field. If we are clear about what we are doing, we can then ask the correct questions and make correct assessments rather than feeling that we always have to be on the defensive.

In fact, a number of agencies have begun to ask questions of schools of social work, rather than accepting outright the judgment by those schools about their agencies.⁸ Some of the questions being asked are very basic.

⁸ Ruth R. Middleman, "Social Work Education: The Myth of the Agency as a Partner," *Social Welfare Forum*, 1973. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 196-212.

Some people within the Center field are wondering about social work practice and its place in the Jewish community center. Is it being used effectively and if not why not? What is the proper place of social work in a Jewish community center?

A case may be made as to whether social work skills are really necessary to all aspects of JCC work. A case can also be made that what is now defined generally as social work, based on what is being taught in schools of social work, is not applicable to what we perceive as necessary in the Jewish community center.

Our problem recently in determining where we are vis-à-vis social work is that we have based our criticisms of what we do in Jewish Centers on an entity called social work which is changing very rapidly, rather than asking what are the goals we are trying to arrive at and then determining the best methods necessary to achieve those goals.

However, after indicating that it would appear that Jewish community centers were practicing classic group work, there is one area of help which seemed to be missing during the crisis. That is the area of help relating to the kinds of *feelings* people had due to the fact that here was another crisis for Israel and the Jewish people. How did this affect people's feelings about being Jewish and having to put up with constant worry and anxiety? Of course, the primary targets of anxiety were the Israelis; we in America were at least one step removed from being confronted with the possibility of direct physical annihilation.

This is not to deny that American Jews were anxious or worried. Some of our colleagues have indicated to me that many anxiety states were relieved by the quick action of the American Jewish community. In other words, people became involved in some kind of activity.

Whereas the Israelis had to examine the readiness of their defense and intel-

ligence forces, as well as question their political leadership, American Jews were being *successful* in their particular tasks. They were raising funds, writing letters, providing for needed equipment, sponsoring rallies and demonstrations and volunteering to serve in Israel for periods of up to six months.

It was apparent, however, that in many communities after all of the fervor of activity, that many people seemed to be burnt out. This was true of the lay leadership who had to spend so much time in meetings and making phone calls, and in some instances it appeared to be true of younger people as well.

Several Centers attempted certain programming around Israel later in the year, and the response from some teens was, "We're tired of Israel." Of course, part of this response may have been based on the possibility that the suggested program was unsuitable. However, it would appear that unsuitability is sometimes a rationalization, since enough material has been published about Israel. A recent issue of *Program Aids* asked us to think about Israel programming and gave us a number of helpful suggestions.⁹

Part of some negative response to Israel programming later in the year also has to do with the probability that a very effective method is not being used. The method is quite an acceptable part of what I call classic group work. This is what is usually called "cue" programming.¹⁰ Such a method picks up on what the members say and the worker goes on from there. Therefore, if someone claims he is tired of Israel programming, the worker should follow through on the meaning of that statement. The use of cue programming is what might

⁹ *Jewish Community Center Program Aids*, Winter, 1973-74.

¹⁰ Ira Berkman, "A Staff Training Project to Help Teenage Members with Their Jewish Identification," *Jewish Community Center Program Aids*, Spring, 1967, p. 4.

have occurred during or after the crisis in addition to the other activities and programs which Centers became involved in.

Another possibility leading to less interest in Israel programming is that staff might not be committed to Israeli or Jewish programming. This aspect is discussed below.

The Present Situation

Eight months after the beginning of the Yom Kippur War, where are we now? Has the War and the dramatic response of Jewish community centers affected Center programming or functioning to any great degree? There would appear to be a greater sensitivity to Israel and it is quite possible that people could be rallied again in a crisis. Some Centers have developed some on-going programs which they had not developed before. Where a Center has a *shaliach*, there is an obvious on-going program, but that begs the question.

The overall feeling I get is one of being spent after the crisis of the fall and winter. Although there is a heightened awareness and sensitivity, any continuous follow through is really a *reflection of how most Centers operated before the crisis*, just as the modalities I described at the beginning of this paper were reflections of Center operations.

One thing which may have affected whether some Centers continued to relate to Israel was the visit of Center executives to Israel in January. I will mention this activity a bit later, also.

In addition, the situation is complicated by the fact that with the killings in Kiryot Shemona and Ma'alot, that some of the anxieties and doubts which might have been sublimated through our action directly after the crisis may be occurring now. This occurred during staff-training sessions for the summer camp program in St. Louis, for example.

In trying to examine the present and by doing this, perhaps the future, we must examine two major areas. One area is the Jewish community center and the Jewish focus of the Center. The other area is the Jewish community center and its image in the Jewish community.

The Jewish Focus of the JCC

If the Yom Kippur War changed the program direction of a Jewish community center, that change was dependent on the *commitment* of the Center's staff members either to Israel or to the concept of the primacy of Jewish identification or Jewish survival as a goal of the Jewish community center.

An example related to Israel: As mentioned above, the Large and Intermediate Cities Executive Conferences were held in Israel in 1974 as a direct result of the Yom Kippur War and the desire to show that American Jews were united with Israel. A number of ideas came out of those conferences. One idea had to do with the concept of "twin Centers" whereby a particular Center in North America would relate to a particular Center in Israel.

The concept is an excellent one. And without appearing to denigrate the idea, it is quite obvious that the concept is not so unusual that it could not have been thought of before. However, the visit to Israel spurred the thinking of the people who went there. In essence the trip could be considered an extended experiential exercise which produced an additional commitment.

The key concept here is that of commitment. What produces commitment on the part of some people and not on the part of others? In the past, the rationalization many Center workers used for lack of Jewish program was that the goal of Jewish identification conflicted with good group work practice.

I say this was a rationalization since

there has always been a stream of thought in social group work which saw agency goals as an integral part of practice. The functional school always maintained that stance,¹¹ and what has become known as the mediating or reciprocal model also recognizes the agency as a factor. William Schwartz indicated recently that,

... group purpose is further clarified and bounded by the agency service in which it is embedded. In society's division of labor the agency has been designated to apply itself to some human problems and not to others. Thus, the agency has a stake in the proceedings; it is not simply a meeting place, or a place of refuge. Its own social tasks are involved and become an integral part of the group experience.¹²

Over seven years ago Ira Berkman of Chicago identified some of the aspects of resistance to Jewish program and worked on a training program to help staff on working with teens around Jewish identification. He explained that,

The basic element in this methodological approach which made it different from others was that attempts to handle the workers' resistance started with his (the worker's) projections. ... The second difference was once the need was established, the focus became one of helping the worker gain an intellectual understanding and acceptance of the need. Simultaneously it was necessary to help him build a strong enough foundation of knowledge as to what constitutes a "Meaningful experience". Only then could the worker begin to participate in such an experience.¹³

I recently spoke with Berkman and he identifies the same characteristics seven years later. Commitment is produced by experiences. *But commitment has also to include knowledge.*

A major problem area related to com-

¹¹ Helen Phillips, *Op. cit.*, ch. III.

¹² William Schwartz & Serapio Zalbach, (ed.), *The Practice of Group Work*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 8.

¹³ Ira Berkman, *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

mitment and knowledge, is the fact that *most people are afraid to admit lack of knowledge*. I have shared this thought with a number of colleagues in the past.¹⁴

The observation was underscored by Anita Weinstein and Bert Goldberg in a recent paper they presented. They were working with college age youth. They developed what was called a Shabbat community. The format developed for the program included Shabbat dinner, ritual observances, festivities, including song, dance; or an occasional speaker and group discussions. As they worked with the program they found,

Most of the participants had little or no knowledge of the ritual prayers or melodies. Instead of a desire for learning, or an openness to become involved in the ritual. ... The feelings the workers found were not of "alienation", or "emptiness", or even "guilt". The workers found themselves facing people who were *ashamed of their lack of ritual knowledge*. (emphasis added.)¹⁵

The same concept not only applies to ritual knowledge, but to Jewish knowledge in general. People are ashamed or afraid to admit their lack of knowledge. Such lack of knowledge then gets translated into rationalizations or negative feelings both of which result in no Jewish commitment and no attempt at Jewish programming. This is a basic issue and we *cannot rely on a crisis in Israel every five years or so to produce committed Jews or committed workers*.

What must be done is the development of a continuous, standardized series of training programs for Center workers. The format for running such programs which would cover Centers in communities of different sizes was presented a

¹⁴ Earl Yaillen, "The Jewish Center Faces the Seventies," *Proceedings, AJCW-JWB Midwest Staff Institute*, 1971, pp. 1-11.

¹⁵ Anita Weinstein & Bert J. Goldberg, "Jewish Psychosocial Identity: A Programmatic Approach," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. L, No. 1 (Fall, 1973), p. 68.

few years ago and it felt like a lead balloon.¹⁶ Charles Levy more recently in a brilliant analysis suggested an outline of the kind of knowledge needed by all Jewish communal workers:

What practitioners in Jewish communal service need to know and be able to do in the implementation of the purposes of Jewish communal service, both in general and in the specific fields of practice of which it is composed, can be both communicated and taught and learned. Since it is essentially common to all practitioners in Jewish communal service ... it can be communicated and learned by all varieties of practitioners. This would represent the common ground of all practitioners in Jewish communal service.¹⁷

In addition to such a training program, more and more Center staff people should be enabled to go to Israel. If it is important for Jewish Federations to subsidize teen-agers to Israel, it is just as important for Jewish Federations to support a certain number of Center workers each year to Israel perhaps based on a percentage relative to the Center's size. The same applies to subsidizing Center staff members to training programs similar to those held at the HUC-School of Jewish Communal Service.

The Association of Jewish Center Workers thought this was enough of an issue to sponsor a session chaired by Yehuda Rosenmann at the 1974 NCJCS meeting on the professional worker of the JCC and his need for a Jewish knowledge base.

The Image of the Jewish Community Center

And even if we were to miraculously

¹⁶ Earl Yaillen, "Executive Management of Staff Organization and Utilization," *Proceedings, JWB Intermediate Cities Center Executives Seminar*, Jan. 1972, pp. 1-24.

¹⁷ Charles S. Levy, "Toward a Theory of Jewish Communal Service," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. L, No. 1 (Fall, 1973), p. 49.

produce commitment to the Jewish purposes of the Jewish community center on the part of workers overnight, we would still have a major problem to face — the perception of the Jewish community center by the community.

In a survey of studies made about ten years ago, a major discrepancy was indicated between the community's perception of Jewish Centers and staff perception of Jewish Centers.¹⁸ The differences included:

1. the community seeing the Center as primarily recreation and physical education oriented and staff talking in terms of Jewish identification and personality development.
2. staff seeing the Center as a family-serving organization and the community perceiving the Center as a youth-serving organization.
3. staff seeing the Center's adult program designed to develop leadership for the Jewish community but in reality the program focusing on skill and special interest groups in physical education and the cultural arts.

In a more recent attempt four years ago to form a cooperative relationship between the Jewish Center and Jewish Federation in Philadelphia the same kind of Center image was identified there. The Center was seen as a "leisure time" agency with no relationship seen as to helping solve Jewish communal problems.¹⁹

The same executives in Philadelphia who made that report also made a survey of views of Federation and Center executives as to the Jewish Center's role in dealing with Jewish communal problems. Adelstein and Miller point out that,

¹⁸ Morris Levin, "An Analysis of Study Material on the Image of the Jewish Community Center Held by Membership and the Community," in Irving Cantor, (ed.), *Research Readings in Jewish Communal Service*. (New York: National Association of Jewish Center Workers, 1967).

¹⁹ Howard Adelstein and Charles Miller, "The Communalization of Jewish Center Services," *Journal of Jewish Communal Services*, Vol. XLVII, No. 1 (Fall, 1970), pp. 30-36.

One of the very few points of difference between Centers and Federation is in their respective view of what the Centers *are* involved in. Federation executives see the Centers in their communities involved 25 percent less extensively in communal problems, than do the Center directors and 33 percent less involved in the most important problems.²⁰

The authors go on to state that this difference might be based on differing perception of what communal problems are or a misunderstanding of what Centers are really doing. In part they may have been correct, but a study made this year would tend to make that caveat unnecessary.

The first published report of the Florence G. Heller-JWB Research Center focused on the use of a family liaison worker by a Center. Part of the study examined the issue of the Center as a resource for assistance with family or personal concerns. The summary indicates,

A majority of parents expressed no knowledge of the existence or availability of professional social work staff.

A majority of parents perceived the "Y" as a cultural, social, educational and recreational institution, and would not use professional staff for discussion of family or personal concerns.²¹

Now that many Centers were so involved in activities around the Yom Kippur War it is quite possible that the perception of the Jewish Center might be different. I do know of one community where the Center was very active in helping with the crisis, and that after things quieted down a major issue between the Center and the Federation about capital

²⁰ Howard Adelstein and Charles Miller, *The Jewish Community Center's Role in Dealing with Jewish Communal Problems*. (New York: National Jewish Welfare Board, 1971), p. 13.

²¹ Alex Gitterman, "The Impact of the Family Liaison Worker Upon Membership Perceptions and Attitudes," Monograph prepared for the Florence Heller-JWB Research Center, 1974; p. 53.

funds was resolved in favor of the Center.

On the other hand, in a discussion with a number of relatively knowledgeable Center lay people in a community recently when a question about the function of the Center was asked, recreation was the function most agreed upon.

It might be said that perceptions of Jewish Centers are based on possible biases of both lay people and professionals or on the possible ignorance of Center functioning. However, I would suggest that perceptions might also be objectively correct.

Most people do not see or understand the group work component of what Jewish Centers are supposed to do, and they may not see the Jewish component either. And if they do not see it, might it not be that the Jewish component is infinitesimal compared to what the "big picture" of the Center is? Or could it be that our programs are so subtle that we have to constantly keep interpreting them?

But even if we had totally committed staffs and thoroughly knowledgeable boards regarding Jewish programming and these staff and board members produced a new image of the Jewish community center, we then come to one last issue I want to touch on.

The Bottom Line

Both Centers and Federations have idiosyncratic problems to face and understand. Centers have membership problems to worry about which in many cases are tied to financial viability. Federations have the issue of Israel vs. local funding to contend with. The problem was identified in the Adelstein and Miller study:

Center directors, when asked about the reason for non-involvement (in Jewish communal problems) where such was the case, pointed to the problem of shortage of

funds and other resources and fear of what may have to be given up as the two most seriously limiting factors.

This raises some very hard questions related to what more can be done by Centers, where the funds will come from, and if choices have to be made, what traditional services should be abandoned in favor of more involvement with communal problems. What criteria shall be used to establish priorities and choices. . . .

The problem of resources is further complicated by the fact that a high percentage of Center income is earned income, derived from membership dues and activity fees. Centers are under pressure from within and from Federations to increase this income, particularly . . . as available funds have become more scarce. In the face of this the authors are considering the question of expanding community problem-oriented programs most of which will generate no income and will result in increased cost.²²

There is no question that some Centers could take their Jewish commitment even more seriously. But let us assume they accept this challenge and do so.

The nub of the issue based on the statements by Adelstein and Miller then becomes *at what point will a Federation recognize that a Center has committed itself as much as it can and that if a Center gets even more involved in Jewish programming, it will need additional financial help?*

Some people feel that federal funding, for example, can get the Jewish community and/or Federations off the financial hook, somewhat. But federal funding raises the spectre of serving more non-Jews which raises another problem related to the Jewish function of the JCC.

Unfortunately getting some of the issues resolved are as complex as disengaging the various armies in the Middle East. For example, the process a Center

²² *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

worker goes through in working with a group of teens at times has to be different than a Federation worker with a very task oriented committee. Although on the other hand, process without regard to some goal can be an excuse for no action. Unfortunately, some of our Federation colleagues do not always realize that certain Center programs are not as task-oriented as Federation programs are. This leads to much misunderstanding.

On the Federal level, some people might say that the Federation cannot be objective since as a fund-raising agency it also becomes a *fund-saving agency*. In other words the goal of social planning becomes displaced since the goal becomes that of saving as much money for Israel as is possible.

If we therefore can be clear as to some of the real issues which might produce friction, misunderstandings, and problems we might very well make some progress.

Conclusion

The Yom Kippur War has shown that Jewish community centers can be mobilized in a crisis situation. Through this examination, we have seen that Centers have certain unique attributes and that Center staff members have certain skills that are valuable. As Centers use and interpret these skills even more, then understanding of the uniqueness of the Jewish community center is possible.

As in any human endeavor we may never reach utopia. Hopefully as Centers go from being passive-external to active-internal, in relation to Jewish function and to social work, not only will the image of the Center change, but understanding might follow.