

The Recent Rise of Professional Orthodox Jewish Social Services

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Certainly, a more positive prospect would be if the existing and well-established Jewish communal service structure joined hands with the Orthodox community. This is easier said than done. Orthodox Jews have grown increasingly more demanding in recent years. In addition, any efforts to merge or cooperate in the delivery of professional services will inevitably be met with mistrust and scepticism from both sides. Nevertheless, these are not insurmountable obstacles.

Within the last ten years, the field of Jewish communal service has witnessed a noteworthy phenomenon: the emergence, in New York City, of an ever increasing number of professional social services which are staffed by, and serve primarily Orthodox Jewish clients.¹ How many services actually have emerged; why did they emerge at this point in American Jewish history; and, what are the implications of this development for the future? This paper will address itself to these questions.

Extent of Professional Orthodox Social Services

Ten years ago, there were few professional social services in New York City which were staffed only by Orthodox professionals and which were designed to serve primarily Orthodox clients. Most of them began since then.

All of these services are operated by private voluntary Jewish social service agencies and organizations. In some cases, the larger agency and administration are not Orthodox and the

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Grossinger's, New York, May 31, 1978.

¹ The term "Orthodox Jew" will not be conceptually defined in this paper. Various operational definitions are suggested in "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life" by Charles Liebman in *The American Jewish Year Book* Vol. 66, The American Jewish Committee, New York, 1965.

As used in this paper, the term "Orthodox Jew" will be defined operationally to include all of those Jews classified as "Orthodox" by the professional social service agencies mentioned here.

funding comes from the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, as well as from public sources, such as government grants. In other instances, the entire agency is run under Orthodox auspices and non-public funds come exclusively from the Orthodox community. In the latter case, the agencies themselves have only appeared in the last ten years. All of these services, however, regardless of sponsorship, are staffed only by Orthodox Jews.

In some instances, the services are strictly sectarian in the sense that only Jews are eligible for the service. In other cases, the services are officially nonsectarian; but, in actuality, the population served is over 90 percent Orthodox Jewish. The number of these services is growing rapidly, as more already existing Orthodox organizations and independent groups branch out into the social service field. The number of Orthodox Jewish individuals and families served is growing even more rapidly as the already existing services expand.

These services include family service, three community center-sponsored group work services, child guidance, two psychiatric services, two foster care, four residential treatment facilities, seven day-care centers, eight vocational guidance and job placement services. Almost all of these services were developed on Brooklyn sites though some serve the metropolitan area.

How can this growth be accounted for? Shall it be assumed that Orthodox Jews have suddenly developed a wide range of needs that did not exist ten years ago or that the

Orthodox Jewish needs for family counseling, foster care, and psychiatric services, etc., have always existed, and in the words of one Orthodox social service administrator, "the Orthodox community was indeed a neglected minority."²

Were all of these needs unmet in the Orthodox community until ten years ago? Certainly not. At least some Orthodox Jews have always availed themselves of existing non-Orthodox Jewish and non-Jewish sponsored services. It must be acknowledged, then, that the recent mushrooming of professional Orthodox Jewish social services has been brought about by many factors which should be examined in detail.

Historical Overview

Throughout the history of the Jews in the Diaspora, from the First Century C.E. until the 19th Century C.E., those services which could be considered "social services" were carried out by the synagogue.³ On the American scene, we find that Jewish social services continued their sectarian characteristics by government mandate. This was highlighted by the case of the first American Jewish settlement which was "allowed to remain," with the proviso that "the poor among them should not become a burden to the company or to the community, but be supported by their own nation."⁴

For the next 200 years, the American Jewish community took care of its own social services

² Lester R. Kaufman, "Comprehensive Mental Health Planning for the Orthodox Jewish Community" in *Intercom Special Issue on Mental Health and Torah Judaism*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Dec. 76, Kislav 5737), p. 27.

³ Herman D. Stein, "Jewish Social Work in the United States" in *The Characteristics of American Jews* by Glazer, Blau, Stein, & Handlin, Jewish Education Committee Press, New York, 1965, p. 140.

⁴ Max L. Margolis & Alexander Marx, *A History of the Jewish People*, Harper & Row, New York, pg. 603.

which were closely connected with the synagogue and religious life. During the mid-19th Century, however, many American Jewish social services lost their sectarian characteristics. One example of this shift was Jews Hospital in New York City, which opened in 1855. Nine years later, the decision was made to eliminate sectarianism and accept non-Jewish patients. Following this trend, the hospital changed its name to Mt. Sinai Hospital.

Stein points out that the degree of secularization and the timetable for that process varied with the particular type of service.⁵ Stein attributes the trend towards secularization to government sponsored public assistance programs and to an ideology that secularism is inconsistent with humanitarian values. In addition, to these factors, the American Jewish community itself was taking on a less religious character with the immigration of large numbers of non-religious Western European Jews.

The push towards greater secularization of American Jewish social services seems to have halted in the 1960's. The last ten years, for example, have produced considerable social work literature regarding the role of the Jewish social service agency,⁶ as well as the nature of the Jewish component in Jewish social service

⁵ Herman D. Stein, "Jewish Social Work in the United States (1654-1954)" *The American Jewish Year Book* Vol. 57, 1956 The American Jewish Committee, New York.

⁶ See for example: Peter M. Glick, "The Jewish Family Service Agency: Its Function in the Jewish Community," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 51, No. 4, (Summer '75) p. 389;

Charles S. Levy, D.S.W., "Toward a Theory of Jewish Communal Service," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Fall '73), p. 42;

Charles Zibbell, "The Jewish Communal Service Agency—A Historical Perspective," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Fall '64), p. 75-82.

agencies.⁷ Articles have also appeared which directly confront the issue of sectarian purposes, policies, and practices for the Jewish social service agency.⁸

Until the mid-late 1960's, however, there were no professional Jewish social services which were staffed by and served only Orthodox Jews. While there were certainly some Orthodox professionals before the mid-60's, they worked exclusively in private practice, in non-Orthodox Jewish service agencies, or in non-Jewish agencies.

This author had conducted informal interviews with some of the founders, initiators and developers of the services mentioned at the outset of this paper. On the basis of that research, as well as personal and professional experience in the field of Orthodox professional social services, the author will offer his speculations regarding the critical factors giving rise to the ever growing number of professional Orthodox Jewish social services in New York City.

Non-Jewish Society

In the larger non-Jewish American society, the mid-1960's were marked by an ideology of cultural pluralism⁹ and by heightened ethnic identification. This heightened ethnic identification and rebirth of ethnic pride began in the black community¹⁰ and later spread to white ethnic groups as well.¹¹

Ethnicity has become a factor in everything from politics¹² to mental health planning.¹³ The American Government has also contributed to this trend. Federal legislation during the 1960's "extended protection to the rights of minorities and also pumped public monies into programs which legitimately found their way into Orthodox organizations.¹⁴ Some of these funds have been used to establish and maintain the services and agencies mentioned above.

⁷ See for example:

Saul Hofstein, "Preparation of Workers for Casework Practice in the Jewish Agency," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Winter '68) p. 156-164;

William Posner & Saul Hofstein, "The Use of the Agency's Jewishness in the Casework Process," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3;

Pauline D. Goldberg, "Jewish Values in the Clinical Casework Process," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 51, No. 13 (Spring '71) p. 270;

Harriet Goldstein, "What's Jewish About Jewish Child Care," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Summer '73) p. 309.

⁸ See for example:

Arnold Aronson, "Sectarianism in the American Society Today: Impact on Jewish Communal Service," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 42, (Winter '64), p. 139-151;

Arnold Gurin, "Sectarianism: A Persistent Value Dilemma," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Vol. 43, No. 1, (Fall '66), pp. 38-48;

Donald Hurwitz, "Sectarian Services in the Crossfire of Current Problems," *J. of J.C.S.*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Summer '70), pp. 291-296;

Isidore Sobeloff, "Jewish Rationale and Sectarianism," *J. of J.C.S.*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Fall '68), pp. 49-55;

Charles S. Levy, D.S.W., "Sectarian Commitment and Professional Purpose in Social Work Practice," *J. of J.C.S.*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Spring '65), pp. 267-273;

Morton Teicher, "Re-examination of the Rationale for Sectarian Social Work," *Social Casework*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Feb. '72), p. 78.

⁹ Nathan Glazer & Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, the M.I.T. Press, Cambridge 1964, p. 13.

¹⁰ William H. Grier, M.D. & Price M. Cobbs, M.D. *Black Rage*, Basic Books, New York, 1968.

¹¹ Judith R. Kramer, *The American Minority Community*, Thomas Cromwell Co., New York, 1970.

¹² Michael Parenti, "Ethnic Politics and the Persistence of Ethnic Identification," *American Political Science Review*, Sept. 1967, pp. 717-726.

¹³ Joseph Giordano, *Ethnicity and Mental Health*, American Jewish Committee, New York, 1973, pp. 33-43.

¹⁴ Egon Mayer, "Jewish Orthodoxy in America: Towards the Year 2000" an unpublished paper delivered at the Midyear Conference of the Alumni of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanon Technological Seminary of Yeshiva University, 1976, p. 18.

The full meaning of the central role of ethnicity in modern life has been discussed elsewhere.¹⁵ Here, it is sufficient to note that the period of the 1960's was clearly one of increased ethnic identification and affiliation, marked by a growing trend of advocacy for self interests on an ethnic group basis.

Non-Orthodox Jewish Community

As noted by Janowsky and others, Jewish identification increased in the 1960's.¹⁶ This identification has been measured by increased synagogue building,¹⁷ increased demand for kosher food,¹⁸ and increased number of full-time Jewish day schools.¹⁹

This increased Jewish identification has been caused by a variety of factors. The Holocaust seems to have shocked and numbed the World War II generation. The post World War II generation has responded to the historical reality of the Holocaust with heightened and at times militant Jewish identification. (i.e. "Never Again!")

The State of Israel has always been a source of pride for American Jews. The Six Days-War in 1967 however, "served to both raise group self consciousness and also mobilize people on behalf of existing or new organizations."²⁰ The Six Days-War also reawakened the survival theme of the Holocaust in very real and frightening dimensions.

Overt anti-Semitism has decreased in the post World War II period and job security is no longer dependent upon assimilation. So, "since members of the third generation find that they can be both Jewish and successful, they feel no need to shed a religious affiliation

¹⁵ Nathan Glazer & Daniel P. Moynihan, *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1975.

¹⁶ Oscar I. Janowsky, *The American Jew: A Reappraisal*, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1964, p. 389.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁸ *Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 1963, p. 3.

¹⁹ *Time Magazine*, December 31, 1965, p. 54.

²⁰ Egon Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

that does not restrict their life chances.²¹

As in the move towards secularization in the 19th Century, Jewish immigration has also played a role in the move towards increased Jewish identification in the 20th Century. Many of the World War II refugees who came to this country in the 1950's and 1960's were Orthodox. The Orthodoxy of these Jewish immigrants had a profound impact on the neighborhoods in which they settled, such as in New York City in Williamsburg, Boro Park, and Washington Heights.

Orthodox Jewish Community

The Orthodox Jewish community has become increasingly more militant in advocating their group interests. Rallies and demonstrations, which were previously reserved only for the *freiye Yidden* (non-Orthodox Jews) are now tactics employed by Orthodox and Chassidic Jews as well. Media publicity, letter-writing campaigns, and legal actions have also begun to be employed by the Orthodox.

While it is difficult to estimate their proportion, there are, quite demonstrably, numbers of Orthodox Jews who object to being served by non-Orthodox Jewish professionals. These Orthodox Jews, at the least, fear being inadequately understood by the non-Orthodox professional and, at the worst, fear being directly or indirectly ridiculed or "put down" for their religious, "old fashioned" way of life.

The experience of those agencies referred to at the outset, as well as this author's clinical experience, indicates that a growing number of Orthodox Jews *prefer* to receive their professional services from an Orthodox Jewish professional.

The extent, degree, and significance of this preference are issues which should be explored in depth. This preference has already been

²¹ Judith Kramer & Seymour Leventman, *Children of the Gilded Ghetto*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1961, p. 16.

documented, however, in the area of mental health services. In 1972, a survey was conducted by a research team from the Maimonides Community Mental Health Center of New York.²² Their findings were based on a survey of 230 Orthodox and Chassidic households in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn. They reported that, "the number of people using Jewish Family Service,* which in the Boro Park office is composed of Orthodox staff, is three times the number using the C.M.H.C.²³

This fact alone, would not verify a preference for Orthodox staff. The researchers, however, also found that, "Nearly 70 percent of the respondents indicated that they would want to send someone for therapy only if he saw an Orthodox therapist."²⁴

The preference for Orthodox Jewish professional staff, of course, would be purely academic, if it were not for the fact that an increasing number of Orthodox Jews are entering the ranks of the social service professions, in general, and the social work profession in particular. This appears to represent the tail end of the process of occupational emancipation for American Jews. According to Dr. Egon Mayer, Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College, "So far as occupational patterns are concerned, Orthodox Jews have followed their non-Orthodox cousins first out of blue-collar crafts into business occupations and more recently from business occupations into both the traditional (e.g. law, medicine, accounting), as well as into the bureaucratic and civil service professions (e.g. engineering, teaching, social work, and public administration)."²⁵ Ten years

²² G. Landsberg and R. Rosenblum, *An Exploratory Study of the Demographic Characteristics, Attitudes Towards, and Use of, Health, Mental Health, and Social Services in the Chassidic and Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Community of Boro Park*, Maimonides Medical Center, Community Mental Health Center, Program Analysis & Evaluation Section, June, 1974.

* Now Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁵ Egon Mayer, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

ago, for example, an Orthodox Jewish social worker was a rarity. Today, any agency with a position opening for an Orthodox Jewish social worker receives literally dozens of applications from highly qualified young and newly trained candidates.

Orthodox professionals, per se, however, do not automatically create Orthodox professional services. As mentioned above, there were always some Orthodox professionals even before the 1960's. The difference between the "pre 60's Orthodox professional" and the "post 60's Orthodox professional" seems to be in their varying degrees of willingness to be identified personally *and* professionally as Orthodox Jews.

The pre 60's Orthodox professional did not display his Orthodoxy. At times he may have even tried to conceal it, at least while on the job. Today, the Orthodox professional is willing and at times eager to exploit his Orthodoxy in professional practice.

Orthodox Jewish professionals are organizing to deal with and confront the relationship between their personal and professional identities as Orthodox Jews. Such organizations include "The Association of Orthodox Jewish Teachers, The Association of Orthodox Jewish University Faculty, The Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists, The Association of Orthodox Jewish Dentists, The Cheshbonot Accounting Association, Achdut Data Processing Association, and The National Association of Traditional Jewish Communal Workers."²⁶

In addition to these professional organizations, publications such as the *Journal of Psychology and Judaism* have been created which address issues of particular relevance to Orthodox Jewish professionals.

The post 60's Orthodox Jewish professional, then, is one who identifies himself as an Orthodox Jew in his professional life as well as at home and who looks for opportunities to practice his profession in an Orthodox setting. This search includes not only job-hunting but

²⁶ Fred Bohensky, "Orthodox Jewish Professional Organizations Organize Coordinating Council," *Jewish Press*, Feb. 11, 1977, p. 39.

job-creating, "grantsmanship" as well.

The Orthodox community, as a whole, is becoming more accepting of professional services. While there are still some members of the Orthodox community who would go to a rabbi before seeking social or psychological professional help, the experiences of those agencies earlier referred to indicate that at least in the area of mental health services, the Orthodox community is becoming more accepting of professional services. This increased *acceptance* is demonstrated by increased *utilization* of such services.

In short, then, the following factors seem to have contributed to the recent trend of rapidly growing professional Orthodox Jewish social services: increased ethnic identification, Federal legislation, heightened Jewish consciousness, increase in the numbers of Orthodox Jews, the militant advocacy of self-interest, occupational emancipation and professional sophistication of the Orthodox Jewish community, as well as the increase in the number of Orthodox professionals willing to assert their Orthodoxy in their professional lives.

Implications for the Future

The trend described here will probably continue and may even increase in momentum and be evident in large cities other than Brooklyn and New York. If so, the field of Jewish communal service, in general, and Jewish agencies, in particular, will have to address themselves to the unique requests, needs, and demands of Orthodox Jews. Failing to do so could result in the Orthodox community developing all of their own, totally independent professional agencies. This movement has, in fact, already begun, albeit on a small scale, in that some of the agencies referred to earlier are completely autonomous and operate under strictly Orthodox auspices.

If the Orthodox community does develop its own independent system of social services, they can not match the level of professional expertise of their more experienced non-

Orthodox counterparts. These new Orthodox social service agencies would experience the inevitable growing pains of any new organization, and ultimately, the Orthodox Jewish clients will suffer. A professionally trained staff does not constitute a professional agency. A high caliber agency must develop through years of cultivation, fertilization, and growth.

The Orthodox community, however, would not be the only losers. If a parallel system of Orthodox professional services develops, the older agencies will slowly lose their Orthodox staff and clientele. In the process, they will lose all of the richness of Jewish experience added by Orthodox Jews to those agencies. Because Orthodox clients are so definitively Jewish, they enhance the Jewish purposes of the agencies that serve them. Regarding Orthodox staff in non-Orthodox agencies, Daner notes that, "Their impact has been substantial in developing a sensitivity toward a more traditional viewpoint in their agencies and even in helping to educate colleagues on Jewish issues and concerns."²⁷

Certainly, a more positive prospect would be if the existing and well-established Jewish communal service structure joined hands with the Orthodox community. This is easier said than done. Orthodox Jews have grown increasingly more demanding in recent years. In addition, any efforts to merge or cooperate in the delivery of professional services will inevitably be met with mistrust and scepticism from both sides. Nevertheless, these are not insurmountable obstacles.

The challenge of the 1980's, therefore, will be whether the Orthodox community will develop services for themselves and under their *own* auspices; or whether the established Jewish communal service structure can develop these services under its auspices and thereby insure the highest quality of service for the entire Jewish community.

²⁷ Joel Daner, "Integrity Within the Jewish Community Structure," *The Jewish Social Work Forum*, Vol. 13 (Spring 1977), p. 67.