PREPARATION OF WORKERS FOR CASEWORK PRACTICE IN THE JEWISH AGENCY *

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ALMOST twenty years ago, William Posner presented a paper jointly written by us on the utilization of Jewish factors in the casework process. In that paper we concluded that "the Jewishness of the agency provides an element which the Jewish client can use in giving expression to feeling and working upon his problems in using help for change. The worker in the Jewish agency must be aware of Jewishness, develop sensitivity to its varied expressions and be prepared to use it in the helping process."[1] During these intervening years a great deal has happened. Until his untimely death seven years ago, I know that William Posner was centrally concerned in finding ways of making the Jewish dimension more meaningful for casework practice. During these years, as I have worked at different levels in both Jewish and non-sectarian settings as well as in private practice, I too have repeatedly seen the confirmation of the conclusion we reached in that paper. Beyond that I have come to feel that the worker's own attitude about Judaism in general or about his own Jewishness plays a vital role in determining the extent to which he can utilize it in his practice. He requires specialized knowledge, a particular sensitivity and a degree of self-awareness about his Jewish identity—or lack of it—to help others effectively. It is the task of the Jewish community to help social workers acquire that background if we are to render maximum service to the clients utilizing our agencies.

While my major task today is to consider some of the factors involved in the preparation of staff for serving in Jewish casework agencies, it is important first to indicate clearly some of the assumptions on which such preparation is based. Education does not occur in a vacuum but rather is affected profoundly both by its underlying goals and by the contextual setting in which it occurs. Primary among the values from which I build, is the conviction that the central source for growth in a democratic society is not that form of "egalitarianism" which wipes out all difference, but rather a pluralism through which the unique contributions to the whole of many diverse faiths, cultures and social institutions are made possible by the opportunity given to each to develop to the fullest degree compatible

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1 William Posner and Saul Hofstein, "The Use of the Agency's Jewishness in the Casework Process," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3 (1950), p. 332.

with the coexistence of others.[2] Difference and uniqueness, rather than being a deterrent to the democratic process, furnish the source of its vitality and creativity. It follows from this that there is a positive value in the maintenance of Jewish continuity not only for the Jews, but for the country as a whole.

Here I echo Herbert Aptekar's impatience with the defensiveness of some Jewish leaders and his affirmation of a creative role for the Jewish social agency.[3] The Jewish casework agency has as its primary responsibility service to the Jewish community. In fulfilling that responsibility creatively through developing whatever services are necessary for the Jewish community, it demonstrates what can be accomplished in the tremendous task of, what Ruth Smalley has described as, "releasing the power in the individual" for both self-fulfillment and contribution to society.[4] In that task it affirms its role as part of the Jewish heritage. That such specific needs are present has been amply demonstrated by various studies as well as by the long waiting lists in most Jewish casework agencies. Talking of the contrary suggestion that Jewish agencies direct themselves to meeting general community needs, Samuel Cohen comments: "Even if every Federation dollar went fully to such programs, it would constitute a drop in the bucket. We would in this manner solve but few problems and, I fear, largely at the expense of serving the Jews who want and need us."[5]

Affirmation of the Jewish agency's primary responsibility to the Jewish community does not imply isolation. Such isolation would run counter to our heritage and tradition of sharing and responsibility. Our very potential for contributing significantly to the solution of broad communal problems lies in our ability to demonstrate, through experimentation and continuous development, the kinds of services and professional skills which can be most helpful in meeting human needs within a particular community. Many of the services now generally in use in serving families, children and the aged were first pioneered by Jewish agencies.[6]

Within the broad framework outlined above, the task of preparing caseworkers for service in the Jewish agency is a dual one. Through their formal education and through agency training, Jewish social workers must acquire the knowledge, methods, skills, values, self-awareness and discipline that represent the best the profession of social work can offer. But that is not enough. If they are to be of maximum helpfulness to the Jewish client, they must be helped to identify with the Jewish purposes of the agency and to respond to these aspects and needs of their clients which are part of their Jewishness. It has been asserted that there are no specific "Jewish" needs and that there is no "Jewish case-

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[2] For a definition of these terms and a fuller discussion of their implications, see: Benjamin B. Ringer, *The Edge of Friendliness: A Study of Jewish-Gentile Relations.* New York: Basic Books, 1967, pp. 181–184.

[3] Herbert H. Aptekar, "The Role of the Jewish Service Agency in American Society," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service,* Vol. XLIII, No. 1 (1966), pp. 56–64.

[4] Ruth Smalley, *Theory for Social Work Practice.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1967.

[5] Samuel Cohen, "Jewish Casework Agencies and the Jewish Community," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service,* Vol. XLIV, No. 1 (1967), p. 81.

[6] For a more detailed discussion of the role of the Jewish Casework Agency see papers by Callman Rawley and Maurice Bernstein in that same issue. See also: Irving Greenberg and David Zeff, "The Jewish Casework Agency: Problems and Prospects in a Time of Paradox," *Idem,* Vol. XLII, No. 1 (1965), pp. 49–59.

work."[7] It is true, that if we abstract all of the factors which make each person individual and different, we emerge with a set of generalizations about an underlying process which is truly universal, which characterizes man and makes him as a species distinct from other animals. Indeed, if we carry this to an extreme, we can deny even the uniqueness of man and find a universality of process that is common to all of nature.[8] At the core of casework helping, however, stands the conviction that each individual possesses a uniqueness of self which must somehow be engaged if any helping is to be achieved. Whatever meaning Jewishness may have for the individual and his way of coping with that in a world which is overwhelmingly non-Jewish constitute essential aspects of his uniqueness.

Self identity is a complex phenomenon involving both deep internal processes as well as the relation of the self to other selves and to the surrounding socio-cultural world. It is not our purpose here to analyze the nature of identity. Suffice it to note that important aspects of that identity are how one feels about the fact that he is Jewish, what actions and associations that feeling leads to and how he copes with the reactions of the outer world to his Jewishness. In every individual, the dilemmas of growth focus often around those aspects of self which constitute his difference from others.

The existence of significant differences in many areas between Jews and non-Jews has been confirmed repeatedly by research in the social sciences. In a review of social science research on Jews, Victor Sanua points out that significant differences were found in relation to values, associations, acculturation and identification, social mobility, political orientation and psychological adjustment and pathology. He points out, for instance, that: ". . . either because of different environmental conditions or possibly because of heredity, Jews seem to have a different pattern of physical or mental illness."[9] The recent Lakeville studies by Sklare, Greenblum, and Ringer similarly conclude that, in a community which might be characterized by a considerable degree of assimilation and the presence of a relatively high percentage of third and fourth generation Jewish families, significant differences from the Gentile appear in relation to activities, recreation, work, values and choice of friends. They note further that, even among those Jews who are most strongly assimilationist in orientation and least associated with Jewish organizations, the friendship circles are made up primarily of other Jews. Repeatedly the observation is made that Jews feel more comfortable with other Jews and that they are able to achieve a level of intimacy with other Jews that they rarely achieve with a Gentile.[10] While there is need for increased research in this area, the evi-

[7] A position somewhat similar to this is to be found in: Samuel Lerner, "The Meaning of Jewishness to Clients and Its Effect on Casework Service," *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, Vol. XXVII, No. 4, pp. 371 to 381. See also discussions of that paper by Maurice Bernstein and Samuel Grand in that same issue.

[8] The universality of process in nature and its implications for social work is considered in some detail in: Saul Hofstein, "The Nature of Process: Its Implications for Social Work," *Journal of Social Work Process*, Vol. XIV, 1964, pp. 13–52.

[9] Victor D. Sanua, "A Review of Social Science Studies of Jews and Jewish Life in the United States," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (Fall, 1964), pp. 71–83.

[10] The Lakeville Studies. Vol. 1: Marshall Sklare and Joseph Ringer, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier: A Study of Group Survival in the Open Society.* Vol. II: Benjamin Ringer, *The Edge of Friendliness: A Study of Jewish-Gentile Relationships.* New York: Basic Books, 1967.

dence from a variety of sources already confirms the importance of Jewishness as an essential aspect of identity.

What then are the implications of this conclusion for the social worker, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, who undertakes the task of serving Jewish clients whether in a Jewish or non-sectarian agency? He certainly should have the knowledge that is already available about Jews in all of their diversity. Similarly, he should be familiar with the value base which underlies their behavior and governs many of the choices they make. At a deeper level, he should be familiar with their heritage and the social forms created out of that heritage. Man can realize his inner needs fully only through relating to some external social system and his ultimate fulfillment depends on the degree to which he can project something of his own uniqueness through a social form. For the Jew, his heritage and the various ways that heritage is realized contemporaneously provides an important source for such projections. A heritage as rich, as extended and as diverse as the Jewish heritage gives rise to a diversity of forms through which it is expressed. The worker concerned with helping Jews must develop an awareness of that diversity and become knowledgeable at least with the variety of expressions of Jewish identity, both religious and secular, most common among the clients he serves.

Knowledge alone does not make a caseworker. Central to the helping process is the manner in which the caseworker uses himself and the discipline with which he is able to control his own feelings and attitudes so that they do not intrude into his relationship with his client. He must be able to respond to the client with *chesed* or loving-kindness, yet he must be clear enough about his own feelings and attitudes to be able to deal objectively with the client's needs and problems. It is this polarity in the demands practice makes of the caseworker, which creates one of the real dilemmas in serving Jewish clients.

There is a certain tendency in all of us to cherish what is familiar and to reject what is unfamilar. As Lewin has shown, this can be a particularly difficult problem in any minority group trying to assimilate itself into a majority group.[11] While it has often been affirmed that a Jewish worker has a particular empathy for the Jewish client, such sympathy may be difficult to attain if that client has expressed his identity in a manner radically different from that of the worker. I think of a worker, thoroughly assimilated and himself quite separated from the religious expression of Judaism, who kept criticizing an Orthodox mother because of the pressures her son's daily observance of *kaddish* was creating for him. Apparently, attuned as this worker was to personality dynamics, he could not understand the nature of the sense of obligation for his departed father in the youngster himself or the guilt which would be generated were he to fail to observe this *mitzvah* which was so central to his own value system. Another worker, herself Orthodox, was caught up in her own revulsion and rejection of a Reform couple whose sexual practices violated her own values. Many other illustrations come to mind, but these must be sufficient. Somehow the education of the Jewish social worker must help that worker develop an awareness of the particular nature of his own Jewish identity and the areas of conflict and tension which that identity creates for him. Having achieved that, he can then learn to accept and understand the variety of forms of that identity in

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[11] Kurt Lewin, "Psycho-sociological Problems of a Minority Group," in *Resolving Social Conflicts*. New York: Harper and Bros., 1948, pp. 145–158.

others. Only then can he begin to achieve the difficult balance between empathy and objectivity so essential to good casework.

Basic also to sound casework practice, is the ability to identify with the purpose of the agency and to embody or personalize that purpose for the client. It follows that the worker in a Jewish agency must relate himself to the Jewish aspects of that purpose. Unfortunately, there are agencies which, for one or another reason, tend to overlook or even to deny that they derive any specific purpose from their Jewish auspices other than to identify the major source of their funds. Whether acknowledged or not, the Jewish agency does have a purpose related to the Jewish community.[12] To relate oneself realistically to those Jewish purposes, it is necessary to know something about them and to see them in the context of the overall structure of community services. It is further desirable to have some awareness of how those purposes derive from their sources in Judaism.

Thus the caseworker in the Jewish agency, in addition to the generalized base of knowledge for casework in any setting, must have acquired the particular knowledge regarding Judaism and its variety of expressions in individual and group behavior and of the Jewish communal structures within which his agency is based. The appropriate use of that knowledge for helping requires further that the worker develop clarity about his own Jewish identity, his own conflicts and tensions related to that. He must also attain the ability to discipline himself in this area for the benefit of his clients. No non-sectarian school, no matter how thorough and comprehensive its educational program may be, can provide all that we have outlined.

For most workers in the Jewish agencies, therefore, there is an educational process demanded beyond the level of their professional education. For many, the effort to obtain that background becomes an individual effort. Jewish agencies must examine whether they have taken sufficient responsibility for helping their workers develop fully, what we might term, the Jewish base for their practice. It would require another paper to outline fully what might go into such a specialized agency training program. Seminars in Jewish content would be only part of it. Essential too would be the utilization of the supervisory process to clarify the aspects of Jewish identity noted above.[13]

Awareness of this need for specialized education for Jewish social workers has been present to some degree within the Jewish community. The early Graduate School of Jewish Social Work pioneered notably in this attempt. Later, the Training Bureau for Jewish Communal

[12] The issue of the sectarianism of the Jewish social agency has had considerable recent discussion and has been the subject of two doctoral dissertations. See: Arnold Gurin, *The Functions of a Sectarian Welfare Program in a Multi-Group Society: A Case Study of the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit,* Unpublished dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1965. Alfred Kutzik, *The Social Basis of American Jewish Philanthropy,* Unpublished dissertation, Brandeis University, 1967. Ben Halpern, "Sectarianism and the Jewish Community," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service,* Vol. XLIII, No. 1 (Fall, 1965), pp. 6–17. Manheim S. Shapiro, "The Dilemmas of Jewish Agencies—Real and Unreal," *idem.,* pp. 18–26. Arnold Gurin, "Sectarianism a Persistent Value Dilemma," *idem.,* Vol. XLIII (Fall, 1966), pp. 38–48. Isidore Sobeloff, "Jewish Rationale and Sectarianism," *idem.,* pp. 49–55.

[13] To my knowledge there has been only one paper which has considered the role of the supervisor in helping the worker deal with the Jewish dimension either in himself or his clients. Sarah Lederman. "The Supervisor's Responsibility in Relation to Jewish Factors in Child Placement," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly,* Vol. XXIV, No. 4 (June, 1948), pp. 380–384.

Service laid substantial foundations for developing, at least on a leadership level, Jewish communal workers. More recently, and for the first time under Jewish university auspices, the Wurzweiler School of Social Work of Yeshiva University has undertaken the task of developing an educational program which would graduate social workers who are competent to function in any setting as well as possessing the special requisite knowledge, skill and self-awareness necessary for Jewish communal service. We are far from having the answers as to how to achieve this dual goal. Nor is there unanimity within our faculty regarding our goals in relation to the Jewish component.

We do attempt to provide in addition to the core curriculum required of all schools of social work, a special Jewish concentration, central to which is a course sequence which covers the areas of Jewish Communal Service and organization, the Jew in American Society and Jewish Social Philosophy.[14] While these courses are basically knowledge-centered, they do collectively provide the student with an opportunity to explore the meaning of Judaism to himself as an individual. As he becomes aware of the diversity of expressions of Jewish identity, he also has an opportunity to come to grips with his own reactions to this diversity. We have had considerable subjective evidence that, to a degree, this aim of increased self-awareness in relation to Jewish identity is achieved by our students. Objectively, in a study not specifically directed to this topic, Dr. Esther Appelberg of our faculty, found that seven of the twelve students involved in the study had "changed their attitude in a positive way toward Judaism."[15] The fact that five or 42 percent reported no change indicated that we are not achieving our aim as fully as we might.

It is clear from our previous discussion that content courses alone are not sufficient to achieve the clarification of Jewish identity which I have suggested to be basic to preparation for casework in a Jewish agency. In a school whose purpose, in part at least, is preparation for Jewish communal service, that purpose should perfuse all of its courses regardless of the specific content. Depending on the particular instructor and the subject, the aspects of Judaism relevant to the subject may be introduced in any class.

In the casework practice course, for example, student records are used for class discussion. Sometimes students may be encouraged specifically to introduce case material which reflects the utilization of Jewish factors. As instructor and students examine case records, factors reflecting Jewish identity problems, or the Jewish aspects of transference and counter transference, may be elaborated. Jewish values and tradition may be brought into the discussion as they relate to casework principles.

In one instance, a student's record included a reference to a woman with a non-Jewish name who had come into a Jewish hospital wearing a Jewish star. The record noted this fact without any comment about the student's reaction to it or what she did with it. Discussion of this incident opened up consideration of the way in which clients might use the identification with the agency as a means of reenforcing their request for

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[14] For a detailed discussion of the educational program of the Wurzweiler School of Social Work of Yeshiva University see: Charles S. Levy. "The Special Purpose of the Jewish School of Social Work," *The Jewish Social Work Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Fall, 1963), pp. 7–16.

[15] Esther Appelberg, "The Mother as a Social Work Student," *Social Work Education Reporter*, Council on Social Work Education, Vol. XIII, No. 4 (Dec. 1965), p. 5.

service. As it happened, once the questions were raised, this incident developed as significant for the casework process. The client was Jewish but had married a Gentile who had subsequently deserted. Her own guilt was such that she was fearful that the Jewish hospital might not accept her. How the worker dealt with these factors was crucial to the development of the case. Related to the client's fear was her question whether her child by this unhappy marriage was Jewish. Knowledge of the Halachic law in this regard was certainly of importance for the worker in this case. Question may well be raised whether, had this not been a Jewish school, these matters would still have been discussed. Possibly but not likely unless the instructor happened to have the knowledge necessary and the insight to elaborate it. The consideration of such Jewish factors, naturally leads to a discussion of the importance of cultural, religious and social factors in all casework relationships.

The Jewish purpose of the school should ideally be realized as well in the field work placement, particularly in a practice-centered educational program. While it might be argued that commitment to Jewish purpose and values should be a condition for accepting a field work placement at a Jewish school, because of various factors this has not been entirely the case at Wurzweiler. In order to provide for our students' experience in the full range of social work service, we have utilized some non-sectarian agencies which offered services not specifically available in a Jewish agency. Certainly, whether the student is in a Jewish or non-Jewish agency, it is in the field work practice experience that all of the factors we have been discussing should be brought together. The field instructor, whether Jewish or non-Jewish, should be in a position, through the use of his supervisory process, to help the student to become aware of how his own Jewish identity and understanding can facilitate or hinder the help he is learning to render. The following experience provides an instance of how that can be accomplished.

A student placed in a state psychiatric hospital was working with a father who objected to the separation from his psychotic son and his son's treatment in the hospital. Recognizing the worker as Jewish, through the use of Yiddish terms and a plea to her Jewishness the father sought to enlist her as an ally against the "*goyim*" and "*shwarze*" who were charged with the care of his son. He was convinced that the "anti-Semitic" attitudes of the attendants were adversely affecting his son. He sought to enlist the student's assistance against the treatment staff. The student's reaction was one of indignation against the "bigotry" this father was showing. She was so absorbed with containing her own reactions, that she failed to recognize the feeling the father was conveying or to deal with his difficulty in letting go of his son and coping with the guilt he felt for his son's illness and hospitalization. The student's recording reflected her own conflict in the area of Jewish identity as well as her rejection of the unassimilated Jew who continued to present so many of the characteristics which she and her family had so painfully overcome.

As it happened, her faculty advisor made his field visit before this particular record was discussed with the field instructor, a highly skilled and perceptive non-Jewish worker. The field instructor had noted this incident in the record but was not certain how to deal with it with the student. In the faculty advisor's conference with her, he helped to clarify the significance of the material both in relation to the client and in relation to the problem of the student's own Jewish identity. They agreed that the

field instructor would deal with it in relation to the student's practice, while the faculty advisor in his next conference with the student would look at it in relation to the student's attitudes towards Judaism. We do not have time to go into the content of these conferences. Of interest is the student's own comments in her closing summary:

> Mr. N. initially tried very hard to identify with my power via our shared Jewishness. It was "we Jews against "them"—"shwarze" (Negro) attendants, not-so-smart residents, and others. Rather than connect to his feelings about the separation I overreacted in a strained, ungiving manner to his overt ethnocentricity, which I found personally repugnant. Mr. L. tried very hard to "divide and conquer" the treatment team through me. . . . While I remained firm against these attempts, I was gradually able to give myself to him in various ways: I accompanied him on walks to the elevator; I acknowledged our common Jewish experiences and knowledge where this seemed appropriate; I helped to arrange the supervised visits with his son. . . . Gradually I became a kind of "good" Jewish mother who "fed" him with interest in him as a person and he responded with pleasure.[16]

From denial and rejection because of her own Jewish identity conflict, this student has shifted to a sensitive use of Jewish factors in helping a deeply distressed parent find a way of participating in the treatment of his disturbed son. This incident illustrates how school and agency working together helped a student come to grips with an aspect of her own attitude toward Judaism and find a way of using it sensitively in her practice.

It would be good to report that this kind of cooperation in the use of the Jewish component, occurs in all instances. Dr. Solomon Green in reporting an effort to seek "the Jewish dimension of field instruction" concludes that there is "ambiguity" in casework agency placements about the use of the Jewish dimension and that there is "little definiteness about how Jewish social work education for practice may be best achieved in agency field placements." Some field instructors were found unable to help students to use or discover the Jewish dimension of their social work practice. His final conclusion is that "the school will need to provide more help to its field instructors to heighten their recognition of what Jewish dimensions exist."[17] In a sense this final conclusion constitutes a challenge not only to the Wurzweiler School but to all Jewish social work agencies. As a Jewish school of social work, we do have a particular reason and responsibility for providing leadership to the field in this regard.

There is another dimension to the preparation of caseworkers for serving Jews that is not easy to define, a dimension suggested by Dean Morton Teicher:

> ". . . a Jewish social worker is one who has a passionate, zealous sense of commitment. He is a Jewish social worker by virtue of his unabashed affirmation of his own Jewishness and his determination to help others to affirm their Jewishness, to give it meaning and ever to deepen both the affirmation and meaning. To be a Jewish social worker means to have a sense of mission which informs and enhances all he does."[18]

In addition to teaching the casework student to utilize the Jewish dimension in his practice, we look to him to further Jewish continuity through his practice and thus add to the Jewish heritage. In

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[16] For the purpose of confidentiality no names have been provided and all identifying material disguised. The writer is indebted to the student, the field instructor and the agency for the use of this material.

[17] Solomon H. Green, "Seeking Jewish Dimensions in Field Instruction," *The Jewish Social Work Forum*, Vol. V, No. 1, (Spring, 1968), pp. 15 and 16.

[18] Morton I. Teicher, "On the Meaning of Being a Jewish Social Worker." Unpublished memorandum, p. 5.

an earlier paper, I noted that "coming to the Jewish agency can constitute an experience with Jewishness."[19] While I referred there to the client, we can add that working for the Jewish agency can represent for the worker a role in furthering Jewish continuity. Commitment of this kind cannot be achieved by education or supervision alone. It is something that grows as well from experience, but only as one is prepared to utilize the Jewish dimensions of that experience fully and sensitively in its ever changing variety.

It is important to serve the Jewish community through the sensitive, understanding, compassionate yet objective help to Jewish clients. Yet, were we to stop at that point, we would not be fulfilling completing the Jewish tradition. From the beginnings of Judaism we have shared our insights and skills with the world at large. Commitment to Jewish social work implies as well a readiness to seek out ways of contributing from the richness of our Jewish heritage to the solution of the world's problems. Jews cannot resolve the crises of our times alone; nor can we be effective by abandoning responsibility for serving our own people in relation to their unique needs. Beyond that, there is a role the Jewish caseworker can play in communicating through his professional role, the Jewish concepts of justice, charity, loving-kindness and individual and social responsibility to the furtherance of man's progress. To do that he must himself have comprehension of and a commitment to those values. Preparation for practice of casework in the Jewish agency involves helping him achieve that commitment so that he can use it as well to assist in bettering the entire human condition.

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[19] Saul Hofstein, "The Jewish Heritage and the Social Agency," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, Vol. XXIV, No. 3 (March, 1948), p. 266.