

CHANGE THE VISION, NOT THE MISSION!

Professional Leadership for the 21st Century

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We cannot allow any new vision statement to abridge or contract our mission by emphasizing one aspect of our religion and downgrading the other. As we confront the rapidity of change, we must have a compass that navigates us through change with a sense of continuity of mission.

As we celebrate both the centennial of the Jewish Communal Service Association, and the end of the twentieth century, I am struck by the paradoxical nature of the past hundred years. During that time, the Jewish people endured a massive relocation of its population, some voluntary and some forced, and suffered the greatest catastrophe in our history, the Holocaust. Yet, we established a Jewish State after 2000 years of exile and built the greatest Diaspora community in our history in the United States. At the same time, we worry about its survival, rather than celebrate its triumph.

The world seemed easier to define at mid-century than it does today. That was when the "greatest generation" (Brokaw, 1999) survived the Depression, fought World War II, built the United States into an economic powerhouse, and developed suburbia as synonymous with America. Although that generation failed to fulfill the promise of civil rights, its accomplishments are nonetheless unparalleled in this century. It believed in the power of government and institutions to help solve problems and reveled in community-based organizations that tried to solve communal problems. Its search for order out of the chaos of the Depression, World War II, and the Cold War was its beacon.

Today, the Baby Boomer Generation, sons and daughters of the "greatest generation," face a series of powerful and profound paradoxes. It distrusts government and institutions, yet will face an economic and public health crisis that only government can resolve, should Social Security and Medicare become underfunded. It is living through an

era of great prosperity. Yet, the gap between the wealthy, middle class, and poor is widening, not narrowing (Handy, 1994). Baby Boomers have helped make racism and discrimination unfashionable and promoted acceptance of peoples of color into a canon of political correctness while feeling uncomfortable with their own sense of Jewishness as a form of ethnic pride.

Boomers use the Internet to narrow communication barriers and build the global village. At the same time, this medium serves as a depository for racism, anti-Semitism, and asocial behavior. The Baby Boomer Generation is very concerned about global issues such as the environment, even as it is increasingly focused on more parochial concerns, viewing what happens in Israel as beyond the pale of active consciousness. Even as Boomers struggle for a sense of personal meaning, they witness the ravages of the sexual and cultural revolution of the 1960s and its products: a decline in personal and social responsibility as manifested by a geometric rise in illegitimacy and divorce and reduction in the rate of marriage (Blankenhorn, 1995; Bly, 1996).

The Baby Boom generation never seems to have enough time. Yet, there has never been so much time available, as people live longer and use less time to make and do things. "Busy people will, if they can afford it, spend money to save time, buy precooked meals, hire maids and child minders to mind the children" (Handy, 1994). I was told of a seminar on child-rearing practices run at a synagogue by a Jewish Family Service in which not a single parent attended. Instead, the nannies substituted for them. With the

bull market of the 1990s there are new highs in what the economist Thorstein Veblen called "conspicuous consumption." Yet, Jewish Baby Boomers still vote disproportionately Democratic, the party of the disadvantaged.

These trends, contradictory as they are, reflect the confusion of our age and its ever-rapid pace of change. Futurists tell us that more change occurs in one day in 1999 than in an entire year in 1900. Our job as professionals and as leaders is to be cognizant of the "schizophrenic nature" of our time and to manage these paradoxes.

PRIVATE VERSUS PUBLIC JUDAISM

The Jewish community, as is the allied profession of social work, is confronted with tension between the micro and the macro. In social work, there is tension between the social reform and advocacy efforts originally fostered by the Settlement House movement (the macro perspective) and the individual, ameliorative approach of personal visits by friendly visitors which evolved into the field of social casework (Specht, 1990).

Within the Jewish community, there is tension between individual faith and spiritual advancement versus what Jonathan Woocher (1986) calls *civil religion*. Civil religion has received a "bad rap" over the past few years because it is a religion practiced in the public domain, which does not necessarily embrace the rituals of day-to-day life within the household. We all know that it is difficult to sustain Judaism into the next generation without the power of ritual as practiced by the individual and transmitted to the family. Secular Judaism, as a force for continuity through socialism, the trade union movement, and the Yiddishist movement, has run its course in history and is not sustainable. The public and private agendas have run, all too often, on parallel paths without significant intersection. Yet, we as leaders must ensure that they not only intersect but also "synergize."

Support for Israel, an important component of civil religion, has been downgraded by some because it does not "sell" as well as it once did, particularly among those who are

personal seekers for whom attachment to a larger collectivity, the Jewish people, is an abstraction that they cannot feel or touch. As a result, while religious observances have remained stable or have even grown, ethnic attachments that advance civil religion and our public agenda, including support for Israel, have eroded (Cohen, 1998).

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

While it is an axiom of our profession that you must engage people initially "where they're at," it is no less our responsibility to help move them to embrace a broader vision of Judaism and the Jewish people. This is because it is eminently clear that without practicing and reinforcing the practice of rituals among ourselves and our families, there will be no Judaism. Yet, without practicing our civil responsibilities and engaging with Israel, there will be no Jewish people. Absent a concerted effort to reinforce this duality, the need for "Jewish" agencies and institutions will erode significantly because Baby Boomers value quality of services as being much more important than "ethnic packaging."

Our role as professional leadership is to address this existential concern in a creative and open manner, lest we rend asunder our magnificent contribution to our families, our people, and world civilization.

What is unique about Judaism is that it encompasses the attributes of a religion as well as ethnicity. This is because Judaism is a covenantal rather than a faith religion. A religion of faith must be universal because its tenets demand the assent of all. In contrast, a covenantal religion demands the fulfillment of obligation by a segment of the population. "The covenantal religion of Judaism gives the Jewish people the character of a community, while giving the Jewish community its character" (Roth, 1977). It is this covenant between God and Abraham that bound his descendants forevermore and gives the Jewish community its distinctiveness. Covenantal religion provides Jews with its religious character and its *raison d'être* as a

people. Religion and peoplehood are therefore intertwined into one whole (Roth, 1977).

This intertwining is reinforced by Samson Raphael Hirsch's (1989) commentary on Hillel's classic dictum in *Pirkei Avot*: "If I'm nothing to myself, who will be for me, and if I am for myself only, what am I?" Hirsch states that only through people's own efforts will they ever attain spiritual fitness and moral worth, which are the most essential attributes to which they can aspire. Once an individual attains this status, however, he or she must never say that it is solely through my own efforts that I have become what I am, and I will use my attainments for myself alone. Instead, the individual must, in selfless devotion, work actively to create and establish a sense of community that will increase the welfare of fellow Jews. Only then will the person become truly human in the image of God. Accordingly, attaining this sense of spiritual growth and satisfaction is only the first stage of a Jew's development. It must encompass the family, the local community, Israel, and all of humanity, if an individual is to fulfill Hillel's precept (Hirsch, 1989). This communitarian bias is also manifested in the sociological literature as the profession from individualism to lifestyle enclaves, to concern for the entire society as enunciated in the sociological classic, *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah et al., 1986).

Our job as communal professionals is to promote this growth so that all of our constituents will attain their highest potential. Our mission and that of Judaism and the Jewish people is to help our constituents grow in their own sense of Jewishness and Jewish involvement.

In this time of ever-rapid change, changing the visioning process of corporations and not-for-profit agencies has in itself become a cottage industry. However, one must never confuse creating a new vision with creating a new mission. The mission is constant; otherwise we lose our *raison d'être*. The vision, on the other hand, is not a statement of purpose but of future direction. Vision statements are very important and can excite an organization in its transformative process. But if you change an organization's mission it is no

longer the same organization and must, in effect, reconstitute itself entirely (Nanus, 1992). We cannot allow any new vision to abridge or contract our mission by emphasizing one aspect of our religion and downgrading the other. "The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing" (Laibovitz & Rosansky, 1996). As we confront the rapidity of change, we must have a compass that navigates us through change with a sense of continuity of mission.

OUR FUTURE AGENDA

The issues and concerns facing the Jewish community are multidimensional in character. Demographic changes, dispersion of our population, intermarriage, assimilation, and a sense of insularity are some of the principal challenges. We must, on the local level, build strategic alliances and partnerships among our agencies, synagogues, grass-roots organizations, Jewish Community Centers, educational institutions, and our professional associations and the federations if we are to reinforce connections to our people and our religion. We must teach the inspiring message of Judaism, not just acquiring skills for the *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*. We must engage adults in serious Jewish learning, including fulfillment of their communal responsibilities, so they can share their sense of excitement with their children. We must build synergy between all that our different institutions provide in a user-friendly manner. We must develop networks with easy access by consumers so they can avail themselves of the rich offerings that our communities provide. We must develop interpersonal and Internet contact among ourselves, Israelis, and Jews in other parts of the world so that we can make Jewish peoplehood into something tangible, rather than an abstraction. We must also penetrate our professional boundaries and work toward creating this synergy. The Jewish Communal Service Association is the best potential vehicle for achieving this goal, and the results of our recently completed demographic survey will be our compass toward achieving constructive change.

If you want to be a leader, you must simul-

taneously look forward into the future and backward into the past. By doing this, as Nathan Laufer (1999) stated, "The past becomes a refracting mirror out of which you can construct your vision of the future." We as professional leaders must communicate this message and serve as role models in actualizing our mission. As noted organizational theorist, Henry Mintzberg, wrote, "Key to the development of an organization ideology, in a new or existing organization, is leadership with a genuine belief in mission and a honest dedication to the people who must carry it out" (Cyert, 1990).

In order to adapt to change in a constructive manner, Michael Hammer (1995) reminds us we need both a wedge and a magnet. The wedge is the societal forces of change that prompt us to adapt; the magnet is the sense of mission and vision that would lead us to a new commitment for the future. One cannot occur with the other. And this vision has to be powerful, or it will not attract followers. If we lower our standards to achieve the lowest common denominator, then we will fail in the long run, because only powerful ideas are long lasting.

During the recent crisis in religious pluralism, many scoffed at the feasibility of achieving Jewish unity. But shall we at least not attempt to achieve greater progress towards achieving Jewish unity? Jewish identity after all is, as Norman Lamm (1995) states, "a constellation of values that are linked and integrated with each other, that defy attempts at subdivision or isolation, that is based on a vision of personal responsibility to God and his creatures, to an on-going commitment to study and moral self-improvement, and the interrelationship of all Jews in an over-arching community."

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY REMAIN THE SAME

A similar tension existed around the turn of the nineteenth century. A group of Reform rabbis in Pittsburgh separated any sense of nationalism or Zionism from Judaism, declaring that Washington is our capitol, not Jerusalem. In reaction, Rabbi Israel

Friedlaender, the founder of the Young Israel movement and a faculty member of the Jewish Theological Seminary, declared that Judaism was essentially a national religion.

It was a fatal mistake for the Jews of emancipation to achieve acceptance by characterizing Judaism as a creed, a summary of abstract articles of faith rather than a National religion....America has every chance of becoming the center of Judaism because the freedom enjoyed by the Jews is not the outcome of emancipation, purchased at the cost of national suicide, but the natural product of American civilization. The true American spirit understands and respects their traditions and associations of other nationalities (quoted in Karp, 1998).

Almost a hundred years later, the eminent historian Jonathan Sarna (1995) similarly envisages the future of the American Jewish community as

one that successfully balances Americanism and Judaism, a community steeped in two cultures, committed to the ideals of each, enjoying sustenance from both. Such a community, at once traditional and modern, stubbornly resistant to extremist and assimilationist tendencies and bound both to the precepts of Judaism and to the values of American life, would of necessity, periodically struggle with the conflicting demands of its dual heritage. That same heritage, however, would also prove its enduring glory.

We as leaders in the American Jewish community must strive to fulfill this mission, which resonates as deeply today as it did at the beginning of the century, reminding us of our duty, which we enunciated at the first convocation of our people: *na'aseh ve'nishma*, We will do and we will listen.

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