

Building Community "along the Turnpike": the Unique Difficulties of a Populous Region*

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It is axiomatic that urban decay breeds social disorganization. Once the city was the hub of an area—economically, politically and even socially. It prided itself on its industry, its facilities, its institutions and its history. But centrifugal forces began to appear, and people and industry and all the elements which make for community health and vitality, especially young people, began to move out leaving behind the elderly who were too poor to relocate, too old to make a change or unwilling to give up old memories or associations. A gulf was created between those Jews who remained and those who left.

THERE is an old story about two men who were walking along a city street when they came upon two women shouting at each other from the steps of their respective houses. After listening a while, one man asked the other, "Do you think they will ever get together?" His friend replied, "No. They are arguing from different premises."

I don't think we will have that problem today. I believe we all start from the same premise—that there is something bigger than our respective Federations and their turfdoms, and that is the Jewish people, *wherever* they are.

Irwin I. Sanders, the sociologist, said, "The community is a place; it consists of people; it provides jobs and services; it has a communication network; it has a past living on in traditions and values; it contains social layers; its people express themselves through groups; it is an arena of interaction; it experiences social change; and it has a system of controls to enforce a reasonable degree of conformity to its traditions and values." This definition, while basic, is too simple for our purposes since it lacks the special Jewish dimension. We need to com-

prehend and agree upon the peculiar character of the elements which constitute a Jewish community.

The core of Jewish communal identity is its agenda and how it should be pursued. Agenda relates to function, and the how equates with form. The architects tell us that form follows function, and they are right. In my view forms such as Federation, synagogue, and national and international organizations are but devices. They are not everlasting and they are not ends in themselves. They should not be confused with Judaism, Jewishness or community. For the moment, however, they seem to be good devices. We may find better ones somewhere down the road.

The overriding item on the Jewish agenda should be the survival and meaningful continuity of the Jewish people, their culture and their values. All other issues that can be identified are either manifestations, aspects or variations of that central issue or are, by contrast, secondary and perhaps even insignificant. Among the problems I regard as directly related to this core issue are the continued existence and peaceful development of Israel as a Jewish homeland for the oppressed and others who wish to settle there; freedom of movement for Jews to leave those

*Presented at a meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Association of Jewish Community Organization Personnel, New Brunswick, New Jersey, June 15, 1984.

countries in which they are not living a satisfying life as members of the general community and as Jews; the enrichment and enhancement of Jewish family life; the strengthening of Jewish educational efforts, both formal and informal, for children and adults; the disenchantment of American Jewish youth with their Jewishness and with the Jewish community; the growth of intermarriage; the amount and quality of participation in Jewish community life; the provision of services to the aged, the handicapped, the sick, the emotionally disturbed and those needing guidance of all forms; and the raising of funds through annual campaigns, bequests and endowments, and other means without which little, if anything can be accomplished.

The Federation, which at this moment in Jewish history most closely approximates the organized Jewish community, should be concerned with all of these problems and issues to help ensure the survival and creative continuity of the Jewish people, their culture, institutions and values. If a Federation is not striving to those ends, then it has no reason to exist and merits no support. Further, the extent to which these issues are dealt with should be our yardstick for determining the state of Jewish community development throughout America and more particularly our Mid-Atlantic region which includes New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania and Delaware (Because there are more roads and automobiles per square mile in this region than elsewhere, we have somewhat colorfully characterized it as a "turnpike").

I contend that there are extremely powerful and unique historical, geographic, political, social, demographic and even religious forces at work in the region which make Jewish community development more difficult here than anywhere else in the country. As the

popular song goes: "If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere!"

Ma nish tana? Why is this region different from all others? The reasons lie in several forces and how they interact within the Jewish community.

These forces also have divisive and destructive effects on the general community. They are identity, mobility, density of population, urban decay, suburbia, parochialism or tunnel vision, materialism and the role of the national United Jewish Appeal and other national organizations.

A visitor from another planet upon driving from New York City to Washington would perceive the region as a maelstrom of roads, bridges, traffic signs, shopping malls, diners, fast-food establishments, parking lots, moving vehicles of every description, high and low office buildings, billboards and the endless noise of tires, motors and horns. If he went deeper into the region and looked behind the carnival-like landscape, he would find that there are suburbs, homes, apartments, schools and playgrounds and even some parks. But one has to look hard and with determination to find evidences of a Jewish community. The only locales which still look somewhat like Jewish communities are the old neighborhoods where many of us grew up in the now decrepit, run-down cities. It is safe to say, I think, that urban decay is at its worst in the mid-Atlantic region. It is axiomatic that urban decay breeds social disorganization. Once the city was the hub of an area—economically, politically and even socially. It prided itself on its industry, its facilities, its institutions and its history. But centrifugal forces began to appear, and people and industry and all the elements which make for community health and vitality, especially young people, began to move out leaving behind the elderly who were too poor to relocate, too old to make a change or

unwilling to give up old memories or associations. A gulf was created between those Jews who remained and those who left, and the resultant feelings are characterized by bitterness, anger, resentment, some envy and some guilt, accusations of betrayal, feelings of abandonment and divided loyalties.

More amorphous areas of population called suburbs sprang up and attracted many Jews. Our four-thousand year journey from tent to split level was over. In that context, I recall a statement in a May, 1974 publication of the Council of Jewish Federations entitled, "Mobility: Facts for Planning." It was one of a series of reports on the findings of the National Jewish Population study:

"The mobility of Jews has a direct bearing on community financing, planning, services and structures. It affects fundraising organization and coverage, location of facilities and services, involvement in boards and committees. Even more basically, it affects community stability, personal and social loyalties, ties, relationships and influences."

Who settled in suburbia? Young marrieds who had been raised in the cities; older city "expatriates;" employees of large companies transferred from other locations and who were likely to be transferred again and, therefore, would sink no roots; commuters to New York City or Philadelphia or Baltimore who claim, with some justification, that they are "too tired in the evening or on weekends to get involved with community work."

The demographic picture is made more complex by the ever increasing growth in the population, Jewish and general, in garden apartments and town houses and particularly around shopping malls and transportation facilities. More commuters. More transients. More anonymity. All of this despite the fact that the region is the heaviest con-

tributor of population to the sun-belt states.

One would think that the fantastic network of highways and railroads would act as a tie bringing people and communities together. The opposite seems to be the case. The roads function as Chinese walls, further increasing tendencies to separateness, isolation, parochial attitudes and unhealthy forms of competition.

While it is somewhat true of the region in general, New Jersey in particular, suffers from a lack of identity. It is a much maligned state, an object of derision for New Yorkers and a place little known by almost everyone else. Even in colonial times, it was remarked that New Jersey was a valley between two mountains of conceit. The reference, of course, was to Philadelphia and New York, which even then overshadowed what lay between. Benjamin Franklin called New Jersey "A beer keg tapped at both ends." Edmund Wilson, the late literary critic, summed it up when he said it was "A place where people do not live to develop a society of their own but where they merely pass or sojourn on their way to something else." Yet, even though it is the ninth largest state in population, the most densely populated, a manufacturing and trade center of great note and the home of numerous corporations, the people of Southern New Jersey know more about what is going on in Philadelphia than they do about where they live, and the same is true of Northern New Jersey and New York. New Jersey communities, particularly, are subject to the fall-out of impersonality which emanates from New York. Those who escape from New York often bring with them attitudes inimical or indifferent to community. These people still relate themselves to New York economically and culturally. If they give at all to Jewish causes, they do so only in the

city—and by that they don't mean Newark. This phenomenon is a major reason why there is such a low level of community organization development in New Jersey, whether public or private, sectarian or nonsectarian. Our late colleague, Manheim Shapiro, said it simply and well: "Identity is a function of community. The loss of community is the loss of identity and vice versa."

By no means least among the forces which impinge adversely on the concept of community is the overemphasis on materialist values. This is not peculiar to Jews or to this region, but when one adds to the rest of the mix, it has a deadly effect on giving, collective action and participation.

This litany of destructive and divisive forces would not be complete without some reference to the role played, especially in New Jersey, by the national United Jewish Appeal and other national and international organizations with headquarters in New York. Our communities cannot be healthy, vibrant and strong if they are merely places in which these causes and agencies dig for gold; nor can they survive meaningfully as colonial outposts for national agency services. National United Jewish Appeal has a long history of inhibiting the development of federated fund-raising and the creation of local services on the mistaken assumption that it will detract from support of Israel. However, with the local community perspective of Stanley Horowitz of Cleveland, its new chief executive, there is hope this will change.

Let us now consider more specifically what impact these forces have had on Jewish community development in the region and what remedies are available to us. New Jersey is severely "impacted" with Federations. There are 25 in the mid-Atlantic region, and 16 of them are in this state. Yet there re-

main large areas where no coordinative efforts in fund-raising and planning or services exist to meet local, national, and overseas needs. Further, there is fierce competition in fund-raising (piracy of gifts and givers would be a more accurate but less kindly way of describing it), duplication and overlapping of effort and an attitude of "let tomorrow take care of itself" and "after me the deluge."

First, we need to plot on a map of the region the areas of service and fund-raising which each Federation and its local agencies claim as their "territories." This will spotlight those territories which are in dispute and those which are not covered at all. Next, discussion and negotiation should lead to the 25 Federations and their local agencies agreeing on who will serve and fund-raise in what area. A compact should also be reached regarding the exchange of information on prospects and contributors, cessation of fund-raising piratical practices, and which Federation should solicit the prospect if he lives in one territory but has his business or works in another, shared use of computer services, standardization of fund-raising terminology and record-keeping practices, joint fund-raising events, etc.

Another item on the agenda of these discussions could well be a regional or a sub-regional approach to income enhancement of Federations through bequests and endowments and philanthropic funds instead of each Federation's setting up its own program, as is the case at present.

This discussion and/or negotiation process will inevitably bring into focus those situations in which merger of one or more Federations should be considered.

None of the foregoing will occur unless leadership is given it by the Council of Jewish Federations with the support of the national United Jewish Appeal.

The lay and professional leadership of both bodies must also involve the Association of New Jersey Jewish Federations in the process from the outset if the venture is to meet with any degree of success.

A similar process needs to be undertaken regarding the development and provision of local services throughout the region so that every Jew will be eligible for help based on need and not geography. This effort should also be spearheaded by Council of Jewish Federations and must involve the lay and professional leadership of local agencies and such national bodies as the Jewish Welfare Board, Jewish Educational Services of North America, Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies, etc.

Capital construction is still another area which should be dealt with on a regional or sub-regional basis. This applies particularly to homes and apartment house projects for the elderly and to Jewish Community Centers. Too often we see such facilities erected in close proximity to each other only because they lie in different although contiguous Federation areas. It is too much to expect, nor is it desirable, even if it were possible, that a regional body be created with the power to veto such wasteful and costly construction taking place. However, it is reasonable to expect that, moved by the spirit of *Klal Yisroel*, Jews will consult voluntarily with each other regionally when it comes to capital planning, funding and construction. If nothing else, they might at least agree on the timing of their capital fund-raising campaigns. The day may even come when synagogues will be part of this voluntary process. Again, this is an area in which the Council of Jewish Federations can and should play a leading role.

Mobility, within, into and out of the area, is another matter which should be

dealt with on a regional rather than piece-meal basis, community by community. Regional or sub-regional demographic studies will enable us to do needed long-range strategic planning. This approach will be especially helpful to smaller Federations which do not have the resources to undertake such a process. I need not dwell further on the importance of long-range strategic planning for community services, community planning and campaign services.

There is a number of programs and services which either do not exist in the region or exist in such small and scattered measure as to be almost meaningless and ineffective. The nature of those I will cite is such, I believe, that they are best organized and provided for on a regional or sub-regional basis. I can only indicate them here topically and not in any order of priority: Jewish chaplaincy services for hospitalized and other institutional residents, *kashruth* administration and supervision, services to college youth, an ample number of professionally trained teachers in our congregational and non-congregational Hebrew schools, adult Jewish education, Federation-synagogue relationships, services for singles, day-care and residential treatment centers for severely disturbed children, non-institutional services for the elderly and strengthened community relations efforts. I am sure others can be identified.

I fully realize that if the Council of Jewish Federations is to successfully undertake the leadership role I have proposed, it will have to make a major investment in staff time and other resources. However, I believe we are justified in calling upon it for that help. It has the requisite prestige and know-how. It is above considerations of turf. It exists to serve the communities and to promote community development. More than 800,000 Jews live in this re-

gion, and they constitute about 14% of all the Jews in the United States.

I do not, even for one moment, contend that the approaches and remedies I have proposed will overcome entirely the destructive and divisive forces in the region which I described above. How-

ever, I do believe that by confronting them on a coordinated regional basis, we can, to a significant extent, weaken their impact. It will take vision and statesmanship of layman and professional alike.



Astronomical Tables and Treatises by Jacob ben Yom Tob Fu'al and other authors. Written in two or three cursive Spanish hands of the 14th century; with colored drawings of the constellations and signs of the zodiac, cosmological diagrams from the Collection of David Solomon Sassoon. Catalogue: Sotheby's