

non-volitional suicide: (1) threat of self-inflicted punishment; (2) pathological despair of life and (3) prior personality disorders or inadequacies. The element of severe shame or disgrace as a factor was also noted. Finally, by introducing the concept of *shalom bayit* and its preservation, we added the elements of degree of marital and intrafamilial distress and the issue of future, potential adjustment.

I believe these guidelines to be appropriate ones for the caseworker from the standpoint of mental health and adjustment as well as from that of the *Halacha*. Guided in this fashion, the caseworker contributes positively to both of these spheres in the client's life.

Epilogue

As mentioned above, any acceptable variation in *Halachic* norms is itself no less an *Halachic* mode of behavior and, thus, when situation warrants opting for alternatives to birth and conception, such options may be assumed with clear conscience. Only the pious fool is stringent where such strictness may lead to *Halachically* undesirable states or conditions such as are hazardous to mental and physical well-being. On the other hand, there is a strong countercurrent; the time work and deeply etched tradition in Jewish life involving acceptance of *yesurin*, pains, and *nisyonot*, tests of faith, where such are deemed ineluctable aspects of the Divine-natural plan. An attitudinal instinct, if you will, is nurtured by many deeply observant Jews—not otherwise naive or given to superstitious speculation—that our faith in God the Provider needs overcome any fears we have over ability to support or care for children, no matter how logical the basis of the fear.

One author notes, for example, that the Malthusian specter of overpopulating the world is not a factor for the orthodox Jews to consider when debating need for contraception⁶⁶—true, insofar as the principle of “He who provided life will provide sustenance”⁶⁷ is concerned. However, when physical or psychological threats enter the discussion, a *Halachically* unique light is cast on “economic considerations,” which are then to be viewed as physical or psychological first and economic—if not *Halachically* implicative at all—only second. And here I think one cannot afford to proffer bromides about faith versus the sometimes extremely deep-seated and potentially destructive conception or pregnancy related fears—with all due respect to the proven wisdom of not promulgating generalized, lenient rulings before the lay public.

Finally, it would certainly be well and good if Jewish educators and *rabbanim* could make successful efforts to deal with the perhaps weak psychological, existential and religious frameworks which dispose many individuals today to maintain pessimistic views on the ability to raise children “in quality surroundings and conditions, etc.” Yet, this is preventative psychiatry and often little alters the degrees of pathological fears and anxieties that obtain and bear on the individuals who pose the sorts of questions to which this study was addressed. *Halachic* latitude is being suggested here for precisely those individuals who appear to be beyond the assistance of psycho-social and religious attitudinal counseling.

⁶⁶ M. Tendler, “Population Control—The Jewish View,” *Tradition*, (1966) 8, p. 5-14.

⁶⁷ Taanis 8b.

Strengthening Jewish Identity in a Residential Setting*

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It is necessary to become personally familiar with the inner workings and personalities of the agency, its responsibilities, methods and procedures, its problems, as well as the clientele served. This complete familiarity together with full access to the agency can maximize the impact of American Jewry's rabbinic and educational leadership upon the Jewish character of Jewish communal services.

Socio-psychological Concepts Relevant to Jewish Identification

As an introduction to the topic of strengthening Jewish identity, I should like to review some relevant socio-psychological concepts. Dashefsky and Shapiro asserted that the concepts of socialization and the interaction between social structure and personality are important factors in ethnic identification.¹ The term “identification” refers to both process of developing an identity as well as the product of that process.² Rosen pointed out three levels of identification.³ First, one may identify with some important person in one's life (in sociological terms, with a significant other). Second, the identification may be with a group from which one derives one's values, i.e. a reference group. Finally, one may identify with a broad class of people, such as an ethnic, socioeconomic, or political group. In short, “Jewish Identification” may be defined as “a generalized attitude indicative of a personal attachment to the Jewish people.”⁴

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Boston, June 1, 1976.

¹ Arnold Dashefsky and Howard Shapiro, *Ethnic Identification Among American Jews*. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1974. P. 3.

² Arnold Dashefsky, “And the Search Goes On: The Meaning of Religio-ethnic Identity and Identification,” *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. XXXIII (1972), p. 242-3.

³ Bernard C. Kosen, *Adolescence and Religion: The Jewish Teenager in American Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1965, pp. 162-166.

⁴ Dashefsky and Shapiro, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

How is identity formed? Many sociologists and psychologists consider the family to be the basic agent of socialization. Marshall Sklare has written about the decline of the Jewish family as a system for identity formation.⁵ Despite its decline, the Jewish family is still the most important source of Jewish identification, in this writer's opinion. This contention has important implications for a child-care agency responsible for the residential treatment of emotionally-disturbed children. If these children are to become Jewishly-identified, as well as socially well-adjusted, adults, child-care agencies must find supplements, if not actual substitutes, for the family influence.

Another important influence in the identification process is the peer group. Rosen reflected the mainstream when he wrote that peer group influence is probably greatest for the adolescent. At this stage of life, it provides a sense of belonging when “conflicting loyalties, identification, and values make him unsure of himself.”⁶

Ackerman's review of the literature lead to the conclusion that there is an ambiguous relationship between Jewish education and identity.⁷ Nevertheless, the Dashefsky and Shapiro study showed that Jewish education had a “mild but lasting” effect on Jewish identification for members of the younger generation.⁸ They pointed to the interpersonal

⁵ Marshall Sklare, *America's Jews*. New York: Random House, 1971, p. 97.

⁶ Rosen, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-104.

⁷ Walter I. Ackerman, “Jewish Education—For What?,” *American Jewish Yearbook*, Vol. LXX (1969), pp. 3-36.

⁸ Dashefsky and Shapiro, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

experiences, not only the cognitive input, as sources facilitating group solidarity and a positive attitude towards participation in the Jewish community.⁹

These then are some of the concepts and determinants which are relevant to Jewish identification which should be kept in mind as we turn our attention to the Jewish Identity Project of the Jewish Children's Bureau and the children it serves.

The Children Served by the Project

There is great diversity in the Jewish educational backgrounds of the children, although the majority have had relatively little formal Jewish education. Some have had several years of Talmud Torah, including a Bar Mitzvah prior to their entry into the JCB. Children's attitudes towards their Jewish education and ethnic identity range from the openly hostile through indifferent to, occasionally, very favorable. The function of religion in their current psychological adjustment ranges from adaptive to pathological.

Many children enter the JCB homes angry at their families and culture. They reject many of the Jewish aspects associated with these sources. They deny that they have any significant influence on their self-concept. Frequently, these sources have not been of the quality to make an appropriate Jewish impact upon the child. As a result, many children have impaired, deficient self-concepts which have a very limited Jewish character to them. The Jewish Identity Project is part and parcel of the overall therapeutic goal of restoring the child to himself. The project seeks to provide the child with a sense of Jewish identity which can contribute to his or her complete personal identity.

Objectives and Operating Assumptions

The objectives are threefold: First, to help the child relate positively to educational, communal, and familial experiences of a Jewish nature. Second, to help the child acquire or enhance a personal identification as a Jew. These objectives are not the same. Frequently one is met with a great deal of

indifference or hostility to the Jewish experiences that the project seeks to provide. The first objective therefore is to overcome this resistance. The second objective is a step beyond this in that it seeks to have the child incorporate Jewish elements into his self-concept and personal behavior. The third objective is identification with the Jewish community at large and its concerns e.g. Soviet Jewry, the Middle East, etc. This objective involves the child viewing himself as a Jew living within a community of Jews.

These objectives correspond to Rosen's three-tiered conceptualization of ethnic identification referred to previously. The antipathy or indifference to Jewish experiences was to be overcome by identifying with a significant other who was a committed Jew. Continued participation in Jewishly-oriented activities and creation of a Jewish atmosphere in the residential units would, it was hypothesized, contribute to the development of a Jewishly-oriented reference group. This reference group would be social contacts made outside the unit and peer relationships within the unit. The ultimate objective was identification with the Jewish community at large which, by definition, would indicate a Jewish ethnic identification.

The project began with several operating assumptions which are vital to understanding whatever success it has had. First, it was hypothesized, the success of the program would depend to a great extent on the quality of the personal relationships established by program personnel with the children. Given the apathy or antipathy of most of the children, the project could not succeed by having a rabbi come to the units occasionally to present programs of Jewish interest. Quite simply, the children would not attend. What was needed was an approach in which the children and the rabbi get to know each other as human beings, rather than in the roles of congregants and spiritual leader. At the outset of the project it was assumed that the rabbi would function as a special child-care worker rather than as a visiting, congregational rabbi. Thus, primary importance was given to the

rabbi becoming a significant other for the children.

The influence process was conceptualized as follows: They would first accept the rabbi as a human being. To do this would require accepting the fact that Jewishness was an integral part of the rabbi's personality. Acceptance of Jewishness in the rabbi would stimulate the children, it was hypothesized, to explore their own ethnic background. That is, acceptance of Jewishness in a significant other would make it easier to accept their own Jewishness.

The second operating assumption has been the importance of flexibility and patience in working with emotionally-disturbed children. It was necessary to be flexible in matters of programs and content offered, pastoral techniques and approaches, and expectations by the project personnel of the children. As an aside, if my wife were to give an operational definition of flexibility, it would be that one must be prepared to feed nine children at a Sabbath meal although only six have accepted the invitation. Regarding flexibility, no particular definition of Jewishness was to be excluded. Children should be supported in exploring their Jewishness in whatever direction they chose through whatever means they chose.

History of the Project

In October, 1973, the Jewish Identity Project began on a one-day-a-week basis. The project was created and has flourished as a result of the strong advocacy and cooperation of Morris Davids, then Executive Director of the Jewish Children's Bureau of Chicago. The initial focus was on the residential treatment programs; in particular, the boys intensive and boys developmental community group homes. During the course of the project's first year it became clear that, apart from the children's apathy, there were some significant problems inherent in the nature of the residential units which worked against the enhancement of Jewish identity. First, as part of its commitment to the general public, non-Jewish children were treated also, on a space-available basis. Thus, they contributed a

non-Jewish cultural influence to the units. Secondly, although the JCB was committed to hiring Jewish administrative, supervisory, therapeutic, and child-care personnel, the highest commitment was to hiring the most qualified and suitable people. As a result, half the administrative, supervisory, and therapeutic personnel were not Jewish and three-fourths of the child-care staff were not. Compounding the problem was the fact that child-care workers occupy the lower portion of the American economic ladder, so it was generally difficult to find Jewish child-care workers. Thirdly, of the Jewish personnel, many were indifferent and/or uninformed themselves about their Jewish heritage. All these factors worked to create a situation in which little attention was devoted to fostering Jewish identity.

It should be noted at this point that this situation did not uniformly prevail throughout the agency. Other residential units were able to devote some attention to Jewish identity because of differences in personnel. Also, in regard to preventive family casework, more attention was able to be focused on the Jewish needs of the families.

During the initial part of the first year, the primary task was to answer the question that both child-care staff and the children were asking, namely "Why the hell is this guy coming around here?" The child-care staff, particularly at the Boys Intensive unit were initially concerned about how or to what extent a well-intentioned Holy Joe would make their jobs more difficult. This concern was alleviated by familiarization with the rules and operating procedures of the unit and the individual treatment plans. It was made clear to both staff and children that I would not allow myself to be manipulated by the children into subverting the treatment plans. So, for example, I would not make plans for an activity before checking to see that the child was not on restriction or that he had school work to do.

Two different trends developed that first year in the way I fit into the units. At Boys Intensive, the children were generally younger,

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

more disturbed, and somewhat more impressionable. There I was called "Rabbi" and most of my activities were of an instructional nature.

At Boys Developmental, a different approach was called for in working with older children who were more hostile to Jewish culture. There I was known by my first name and most of my activities were of a recreational nature. Ultimately the boys came to perceive me as a person with special resources and interests in the area of Jewishness, a resource person who was available to them, yet would not impose his own Jewishness or a desire for Jewishly-oriented activities upon them. As the children began to feel more comfortable with me, questions would be directed to me in the middle of ping-pong, TV, or chess about the Sabbath, Kashrut, Israel, etc. Some children came to my home for a Sabbath meal. A Passover Seder was conducted in the unit which was relatively well-received.

The lessons learned during the first year were these:

- 1) There was a great potential for reaching these children and helping them relate positively to their Jewish background. However, I had unwittingly over-extended myself by becoming involved with two units and thereby with so many children. It was not possible to develop fully these relationships given the limited amount of time and the great number of children available to the project.
- 2) The basic deficiency in the project appeared to be that it involved the importation of Jewishness into the units. It walked into the units with me, as it were, and also walked out with me. Part of the problems was the need to gain the acceptance and support of the child-care staff. There were problems of coordinating and integrating project activities with the units' overall programs.

As the project continued this deficiency abated somewhat. The reason for this appears to be that I became a part of the unit culture. Coordination between myself and staff improved. Kids even began to introduce me with pleasure to their friends as "their rabbi."

Important changes needed to be made in the unit's structure and culture in order to make a more Jewish atmosphere, not all of which were realistically possible. However, over the years the rabbi's impact has spread so that some Jewish influence is apparently felt at times when he is not around.

During the program's second year, from September, 1974, to August, 1975, the project expanded greatly. For the first time in quite a while all the major Jewish holidays were observed in some fashion at the Boys Intensive unit. Three children were also prepared for Bar Mitzvah. The ceremonies were conducted in the synagogues with which the families were affiliated.

This expansion of programming was made possible by the hiring of a second rabbi in January, 1975, thereby doubling the amount of time available to the project. At that time a staff education program was begun for upper and middle echelon administrative and supervisory staff. Meetings were held once or twice a month at which time a basic introduction to the history and philosophy of Jewish holidays and observances were discussed. The purposes of these discussions were several: 1) to emphasize throughout the agency the JCB's commitment to fostering Jewish identity. 2) to discuss ways by which the cultural and religious atmosphere could be enhanced in all services of the agencies, with particular emphasis on the residential units. 3) to increase the impact of the project personnel by making them available on a consulting basis to those units which they could not visit regularly. It was hoped that by providing the necessary information and references to these unit administrators, they would be able to take independent action in fostering Jewish identity.

The addition of another person also facilitated occasional visits to the Boys Transitional and Girls Transitional units. These visits resulted in one girl celebrating her Bat Mitzvah at the age of 18. Progress during the second year may be measured then in terms of additional personnel, expanding programming, and more direct service time with the

children.

Two Case Illustrations

These two brief case histories illustrate some measures of success which were achieved.

The first case involves a boy who had a relatively good Jewish education until the age of 16 and had even been to Israel. However, he despised all things Jewish. He liked playing chess with me, but refused to come over to my home with other residents for a holiday or Sabbath meal. This continued for over a year. During this period he eventually began to ask questions about Judaism and vent criticisms and bad feelings about the Jews and Judaism that he had experienced. To make a long story short, he now calls me up to invite himself over for a Sabbath meal. Over a game of chess we will discuss a personal problem or an aspect of Judaism. He has expressed an appreciation for the Sabbath atmosphere in my home. He has come to the point where, without any prodding on my part, he will even wear a yarmulke, make blessings and sing songs with the family. With my encouragement he has had some involvement with a college Jewish students group. He has plenty of reservations about Jews and Judaism left inside, but he has come a long way from his previous self-hatred. This for me is proof that with patience and flexibility a great deal can be accomplished in fostering Jewish identity in a residential setting.

The second case involves a boy with whom I have been playing a lot of pool. Unlike the first boy, he has only a little interest in discussions of Jewish content, although he has been to my home for holiday meals. He can be very appropriate socially and charming. However, his emotional problems cause him to act inappropriately in order to test whether or not he will still be loved and accepted. On more than one occasion he has said that I was a "cool" rabbi. This signifies to me that he has accepted me as a person and as a Jew. I am confident that if and when the day comes that he can accept himself as he is without needing to test other people's acceptance of him, if that day comes, he will also accept himself as a Jew.

Currently the project is in its third year and is enjoying further expansion. Personnel time has been increased from two to three-and-a-half days a week. One of the most notable

results is that I now live with my family on the third floor of the apartment building housing two Girls Transitional units. One general objective of this situation is to provide the girls with opportunities to have healthy interactions with an intact, stable family. The other, related objective is to provide them with opportunities to experience Jewish holidays within a warm family setting.

The obstacles to achieving these objectives were these: First, the girls have varying degrees of difficulty in reaching out to establish relationships or in accepting our invitations. Second, the method used at the Boys units, namely spending a lot of time cultivating personal relationships through recreational activities, was not appropriate for older adolescent girls. Third, many of the girls were indifferent or hostile to Jewish culture.

The method used with some success has been to adopt the role of the friendly-neighbor next door. We loan things to the girls; they reciprocate. Occasionally a girl will come to talk with my wife or myself about a problem in order to get another viewpoint besides their child-care worker's! Our entry into the building culture was assisted by the High Holy Days. My wife was very helpful in fostering this role by responding to the girl's request for help in planning and preparing menus for the holidays.

One incident captures the flavor of much of our experience as the third floor neighbor. One of the girls was interested in learning how to make kreplach. So we had the interesting anomaly of a Jewish girl who was punishing her parents by taking an interest in Christianity. Here she was standing in our kitchen before Succos helping my wife make kreplach and wearing a cross! This illustrates the ambivalence that many of the girls experience about their Jewishness. Many of the girls are reluctant to reach out to their third floor neighbors, particularly since they are strongly identifiable as Jews. Yet many of these same girls accept our dinner invitations for the Holidays and an occasional Sabbath. So it is with our Jewish-Christian kreplach-maker. She accepts our invitations frequently and she

always makes a point of wearing her cross.

The increase in program time has also made possible the following new aspects of the Jewish Identity project: 1) Regular, as opposed to occasional contact is maintained with the Boys Transitional unit and regular contact is also maintained with two specialized foster group homes. 2) Weekly visits are now made to the Children's Service Center which provides elementary and high school education to children too disturbed to attend regular schools. My activities there involve participating in gym programs, talking to kids during lunch and recess breaks, and giving pre-Bar Mitzvah instructions. One hoped-for development which is slowly occurring is the extension of invitations by teachers to address their classes when there is an interface between the class subject and Jewish culture. 3) Another new activity which has great potential for expanding the impact of the project is a series of scheduled meetings with the Foster Parents Association. These meetings center around Jewish holidays. At Chanukah, for example, the holiday observances and history was explained. A discussion ensued about how the foster parents and children, not all of whom are Jewish, dealt with the potential Chanukah-Christmas conflict. 4) There has also started an involvement with the JCB Volunteer Program.

This then is the history of the Jewish Identity project. The Jewish Identity project has provided a wide range of Jewish experiences to significant numbers of children who were receiving little if any previously. It has also improved the quality of the Jewish experiences offered in some of the other areas of the agency which did have Jewish content in their programming. In this sense the project is a success.

Strengthening the Jewish Component of Jewish Communal Service

In recent years there has been increasing concern about the Jewishness of Jewish communal services. In the concluding chapter of their study of Jewish identification, Dashefsky and Shapiro noted that the social structure of the community is important for the maintenance and development of Jewish identity and that Jewish identity has a reciprocal effect on the nature of the social structure. They added:

If one wants to consider policy implications for strengthening Jewish identity and identification, then the most strategic point in this cycle is that of inter-personal relationships. What the Jewish community can do is provide the organizational and institutional context for the development and maintenance of these relationships.¹⁰

My experience as a rabbi with the Jewish Children's Bureau leads me to the conclusion that one can work for change most effectively when working inside the organization. If the specifically Jewish component of such communal services as children and family services, vocational services, community centers, etc. is to be improved, it might be helpful for there to be special resource people, such as specifically-trained rabbis or educators, working *within* these agencies. These resource people could provide information, as well as direction and coordination of agency efforts to increase Jewish identification among its staff and clientele. It is necessary to become personally familiar with the inner workings and personalities of the agency, its responsibilities, methods and procedures, its problems, as well as the clientele served. This complete familiarity together with full access to the agency can maximize the impact of American Jewry's rabbinic and educational leadership upon the Jewish character of Jewish communal services.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Aliyah—A New Dimension in Center Programs and Services*

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Aliyah therefore is a constructive way to keep Jews in the fold. The constructive and positive elements of Aliyah include: A choice to live a Jewishly more meaningful and stimulating life; to participate in the pioneering challenge of rebuilding the Jewish State, fulfilling a two thousand year-old dream; and an educated decision made on an individual basis.

Foreward

Following the November 10, 1975 infamous U.N. resolution denouncing Zionism as racism, 170 Jewish leaders representing 27 countries, met in Jerusalem for an emergency three-day summit conference, signing a pledge to help Israel to "fulfill its historic mission in the return to Zion". Only Abba Eban, former foreign minister, was more specific, urging American Jewry to "give us one-third of one percent in each year" meaning 20,000 *olim* (immigrants) instead of the average 5,000 annually during the last decade. On December 14, 1975, 120 Jewish community leaders and professionals were called to New York to meet Israel's defense minister, Mr. Shimon Peres, for the first meeting of the newly formed National Aliyah Council; the agenda: to increase *aliyah* from the U.S.A.

After 28 years of independence it is evident that Israel has failed to provide the ideological inspiration and the spiritual magnetism to attract substantial *aliyah* from the U.S., nor have the proper tools and structures been developed to attract Americans. These facts indicate a dire need for intellectual and professional reinforcement in Israel. This very professional and intellectual force exists within the American Jewish community.

George E. Johnson observes: "The needs of the State of Israel have increasingly shaped the work and reshaped the structure of the organized Jewish community. The fund-raising campaigns of local Jewish Federations have expanded their efforts on behalf of the State of Israel while at the same time helping

to transform Federations into the central funding and planning agencies of the local American Jewish community. Community relations councils also have gradually increased their activities in local communities, explaining the problems and needs of Israel to the Jewish and general public. Given the central role Israel plays in both the politics and culture of American Jewish life, it is somewhat paradoxical that *aliyah*—emigration to Israel—continues to be a fringe phenomenon, involving yearly about one-tenth of one percent of the American Jewish population, and is virtually ignored with but few exceptions by the wide range of Jewish organizations and institutions. It is all the more curious inasmuch as the Return to Zion has been a central motif in Jewish life for two thousand years, and a high priority of the State of Israel and the Jewish Agency, the major beneficiary of fund-raising efforts in the United States. The late Pinchas Sapir, then Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, told the annual Assembly of the Jewish Agency last June (1975) that Israel must double its present population in order to have peace and security.¹

The Objective

In essence, this proposal calls on the leadership of the organized American Jewry to accept the historic challenge and assume the major responsibilities concerning *aliyah* and its complex professional, ideological and material machinery. Such *aliyah* has to come in substantial numbers from America, in the order of about 50,000 *olim* a year. If not, Israel may not survive to celebrate its 50th

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Boston, May 31, 1976.

¹ George E. Johnson, *Analysis* No. 53, Nov. 1975.