INSIDE THE JEWISH SCHOOL

A Study Of The Cultural Setting For Jewish Education

by

Samuel Heilman

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7605 Old York Road
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Samuel Heilman earned his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. He is Professor of Sociology at Queens College of the City University of New York. He is the author of Synagogue Life and The People of the Book (both published by the University of Chicago Press) and numerous articles on the sociology of American Jewry.

FORWARD

The ultimate goal of Jewish education today is the affirmation of Jewish identity. Simply stated, we wish to assure that as many as possible of our next generation will remain proud and active Jews. We would also like to produce as many Jewishly knowledgeable Jews as we can. In the past, we took Jewish identity for granted, assuming that the home, the neighborhood, the community, and outside pressure, would guarantee Jewish identity and Jewish consciousness. The feeling of Jewish self-esteem and group belongingness was a product of the environment and a network of relationships and practice. Jewish schooling was called upon only to provide knowledge and transmit cognitive information. Today, environmental conditioning can no longer be taken for granted. As a result, Jewish education is now expected to do what is probably an impossible task, to serve as a surrogate for the home and neighborhood in Jewishly socializing the children as well as to transmit Jewish knowledge.

The American Jewish Committee has had a long-standing concern with Jewish education and has contributed through research, colloquia and publications toward a better understanding of the problems and accomplishments of Jewish education. Notable among these AJC contributions was a three-year colloquium conducted in the mid-seventies on Jewish Education and Jewish Identity. This colloquium, consisting of an interdisciplinary group of scholars, based its deliberations on related research which was funded by the AJC. Both the research and the colloquium, in their focus on the impact of general society on Jewish education and the role of the family in identity formation and education, represented an important departure from the usual studies of Jewish education. The latter, more often than not, attempt to assess curriculum and methodology and to evaluate results in terms of the acquisition of information.

Dr. Geoffrey Bock's research on Jewish education and identity which was the basis of the AJC Colloquium, suggested, for example, that all things being equal, the family is almost twice as important as schooling in the formation of a private Jewish identity. Private or personal identity is defined as a set of values and beliefs, Jewish self-image and self-esteem and behavior in day-to-day private life. The significance of this finding in terms of its implications for the future of the Jewish community and on communal programs to maintain and strengthen Jewish identity is self-evident. Furthermore, this finding is almost revolutionary when viewed against the prevailing conviction that sending one's child to a religious school will assure his/her Jewishness.

Continuing the broader, cultural approach to Jewish education, the Jewish Communal Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee commissioned Dr. Samuel Heilman, Professor of Sociology at Queens College, to conduct an ethnographic study of several Jewish schools which would focus on the culture of the school, human relations, attitudes and expectations. Dr. Heilman's report which is based on on-site observations of three different schools--Orthodox, Conservative and Reform--describes what is actually going on inside the classroom and recommends policy and program changes for communal consideration and action.

Many of Dr. Heilman's findings illustrate the theme of dissonance between parents, children, and teachers. Each group approaches the subject matter with its own set of expectations and values. Although some difference in perspective is healthy, the wide cultural gaps between teacher and students make effective teaching difficult, if not impossible. Furthermore, Dr. Heilman finds that the schools reflect the values, lifestyles and expectations of the parents and the Jewish culture of their community.

To rectify this situation, Dr. Heilman urges consideration of efforts to transform the school into a total community. This can mean involvement of parents in their children's studies as well as informal experiences such as Shabbatonim and other types of retreats. Beyond such activities he also suggests the creation of Jewish boarding schools which would form total Jewish communities. This last recommendation is far reaching in its potential effect and calls for most serious and objective consideration.

Dr. Heilman's study suggests the need for further investigation of the cultural dissonance between the world of the teachers and that of the students, between the school community and the total community. It gives equal weight to the expanded study of ways of making the family the focal point of Jewish education, which should be distinct from public school education and oriented towards transmission of values and personality development.

The findings and recommendations contained in Dr. Heilman's report deserve serious communal study with appropriate action as the goal, not only by Jewish educators but by concerned volunteer communal leaders as well.

Yehuda Rosenman
Director, Jewish
Communal Affairs Department

There is a story about a learned man who came to visit a rebbe. The scholar was no longer young -- he was close to thirty -- but he had never before visited a rebbe. "What have you done all your life?" the master asked him. "I have gone through the whole of the Talmud three times," answered the learned man. "Yes," replied the rebbe and then inquired, "but how much of the Talmud has gone through you?"

Much concern about and research on Jewish education has focussed on how successful our schools have been in getting students to go through the Talmud and other Jewish texts. To be sure, the content of Jewish learning is fundamental, since no amount of feeling, however deep or sincere, can take the place of knowledge and Jewish literacy. Moreover, few Jewish educators would argue over what constitutes the basic corpus of information that should be passed on to students. Nevertheless, while we are interested in whether or not our students go through the traditional texts and cover the lesson plans, we are also concerned about the extent to which these texts and all they signify manage to get through to them, to penetrate their consciousness and character, their environment and culture.

Unlike other researchers in the field who have focussed on matters of pedagogy, curriculum, administration or educational philosophy, I have, as a social anthropologist and ethnographer, concentrated on the social environment and culture inside the Jewish school. By entering into the school as neither teacher nor administrator nor student nor parent, I have spent my time watching in order to discover what constitutes normalness, to expose the taken-for-granted life as it unfolds within the institution. For it is the normal rather than the exotic that reflects and reveals the inner character of life as experienced by insiders. Throughout, I have concentrated not so much on what is learned but on how it gets through and what impact it has.

This technique, often referred to as "seeing things from the actor's point of view" allows a level of interpretive understanding that is not normally available with other methods of research. It makes it possible to share moods and motivations with those one is studying and renders their behavior less opaque.

Yet, even the most empathic understanding is not enough, for all insiders presumably have that. The professional social scientist brings an additional element of interpretation to the enterprise. He or she can look upon the inhabitants of the Jewish school (both staff and students) as if they were members of a small community, expressing the larger Jewish culture of which they are a part. We thereby discover not only what goes on inside the school, but also gain a sense of that school's connection to Jewish peoplehood. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz has eloquently put it, "seeing heaven in a grain of sand is not a trick only poets can accomplish."[1] Social scientists too can see the larger reality by looking intently and with an informed eye at the particular case.

For me, as for most observers of culture and society, "the road to the grand abstractions of science winds through a thicket of singular facts."[2] As an ethnographer of the Jewish school, I have searched for the larger reality by looking intently and with an informed eye at the details of school life.

Doing ethnography, trying to decipher the precise character of human behavior in order to describe it and render it comprehensible, is, however, like trying to read "a manuscript -- foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior."[3] One immerses oneself in details not for their own sake but rather because they are symbolic expressions of culture, genuine slices of life from which the informed and careful observer may piece together the narrative line of that manuscript we call human culture.

To reach some understanding about the Jewish school and the culture to which it is bound, I spent a total of approximately 100 hours inside three types of schools: an Orthodox day school, and two afternoon schools, one Conservative and the other Reform. I attended classes, loitered in the hallways, went to the neighboring shops to watch the students when they "broke away" from the school, and talked informally with people around me. To be sure, this amount of time was far from sufficient for a comprehensive view of any one of these educational settings; but my own native familiarity as both student or teacher in similar institutions as well as my experience as a social anthropologist, enabled me to reach certain tentative conclusions. I add one disclaimer. Having studied Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewish schools, I sought to identify trends common to all three. There are, however, important differences among them, which are beyond the scope of this paper.

CULTURE TENSION AND JEWISH LEARNING

A underlying assumption of all education, and especially Jewish education, is that "we are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture -- and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it."[4] The classical educational approach emphasizes completion through knowledge. Knowing is the prerequisite to being and doing. Thus to train students in skills such as reading and writing, to expose them to history and teach them science is not simply the way to introduce them to western culture and its great tradition. It is to civilize and thereby complete them. Applied to Jewish education this approach suggests that to be a complete Jew one must first learn what it is Jews do and have done. In religious terms, one might say that he who would believe must first know.

In fact there may be an alternative: in order to want to learn about what Jews do and have done, to become complete, as it were, one may first have to feel

Jewish, to identify with and be committed to Jewish life, people and culture. He who would know must first believe. As the Book of Proverbs (1:7) puts it: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

If that is the case, what are the indications for Jewish education? First, an appreciation of the role that Jewish learning can play in one's life may be a necessary prerequisite to assimilating the material. The absence of strong attachment and commitment, and a concomitant feeling of cultural tension, a sense of distance or alienation from Judaism, Jews or Jewish life, will directly and negatively affect the educational process. Those who do not feel bonded to their Judaism and Jewish peoplehood, and even those who feel only marginally attached will to some extent be unwilling and therefore unable to learn. As Avraham Yehoshua Heshel, the rabbi of Apt, once put it when addressing a crowd that had come to hear his teachings: "Those who are to hear will hear even at a distance; those who are not to hear, will not hear no matter how near they come."[5]

Second, where there is a confusion about the nature of the Jewish life to which one is tied -- as when, for example, the teachers embrace one form of Jewish life and the students another, or if each is unclear as to what is demanded of the other as Jews -- the learning process, even if technically successful, will be impaired, and so will Jewish identity. Cultural confusion and dissonance stand in the way of Jewish learning, while cultural competence and harmony abet it.

These general tendencies can be seen in the details of classroom life. Consider, for example, the phenomenon of "flooding out." First a definition. Commonly, in classrooms as in all encounters, "it is proper involvement that generates proper conduct."[6] "During any spate of activity, participants will ordinarily not only obtain a sense of what is going on but will also (in some degree) become spontaneously engrossed, caught up or enthralled."[7] Thus, for example, during a class in Bible, if the students become involved in and comprehend what is

going on, the learning will continue without disruption. Under certain circumstances, however, proper involvement is not maintained and a break occurs. People talk out of turn, switch into some activity not at all in line with the lesson plan, break into laughter, radically change the subject and so on. Such a disruption may be called "breaking up," a term often associated with the disengagement that comes by way of laughter, or it may be called "flooding out." When someone has flooded out, "he is momentarily 'out of play.'"[8]

Flooding out is contagious because involvement is an interlocking obligation. Whatever causes one individual to break his involvement in an ongoing activity, produces in him behavior which causes others to flood out. "Should one participant fail to maintain prescribed attention, other participants are likely to become alive to this fact;" and then they either join in or turn their attention to what the break means and what to do about it.[9] For example, if someone talks out in class, either others join him in the disrupting talk, or else they shush him. In either case, the whole class is removed from their proper involvement. "So one person's impropriety can create improprieties on the part of others."[10] The one who floods out is thus something of a revoluntionary whose actions threaten the steady flow of proper behavior. But why do people flood out?

In his careful consideration of the phenomenon, Erving Goffman, has explained that in social settings, "as the tension level increases, so the likelihood of flooding out increases, until the breaking point is reached and flooding out is inevitable.[11] The source of such tension, while often interpersonal or situational, can also be cultural. When, because of their cultural background, participants cannot "get into" or remain involved in what is going on, they break away or flood out. What follows is "either disorder or a new, more manageable definition of the situation."[12]

There are three options of involvement that culturally tense participants may choose. First there is "high involvement." This occurs when students disattend their sense of unease and can therefore become attached and committed to what is being taught. When the teacher is able to charm his class by his pedagogy or personality, when a significant group of other students become involved and the culturally tense student gets caught up with them, or when the occasion simply has an inherent drama which forces the student to forget himself, this may happen.

The student may also pursue the option of "partial involvement," in which he carries on side involvements (doodling, reading something else, passing a note, and so on) while simultaneously remaining somewhat involved in what is going on in class even though he is not completely absorbed by it. Such students represent a real challenge to the teacher for they are potentially still engageable. However, if the teacher does not involve them, they may ultimately be overcome by a sense of tension, and then break out. The note is passed in a disruptive way, or some other open breach occurs. This leads to the last option: "non-involvement." Here flooding out is the rule, where even a side involvement (a conversation with a friend, a request for a drink of water or permission to leave the room and so on) becomes dominant.

These matters are crucial, for it is not unusual to find a third of class time taken up with matters of structuring and maintaining student involvement. Teachers and students frequently spend much time sparring with one another to see who will succeed in determining the focus of involvement. Will it be the lesson plan, or some other plan of disruption and digression? In every setting, with a variety of students and teachers, I witnessed instances of flooding out. Consider some examples:

The setting is a Conservative afternoon school. The teacher, personally committed to ritual practice, is training his students in *tefila*, prayer. Each one is supposed to recite a line from the *Ashrei* prayer. But the students come from a

world where prayer is rarely if ever part of their lives. To immerse themselves in it, even in the artificial setting of a classroom, does not come easily. Cultural tension arises, and even temporary commitments are difficult.

A student raises his hand, apparently to volunteer to recite or perhaps to make an inquiry about the text. The teacher turns toward her. "Shoshana?" "Can I go to the bathroom?"

The shift in focus is abrupt and wrenching. Other students barely conceal their amusement. The teacher realizes he has been had. Any success he may have enjoyed in weaving an atmosphere of prayer is shredded. What should have been a side involvement at best has been turned into the main act. Soon others request their turn -- not to recite the prayer, but to go to the bathroom or get drinks. Finally, the focus of activity becomes so blurred that when the teacher calls on a student, the latter, believing it to be his turn to recite, begins to pray only to be stopped by the teacher.

"No, I thought you wanted to go to the bathroom. It's your turn now."

Consider a second example in a similar setting. The instructor is about to begin teaching. He has been spending the opening few minutes of the class in friendly banter, waiting for his students to wander in and settle down. There is a warm atmosphere and the observer can see that these students are happy to be in one another's company. The teacher formally begins the class by announcing that today they will begin Megillat Eicha, Lamentations. Discovering that none of his students has ever studied this book before, and that they view it as unconnected to their concerns, he nevertheless asks them to open their texts to page 68, on which the first verse appears.

"Did you say 69?" one student calls out, to the amusement of the others. It is a clear effort to break away from the text and its solemnity with a subtle but

unmistakeable off-color reference drawing attention away from the lesson plan. It is a barely veiled refusal to become engaged by the activity of study.

The teacher ignored the remark, as if believing that if he did not respond, he would be able to continue to manage the situation. He began to explain the meaning of the opening verse, trying to tap the students' capacity to identify with the devastation and mourning the book recounts. But they would not, perhaps could not, become engaged. To know one must first believe.

One student raised his hand. The teacher had to make a choice. He could ignore the raised hand, assuming it to be a potential disruption. On the other hand, it might be a genuine inquiry which would move the class into a more engaged learning. The teacher looked up and acknowledged the student. "Are you going to give out snacks in this class like you did in my brother's?"

The teacher gambled and lost. The question broke the flow and the teacher would either have to ignore it, risking additional disruptive inquiries from the others, or else answer it and then try to move back to the text and recreate the mood for which he was aiming.

A third case. The setting is a day school during an evening "mishmar" (all night) class reviewing Talmud. The teacher tries to explain the topic under discussion: the need to be careful, indeed circumspect, in one's use of language. He offers a talmudic illustration, explaining that the Torah takes great care in its use of language, preferring to use more refined terminology whenever possible. So too, he continues, b'nai torah (yeshiva students), must pay heed to the way they speak, using only refined language. Coarse language is something he associates with non-Jews and which by implication he wishes his students to view in the same way. "Shkotzim" (the incarnation of evil) use dirty words on the street, on the playing fields, even in the supermarket, he explains. Near me I hear a boy whisper to another, "they're not the only ones."

There are smiles and murmurs from the boys. There is not yet an open break, but the observer can sense the building up of tension. Offering illustrations from contemporary life and from his own experience, the teacher either is unaware of the tension or has chosen to overlook it, hoping perhaps to introduce and ultimately engage his students in a Jewish culture different from the one to which they are accustomed. The boys resist the effort.

To charm his class and involve them in this lesson, he recounts a personal experience. When he was in yeshiva, he tells them, he used to drive a truck during summers. At truck stops, he would meet other truckers -- naturally they were all Gentiles, he points out. Their language was foul.

"But when I came to the yeshiva I heard how beautifully the boys addressed the rebbe, never directly but only in the third person. Here I first understood what the Torah means when it teaches us to use nice language." The description of a yeshiva worlds away from the one in which we sit. The cultural tension explodes and the class floods out.

"What did the truckers say?" a student calls out. "Yeah, tell us what they said?" another quickly adds. "Did they talk about Preparation H?" asks a third.

It is a clear effort to get the teacher to flood out or at least to break up the other students. And it works; even the teacher smiles.

Quickly, many of the boys began to outdo one another in placing words in the mouths of the truckers and the teacher. Some others, more intent on returning to the Talmud, cried out for quiet, in an apparent effort to help the teacher regain control. In fact of course, <u>everyone</u> flooded out and the teacher spent much of the rest of the time trying to bring everyone back to the original focus on the text and its subject.

These are but three of many examples. The situation is familiar to anyone who has spent time inside the Jewish school. The question is: what does it mean?

Reviewing the incidents of flooding out that I witnessed as well as those occasions when it did not occur and everyone remained caught up in the learning at hand, I noticed a pattern emerging that involved cultural tension. When the matters being learned or discussed are difficult to assimilate, for social, intellectual or cultural reasons; when other options are unavailable, students are likely to flood out. Moreover, those students who have a sense of marginality, who feel a distance from and ambivalence about matters Jewish are most likely to initiate or enthusiastically participate in flooding out.

Though it occurred everywhere, flooding out seemed more prevalent among those students who were not clear about why they were in school or what their association with Judaism was, than among those who had an unambiguous sense of Jewish identity and a prevailing commitment to Jewish life. Flooding out thus serves as a kind of signal that something is blocking the Jewish learning from getting through to the students. Recall the examples I have cited. In the first, the teacher has been trying to get the students to pray. But prayer, and specifically *mincha* on which he is concentrating, is not comfortably a part of their lives. They have no attachment to what it implies and can therefore not become involved in it. Going to the bathroom, getting the teacher off the track, involvement in us-versus-him play is far more engaging.

In the second case, the teacher is trying to get his class to comprehend and deal with the matter of mourning over the loss of the Temple and Jerusalem. This is not something they can appreciate. Perhaps in the context of a Tisha B'Av commemoration, with the lights low, candles burning and all the other elements of the environment set into places, they might be able to become involved. But here on a weekday evening, smack in the middle of their lives of civil secularity, the matter of mourning over the Temple is "distant" to them in every sense, and flooding out seems the proper response.

Similarly, the importance of speaking in a refined manner, addressing the teacher in the third person, and avoiding coarse language are hard to accept for modern Orthodox students in a day school. As Orthodox Jews, they already perceive themselves as separated from the outside American Gentile world in many unavoidable ways. As modern Orthodox Jews, they seek to be neither remote from nor untouched by the modern world even as they remain committed to the tradition. One of the ways they have learned to play this dual role is by sounding like the Americans/Gentiles around them, even as they remain bound to Orthodox practices and beliefs. To suggest that they must separate themselves in this way as well raises all the ambivalences inherent in modern Orthodoxy. Flooding out is a way of avoiding the issue.

In my study of modern Orthodox synagogue life, I argued that the ubiquitous gossip and joking -- in fact a kind of ongoing flooding out -- that is so much a part of shul life, "blocks out -- literally as well as symbolically -- the possibility of the speakers' having to come to terms with the deeper antinomies inherent in their modernity and Orthodoxy."[13] The same is occurring here. As their parents do in shul, so the children do in school.

Put another way, one might argue that flooding out signals the presence of cultural dissonance. That is not to say that students are aware of the tension. Commonly, they flood out simply because it "feels right," it gets them out of a tight spot.

There is another key point here. As insiders will attest, flooding out often seems to be mandatory behavior. Even those students who come to class intending to become involved in the lesson soon discover that there are social pressures which encourage them to join in the flooding out. For example, I observed an occasion on which a student was answering all the questions the teacher asked.

Throughout he behaved properly, displaying the ideal level of involvement from the pedagogic point of view, while around him the other students were desperately trying to get the teacher and the class to flood out. Proper answers ran against the grain of the occcasion.

"Stop getting so involved," one boy finally called out in desperation. "Would you stop being so smart'" said another. Embarrassed, the "good" student became silent. It was an extraordinarily graphic illustration of a process which is usually much more subtle. The lesson was not lost on the other students.

In these instances of group pressure there is tacit agreement among the participants to limit their engagement, because all more or less share the same cultural dilemma. Only when there are varying cultural groups in a class do such pressures fail. Thus, for example, in classes where some of the students come from more Jewishly observant homes than others, where a variety of communities are served in the same setting, cleavages occur in levels of classroom involvement -- with teachers sometimes playing only to the engaged.

Interestingly, in those day schools and yeshivas where the Jewish curriculum is most emphasized attitudes toward secular studies reflect a similar pattern of disruption. Thus, traditionalist yeshiva boys are more likely to flood out during a lesson in social studies rather than during a Talmud class.[14]

Indeed, teachers have found ways of coming to terms with the flooding out, perhaps reflecting their own difficulties in becoming engaged too deeply in subjects that their students cannot embrace. The teachers' response is seen in their willingness to move with the flow, to allow digressions as long as the subjects of these digressions do not lead to disruptions and seem in some way associated with Jewish learning. Moreover, those unwilling or unable to "go with the flow," but who remain wedded to their lesson plan even when it does not engage their

students, may sometimes maintain decorum, but usually lose all but those students already committed to the material. Hence, the class which started out as a recitation of mincha devolved into a march to the bathroom and water fountain. Yet the teacher continued the liturgical recitation while keeping an eye on who went out and who came in. Students were lost in boredom, seeking ways to leave their seats or get the teacher to flood out. The class reviewing Lamentations evolved into a discussion about tenets of Conservative Judaism. Other classes in other schools got on other tracks in the same way. Digressions were the teachers' way of impeding flooding out. A continuous flow of changing activities requiring only the shortest commitments were the best way to get and keep students engaged.

Indeed in one afternoon school, the principal experienced this very attitude. After he explained that he would have liked all his students to have more intensive Jewish educations and to come from Jewishly committed homes, he concluded that, that, alas, was not possible. So his goals had changed: "I am happy if I can get my kids to the point where they are happy to come to school here." A similar attitude was echoed by a day school principal who explained: "The school is haymish and we want it to be haymish and the kids feel at home here."

THE JEWISH SCHOOL AS JEWISH HOME

The principals' stated aims should not be viewed negatively. While from a pessimistic perspective they constitute an admission of pedagogic failure, they may also be considered in more positive terms. What does it mean, after all, that the students "are happy to come to school?"

It is worth recalling that for many contemporary Jewish children, the Hebrew school represents the only environment which celebrates Judaism as a civilization and where they are completely surrounded by other Jews. This is more true for

those attending afternoon schools, but it is to a degree true in day schools as well. That is what often tinges the Hebrew school or religious side of the curriculum with an aura of intimacy that some day school students refer to as "haymish" or homey. While pursuing the secular curriculum, they are in a more formal environment, surrounded by ideas and echoes of the non-Jewish world. This is true even in day schools since few if any of them integrate the Jewish and secular curricula; compartmentalization is rather the rule.

Thus, the Jewish school and classroom become the last ghetto, an extension of and often a replacement for the Jewish home, a standing contrast to the public school, the secular curriculum. In some ways, Hebrew school is the Jewish cultural analogue of an after-school extra-curricular club. Thus, for example, in preparing the grade point average for college admissions, one of the day schools observed does not average in grades for chumash (Bible) and navi (Prophets), in spite of the fact that such courses are taught in college and students often seek transfer credits for them. This suggests that two separate worlds are involved in the teaching, and that the world of Jewish studies is, so to speak, off the record. This may make students feel more relaxed and more at home in the Jewish studies environment.

To paraphrase Y.L. Gordon, who urged Jews to "be a man in the street and a Jew in the home," most of the students attending today's Jewish schools are "men in the streets and Jews in Hebrew school." Indeed, for some parents, particularly those who are marginally concerned with the content of Hebrew school, the major reason for sending their children to the schools (beyond the matter of bar or bat mitzva preparation) is to insure that they maintain contacts with other Jews, that they experience Jewish community.

By and large this goal has been reached. In every setting I observed, even those students who were clearly alienated or at least distant from the content of

the curriculum displayed a closeness to their fellow students. Not only during class, when the display of camaraderie might be interpreted as a vehicle for flooding out, but also during breaks and before and after school, the students demonstrated closeness and communion in many ways. They exchanged news about their lives. They shared food with one another and at times with their teachers. They often came to and from school together. Indeed, at times the most important part of coming to school seems to be opportunity to enjoy one another's company, in spite of their commonly experienced feelings of unease with the curriculum, and this explains the otherwise curious fact that students claim to "like Hebrew school" even though they may have little or no interest in what is learned there.[15]

The homey quality of the Jewish school not only characterizes relationships among students and their peers, but is also found between students and staff. This comes out in a number of ways. First, even when there is boisterousness and "misbehaving" in class, there is a notable absence of overt hostility. Teachers may get irritated and students may feel aggrieved, but both sides manage to overcome these feelings much as everyday conflicts fail to leave lasting trauma on a stable family. There appears to be a tacit agreement that, in spite of all tensions, the basic unity of the group remains intact. No teacher, however harrassed, ever evinced the kind of anxiety and fear that public school teachers often experience. To be sure, this may be a product of the middle-class nature of the environment. It may, however, also have a Jewish source, which may be called the "kehilla imperative." This communal bond is of great value for it leaves students with warm feelings for their fellow Jews. And we all know how sorely that has been missed at various times in Jewish history.

If there were nothing else positive emerging from the Jewish school experience than a residual feeling of comfort when one is with other Jews, that

might be sufficient reason to perpetuate the institution. It is quite conceivable, moreover, that youngsters who feel at home in the Jewish school will as adults feel more bonded to the Jewish people than their peers who have missed that school experience with its Jewish relationships. And might these sorts of Jews not be the ones best suited to survive in an American Judaism that, on the one hand, retains some vague notions about the value and importance of Jewish life, while on the other is uncomfortable with much of its substance and ambivalent about its demands?

This homey quality of the school has consequences for learning. When students feel at home in the school, their acquisition of knowledge becomes an expression of this feeling. Thus, for example, in the day school it is common to find students independently reciting prayers or reviewing texts because this is a way of displaying their belongingness to the place. And even in the afternoon schools students would refer to matters Jewish (Bible stories, dietary laws, prayer and so on) which they would be unlikely to talk about anywhere else, simply because these subjects were at home in the school. To be sure, this will only happen if the school injects Jewish content into the homey environment, making clear that the feeling of closeness requires familarity with Jewish lore.

Surprisingly, flooding out, while signalling cognitive tensions, can sometimes lead to feelings of intimacy because it creates a sudden atmosphere of informality. When the teacher allows himself to get caught up in the flooding out, he can share in the feeling of closeness. Therefore, teachers will sometimes not only join in, but also encourage flooding out.

For example, in one fifth grade I observed, the class was reviewing grammar, going over their workbooks. This was rote learning; the material was excruciatingly boring, and neither teacher nor students seemed engaged by what

they were doing. Still, the class was decorous and seemed to get along well with the teacher. He made jokes occasionally, some related to the exercises in the workbook, and some about relationships he had with the children, or about sports. In a sense these bracketted remarks, moments when everyone flooded out, were among the most animated periods of the class. It was as if the group truly came to life only when they digressed from -- indeed, abandoned -- their formal class. They were intimate and warm toward one another, close friends who were, alas, caught up in a task they were not excited about but structurally committed to doing. They did it, therefore, out of a sense of loyalty to the teacher and the formal definition of the situation -- but all were happy whenever they could break into something more animating.

On another occasion, after a particularly intense period of learning, a teacher in one afternoon school pre-empted all student efforts at flooding out by organizing a musical chairs game. The exercise itself, virtually an organized pandemonium, had nothing to do with formal learning except that the commands in the game were all given in Hebrew. Yet, if the students did not learn these Hebrew phrases, they surely had a good time playing, and clearly displayed feelings of closeness to one another and to the teacher at the end of the hour.

There are other ways in which the Jewish school plays the role of Jewish community. One, already mentioned above, is that cultural attitudes towards Gentiles are easily expressed. The attitudes I heard served to distinguish Jews from Gentiles and celebrate Jewish superiority. Sometimes these contrasts are subtle, as when a Bible teacher associated all the grumbling and discontent among the Israelites with the "eruv rav", the so-called mixed rabble, non-members of the covenant who during the exodus from Egypt joined the Jews. And sometimes the message is far more obvious. I have already noted how the teacher in the day

school contrasted refined Jewish behavior with alleged Gentile coarseness. (It is intereting to recall how common this practice and its reverse among non-Jews has been throughout history.) These contrasts were made on numerous occasions.

Calling students by their Hebrew rather than their English names also stresses Jewish-Gentile differences. It is as if the school and teacher are saying that in the Jewish environment you are someone different, the possessor of a separate identity by which no Gentile knows you and by which no Gentile could be known. Students who fail to respond to their Hebrew names or who do not know them are sometimes locked in subtle but unmistakeable struggles with the teacher, and by implication, with their Jewish identities. Thus, one is far more likely to see students called by their given English names in those schools which make only partial Jewish demands on students' involvement or where a sense of Jewish marginality reigns supreme.

CULTURAL DISCOVERY

Attending a Jewish school is not only an opportunity to share in the experience of Jewish communion. It may also be an experience of cultural discovery and sentimental education during which the child learns what it means to be a Jew -- and not simply a Jew in general, but a particular kind of Jew. The latter is the case because schools are often agencies of one or another ideological movement. As the students recite and reiterate their lessons, review and react to what their teachers tell them, speak in Hebrew, perceive the world in Jewish terms, students and teachers -- at least within the boundaries of their classes --can form and discover their relationship to both their ethnic Jewishness and their religious Judaism.

In afternoon schools the process has largely become an oral tradition. Students simply are not sufficiently competent in Hebrew to read and comprehend

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texts in the original, so they must depend on translations and the teachers' explications. Informal conversation, questions and answers, and discussion are the primary media of learning. This means that their contact with the sources of Judaism are at best secondary. In the day school students have a greater facility in Hebrew and can therefore study original texts. Consequently their study resonates greater authenticity. But even here, culturally bound interpretation of the texts -- what, for example, is metaphor and what reality -- is an important component of the learning.

Listening to themselves and their fellows bring the tradition to life -- in however limited a way -- gives students what for some are their only direct encounters, not just with the texts, but with the substance of Judaism. For many students the Hebrew school and what they learn there disambiguates the fuzzy ideas of what it means to be Jewish.

Sometimes these cultural discoveries occur outside of class. For example, during informal conversations which took place between teachers and students in the break between classes in one afternoon school, I recorded the following 29 Jewish terms which made their way into talk: minyan (quorum), kaddish (memorial prayer), shul (synagogue), kol boynick (jack-of-all-trades), aliya (call to the Torah reading), yahrzeit (anniversary of bereavement), omud (synagogue podium), pasken shaylos (to adjudicate religio-legal questions), tsaddik (righteous man), meshullakh (charity emmisary), nedava (donation pledge), pilpul (casuistic argument), mitzva (Jewish observance), minhag (custom), shulkhan orukh (a codex of Jewish law), sefer (holy book), shiva (Jewish seven day mourning period), shloshim (Jewish thirty day mourning period), kikhel (a type of cake), shalosh seudot (the three Sabbath meals), aufruf (the bridegroom's call to the Torah on the Sabbath before his wedding), simkha (joyous occasion), bris (circumcision), tefilin (phylacteries), khupe

(wedding canopy). Some of these terms the students knew; others were at first foreign to them and were therefore defined matter-of-factly in the flow of conversation. Their insertion into the informal banter in the halls turned this activity into an occasion for literally speaking in Jewish terms. To speak in these terms, moreover, is to see the world from a Jewish perspective, to evoke, discover and explore Jewish cultural reality.

To see how Judaism is disambiguated and acquired in class it is worth reviewing, however, briefly, a strip of classroom activity in which such cultural activity occurs. Consider the following:

> The class in an afternoon school is reviewing the story of the exodus from Egypt. The students are reading from a translation because they are not versed in biblical Hebrew. They are limited, therefore, to talking about general concepts. One student reads the text aloud, as others follow along. The teacher, as a sort of surrogate for the traditional commentators which are inaccessible in their original, periodically offers glosses to accompany the text. There are references to midrash and Talmud, Rashi commentaries are retold by the teacher, and a variety of other Jewish texts and traditions are cited. Throughout, the teacher structures the learning by asking questions that will elicit from the students the desired, doctrinaire responses. As a result, the students repeat fundamental elements of Jewish tradition, and sometimes tenets of a sectarian form of Judaism: what we Conservative, Reform or Orthodox Jews believe. It is an indirect but not unsuccessful form of learning.

This approach also allows students to display their "knowledge." Once committed to the action by their displays, they seem more willing to expand that knowledge. But the questions must be carefully framed lest they generate flooding

out. And the teacher must be ready to move in the direction of student interest too, which runs the risk of disruption and digression.

In the midst of a discussion of the exodus a girl speaks up, recalling her experience with hand-baked matza. Interrupting the teacher's review of the biblical narrative, she asks the reason for such matza. The teacher turns the disruption into a part of the ongoing lesson, explaining that this is called "matza shmura" (specially-guarded Matza). The question and subsequent digression are just as appropriate as the Bible is for the upcoming Passover holy days. The ability to go off on tangents so naturally communicates openness and a relaxed air about the learning. The students are discovering the extent to which digression is built into their Jewish learning experience. At the same time, however, they are learning something substantive about the Jewish tradition. Moreover, one observes here how conversation between students and teachers in the Jewish school takes place against the background of a world that is silently but unmistakably taken for granted. This is precisely the sort of teaching Franz Rosenzweig idealized when he argued that one who desires to tap the spontaneous interests of his students "cannot be a teacher according to a plan; he must be much more and much less, master and at the same time a pupil." And, he concluded, in the encounter between teacher and student, "the discussion should become a conversation...[that] brings people to each other on the basis of what they all have in common -- the consciousness, no matter how rudimentary, no matter how obscured or concealed, of being a Jewish human being."[16]

"What's the difference between matza shmura and the matza we eat?" the teacher asks, simply continuing the line of conversation begun by her students. "The other has to cook in the sun," the girl shoots back. "No, but technically it should be," the teacher replies. "Can we try that? Take a piece of bread and put it in the sun," a boy asks.

"We can make matza here," the teacher responds, altering the boy's request or perhaps refining it. "What we would be making would be something more like shmura matza."

The teacher is treading carefully here, avoiding the flooding out and the consequent alienation from the activity of learning that is possible. Her control of the situation requires self-confidence and competence in harnessing student interest, rare qualities in teachers. But she is successful, and the students get caught up in the line of discussion that the teacher is able to dominate. They learn about the details of "matza shmura."

Some of the students seem confused and murmur explanations among themselves. The teacher inserts herself into the discussion almost immediately and goes with the flow. When one girl says that this matza tastes "like cardboard," the teacher quickly agrees. No uncontrolled breaks in the action will occur here. As long as all digressive breaks can be assimilated into the learning, the teacher remains in charge and the class does not break up. An examination of the details of her method is in order. The teacher is plumbing the depths of the exodus story.

"What is Pharaoh like? He keeps saying 'I'll be good, I'll be good' and he's bad. And you have to believe he means he's going to be good. Why does he keep being bad?" the teacher asks, elaborating her question by animating Pharaoh. She tries to make him sound like a contemporary character as she speaks his words in tones and phrases the students would presumably comprehend and even identify with. This is how an ancient tale is made applicable to a contemporary youth. It is an expression of the timelessness of Bible stories that they can be thus 'translated.'

"Because when he sees that it works out so well...." one boy begins to say but is interrupted by another who explains: "He continues because there's nothing he can do about it." The students are vying with one another, trying to come up with an answer. They are obviously getting caught up in the lesson. It touches them.

"Well what is Pharaoh lacking?" the teacher asks. "Oh! responsibility," one boy suggests, as if this long and special word which resonates established moral lessons of childhood will satisfy his teacher. He has clearly identified the situation as an opportunity for a repetition of the classic moral lessons. Some of the students giggle at this -- flooding out because they cannot allow themselves to take this all too seriously or because they believe this boy has obviously missed his cue.

Other students continue in the face of the teacher's silence, her non-ratification of his answer. To them, Pharaoh is missing: "Truth." "Brains." "Loyalty? Something like that."

But the teacher is searching for something else. "What keeps you from doing the same thing wrong twice when your mother says not to?" she asks. Again she tries to bring the ancient text into terms the students can understand and through which they can be touched.

"Because my mother smacks me," a boy breaks in, amidst the chuckling of the others. The teacher, moving with the student and thereby trying to avoid his flooding out, responds immediately to his idea, "O.K. God is smacking him and he keeps doing it. What is he missing? He's an evil person and he keeps doing the same evil thing. What is he missing, what feeling? What is he missing?"

"Oh," the boy calls out. He's been captured by the topic and has caught the teacher's drift. He continues: "Conscience." "Conscience," the teacher repeats softly for emphasis. This was what she was looking for. With it she has humanized the character of Pharaoh and perhaps set the stage for the students' empathic comprehension of the story.

"Yeah, Pharaoh was like Pinnochio," one of the students suggested. He wanted to show he understood, but through the banality of his example could still display a degree of distance from the proceedings. He at least was not ready to be

wholly caught up in this discussion. Yet even this somewhat alienated youngster has obviously been stimulated enought to be engaged, albeit in a limited way. It is eloquent testimony to the teacher's masterful performance.

A question from another student, however, is even more impressive for it leads to a further exploration of the underlying theological questions with which the lesson is undeniably concerned. He asks about free choice and destiny, something that has concerned and puzzled commentators for generations. "Why didn't they give him a conscience?"

Asking this question as if it were personal and original of course gives it an urgency far above what it would gain had the teacher expressed it as part of a formal review of some commentary. Moreover, these kinds of students -- largely illiterate in Jewish matters -- could not even follow such a commentary if it were open before them. Only if the teacher stimulates them to ask these classical questions from out of their own consciousness will they have any meaning to them.

"Because Pharaoh, like all people," the teacher replies, "has free choice as a human being to either be good or bad. Nobody's going to make you be good or bad." The switch from "Pharaoh" to "you" is a subtle one but it cannot help but bring the two characters -- the one in the story and the one hearing it -- together. The teacher was in a sense being asked to speak in behalf of the Jewish tradition.

"People are responsible for the choices they make. They were given the choice to do right or wrong, and Pharaoh was one of those people who chose to do wrong again and again and again."

The class was silent, apparently satisified with this response from the teacher.

"I have one last question," the teacher added. "When people read the (story of the) ten plagues at the seder, why do we spill the wine?" She subtly takes for

granted a certain degree of cultural competence on her students' part: that they are familiar with and carry out (she says "We spill") this practice. "Is that a symbol of something?" she continues.

"Is that the blood that was given, something like that?" a boy answers. It is a chance to repeat lessons learned, to recite Jewish traditions. "Whose blood?" the teacher asks. "The Egyptians!" "Right. Why are we commemorating the loss of their blood?" "Cause they're human?" "Right. What happens when they come out of Egypt? What's the first, when they cross the sea, what's the first thing Moses does?" she now asks.

After a few wrong answers, the students finally recall the Az Yashir, the song of thanksgiving that Moses offered. The teacher continues:

"Now, what's God's response to Az Yashir? "He liked it; he thinks the Jews are nice," a boy answers, drawing what to him seems to be a logical conclusion and one that the teacher does not argue with but is not prepared to accept completely. "What else? What's wrong with Moses singing a song of praise to God after 20,000 Egyptians have drowned in an (sic) ocean?"

"Oh, you told us about that. He doesn't like when they're happy cause he killed them, that they're happy that his creatures died."

"Same thing," she now responds, "with the wine. We want to show we agree; we're not completely happy that human beings died."

Suddenly, in the midst of this rather free-wheeling discussion, one boy asked the teacher to tell the story of the time that Moses struck the rock. It was clearly a narrative he and all of the others knew but which he believed deserved retelling in the present context. His request, reaffirmed by some of the other students, called for a cultural performance, an opportunity to reflect, communicate and perpetuate an inherited conception of Jewish tradition. Retelling old stories,

already known, as if they were new and fresh is after all the blood and tissue of ritual Jewish learning.

The teacher agreed and retold the story, inserting commentary into the narrative, and bringing the encounter between God and Moses vividly to life. The students listened attentively and at last asked why Moses was punished at all. The teacher, turning the question back to them, elicited at last a response she considered adequate when one boy explained Moses "was losing his trust in God." This turned the conversation toward a consideration of the responsibilities placed upon the righteous man. Hearing the consequences of righteousness, one boy asserted, "then I'd rather not be a righteous man."

"You take a risk," the teacher admitted. Here were moral lessons quietly but undeniably inserted into the digressive flow of a routine class. The classroom is the place where Judaism is discovered and explored, and cultural performance takes place in that everyone gets to see where everyone else is coming from Jewishly. To be sure, sometimes such learning is accomplished serendipitously. Sometimes it is segmented and incomplete. But, it can still occur, even if to a far more limited degree than it perhaps once did.

I have reviewed this class at some length for I believe it exemplifies relatively successful Jewish learning. In the day school, the discussion might be more detailed and nuanced. It might refer more often to original texts and commentaries while drawing more deeply from Jewish tradition. The questions and answers might vary in content. But in all cases the basic method of digression and discussion, of a teacher sensitive and responsive to students' interests is what makes for learning.

To be sure, the variety of Jewish perspectives in the classroom do not always lead to a fruitful encounter. As I earlier suggested, when the Jewish world which

the teacher takes for granted is not the same one that the students inhabit, the conversation can sometimes undermine Judaism rather than inform and strengthen it. When neither side understands the nature of the Jewish world that the other accepts learning is endangered.

A simple illustration will help. The setting is a Conservative afternoon school. The teacher has just announced to his students: "I'm prepared to discuss any topic if it's presented to me before class or even during class...if you find it in the Mishneh Torah." (Maimonides, Code of Jewish Law). This is a fairly loose mandate, but it was accepted in the free-wheeling discussions that this class often had about matters of Jewish law. Following some general remarks about definitions of the word "kosher," the teacher was interrupted by one of the students. The speaker, a boy who comes from a mixed marriage (his mother is Vietnamese), asked a question. It began a digression which lasted through the rest of the class hours.

He referred to an article which another teacher in the school had read to the class earlier, one which discussed some principles of Conservative Judaism.

"I learned that the Conservative movement is based on that you take the laws and you weigh them and say what is necessary, what is applicable to today's society, and then you decide that this is what we as Conservative Jews are going to do."

He had hardly finished when the teacher paced to the other side of the room, leaned against the wall and looking furious, replied: "You know me. You know me for two years, maybe longer, o.k.? And you know my background; you know I'm from the Orthodox world." The teacher continued. "When I hear this, I have very serious questions."

The class was silent; they listened attentively.

"For me, I believe that the Torah is divinely written. Ve zot ha torah asher... (This is the Torah which God commanded....) He let the students complete the verse, which several of them knew. Here was a clear cultural performance, a chance for the students to hear themselves verbally reaffirm and at least partially associate themselves with the traditional belief in divine revelation.

"In other words," the teacher went on, "Moses wrote every letter, as dictated to him by God."

The students remained silent once again; they had, after all, just recited words that according to their teacher asserted this truth, words they were familiar with and which on occasion they recited as part of the liturgy.

Now came an oblique reference to the text they were nominally studying: "And the Rambam (Maimonides) will say when we learn about what is a prophet -- we will find that Moses is the father of prophets." The teacher was using this class to insert into his students' consciousnesses a whole variety of little tidbits of information about Judaism and Jewish tradition. But, and it is a big but, the Jewish world which he inhabited and the one they did were not the same one. The conversation took place against two different backgrounds which were not necessarily compatible -- that is what made the encounter troubling for the class. When for example at one point the teacher remarked that in Conservative Judaism "people pick and choose what they want from religion," he meant it as a criticism. His students responded, "that's right," and clearly understood such a characterization of their brand of Judaism as one of its positive qualities, its flexibility and capacity to meet the particular needs of their lives. Neither side, however, seemed able to perceive the viewpoint of the other. Thus, a number of students left the hour shaking their heads in frustration about their inability to resolve this issue. Afterwards the teacher explained to me: "They just don't

understand it at all." In both cases, the frustration expressed was not generated by bad interpersonal relationships between students and teacher; these seemed good by and large. Rather, the frustration was rooted in the cultural contradictions of their situation.

When the teacher concluded his lesson with a kind of Orthodox creedal question and asked "Who, who today in this generation, in the last generation," and now with his voice rising to a crescendo, "in any generation -- including the generations of Moses -- could stand up and abrogate something that is written in the Torah?" he was at last confronted by a chorus of "no's" from the students who tried, in the words of one, to explain "A Conservative Jew isn't saying that."

Yet as the class went on it was clear that the students were not altogether certain what was demanded of them as Conservative Jews nor was the teacher clear about the nature of the Jewish commitment they were prepared to accept. Each side tried to communicate its attachment to Judaism, but the Judaism to which each felt attached was not the same.

Something similar occured in another class I observed where the teacher, an Orthodox Jew, and his students, marginally Conservative in background and outlook, discussed an eruv, the boundary within which certain activities otherwise prohibited may be carried on during the Sabbath. A student had asked why an eruv was necessary; the teacher responded by explaining how an eruv works halakhically (according to Judaic law). Neither seemed able to conceive the cultural perspective of the other.

In this case, the cultural backgrounds and Jewish orientations of students and teacher are not different but at odds with one another. Can the Orthodox teacher serve as vehicle for the Reform or Conservative Jewish student's discovery of his and his parents' brand of Judaism? Can a non-Orthodox teacher stimulate

Orthodox practice and foster a traditionalist worldview? Yes, but only if the teacher is able to suspend his own conceptions of the world and become sensitive to those of the communities he serves.

Often, though, out of the sincerest of intentions, teachers and students serve unknowingly as agent-provocateurs, trying to undermine one another's cultural assumptions. Thus in one class I observed the students who were non-Orthodox tried to convince their Orthodox teacher of the ludicrousness of a "Shabbat elevator" while he tried to persuade them of the benefits of living within the "four cubits of the halakha (law)." And in another, teachers, acting in accord with their day school's policy, instructed their students to pray, but did not do so themselves, thereby communicating at best an indifference to prayer.

These examples and the many others like them illustrate that a teacher cannot always disambiguate the substance of Judaism for his students. It requires more than technical training; it takes cultural competence. "Religion requires a religious community," sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmannn argue. "And to live in a religious world requires affiliation with that community."[17] To this one could add that religious education requires that the educator be part of the religious community into which he or she is presumably leading students. When this is not the case, when the Jewish world the teacher and student inhabit are not the same one, and neither can make the leap toward the other, learning is replaced by frustration and cultural continuity by disruption.

This is not only a problem in afternoon schools where the teachers are often Orthodox and the students something else; it can happen in the day school as well. The teachers responsible for secular studies, and sometimes even the principals responsible for that side of the curriculum, are all too often culturally segregated from the Jewish studies side. Or, just as the afternoon schools are forced to draw

their teachers from the liberal wing of Orthodoxy, so analogously the day schools sometimes find their teachers drawn from more traditionalist elements.

While all groups nominally subscribe to the same "Great Jewish Tradition," they often overlook, at their own risk, the "little tradition," the cultural nuances and differences among them, and this weakens their schools. It is clear, therefore, that insofar as each wing of American Judaism feels committed to its own interpretations of Judaism, it must accordingly produce its own culturally competent and pedagogically trained teachers. Without a cadre of teachers who share the value systems, worldview, and ethos of the communities they serve, cultural dissonance will continue to be built into even the best classrooms.

In addition, this suggests that students and staff should share community life (and the associated ethos and cosmology) outside of the class as well as in it. In this way the teacher will persuasively play his role as cultural agent, guide into Jewish life. But if that community, however, is one which at best is ambivalent about matters Jewish and at worst is indifferent or even hostile to them, then both teacher and students need to share a world which is insulated from the host community. That is precisely what successful Jewish summer camps or yeshivas accomplish by locating themselves far from the homes of their students in environments which force the school to become a cultural island. That is what many prep schools and colleges with their isolated campuses have always done.

JEWISH IDENTITY

Critics of Jewish education often argue that the Jewish school does not work. It works. It is a model of the Jewish community it serves, a mirror image of what goes on in the Jewish world around the school. And, the Jewish school is a model for Jewish community life, a blueprint, or more precisely a template, that produces Jews who are suited to inhabit and sustain the community. As psychoanalyst Allen

Wheelis has explained: "Every culture creates the characters best fitted to survive in that culture."[18] The Jews are no exception. Thus, each of the schools I observed turns out students who will feel at home in the community, and will in turn give life to that community. The Orthodox day school produces students who can inhabit and sustain the same sort of dualistic and compartmentalized culture their parents lived in, often experiencing the same conflicts and cultural dissonances that their parents do. Similarly, the Conservative and Reform school students display the same confusions about Jewish life that their parents do: on the one hand retaining some vague notion about the value and importance of Jewish education, while on the other expressing discomfort with much of its substance and ambivalent about its demands.

Those critics who argue that Jewish schooling does not succeed really mean, therefore, that it succeeds too well; what they are actually lamenting is that the Jewish community, instead of being altered by the education it provides, perpetuates itself along with all its attendant problems. But how can we expect a school which is not a cultural island to create anything radically different from what exists in the surrounding milieu? To be sure, the school can provide knowledge in place of ignorance, if it has devoted students, a competent staff and a community committed to Jewish education (elements often lamentably missing). But in great measure the Jewish school's aims are not limited to inculcation.

Indeed, one might accurately describe the school's essential goals as enculturation and socialization. While we Jews have always believed that the study of Torah was an invaluable intellectual exercise, we also understood that such regular review would help us keep spiritually in touch with the tradition, allow us to replay the past in the present, and serve to communicate as well as perpetuate the inherited conceptions that define Jewish culture.

To demonstrate how a school may reflect and reenforce the nature of Judaism and Jewish identity which the students and teachers bring to it, I offer an extended and telling illustration.

The teacher, a Conservative rabbinical student obviously committed to traditional values and norms, was exploring with his students the question of what they believed Conservative Judaism demanded of them. In response to his opening inquiry about the nature of their Jewish identity, all the students characterized themselves as Conservative. He then proceeded to ask them a series of questions about beliefs and practices, to which they would call out answers. Often one or two students spoke for the entire class. If there was agreement, the rest would signal their concurrence with nods, murmurs or silence. In cases of disagreement, two or three students would voice the varieties of opinion for all.

One boy volunteered a definition of himself as a Conservative Jew. "Well, I celebrate most of the holidays and..." He ran out of things to say. There was apparently nothing more that he could immediately call to mind.

"What makes you different from an Orthodox or a Reform?" the teacher asked.

"Well, I'm not Reform because I go to Hebrew school and I do celebrate the holidays and stuff."

"But so do Reform Jews," one of the other students pointed out, to which the first seemed to have no answer. The distinctions were obviously fuzzy.

The teacher tried to focus their attention. "How many of you can safely say that you can give me a good definition at least of Conservative Judaism?"

A girl tried. "Somebody who is not as strict as Orthodox. Because they go to the Temple on holidays but they -- but they don't have to, like, not ride on Shabbat."

"Well, it's just in between Reform and Orthodox," another suggested.

"Is there anyone who disagrees firmly with that?" the teacher asked. No one did. "So everyone would agree here that Conservative practice is in between Orthodox and Reform? What would you do if I said that that's not true."

"I'd say you lied," one student responded.

"But then all Jews would be the same," another girl broke in. She continued. "There wouldn't be Orthodox, Conservative and Reform. So how would Conservative Jews know if they should be kosher or they shouldn't be kosher?"

The teacher ignored the question and instead began to list behaviors and beliefs and asked the students whether or not they believed these to be part of the formal definition of Conservative Judaism. He asked them about keeping kosher in the home. Most seemed to agree it was important; a few did not.

"How about observing kashrut when eating out?" he continued. Some said "yes," while the majority called out "no." Still others responded, "half the time" only to meet with a chorus of "no, not at all."

"Being a member of a Conservative synagogue?" Everyone agreed that was crucial to the definition.

"Speaking Hebrew?"

"Well, speaking it but not understanding it," one student said. For most if not all of the others this was a particularly apt way of putting it. "I know how to read it," added one girl (whose earlier performance left some doubts on this score), "but I don't understand it." This was a particularly telling admission to be made in "Hebrew School."

The teacher continued listing such matters as contributing to Jewish charities, observing the Sabbath, lighting Sabbath candles, saying kiddish (blessing over wine) and attending Shabbat services, spending time in Israel, making aliya,

participating in high holy day services, having a Passover seder, praying every day, and helping the poor or the aged. Throughout, the students gave responses that reflected all of the ambivalences and attitudes of Conservative Jewry. They were for giving charity, having Passover seders and participating in high holy day services; split on the importance of Sabbath observance and kashrut, confused about how important Israel should be in their lives but convinced that they were not expected to move there.

"Remember," the teacher added, "I'm not asking you what you do, just what you think is important for Conservative Judaism." To him there was clearly a useful distinction to be made here, but for the students, as indeed for their parents, the difference between ideology and behavior was minimal. It might not even have been conceivable.

The teacher now asked the students whether or not they believed that maintaining regular Jewish study throughout the rest of their lives was part of the Judaism they practiced. At first the immediate response was a uniform "no."

"Listen to this one, dating only Jewish people," the teacher continued. Here there was some division, with a vocal majority agreeing but a minority saying that it was alright as long as there was no marriage involved.

"What about marrying non-Jewish people?" "No," one boy answered on behalf of the rest, and then another added: "That's very important." No one explained why this prohibition was to be maintained but all had clearly received the message that it was. This stimulated conversations among the students during which some asked others if they would abide by this stricture. They all -- at least here and now -- agreed that they would.

"Do you believe that Conservative Jews should believe that the Torah is the word of God?" the teacher continued. When quite a few said yes, the teacher

remarked, somewhat incredulously, "You believe a Conservative Jew should?" Now the students seemed less sure. A subtle message about the theology of Conservative Judaism, as understood by this teacher, had been passed on to them.

He continued. "Conservative Judaism on the books, what it is ideologically -- what it is in written form, so to speak -- what it's supposed to be is a lot different from what it is. Now, those of you who raised their hands and said they're Conservative Jews -- are all your parents members of a Conservative synagogue?

As one, the students answered: "yes."

"Then you have a perfect right to say you're a Conservative Jew. But when I tell you -- it'll take maybe twenty seconds to tell you what Conservative Judaism demands of people who call themselves Conservative Jews, you'll find that there's a big gap between what it's supposed to be and what it is."

"Alright, so what is it?" one of the boys asked. There was silence now, perfect and utter silence for the first time all class.

"According to Conservative Judaism, Conservative Jews are supposed to observe all halacha which means they must observe all Jewish law. So you're not allowed to go shopping on Shabbes, according to Jewish law."

There were rumblings of conversation among the students, while the teacher continued. "According to Conservative Judaism you have to abide by all these laws: you have to pray three times a day; you have to go to services--"

"Forget that," one girl said.

"No way," added another.

"So Reform must really be reform, reform, reform," said a boy.

"Now," the teacher continued, "someone tell me what the difference is between that and Orthodoxy."

One girl answered immediately: "Because Orthodox is a lot worse. Orthodox probably says if you don't do it..." The teacher completed the line: "lightning."

The students were not quite prepared for this sort of explanation and moved instead to a description of Orthodoxy that was anchored in specific practices.

"Orthodox have to wear a yarmulke everywhere you go if you're a boy," a girl explained.

"Conservative Judaism doesn't say you have to, but when you're eating, saying any bracha (blessing) -- most of the day you should have one on," the teacher explained. He continued: "Have you ever seen those tsitsiyot, arba kanfot?" (fringes on garments)

"Like Tevya wore?" asked one of the boys, making reference to the closest he may have ever come to an image of a traditional Jew.

"Yeah," the teacher answered. The students had seen these. "Well, Conservative Jews have to wear those."

"Oh no!" a boy called out.

"Do you wear them?" asked another, without getting an answer from the teacher.

"Only on Shabbat?" asked a girl, referring to the one day that in her calendar seemed to have been set aside for religious life.

"Every day," answered the teacher.

"Now what's the difference between Conservative and Reform?" he asked.

One boy was ready with an answer. "Reform is more assimilated than Conservative. They don't follow all the rules. You know they're the ones with the Hanuka Bush and all that."

"On the books," the teacher continued, "what is a Reform Jew supposed to do?" There was no ready answer, so the teacher gave one.

"According to Reform Judaism, you must follow all of the moral rules of the Torah," the teacher explained.

"Because you believe in them?" one of the girls asked.

The teacher did not really address this question but went on to suggest that Reform Judaism does require one to carry out the laws between man and man but not between man and God. This meant, for example, that adultery was prohibited but driving on Shabbat was not. From this the teacher concluded: "The Conservative Jews says, 'We have to be concerned about what God cares about;' and the Reform Jew says, 'We have to be concerned about what we do with other men.'"

The students were not quite sure what to make of this. Quite a few had already turned their attention away and were involved in conversations among themselves. They had already begun to flood out. The teacher concluded: "Haverim, (friends) what I want to leave you with, although not everyone meets up to what Conservative Judaism is supposed to be, that doesn't mean we're not Conservative Jews."

As one listens to this exchange between teacher and students one cannot help but be struck by the extent to which the students reflect the Jewish community from which they come. The teacher has not simply been polling his students about Conservative Judaism, he has also provided them with an opportunity to recite their understanding of its basic tenets. In the process, all the classic values, behavoirs and attitudes have been passed on and are reflected and reaffirmed in this classroom encounter. The session is a model of and for Conservative Judaism. It presents and sustains a particular form of Jewish identity. And it appears to work.

The example cited is not unique. In all the settings I observed the participants found ways of communicating culture and forming Jewish identity. Sometimes there were problems of cultural dissonance created by the varying

backgrounds of the participants. But then flooding out often occurred, making it clear that there was a problem. A teacher sensitive to the meaning of such disruptions and willing and able to try again could turn things around. He could digress along with his students, reach out to them, as long as he remained aware of who they were and from whence they came. That is, as long as the teacher was culturally and pedagogically competent and had basic interpersonal skills, he could succeed. To be sure, teachers like that are not easy to find, and once found even harder to keep, considering the meagre rewards they receive from the community.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Commonly, in anthropology working hypotheses and explanations of behavior are most successful for translating the meaning of human behavior *in situ*. Longer explanations run the risk of drifting into theoretical fantasies because cultural theory -- for which anthropology aims -- is not strictly speaking predictive. Since, however, the mandate of my research called for some policy recommendations which have emerged as a result of my work and because every field researcher inevitably places his observations and interpretation of action into some overall conceptual framework from which certain conclusions may be refined, I shall close this paper with such comments.

Certain conclusions seem obvious. I began by arguing that a sense of attachment to being a Jew may precede learning, and that the process of Jewish education may be understood as a form of cultural expression and completion. Therefore, some form of cultural preparation may be necessary before sending children to Hebrew school. This may take the form of enrolling parents and children in Jewish cultural enrichment programs before the beginning of formal instruction so that the entire family comes to feel a more intensive Jewish identity and involvement. Jewish family summer camps, institutes, family pre-school programs are some possibles vehicles for this.

I pointed out that sometimes confusion or ambivalence about cultural matters results in flooding out, breaking away from the substance of learning. I have shown that there are nevertheless occasions when successful learning does occur. For such success, I have suggested that teachers and students must share a single Jewish culture, or at least be able to comprehend and even empathize with the one from which the other comes, and teachers should be willing and able to move with the flow of their students' interests. This requires minimally that teachers must be informed about the Jewish world from which their students come. Maximally, this requires a sharing of culture and community. As noted earlier, the easiest way to accomplish this would be to create separate self-contained school communities.

Simply stated, for the teachers and students to share a controlled learning environment where ther is cultural continuity between the world inside of class and the one outside of it, they must have their own campus. Before this can happen, though, teachers will have to become endowed with a sense of vocation, the sort that roshei yeshivot, (heads of yeshivot) camp directors, and prep school dons have. That requires better pay, facilities that can be used to house staff and students, deeper commitments all around, and a fundamental rethinking on the part of American Jews about the sincerity of their interest in Jewish education. If this sounds grandiose, it is. But the stakes, after all, are high.

No one imagines that this will be easy, especially given the modest compensation that teaching in general and Jewish teaching in particular now offers. Salaries and benefits are abysmal; prestige is essentially non-existent; and a sense of vocation has for all intents and purposes disappeared. As a number of recent studies have documented, only a minority of teachers of Jewish education plan to stay in the profession. In a particularly striking finding George Lebovitz in a survey of day school teachers, discovered that less than half them planned to be in the same profession five years from now, nearly all those planning to leave were

under forty, and 30% of the teachers under forty planned to leave at the first opportunity.[19]

The problem that teachers and students come from different cultural milieux is compunded by the fact that parents are often only marginally aware of what happens inside the school. This is not to say that they do not receive the information that schools send home via their children or in the mails. But they do not often have an opportunity to share the experience of the school with their children.

One might object, perhaps, that no public school allows the parents to share its experiences with their children. This is true but irrelevant when one realizes that the purpose of the Jewish school, as I have suggested, is to act as a model of and model for Jewish cultural life. And, as I have also noted, for many students in afternoon schools, the institution represents the only totally Jewish environment in which they regularly participate. What goes on there becomes the embodiment of their Jewishness. Simply stated, "to be a Jew," as one young girl in one of the schools I observed put it, "is to be someone who goes to Hebrew school."

If being Jewish is so tied up with the school experience, then it behooves the parents to share that experience. There was a time when Jewish education in the school was an extension of the home and the Jewish community. Now it has largely become a replacement for them. Parents must now join the children in school in order to share in the Jewish experience. As long as Jewish schools are housed within local communities, parents must become part of what goes on inside the classroom. In one Conservative school I observed, just this sort of program had been established, and it succeeded beyond expectations. Not only did many parents attend once a week with their children, but the same children who at other times might not be engaged by the classroom activities become far more involved in learning when their parents learned along with them. To be sure, there must be

some generating sense of commitment to get them into the school in the first place, but once they are both there, that commitment can develop and deepen. Students and parents acquire during such joint sessions a capacity for what Bateson has called "deutero-learning," learning how to learn.[20] And that is a significant skill for a people who values "torah lishma" (try for its own sake) and believes that "talmud torah keneged koolom." (The value of studing torah outweighs all).

Another significant problem is that of motivation. In both types of afternoon schools, and, to an extent, in the day school, countervailing curricula confront both students and teachers. On the one hand there is the secular curriculum, with its academic demands and career objectives. On the other is the Jewish curriculum, connected to all intents and purposes with another world. In all the schools I observed there was seldom if ever a continuity between the two. Rather, each implicitly interrupted the domain of the other, and students were forced to choose between them. In the afternoon schools there is a tacit affirmation that the secular curriculum dominates. Hebrew school, as noted earlier, is an after-hours involvement, often competing and sometimes identified with extra-curricular activities in the public schools. Commonly, students miss Hebrew school in order to attend some activity at public school. With the exception of missing public school on holy days, the reverse never occurred. On one occasion in one school, two thirds of the class was missing because they were rehearsing a play at the public school. The teacher did not challenge the legitimacy of that excuse for their absence; she simply accepted it as a fact of life. Another time, when the vacations of the Hebrew and Public schools did not match, it was taken for granted by students and tacitly accepted by teachers that the students would skip Hebrew school during the public school recess and vice-versa. In a third instance it was understood that students would absent themselves from their Jewish studies in order to prepare for Regents Examinations.

The dissonance is undeniable even in the day schools, which value an effort to demonstrate the dominace of Jewish studies by putting them first in the day or scheduling the day to make the students see that each curriculum demands equal time and effort. On rare occasions there is a dialectical interplay between the two curricula, and hence the two traditions. In most cases, however, there is simply compartmentalization. The student moves first to the Jewish tradition, then to the secular one, back again and so on. Recall the fact that chumash (Pentateuch) and navi (prophets) grades are not averaged into the student's official transcript. As the adept day school students learn to compartmentalize their Jewish and secular concerns in school, so they repeat this skill in later life.

But if the temporal differences are clear, the value orientations which distinguish the two curricula are even more important. The secular curriculum emphasizes achievement and perhaps, in some secondary way, character training. The accumulation of skills and knowledge is paramount, leading to some specified goal, variously articulated as "high school," "college" or "career." For students who aspire to this goal, work is largely teacher-dominated, for the teachers have the information the students seek to master. This is of no small consequence to Jews for, as Rosen and D'Andrade[21] have shown, they stress achievement.

The Jewish curriculum, while ostensibly also aiming for specific achievements and skills, primarily emphasizes Jewish identification and the development of a Jewish consciousness. That is, while secular studies provide skills and specific knowledge, Jewish studies provide students with a sense of peoplehood,something that might best be described as "Yiddishkeit". The presence of other Jewish students and the social world constructed in the classroom may therefore be as or more important than the teaching. Recall that especially in the case of afternoon schools, the students' time there may be the only one in their entire day when they are surrounded completely and solely by Jews. The school

becomes the symbolic Jewish home, the Jewish community for all intents and purposes. In this situation, moreover, the teacher must be a facilitator and catalyst, role model and co-participant to a greater degree than a teacher of secular subjects. Perhaps only a genuine community insider can achieve this.

These special goals of the Jewish curriculum also make success harder to measure. The secular teacher has succeeded when the student has mastered certain skills: reading, mathematics, geography and so on. The Jewish teacher may succeed in getting his students to learn some Hebrew, comprehend some sacred text, or acquaint themselves with points of Jewish law. But even so, he has not necessarily fulfilled his mandate which, in the final analysis, is to make Jews out of his students. Conversely, even if the Jewish school teacher does not succeed in making his students fluent in Hebrew or enabling them to make their way independently through a Jewish text, he may still succeed in eliciting a warmth towards and attachment to their Judaism and ethnic identity.

Accordingly, the secular achievements can more easily be evaluated, graded --if you will -- than the Jewish ones. Yet strangely, the same grading system is used for the Jewish curriculum as for the secular one -- and this even when Jewish studies grades are not part of the official grade point average. Lacking the same basis in reality, however, these grades are largely meaningless, and students look upon them with a jaundiced eye. They realize that time in Hebrew school is not like time anywhere else. "Another world to live in -- whether we expect ever to pass wholly over into it or no -- is what we mean by having a religion," philosopher George Santayana once suggested.

If the Jewish school is in fact a religious school, an institution forming and confirming religious identification, then it ought to stress its difference from rather than its sameness with the secular curriculum. In practice this might mean

a different system of evaluations, a different format of teaching (stressing, for example, the intimacy of religious community rather than the formality of the classroom, a different language and so on). Too often our Jewish schools try to mirror secular institutions. They need and can forge their own identity from the besmedresh and cheder (European-style Jewish schools) rather than the public school. "Religion for the Jews," as Herman Wouk has put it, "is intimate and colloquial, or it is nothing."

CONCLUSION

Since we agree that the goal of Jewish education is worth the effort, what is to be done? I am convinced that to know one must first believe; that feeling and being actively Jewish may be a prerequisite to becoming more so; that the number of volumes of the Talmud we have gone through may be less important than how many of them we have let get through to us. Nearly half a century ago, the great Jewish student and educator, Franz Rosenzweig, in an essay arguing for a renaissance of Jewish learning, wrote something eerily similar: "Books are not now the prime need of the day...what we need more than ever, or at least as much as ever, are human beings -- Jewish human beings..."[22] If we form communities in which being Jewish is a positive and active element of life, then we shall produce Jewish human beings, and our schools will ineluctably reflect that success. If we fail, our schools will mirror that failure.

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