ENDOWING TOMORROW WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PAST

Philip M. Klutznick

"To seek wisdom in old age," said Ibn Gabirol, "is like a mark in the sand; to seek wisdom in youth is like an inscription on stone."

The poet's lyric embraces this gathering. We blend thoughts and words of tribute in their older years to those we celebrate for a wisdom they attained in youth. Yet they still toil, that the youth of this age may seek wisdom worthy of the permanence of stone.

Each of the illustrious groups of Hillel chairmen and national directors we honor today made a lasting contribution to the advancement of Hillel. It does not diminish the brilliance of their individual and collective accomplishments to single out one who played a unique role. He was there at the birth, as faculty adviser to the founding director, Ben Frankel. He succeeded Frankel when that visionary died much too young. He wanted Hillel -- and I recall his phrase -- "to co-opt the campus for its program with Jewish students." And he succeeded. He found in the B'nai B'rith, under the leadership of Henry Monsky, a companionable sponsorship.

He advanced to the chairmanship of the commission, a responsibility he continued with zeal and achievement until he confronted the challenge at Brandeis.

No man has served this work longer or in more tasks of leadership. He began in Hillel fifty years ago; he persists to this day. In a real sense, Hillel is the shadow of the man Abram Leon Sachar; heightened by one always at his side, the gracious and lovely Thelma.

On this day of consecration, as we honor the builders of the Hillel movement, it is tempting to be overcome by memory. There is much greatness to remember. It is also useful to remember -- to endow tomorrow with an understanding of the past.

Fifty years ago, we were a Jewish community of half our present number, our roots replanted in a nation reacting to the close of World War I with restrictive immigration laws. Our leadership was selective: a few descendants of the first Sephardic settlers, and German Jews who were the establishment, their families having emigrated a generation or two earlier. The huge Jewish wave from Eastern Europe has just begun to produce its native American generation.

We were, in common with much of America of that era, a debtor rather than a creditor community. Our institutions were mutual help: free loan societies, settlement houses, Americanization classes. Our labor was the sweatshop and the small, often profitless, business. Religion meant the shul, the shtibl in the tradition of Tevye. Jewish education meant chedar and the melamed. The immigrant Jew was -to quote Leo Rosten -- "a linguist by necessity": Hebrew in the synagogue, Yiddish in the home and -- to the Gentile -- the language of an adopted land.

The Jewish youngster of the early 20's lived in a divided world that of his Jewish home with its emphasis on alien, imported idioms and practices, and that of a "melting pot school" where -- as the promise went -- education would be his entry to the economic and social bounties of an act-alike and feel-alike society. It was a time when, as Mordecai Kaplan put it, most Jews thought of their Judaism in spectres of anti-semitism: What does the Gentile think? Differences had to be shunned and shed. The goal was a conformist equality -- not just to be equal but to be the same.

I am of the generation that might easily have drifted into other avenues save for B'nai B'rith's concern and foresight with Jewish youth. When I went to college, there was a meaningful but modest Jewish effort called the Menorah Society. It was on few campuses, altogether under-financed. It was there when I was a freshman, so limited, I didn't discover it until I left. One of its achievements was the Menorah Journal, a publication of genuine quality. Recently, I looked again at The Menorah Treasury, an anthology of 108 articles and poems that had appeared in the Journal. More than 80% was written by foreign-born Jews. At least six of the selections were by non-Jews. We had not yet created a native Jewish scholarship.

This, in capsule, was the environment at Hillel's birth, an era when the cultural gap between a Yiddish-speaking generation and its Americanized youth was dominant and challenging from the east side of New York to Boyle; Heights in Los Angeles; an era when Jewish youth disguised or abandoned its heritage, opting for a shallow security by escaping into the majority. It was the struggling task of the Hillel rabbi-director on the campus, epitomizing Jewish scholarship and faith, to confront the erosions, to inspire a youth generation to value its Jewishness.

It is an oversimplification to say that Hillel succeeded. Hillel was an idea responsive to the times. It has been an evolving idea responsive to changing times. It is an idea much in need today.

Our generation has lived through world convulsions. We Jews, in common with mankind, have known the horrors of World War II, the miracles of science, the multiplication of nations, the population explosion. As Jews, we have had our own special crises. The trauma of the Six Million. You and I lived through it; today's youth barely read of it. And the protective cover of the Holocaust, the world's guilt complex, is wearing off. Willy Brandt suggested as much in West Germany.

The 25 years of Israel has transformed the Jewish world in ways that few foresaw. Today the possibility, yet remote, of an Israel at peace with her neighbors has its profound implications for Jewish life everywhere.

And the melting pot of our childhood -- it has been boiled away by the rising concept of pluralism, and the new thrusts of racial and cultural ethnicity. Acceptance no longer means conformity. The lifestyles of our youth reflect the openness of contemporary society.

And, unlike fifty years ago, we are no longer a debtor community. Economic advancement means that our youth now live with the competition of plenty, replacing the voids of poverty.

For good measure, there is the extra stress on the traditional gap between generations. It was inevitable that in the age of astronauts and the computer, our youth consider itself matured more rapidly, aching to do its own thing sooner.

Abba Eban, in his book "My People," praises the American Jewish community, but wonders whether Jewish individuality can survive the assimilating influences of American tolerance. "Would a new generation which knows neither the trauma of the Holocaust nor the elation of Israel's rebirth have emotional reason to give its thought and work to the task of Jewish conservation?" Eban asks.

It's a question we have to answer. We have come full turn. The Jewish community showed, from the 1920's through post-World War II, that it could survive the bad times of intolerance and prejudice. The question is now reversed: Can we survive the good times of acceptance, of social and economic freedom?

Our people in Israel are experiencing a social shock and political awakening in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. It is a painful process. I continue to ask myself: Must the Diaspora -- especially its largest community -- undergo a new shock experience of its own to realize that we too are in a markedly changed world?

For many years, we Americans have lived in an environment of economic, social and political growth. The thought was prevalent that obsolescence was the cornerstone of our nation's golden age. The U.S., with 6% of the world population, enjoyed 40% of its gross product. Even in more recent times, with the rehabilitation of Western Europe and Japan, America's share of the gross product was around 30%.

Our Jewish community -- some call it the most affluent in history -- has been nourished as a byproduct of this growth. Tzedakah and Torah express themselves in a vast network of philanthropic, educational and religious institutions.

I can recall attending the first meeting of the newly organized Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. It was in the early 30's; a few hundred delegates participated. By contrast, this past December more than 2,000 attended the CJFWF plenary in New Orleans. The Moorish-style buildings, the storefront shtibles, the temporary halls that were shuls of my youth have given way to masterpieces of modern architecture. The B'nai B'rith of 1926 was daring enough to adopt a Wider Scope program for the modest support of Hillel, BBYO, other programs and unmet needs of those days. Now, B'nai B'rith is a \$17 million and more enterprise -- with unmet needs, no longer modest, but exceeding the total budget of the 20's.

Perhaps the greatest advancement was in the massive change from voluntarism to a growing professionalism in Jewish life. The emergence of a large Jewish civil service was a necessary development. It was prodded by the proliferation of domestic communal programs and supported by swelling budgets. The budgets in some communities are today larger than that of the entire Jewish community two generations ago. Critics have decried this for its negative manifestations, calling it "check-book Judaism." Yet, the expanding domestic needs and programs, added to the spiraling demands from abroad, could not have been met without a skilled professional bureaucracy—and an undreamed—of outpouring of funds.

We made education -- especially higher education -- the cornerstone of our new national growth. Here too, it was all forward and upward. A soaring American birth rate almost collapsed the public school system. The elitism once inherent in a college education became a commonplace for a million students, then three million, and now nine million; some yet anticipate 12 million on the campus

The reasonably balanced private-public mix in higher education changed to an overwhelming emphasis on low-tuition public colleges. Hillel began at Illinois, in the small-town environment of Champaign-Urbana. At Michigan, it was Ann Arbor; in Wisconsin, it was the town of Madison. While all of these great schools have grown geometrically in student population, the population of their combined locales do not match the student enrollments attending the public colleges and universities — junior college through graduate school — in a major urban center such as Chicago or Los Angeles.

The effect has been a crisis for the small, private college, caught in today's budget crunch. The dormitory, the fraternity and sorority house -- these are now less important to the campus than fast-commuting trains and full-time jobs.

In my youth, a Jewish professor was a rare sight on campus. Today, at many major colleges, Jews are 20% and more of the faculty.

Today, nearly 400 colleges include Jewish studies in the curriculum -- from a single course to a full study program leading to a degree in Judaica.

they're paying the tuition costs -- and their children are studying it in some colleges.

These are some of the manifestations of change we have -- and are -- experiencing. The social prejudices and economic discriminations of the past while not altogether gone have been diminished by the open society. Our generation got much of what we strived for -- the right to be swallowed by the majority culture -- only to discover it's not really what we want. The new name of the game is ethnicity.

Ethnicity in an open society -- there's a contradiction for you. It's a contradiction that confronts us, particularly our college youth. How do we balance these opposites?

I suggest that this is a critical time when the Jewish community | we need the pulsations of flesh and life. needs to know where it is, where we hope to go, and how to get there.

and financial adjustments. They have been inadequate to the realities.

One reality is unabated inflation. It is compelling communal, social and education institutions to re-examine their programs and methods. For the next decade at least, energy and raw material shortages will mean a tightening process to eliminate obvious waste, but more importantly, to exercise ingenuity and skill. There is no other way. The unacceptable alternative is to eliminate -- wholesale -services and programs that we need.

I do not fear for our nation or the Western world. They will adjust and overcome. But, candidly, I am less sanguine about our Jewish community, whose mobility is much more limited. Our community programs are numerous and sometimes duplicatory. Many have been existing in a fool's paradise. There was a time when Jewish needs abroad created a spin-off at home: the exhortations that raised more for Israel helped raise more -- in absolute dollars -- for our needs here. But, like the fellow who was given an unlimited budget and then exceeded it -- we may have reached a stage of diminishing proportions.

The fact is, in the past decade, we have in absolute terms either cut domestic budget, or raised them barely enough to absorb

Some of our contemporaries once ran away from Yiddish. Now inflation. Our home-grown programs have had to fight for subsistence levels rather than for creativity or growth. The Jewish establishment as been charged with neglecting the real demands of Jewish education, culture and youth. We are not free of guilt.

> At one time, in common with many, I had hoped for an abatement of needs abroad. It is abundantly clear that this is not to be. I bubt whether we can meet these indispensable historic and human challenges, provide for inflation and maintain -- let alone expand -our present programs, if we continue with incremental budgeting and mogramming to stem the tide.

There will be those who find an answer in indiscriminate budget cuts. That is one way -- requiring neither imagination nor ingenuity. h can cut costs. It can also achieve the dry bones of a skeleton when

There might be a better way -- one that demands imagination We have trifled with the need for change by incremental gestures and ingenuity. Perhaps the pressures that surround us can be the very bree we need to shake up some of our institutionalized habits and shibboleths.

> We might consider a more representative structuring of the American Jewish community for critical and constructive examination -and re-examination -- of our programs and activities.

It can be done -- as the Hillel movement itself has shown -- to accommodate the pluralistic character of Jewish life. I don't interpret pluralism to be, necessarily, separatism. A representative American Jewish assembly -- instead of a garden variety of roof and general organizations -- might be the catalyst to diminish, if not curtail, wasteful duplication where, in naked truth, it exists.

The issues that confront the community are mixed: program and budget, domestic and foreign, incremental and long-term. They are Jewish political, involving deeply held views such as who and what is a Zionist or non-Zionist? Can there be Jewish creativity in the Diaspora?

A substantial representative assembly involving community leaders, academics and scholars, business and professional people, and youth too -- supported by adequate technical studies -- should

expose itself annually to the shifting scene. The next 10 to 20 years of Jewish life here and abroad will be a testing period as a new status for designed. The phenomenon of the Batim, havurot, and other Jewish Israel emerges (whatever consequences of present discussions), as a new complex and distribution of economic and political power established itself in the world, and as our own national economic, political and social structure shifts to meet the demands of today.

60 B'nai B'rith representatives convened to determine whether B'nai B'rith should continue as a member of the American Jewish Conference. That was in 1948. The Conference had begun five years before, a temporary assembly called together by Henry Monsky to coordinate the community's efforts in behalf of the remnants of European Jewry in the make. By coincidence, Hillel's 50th anniversary comes at just such a wake of World War II.

Conference? Dr. Sachar and I, and a handful of others, favored taking best express our reverence and appreciation by honest toil of our own. the risk of such a permanent forum in Jewish life. We were a distinct minority. The concept of a permanent Conference collapsed.

Since the, I've continued as an advocate-of-sorts of the principle -- with less success than I like to admit.

I persist. I think we need that kind of collective thinking and collective action in this era of shift and change.

Surely, our Jewish community can better utilize the academic talent that exists and is emerging. It is said by the sages: "Just as a tent cannot stand without pegs and cords, so Israel cannot stand without scholars." For too long we have ignored or submerged the scholar, the academician, the thinker in our decision-making processes. Their input is essential. We are at a point when the establishment doors must let in the fresh air of two groups too long minimized -- academic and youth.

Our critical needs -- schools, youth programs, and other essential services, must not be sacrificed to inflation or the cost crunch. We need to review the mix between professionalism and voluntarism. The change in lifestyle which so many now predict might well recommend more volunteers doing the job, more professionals training them to do it. I know that this can be questioned. But we may not have a choice.

And some very successful college youth programs are studentco-ops is found on many campuses.

I have not yet succumbed to "future shock." Nor, I hope, am I frightened out of any sense of balance. But in a relatively few months some major revolutionary developments have surfaced in the Jewish Dr. Sachar will remember when he and I were two of a group of world. We need to think in more revolutionary terms in confronting

It is demonstrable that in a period of violent or major change, humanity hovers between a history it should know and a destiny it must pivotal period. We have chosen this day to honor the builders of Hillel. It may be well to recall that the real honor is their honest toil, which Would B'nai B'rith participate in a permanent American Jewish lover the years wrought the movement and its program. We in turn can

> To shrink from challenge is not honest toil. To await a messiah is not honest toil. I recall a favorite idea of a great friend of Dr. Sachar and many others here -- the late Eleanor Roosevelt -- who deplored a reliance on kings and princes because, as she said, it is the people themselves who make their history and determine their destiny. Or, as the Talmud speaks: "Where men truly wish to go, there their feet will manage to take them." If we will it, the challenge of this fiftieth anniversary can give birth to an inspirational dream for tomorrow -- and usher in an era of achievement and glory.