

THE JEWISH COMMUNAL PROFESSION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

PROFESSOR GERALD B. BUBIS

Founding Director, Irwin Daniels School of Jewish Communal Service, Alfred Gottschalk Professor Emeritus of Jewish Communal Studies, and Vice President, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

To cope with the rapid pace of change, our definitions and understandings of Jewish communal service must change; JCSA must reinvent itself as well. A strong national professional organization is vitally needed more than ever.

This article begins with two disclaimers. First, I remind you that prophecy fell into the hands of fools and children after the destruction of the Temple. Second, in my writings I have explained why in my opinion there is no profession of Jewish communal service (see Bubis, 1983). That does not diminish my desire to explore the ramifications of some trends evolving today that will have a major impact tomorrow.

THE PAST CENTURY

No attempt, however modest, to discuss Jewish communal service in the twenty-first century can ignore the century just ending, for its shadow is long and its impact powerful. In 1980, the Conference of Jewish Communal Service, as the Jewish Communal Service Association was then called, published a 1,531-page, two-volume work called *The Turbulent Decades*, which brilliantly reviewed the years from 1958 to 1978. Graenum Berger (of blessed memory) edited this massive undertaking, which analyzed and assessed the various settings and services under the rubric of Jewish communal service. The volumes featured articles by academics and practitioners covering topics ranging from camping to community relations, Jewish communities abroad and in Israel, Jewish values, professional education, public funding, and the rabbi, synagogue, and social welfare.

This encyclopedic overview of the field had never before been attempted. The Conference (now JCSA) entered its eighty-first year in 1979. The publication bespoke the relative power of the Conference itself as an

overarching organization whose activities were highlighted by an annual conference attended by 900 to 1200 members.

An earlier work, *Trends and Issues in Jewish Social Welfare in the United States, 1899-1958*, published in 1966, provided a documentary history of the first six decades of the Conference, and the very name change of the 1980 volumes bespoke the broadening shift in emphases and service that took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

It was during the last two decades of the twentieth century that the velocity of change accelerated exponentially. The miraculous emigration of Soviet Jews, the more miraculous Ethiopian Jewish rescue, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the enormous growth of Jewish political power and economic wealth, Rabin's assassination, the Lebanese War debacle, the Intifada, the women's revolution, the Jews' incursion into academia, the expansion of their role in the arts, and the Internet are but some of the recent developments on the world and national institutional scene.

Jews as individuals and families did not escape the great upheavals and changes of the past two decades. Postponed marriages, growing divorce rates, the public presence of gays and lesbians, the dropping birth rate, increased longevity (creating a small yet significant number of five-generation families), assimilation, intermarriages, physical and upward mobility, the growing impact of Orthodoxy, the move to spirituality and to traditional forms of Jewish expression in the Reform movement, the turn to increasingly

privatized manifestations of Jewish expression, lower rates of affiliation, and the distancing from Israel among younger Jews are among the most important trends.

Within Jewish communal service itself, the last two decades have seen a fracturing of the JCSA and the field. The role of JCSA has diminished, as the major national umbrella organizations increasingly offered training and educational opportunities for professionals in their respective settings. For example, federation planners, campaign directors, large, intermediate and small city executives, and endowment directors hold their own meetings at different venues and times of the year; even the Association of Jewish Community Organization Personnel conducts its annual meeting in conjunction with a United Jewish Communities event.

Likewise the Association of Jewish Center Professionals (AJCP) changed its annual meeting to a coordinated biennial conference with the national umbrella organization of the Centers. They also initiated a certification program for its members, not with JCSA, but with this umbrella organization, thereby enhancing the importance of AJCP's regional and national meetings.

The notion of belonging to or identifying as a member of the field of Jewish communal service has weakened considerably. Instead, the identification tends to be with the workplace and the particular job held by individuals. In all cases staffing services are provided by the respective national organizations. The outcome is something quite different than with other professional organizations, each of which is independent of the settings in which its members serve. For example, educators, librarians, directors of HMOs, and social workers have a primary loyalty and identification with their respective professions, not their settings. The certification, education, and training programs are solely in the hands of the professional organization. In contrast, the JCSA itself is now a secondary organization in its impact on shaping the goals, training, and education for the field.

JCSA continues to sponsor a comprehensive insurance program and publish the still

prestigious *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, which has existed for the past 75 years under different titles. If the insurance programs were made available in a free-standing form, and the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* found elsewhere the subsidy it now gets from JCSA, the Association itself would be even further weakened and would need to find new directions.

THE NEXT TEN YEARS

Mergers

After years of near-abortive attempts, the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF), United Israel Appeal (UIA), and United Jewish Appeal (UJA) have finally merged into United Jewish Communities (UJC) (see the article by Solomon in this issue). Given the fact that its volunteer leadership are successful entrepreneurs who have dealt with mergers and the consequent downsizing, it seems inevitable that the national example will find its way into local communities. Pressures will grow for agencies performing complementary functions, such as vocational services, family services, free loans, big brothers, and custodial services, to merge to create mega-agencies, all in the name of efficiency. Furthermore, this next decade will see the retirement or passing of board leadership at a level not experienced in the last 75 or 100 years. The time pressures faced by young leaders as a result will probably move them to advocate the merger process, thereby enabling them to adjust the often cumbersome and sometimes seemingly duplicative governance to their busy schedules.

Changing Roles of Federation

Federations have become essentially elitist in their fund raising and their governance and, as a result, continue to raise more money collectively than any other single-focused Jewish organization in America. As the Israel-Diaspora relationship continues to be redefined, the combined efforts of Israel-related organizations—the Friends of...—will offer greater opportunities for mega-

givers to relate to Israel on a more personal basis than through the federations. However, new federation approaches to teaming and twinning cities should help stem the hemorrhaging, especially if there are personal opportunities for givers that escape the colonial models of the past.

These interactive relations that go beyond money will then accelerate the federation's move into new roles that will emphasize expertise on both sides of the water. Federations will also cooperate increasingly with synagogues and other Jewish organizations, finally recognizing that only in moments of great emergency do federations become the central address for the Jewish community. They will help train other organizational leadership, particularly in fund-raising skills, and where appropriate, will cooperate in joint purchasing, to name but a few areas.

Continued Deprofessionalization of the Field

There is still no agreement, except in counseling agencies and Jewish education settings, as to what staff are supposed to know, how they are to apply their skills, and how to measure their competencies. As fewer people will have master's degrees, as salaries remain minimal, and as many who take jobs are women who are unable to relocate, the movement into and out of the field will increase. More and more people will have jobs rather than callings, resulting in a lower level of commitment to the goals of Jewish communal life. Those who are competent and remain in the field will need to be rewarded, as is now the case in the rabbinate and Jewish education, even as the salary differentials between the highest and the lowest levels in the field will likely continue to increase. Even though the missions and goals of many organizations are dedicated to strengthening Jewish life, insensitivity to the Jewish family life of staff will remain, with little attempt to utilize flex time or job sharing, or provide child care in the work setting.

The irony is that Jewish communal service at the beginning of the twentieth century was

often at the cutting edge in developing new services for its constituencies, such as pre-school and kindergartens, free dental and medical care, to name but a few. In contrast, the field is perceived by many colleagues in non-Jewish settings as being at the lagging edge for social change and betterment.

Continued Elevation of Jewish Educators and Jewish Education

Even as beginning salaries in most Jewish communal settings remain depressed and will continue to be so, the salaries for Jewish educators are being raised at the teachers' and principals' level. The specifics of what they are perceived as knowing has added to the salary acceleration. Because of the unexpected day school explosion among the Reform and Conservative movements, there are many more positions than there are qualified teachers. No one can predict how long the "feeding frenzy" will continue, although two factors will help answer the issue. The first will be whether or not parents continue to choose Jewish day schools in significant numbers over secular private schools. Perhaps these private schools will add Jewish tracks to their curricula to attract more Jewish students. If all the schools now on the drawing board are built, the capital cost of new Jewish day schools in the next decade could well approach 750 million to 1 billion.

The second factor that might negatively affect the need for Jewish educators is the demographic curve. The number and size of Jewish families, except among the most traditional of Orthodox Jews, continues to shrink. Marriages continue to be postponed, with a significant minority of women opting not to marry or have children at all. The increasing number of publicly self-identified gays and lesbians adds to the shrinking numbers.

As the Boomer bubble subsides, the number of children is likely to diminish. Add to this the great number of intermarriages with little likelihood of their children attending Jewish day schools, and the community may face a different kind of crisis in 20 years, with unused facilities and unemployed Jew-

ish teachers.

Other settings are also responding to the present growing interest in Jewish education, often in informal arenas. Jewish camps and Jewish Centers serve only a small percentage of the available population. Because they in turn are often not bound by Jewish law in deciding who to serve, they present a fertile potential for growth for the predictable future.

Continual Redefining and Refining of the Roles of Community Relations Agencies

The Holocaust and the Drive to Remember

By the year 2020 only a handful of survivors will be alive. While their progeny often take seriously the need to remember through observance of Yom HaShoah, the building of memorials, and the like, the wave of guilt that engulfed this generation will have subsided. The nature of life being what it is, the issue and place of the Holocaust on the community agenda will have moved to a secondary position among Jews and the world in general. The present flurry of compensation awards will have been resolved, and a bitter and horrendous chapter of Jewish life will be seen increasingly as ancient history.

Diminution of the Need for Political Action for Jews at Risk

We all have a right to be proud of the magnificent job done by the Jewish Agency for Israel, supported by Jews around the world, in rescuing Jews, primarily from the Former Soviet Union. The roles played by the community relations councils and the National Conference of Soviet Jewry were indispensable in this effort.

Nearly one million Soviet Jews and almost all Ethiopian Jews are now in Israel. Add those settled in other countries, and almost 1.5 million Jews are now living in freedom.

The FSU demographers tell us that for every Jewish birth there are eight Jewish deaths, resulting in the median age of FSU Jews being the highest in the world. The number remaining—estimates are 850,000 to 1.5 million—will be seriously diminished

by natural causes. Those who choose to remain seem to have every chance of building a fulfilling life. Only a fool would say flatly that all will be well for Jews there in the decade or two ahead. The odds look good, however. At the moment the FSU is living through economic and political strains, but many Jews in Russia indicate that economic concerns far outweigh political ones. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee will continue its significant role of helping elderly, poor Jews.

Economic Independence of the State of Israel

The government of Israel, as a result of a commitment made by the Netanyahu government and continued by the Barak government, is committed to receiving no further economic aid from the U.S. government. Bipartisan support for Israel's security suggests that military aid, thank God, is assured for the indefinite future. Israel has miraculously become the sixteenth or seventeenth strongest economy in the world, enjoying a per capita income only a bit lower than that of Britain. Its GDP has grown to just short of \$100 billion, and as a result Israel is no longer considered a third world country. In fact, the Israeli government in its concern for the viability and security of American Jews has allocated \$21 million to help support efforts geared to stemming the tide of assimilation in America!

Finalization of the Peace Process

Dream of dreams, hope of hopes, there seems to be a high probability that the next decade will see the peace process firmly in place in the Middle East. As a result, the whole Jewish communal enterprise related to Israel will have to adjust its priorities and roles. This suggests a far greater emphasis on the domestic agenda in America and on new ways of relating to Israel that will not automatically demand great amounts of money, extensive lobbies, and advocacy groups devoted to the external security of Israel. This redefinition has already begun with new approaches by the UJC.

*Continual Decline of Anti-Semitism
in America*

Eternal vigilance by Jews is a given for any sensible Jewish community. With the continued decline of anti-Semitism, however, those agencies and organizations that have made the defense of Jews their central focus will have to change their priorities. There could well be a renewed emphasis on mergers within the community relations field, particularly because their local federation counterparts also deal with Israel-related concerns.

**Accelerated Entrepreneurial Roles of
Service Agencies**

In recent years, the percentage of federations subventions to agency budgets has shrunk, in some instances quite dramatically, while these same agencies have been called upon to increase their services. Simultaneously, government has increasingly looked to the private sector to deliver services because of their perceived greater efficiency and effectiveness. Agencies whose mission coincides with government's priorities for the private sector should therefore continue to flourish. The most creative and progressive of the agencies do not pin their budgetary hopes on government largess alone. More and more design services within their agencies that can compete with the private sector. More will likely continue to create for-profit enterprises whose profits will go to support core services that continue to need extensive subvention.

Those agencies unable to cope with these new realities or whose mission calls for services not easily adjusted to these new realities will probably disappear or be absorbed by those that cope with these radically new financial underpinnings.

**Accelerated Partnerships with
Congregations**

The hallmark of Jews in America is physical mobility, creating Jewish communities throughout the country where no Jew ever lived before. It is inevitable that the first

institution created by these Jews is the synagogue. However, they bring other needs and interests with them and desire to develop everything from day camps to counseling services.

The challenge, which will continue into the twenty-first century at an even more accelerated pace, will be for the federated agencies to find creative ways to deliver services in partnership with congregations, for there is no other reasonable way to bring these services to where Jews live. The use of the Internet, websites, and teleconferencing will grow to reach even more distant communities. Distance learning will become normative, and teams of community specialists of all kinds must be developed and funded to help these communities remain connected. Traveling rabbis could be enlisted as representatives of the greater American Jewish community. They should be trained in how to bring together these dispersed Jewish clusters and make them feel part of the broader Jewish community.

As Jews become more and more dispersed, the "detached service" model of the former UJA will have to be extended more comprehensively. Traveling rabbis could become detached service fund raisers. I speculate that a significant number of the children of our wealthy contributions are living in some of these outlying areas.

**Diminution of the Role of JCSA and of
Some Member Associations**

JCSA has been seriously weakened by various factors. The vital role of such an organization as standard-setter for the field and a representative for its members at a multiplicity of levels has never been given sanction, either by the field or the American Jewish community. Other than the *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, it publishes no texts or other materials related to practice. There is little highlighting and honoring of practitioners nor interpretation to the community at large—Jewish and non-Jewish. Many of its affiliated associations have been weakened because their members see them

as non-functional. This next decade likely will see a continued decline as those who organized them leave the scene through retirement, inactivity, or death.

This bleak description is made painfully by one who labored mightily with others in ultimately futile efforts to update the focus and function of JCSA.

However, JCSA could fulfill its important role *if* today's Association leadership challenges the most powerful executives—both nationally and locally—to support a national professional organization. Today's CEOs possess much power and leadership skills, but ironically, they have no venue to fulfill their own needs or channel their influence in an ongoing way across the various settings in which they work. This can happen only *if* they can be convinced of the need for JCSA.

Growing Importance of the Schools and Programs of Jewish Communal Service

The future of the schools of Jewish communal service is more secure than ever. There is now a significant cadre of scholars and teachers, scores of books, and hundreds of papers focusing on the field. Much seminal research has been conducted, with many practical benefits. The combined budgets of the programs continue to grow and are in millions of dollars annually. A significant minority of the field are proud graduates of the programs and schools, and indeed some of the most prestigious posts are filled by the graduates.

However, the Jewish community as a whole and its leadership are not yet sufficiently aware of the schools' contributions to Jewish communal life. As volunteer leaders become increasingly aware of the difficulty of finding trained professionals, the importance of these schools will be recognized further *if* they in turn experiment in response to the rapid changes confronting Jewish life.

The schools and programs that will last in meaningful ways will do so by engaging in truly creative thinking and risk-taking. Graduates of these schools must be observed

to be palpably different from non-graduates, infused with Jewish knowledge and purpose grounded in practice and competence.

Increasing Power of Private Foundations

This past two decades has seen the exponential growth of Jewish-sponsored foundations, which now control hundreds of millions of dollars (see the articles by Wertheimer & Kent and Mendelson in this issue). Their founder-leaders wield enormous power in shaping tomorrow's Jewish agenda. The present focus of substantial numbers of foundations on Jewish identity and Jewish education has helped flesh out significant programmatic responses to Jewish continuity. As the founders themselves age, the future strength and funding of these foundations and the direction of their initiatives may be subject to radical change, for no one can predict what their progeny's priorities will be. Research suggests that radically different concerns often exist among the next generation.

Whatever the direction, their impact on the planning process within the federations will grow. One can only hope that disciplined and coordinated action will be the hallmark of these thoughtful, generous, and committed people.

CONCLUSION

The Jewish community's need for wise, competent, flexible, and creative staff is greater than ever. Yet, training and education in preparation for all aspects of Jewish life are often not perceived as important. Functions and roles of staff and volunteer leaders are often blurred; values frequently are neither shared nor appreciated as an important component to divining and shaping the agencies and services of tomorrow.

Because of the very velocity of change, many service providers of today will become obsolete. The CAJE and Funder's Network of today and tomorrow, together with the countless new initiatives and those not yet conceived, will probably supplement many of today's organizations.

Certainly, the revolutions of this past twenty years, including the growing presence and impact of women in the rabbinate and Jewish communal services in the broadest sense, the increased awareness of and acceptance of gays and lesbians in growing circles, and the enormous wealth and influence of Jews in the world, to name but a few, have helped shape the Jewish communal agendas and those who work as Jewish communal workers.

Our very definitions and understanding must therefore change. This is obvious when one rereads the Introduction to *Trends and Issues*: "Philanthropy and social services have been the areas in which the Jews of the United States have shown themselves at their best. Their chief instrument for these purposes has been The National Conference of Jewish Communal Service (now JCSA)."

Today, while social service concerns are an important component of Jewish communal service, a broader definition is needed.

All nonprofit services for Jews as individuals and as subunits in the greater Jewish community are engaged in Jewish communal service. Synagogues; other spiritually oriented institutions; educational services, formal and informal; training and educational institutions devoted to serving the Jewish community; publicly oriented action programs relating to all levels of government; musicians focused on Jewish life; Jewish libraries; other Jewish culture organizations; those focusing on Israel-Diaspora relations; Jewish outreach programs; camping services; services to the elderly at all levels of comprehensiveness; services to the family, however defined; leadership courses for volunteers and professionals; social services, vocational services, counseling, immigration services at all levels—these and probably more constitute Jewish communal service. All who serve do not define themselves as Jewish communal professionals. Yet, they all serve dimensions or parts of what we call the Jewish community, itself composed of anyone at any level who identifies him- or herself as being part of that community we broadly call the Jewish

people.

Decades ago Abraham Maslow wrote of a hierarchy of needs, of which food, shelter, and work were the elemental needs, with a series of steps culminating in the aesthetic and cultural fulfillment of people individually and through their institutions.

The Jewish community, as have Jews in general, has climbed this hierarchical ladder. Thus, the priorities of Jewish life, while not forgetting those in elemental need, are increasingly turning to the higher level.

This suggests that an organization such as the Jewish Communal Service Association will not have the power or play the central role it once did in serving Jews and Jewish professionals unless it redefines and reinvents itself as almost every other major Jewish organization and institution is in the process of doing.

This process of redefinition must establish the boundaries for membership for those defining themselves as Jewish communal professionals. JCSA could engage in a process of certification after grandfathering all who are so identified. Then, just as realtors and insurance people have done, JCSA should set standards that can be tested and renewed periodically after evidence of appropriate continuing education courses. The process may even encourage other affiliated groups to take parallel steps.

I chose the model of realtors or insurance underwriters instead of social workers in order to cast as wide a net as possible regarding prior educational preparation for work in the Jewish community and thus broaden the scope and scale to which JCSA could reach.

Thomas Friedman (1999) writes eloquently about the world of *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*—the Lexus as metaphor, being one of hundreds of thousands of cars built with 90 workers, while granting the need for the olive tree (the metaphor for values of clan, community, past, and memory) also to be nourished. Jewish communities should make the fullest use of the power and sharing of knowledge and tools in bringing efficiency and effectiveness to social institutions.

Never in history has a Jewish community had more wealth and power while playing such an important part in the shaping of the world itself, a number of its governments, and cultural, social and educational institutions. That new and ever-evolving world beckons to JCSCA, as it does to all of us who identify as Jewish communal professionals. How we play out our roles will depend upon the venues we perceive to be the most relevant in achieving our respective professional functions and tasks. If JCSCA is seen as helpful to the professional, it will flourish. It really is in our hands.

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