

## Family Change—Nursery School Response\*

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... a number of studies have shown that, with minimal training, parents can become effective teachers of their children, supplementing and strengthening the impact of whatever professional services are available and providing heightened continuity between the family and outside resources.

The following thoughts are shared as a working paper in which both listeners and readers are participants. Critical evaluation is invited and refinement through modification a must.

Indeed, in the words of Jung: "I do not forget that my voice is but one voice. My experience a mere drop in the sea. My knowledge no greater than the visual field in a microscope. My mind's eye a mirror that reflects a small corner of the world, and my ideas a subjective confession."

### I

We shall investigate the Jewish nursery school's response to changing family life styles in two distinct parts: a brief overview of family life in general—the Jewish family in particular—and subsequently, consideration of an hypothesis concerning the Jewish nursery school professional's response to the family condition.

"Families in America take many forms... Even federal agencies cannot agree on a definition on the family. The U.S. Bureau of Census defines the family as two or more people related by blood, marriage or adoption, who reside together. The Family Assistance Plan includes in its definition all relatives living in the home with children. The food stamp program is addressed to households, which may include unrelated as well as related persons."<sup>1</sup>

\* Presented at the JWB Institute for Nursery School Directors, New Jersey, 1976.

<sup>1</sup> Jeanette F. Reibman, compiler, "The Role of the Family in Child Development," Educational Commission of the States, Denver (1975).

The term *family* will be used in this brief article to refer to any adult arrangement that has as one of its functions the nurturing of an infant or young child.

The present condition of the American family which is often reflected in the Jewish families with whose young children we come in contact can be summarized as follows:

1. Advanced technology and the media's ability to create on-going information explosions have imposed the problem of freedom on family members. There is an increasing struggle between autonomy and a person's search for stability, involving new limits and structures.
2. Social and educational mobility has created a severe generation gap between members of the family. Children learn from their peers and adults learn from theirs. The competency for intra-family communication and meaningful interaction has been severely diminished.
3. "The placement of experts between parents and child in order to further a child's development has had the unintended effect of weakening the parent's confidence in his or her child-rearing abilities, encouraging abdication to the expert."<sup>2</sup>
4. Although, at best, families function as either companionship or colleague models in which relationships and shared decision-making are key factors, both the family and society, as reflected in institutions, seem to indulge the illusion that we are all still living at a time when families were economically

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

sufficient groups, transmitting knowledge and skills in a context of authority.

5. The assumption that the ability to raise children wisely is a natural talent possessed by most parents is not challenged by a growing body of evidence suggesting that couples experience a severe crisis in adjusting to the newborn in their lives. Adults express the feeling that practically nothing, in or out of school, prepared them to be mothers and fathers.
6. The combined forces of the "new narcissism" in which there is a swing from a concern for others toward the development of self (liberation movements, intermarriage and divorce trends included) and the high price of family living (the cost of raising one child to the age of 18 is estimated to be \$34,464. The figure climbs to \$98,361 if we add the mother's income loss and a college education.) tend to increase the amount of tension, frustration and anger in a family.

In addition to the aforementioned, Jewish families project the following concerns:

1. The Jewish family's motivating pride has been weakened by the thoughtful suggestion that the idealized Jewish family, laden with values and the unique components of caring and *nachas*, may well have emerged as the result of the ghetto or immigrant Jew's simple need for a survival setting rather than as an outgrowth of deep-seeded Jewish cultural imperatives. Furthermore, Jewish families reflect "popular" tendencies in such areas as delinquency, narcotics, poverty, cults, and so forth.
2. The participation of a Jewish family in Jewish education is so child-centered that when the children are no longer part of the family setting, the family adults are faced with the loneliness of immature notions of Jewish identity.
3. Jewish families suppress the creative potential to act out Jewish identity in

new modes because departing from the models of Jewish life which boast historic frequency proves to be guilt-laden behavior.

### II

Jewish Identity Education, a renewed and reinforced element of Jewish Center programming, has the potential to provide both an environment and process in which a meaningful response to the implications of the problems defined in the preceding paragraphs can be operationalized.

Indeed, the Jewish Center nursery school has a powerful opportunity as it is usually a family's first contact with a caring professional, other than the family doctor.

The Jewish Center nursery school and its professional staff can face the issues of family life styles while responding to the mandates of Jewish identity education, if the following foundation thoughts are accepted:

1. Jewish identity conditions an individual's perception of self and others so as to better understand the requisites for improving the quality of human life.
2. The Jewish component, when well integrated throughout the process of early childhood education, provides a useful form through which a youngster can acquire authenticity, significance and self-esteem.
3. The strengthening of a person's Jewish identity, by means of Jewish education, is necessary for the creative survival of the Jewish People.
4. The Jewish Center nursery can become a "therapeutic haven" in which both the young child and family adults are viewed as clients.

Family adults must be well integrated into the total process of the Jewish Center's nursery school program.

"Active parent involvement is critical... Not only does it enable the parent to understand and better meet the needs of his child, but it provides the child with a sense of continuity between the program and the home.

There is no doubt that even the infant responds to the inner harmony or lack of it between his parents and the society in which he lives. No sooner does he enter school, be it day care, nursery or kindergarten than he reacts to the slightest disagreement between parents (home) and education; as to values or standards of behavior. It can be extremely valuable for a child's self-image to see his mother or father in a position of authority and responsibility in the Center. Indeed, a number of studies have shown that, with minimal training, parents can become effective teachers of their children, supplementing and strengthening the impact of whatever professional services are available and providing heightened continuity between the family and outside resources."

The professional should not assume that the Jewish home, as we find it, is either unwilling or unprepared to participate in Jewish identity education. The fact that the American Jewish family may not promulgate the priorities of the Center's nursery school need not be interpreted as parental neglect. Perhaps the professional's concept of the word Jewish is invalid.

It may be that options for significant Jewish identity are being projected by the home, but the school has failed to develop a readiness to deal with the signals.

The principle for improving this situation is the acceptance by all concerned of the following observation by the late Abraham Cronbach: "Judaism is strong enough and broad enough to tolerate all the results of free inquiry, if only the spirit in which they are carried out is honest and the aim in view the furtherance of Jewish self-awareness as embodied in the concepts of *kedushah*, uniqueness, *tsedek*, justice, and *chesed*, loving-kindness.

It is time to stop sending learners home with Sabbath candles and seder plates so that the "impoverished family" can be saved.

In direct response to the six general statements concerning family life with which this paper began, early childhood profes-

sionals committed to Jewish identity programming might consider the following programming options:

1. The search, within a context of freedom, for maturity and integrity suggests an expanded use of open classroom techniques. Free play periods could be supplemented by a series of carefully structured learning centers which, when enriched with Jewish symbols and lifestyle props, provide an atmosphere of freedom and discovery. In such a setting, knowledgeable professionals and family adults could serve as objectifiers of individual and group life, helping young people and themselves find the component parts of Jewish identity best suited to their needs.
2. The diminished competency for intra-family communication and interaction can become the agenda for: (a) living room dialogues for small groupings of family adults, (b) professional development of practical workshops and guides that enable family adults to establish themselves as a self-reliant, primary unit for creative Jewish survival (holiday parties, bedtime stories, games, fine arts experiences, trips, etc.), (c) Shabbat afternoon programs which encourage the participation of adult males in the family.
3. The abdication of responsibility to professionals by family adults, the need for increased "parenting" competency and the problems of family tensions, frustrations and anger can be addressed by the early childhood professional who makes resources readily available for family, child, and adult counselling. In addition, the Jewish Center nursery should sponsor lectures and mini-courses for family adults in Judaica and Hebraica, as well as child development. These learning sessions should, in part, reflect the questions and developmental needs initiated and projected by the nursery school youngsters.

4. In order to enrich the family models in which adults and youngsters now participate, senior citizens should be involved in daily nursery school activities to promote a transgenerational environment. Furthermore, the professional should pursue curriculum planning with family adults in order to share adult needs with children, including (a) identification of self as a Jew, (b) sexist/non-sexist roles, (c) decision-making, (d) confronting evil and absurdity, but retaining confidence in goodness and order, (e) the tension between individuality and group values.

Finally, it is essential for the early childhood professional, working in the arena of Jewish identity education, to adopt a strategy of group process in which the cherished values of Jewish identity are constantly operating, creating a living dynamic framework for early childhood and adult activities.

A. What is the difference between life in a Jewish group and a non-Jewish group? The answer should be found in the style and context in which the professional and group "work out" needs. There must be a recognition of the Jewish mode of "doing." A Jewish group should operationalize Jewish identity. We must blueprint the value system and its sources. When there is "movement" in a group, normally the professional will use a middle-class value to evaluate the behavior. It is rarely confronted within the context of Jewish values.

B. The professional in the field needs the Jewish values framework systematized for immediate implementation. Theory is a luxury, productivity of the essence.

C. Words can serve to concretize cultural values as well as individual levels of consciousness. Throughout the continuum of Jewish experience a corps of unique words has emerged that can best be described as the *culture code*.

1. Although subject to translation, Jewish

*culture code* words possess a quality which, when expressed in Hebrew, transcends a dictionary definition.

2. They establish a foundation for interaction and goal-setting.
3. It is imperative that these *culture code* words be used in a broad-based environment with maximal frequency. Therefore, it becomes essential for clients and professionals to have the opportunity to acquire competency and fluency with this vocabulary.
4. There follows a sample listing of these *culture code* words.

*kodesh* . . . . . unique, separate, holy  
*chesed* . . . . . lovingkindness, favor  
*shalom* . . . . . fulfilling peace  
*tsdakah* . . . . . righteous outreach  
*chayroot* . . . . . freedom  
*mitsvah* . . . . . ought, obligation  
*derech erets* . . . . . wholesome behavior  
*chevra* . . . . . togetherness, friendship group  
*bitachon* . . . . . security, trust  
*chawchmah* . . . . . wisdom  
*cheshbon ha-nefesh* . . . . . introspection  
*b'reet* . . . . . covenant, contract

D. Thus the primary use of the *culture code* is for the professional to integrate the *code* along with the necessary academic background within a broad-based conception of Jewish identity: making the *culture code* so much a part of his/her apperceptive antennae that when operating in any group situation, the *culture code* can be deployed to objectify behavior, to move toward new behavior, and to stimulate different kinds of action. Judaism then becomes an approach to living and dealing with its problems.

The situation, problems and responses having been discussed, let us continue to pursue the challenge, the messianic ideal of the prophet Malachi: "... then shall the hearts of fathers and mothers be turned to the children and the hearts of the children be turned to their parents."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

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## The International Migration Factor: Causes and Consequences\*

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*In a world characterized by conscious awareness of the need and the will to bring into being national interdependence, the causes of international migration will be other than those caused by man's inhumanity to man ... among the consequences of such migration will be the broadening of man's horizons ...*

The right to leave one's country is a basic human right. Socrates regarded it as an "attribute of personal liberty." The Magna Carta incorporated it for the first time into national law. The French Constitution of 1791 provided for the same guarantee, and an act of the U.S. Congress in 1868 declared that "the right of expatriation is a natural and inherent right of all people, indispensable to the enjoyment of the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

In considering the right to leave, there is frequent association with the concept of a "refugee" and with the crossing of borders in order to seek asylum outside one's country or place of residence. However, it should be noted that there are situations (e.g. in both hemispheres) where some people within their country of residence or nationality are oppressed and uprooted from, or impeded from living in accordance with, their cultural-religious roots which are distinctive and different from the majority culture.

Whether the refugee is within an inhospitable country or elsewhere, his position is especially precarious. As Dr. Paul Weiss, formerly director of the Legal Division of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, pointed out:

This is due to the fact that in classic international law nationality is considered as the link between the individual and international law. . . . In the case of the refugee,

\* Based on a Paper presented at the General Conference of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, Leysin, Switzerland, December 6-11, 1976.

this link is not effective, it has been broken. . . Refugees may be stateless or not. It is not their nationality status but the absence of protection by a state which is a determining element of their refugee character. It would therefore in the case of refugees and stateless persons who have been called "flotsam, res nullius," "a vessel on the open sea not sailing under any flag," be more proper to speak of *de facto* and *de jure* unprotected persons.<sup>1</sup>

Political, religious or economic oppression, and military pressure are among the principal elements creating the refugee, who, according to the internationally accepted definition, is:

an individual who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or, who, not having a nationality of being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.<sup>2</sup>

The plight of the refugee has been perceptively described as being:

Isolated in an anarchy that he did not create, he is overwhelmed by his sense of not belonging. He lost his social status when he lost his economic status. Deteriorating in the

<sup>1</sup> Paul Weiss, *Human Rights and Refugees*, 1966, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Revised 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Article 1(2).