

# JEWISH IDENTITY AND ADULTHOOD

## A Family-Systems Approach to Adult Jewish Education

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*In this article, the author proposes a model of adult Jewish education that recognizes the emotional needs of adults who, for a variety of reasons, must reclaim their Jewishness on their own terms. To enable adults to reconnect with the Jewish past as choosing individuals, teachers need to speak to them not as impersonal representatives of Jewish tradition but as committed Jewish individuals who have made specific decisions about the meaning of Judaism in their lives. In that way, students are challenged to assume responsibility for defining their own relationship to Judaism.*

**I**n his opening lecture at the Frankfort Lehrhaus in 1920, Franz Rosenzweig offered a vision of adult Jewish education as a response to the secularization that defines the modern Jew.

A new learning is about to be born—rather, it has been born. It is a learning in reverse order. A learning that no longer starts from the Torah and leads into life, but the other way round: from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, or pretends to know nothing, back to the Torah. That is the sign of the time. It is the sign of the time because it is the mark of the men of the time. There is no one today who is not alienated, or who does not contain within himself some small fraction of alienation. . . . We all know that, in being Jewish, we must not give up anything, not renounce anything, but lead everything back to Judaism. From the periphery back to the center, from the outside in (Glatzer, 1955).

Traditional Jewish learning took as its initial premise a fundamental closeness between student and text, a closeness based on deference to authority. The student began with an acceptance of the text's validity and, on that basis, worked outward in an effort to apply it to life. The student's allegiance to the text, the closeness out of which everything else flowed, was at one level due to a belief in the text's divine origin. Yet, more fundamentally, it

was the other way around. Jews accepted the validity of the text's claims, including the claim of its own divine origin, because they were already so closely bound to it. Their belief in divine authorship was less the source of their allegiance to tradition than one of its effects. The more fundamental closeness was an intergenerational one. The deep identification of one generation with another left little room for the emotional separateness, the psychological independence that would express itself as skepticism toward inherited assumptions.

The new learning of which Rosenzweig spoke begins with the distance of the modern Jewish adult from the text. Again, at one level, that distance is a theological one. Without an unqualified belief in divine authorship, Jewish adults can no longer take the authority of the text as their starting point. Yet, at a deeper level, that theological skepticism is a result of their distance, rather than the cause of it. The more fundamental break with tradition is in their definition of a mature relationship between the generations.

The definition of emotional maturity that we have absorbed from contemporary Western culture, a definition fundamentally at odds with that of pre-emancipation Jewish culture (and, for that matter, of premodern cultures in general) emphasizes emotional differentiation from one's family of origin. Adulthood in contemporary

culture is measured not by the readiness to accept a predefined identity rooted in family and tradition, but by the capacity to stand back and *choose* one's identity, to take individual responsibility for one's categories of belonging, and, with them, one's core values and system of meaning. The issue is less the content of the chosen identity (the degree to which it differs in substance from the legacy inherited through the family) than its chosenness per se, i.e., the individual's capacity to assert individual ownership of it. The fundamental differentiation, in other words, is not of content (though the content is likely to differ as well), but of emotional position. Growing up, by this definition, means separating from one's family to an extent that allows for a highly autonomous, choosing self to emerge. One can then reconnect with the family from that more autonomous position.

For Jews who have internalized this definition of what it is to be an adult, the intense closeness and deference to the text that defined the starting point in traditional Jewish learning are unreachable except by way of psychological surrender. The only way to return to that starting point would be to renounce our sense of our own adulthood.

For a limited number of contemporary Jews, those who are drawn to traditional Judaism less as a choice than as a forfeiture of choice, that renunciation of personal autonomy is a viable path. But for Rosenzweig, as for the vast majority of contemporary Jewish adults, such surrender is impossible. "We must not renounce anything, not give up anything, but lead everything back to Judaism." The goal of Rosenzweig's new Jewish learning is not to return to tradition by surrendering the emotional independence that defines us as modern adults, but instead to use that very independence as our means of returning. It is a learning in reverse order because, instead of starting with our closeness to the text and, on that basis, applying the text to our lives, we move in the opposite direction. We start with an attempt to apply

the text to our lives, to achieve a personal reading of it, and on that basis we reaffirm and reclaim the text. The destination of this journey "from the outside in" is a new kind of closeness to tradition, a new sense of belonging and purpose, based not on psychological surrender but on individual choice, an identification with tradition that does not exclude an autonomous, decision-making self but to the contrary requires it. In James Fowler's developmental framework (1981), this journey represents a lateral shift from a critical ("individuated-reflective") secularism to a critical Judaism. It in turn opens the door to a later developmental transition to a postcritical ("conjunctive") Judaism.

#### CLOSENESS VERSUS SEPARATENESS IN JEWISH IDENTITY

The challenge that Rosenzweig outlines, that of reconnecting with the Jewish past as a choosing individual, must be understood at two levels. At the level of content, the challenge is intellectual and existential. The individual must grapple with traditional Jewish beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior in an effort to find a new sense of personal meaning in them.

Yet, for many if not most Jewish adults, Rosenzweig's challenge involves a more fundamental struggle at the level of family structure. Jewish identity struggles, like Jewish identity itself, are not only about the individual's relationship to the specifics of Jewish content but also about his or her connection to other Jews, past and present, as part of an emotional system, a quasi-extended family reaching back through history. Identification with that larger family system, in turn, is rooted in the nuclear family, in one's identification with parents. Conflicts over Jewish identity, then, are not only over issues of belief and practice but also over issues of emotional closeness versus autonomy, belonging versus independence.

At that second level, the difficulty that Jewish adults have reconnecting with Jewish

tradition as choosing individuals is often due not to too much distance on their parts but to too little. Their alienation, their inability to feel that their Jewishness is their own, may have less to do with the content of their heritage per se than with their difficulty asserting the emotional distance from it that they would need in order to stand back and choose their relationship to it, to reclaim it on their own terms.

In a sense, then, many Jewish adults find themselves caught in the middle between tradition and modernity, neither here nor there. Even as their vision of themselves as adults prevents them from simply deferring to the authority of the Jewish past, they may be unaccustomed to relating to that past in any other way. Although they would be unwilling to re-integrate their Jewishness into their lives except by way of an independent choice, they may never have asserted the emotional independence as Jews that would make such a choice possible.

Frequently, Jewish adults—even as they take individual responsibility for their identities in other areas—remain bound to the Jewish people and heritage in much the same way that they were as children: not as decision-making individuals, but as extensions of their parents (Perel, 1990). Jewish adults in that position experience their Jewishness not as a mature commitment, but as an involuntary, almost biological bond. Never having repositioned themselves as choosing individuals in relation to their heritage, they have no room to ask themselves what being Jewish means to them—or for that matter what it does not mean to them—in personal terms.

Bound in that emotionally undifferentiated relationship to the Jewish past, they carry within them the voices of parents, teachers, and other authority figures who embodied that past for them in childhood, without ever feeling the freedom to choose their relationship to those voices. Feeling like children vis-a-vis those voices, unable to question or re-evaluate where they stand in relation to them, they are unable to in-

tegrate their Jewishness into their adult selves, to reclaim it as their own. At the same time, they are unable to leave their Jewishness, the legacy represented by those voices, behind. They can do nothing except feel crowded by it.

When teaching adults who are trapped in that in-between state—unwilling simply to surrender to the authority of the Jewish past and at the same time lacking the distance to stand back and reappropriate that past on their own terms—attempting to persuade them of the merits of Jewish content will have little effect. To the extent that the teacher positions him- or herself as a defender of Jewish tradition, the teacher will be merging his or her voice with the very voices by which the students feel so crowded. The teacher will become an impersonal representative of an emotional system that, because of the students' own lack of independence within it, feels monolithic and oppressive to them. Students in that position will no more be able to stand back and appropriate what the teacher offers them than they will the messages that they carry with them from childhood. It will all sound the same to them, all part of a broad, overbearing call for surrender.

Lacking a sense of themselves as adults in relation to that which the teacher represents, they may retreat from any active engagement with the material under discussion, withdrawing behind a respectful exterior that masks their deeper resistance. Or they may resist more overtly, objecting to the material as too restrictive, judgmental, exclusive, outmoded, etc. The content may indeed be problematic for them. Yet, the more rigid and anxiety-laden their reactions are, the more likely it is that the fundamental struggle for them has to do with their own lack of emotional distance, that what they are really reacting against is not so much the words themselves as their sense of being imposed upon by the voice behind the words. Their objections to the material—in fact, the way in which they hear the material in the first place—have less to do with the content per se than

with their own struggle for breathing room. Their sense of imposition becomes an emotional filter through which they hear and interpret the words.

Attempts to defend the content, then, to pull them closer to it by persuading them that they are wrong about it, will be counterproductive. Such attempts will only reinforce their feeling of being crowded, and hence their resistance. Their problem is that they are too close to begin with.

Rather than argue the merits of the content under discussion in an effort to pull them closer to it, the teacher would have more success by helping them first to begin separating emotionally from the voice behind the content, establishing their right as adults to choose their relationship to the Jewish past. That separation would gradually make it possible for them to turn around and hear the content from a more autonomous, less conflictual distance and ultimately to reintegrate it on their own terms.

It is important to note that reintegration of Jewish identity "from the outside in" does not entirely negate the existing bond to the Jewish past rooted in the unchosen identification of the child with his or her parents. Separating from and reintegrating the Jewish past does not mean breaking that childhood bond and starting from scratch. It means *stretching* that bond enough to resolve the conflict between one's Jewishness and one's adulthood, creating room within that attachment for a sense of individual ownership. At one level, that emotional repositioning occurs within the extended family system of Jewish peoplehood, whereas at another level it occurs within the nuclear family, between the individual and his or her parents.

#### COMPARTMENTALIZATION, CRISIS, AND PRESENTING PROBLEM

The internal discontinuity that underlies the conflict—the discrepancy between Jewish adults' sense of their own adulthood and the tightness of their identification

with the Jewish people as an emotional system—is due to the nature of the culture from which they derive their definition of adulthood. The same contemporary culture that challenges young Jews from early adolescence on to choose the secular allegiances that will define them as adults—to take individual responsibility for their professional and political identifications, for example—tends to treat their Jewish identity with a kind of benign neglect. Jewish children can grow up in America without ever being challenged to define why, given the alternatives available to them, they choose to identify with the Jewish people and heritage. American culture, with its tendency to compartmentalize religion, has little internal need to ask that question. It can afford to relegate religious identity to the realm of family history, rather than individual conviction. Traditional Jewish culture, on the other hand, would never have asked that question because the contemporary American definition of adult responsibility, with its emphasis on individual decision making, has always been foreign to it. To the contrary, traditional Jewish culture, like all traditional cultures, tended to discourage that kind of emotional differentiation. Jews in America may grow up with little sense of what being Jewish means to them as free individuals simply because they never needed to decide. Neither their Americanness nor their Jewishness ever challenged them to do so.

As long as Jewish adults are not challenged to take individual responsibility for their identification as Jews, they may deal with the conflict between their Jewishness and their adulthood by keeping their Jewishness emotionally compartmentalized, set apart from the realm of individual decision making and responsibility, from the areas of life in which they expect to function as (and feel like) adults. The result of that compartmentalization is a Jewishness that they may feel very deeply, but over which they have little sense of personal ownership and which plays no active role in their adult decisions. The conflict be-

tween their adulthood and their Jewishness, while dormant, remains unsolved.

Consider these examples.

A middle-aged Jewish husband and wife have attended High Holiday services all their lives out of a sense of duty and respect. Not to attend would feel to them like a betrayal. Yet, they leave the synagogue every year without having made any active attempt to integrate what they have heard and said in the synagogue with their lives outside.

A young Jewish couple is planning their wedding. Both partners take it for granted that they must have a rabbi officiate at the wedding in order to validate their marriage. But they have never discussed any role for Judaism in their marriage beyond the wedding ceremony.

A couple in their mid-thirties with young children joins a synagogue in order to enroll their children in Hebrew school. Neither parent ever thought of doing so as a choice. It is an obligation that they never questioned. They have never seriously considered continuing their own Jewish educations either, seeing Jewish study as mainly a matter for children.

By never considering questions of personal relevance at all, separating their Jewishness from their adulthood, Jewish adults may keep the two from overtly conflicting for a long time. Theoretically, a family could maintain a Jewish identity in such a compartmentalized state indefinitely, transmitting it from generation to generation, as long as no one in the chain of transmission ever needed to confront and resolve the deeper conflict. The point at which that compartmentalization fails—at which it ceases to be useful—is when Jewish adults, for one reason or another, are challenged by their own needs (or the needs of the people around them) to assert individual ownership of their Jewish identity, to take responsibility for it as an adult decision.

In contemporary American society, such

a challenge may take any number of forms. Jewish adults may find it necessary to explain to someone close to them—a spouse or prospective spouse (most often a non-Jewish one), or a child or grandchild who is approaching the age of independent questioning—why, given the alternatives available to them, they remain committed to being Jewish. That question will be particularly pressing for those who are asking the other person to share or otherwise support their own Jewish allegiance. To answer that question, they must speak not as undifferentiated heirs to a heritage, but as free individuals who choose to make that heritage their own. Or, due to a crisis in their lives—for instance, an illness or the death of a loved one—they may find themselves searching for religious meaning in their heritage, looking for answers to questions of personal faith. Again, that means confronting their tradition not as undifferentiated links in a family chain, but as *critical*, questioning individuals. Or, facing an unmarried and/or childless future, they may be forced to redefine their Jewishness as a personal choice, as something that matters to them as individuals, rather than strictly a matter of intergenerational continuity. They can do that only by standing back and confronting their tradition from a more independent perspective, searching for their own connection to it.

For adults whose only connection to the Jewish past is the unchosen bond that they bring with them from childhood, such challenges are likely to represent a deep threat. From their vantage point of undifferentiated closeness, the prospect of standing back from the Jewish past and re-examining it as autonomous individuals may appear to them more as a betrayal, a break with the past, than as a means of reconnecting with it. Their status quo, as conflictual as it is, is all that they have. In response to the challenge, then, their initial reaction may be to try to hold onto that status quo all the more tightly, closing ranks

with the Jewish past, rather than allowing themselves to stand back and re-examine it as individuals.

Hence, Jewish adults who are struggling with such a challenge may tend at first to define the problem in a way that shifts the responsibility for change away from themselves. Rather than presenting the problem in terms of their need to take responsibility for their own Jewish convictions, they may present it as one that requires an external solution to be provided by a teacher, a rabbi, or another representative of Jewish tradition. That definition of their need, by placing them in an emotionally dependent position, is consistent with the status quo that they seek to maintain. Yet, because that status quo is such a source of conflict for them in the first place, such a definition of the problem cannot lead to a real solution.

A Jewish man in his twenties has asked his non-Jewish fiancée to convert to Judaism so that their children will be recognized as Jews. He cannot say in any concrete terms how he wishes to observe Judaism in their family, insisting that he is not "religious." But he is deeply invested in the continuity of the Jewish people. He approaches his family's rabbi to ask him to take responsibility for his fiancée's Jewish education and conversion. He has given no thought to his own role in the process.

In this example, the Jewish husband-to-be needs to take greater individual responsibility for his Jewishness for the sake of his marriage. In addressing his fiancée as he does, as an undifferentiated member of a tribe to which she does not belong rather than as a choosing individual like her, he leaves her essentially alone, with no way in. Only by individuating his own Jewish identity on Rosenzweig's model can he offer her a Judaism that they can truly share. If they are to function as a couple during her conversion process (and afterward), he must in that sense become a Jew-by-Choice along with her.

In his undifferentiated state, however, the Jewish partner defines the problem not in terms of his own need for separation and self-definition as a Jew, but in terms of the threat to his Jewishness that his fiancée represents. He assigns the rabbi the responsibility of neutralizing that threat by making her a Jew. The purpose of his fiancée's conversion, as he defines it, is to spare him the challenge of self-differentiation, to protect his current position within his family (Perel, 1990). A conversion under those terms can only lead to problems later on in their marriage. The converted spouse is bound to feel, at some point, that she got nothing in the bargain.

A Jewish woman in her early sixties is deeply distressed over her son's decision several years ago to become an evangelical Christian, particularly now that her son has a young son himself. She knows that, as her grandson gets older, she will feel a need to let him know about his Jewish roots. But since she herself has never felt comfortable with the idea of Jewish particularism, always having considered it arrogant and presumptuous that Jews should consider themselves "better than other people," she does not know how to talk to him about it. Moreover, she worries about offending her son and his wife if she tries to talk to her grandson about his Jewish heritage. She enrolls in an Introduction to Judaism class to learn what she should say to her grandson.

The only way that the woman in this example will be able to speak in a meaningful way to her grandson about his Jewish heritage—and in a way that will not undermine the authority of the child's parents—is by defining where she herself stands as a Jew, by finding her own Jewish voice. Her message to her grandson needs to be, not who "we are," but who "I am." Jewish distinctiveness clearly matters to her. Yet, never having felt free to decide why it matters to her, she can only experience that idea as an imposition and react against

it. It is not in her own voice that she hears it, but in the voice of some childhood authority figure. Only by standing back from that voice and finding some way to make that concept her own can she know what she wants to say to her grandson.

In her presentation of the problem, however, she looks to the teacher to relieve her of that challenge of separation and self-definition by giving her the proper words. To the extent that the teacher tries to fill that role, to speak as an impersonal representative of Jewish tradition, the teacher will only become a focus of her resentment, her sense of being crowded by that which she has inherited. From that position, no matter what the teacher may say about Jewish particularism, the teacher is almost bound to be misunderstood.

The parents of a 16-year-old boy are deeply anxious about their son interdating, but have trouble talking to him about their feelings on the subject. When they try, their son responds that their position is intolerant, even racist. They do not know how to get through to him and ask their rabbi to tell them what they should say to him.

In order to speak to their son in a way that will make room for his own emerging sense of adulthood, that will not crowd him into a defensive position but will instead leave him room to take responsibility for his own convictions as a Jew, the parents need to speak about their own Jewish values more personally and less defensively. Their challenge is to take greater individual responsibility for their own Jewishness—to speak to their son as Jewish adults—in a way that will challenge and permit him to do the same.

In their presentation of the problem, however, they define their need impersonally, looking to the rabbi as an embodiment of Jewish tradition to tell them what to say. If the rabbi accepts that assignment and relieves them of individual responsibility for their words, the rabbi will only be feeding the conflict between them and

their son. As long as they are not speaking as individuals, their son, who is struggling for his own individuality, is bound to feel crowded by their voices.

A middle-aged woman lost a child in an accident several years ago and feels a need for religious comfort. She is troubled by the question of why the innocent suffer. She deeply resents traditional attempts to justify God at the expense of the sufferer. Such reasoning feels oppressive and demeaning to her. But when she is offered alternative approaches from Jewish tradition, she resists those as well. She enrolls in a class on Jewish theology to see if the teacher can give her the answer that she seeks.

The student defines her problem as an inability to accept the traditional teachings that she learned as a child. Yet, the emotional intensity with which she rejects them and her simultaneous resistance to other Jewish approaches indicate a broader and deeper struggle with her heritage. Her sense of being oppressed and demeaned has less to do with the specific content that she remembers than with her inability to feel like an adult in relation to the Jewish past in general. She will not be able to derive any real comfort and meaning from her tradition until she can claim the right to reappropriate that tradition on her own terms. Only by standing back and asserting a more mature distance will she be able either to adapt and reintegrate in some way what she learned as a child, or else let go of it and integrate a different Jewish approach.

However, in asking the teacher to respond to her as an impersonal authority, she enlists the teacher in an attempt to hold onto that conflictual status quo, rather than to move beyond it. To the extent that the teacher accepts that assignment and tries to provide her with an answer, rather than help her find her own, she will be unable to integrate what the teacher says. No matter what it is, she will feel imposed upon by it.

A single Jewish woman in her late thirties is struggling to come to terms with the prospect that she may never find an appropriate Jewish man to marry. Although she had always hoped to observe some Jewish traditions in her home, she had assumed that she would do so after she had married. She enrolls in a class to learn more about home observances. But she is offended by the traditional assumption, as reflected in the material, that all Jewish adults are married and have children, and she repeatedly complains about the assumption to the teacher.

The assumption that the student finds so offensive is the same one that, until now, has prevented her from observing Judaism as a single woman. It feels so oppressive to her precisely because it is so close to her. It is the model of Jewish life that she inherited from her own family. Only by separating herself emotionally from that model and claiming the right to establish her own will she be able to take charge of her own Judaism.

In her complaints to the teacher, however, she in effect asks the teacher to explain away the conflicts for her, sparing her the necessity to separate. To the extent that the teacher accepts that role and tries to defend or redeem the material for her, the teacher will only be stepping into the middle of her conflict, trying to pull her closer to a tradition from which she first needs to stand back.

#### **THE POSITION OF THE TEACHER**

Cases like the preceding ones offer important openings for adult education, in that Jewish adults' own needs at such times call for a personal reappropriation of Jewish identity on Rosenzweig's model. Either their own existential questions or their need to function as Jewish adults in the context of their relationships makes it necessary for them to reclaim their Jewishness on their own terms.

In many cases, as in some of the previous examples, adults facing such challenges

will find their way to educational settings, ready to focus on Jewish content, even if they are not yet ready to take the individual responsibility that their situation calls for. In such cases, the teacher will need to work with the student from a position different from that which the student attempts to assign to him or her. If the teacher falls back into an impersonal role, merging him- or herself emotionally with the tradition against which the student is struggling, the teacher will merely be stepping into the middle of that struggle.

Such an emotionally undifferentiated position is inherently defensive. From that vantage point, the teacher would experience any move toward separation by the student as a breaking away, rather than as a means to reconnect, and hence would feel the need to rein the student in ever more tightly by way of arguments and persuasion. Such a stance by the teacher would offer a certain comfort to the student, in that it would leave the student's status quo unchallenged. Yet, at the same time, because that status quo is so conflictual for the student, the teacher would find it difficult to have any real influence from that position. Lacking any breathing room, the student would either retreat from a mature engagement with the teacher, attempting to re compartmentalize that which the teacher represents, or else resist more actively, using the teacher as a lightning rod for his or her resentment.

In order to help such students reconnect with Judaism from a more mature, less conflictual distance, the teacher needs to speak from a more emotionally independent position as well, not as an impersonal representative of Jewish tradition, but as a committed Jewish individual who has made specific decisions about the meaning of Judaism in his or her life. Edwin Friedman's model of "leadership by self-differentiation" (1985), in which a religious leader's primary task is to maintain a well-individuated, nonanxious stance, is relevant here. In this context, that means sharing one's Jewish



vision and commitments in a comfortable first-person-singular voice, and interpreting Jewish voices other than one's own, as represented in the texts, with a separateness that eliminates the need for apologetic.

The more individuated and undefensive the teacher's stance, the more easily the teacher can keep students actively engaged while at the same time staying out of power struggles with them, which generally take the form of impersonal debates. Personal expressions of belief and commitment and personal readings of Jewish tradition are difficult for students merely to react against, in that they do not call for their agreement in the first place. Instead of crowding students and raising their defenses, such personal statements by the teacher implicitly challenge them to define in positive terms where they themselves stand. Friedman (1985) has noted that "when leaders accept that challenge [of self-differentiation], they automatically challenge their followers to do the same." By maintaining an individuated stance, as opposed to merging defensively with the tradition that he or she interprets, the teacher implicitly shifts a greater degree of responsibility onto the students' shoulders.

Such a personal stance, even as it challenges students implicitly, gives the teacher room to raise that challenge explicitly. Having addressed the students as decision-making individuals, the teacher can then ask them to respond in kind, giving them permission to stand back and confront the material with questions of personal meaning. By sharing his or her unresolved questions and doubts, as well as personal answers, the teacher can normalize the students' own irresolution, giving them room to move beyond it by making real choices.

It must be emphasized that the content of those choices—those of the teacher and ultimately those of the student—is not determined by their chosenness *per se*. A more emotionally independent position does not necessarily correspond to a less traditional vision of Judaism at the level

of content. Theoretically, as a choosing individual, one could embrace any theology or mode of practice, from the least traditional to the most traditional. The issue is not what one believes or practices, but how one comes to that belief or practice: as a personal decision or as an unquestioned assumption.

Maintaining a comfortable first-person-singular voice can be a particular challenge for the teacher when students resist the self-differentiation that underlies it. Friedman has noted that those who are least individuated themselves will be most threatened by a religious leader's attempt to speak as an individual and will almost reflexively attempt to pull him or her back into a less differentiated posture. Frequently, by the phrasing or tone of their questions, students may attempt to draw the teacher into defending Jewish content, prescribing Jewish norms for them, or in some other way overidentifying with the tradition from which they themselves are having such difficulty separating. To the extent that students succeed in pulling the teacher back into such an undifferentiated stance, they will be in a position merely to react against or re compartmentalize that which the teacher represents, rather than having to step back and define their own convictions. In order to maintain a constructive separateness at those moments—to respond to students' impersonal questions with personal answers that will keep them engaged yet give them room to grow—the teacher must already have achieved a high level of comfort with his or her own Jewish choices. Opportunities for rabbis and other adult Jewish educators to stand back and work on defining the meaning of their own Jewishness in supportive, unpressured settings are therefore a crucial component of their training.

#### ADDRESSING UNDERLYING ISSUES

In general, during discussions of content in class, the teacher is limited by his or her role to dealing with issues of emotional

position only indirectly. The teacher's attempt to reframe the student's needs, to shift a greater degree of adult responsibility onto their shoulders, is implicit in the emotionally differentiated stance that the teacher adopts, and challenges the students to adopt, vis-a-vis the content under discussion. The therapeutic dimension of the educational process, the challenge to the students of repositioning themselves within their family structure, remains inexplicit, whereas the explicit focus is on the content.

Yet, in private meetings outside the class, opportunities often arise for teachers to encourage that repositioning more directly by shifting the focus away from Jewish content questions per se and dealing more explicitly with the interpersonal issues that brought students to their studies in the first place. (For example: "Your grandson will not be able to hear you unless it is *you* who is talking. Try to worry less about what you ought to say to him—about what other people think you should believe—and think about what you *want* to say to him, about what you really do believe. He will hear that.")

Along the same lines, the teacher may reframe students' struggles with the content as struggles of emotional separation by shifting the focus back to their relationships with parents and/or other Jewish authority figures from childhood. ("When you feel that you can observe Judaism only if you are married and have children, whose voice are you hearing? Who in your own life communicated that to you?") The identification of the voices that students are reacting against as the voices of particular people in their lives, as opposed to impersonal absolutes, gives them room to begin differentiating from those voices. The teacher can then encourage that differentiation by emphasizing their right to function as adults in relation to those childhood authority figures.

Such interventions, with a more explicitly therapeutic character, tend to take the teacher beyond the conventional limits of his or her educational role. However, the

teacher's willingness to stretch that conventional role boundary during private meetings, to the extent that his or her training and relationship with the student allow it, can deeply enhance the educational process.

Such interventions are not only an important supplement to adult Jewish education but also in many cases are a prerequisite to it. Often, as in some of the examples above, Jewish adults' initial definition of their problem may not bring them to a class at all. Instead, it may bring them to a private meeting with a rabbi or other Jewish communal professional (or, if available, to a workshop defined around parenting or intermarriage issues), seeking advice on how to control the person who threatens their status quo. Although a real resolution of their problem will generally require them to re-explore and re-appropriate their own Jewishness in some way (which will almost inevitably require some Jewish study), their presenting problem will have to be reframed to some extent, with a greater burden of responsibility shifted onto their shoulders, before they will be motivated to begin that work. ("It seems to me that, before you can ask your fiancée to convert, you need to clarify what it is that you are offering her, what you want to share with her." Or, "I think that you would be better off talking with your son about why marrying a Jew was so important to *you*. You know how adolescents hate to be told what to do; but hearing about what you want Judaism to mean in your own marriage, without any pressure on him, might mean more to him than you think.") Using private consultations or group workshops to reframe the presenting problem and shift the burden of responsibility can lead Jewish adults into educational programs as a natural next step in dealing with the interpersonal issues that brought them in for help.

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### What They Mean for Jewish Communal Service

The Council of Jewish Federations' 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) is the most important research study in recent years about the total American Jewish community. Its findings on Jewish continuity and intermarriage have sent shock waves through the organized Jewish world; no less important for Jewish communal professionals are its data about household size and composition, use of Jewish social service agencies, the changing demography and needs of the aging, and the economic status of American Jews.

In the Summer 1992 issue of the *Journal*, researchers (including the authors of both the 1970 and 1990 NJPS), rabbis, and leading communal professionals explore the implications of the NJPS for the field of Jewish communal service.

#### Research Findings

NJPS methodology and major findings—*Dr. Barry Kosmin*, CJE, New York  
 Why is New York different?—*Drs. Bethamie Horowitz* and *Jeffrey R. Solomon*, UJA—Federation, New York  
 Need for and use of Jewish social service agencies—*Dr. J. Alan Winter*, Connecticut College, New London, CT  
 Politics of research—*Dr. Fred Massarik*, UCLA, Los Angeles

#### Jewish Continuity—Will Our Grandchildren Be Jewish?

*Barry Shrage*, Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston  
*Rabbi Lavey Derby*, Council on Jewish Life, Los Angeles  
*Steven Bayme*, American Jewish Committee, New York  
*Rabbi Joy Levitt*, Reconstructionist Synagogue of the North Shore, New York  
*Elliot Gershenson*, United Jewish Community, Harrisburg, PA

#### Policy and Planning Implications

Jewish communal leadership—*Bernard Reisman*, Ph.D., Brandeis University, Waltham, MA  
 Lay Leadership—*David Dubin*, JCC on the Palisades, Tenafly, NJ  
 Jewish family service agencies—*Bert J. Goldberg*, Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies, Kendall Park, NJ  
 Jewish vocational service agencies—*Dr. E. F. Royfe*, Jewish Employment and Vocational Service, Philadelphia  
 Jewish community relations councils—*Lawrence Sternberg*, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA

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