

THE VITAL FUTURE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER IN AMERICA *

by SANFORD SOLENDER

Executive Vice-President, National Jewish Welfare Board, New York

THE subject originally scheduled for this session was entitled "To Be as One." It was planned to present and discuss at this time the new film about the Jewish community center which bears this title. But the publication of a series of articles on the Jewish community center in the Winter-Spring 1962 issue of *Conservative Judaism* led to the decision to devote this session, instead, to the issues raised by the writers of these articles.

The irony of this situation lies in the fact that the original title is the most appropriate one for the *new* subject as well. This compendium of articles is a bitter attack upon the Jewish community center designed to destroy it as an institution. It is an attack from a source which more properly should be concerned with strengthening every potential force for Jewish enrichment in America. It must be noted with sorrow how far these authors have ventured from their time-honored commitment to Klal Yisrael: "To Be as One" indeed should be the title for this discussion.

These articles, and the press release announcing their publication, attempt to make the following points: that the purposes of the Jewish community center are not intrinsically Jewish; that

Center program content is not sufficiently Jewish; that Center professional leadership is deficient in Jewish background and commitment; that Center lay leadership is Jewishly marginal; that by their open door policy Centers contribute to inter-marriage; and that since Centers do not contribute to the enrichment, development, or preservation of Jewish life in America, funds they receive from federations should be redistributed to synagogues at least for their Jewish educational and youth programs.

This "symposium" in *Conservative Judaism* (the term is a euphemism since only one side of the picture is presented) is remarkable for its failure to recognize that the issues with which it deals are actually the fundamental problems of all Jewish life today. They affect equally the synagogue and every other Jewish institution. The tragedy of these articles is that instead of examining the roots and causes of matters which concern the synagogue as much as the Center, attention is focused only on the Center. Certain of the authors even endeavor to attribute responsibility for some of these problems to the Center. The editors of the magazine have in fact shaped these articles as an assault on the Jewish community center, which they would eliminate from the American Jewish scene.

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Atlantic City, June 3, 1962.

It is especially paradoxical that these articles appear at the time of such tremendous development of Center work in America. The striking progress of the Jewish community centers and the Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Associations in the last decade and a half are a dramatic story of the flowering of one of the Jewish institutions truly indigenous to Jewish life in the free democratic soil of America.

A Maturing Movement

Few facts describe the maturing of the Center movement more eloquently than the process in the past decade of redefinition and reaffirmation of the purposes of the Jewish community center in American life. Initiated in 1947-48 by the National Jewish Welfare Board survey conducted by Dr. Oscar Janowsky and consistently carried forward since by community studies in all parts of the nation, by conferences of Center boards, and by action of individual communities, this process has significantly sharpened and focused Center aims. The primary functions of Centers have been reasserted to be the enrichment and strengthening of American Jewish life through significant Jewish group association. Universally rejected has been any idea of the Center as a place for association by Jews without affirmative Jewish purposes.

Growing out of this sharpened sense of direction has been greater clarity about the focus and content of the Center program. Center workers and lay people have applied themselves to kindling the interest, excitement and activity of Center members about Jewish concerns and steady progress has resulted. While the universal aspects of the Center's program have been strengthened, the greatest emphasis has been on enriching Jewish experience for pre-school and school-age children, teenagers, adults, and older adults. Clubs

and special interest groups have dealt increasingly with Jewish concerns through discussions, festival programs, visits to points of interest and community participation projects. Mass activities and inter-group programs have been based on Jewish interests.

Jewish cultural programming in the arts and Jewish adult education has been accelerated. In the span of a few days on a recent trip, I saw an impressive exhibit of Jewish art by a contemporary American Jewish artist on display at the Center in Cincinnati, in co-sponsorship with the local Bureau of Jewish Education. In Los Angeles I was told of plans for the American premiere of a modern Jewish drama by the dramatic group of one of the Los Angeles centers. In the recent JWB-sponsored National Jewish Music Council project to commission new indigenous Jewish music, 14 Centers commissioned 20 new Jewish musical compositions. A study¹ of adult programming revealed that more than two-thirds of Centers with forums and concerts presented programs in which Jewish subjects were 75% to 100% of the total. Close to three-quarters of the Centers conducted adult classes, and in almost a third all subjects were of Jewish interest and 57% included one or more Jewish subjects. Centers have organized Jewish cultural activities for Center members and for all Jewish organizations in the community through Jewish cultural councils and community-wide cultural activities.

Centers have taken vast strides towards conducting programs with profound meaning which is expressive of both the general and Jewish facets of their concern. Stress has been given to programming for the entire family in matters of general and Jewish interest,

¹ Samuel D. Freeman, "Adult Jewish Education in the Jewish Community Center," *Jewish Education*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Summer 1954).

and increasing opportunity for inter-city association of Jewish youth. There has been special emphasis on a world outlook in Center programs through year-to-year support of the Jerusalem YM & YWHA and visits with and to Jewish youth of other lands. The rising interest in the time-honored Jewish sense of social justice has animated greatly increased Center activity in public affairs. Center day and country camping has grown apace, with enlarging stress on the use of this experience to deepen Jewish interests.

Since Centers underline the importance of professional staff to carry out Center purposes, the spectacular rise in the number of Center professional workers from 745 in 1945 to 1,550 in 1961 is especially significant. Recruiting workers with affirmative Jewish commitments and background has been emphasized. The Center field has a greater proportion of workers so qualified than ever before. Leaders of nationally affiliated Jewish youth groups explore careers in Center work with increasing frequency, a trend influenced by the general awareness of the Jewish purposes of the Center.

There has been a dramatic rise in training programs for Center professional staffs dealing with Jewish knowledge. A growing number of Centers conduct such projects, some even making attendance by their staff compulsory. Such programs are found throughout the nation, as for example in Cleveland, Chicago and Baltimore. Often they are carried on in cooperation with Jewish educational institutions such as the University of Judaism in the case of the Jewish Centers Association of Los Angeles. In New York City an extensive program of this type is conducted by the Federation, the Jewish Education Committee, and JWB. The Professional Education Committee of the National Association of Jewish Center Workers

gave this subject highest priority during the past two years. Half of this year's Conference is concerned with the Jewish preparation necessary for Center work. The length and depth of JWB's orientation program for new Center workers has been broadened from one or two lectures or discussions at schools of social work in years past to eight-day institutes. Matters of Jewish concern permeate the conferences of executives of Centers in small, intermediate and large cities.

Indicative of the progress of the Center movement is the growth of its membership from 427,000 in 1945 to 670,000 in 1961. Center rosters have risen particularly in the expanding age groups, such as children, teenagers, and older adults. Participation of whole family groups through family memberships has strengthened the effectiveness of Centers. Centers have moved into new areas of Jewish residence to make their services more available. Center memberships typically conform to the cardinal Center principle of inclusiveness of all segments of the community. Persons of every religious denomination, those who are secular Jews, and persons of every ideological persuasion and organizational interest in Jewish life are members of Centers. Jewish community centers truly are instruments of the whole community.

The development of Center lay leadership is striking. Lay leaders have broadened their understanding of the Center's objectives and deepened their commitment to the Center's Jewish purposes. Center board members have benefited from local, regional, and national training programs. Center boards have the same remarkable representativeness of every Jewish interest as the Center membership, which generates a constant interplay of different points of view on the Center's policies and practices. This is a faithful reflection of the community

itself, and the process of policy making is one of community education.

The expansion of Center facilities is phenomenal, a recognition that Center effectiveness requires a modern, attractive and functional physical setting. The total capital value of Center facilities estimated at 42 million dollars in 1945, more than doubled to 100 million dollars by 1961, with many additional new buildings being planned.

The growth of the financial resources for Center work reflects this expanding trend. Combined Center budgets were seven million dollars in 1945 and exceeded 23 million dollars in 1961. Support by Center participants rose to 60% of the total in 1961, with Centers somewhat less dependent on community subsidies than in 1945. The community subsidy has been an essential safeguard of the community character of the Center. The importance of these programs to the Jewish community has been recognized and reaffirmed continually by Jewish federations and welfare funds whose grants to Centers climbed from two million dollars in 1945 to over six million dollars in 1961. The Center's value as a part of the total community's resources has been evidenced by a rise in Community Chest and United Fund grants to Centers from over one million dollars in 1945 to more than four million dollars in 1961.

The community orientation of Centers is revealed by the quality of their cooperation with all types of community groups—synagogues, bureaus of Jewish education, national Jewish youth groups, organizations concerned with the mental and physical health of the Jewish community, and federations. In recent years statements of relationships between the Center and these bodies have served to advance their good relationships. The Center has not been and is not the competitor of any of these organizations, but rather their partner in

a common task on behalf of the total Jewish community.

Constant Self-Examination

The dramatic progress of the Jewish community center in America has been marked by a characteristic preoccupation with self-examination. Center leaders have been profoundly aware of the major problems they must solve if Centers are to contribute fully to American Jewish life. It is indicative of the Centers' strength that their leaders address themselves so persistently and with such forthrightness and frankness to their problems.

No institution experiences such dynamic growth, however, unless it responds to people's innermost needs. Centers have grown because of American Jewry's deep conviction that Centers meet some of its vital requirements. The American Jewish community has acted on the principle that strengthening Centers is essential to meeting community needs. Only this can explain the remarkable support which the Center has evoked. The vigor and strength of the Center movement in America today is such that it cannot be affected adversely, even by extreme and unwarranted claims loudly proclaimed by a small group.

It is essential to recognize that the Centers' problems are those which afflict all of American Jewish life. Lack of knowledge of their heritage by most Jews, incomprehension of the relevance of this heritage for meeting the great challenges of present day living, failure of Jewish forms and practices to come alive as instruments for significant Jewish living, and the shortage of qualified Jewish professional personnel affect the Center to the same degree that they do any Jewish institution. Every Jewish organization, be it the synagogue, the Jewish school, the federation, or the Center is attempting to cope in its own

way with these concerns. Each organization is struggling to make its particular contribution to their resolution, and to deal with the consequences of these problems for the organization.

Criticism To What End?

It is completely comprehensible that the emergence of the Center as a dynamic, modern American Jewish institution has given pause to some. It is understandable that the irresistible surge of the Center in the last decade and a half has evoked uneasiness among those who would thrust back the unfolding of indigenous, modern patterns of American Jewish living.

Had the writers of these articles examined critically and objectively the problems of the Center and constructively pointed to the ways of coping with them, this would have been a commendable act of Jewish leadership. But their destructive intent requires reflection and explanation. The most charitable comment which can be proffered is that for the most part these writers are uninformed as to the contemporary character of the Center, and particularly the course of its recent development. Either they have not taken the trouble to discover the facts, or they are unwilling to acknowledge the actual situation. There is manifested in these articles a lack of current information on Center purposes, methods of work, programs, personnel and membership policies. What pitfalls there are when sweeping generalizations are made without the benefit of careful study and when conclusions are reached from limited or special experience! Perhaps the Center movement itself has failed adequately to interpret the exciting new advances which are so rapidly and substantially altering the character of the Center today.

It is manifestly clear that some of these articles are less a considered analysis of the Center as it exists today than

an institutionally oriented attack from a fixed and unaltered position. The present argumentation of several of the authors is similar to that expressed by them in prior years. They have not appraised the Center as it actually serves Jewish life today, nor have they recognized that as a dynamic social institution, the Center is constantly growing, changing and evolving. They seem intent only on making an ideological point, irrespective of what the facts indicate—or the degree to which the facts vary from those which support their unchanging view.

There is accumulating evidence that American Jewish life has not moved towards the exclusively monolithic religious frame of reference predicted by some and premised by the writers in *Conservative Judaism*. Jewish life in America continues to evolve on a far broader plan, continues to give expression to "the civilization" concept in its widest sense, albeit with a religious core. The American Jew refuses to define his Jewishness narrowly. It is plain that large and expanding areas of Jewish organizational experience are built along other than congregational lines. Jews seek more than synagogal institutional forms to express their varied Jewish interests, in a pattern that is characteristically American. The diversity of the institutions outside the church in America that express a variety of Christian interests offers a significant parallel to what has happened in the Jewish community.

It is plain to even a casual observer that for Jews affiliated with synagogues, the congregation is not their sole Jewish interest or organizational activity. The multiplicity and diversity of their Jewish affiliations are too apparent to require lengthy discussion. But it is important to note that at a time when synagogue membership is at a peak, almost as many Jews are not members of synagogues as are so affiliated. There can be no blink-

ing the reality that many in this segment of American Jewry are determined to maintain an affirmative, knowledgeable, and active Jewish identification, but not on a religious basis. Surely, the writers of these articles would not read these persons out of Jewish life! Much as some may wish for the contrary, an important part of American Jewry will find other than religious forms for maintaining their active Jewish connection. This nagging fact—and the capability of the Center for satisfying the needs of both religiously and non-religiously affiliated Jews and affording them a common Jewish ground on which to live together—may account for the petulance of some of what has been written.

The prevalence and persistence of denominational differences in American Jewish religious life constantly comes to the fore in daily experience. No amount of wishful thinking can dismiss this fact. Predictions that the distinctions between the denominations are dissolving are contradicted by the well-established and substantial differences in patterns of worship and religious observance, and the constant expansion of the institutional expressions of the denominations: their seminaries, publications, congregational bodies, professional services and international programs.

The flowering of this diversity is one of the strengths of Jewish life. As the writer of one of these articles declares: "The existence of three shades of Judaism in America is a benediction rather than a malediction. Jewish experience is greatly enriched thereby."² But there is no profit to Jewish life in denying that this also is a separatist factor within Jewry. It is curious that while another of the writers states that "Membership in a congregation . . .

does not engender feelings of divisiveness,"³ still another acknowledges the contrary, remarking that "synagogues tend to build their denominational fences so high that excessive competitiveness and often hostility develops between various synagogues."⁴ In the face of these statements, the assertion of one of the authors⁵ that the synagogue is best qualified to provide a binding and unifying force for Jewish life is incomprehensible.

It is at this very point that the unique capacity of the Center, as a communal institution, is manifest. It has infinite potential for bringing together varied segments of the Jewish community in a continuing, enriching experience which can build a solid foundation of Jewish unity and participation.

It seems clear that some of these writers are experiencing a deep sense of frustration that a long cherished hope and prediction has not been fulfilled. Together with a small group of companion voices, they have long contended that the synagogue will become the all-encompassing institution in Jewish life, and that the Jewish community center, like other non-synagogal Jewish institutions, is an anachronism whose functions will be absorbed in time by the congregation. It is small wonder that the shattering of this expectation by the course of events, which finds Centers growing dramatically in every corner of the land, causes such disquietude. This may account for the fury with which the writers lash out against the Center. The synagogue is at the heart of our life as a people but it is not, and does not give

³ Bernard Ducoff, "Sectarianism of the Synagogue," *Conservative Judaism*, Winter-Spring, 1962, p. 6.

⁴ Max Artz, *supra*, p. 41.

⁵ Harold Schulweiss, "Jewish Leisure and the Synagogue," *Conservative Judaism*, Winter-Spring, 1962, p. 17.

² Max Artz, "Agenda for Synagogue and Center," *Conservative Judaism*, Winter-Spring, 1962, p. 39.

indication of becoming the exclusive and inclusive expression of our institutional existence.

The ire of some of the authors may well be compounded by the fact that by and large, their own laity and considerable numbers of their fellow-Conservative rabbis have rejected their aims. Leaders of Conservative congregations are among the outstanding leaders of the Jewish community center movement in America. Numbers of Center professional workers are affiliated with Conservative congregations. The dissident writers have not been able to gain effective adherence in their own movement. Their views by no means represent those of all Conservative rabbis, as the expressions of many since the appearance of the articles make manifestly clear. Addressing the convention of the Rabbinical Assembly in May of this year, Rabbi Edward Sandrow, at that time the president of the Assembly, declared that the articles in question do not reflect the official opinion of the Rabbinical Assembly, except where the sanctity of the Sabbath is concerned. Important strength and counsel are derived by Centers from the substantial support they received from all sections of the American rabbinate.

It is possible that dismay at the disquieting weaknesses which have crept into some synagogue life, a concern shared by all of us who are so profoundly committed to the vital role of the synagogue in our existence as Jews, may have led some of the writers to project this failure upon the Center, rather than to face directly the self-appraisal so urgently needed. The unhappily small attendance at most religious worship, the disturbingly limited impact which religious services seem to exert on most participants, the use of some synagogues as catering establishments, the wholesale non-observance of religious practices—especially the Sabbath and kashruth,

and the heavy congregational emphasis on such activities as brunches, luncheons, fashion parades, and even bingo and raffles—are but examples of the serious problems of the synagogue. Apprehension about this situation has been expressed repeatedly by many rabbinical leaders. This state of affairs is acknowledged at points in the articles, as for example in the statement that “The voice of Judaism is in danger of being drowned out by the cacaphony of secular diversions in the Synagogue.”⁶ The writer in question expresses confidence that the synagogue will not “. . . for long allow its religious purposes to be eclipsed,” and one can only hope that there is justification for this optimism. It ill-behooves these writers, however, to sit in judgment on the Center, when the institutions for which they are responsible confront such serious unresolved issues.

It is with ill-grace that the countless Jewishly committed and dedicated lay leaders of Centers are indicted in these articles for lack of Jewish interest and qualifications. To the degree that there is need for growth in this area, it is required equally by every Jewish organization, and by the synagogue itself. In 1959 the United Synagogue of America convention found it necessary to act on this very matter. In a resolution it referred to “. . . surveys of our leadership . . . indicating the need for the elevation of positive Jewish commitments by such leadership,” and provided for the establishment of “. . . an approved minimal code of standards for positive Jewish commitments to be expected of leaders of the United Synagogue, its affiliated congregations and all of their affiliates.”⁷

⁶ Max Artz, *supra*, p. 37.

⁷ “Resolution on Commitments of Leadership and General Membership,” *Proceedings, 1959 Biennial Convention, United Synagogue of America*, November 15–19, 1959, pp. 163–64.

But like so many of the problems of the synagogue and the Center, these are problems of all of Jewish life today—not of a given institution. These weaknesses are identified here with not the remotest intention of attacking the synagogue. The synagogue is so fundamental to Jewish life that one can only pray that the best shared efforts of all can aid the synagogue to throw off its crippling shackles where these exist and fulfill its mission. But a frank, critical appraisal of Jewish life in non-institutional terms is an essential condition precedent to correcting these maladies. How much more effective would be all of our efforts if our united attention were focused in this direction, rather than on institutional attacks!

It is not possible to deal with these issues, and especially with the recommendation of some of the writers that Center work be turned over to the synagogue, without referring to the present state of Jewish education in America. It is barely two decades since Jewish education in America took a radical turn from a communal to a congregational basis. And yet, a major national study of Jewish education in America, published in 1959, concluded that "little has been accomplished towards teaching our children the literary-historic culture of their people. Consequently, American Jewish schooling is like a shallow river, 'a mile wide and an inch deep.'"⁸ It is understandable that the question is being raised with growing frequency: was this shift from the communal to the congregational base entirely sound? Much of the experience of Jewish education after several decades under congregational auspices raises the question

as to the validity of the claims of the writers that a similar fate should be dictated for Center work.

It is well to note in reference to Jewish education that the Center fills an important part of the vacuum created by the admitted meagerness and inadequacy of modern formal Jewish education. Through its many-sided programs of Jewish experience for adolescents, youth and adults, the Center compensates for this critical void. The informal Jewish education which results from participation in group activities in the Center is often the primary organized Jewish influence in the lives of these people. Particularly important is the Center's capacity to help participants in Jewish group programs to obtain an understanding of the contemporaneous relevance of their Jewish heritage.

Where the synagogue has attempted to perform Center type functions, they have generally received a low priority on funds and attention, and have at best been limited, improvised and uneven.⁹ For the most part, the function of such programs as vital educational instrumentalities, rather than merely comfortable diversions, goes unrecognized and unimplemented, even where the synagogue presumably espouses an interest in this work. Certainly there is neither acceptance of nor commitment to the social work character of this program. The author of one of the articles very candidly acknowledges that "It is true that our synagogues are unable to meet all of the spiritual, educational and social needs of the Jewish community."¹⁰ Although he attributes this in part to lack of synagogue finances, the general experience indicates that the synagogue

⁸ Alexander M. Dushkin, and Uriah Z. Engelman, *Jewish Education in the United States: Report of the Commission for the Study of Jewish Education in the United States: Summary*, American Association for Jewish Education, New York, 1959, p. 2.

⁹ Sanford Solender, "The Place of the Jewish Community Center in Jewish Life: A Formulation of the Position of the Center," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1 (1957), pp. 36-54.

¹⁰ Bernard Ducoff, *supra*, pp. 6-7.

is not equipped either by purpose or commitment to function as a social agency of the Jewish community.

The Jewish community center, on the other hand, as a communal institution concerned primarily with enriching Jewish group association for the resulting values in personal development and community enhancement, has maintained the integrity of this function, has made great progress in intensifying program, and has strengthened its career service. And its prospects are high for dealing with and solving its large and crucial problems.

It is entirely appropriate that synagogues should conduct fellowship and social activities to strengthen the adherence of their members to the congregation and to enrich their religious experience. The Center has been and should be helpful to the synagogue with such programs and there are innumerable examples of this. But under the most favorable circumstances, this can be only a supplement to the main and primary work of the Center—to conduct a rich Center program under its own auspices in Jewish community center facilities. Serving as a gathering place for the entire Jewish community, as well as conducting a program, is basic to the Center's function. The broad range of Center activities and their inter-relationship in a rich experience for participants, the interlacing of the professional social work practice of Center staffs in the total organization of the Center, and the essentiality of a physical setting in which Center service is the primary and exclusive program require the operation of the Center in its own building. The Jewish community center would be destroyed as an institution were these qualities eliminated and were it to function merely as a service body to synagogues. In the face of the Center's substantial, demonstrated, and well-recognized achievements, there is not a shred

of justification for such a step, with its consequent loss to the Jewish community.

It is very possible that economic considerations loom large in the context of some of the writers. Their demand that community monies now allocated to Centers be given to synagogues must be viewed in this perspective. Many synagogues in recent years have erected lavish structures, expensive to build and costly to maintain. The capital and operating costs are for some a most difficult burden. The desperate search for a way out of this dilemma is understandable. It is to be regretted, however, that a covetous eye has been cast in these articles upon Jewish communal funds, since such utilization of community funds would radically alter the entire modern concept of the Jewish community.

The challenge to this proposal is not the issue of "Church and State" as one writer suggests.¹¹ The issue is that of protecting the use of Jewish community funds for the support of those programs and services which are inherently communal in character, for whom the whole Jewish community—all its groups—are the auspices and constituency, and for whom the object of service is the welfare of the total Jewish community. That is why a Jewish community center is the appropriate recipient of community grants, and why the fellowship and social activities of a synagogue cannot be viewed thus.

Support from Jewish community funds is sound for those communal services whose frame of reference is the entire community regardless of denominational or even synagogal affiliation; whose programs engender identification with the total community, deal with total community interests, and cultivate broad community values; and whose boards represent a community cross section. Such communal bodies are distinguished

¹¹ Harold Schulweiss, *supra*, p. 15.

from the institutions, no matter how valuable, for whom the test of affiliation is readiness to accept the special commitment of the organization. Financial support for these latter organizations is the logical obligation of their adherents. Community sustenance must be reserved for communal institutions representing a broad, universal Jewish identification.

By definition, the Jewish community center and the YM & YWHA are such communal institutions. The social welfare character of the Center qualifies it uniquely to receive community funds. The Center's special awareness of the needs of its members as individuals, groups, and families derives from its commitment to the utilization of social work in advancing their welfare and the entire organization is shaped to discharge this function. Its distinctive role is the meeting of the characteristically Jewish needs of its constituency in this context. The very nature of the Center: its auspices, purposes, program, membership, board composition and relationship to the federation make it a logical recipient of the Jewish community's support.

Acceptance of community support carries with it also the obligation of community discipline: to participate in community planning, to justify budgetary requests in a budgetary review, and to adhere to broad community policies. No institution—synagogue or otherwise—can receive community financing if it is unwilling to accept these obligations. It is hardly realistic to expect that the synagogue, with its specific credo and commitment, can adhere to such community discipline. The Center, like other Jewish communal agencies, recognizes and accepts these responsibilities.

The concept of "membership" in the Center is far different from that of membership in a synagogue. The choice of Center affiliation depends only on a wish to associate with the Jewish people and the Jewish community and to share

in its group life. It entails no choice of a particular type of Jewish commitment. Unfortunately, some of the authors of these articles misconstrue this as "purposeless" or "characterless" neutrality. Nothing could be further from the truth. The test of a positive Jewish purpose cannot be narrowly defined as election of a singular denomination.

The attack on Center membership practices in some of these articles requires particular note. Here occurs an erroneous generalization at variance with the facts. While with few exceptions Center membership is open to all: Jew and non-Jew alike, almost universally the number of non-Jews who have affiliated with Centers has been nominal, is in most cases considerably less than 10%, only a fraction of whom are teenagers. There is general recognition of the uniquely Jewish objectives of the Center on the part of most non-Jews who affiliate with it.

But those who cry that the availability of the Center to non-Jews promotes inter-marriage hardly have reflected on all the implications of this issue. Would they seriously propose that Jews who so deeply resent discriminatory practices when applied to them now reciprocate by such undemocratic policies in their own community organizations?

Inter-marriage obviously is not a Center-induced problem. It is an issue in Jewish life generally today. Thoughtful persons agree that the solution is not in artificially separating Jewish youth from non-Jewish contacts. The best safeguard lies in providing Jewish youth with deep wells of inner strength as Jews: with a warm sense of Jewish belonging, a rich understanding of their Jewish heritage and the joy of active Jewish participation. Young people with such backgrounds will be prepared to evaluate soundly the factors to be considered in selecting a mate. When the Center concentrates on giving young people

such inner fortification, there need be little fear of their normal democratic exposure to a variety of human associations. Under these conditions, when Jewish youth extend the hospitality of their Center to their non-Jewish friends they can do so with conscious pride in their Jewishness and with no diminishing of their Jewish youth activity. This is an affirmative approach, far more in keeping with traditional Jewish values, than an anxious effort to minimize the general associations of Jewish youth.

Vital Future of the Center

The vital future of the Jewish community center rests upon demonstrated evidence that it is peculiarly fitted to meet the needs of the Jew, both as American and Jew. It is uniquely suited to providing means for the expression of the harmony of these inseparable and integral aspects of a unified personality. Its capacity to do so explains its phenomenal growth.

The Center's special gift is the ability through sensitive social work to harness the infinite educational potentialities of the Jewish group association. It understands human needs and growth and the impact of group life on the person. It is capable of ministering to the individual and family needs of the Jew, in the context of his group participation. By providing within its walls a replica of the community, the Center builds community attitudes and participation through experience. With skill and creativity in leadership, group activities become vehicles for learning and growth, and for cultivating Jewish belonging, knowledge and participation. The very flexibility of Center-programming and its sharp purposefulness give it special vitality and adaptability.

Jewish values are conveyed through the Center's personal impact on the individual who learns through group activity

and the influence of leadership to better understand his heritage and live by it. The Center stimulates as well Jewish cultural creativity, develops Jewish leadership, and strengthens the Jewish community. The individual can be guided through the Center experience, which is an expression of the finest Jewish heritage, to a more active part in American society as a whole.

Important Tasks for the Center

The reassertion of the great potentiality of the Jewish community center leads to the fact that major problems must be overcome if the Center is to fulfill its utmost possibilities. Self-criticism is both a tradition of the Center movement and the mark of a confident, maturing institution. The editors of Conservative Judaism included in their recent issue an article by Carl Urbont, Executive Director of the 92nd St. YM & YWHA, in which he fearlessly and with determination calls the attention of his colleagues in Center work to the tasks with which they must deal. It is regrettable that the editors obtained Mr. Urbont's consent to publish this article without informing him of their intention to use it in such a destructive context.

Foremost must be a determination to make greater strides toward richer programs in depth for all age groups. Jewish life is sorely tried by the virtual disassociation of teenagers from congregational activity after bar-mitzvah or confirmation, and by the inanimate quality of most Jewish knowledge and practice. The Center must make a more daring, frontal attack on this problem. More resourcefulness, creativity and vigor must go into motivating interest in Jewish activity and planning the content of such programs. Staff must not be deterred by initial resistances to Jewish interests but must redouble their efforts to open new avenues of Jewish activity.

There must be more experimentation, research and demonstration in Jewish programming.

The momentum which has been generated for strengthening the capacity of Center professional staff to provide the needed leadership must be accelerated. The allusions to this subject by several of the "Symposium" authors totally ignore the progress which has been made in this area. The need for Jewish commitment and adequate Jewish preparation for Center workers is well established and accepted. The recruitment and selection of persons for the profession with solid Jewish backgrounds must be stepped up. Determined measures must be taken to extend the programs developed to date to provide preparation for Jewish practice, as a complement to general professional social work education. The great surge of in-service training programs emphasizing Jewish learning must be sustained and enlarged.

Nor should recruiting and training efforts rest at the professional level. Similar measures for lay leadership must receive continuing emphasis. Tendencies for board members and staff to be preoccupied with administrative and management matters to the detriment of program must be avoided. All energies must be concentrated on deepening the quality of program.

Creativity must be employed also in dealing with Jewish practices. The issue of Center programming on the Sabbath has been widely misunderstood; the emphasis improperly placed. This is not essentially a Center problem; all American Jewish life is experiencing the stresses and strains of the adaptation of Jewish practices to the rapidly changing social scene. The Sabbath in American Jewish life today is observed for the most part in the breach. Can the intrinsic and lasting values of the Sabbath be preserved and given meaning for people

on this basis? Are scolding and admonishing people for ignoring the Sabbath the answer? Or is the answer to be found in a creative effort to move towards Jewish living on the Sabbath which preserves essential values but adapts them to the contemporary scene? The Center has infinite possibilities for serving a constructive Jewish purpose in this regard. This will not be done either by intransigence or by reckless, thoughtless abandon.

What an opportunity exists here for rabbis and other Jewish leaders to help Centers carve a creative new pattern which can give renewed, modern meaning to the Sabbath in Jewish life! Rabbis of the various denominations have advised with Centers most helpfully in developing such an approach.

Such matters as the Sabbath practices of Centers are local community problems which must be dealt with by the local communities. They are issues around which there are an infinite variety of views, even within the religious community. JWB as the national body of the Centers has reaffirmed the original recommendations of the Janowsky report that Centers should be open on the Sabbath only for those activities which are in consonance with the day. JWB has urged that the determination of a given Center's policy within this framework should be made with the fullest consultation with all affected local groups.

Centers share their important tasks with other institutions, chief among them being the synagogue. While the Center's community orientation has always influenced it to be concerned about these relationships, this must be given a place of continuing primacy. It is a source of special satisfaction that recent years have seen progressive advances in healthy understanding, mutual acceptance and cooperation between most Cen-

