

## MEETING THE NEEDS OF TODAY'S JEWISH TEEN-AGERS\*

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"TRAIN a child in the way he should go and even when he is old, he will not depart from it."<sup>1</sup>

Beyond a doubt, there have been more conferences, articles, books and general discussions in the press and on the air about teen-agers in the past decade than of any other age group in our society. This has been due, of course, to the rapid rise in juvenile delinquency, notably in the larger cities. While it is difficult to cite an accurate figure on the number of juvenile delinquents because of lack of uniformity in definitions of "delinquent" acts and variations in the way courts classify and handle juvenile offenders, it would appear that they represent approximately 5% of the population of children and youth in our land. However, the fact that there is reported an upsurge in youth crime by about 55% since 1952 among persons under 18 years of age and because of the unprecedented violence of these youthful crimes, there is indeed cause for grave concern regarding the prevention and control of juvenile delinquency.

Regrettably, because the healthy aggressiveness of youth or what has been called "developmental defiance" is often

confused with delinquent behavior, there is a tendency in some places to equate the term "teen-ager" with "delinquent" or "hoodlum."

Dr. Sophia M. Robison<sup>2</sup> points out that in 1952 Jewish children brought into the courts for juvenile offenses in New York City represented but 3% of the total as compared to 1930 when Jewish children accounted for almost 20% of all the cases brought to the attention of the court. However, she found that a comparison of the 1930 Jewish figures and the 1952 statistics shows a dramatic shift in the categories of offenses. In 1930 the leading offenses were peddling or begging without a license. In 1952 the Jewish child brought into court came because his behavior was more similar to that of the non-Jewish delinquent than was true 2 decades ago, exhibiting more violent and aggressive behavior. These children did not come from broken homes or large families, nor were they children born out of wedlock as were a high proportion of the general court population. Only 4 of the 100 Jewish children on whom more detailed data were gathered had Intelligence Quotients below 80;

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Sophia M. Robison, "A Study of Delinquency in Jewish Children in New York City," in Marshall Sklare, *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*, The Free Press, Glencoe, Ill., 1958, pp. 535-541.

20% of the total Jewish group had I.Q.'s over 110. Dr. Robison also states that the facts she studied contradict the hypothesis that neighborhood as such has much to do with the production of delinquents.

The total number of Jewish cases being so small and so different in respect to family and child characteristics from the total population, the inference appears warranted, according to Dr. Robison, that the infrequent Jewish delinquent in this study resembles the non-Jewish delinquent only in his type of behavior and that these findings would seem to point up the need for a definitive analysis of the types of behavior and problems which bring Jewish children into the Juvenile Court. I would also agree with the suggestion that an investigation of the family and group solidarities and of cultural characteristics may be more rewarding than the current frontal attack on so ill-defined an entity as delinquency.

Do we not need to ask ourselves about these young people in trouble (and all our teen-agers) whether, in addition to the eternal problems of adjustment to physical change and the general maturation process, they are not now confronted and confused by the complications and rapid changes in our present day society? As Dr. Irene M. Josslyn of the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis puts it, ". . . the only framework for behavior our culture provides is a very intangible philosophy, which most of us believe in and struggle to make effective. But it does not spell out in any detail how a person acts as an individual. This may be one reason why the adolescent finds it hard to be an adolescent in our culture; why parents find it hard to be the parents of adolescents and why we who work with adolescents get confused in our own thinking as to what should be the framework for adolescent behavior. Perhaps that is why he turns

to his peer group because it provides him with a framework of behavior patterns."

### Developmental Tasks of Adolescence

To take a closer look at adolescence, there is a helpful guide in the "developmental tasks" developed by Robert J. Havighurst<sup>3</sup> which arise out of the processes of physical maturation; from cultural forces and from the "desires, aspirations and values of the emerging personality . . . and in most cases from combinations of these factors acting together." They are:

1. Achieving new and more mature relations with age mates of both sexes.
2. Achieving a masculine or feminine social role.
3. Accepting one's physique and using the body effectively.
4. Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults.
5. Achieving assurance of economic independence.
6. Selecting and preparing for an occupation.
7. Preparing for marriage and family life.
8. Developing intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence.
9. Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior.
10. Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior.

Now let us sketch in briefly some of the factors that have contributed to the making of today's baffling and rapidly changing world in which today's teen-agers are expected to achieve these developmental tasks.

Today's boys and girls from 13 to 18 years of age are the children of parents who grew up in the "boom and bust" period of the 20's, who tried to build their young adult lives in the depression and the period of diabolical madness of Hitlerism and Fascism in the 30's and

<sup>3</sup> Robert Havighurst, *Developmental Life Tasks and Education*, University of Chicago Press, 1949.

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 22:6.

the decade of the ravages and revolutions of World War II, post-World War II, and the advent of the hydrogen bomb. Many of today's parents came back from battle and wartime jobs or settled down in new communities discovered in the process of wartime relocations, and endeavored to rebuild their lives in a time of housing shortages aggravated by increasing population. It was a time for re-establishing themselves in education, occupation and social goals and values, in an era of spreading conformity and hysteria. They strove mightily to make up for lost time on all fronts in an increasingly difficult world for which they were not prepared. Many of these men and women had been deprived of their opportunity to achieve the "developmental tasks" of their own adolescence in a wholesome and gradual fashion before being thrust into adult tasks and responsibilities. We thus find so many parents unable to provide stable supports for today's teen-agers in their pursuit of maturity when they themselves have a good measure of unresolved growth conflicts and immaturity.

In America, a new era of prosperity has been ushered in and there has developed a large middle class with all the related external standards pertaining thereto. The past decade has witnessed rapid increase in population and size of family, major neighborhood changes and an unprecedented growth of the suburbs, with the development of many attendant changes in community structure, social values, and practices. Advances in social security and emphasis on material things are added elements in the world of today's teen-ager.

The manifold uncertainties, pressures, and problems which confront youth in general are augmented for Jewish youth because of the factors in the American Jewish scene and world Jewry, of which they are a part. It is important to note some of the many changes that have

taken place in American Jewish life in our generation.

Today almost 80% of American Jews are native born and English speaking. They are preponderantly middle class with all the characteristics and cultural values pertaining thereto. They have moved from being concentrated in crowded urban communities to being dispersed in all sections of metropolitan communities and continuously being transformed from apartment "cliff dwellers" to home owners in suburbia and to many new small communities which were post-war phenomena.

In addition, the emergence of the State of Israel after the holocaust of Nazi Germany and the devastation of World War II; the increase in religious institutional membership as well as manifestations of acculturation in the general community are among the important factors to be considered in dealing with the needs of today's teen-agers. Jewish young people today are concerned about the nature of their identity as Jews and about their relationships with Jews and non-Jews in the community of which they are a part. The movement to the suburbs has increased the number of synagogues and synagogue affiliation, but whether or not it has contributed to increased religious identification is subject to question.

#### Jewish Religious and Cultural Identity

Several studies have been made in recent years which confirm the fact that, unlike the teen-agers of an earlier generation, there is less rejection of, and resistance to, Jewish identification and religion. On the contrary, as Will Herberg suggests, perhaps the emerging stratification of the total American community in terms of religious identification and the new cultural patterns of suburbia have contributed to greater acceptance of religious identification as part of the

American way of life—"as a member of one of the three religious communities in this country, (the youth) has status and a defined position."

However, it is evident there is often a wide discrepancy between religious attitudes and behavior. In a study of adolescent religious conviction and conduct Bernard C. Rosen reported<sup>4</sup> that the overwhelming majority of three groups of boys and girls 15-17 years of age, indicated that ritual observance is the primary element in the frame of reference within which they perceive their own religiosity and that of others and since their synagogue attendance and observance of dietary laws and the Sabbath are minimal they did not give a high estimate of their religiosity.

Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson reports that a sample of approximately 850 boys and girls, average age 15 years old, widely distributed geographically and coming in the main from middle class families, believed that ritual is a tangible expression of one's Jewish identification, and the young people desired far more of it than they found in their own homes. Sixty-three per cent of them expressed a desire to observe more ritual than their parents do, most of whom, incidentally, may have been raised in the Traditional homes.<sup>5</sup>

Rabbi Davidson comments that although the belief of the teen-agers as revealed in this study is God-directed, the concepts of their belief are immature. He suggests that perhaps this is due to the fact that theological teaching in a reform Jewish religious school never gets far beyond the "Biblical version of a God who works miracles, divides seas, brings plagues and wins battles."

<sup>4</sup> Bernard C. Rosen, "Minority Group in Transition," in Marshall Sklare, *op. cit.*, pp. 336-346.

<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Jerome K. Davidson, *The Religious Attitudes of Reform Jewish Youth*, pub. Union of American Hebrew Cong., N. Y.

It is interesting to note that in a study conducted for and in conjunction with the Young Men's Christian Association of Greater Metropolitan Chicago of a comparable group, 80% said they are very much interested in religion. About one-half the group believed that to be good means going through the formalities of religion and about 41% stated they were still searching for something to believe in that would make sense for them. Seventy-one per cent indicated a great desire for more information about religion.

It is interesting to note some of the findings reported by Rabbi Alfred Jospe, in a pilot study initiated in 1954 on the Jewish attitudes and beliefs of a whole class of incoming freshmen at Hillel Foundations at three universities in three different geographic areas. He finds that the Jewish student today is very "polite" to his religion. There is a high regard for the synagogue. Yet only 5% testify that they attend services with any degree of regularity. Nevertheless two-thirds of the respondents assert that one needs religious belief in order to attain a mature philosophy of life and the same proportion thinks that religion has had at least a moderate influence on their upbringing.

Certainly there are important implications here, as in other findings of these studies which I shall refer to later on, for Jewish education, for the Rabbis, for Jewish Community Center programming and for all of us who work with Jewish youth and their families.

One of the "developmental tasks" of adolescence is that of acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior. Fundamental to the understanding and establishment of a value system are ideas, ideals, and attitudes which flow from the Jewish religious and cultural heritage. Others are founded on the best in our American

traditions and the socio-cultural heritage of our civilization.

Many of the changes in modern society referred to earlier have important implications for our value systems. Some of our most cherished traditional and general social values have been put to the test and some of them have been undergoing many changes. Our educational institutions, formal and informal, Jewish and general, are challenged to help parents and teen-agers to understand traditional and emergent values and to bring to young people experiences in motivating their behavior, relationships, aspirations, and life goals on the firm foundation of values, clearly defined and integrated into an ethical system that will help the teen-ager in his quest to know "who am I and what am I."

Rabbi Davidson,<sup>6</sup> in his report cites the college student who returns home after his first year complaining that he was not taught enough about his heritage.

Rabbi Davidson points out that such teaching probably took place in the 3rd grade and reminds us that all too often older youth reject religion because their childish concepts are shattered. He stresses the need to help young people to mature theologically as they mature intellectually, by giving them opportunities to ask questions and seek answers as they grow up.

In a New York study<sup>7</sup> there was evidenced overwhelming acceptance among teen-agers of the need for Jewish education, but it was equally evident that the Jewish school did not meet their standards. Of the 3,900 questioned, almost 3,000 had attended a Jewish school of one kind or another. Forty-eight per cent terminated Jewish schooling before

its completion. The average length of stay in school was 4 years. Seventy-four per cent did not attend any other Jewish educational programs since discontinuing or completing their elementary Jewish education. More girls than boys indicated post elementary education, with boys usually leaving after Bar Mitzvah. According to other available figures only a little over 8% of our teen-agers are in Hebrew High Schools. In a question calling for comparison of Jewish and public schools, the number rating the Jewish school as inferior was 4 times as great as those who gave it a superior rating. Of the 900 young people interviewed who said they received no Jewish education, 56% believed it to be important to have a Jewish education and would give their own children the opportunity to attend.

It is obvious from these studies, and from a more extensive survey of Jewish education in the United States, sponsored by the American Association for Jewish Education (which will be reported on shortly by Dr. Alexander Dushkin) that the need of today's Jewish teen-ager for enriching Jewish identification with a knowledge and appreciation of our Jewish cultural heritage and Jewish values is not being met to any appreciable degree. This is true, notwithstanding an increase of 105% in Sunday Schools, 160% in week day schools and 130% increase in all day schools, as reported by Dr. Dushkin in his study. It is also of interest to note here a current enrollment of 44% of children in Jewish education as contrasted with previously reported figures of 25%, and the fact that 69 Junior and Senior High Schools in New York City are teaching Hebrew and related cultural content to about 5,000 students. Hebrew courses are also reaching about another 1,000 students in 13 high schools in 12 cities in other parts of the country.

There is a great need to re-evaluate

the goals and programs of Jewish education for American Jewish youth and to provide more and better Jewish education programs for the developmental growth needs of American Jewish teen-agers.

Such an evaluation of the role of the Jewish Community Center in America took place, as you know, a decade ago under the auspices of the National Jewish Welfare Board with the distinguished leadership of Dr. Oscar Janowsky. The program of the 354 Jewish Community Centers in America is motivated by a concern for the growth and well being of the individual in all his relationships and in the most effective use of his group experiences toward achieving an understanding and acceptance of himself; of improved relationships with peers, with family, with his Jewish group; as an American and as a member of an increasingly interdependent world. The Center is also deeply concerned with the nature and quality of Jewish group life in America, relationships with other Jewries, and with our non-Jewish neighbors and fellow citizens.

For more than a decade there has been a focussed emphasis in the Center movement on group process and the use of social group work skills, especially in helping children and youth to achieve wholesome developmental growth. More recently there has developed an increasing concern with the "what" or content and quality of Center program.

As an informal education and recreation agency offering group services, the Jewish Community Center is confronted with the challenge to provide today's teen-agers with significant experiences for identification as American Jews in consonance with their general developmental growth and group needs; with opportunities for free expression of feelings about being Jewish and relationships with non-Jews; and with enjoy-

able experiences with the Jewish cultural arts. There is a great need to stimulate creative, indigenous, American Jewish cultural expression in the arts. It is also possible and desirable in the Center to build program around Jewish history, customs and folkways, and many other areas of program content, including interest in Yiddish and Hebrew.

This kind of rich program content requires qualified leadership in Centers and their camps and the effective use of group work method. We appear to have emerged from a period of some resistance to, and fear of, Jewish programming. In working with teen-agers, as well as all age groups in the Center, the need is great for creativity, resourcefulness, and the best of professional skills. There must be much experimentation, research, and evaluation along these lines. Such must be the work with teen-agers to help them fulfill their manifold developmental needs in sex roles and relationships, preparation for marriage and family life, educational and vocational choices, socially responsible behavior, emotional independence, community participation, and a sense of having a role to play.

In helping young people to integrate Jewish values, all national religious, ideological and fraternal Jewish youth organizations have a significant contribution to make.

In a study of the "Beat" phenomena, Dr. Frances J. Regney and Mr. Douglas Smith of San Francisco say "the members of this group are not a 'generation' but are part of the never ending search for meanings—which, in this form, is analogous to what has characterized artist communities as long as 'Bohemia' as a phenomenon has been in existence" . . . "we do not feel these individuals to be the end products of society but rather as experiencing (albeit in intensified form) that searching for identity we are all heir to." And in this search,

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Jewish Education Committee, 1239 Broadway, New York City, 1952.

all too often, the roadblocks of disillusionment and frustration flowing from inconsistencies and discrepancies in the adult world create deep problems calling for skilled guidance and therapeutic measures which our colleagues in the medical and social work professions must provide, and which are in short supply.

In a session on youth at the recent convention of the National Council of Jewish Women in Los Angeles, Bert Gold, the executive director of the Jewish Community Centers Association of Los Angeles, stressed the need to counteract the prevailing emphasis on safety, security, and conformity as basic values in life. At a recent conference of selected teen-agers from various regions of the country, there was a shocking lack of expressed concern for the basic social issues of the day. The youth stated they felt this apathy was due to a lack of stimulation in these areas from parents, teachers, and other adult leaders. They also referred to their fear of the "punitive measures" they had seen meted out to adults who had taken "positions" on issues. As Governor Lehman said recently, "They have learned that it is safer to conform than to be different; they seem to believe that it is wiser to be safe than to be right."

How contrary to traditional Jewish and democratic values this is and what a challenge it presents to all of us who work with youth! To quote a comment from the *Saturday Review of Literature* on college youth "They have abandoned causes for convertibles." Rabbi Davidson too found a lack of awareness of social problems and he says, "Let us teach our children how principles of justice and righteousness, so fundamental to our faith, can be applied on the contemporary scene."<sup>8</sup>

Building bridges between Israeli and

American Jewish cultural and other experiences presents another challenge to informal and formal Jewish educational programs in America.

In a study<sup>9</sup> of attitudes of Jewish youth toward Israel, Dr. Irving Canter reports as follows: "They are decidedly pro-Israel and see no conflict in loyalties as between Israel and America. Although they have a limited factual knowledge of names and places related to Israel, they are aware of the historic significance of the establishment of the Jewish State and have an appreciation of the relationship between the Israeli and American Jewish communities. While they want to visit Israel, they have no interest in settling there. Only a very small group, ranging from one-third of one per cent to six per cent showed a strong hostility to Israel. Another small proportion ranging from 4% to 9% have an exceedingly strong attachment to Israel. A similar evidence of vital interest in Israel among Hillel Foundation members was reported by Rabbi Alfred Jospe.

Rabbi Davidson cites as examples of an increasing feeling of security as Jews, the decreasing concern with anti-Semitism and a growing interest in the State of Israel. Sixty-two per cent of the respondents in his study enthusiastically indicated a desire to visit the State of Israel.

Similar evidence of teen-age interest in Israel is reflected in a variety of ways among Jewish Community Center youth and members of other national religious and ideological youth organizations. Much of it appears in a desire among young people to study Hebrew. As Ambassador Abba Eban has said, "Hebrew . . . is both the bridge between Israel and the Jewish people and the unifying instrument amongst the various elements

<sup>9</sup> Conducted by B'nai B'rith Youth Organization and American Zionist Council.

of which Israel is compounded. . . . It unites both Israel and American Jews by a single, magic thread, to the entire historical background of our people."

It would be well to provide new and more creative approaches to the teaching of Hebrew to American Jewish adolescents—not only as a tie with Israel but as an added channel of communication of Jewish values and the great Jewish heritage. Not all of them will want to join the high school classes. Perhaps we need to organize more *Ulpanim* on the teen-age level.

It may also stimulate interest in general in language study and its use in building bridges to many peoples in this increasingly interdependent world. It is important in adolescence to get a broader knowledge of the world's peoples and different ways of life especially as suburbia creates insular settings and experiences.

To fully understand the teen-ager, we must get to know and understand his concept of himself. Often there exists a disparity between what he is and what he would like to be. This may call for skillful guidance services as they relate to his personality development, his educational and career choices, and his socialization goals. All too often his levels of aspiration are low when his motivation is poor and he has no sense of purpose.

As has been pointed out in a letter to me by Beatrice Novick of the Jewish Vocational Service of Cleveland, "the employment boom, the consequent higher standard of living and the life in suburbia have emphasized for the teen-ager the need to achieve material success which is in every way comparable to or higher than that of his parents. . . . Emphasis is on going to the best college, attaining professional status for material gain and economic security, and many teen-agers develop no other values. . . . Often the teen-ager is left

with an inner conflict between his natural interests and abilities and what he chooses as his goal for material and status reasons. Also, many young people have been influenced to jump on the bandwagon built by the requirements of our technological and scientific age . . . because of increasing opportunities (and prestige) in these fields without relation to their abilities. As a result, some youngsters are unable to gain admission to professional schools or, if accepted, are unable to compete in advanced training programs and finally in securing suitable employment."

The rising college enrollment and the resulting anxieties about college admission have created a feeling of panic in young people and their parents, especially when stress is placed on admission to the better known colleges which are unable to accept all of those who apply. This no doubt stems from their view of college as a status and socializing experience. Another problem is financing college education. Rising costs have created a heavy burden for many families, particularly where there is more than one teen-ager. Longer periods of training for many professions have also added to the financial burdens of young people. There are not enough scholarships to go around and many capable students are unable to obtain scholarships because of the competition.

Miss Novick observes that within Jewish working class families, unlike their non-Jewish counterparts, the striving and aspirations are those of the middle class group. There appears to be little enrollment of Jewish youngsters in vocational schools which are well attended by children of other working class families. She reports that while there has been an increasing emphasis on guidance services in the schools of many cities, there has been an uneven growth in this service. Students who are not going to college get very little guidance

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*

help. There are of course many teen-agers making suitable choices and developing wholesome values to sustain them throughout their lives. Nevertheless the need for such guidance is great and warrants fuller consideration and support. Jewish community centers, Jewish family service agencies and national youth serving organizations like the BBYO, are providing some help to parents and teen-agers in this area. Career conferences, teen-parent meetings and similar activities have increased in number to meet this need.

Other important areas of concern to parents and teen-agers alike which are part of the normal process of growth related to the pressures of the mores and changing value systems have to do with dating, hetero-sexual development, early marriages and family life. Much has been said in many places about the accelerated trend toward "going steady" (even in the nursery school!) among today's boys and girls. Whatever its origins or motivations, we are mindful of the increasing number of high school marriages, often forced. There is a great need to help boys and girls rushing into early teen-age marriages with careful counselling and more effective family life education.

We have for too long relied on providing sex information for youth, which is not enough to help young people achieve sexual maturity. Individuals need help in developing attitudes toward their sexuality and adolescents need adults who will not always equivocate with them in this area. Adults must be prepared to take the responsibility for making difficult decisions where that is needed and to help establish a sex ethic. Some early marriages, of course, are made on a mature level. But there is a hazard in making a marriage choice before vocational choices. There are some who feel that this trend too is part of a conformity pattern.

Certainly there is a need for better and more family life education programs before and after marriage, for adults as well as teen-agers, in these times of changing sex roles and responsibilities in the family unit. For the Jewish teen-ager, there are important learnings in this area growing out of his cultural tradition. Questions about "inter-dating" and inter-marriage are of such concern to them. Sex education, broadly defined, and preparation for family life does not come easy to parents. Religious leaders, social case and group workers, and counselors in other professions can be very helpful to teen-agers and parents alike.

Studies like those made by the Boy and Girl Scouts, the Purdue University polls gathered by Remmers and Radler and published in *The American Teen-Ager*, and other sources have confirmed the fact that while the struggle for independence from parents and adults in general is one of the "developmental tasks" of the adolescent, he wants more help from them than he is ready to admit.

For the Jewish parent there is also a need to make up for the two "lost generations" which failed to reconcile their freedom to live in a democracy with their opportunity and responsibility to contribute creatively to the enrichment of American culture through a knowledge and appreciation of their own Jewish cultural heritage. There is a great need for more work by all our agencies with parents and with the family as a unit. We have come to realize that in the past two decades parents have felt intimidated by authorities in the child rearing fields and have often felt inhibited in developing and carrying out their own values in the family. Many parents of today's teen-agers have to be helped to resume their own natural roles as heads of families for their own sakes and in

support of our youth. The anthropologist Ethel Alpenfels once aptly said, "While many responsibilities, formerly considered parental, have been turned over to the State and other institutions, there is one job left for the family, and that is the most important job, the transmission of moral, ethical, and cultural values."

It is anticipated that by next year the total teen population will number approximately 14,100,000 of whom approximately 439,000 will be Jewish. Are we ready to serve those who will come to us, in helping them to grow and develop in a wholesome and creative way? And

should we not consider how to do better than we have thus far in reaching the unreached?

Would it not be wise to consider immediately how we can work together to pool our resources and seek out new ones for cooperative research, demonstration programs, and pilot projects that will enable us to meet the challenge of today's teen-agers more effectively. And do we not need to enlarge and accelerate our efforts to recruit more personnel who will train to render more and better service for teen-agers and their families in all the fields represented in this Conference?