

THE JEWISH EDUCATION CONFERENCE

BY EMANUEL GAMORAN

THE fundamental problem of the Jew in America in the years to come will be that of organizing and vitalizing his inner life. With the limited immigration of Jews into this country and with, it is to be hoped, a decreasing need of Jewish relief in other parts of the world, the center of gravity will gradually be shifted from philanthropic effort to cultural and educational work. Evident as is this process which is taking place before our very eyes, how best to guide it is not so simple.

Jewish immigration to this country in large masses began only in the eighties. The influx was so sudden that we have not to this day succeeded in adjusting ourselves to the new situation. Especially have we failed to take care of the cultural needs of American Jewry. We are practically twenty-five years behind in our educational work, and we have therefore lost almost a whole generation. American Jewry must now strive to make up for lost time.

Briefly stated, the problem is that of assuring the "spiritual renewal" of Jewry in America. An adequate solution of this problem involves a great many steps. First of all it implies large finances. Secondly it involves the provision of Jewish education for all the children of school age. Then, there are the several hundred thousand Jewish adolescents that at present are practically entirely neglected. Our attempts at training Jewish teachers are still in their infancy, and must be made much more intensive if we wish to make certain that our

schools will be properly directed. Finally provision is to be made for Jewish adult education. We have failed miserably to take advantage of the leisure time of our adults and have thereby missed the opportunity of bringing to them those values of Jewish life and thought which might beautify and enhance their life. To parallel all of this work there must come the creation and development of content material, the preparation of syllabi, text books and books for general reading, as well as discovery and experimentation in the field of methodology.

At present only about 200,000 Jewish children of elementary school age are receiving *some* Jewish education in this country while half a million more are not receiving any Jewish education.

The financial side of this very difficult problem will for many years to come absorb the energy and the attention of leading Jewish educators, social workers and far-sighted intelligent laymen, but the problems of content and method of organization and standardization will remain primarily the task of the professional Jewish educator alone.

Only fifteen years ago it would have been necessary to explain the term "professional educator." Jewish education as a profession is in itself a new thing. Today there are a number of men, still a handful, it is true—but their number is on the increase—devoting themselves to Jewish education as a profession in some executive capacity or other. If we add to this

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the increased number of principals of Jewish schools who are beginning to regard Jewish education as their life work and the many teachers that are coming to realize that teaching in Jewish schools is a task requiring both Jewish knowledge and pedagogic training, faith in the Jewish future, and an intelligent professional attitude, the total number of professional workers in Jewish education is by no means inconsiderable.

With this increase in professional workers in mind, the Associate Staff of the Bureau of Jewish Education, headed by Dr. Samson Benderly, felt it expedient to call the National Conference on Jewish Education in Cleveland. For the first time in the history of American Jewry professional educators from all parts of the country came together for the purpose of inter-changing thought on the problems of Jewish education. For the present, membership in the organization is limited to the following:

1. Those in executive charge of a community Board of Education in communities where the population of Jewish children is 2,000 or more.
2. Those in charge of a teachers' training school.
3. Those in charge of a Hebrew High School.
4. Those in executive charge of a large department in a national organization such as the Jewish Welfare Board, the United Synagogue of America, the Department of Synagogue and School Extension, Young Judea, and others.

5. Persons whose professional service and personal contributions to Jewish Education entitle them to affiliation in this organization.

There is no doubt, however, that as the organization develops it will branch out and include more and more of all the forces in this country interested in the preservation and enhancement of Jewish life in America. For the present the professional group composing this organization will proceed mostly along the lines of research in the theoretical and practical problems of Jewish education, and standardization of certain important phases of Jewish educational work.

Though many of the people in the present group are executive workers in charge of Jewish education in some of the largest Jewish communities in this country, they will, as this first conference in Cleveland has well indicated, interest themselves equally in problems of content and method. At the same time the practical every-day problems will not be neglected. In fact, one of the aims of the organization will no doubt be to overcome the difficulties that beset an executive in any community who easily becomes absorbed in the details and does not have the opportunity to think of the more fundamental implications of his work.

As an illustration of some of the practical discussions involved in standardization, we might take the question of teachers' salaries. A paper on this subject was read by Mr. I. S. Chipkin, Educational Director of the Jewish Education Association. In his paper he amassed a great many facts

showing the changes that have taken place in the salaries of Jewish teachers in recent years, and pointed out to what extent the salaries of Jewish teachers are still not commensurate with the standard of living. Another attempt along the lines of standardization was the paper read by Mr. Ben Rosen, Director of the Bureau of Jewish Education in Philadelphia, entitled "New Stones for Old." In this he pointed out the steps that ought to be taken in a community which wishes to plan intelligently the location and construction of buildings for Jewish school purposes. His study attempts to answer four questions:

1. What is the trend of the general population in the community.
2. What is the trend of the Jewish population?
3. In what section of the city is the growth of population most marked?
4. What is the probable Jewish population in that section in the next ten years?

Thus the community in Philadelphia, before spending its \$800,000, on Jewish school buildings, is making sure that the buildings will be located in places where they will serve most, instead of just haphazardly putting up buildings in neighborhoods which may in a short time become non-Jewish.

Not only is it necessary to determine where the buildings are to be located, but also what type of building would be most suitable. Should the building be small or large; what facilities should it have; what is to be the nature of the site, the internal

structure, including stairways, corridors and basement; the service systems, including ventilation and fire protection, and many other detailed features? These are questions that must be answered. Just think for a moment how many miles away these considerations are from the physical facilities of the Heder which was transferred from eastern Europe to this country, and which has not been altogether uprooted to this day. Many a Melammed would look with consternation at the list of standards for a modern Jewish education center drawn up by Rothschild and Rosen for the new buildings in Philadelphia.

Another illustration of the practical value of the National Conference on Jewish Education may be found in the type of paper presented by Mr. A. H. Friedland, Director of Hebrew Education in Cleveland, on "Achievement Tests in Hebrew." How many of those connected with Jewish schools have taken seriously the problem of measuring achievement in Hebrew? A boy usually entered the Talmud Torah and studied for a number of years. If anyone wanted to find out whether he knew his work a portion of the Humosh was presented to him for translation. That constituted the test. It never occurred to anybody that such a test was not quite scientific. Who needed a scientific test? And yet today Jewish education is surely working in the direction of creating a new science, the science of Jewish education. For example, this is the procedure which Friedland used in constructing his list of the first thousand basic Hebrew words. He took nine text books for the first year of Hebrew, and made a composite list of all the words contained in the nine

books. He then asked fifteen teachers to make up their own lists, and used the composite lists of the teachers. The final list was then made on the basis of the two.

Now, as Friedland correctly pointed out, "Comparing such an attempt with the method used by Professor Thorndike, where millions and millions of words were involved, the procedure naturally appears very inadequate." Bearing in mind the work of Dr. Benderly, Rosen, Chipkin and Friedland, we may conclude that while some of the things done may not be important as achievements, may be "inadequate", they are important as indications of the direction in which Jewish education is going.

Similar to the standards worked out by Mr. Rosen, and supplemented by Mr. Louis Kraft in his able discussion on the subject, and parallel to the work of Mr. Chipkin on teachers' salaries, material has to be prepared on teachers' qualifications. In a general way, we know at present what a Hebrew teacher ought to know, but that knowledge is by no means in a state in which it can be accurately applied by the principal of the Hebrew school, nor can we have an adequate system of uniform salaries without standardizing teachers' qualifications.

There are many other practical pieces of work that this conference can do, or initiate, and then stimulate other bodies to execute. Several tasks have already been agreed upon as

immediate. Most important amongst these will be the publication of monographs in various fields of Jewish educational research. All the executives have agreed to the exchange of published and unpublished material of value between the various bureaus of education in the different communities. This will lead to improvements in the local work of the various communities. The conference also decided to urge the various Hebrew high schools and the teachers' training schools to send selected students for at least one year of additional study in the Teachers Seminary in Jerusalem, or at the Hebrew University, and to interest themselves in the advancement of teachers' salaries so that they keep pace with the standard of living.

The outstanding features of the Cleveland Conference were the sessions held on Wednesday afternoon at which Dr. Benderly and Professor Kaplan presented their ideas on "Curriculum Making." It is impossible within the short space of this paper, to convey to the reader an idea of the inspiration of this session. But, both the papers and the discussion that followed showed that here was a group by no means limiting itself to the mechanics of the problems in which they are engaged, but one that is interested in the fundamental questions, in seeking new ways and in finding them. The search, it is hoped, will lead to the development of a philosophy of Jewish life in America with a corresponding Jewish school system.