

ADOLESCENTS AND JEWISH CONTINUITY THROUGH THE LENS OF LIFE-SPAN DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

AVIVA R. G. BOCK, M.A., CCMHC

Psychotherapist in Private Practice, Newton, Massachusetts

The agenda for adolescence and the agenda for Jewish continuity are intertwined. Healthy growth and development are dependent on a sense of attachment and of a secure base. The Jewish community should ensure that its institutions are organized with a Jewish attachment framework in mind.

*"If I am not for myself, who am I, and if
I am only for myself what am I?"*

Hillel's very familiar saying penetrates to the core of Judaism and Jewish tradition. It not only expresses the values and ways of living life endemic to the Torah and Jewish philosophy but it also reflects the contemporary psychoanalytic view of human development and of attachment theory.

This convergence of the psychological and the religious is most fortuitous. Judaism and the Jewish community today are facing the difficult problem of Jewish continuity. Numerous efforts have been initiated by the Jewish community to stem the tide toward assimilation and intermarriage with non-Jews.

In the last few years much of this attention has focused on the adolescent population. There are two reasons for this. First this group is the object of study in contemporary research in sociology, psychology, and education. The results of this research make it clear that adolescents have been badly misunderstood as a group by the culture at large. Second, and more to the point, the Jewish community regards adolescents as the hope for the Jewish future.

Jewish educators and community leaders must familiarize themselves with contemporary research on human development, especially the work that focuses on how attachments are formed and maintained. These findings suggest an approach to family and community that could contribute to the goal of instilling an ongoing commitment to the

Jewish community in the next generation.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that the agenda for adolescence and the agenda for Jewish continuity are indeed intertwined. Accordingly, I first demonstrate how the new perspectives in human development have revolutionized the way we understand adolescent and adult development. I focus on adolescent development first, although it is clear that many of the trends and traits that are common to adolescent development are constant throughout the life-span. Then, with these new perspectives in mind, I discuss the importance of parent development. Finally, I suggest ways that Jewish educators can integrate both the Jewish and the psychological experiences and address the relevance of this theory for guiding policy decisions in Jewish family education.

ADOLESCENCE REDEFINED

As a culture we have tended to perceive adolescence as an especially complex developmental period. However, when we examine adolescent behavior through the lens of contemporary developmental theory, we see that it is our approach to adolescence that has been off track, not our adolescents. Their complicated behavior has not infrequently been their response to the ways we have dealt with them (Table 1).

The Separation-Individuation Myth

We have gone along with these cultural myths and have adopted a hands-off, wait-and-see

Table 1. Some of the Ways that Adolescents Have Traditionally Been Thought of in Our Society

- Adolescence is always hell on earth for parents.
 - Teenagers are rebellious.
 - Teenagers are horrible to live with.
 - Teenagers are always impossible to manage.
 - Teenagers just want to do their own thing.
 - Teenagers are rude and obnoxious.
 - Teenagers are always in turmoil, moody, defiant, and unmanageable.
 - Adolescents are selfish and egocentric.
 - The only people who can relate to kids at this time are other teens or those in their early twenties.
 - Adolescents are alienated from their parents, families, and other adults.
 - Teenagers need to be allowed to live in their own world and revel in their own culture.
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approach to our children because we have assumed that negative behavior is an expression of the adolescent's struggle for separation and individuation. We have been badly misled by theories that have suggested that the main thrust of human growth and development is toward independence. Adolescents have been led to feel that to need their parents is childish. Parents have been urged to ensure that their children not hold onto childish "dependencies," which may stand in the way of them becoming independent adults. The good healthy parent has been seen as one who can 'let go' of his or her kids and helps them 'separate.'

This separation-individuation emphasis has dominated American family life and schooling in the last half-century. Only now is it being laid to rest.

In the seminal work of John Bowlby and Ainsworth in the 1960s on attachment; the Studies on Infant Development carried out by Daniel Stern (1985, 1990) and others in the 1970s and 1980s; the work of Carol Gilligan at Harvard and of Jean Baker Miller, Judy Jordan, and others at the Stone Centre at Wellesley College; and the recently published findings of the Carnegie Foundation on Adolescence (1995), the message has remained essentially the same: Healthy development at all stages of the life cycle is based on the

balancing of a sense of personal autonomy with a strong sense of relationship and connection to parents, family, community, and friends.

ATTACHMENT THEORY

Throughout an individual's life-span, healthy growth and development are dependent on two apparently opposite forces working in harmony with each other. In order to become autonomous, or in Bowlby's (1988) words to display "exploratory behavior," individuals must feel secure in their attachments. They must always have a sense of a secure base. A secure base is the place that one can count on to be there to seek comfort or refuel throughout life, both physically and mentally.

This represents a revolution in thought. Any notion that suggests that the thrust or goal of human growth is toward independence or separation has been deemed erroneous. In other words, the majority of adolescents who stay on a healthy developmental path are often those who maintain a good close relationship with their families. With this relationship firmly in place, they are then able to deal with the complex array of developmental changes that characterize the adolescent era.

The erratic behavior that is often associated with teenagers is a good indication of just

how difficult it can sometimes be to negotiate the delicate balance between self-sufficiency and connection. On the one hand, self-sufficiency and selfhood exert a strong pull on adolescents—an 'I' mentality. At the same time adolescents experience a strong urge to maintain a relationship to the world around them, what I term a clear sense of 'we.' Healthy development is dependent on these "i/we" poles being in harmonious balance.

If a comfortable sense of attachment and a sense of a secure base are the vital ingredients for healthy development, are there discernible differences between the parenting styles of those who have an easier time with their children's adolescence and those who approach the era with dread? Moreover are there factors in the world beyond the parents that make a difference in the way adolescents develop, such as schooling, community, religion, or society?

AUTHORITARIAN, PERMISSIVE, AND AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING

Diane Baumrind (1991) has used attachment theory as the background to her work on different styles of parenting. She studied patterns of parent-child interaction and noted that there was indeed a discernible parenting style that allowed for a comfortable give-and-take between parents and their offspring. She distinguished three principal parenting styles: the authoritarian parent, the democratic or permissive parent, and the authoritative parent. Both the authoritarian style of parenting and the democratic, permissive style correlate with negative outcomes with adolescents who were less mature and more likely to act out. In contrast, authoritative parents consistently had both the least problems in dealing with their adolescents and the most socially mature and autonomous adolescents. In other words, social maturity and autonomous functioning correlate with a sense of secure attachment.

Authoritative Parenting

The authoritative parent is clearly in charge,

but at all stages validates or takes into account the child's perspective. This style of parenting is very demanding and time consuming, requiring an adult who is able to balance a strong sense of self with a flexibility to hear and validate the concerns or alternative viewpoint of the child. It involves a great deal of listening and negotiating throughout childhood and still more so in adolescence so that conflicts can be resolved harmoniously. Conflict is inevitable, but how it is resolved determines the way the adolescent approaches life both within and outside the family.

When the child disobeys, the authoritative parents exercise firm control. Inappropriate expressions of aggression are reprimanded or curtailed, but unlike in an authoritarian system, the child is not hemmed in by continual arbitrary restrictions. By the time the child reaches the mid-teens, the parental and societal norms have been sufficiently internalized so that the autonomy of the adolescent is respected and trusted by the parents. Thus, when the struggles inherent in the two-pronged developmental thrusts—the balancing of autonomy and connection—have been resolved harmoniously, adolescence is a relatively smooth transitional period. The teenager who has a comfortable sense of self; relates well to parents, adults and peers; and is socially responsible and engaged is most likely to have come from a home where this steady authoritative style of parenting has provided the secure base.

Parents First: The Well-Being of the Parent Will Support the Healthy Growth of the Child.

If a society values its children, it must cherish their parents (Bowlby, 1988).

In an attachment life-span developmental framework, the growth needs and development of the parents have to be considered alongside those of the child. In other words there is a direct connection between the well-being of the parent and the healthy development of the child. A fulfilled child is predicated on fulfilled parents, and fulfilled par-

ents require a framework of connection. In the old world guided by the myth of separation/independence, when adults exhibited a need for support, it was viewed as a failure to achieve complete independence. Now we assume adults will continue to require relationship support and connection. Thus the social support system, if it is to be effective, must focus both on the parent and on the child.

By shifting our attention to the parent, Bowlby clearly sets the stage for the matrix of attachments as opposed to separations that have to be in place for healthy growth and development to occur. If the only way we can hope to have healthy children and a healthy society is by first ensuring that the adults, the parents of the children that we care about, are attended to, then we are in a world that inevitably stretches beyond that of just the parent and child. The parents' healthy growth and therefore ability to parent effectively will be dependent on their sense of continuing to be securely attached and connected in meaningful and positive relationships.

This is a very different world view than the world of rugged individualism, with its stress on individuation and separation. It must lead us beyond the world of the nuclear family and into the domain of the community.

BEYOND THE WORLD OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

It is at this point that the agenda for adolescence and the agenda for the Jewish community converge. The focus now turns to the different types of community that can be sought to support the well-being of parents. Parenting is easier in traditional societies that mimic the structure of villages because they have implicit or explicit values and rituals that serve as organizing principles in the life of the community. Many of the rules or expected ways of doing things are based on commonly held community norms and beliefs, and therefore are simply part and parcel of the society in which the family lives. In theory, any tradition could suffice. Since our concern is to provide Jews with a clear agenda

of Jewish values rooted in Jewish tradition, the rituals and customs that we need to emphasize within our families are Jewish rituals and customs.

I am not suggesting that the only way a family can lead a positive life style is to live a traditional Jewish life. Many families happily organize their lives around a framework that has nothing to do with being Jewish. Musical families for example may place a great emphasis on music in their lives, and many of their family rituals and social activities occur in the context of playing, creating, or listening to music. Politically active families likewise may find that shared concerns occupy a central value system. The point, however, is that families do need village equivalents.

The framework of attachment theory can help us understand why observant families seem to be able to negotiate their children's adolescence relatively smoothly. Orthodox families, schools, and communities are not problem free, but while they may pay lip service to the American/Freudian ideas of individuation and separation, the community and home life have acted as a buffer against the worst consequences of that mistaken philosophy. Children and parents in these more traditional homes have a clear blueprint for many aspects of their lives. Children may occasionally raise an objection to a parental rule, but parents feel secure in their demands because they are bolstered by community norms, which at times may be inseparable from religious norms as defined by the group. Moreover, the emphasis on shared ritual norms means that the family is linked up with a larger community of more or less like-minded adults and children who share in the same beliefs, values, and activities. Because of the prohibition against using transportation on Shabbat the families tend to live within close walking distance of each other. Therefore, families are nearly always well acquainted and on socializing terms with neighbors who share their lifestyle. Inevitably, they spend time whether at home or in the synagogue engaged in similar pursuits of

learning, praying, eating, and celebrating. In essence these families are able to take advantage of a village equivalent environment. The central organizing principle in these villages is to live a Jewish life according to a more or less commonly shared code.

It Takes a Jewish Village to Raise a Jewish Child

Orthodox Jews follow this lifestyle because they believe that they have been commanded to do so. For them it is not a matter of choice. The fact that they derive certain social or psychological gains from it is an unintentional byproduct. In contrast, the issue of choice is critical for the nonobservant family. The more marginal the affiliation, the greater the imperative that belonging yield tangible proof of gain.

The quality of the lives of such families must be improved through their continued connection to the Jewish community. They must choose to affiliate because their whole way of life and their value system are so tightly interwoven with being Jewish that not to live Jewishly would leave them feeling quite bereft.

This experience of bereavement holds great potential for Jewish leaders. They can harness it constructively to intervene in the tide of assimilation. Jews, to paraphrase John Bowlby, need to have a strongly internalized sense that their secure base is a Jewish secure base. Jews who stay committed for positive reasons—not out of fear or neurotic guilt—will be those who have experienced their primary attachments and thus many of their most impressionable experiences in their lives in a Jewish context. Their deepest positive emotions, pleasures, and excitements and memories will need to be tied up with Jewish frames of reference.

Adults will need to be able to model Jewish living so that it is experienced as a treasure that cannot be discarded. Only if this happens can children be expected to remain attached to the values and by implication to the Jewish way of life that they have been shown. Only in this way will the absence of

Judaism feel like a loss when it is not available to them. Nor can parents engage in Jewish ritual observance only to model the behavior for their children; an empty gesture of ritual observance is a masquerade uncovered by even the smallest child. Parents must instead model Jewish living because they themselves find it important.

If individuals' attachments are bound up with a specifically Jewish lifestyle, they will have to refuel in a Jewish environment with other like-minded Jews. The goal is to enhance the possibility that Jewish families attach their sociological, psychological, and religious needs to a Jewish world, one with content that is clearly recognizable as Jewish.

One of the best ways to do this is through Jewish ritual. If Jewish families use the ritual calendar as an integral component of their family life, they will not only increase opportunities for the family to be together but will also enhance the possibility of their children remaining loyal to Judaism. The ritual calendar, Shabbat, and holidays are tools for family development and for community development.

IT IS A TREE OF LIFE TO THOSE THAT CLING TO IT

The trunk, branches and leaves of the tree must be sufficiently dense so that they can be grasped. If the Jewish community wants people to stay within the fold, it will have to ensure that its institutions, families, synagogues, schools, workplaces, youth centers, old age homes, religious organizations, and neighborhoods are organized with a Jewish attachment framework in mind. In order for this to happen, Jews will have to be Jewishly literate, so that they can know how to create and conduct their family lives in a framework steeped in Jewish ritual.

To this end Jewish literacy must replace Jewish ignorance. Educational programs and courses that enable Jews of all ages to become more Jewishly knowledgeable not only provide intellectual stimulation but also increase the likelihood of theory being translated more easily into practice. Families need help to

make Shabbat the center of their weekly family lives and the yearly calendar an integral part of family living. The Jewish life cycle and daily, weekly, and yearly cycle should be presented to families as an incredible opportunity for a playground for family living and for community interaction and support. With this in mind, the celebration of Shabbat both in the home and in the synagogue provides an authoritative framework for parents and children to spend positive time in each other's company on a regular, predictable basis. Families need to understand and have spelled out for them in great detail the dynamics of family and community that can be enhanced when this happens.

Jewish educators need to have the courage to be authoritative educators and must insist on the centrality of Jewish practice, in addition to Jewish morality and ethics. If those in charge of Jewish continuity and education fear that, by making demands on the lives of the families or students that they meet, that they will lose them, then they are in the position of the permissive democratic parent and will be equally ineffective. Thousands of dollars will be poured into efforts that have very little substance. If they do not make demands, the specifically Jewish component of the family's or children's experience will be so watered down that it will not hold and the effort will have been in vain.

At the end of his excellent study, *Speaking of Sadness, Depression, Disconnection and the Meanings of Illness*, David A. Karp (1996) concludes that the cult of individualism may be changing. Today people are searching for ways to introduce ritual and routine into the loneliness and disconnectedness of their everyday lives. He writes, "I am fully persuaded that we need to rediscover community as the very best medicine for many of our ills." He

sees this both as a sociological and a spiritual solution, concluding, "During this current moment of cultural discontent we may be better able to appreciate the spiritual message that all of us are connected to and responsible for each other."

An important challenge for concerned Jews who are part of this moment of cultural discontent is to learn to use the daily rituals and routines that are inherent in Jewish tradition in ways that are not only nourishing spiritually but also help promote attachment bonds and healthy developmental patterns for parents and children alike.

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