A Jewish Philosophy of Social Work Practice*

Norman Linzer, Ph.D

Associate Professor, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Yeshiva University, New York

Though Judaism emphasizes the process that leads to the religious life, and social work is a helping profession, they similarly require certain personality characteristics, coordinated systems of action, and mediating structure for the attainment of their goals.

Professional practice, whether in social work, psychology or the rabbinate, takes place in a social context. The professional is involved directly with the client system in a mutual exploration of objectives that will lead to desired change. The professional introduces methodologies and techniques based on propositional and prescriptive knowledge which guide his interventions in the helping process.

In addition to techniques the professional grounds his practice in an ethical value system and an ideology—a philosophy. The philosophy is addressed to the "why," even as the technique is addressed to the "how" of practice.

This paper will present a Jewish philosophy of practice for the Jewish social worker in the fields of Jewish communal service. It offers a rationale for his professional work in the Jewish community. It is divided into three parts:

I. The professional as a helping person
   a) professional identity
   b) professional staff
II. A concept of practice
III. The role of the Jewish communal agency; concepts from Jewish tradition as well as the social work literature will be explored in order to arrive at a formulation of a philosophy of practice.

I. The Professional as a Helping Person

Two dimensions of the professional as a helping person will be examined. The first refers to the notion of professional identity, the kind of person a social worker ought to be. The second deals with the concept and definition of the professional self.

Several years ago, in a paper on voluntarism in Jewish tradition,[1] I compared voluntarism with the Jewish approach to *hesed,* which is defined as the performance of acts of loving kindness by one person to another. A comparable term, *tzedakah,* conventionally known as charity but essentially defined as righteousness, was contrasted with *hesed.* The act of *tzedakah* is usually momentary and transient, expressed in monetary forms. The act of *hesed* is usually of longer duration and non-materialistic. It evokes the presence of the other in the form of a relationship. The classical illustration of *hesed* is Abraham's ministering to the three angels at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

Hesed usually involved expectations of recompense, whether it be a handshake, a gift, or a different reciprocal gesture of appreciation. Motives are not always altruistic, yet they do not diminish the validity of the act. When we do someone a favor, we are only too human not to expect a gesture of thanks in return. The only form of *hesed* that is one of truth[2] which does not anticipate reciprocity is the act of ministering to the dead. The classical example is Joseph's promise to re-bury Jacob in Israel after the Israelites left Egypt.

Since the conventional act of *hesed* is social and voluntary in character and does not rule out egocentric satisfactions as motivational factors, it is interesting to speculate whether

* Presented at the *Shabbat Kallah,* preceding the Meeting of The Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Grossinger, N.Y., May 27, 1978.

[1] Norman Linzer, On the Role of Voluntarism in the Jewish Tradition," in Gilbert S. Rosenthal, ed., *New Directions in the Jewish Family and Community.* New York: Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, 1974, p. 236.

[2] *Gen.* 47:29.

social work can be defined as *hesed*. The social worker is a caring person who is motivated toward helping the other to grow.[3] However, his altruistic motives are tempered by such important considerations as financial remuneration, career development, social status, and opportunities for growth and creativity. Perhaps congruence with the act of *hesed* is improbable, but certain similarities do exist.

Regardless of the validity of the equation of social work with *hesed,* the sense of caring that is endemic to the social worker's personality bears further exploration from the perspective of Jewish social philosophy. The *Halakhah* (Jewish law) envisioned a change in the personality of a *baal hesed* (one who performs acts of *hesed*). A person should not only *do* acts of kindness, but should *become* a kind person. The Jewish value that exalts the quality of compassion in the personality and not only in the deed is expressed in the Talmud as: "Just as He is merciful, so shall you be merciful; just as He is compassionate, so shall you be compassionate." The Jew is exhorted to imitate God in His anthropomorphically human qualities. The *acts* of kindness are meant to transform the *personality* to one of kindness. This would necessarily include the cultivation of feelings, sensitivity, and empathy for the plight of the others.

The analogy to social work is clear. The social worker is placed in a variety of situations which evoke feelings of compassion for the client, as well as requiring consummate skill in understanding and intervention. It is commonplace that both the client's and the social worker's expression of feelings is indispensable for the establishment of the helping relationship. Ideally, the social worker should share feelings not only because it is required for effective helping but because it arises from his humanity and sensitivity to the needs of others. Not only must the social worker *act* compassionately because it is called for in the particular situation, but he must *be* a compassionate person.

[3] Milton Mayeroff, *On Caring*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979, p. 5.

Until this point, we have compared social work with *hesed* in terms of goals and feeling for the other. If social work is construed as a variation of the act of *tzedakah* because the latter, too, is a significant form of helping in Jewish tradition, similarities may be envisioned between the stages of *tzedakah* and levels of helping. Maimonides has made the classical statement that delineates the stages of *tzedakah*.[4] The lowest rung is the one who gives *tzedakah* grudgingly and insufficiently for the needs of the other. The highest rung is the individual who lends money to the poor or invites him to become partners in his business enterprise for the purpose of enabling the recipient to become self-reliant. The interim rungs range from respect for the poor to increasing levels of anonymity between donor and recipient in order to save embarrassment.

The levels of helping may be favorably compared to *tzedakah*. The lowest level begins with the hand-out of minimum grants in such a manner that the client's dignity is demeaned and his dependency is maintained. The continuum reflects increasing respect, the provision of social services beyond income maintenance, to the point where the client is helped to get and hold a job, act and think independently—behavior that indicates self-sufficiency.

The Professional Self

The identity of the professional person consists not only of a compassionate personality, which is a quality of character, but a professional self, which is an attribute acquired through professional education. The professional self is the distinguishing feature of the social worker's identity. It is defined alternately as the conscious use of self. Its essential ingredient is self-restraint or containment. Helen Phillips has defined containment as "the active and conscious use of restraint that stems from the philosophic belief that not only do people have strengths within themselves, but that only as the human will is engaged can there be forward movement."[5]

[4] Maimonides, "Laws of Gifts to the Poor," *Mishneh Torah,* 10:7.

William Rosenthal has elaborated different levels of awareness upon which human behavior is predicated.[6] The naive or natural attitude is absorbed in one's doing or experience without standing back or reflecting on it. When the natural attitude has been jogged, either through the client's intervention or by self-generation of the professional, a level of reflective awareness has been achieved. This is what is meant by consciousness of self and it is a second level of awareness. The conscious use of this self, or the professional self, is realized in the selectivity and control of second level awareness of acting and doing, based on a set of values.

The social worker's conscious use of self entails affirmative action in relation to the client and actions of restraint on self needs, e.g. to give solutions, express irritation with the client and desire to control. "The professional self is above all the disciplined acting self."[7]

The concept of self-discipline or containment as an aspect of the professional self was intriguingly compared with the mystical conception of God's creation of the world by Felice Grunberger. Containment requires that clients be allowed to interact without the constant participation of the worker. "Containment is a necessary hesitation on the part of the worker and an intentional tentativeness in action. The worker is asked to will herself to be contracted. That contraction of the worker enables the expansion of the client's freedom to create a process of relationship."[8]

In the mysticism of Isaac Luria, the doctrine of *tzimtzum*, containment, contraction is preferred as explanation of God's creation of the world. To quote Grunberger:

> Creation was actually predicated upon God's contraction as opposed to His emanation or externalization. The idea that the all-powerful divinity withdraws something of Himself to create is awesome. It suggests that God conceived of man as so precious that He willfully gave up part of Himself in order for man to exist. It suggests further that containment is a necessary preparation or prelude to creation. Implicit within the Lurianic view is the concept that creation is not solely a process of emanation but one of intentional restraint.[9]

The idea of intentional restraint not only is of mystical origin, but has been advanced as an explanation of the negative *mitzvot*, commandments. Judaism consists of positive and negative precepts, with the latter more numerous and important. Joseph B. Soloveitchik insisted that the negative precepts are at the core of Judaism because they require a greater effort and demand a more sacrificial spirit than the positive precepts. They require heroic restraint, inaction rather than action, withdrawal rather than surging forward.[10]

Restraint of one's appetites is clearly illustrated by Elazar ben Azariah who comments that a person should not say that I do not like pork; he should say I do like it but what can I do if my Father-in-heaven decreed it on me. The verse says, "And I have separated you from among the nations to be my own." This means that your separation from them is for my sake, i.e. to desist from sin and accept the yoke of heaven."[11] The restraint initially derives from an external source, namely *Torah* law, but then it becomes internalized. The individual's act of withdrawal from indulging in forbidden gratifications becomes a personality trait. Withdrawal, self-restraint, and

[5] Helen U. Phillips, *Essentials of Social Group Work*. New York: Association Press, 1966, p. 148.

[6] William A. Rosenthal, "From Awareness to Conscious Use of Self to the Professional Self: The Emergence of the Professional Self." New York: Wurzweiler School of Social Work, N.D. (Typewritten).

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[8] Felice Grunberger, quoted in Norman Linzer, *The Nature of Man in Judaism and Social Work*. New York: Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, 1978, p. 43.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

[10] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in Joseph Epstein, ed., *Shiurev Harav:* A Conspectus of the Public Lectures *of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*. New York: Jewish Studies Division of Yeshiva Univ., 1974, p. 58.

[11] Quoted in Rashi, Commentary on Lev. 20:26.

self-discipline become acts of surrender to a Higher Will and characterize the personality of the lonely man of faith.[12]

The social worker who consciously acts with restraint is not only engaging in specific behaviors required by the professional function. When this pattern is habitualized, it becomes a way of work, an internalized character trait. The conscious use of self, the professional self, is at the core of professional identity.

II. A Concept of Practice

Abraham J. Heschel has distinguished between the Greek and biblical conceptions of man. To the Greeks, man is a rational being; his rationality makes him compatible with the cosmos. In Judaism, man is a commanded being, a being of whom demands may be made. "The central problem for man is not: what is being? but rather: what is required of me?"[13]

Judaism consists of beliefs and actions, the latter contained within an elaborate system of *mitzvot* that guide the individual's spiritual life as well as his participation in society. Though beliefs are distinguished from actions by definition, in Judaism their reality becomes visible only when they are translated into actions. All beliefs have action components, specific forms that enable the individual to demonstrate his faith in God and man. Faith in God, for example, can be operationalized in prayer, observance of the Sabbath, performing the act of *hesed*. Love of fellow man must be displayed through concrete acts of kindness, some of which are visiting the sick, attending to the dead, rejoicing with a bride and groom, and giving charity to the needy. In Judaism doing is greater than being.

An individual's life can only be fulfilled through the structures and forms that reflect the fundamental values and beliefs of the religion.

According to Soloveitchik, Judaism's emphasis on the *mitzvah* implies that detail is important. The model for religious ritual in Judaism is mathematics, whose characteristic is precision. For example, regarding the onset of the Sabbath, one minute before sunset on Friday eve and one minute after is the difference between identical acts being permitted or forbidden. There is no room for individual interpretation or leeway. The *Halakhah* sets down objective standards, minutely detailed, to which the individual and community orient their time and attention. "Just as truth demands precision and is concerned with trivia, so too *Halakhic* thinking is rigorous and *Halakhic* action is expressed via the detail."[14]

The alternate to the mathematical model is the aesthetic model, where the overall configuration, the gestalt, is important. When viewing a painting, one steps back in order to increase the overall effect. Excessive concentration on the detail detracts from the aesthetic appreciation of the painting's gestalt.[15]

While Soloveitchik denies the applicability of the aesthetic model to the *details* of the religious ritual, perhaps it may appropriately explain the *goals* of the religious experience. It is commonplace that those who adhere closely to the performance of religious ritual are in imminent danger of becoming lost in its details. They may be guilty of displacement of goals where, similar to the bureaucratic phenomenon, attention to the details and rules displaces focus on the goals, toward which the details had been originally conceived. Jews who are overly zealous in the practice of ritual may lose the emotional and spiritual meanings that are inherent in it. The aesthetic model helps them to experience the beauty and wholeness of the action or the event. Observance of details is complemented by an appreciation of their profound significance as a holistic experience.

[12] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition*, Vol. 3, Spring-Summer, 1965, p. 65.

[13] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Who is Man?* Stanford, California. Stanford University Press, 1965, p. 107.

[14] Soloveitchik, *Shiurei Harav*, op. cit., p. 58.

[15] *Ibid.*

The Lubavitcher Rebbe has applied the mathematical model to the individual's relationship to the community. In commenting on the significance of the paschal sacrifice, the Rebbe asserts that a community project must begin with the individual, the family and one's immediate circle. Passover represented the deliverance of the Jewish community, but it could only be experienced via the individual's participation in the Seder as a member of a family. The Rebbe continues: "Moreover, attention should be directed not toward generalities and all-embracing resolutions, but toward the 'small' duties of everyday life. This is the approach that brings deliverance of the individual and the community."[16]

The individual is equated with the detail. Just as the combination of many details contributes to the fulfillment of an action, so do the individuals constitute the community. The execution of the action requires a sequential ordering of, and interrelationship among the details, guided by the purpose. Individuals in the Jewish community, identified with its purposes, develop kinship systems in order to fulfill their mandate. Commandments are sometimes addressed in the singular, and sometimes in the plural, but in either way, they devolve upon the individual.

In Judaism the focus is on the individual and on the detail. The community is the individual writ large. The emotional and spiritual experience should ideally emerge through the execution of the detail. The mathematical and aesthetic models are thus viewed as complementary, for their combination enables the Jew to experience the meaning of the ritual more fully.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The social worker's focus on the detail, the individual, reflects his primary use of the mathematical model, but not to the exclusion of the aesthetic model, for both are necessary components of the helping process. The mathematical model manifests itself in the microcosm of the social worker-client relationship where anger, guilt, shame, and inferiority feelings are expressed. The client looks at the ugly things in his life, his self in social interactions, and the incremental steps for change. Neither he nor the social worker deals with the global issues, except by extension from the details.

The group worker is primarily concerned with helping the group to define its purposes, determine the functions appropriate to their achievement, and devise a structure to fulfill the functions. These efforts require emphasis on the particulars of group life, the interactional process, the time phases, group norms and structure, and the locus of individuals in the group. Here, too, mathematical model is dominant, for the worker and the group soon realize that ignoring the details of a program may culminate in its failure and ultimately, in the failure to achieve the goals of the group.

The community social worker's position is similar to that of the group worker. Whether he is involved in fund-raising, the development of community projects, or the improvement of inter-group relations, the worker must pay attention to the details of the task. Execution of the details is instrumental to goal achievement.

The aesthetic model of practice is an indispensable tool for the social worker. The worker needs to have a vision of what the client can become, how far the group can develop, and how cohesive the community can become. He needs to lend this vision to his constituents. The aesthetic model affords the worker a gestalt of the goals of the helping process. It is based on a philosophy of man as an individual and as a social being who has the capacity to grow and develop throughout his life. It encourages the worker to persevere even in the face of frustration and failure. It enables him to transcend these setbacks and begin again with new strategies. The aesthetic model complements the mathematical model, as both serve to define the parameters of social work practice.

[16] Lubavitcher Rebbe, "Torah Thoughts for Modern Times," *The Jewish Week-American Examiner*, April 2, 1978, p. 34.

The primary emphasis on the detail, the action component in social work, can be traced to the profession's philosophical antecedents in pragmatism. John Dewey has written that "the object of knowledge is practical in the sense that it depends upon a specific kind of practice for its existence."[17] The pragmatic view that knowledge leads to action is reflected in a type of knowledge known as "prescriptive." Prescriptive knowledge consists of principles that guide the worker's actions in specific situations. These principles are generic to all modalities of practice, but their specific application is determined by the function of the agency and the needs of the client.

Agency function is seen as providing limits within which the worker and client may move without becoming lost in the movement. The worker sets up the conditions of the service as found in his agency function and procedure. The client reacts to the limitation as well as to the possible fulfillment inherent in the function. Jessie Taft has postulated that without the function, "there is no fixed point, no focus, no spot from which to measure or to understand, however relatively, the very process of which social work is based."[18]

Emanuel Tropp, discussing different approaches to working with groups, asserts that the function of the group determines the role of the leader and the nature of the skills he needs.[19] Function implies precision and specificity. The social worker defines himself in terms of what he is there to do. He leaves the other free to discover whether there is an answer to his need.

Prescriptive knowledge, function and service are terms that reflect social work's emphasis on doing, rather than being, on practice as well as theory, on the detail as well as the gestalt. With reference to this definition of practice—informed action—the social work profession is congruent with Judaism in their primary emphasis on the act. "Study is not the most important thing but practice."[20]

III. Role of Jewish Communal Agency

The Jewish communal agency, as the locus for professional practice, and the vehicle for service to the Jewish community, serves as the link between the individual Jew and the larger society. This function will now be explicated.

In pre-modern societies, communities functioned as all-embracing, all-containing entities that were able to sustain individuals within their "sacred canopies." The mechanical solidarity of which Durkeim speaks constituted the inseparable connection between the individual and the community, the lack of individuation.

Modern society has witnessed the development of abstract megastructures due to industrialization that has resulted in a progressive separation of the individual from collective entities. The process of individuation coincides with the increasing abstraction of institutions, thus contributing to the threat of anomie.

The dilemma of individuation manifests itself in people wanting both individual autonomy and communal solidarity. Their major problem is the search for social arrangements that will at least partially satisfy the yearning for community without eliminating the achievements of individuation.

Before we explore the nature of these social arrangements, it is necessary to investigate the relationship between these megastructures and the individual in modern society. Peter Berger has described the dichotomization of social life between the huge megastructures and the individual as the differentiation between the public sphere and the private sphere. The

17 John Dewey, "What Pragmatism means by the Practical" in Paul Kurtz, ed., *American Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*. New York: MacMillan, 1968, p. 180.

18 Virginia Robinson, ed., *Jessie Taft, Therapist and Social Work Educator: A Professional Biography*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962, p. 215.

19 Emanuel Tropp, *A Humanistic Foundation for Group Work Practice*. New York: Selected Academic Readings, 1974, p. 63.

20 *Ethics of the Fathers*, 1:17.

institutions of the public sphere include the state, the corporations, labor unions and bureaucracies such as education and the organized professions. They are remote and impersonal, and unsatisfactory as sources for individual meaning and identity.

The individual seeks meaning and identity in the private sphere. Even as the public sphere is overinstitutionalized, the private sphere is underinstitutionalized. In the private sphere, the individual is enabled to give meaning to his identity through a variety of activities, such as religious preference and a sexual life style. The demands on the individual to formulate a meaningful identity in the private sphere are indeed great. He may not be able to draw meaning from within himself. His private life, therefore, is always under the shadow of anomie. Modernization, according to Berger, breeds alienation and anomie.[21]

There are individuals who can successfully negotiate the identity search in the private sphere despite the alienating effects of the public sphere. For others, the situation becomes intolerable, for they cannot say, "when I go home, I can really be myself." Mediating structures are needed, i.e. institutions, however weakened, which still give a measure of stability to private life. Berger lists the family, church, voluntary association, neighborhood and subculture. They are designated as mediating structures because they mediate the relationship between the individual and the society. Mediating structures can satisfy the yearning for community without eliminating the opportunities for individuation.

The phenomenon of mediating structures may be found in the *Halakhic* tradition—not between the individual and the larger society, but between the individual and the Jewish community. Anomie was indeed recognized as a distinct possibility when an individual sustained a personal loss through the death of a close relative or spouse. In a state of profound shock, the individual was relieved of the duty to perform *mitzvot* and was assigned to a state of *aninut,* deep sorrow, for which there was no consolation and no obligation to extend condolences. A social structure was not created by the *Halakhah* to alleviate the *onen's* distress, for no grief can be dissipated "when the dead was before him."

After the burial, the reality of the loss is soberly internalized. The individual feels quite alone, anxious, sad and grief-stricken. This state of sorrow is ripe for anomie.[22] The *Halakhah* then introduced the institution of *shiva,* the seven day mourning period, during which members of the community were obligated to visit and console the mourner. The social component of *shiva* represents a mediating structure for the individual, for upon its completion, he is able to be re-integrated into the community.

The poor, to avoid being a distinctive subgroup in Jewish society, were to be supported through such communal endeavors as the *kuppah* (charity box) and the *tamchuy* (food basket). Every Jewish community had a *hekdesh,* a hostel which provided the itinerant poor with food, bed, and fare to the next city.[23] These were some of the mediating structures organized by the Jewish community to alleviate the social isolation and financial plight of the poor, that enabled them to become integrated members of the community.[24]

The concept of mediation is familiar in social work. William Schwartz has suggested that the general assignment for the social work profession is "to mediate the process through which the individual and his society reach out

21 Peter L. Berger, *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion*. New York: Basic Books, 1977, p. 134.

22 Durkheim found that widows, widowers, and divorcees were more apt to commit suicide than married people. He called this "conjugal anomie." See *Suicide*, Glencoe, III.: Free Press, 1951.

23 Leo Jung, *Between Man and Man*. New York: Jewish Education Press, 1976, pp. 9-10.

24 Saul Berman, "Jewish Value Perspectives on Poverty, Sexuality and Family Life" in Norman Linzer, ed., *Judaism and Mental Health: A Social Service Perspective*. New York: Jewish Education Press, 1978.

for each other through a mutual need for self-fulfillment."[25] The agency is the means through which this mediating function is carried out by the worker. Grace Marcus has enunciated this concept more explicitly: "The social agency is the place where the interests of society and the interests of the individual are joined."[26]

In the Jewish community, the Jewish social agency serves as a mediating structure between the individual Jew and the general society. The phenomenon of mediation takes on special meaning in Jewish communal service because of the precarious status of Jews as a minority group in American society. Mediation between alienation in public life and anomie in private life serves a particular purpose for the assimilated Jew whose Jewish identity is not a critical component of his total identity. The Jewish agency, whether it be the community center or the family agency, and most certainly the synagogue, anchors the individual in the Jewish community and provides him with a rationale for Jewish living. It affirms and strengthens his identity as a Jew so that he can enter the public sphere with a firm sense of belonging.

The committed Jew whose family is wholesome and conducive to the growth of its members and which functions as a mediating structure, is doubly secure in confronting the anonymity and depersonalization in public life. He has the support of his family and community.

The agency, as the mediating structure, has a more difficult task when it deals with dysfunction—a family broken by divorce or death, a delinquent adolescent, marital conflict, and intergenerational conflict. In these situations the tendency for the professional is to utilize psychological theories that might explain dysfunction and conflict, and develop-

[25] William Schwartz, "The Social Worker in the Group" in *The Social Welfare Forum*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, pp. 154-55.

[26] Grace Marcus, quoted in Ruth E. Smalley, *Theory for Social Work Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967, p. 103.

mental theory that explains normal behavior in a particular stage of life. The worker might disparage the possibility that the Jewishness of the client may be an essential component of the problem, or that it can be used as a vehicle for establishing a connection to the Jewish community. Touching a client's Jewishness can evoke feelings of nostalgia and warmth and can serve as a breakthrough to the formation of the professional relationship. Helping clients to become members of the Jewish community even as we treat their dysfunctions serves to reduce anomie in their private lives and enables them to combat the alienation in the public sphere.

Jewish tradition, the social work profession, and the Jewish communal agency possess structures that mediate the process between the individual and the community/society. The mediating function enhances the individual's social functioning.

Summary

Explication of a Jewish philosophy of practice has encompassed an analysis of the identity of the professional, the concept of practice, and the role of the Jewish communal agency. Both Judaic sources and social work values were juxtaposed in order to determine areas of congruence. Without consciously stretching the argument, it was found that similarities abounded. Though Judaism emphasizes the process that leads to the religious life, and social work is a helping profession, they similarly require certain personality characteristics, coordinated systems of action, and mediating structures for the attainment of their goals.

The personality of the Jew, as well as the social worker, should be suffused with care and compassion. These attributes should ideally motivate the individual to extend kindnesses to others, especially when in need. The professional is able to discipline his compassion through conscious acts of self-restraint. Self-discipline, containment, and conscious use of self are terms that constitute the definition of the professional self in social work. These terms are not strange to Judaism; in fact, they are prerequisites for Jewish living and the hallmark of the committed Jew's behavior.

Having acquired a professional identity, the social worker engages in professional practice in his service to clients. Practice may be defined as informed action, action that presupposes a body of knowledge, propositional and prescriptive, whose translation usually takes the form of details. Details in social work—the planning of a program, the examination of a relationship—find a parallel in Judaism's emphasis on the performance of the *mitzvah* and in the *Halakhic* tradition that suffuses daily behavior. The detail, the individual, the doing symbolize the mathematical model that requires precision and specificity.

The aesthetic model of practice can be discerned in Judaism's appreciation of the deeper significance of, and emotional response to, the performance of *mitzvot* which presupposes faithfulness to *Halakhic* detail. In social work, the practitioner lends a vision to the client, group and community that transcends the mundane details that are transacted in the course of the relationship.

The social worker represents the agency to the client. He *is* the agency at the point of contact with the client. Conceptually, his function is to mediate the process between the individual and the society. The worker stands in between the individual or group and the larger social structure, the alienation of the public sphere and the anomie of the private sphere. The Jewish communal agency serves a dual function in this regard: it provides an anchor for the individual's social functioning in a meaningful way and enables him, as a Jew, to retain his identity with the Jewish community despite the encroaching ethos of individuation. It is a vital mediating structure for the preservation of Jewish life in an alien society.

The Jewish social worker who shares commitments to authentic Jewish life and to the values and ethics of his profession is afforded the opportunity to develop a philosophy of practice that accords with Judaic and social work principles. The possibility for integration of the religion and the profession is ripe. Such integration can only enrich professional practice in the service of the client.