

by several elements, including our coming of age as a native born community, the Holocaust, the creation of Israel, a tradition of political activism, our concern with anti-Semitism, the actions of other denominational bodies; and that no one of these elements, but probably a

combination, plus others unspecified, may be of interest and of considerable importance to historians of the future in chronicling and in developing a perspective upon the accommodation of the Jewish community to the American scene.

Historical and Contemporary *Havurot*: A Comparison

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"Using the paradigm of the ancient havurah, its applicability (is developed) to the formation of a contemporary havurah in a suburban community, wherein the temple is seen as the center of Jewish life."

Purpose

IN the past decade there has been a surge of activity within the Jewish community in forming *havurot* on college campuses and, more recently, in synagogues. This is a result of the growing feelings of isolation and anonymity experienced by Jews in suburbia. Little has been written about its conceptual framework and its theoretical design. The purpose of this paper is to present the model of the ancient *havurot* and to explore the similarities and differences between a contemporary *havurah* and its historical predecessor.

Believing that such groups are an important part of a preventative model for mental health care, Jewish Family and Children's Service has become actively involved in establishing such groups. In Spring, 1974, JFCS co-sponsored a Bar-Bat Mitzvah discussion group for parents in a suburban Boston temple. One of the major issues raised by members of this group was their feeling of personal isolation and lack of meaningful involvement with the Jewish community as represented by the temple. In response to this need, a collaboration between JFCS and the temple was begun. Our intention was to develop a design for a *havurah* at the temple.

Historical Precedent:

But, what is a *havurah*? Much has been written about *havurah* in the past

decade. The earliest reference found in the literature was by Jacob Neusner.¹ In this book he describes *havurah* as being formed in the 1st century C.E. by the Pharisees. They called their fellowship of Jews a *havurah*. There were two forms of these fellowships. One emphasized the study of Torah. The second type was created by individuals who wished to carry out the neglected details of Jewish law, particularly those related to the rituals of tithing and ritual purification as seen in clothing and kashrut. As Neusner suggests, the tasks of the ancient *havurah* were:²

1. To create a fellowship within the larger community.
2. To define its "concerns" and goals. The purpose of the group was limited to the achievement of these specific social and religious goals.
3. To create rules for its members' behavior within the *havurah* and with people in the broader community who were not members of the *havurah*.
4. To teach the broader community its principles while always remaining a separate entity within the larger community.

¹ Jacob Neusner, *Fellowship in Judaism, The First Century and Today* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell and Co., 1963).

² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Using this ancient paradigm, I will attempt to show its applicability to the formation of a contemporary *havurah* in a suburban community. In this contemporary community the temple is seen as the center of Jewish life. Jewish families are dispersed over a wide geographic area and use the temple as their meeting place.

Referring to Neusner's first point, creating a fellowship within the larger community, in the contemporary counterpart, it was decided to create a *havurah* within the temple community as a part of, not apart from that temple community, although the group was clearly to have its own identity. This was accomplished with the active cooperation and participation of the temple's rabbi. This joint effort involved many meetings where his knowledge and expertise both in Judaism and about his community helped us to create a meaningful *havurah* design. Without his participation and support the program would have failed.

Now as to Neusner's second point, the *havurah* defined its "concerns" and goals. In the contemporary design there was an initial organizational meeting of prospective *havurah* members where the concept of *havurah* was discussed. This large group was divided into *havurot* of no more than six or seven families. The "contract" was for the agency worker to meet with each *havurah* weekly for six consecutive weeks to determine what its goals were to be and how it saw itself achieving these goals. The meetings were to be held in the members' homes. The discussion led by the JFCS worker would last one and one-half hours and would be followed by a simple coffee hour and socializing.

Each group defined its goals within the parameters of Jewish interest and content. Their exact focus differed slightly, but the core was the Jewish

calendar (i.e., celebration of holidays) and the Jewish life cycle with additional periodic special events such as seeing a play, i.e., *The Dybbuk*, or visiting the Jewish Historical Society during the Bicentennial celebration.

An open ended questionnaire was devised to aid the social worker and the group in defining its goals. This acted as an assessment procedure establishing what values the group members held and which ones they might share in common. This gave us clues for the schematic structure of the weekly meetings so they focused on Jewish content while enabling the individuals to coalesce as a group. To enable the *havurah* to do this, each meeting was carefully structured internally and its relationship to all the other meetings carefully considered.

In the first meeting the group dealt with their expectations of *havurah*, expressing both their hopes and fears for their group. In subsequent meetings we found it useful to have the group participate in exercises where there was much interaction initially on a one-to-one basis. We broadened this to include three or four members and finally the entire group. These exercises were most successful for on one level they focused on Jewish content and values while on another level they enabled the members to get to know one another in a meaningful way. With this, the group began developing its own unique identity. This required a delicate and skilled interweaving of these two variables. While the focus was primarily on content, not process, group process was evolving. The more task-oriented the group, the less self-conscious was the process. However, there did arise certain problems inherent in all groups . . . those of communication and disclosure. The *havurah* struggled with many questions: such as, "Who can belong to our

group?" "Should children be included and if so, how?" "How do we relate our group to the temple?"

In the final meetings it was necessary for the JFCS worker to deal with the group's tendency to see the leader as their authority, as our goal was to enable the group to function on its own after the six sessions. Interestingly, no natural leader emerged. Instead, the decision was that the leadership role was to be rotated among and shared by all members. The members were called upon to decide when they would meet again. They were led into planning their agenda for meetings so they could begin to see themselves as collaborators with the leader; able to assume the leadership of their group at the appropriate time.

Neusner's third point was that the *havurah* created its own rules and roles for its members. This was enacted in many ways and I will describe just a few.

Each group decided the number of families it wanted in its group. The limit was required because of meeting in each other's homes. To do this the issue of exclusiveness or cliquishness was grappled with by them time and time again. The *havurah* set as one of its principles that it condemned "cliquishness." Yet, two points became apparent as group solidarity evolved. One was the need to enlarge the group from four families to six or seven. The group decided how to accomplish this after many hours of intense discussion. One member had to be reminded he had put forth this principle and the entire group had to reaffirm its principle of not becoming a clique. In this case, it meant no blackballing of potential new members. On a deeper level, it meant that they were willing to tolerate different kinds of people in the group.

Rules of conduct were constantly evolving. They covered a broad range

of behavior and activities. After an incident where one woman provoked another to tears, the entire group dealt with their individual reactions to this episode. Although one of their high priority goals was to become an "extended family," they found they meant an "ideal" extended family. A long discussion ensued. The goal was re-examined. The issue of closeness was dealt with directly. From this emerged new guidelines for behavior within the group. Each member reaffirmed his desire to be close and part of the family and now saw himself responsible for his own actions. This meant (to the group) each of them had to care enough not to deliberately hurt another.

Other rules were arrived at less painfully. Each member became increasingly sensitive to his fellow members' needs. So, although one couple, older than the others, deeply fearful that the group would not include its teenage children in their adult activities, finally raised it as an issue, they were pleasantly surprised to find the group willing to include the teenagers as part of the adult discussions if the teenagers wished to participate.

On Neusner's fourth point, the group did educate the community both formally and informally. Articles were written in the temple bulletin about its activities. Upon the request of the rabbi, it led specific temple activities. Informally, members recreated *havurah* exercises with friends outside the group. An example of this was to ask: "How would you describe yourself: as an American Jew or as a Jewish American, and why?"

Conclusion

The use of a historical model of *havurah* in helping the social worker to better conceptualize the purpose and workings of a contemporary *havurah* has been presented.

Thus far we have been able to establish three contemporary *havurot* using this design. Although these *havurot* differ from ancient *havurot* in certain dimensions, the focus of both is the consolidation of Jewish identity. Social workers in a Jewish family agency are trained to deal with this area. This preventative type of program is one in which social workers can be of service in a meaningful way to the Jewish community.

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Government, Voluntarism, Jewishness and Accountability

An Essay on Principle and Principal*

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"For the Jewish communal agency, the issue is whether the agency can take government funds and yet preserve its Jewish mission. I see its mission to be an instrument of the Jewish community to continue Jewish identity, heritage, and life. So for the Jewish agency, the implications of government funding go straight to its core, its very existence."

Introduction

WHAT is the price Jewish communal agencies pay when they receive government funds for their services? That question, I think, like all important questions, must be reduced to a series of subquestions if a helpful answer is to be found.

How does government funding affect their position as voluntary agencies? How does it affect their ability to carry out their Jewish purposes? ("What are their Jewish purposes?") And how does the accountability which flows with the government funds affect their functioning as voluntary, and as Jewish, agencies?

We are talking about two different, though related, characteristics when we talk of the Jewish communal agency. It is at once a voluntary undertaking and a sectarian-ethnic venture. And although the concerns of the voluntary agency are shared by the Jewish communal agency, the Jewish agency has additional, special concerns.

For the voluntary agency, the issue is basically one of autonomy, freedom of action, control. Those words, though much maligned of late, describe the

fundamental and distinctive characteristic of the voluntary agency. So even for the general voluntary agency, the implications of government funding go straight to its core, its very existence.

For the Jewish communal agency, the issue is whether the agency can take government funds and yet preserve its Jewish mission. I see its mission to be an instrument of the Jewish community to continue Jewish identity, heritage and life. So for the Jewish agency, the implications of government funding go straight to its core, its very existence.

What this presentation deals with, then, is money, identity and existence!

Implications for the Voluntary Agency

To a significant extent we can view government as any other large and important contributor of money to the programs and purposes of the voluntary agency. If a significant contribution is made for a specified purpose to a voluntary agency, and the voluntary agency is willing to use those funds for that purpose, it then is accountable to the contributor for the programs and services rendered with those funds. In fact, if the contribution is large enough, the contributor could specify:

- (1) the people to be served in general,

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