

Jewish Resourcefulness: A Response to Shrinking Resources*

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The answer for some who have confronted modernity, with all its blandishments and possibility for good, has been to withdraw from it. . . . There are others at the other end of the spectrum who have removed themselves totally from the destiny of the Jewish people by totally disavowing any relatedness to past or present as Jews—the assimilationists. Most of us can be found between, on the bell-shaped curve.

Prologue

Being human, we can always look forward to the constancy of change. How much more so as Jews. While many Jewish individuals have not coped well in adapting to change, few would quarrel with the resiliency of the Jews as a people. Jews have accommodated with flexibility to radical environmental and geo-political realities in the one hundred and twenty generations of their existence. Indeed, if one were to extend the wish for Moses' life span to the generational life span of a people, we are the only landless people to have achieved and exceeded *mea-v'esrim* generations of life on this planet as a continuous, identifiable group.

And today, geneticists, virologists and gerontologists tell us they are on the verge of remarkable breakthroughs which will enable many of the young among us to approach Moses' remarkable numbers in their own life spans. The Jews as a people will be here to continue choosing life for many more generations to come. There will be those who believe the forebodings and fears of those who Marshall Sklare has identified as the lamenters of the Jews as an "ever-dying people." I am not among them.

We may have reached an impasse in available resources because of a temporary interruption in our fiscal growth. I choose to look at a longer time frame for my comments about our resources and resourcefulness. There are, in reality, a number of contradictory trends and I will identify them in a broader context in more detail. Resources available to Jews for certain purposes and from certain sources are burgeoning while the real dollars raised by Federations may be shrinking or may have stabilized temporarily.

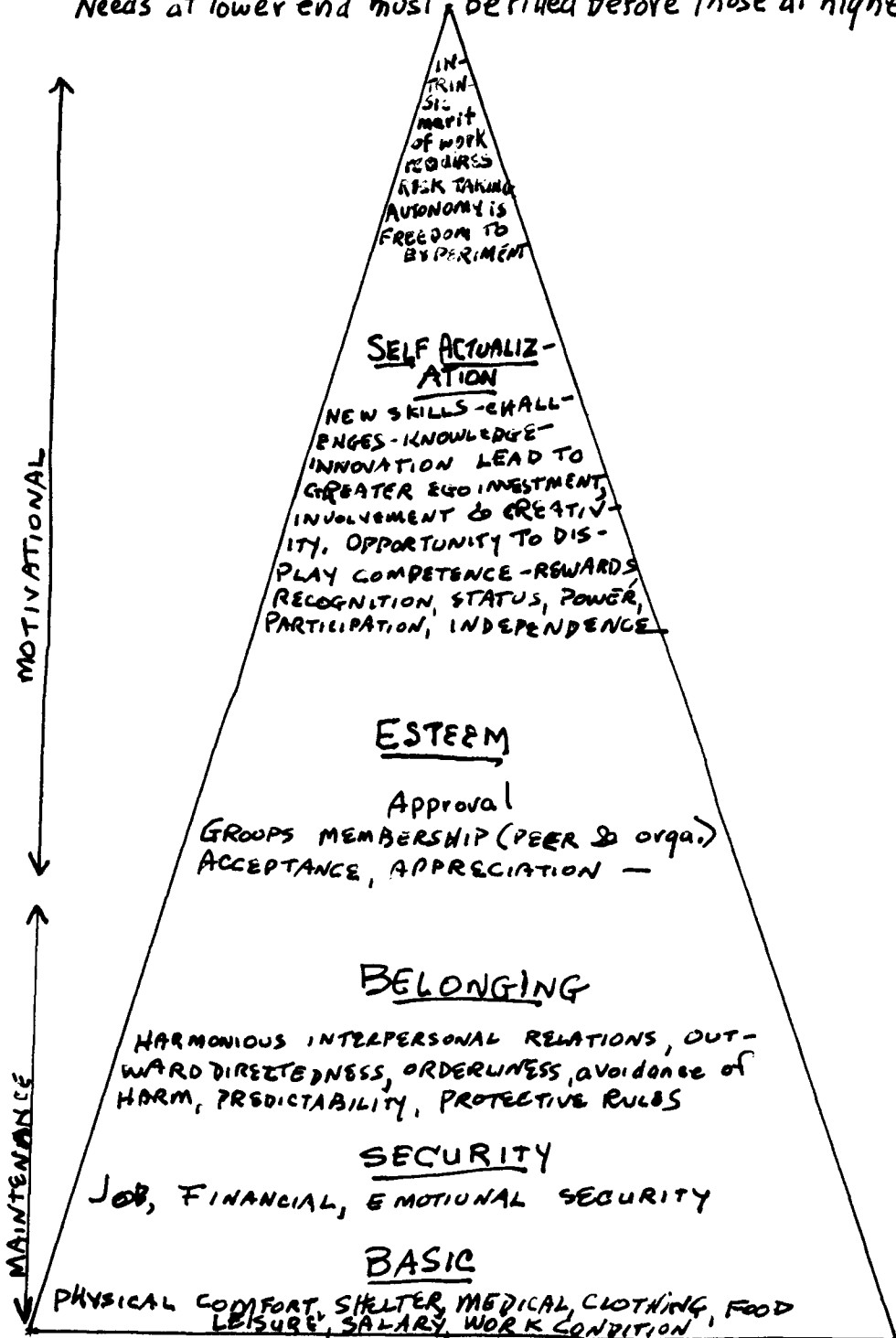
I choose to examine these issues as part of one facet of this marvelous mechanism we call Jewish peoplehood. How it has governed and how it might yet come to govern itself, growing in the rich soil of America, winnowing the utilizable out of its past, replanting the old, enriching the new, producing new seeds, while continuing to harvest the fruits from the open orchards of this great land.

I will use two models, one individual, and one corporate, as frames of reference for my discussion. I will analyze the last century in the context of these models and suggest the modifications I see evolving; modifications which will engage the new communal workers in their *dor*, their 35 years or so, of working in the fields; what awaits those who remain fulfilled and fulfilling in the time allotted to them as communal

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MASLOW'S HIERARCHY

Needs at lower end must be filled before those at higher



workers. *This paper does not deal with Israel and its importance to American Jews. That remains a given, no matter the nature of changing relationships between Diaspora and Israel.*

The two models which frame my analysis are Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs¹ and Daniel Elazar's model of the *ketarim*,² the "crowns" of governance.

Maslow posits the image of a triangle with the layer at the base devoted to the most elemental needs of human existence and security. The succeeding layers proceed through levels of psychic and psychological stability and fulfillment up to the rarefied (and one might

assume, rarely achieved), levels of spiritual and esthetic satisfaction and fulfillment. Not until the "lower levels" of need are achieved can the human move onto the "higher levels."

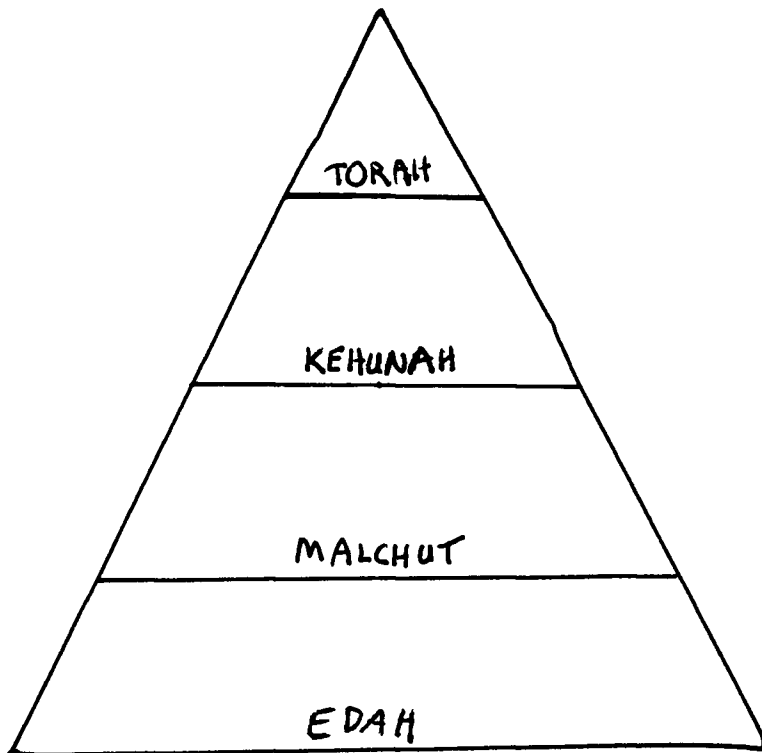
This over-simplified reference to Maslow reminds us that it is *always* imperative for society to continue its efforts to fulfill, what Towle called, the common human needs as a base upon which to build its higher aspirations.

Elazar's crowns, too, can be layered in a triangular hierarchy, segmented into four sections: 1) the apex represented by *Torah* or God and God's word, under which is 2) the *keter* or crown of *kehunah*, the priestly interpreters, followed by 3) *malchut*, the rulers. The bottom layer represents 4) the people, the *edah*, the community which consents to the yoke of governance that filters through the three upper segments of the triangle.

¹ A.H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper, 1954.

² Daniel Elazar, *Governing Peoples and Territories*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982.

ELAZAR'S LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE



To over simplify, Elazar and his colleague Stuart Cohen suggest that the Jews entered into a voluntary contract—the *Brit*—with God. Out of this grew a governing mechanism based in and upon law. This mechanism was guided by a group of interpreters and guardians, the priests and the governors, the holders of political power.

The crown of *malchut* inter-acted with the *edah*, the community, in being a conduit between the other *ketarim* and the people. As we envision the two models in action, Maslow's approach calls for beginning at the bottom and working up while Elazar's is the opposite, beginning at the apex and filtering down.

Elazar suggests that, plus or minus every ten generations, some cataclysmic event befalls the Jewish people. In each new era, new governors and interpreters arise. The new interpreters of the law, the governors, with the people, refine and redefine their understanding of the *Brit*, the covenant. Thus through time, from the tribal days of the *Avot* forward, through priests, kings and the rabbinic period on up to modern time these layers, in their redefined forms have served the Jewish people. And so have the understandings, interpretations and roles changed.

Some might argue with some of the charting of time and events. Few would disagree that the model presents a challenge for governance for a modern people, voluntarily self-identified, often in the most individualistic of terms.

It is a miracle that so many have chosen to remain Jews in our society. For the price of admission to full "Americanhood" has no disability or expense attached to it vis-a-vis one's Jewish self. In short, of that which is Jewish, one can do as much or as little as desired today and still find acceptability as an American. Yet we see a

series of anomalies involved in the present state of affairs.

We as a people have always lived in a tension produced by universalistic messianism and nationalism. Our history is replete with examples of individuals and communities seesawing on the rocking board of history. We have never achieved the ultimate balance. Neither have we as a people given up the teeter-totter ride through time; even as individuals have fallen off, some to be bruised to try again, others to escape to other games, in parks other than our own.

The answer for some who have confronted modernity, with all of its blandishments and possibility for good, has been to withdraw from it. We can thus identify a small but dynamic group who have remained in the 19th century as a corporate entity, the Hassidim. There are others at the other end of the spectrum who have removed themselves totally from the destiny of the Jewish people by totally disavowing any relatedness to past or present as Jews—the assimilationists. Most of us can be found between, on the bell-shaped curve. We try to a greater or lesser degree, and with varying need and opportunity or desire, to engage actively in the corporate enterprise, the modern Jewish community.

In past centuries those who chose to be involved in their Jewish community dealt with the two models described earlier. We are familiar with the story of immigrants in America. They took the measure of America and insisted on accommodating to its expectations as they understood them, trying to succeed as individuals and Americans. Thus the primary tasks and aspirations of the immigrant was to satisfy those most elemental needs in Maslow's hierarchy. Those who chose to develop institutions to help immigrants were bringing Elazar's model to life. They

acted out of their understandings of their responsibilities required of them as Jews. At first, the primary focus was almost totally upon meeting the basic needs of Jews. Meanwhile, Jewish individuals climbed up the hierarchical ladder of Maslow from the base to the apex. Out of some covenantal sense of obligation, the elite in the Jewish community took its guidance and inspiration from the apex to meet the needs of the base, the *amcha*, and respond to it.

We thus witnessed the continuance of a "government," voluntary in nature, serving those who chose to be governed by it, and when able, to support it. And we have evolved living in America these past three generations a treasury department envied by all other voluntary communities in the world. This mechanism, the United Jewish Appeal/Federation, annually produces the funds to underwrite vital services to Jews both in America and abroad. This treasury department by piercing the veil of mystery surrounding the world of finance has developed the skills required for successful investment economics. They include issuing bonds, borrowing directly from financial institutions, accruing assets and investing in corporate America through creative use of endowment and philanthropic funds. It has even been able to persuade the American government, to underwrite much of the cost of being Jewish through grants and low cost loans to Israel and huge allocations to agencies providing health and social services to Jews in America. As a matter of cold reality, all the money raised from Jews on behalf of other Jews here and abroad is greatly dwarfed by the funds flowing from the coffers of the United States government and private insurance sources. It is obvious, therefore, that we have a successfully functioning treasury department.

Jews have also developed the equivalent of a department of human services. Here, Jews have magnificently served Jews at risk both here and abroad by utilizing the strange amalgam of fees for service, contract service, government grants and individual and corporate gifts. Jewish family services, Centers, health services, care of the elderly, the spectrum of activities of the Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency, all of these attest to our abiding concern to keep the covenanting process alive (even among and by those who would deny the divine origin of the covenant). Most Jews have equated this helping process for the needy and deprived, as the highest *mitzvah*. All who engage in *Tzedakah* are, in some lights, as if they are performing all *mitzvot*. (Even though many masters of the crowns identified by Elazar would suggest the crown of learning, not the crown of giving, surpasses them all, but that is for another day).

High on our contemporary governing agenda is another department, that of foreign affairs. Over the decades, it has become a kind of State department, dealing on our behalf with our equivalent in foreign countries. It has taken generations to evolve mechanisms to deal with governments, popes, princes, Blacks, Latinos, and even Jews in other countries. We interface, lobby, petition, cajole, threaten, bribe (when necessary and always for truly honorable reasons), quibble, devise, revise, plot, plan and execute through a dizzying array of entities, all of which could be subsumed under this informal classification of foreign affairs. Almost all of this activity is a manifestation of Elazar's model responding to the elemental needs of Jews as identified by Maslow.

These three "departments," by necessity sketchily described, have worked and continued to work well, often with

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ever-increasing sophistication. Each has evolved, in varying degrees, ways of dealing on local, regional and national lines so that as a community we are structured to meet the needs of Jews through a series of generally functional and limited alliances. Thus to cite but one example:

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith and the American Jewish Committee, each, developed their own networks or structures, parts of which function overseas. They cooperate, when necessary, at times informally and at other times more formally, through the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

Generally, and by implication, an observation can be drawn from the classified structures. Services geared to help Jews as Jews in America tend to be highly localist in their structure and their capacities.

Thus while we have devised strategies and structures to transfer *funds and resources* when necessary across national boundaries we are no longer able to do so when *Jews cross local and state boundaries*. The pattern of what Elazar calls "scatterization" of the Jews is well identified. The massive movement of Jews world wide has been responded to brilliantly by the Jewish community. The heroic efforts of J.D.C., U.J.A., HIAS, Jewish Agency, Youth Aliyah attest to our ability to transfer funds and provide human resources at points of world-wide need. In the early part of this century we sent people and money across state lines to help tuberculars or to find the deserted; these are but two examples.

However, as Jews today move within America we falter and fail. The disproportionate numbers of elderly in Florida and singles and single parents in the Southwest and West reflect a great population shift. Resources of the great Northeast and Midwest are not

transferred to help serve those who have left their homes and constitute a great proportion of those clamoring for services from the communities of new growth in the "Jewish crescent" from Miami to Seattle.

A second conclusion can be drawn. Most Jews in America have moved far beyond the minimal needs identified by Maslow. But most of the Jewish governance mechanism is still geared to serve the Jews at this minimal level. This does little to enhance the communal climb upward to elevate and enrich the cultural, educational and spiritual need of Jews.

The bulk of those services focused on the needs of the post-material generation, as Mead called them, are delivered by the synagogues. They, in turn, relate through their respective movements with their equivalents of departments of education, culture, and communications. These departments in turn, relate to each other irregularly, and rarely relate in any ongoing way to Federations.

In turn, the Federations are no longer just treasury departments. Increasingly they have taken on the functions of local departments of planning and urban development, still primarily for physical and psychic needs, for some education needs, but rarely for esthetic and/or spiritual needs.

One department, to continue the metaphor, no longer functions for most Jews. Today few Jews pay attention to any contemporary form of the crown of *kehunah*, the interpreters of Jewish law. *Halacha* is of little matter or moment to most of us.

We have no judicial or legal departments used regularly by other than a small minority among us.

The inconsistencies and incongruities are evident. We can begin to envision the agenda for the next generation of communal workers and lay

leaders. For the foreseeable future, at least two points of view seem to be emerging which will contend for prominence and dominance. One might talk of the coming battle between the people of heat and the people of light. The motto of the people of heat is, "Where is the grief?"

There are many myths about money. Let me share some realities. The dollar support for Israel and services to Jews in America through Jewish auspices from the American government has grown enormously. Factoring for inflation, there has been an increase of over six hundred percent in government aid for health and social services in America and aid to the government of Israel over the past 10 years.

In that same period of time the actual dollars raised by Federations have shrunk by as much as thirty percent after inflation is figured in. Organizations engaging in independent fund raising which have been most successful have been those "selling" fear of anti-Semitism and another holocaust as their "product".

This last group concerns me the most, for they have found a saleable formula which appeals to our basest instincts while blunting the community's need to recognize the need for evolving priorities.

According to one economist, during the past decade the Jewish share of the gross national product has grown to as much as eight percent of America's gross national product. If true, this would mean that Jews have over 246 billion dollars of the GNP. Under the most generous totaling of money spent for *all* Jewish purposes annually, we arrive at less than three billion. United Jewish Appeal estimates that in this same period the annual number of \$10,000-and-over gifts has dropped from 7400 to 6900—one-third of one percent of Jewish households.

In short, potential resources are not shrinking but growing. Of the money being given for Jewish causes, the dollars being collected by Federations factored for inflation are not growing but other Jewish causes are raising more than ever, especially those which emphasize the "dark side" of Jewish life in America.

The people of heat will be motivated by their own reading of history and the present. Born of pessimism, anticipating a second holocaust, viewing most gentiles as anti-Semites, seeing the future of the Jews in the bleakest and blackest of terms, they will fight for dollars and power as the tools to prepare for the doomsday of the Jews.

I do not minimize the danger signals and the concerns which face us as a people. This must, however, be put into a context and I choose the path of light to deal with them. I suggest that the next generation should be bedeviled much more by the challenge of responding to, and anticipating, the needs of Jews who seek quality Jewish experiences. These Jews will be born of hope, and will be encouraged by options and opportunities for Jewish creativity. They will be wealthy enough to experiment and to encourage the arts and artists to respond in turn.

We face an opportunity for dynamic and ever-more meaningful re-covenanting with those who remain Jews and choose to do so, not out of fear but out of desire. This will result in the need of new mechanisms and new priorities. Our voluntary "government" must perforce continue to help Jews physically and psychically while including new ways of transferring credits and resources to follow Jews at risk who cross state lines.

In addition new coalitions will have to be found in other ways. For we will have to learn how to transfer dollars and perhaps services from cities which

have resources and resourcefulness to those cities which now take care of elderly parents or singles and single parents out of proportion to their own capacities. Further, the institutions of higher Jewish learning, our synagogues and their national bodies, will somehow have to do the same.

Our departments of Jewish "government" will have to be supplemented and aided by our institutions of education and spirituality to help raise sights, add departments and raise the necessary funds. At the same time we will never centralize and function in a "rational" manner for it is not sensible to do so, even if it seems rational to do so. We will instead apply our understandings of the crowns. They are the force which impel or should impel us to do and be good. Our great teacher Mordecai Kaplan would have called this Torah. We will appreciate the ambivalence of our lay leadership as they evolve their governing roles, not as rulers of old, but as representative elitists as Elazar would call them. Part of their ambivalence grows out of the discomfort of discovering that a covenant demands much more than the one *mitzvah* of *Tzedakah*. To be authentic and fulfilled, a community must respond to much more than physical and psychic healing. The communal workers, rabbis, educators, communal service personnel, will in turn re-define the roles of *Kehunah*, of teaching and interpreting, doing and giving of self in the process.

We are closing *an* era, as we move up the Maslowian ladder. But more importantly, we will move up the lad-

der of trying, as our heritage would demand, to be a moral people, even if as individuals we aren't always successful. Holocaust and hate and fear will not crush our sensibilities. We will sanctify our six million, not out of fear, but because we will see their search and striving for life as a model for ourselves. We will continue our tension in being human and being Jewish by being as one with everyone and different from all. We will be ever vigilant so there indeed is never again a time of hopelessness. It will not be necessary to spend a disproportionate amount of our treasure and time in fighting invisible and non-existent hate mongers or claiming to do so as a way of building institutions.

We will help lay people learn that supporting an artist may do much more for Jews a thousand years from now than ferreting out a Ku Klux Klan member today. Our pragmatism then must be enveloped by the *Shechinah* or otherwise what we do is as nothing and in truth for nothing.

Life beyond 120 generations beckons the Jews as a group even as life up to 120 years is now within realm of the possible for individuals. Jews as human beings are ready to live. There is every evidence that the same is true for us as a people. Our access to Jews' resources may have reached a plateau precisely because our dreams for Jewish possibilities plateaued. As we help bring our models together, help bring Torah down to raise Jews up, we must demonstrate our resourcefulness. *Kadimah*. We choose to live.