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Eizenstat, Stuart E., 1989-1992.

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NORTH AMERICAN COMMISSION ON JEWISH EDUCATION

Date of Interview: September 19, 1989
Interview with: Stuart Eisenstadt Location: Washington, DC
Interviewer: Art Rotman Duration: One Hour

Stuart Eisenstadt was full of praise for the staff work of the Commission. He had rarely participated in any meeting where the staff work was as thorough.

As to the problems facing the Commission's successor, he identified relations with the synagogues and the denominations as the "toughest nut." From his experience the synagogues are not only jealous of any non-synagogue entity but are even jealous of one another, and in his community three conservative synagogues, for example, have not been able to come together to operate a common school, as desirable as that would obviously be. This is an indication of the difficulties that would be faced in trying to get various groupings in the community to come together which Eisenstadt feels will be crucial to the success of the Commission.

Eisenstadt is very intrigued with the idea of a Community Action Site. He cautions that we should not spread ourselves too thin. Better to have fewer sites but provide each one with the proper resources. This approach would call for no more than about three or four sites and not more. More than that would dissipate the funds and energies available so that we would end up just doing somewhat more of the same. Eisenstadt feels that it's not an incremental change that's called for, but a dramatic change which can only be made possible by a concentration of resources.

Washington would be ideal for one of the community action sites. The current president of the Federation is the past president of the JCC and is familiar with the Jewish educational thrusts, at the nursery school, some in the adult education programs and its day camps. In other words, the CAS, if located in Washington, would be assured of a sympathetic voice at Federation.

A problem locally, as he sees it, is that the Federation does not have the resources to be helpful. The campaigns have been flat, after taking inflation into account. This does not allow for any expansion or any increase of allocations to any of the functional agencies. This has inhibited the development of creative programming.

Eisenstadt understands very well the catalytic mission of the CAS in each community. He thinks that the "carrot" approach could do wonders in bringing various elements of the community together.

The Commission is on the right track in selecting personnel and community as its targets. He agrees completely and suggests that we stick to those targets for at least the first few years since success in these areas would enable other things to happen.



15 EAST 26th STREET · NEW YORK, N.Y. 10010-1579

January 3, 1990

A report on interview with Stuart Eizenstat, member of Commission

Interviewer: Art Rotman

The interview had to be by telephone because of the difficulty of dovetailing schedules. Duration: Half-hour.

Stuart Eizenstat is very impressed with the work of the Commission and intends to attend the next meeting. However there is a 50/50 chance that he will be in Israel at that time, so that his indication of attendance is, at this time, only tentative. He will be in a better position to know as we get closer to the Commission meeting.

Fund. Stuart came out very strong on the need for the establishment of a large fund of several million dollars to be available for the implementation of the work of the Commission. He's of the opinion that there is a great deal that needs to be done both on a national level and a local level, if the recommendations of the Commission are to be effected. The availability of such a fund (the number of \$25,000,000 was mentioned), would allow the focusing of a sufficient mass of resources which would be essential if there was to be any kind of significant change.

Community Demonstration Sites. Stuart suggested that if four or five sites are selected that each be asked to demonstrate a different aspect of Jewish education, in addition to demonstrations in the area of personnel and lay leadership involvement. He suggested as examples:

- Early intervention/pre-school
- Adult education
- Day schools
- Supplementary schools

Hopefully, the demonstration sites will provide a "measurable" result of their efforts. In many communities there are, at this point, baselines for comparison. In others, we would need to develop such baselines. It's only by comparison of these baselines from one year to the next, or over a period of time, that we would be able to determine any success.

Stuart asked whether there would be any central mechanism selected in each community to be the prime mover. He was satisfied that it might be somewhat different in each community but that the Federations could play a key role.

Stuart stressed the need for accountability. Each community should have a line of responsibility to the central overall national entity for this accountability.

It would be necessary to get a commitment from the local community that they are seriously interested and will provide, in due course, the necessary funding. One way of doing this might be to provide an incentive. For example, if we wanted to end up with four or five sites, we would select ten or twelve. In each community the approach would be that the final selection would depend on the indication of community support. This, of course, would assume that there is a sufficiently large pool of funds available nationally, which could then be funnelled into the communities to act as an incentive. Stuart thought that it would be very difficult for the Federation to provide funds out of its campaign. He pointed out that in Washington, where he is president of the JCC, he has just received a letter from Federation indicating that the allocation to the Center would be five percent less than the previous year, which, with inflation, means in effect a ten percent cut. In the face of such cuts it would be difficult to get Federations to project that, even in a few years, they would be in a position to provide the necessary resources. However, these resources might be obtained from other large givers, depending on the success of the efforts in lay leadership involvement.

National Entity. Stuart feels that there needs to be a continuation of the Commission. The composition of the Commission is just right and it is so unusual to get such a diversified group to be so involved that it would be a shame to give it up. Meetings could be held once or twice a year.

The key to success would depend not only on the continuation of the Commission but on a small core of professionals of top quality, who would staff this entity. Staff with credibility in the communities who could act as catalyst, monitors, evaluators, etc. would be crucial.

Enjoled

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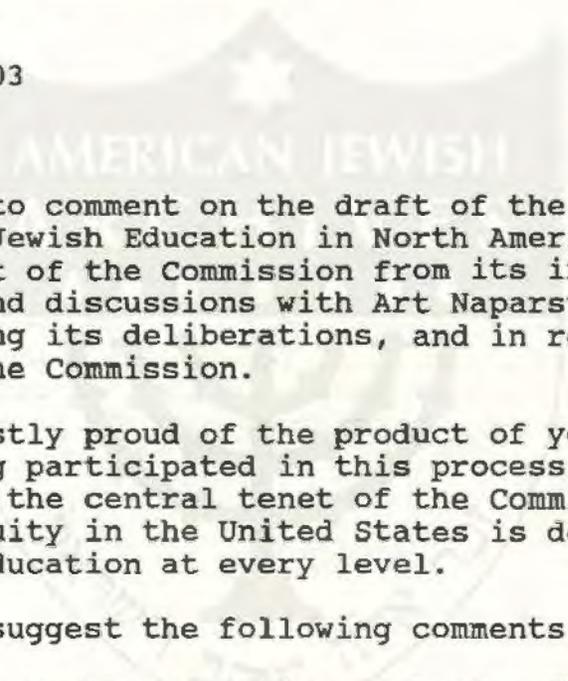
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November 21, 1990

Mr. Morton L. Mandel
Chairman
Commission on Jewish Education
in North America
4500 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44103

Dear Mort:



I would like to comment on the draft of the final report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America. I am proud to have been a part of the Commission from its inception, in several meetings and discussions with Art Naparstek before its formation and during its deliberations, and in reviewing the final product of the Commission.

You can be justly proud of the product of your vision and leadership. Having participated in this process I have an even stronger belief in the central tenet of the Commission's efforts: that Jewish continuity in the United States is dependent upon improving Jewish education at every level.

Permit me to suggest the following comments:

1. In many ways the operative mechanism for implementation of the Commission's recommendations is the selection of model "Lead Communities" (pages 43-46). I subscribe to this and discussed it at an early stage with Art Naparstek. However, you should clarify who will make the selection and on what basis one community will be chosen over another. Would the new Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education be the empowering institution? I also believe that it would be very useful to suggest some criteria more specific than those very general ideas set forth on page 44. For instance, the Federation in the community should make a commitment of additional funds, a local planning committee must be established, etc.

2. The issue of funding runs through much of the report. But the report is somewhat vague on the sources of funding. For example, with the new Council (page 47) would funding come only from private individuals and foundations? Could Federation be asked to pay a modest fee to support the Council? Who would pay

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for the marketing study (page 32) and the recruitment plan (pg. 32)? How about the Fellows of Jewish Education and the Jewish Education Corps (page 33)? Would the local communities to which they are posted pick up the costs? Will they only be sent to the Lead Communities? Who would be responsible for securing the "substantial funding" for training, "program development for additional faculty positions and for student fellowships?" (page 35) What institution would do the follow-up here?

The improvement of salaries and benefits for educational personnel (pages 36-37) is critical. But how will "funds be raised to cover the additional costs?" (page 37) After all, with the pressures of Soviet Jewish integration here and in Israel, Federation allocations are already being cut to local Jewish organizations.

3. I strongly support the focus of the report on the two issues of developing the profession of Jewish education and generating community support behind the importance of Jewish education (page 26). If progress can be made in these two cross-cutting areas, it will positively impact on all of the other problems of Jewish education.

4. There are several "micro-points" I would like to add:

(a) You can dramatize the trends in Jewish education noted on page 6 by mentioning that today, while more children are getting an intensive day school education, a much smaller percentage of children are receiving any form of Jewish education than in 1960. The figures I have seen are that two of every three American Jewish children between the ages of 7 and 17 received at least some form of Jewish education in 1960 compared to only one in three today.

(b) It would be useful to cite, even briefly, some of the successes of Jewish education to provide communities interested in becoming Lead Communities with some ideas of what already exists. For example, in our greater Washington community:

- Rabbi Joshua Haberman's Foundation for Jewish Studies is an exceptionally successful, brilliant model for adult Jewish education across denominational lines. The Foundation

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sponsors world-class scholars-in-residence who spend up to three months in the community, speaking at synagogues, temples, luncheon sessions, and leadership fora. Such outstanding individuals as the late Rabbi Pinchas Peli and Rabbi Gunter Plaut, have had a tremendous impact on the community. Moreover, the Foundation sponsors weekend scholars' retreats and Talmud classes.

- The Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington, of which I am now president, established three years ago, an Institute on Jewish Learning, which now has 1,000 students and a great variety of courses taught by exciting teachers. It is an example of how JCC's are moving into the Jewish education vacuum.
 - Our JCC of Greater Washington is one of five new sites opening this year for the Florence Melton program, an extensive program in conjunction with Hebrew University to help American Jewish adults achieve the basic literacy needed to participate in Jewish life. A certificate from Hebrew University is available for successful completion of the program. There are already close to 200 graduates in the program throughout its five-years existence in the U.S.
- (c) I would like to see the report mention the importance of Jewish educational outreach to non-Jewish spouses of mixed marriages to acquaint them with the beautiful aspects of Jewish life before they decide to convert. Our JCC has begun to work extensively with intermarried couples prior to any conversion decision. While this is obviously a delicate areas, it is a fact of life with which we must deal.
- (d) The American Jewish community does not make sufficient use of visiting Israeli scholars, who are scattered throughout American colleges, universities, and "think tanks" for short periods of time. Yet they are rarely tapped by the communities in which they are present. Indeed,

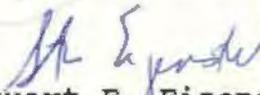
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their presence is often unknown. Yet they would enrich the adult Jewish education in the communities. Emphasis should be given to identify them and to "plug them into" their local Jewish community.

- (e) Organizations like Rabbi Irving Greenberg's CLAL which educate Jewish communal leaders and heighten their awareness of the importance of Jewish education should be supported as "change agents" to produce the type of environment for Jewish education we are seeking.
- (f) Jewish day school education remains less than it should. Students graduating after 12 years still have poor Hebrew language skills. They often serve an elite group of students and do not deal well with other children; e.g., bright kids with learning disabilities, who often must leave Jewish day school for secular private or public schools. Yet day schools must light the way for the rest of the community.

Thank you for the privilege of serving with the Commission and for the extraordinary vision and effort you and the staff have put into this venture. It promises to lead to the most important emphasis on improving Jewish education of the post-War era.

Very truly yours,


Stuart E. Eizenstat

SEE/jt

cc: Arthur Rodman
Executive Vice President
Jewish Community Center Association

STUART E. EIZENSTAT

GUEST COLUMNIST



The sword of assimilation is aimed at the heart of American Jewry. Our shields are aliyah, greater religious piety and Jewish education.

A perplexing paradox: More American Jews are more Jewishly committed today than in previous generations. And more American Jews are abandoning Judaism than ever before. The American Jewish community is like a corporation with two divisions—one prosperous, dynamic, growing, successful; the other bankrupt, dispirited and alienated, threatening to sink the entire enterprise.

In our healthy division:

- The Jewish day school movement has experienced explosive growth since the end of World War II, when barely 80 schools existed, mostly Orthodox; today there are more than 600 of all denominations providing more intensive Jewish education to more American Jewish children than ever before.

- More American Jews than ever engage in overt religious practices—from an increase in kosher homes and restaurants to more people wearing *kipot* [head coverings] in public and an increase in tradition and ritual in Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative and Orthodox synagogues.

- American Jewish political activity has increased dramatically due to a belated recognition of American Jewish timidity during the Holocaust; the dramatic impact of the Six-Day War; and a marked reduction in overt antisemitism, sparked by the 1960s civil rights movement. More than 90 Jewish-oriented political action committees raise more than \$2 million annually to support candidates with pro-Jewish and pro-Israel agendas. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is the premier political organization in Washington. The Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations melds the disparate voices of about 40 American Jewish groups into a generally united voice on Jewish issues.

- United Jewish Appeal (UJA)/Federation raises more than \$600 million

annually, more than half of which goes to Israel, and hopes to raise more than \$400 million in the next two years to help integrate Soviet Jews in Israel, while Israel Bonds offices raised an unprecedented \$1 billion last year.

- Linkages with Israel have been broadened. In 1990, 10,000 American Jewish high school and college students studied in Israel and volunteer programs for teenagers, young adults and senior citizens abound.

- Despite the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the Pollard spy affair, the "Who Is a Jew" issue, the *intifada*, the West Bank settlements and the deportation of Palestinians, surveys show no significant diminution of American Jewish support for Israel, with between 80 and 90 percent of American Jews describing themselves as pro-Israel.

That's the good news. The bad news is that these positive developments are occurring only within a minority of the American Jewish community—a core of committed Jews.

In our bankrupt division:

- Disaffiliation is outpacing the renewal experienced by the core of committed Jews. The number of American Jews walking away from Judaism outstrips those seeking to instill it in their homes and in their children.

- The percentage of Jewish children who receive no Jewish education has increased as dramatically as the increase in the number of day schools. In 1960, approximately two-thirds of Jewish children between 7 and 17 received some Jewish education; today only 40 percent do. In 1960, 600,000 Jewish children went to Jewish supplementary and day schools. Today, only about 390,000 do. Between 1962 and 1982, enrollment in Jewish schools declined by nearly 35 percent.

- Less than a third of American Jews have visited Israel.

- Less than 50 percent belong to any Jewish institution or contribute to

any local federation or practice any consistent pattern of ritual observance.

- Jews have the lowest birthrate in American society. Because of the birthrate and escalating assimilation, only 4.3 million Americans, according to the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS), now identify themselves as Jewish by religion—one and a half million less than had been assumed.

- For the first time interfaith marriage rates for new marriages, according to the NJPS, exceed 50 percent—up from 30 percent in 1970. To compound matters, conversion rates by the non-Jewish spouse are down to just 6 percent.

- A study in Philadelphia showed that no grandchildren of mixed marriages without conversion to Judaism identified themselves as Jews.

- Nearly 600,000 Americans born or raised as Jews now have either no religion or have another religion. Today fewer people convert to Judaism than convert from it.

The very integration into the mainstream of American life we have so long sought is producing catastrophic assimilation. At the time American society is most willing to allow us to express our ethnic and religious identity, huge numbers of American Jews are abandoning their religion and melting into the American landscape.

- In 1930 we were more than 3.5 percent of the U.S. population; today at less than 2 percent, we are in danger of becoming a remnant within a remnant and losing our full potential to contribute to American diversity.

What can be done to keep American Jews Jewish? The winds of assimilation blow so fiercely that any solutions bear uncertainty and trepidation. I see three alternatives to shield against the sword of assimilation aimed at the heart of American Jewry: *aliyah* [immigration to Israel] or, at least, extended contact with Israel; greater re-

ligious piety; and Jewish education.

• *Aliyah* is the surest way to remain Jewish. During Israel's 43-year history only about 80,000 American Jews settled permanently in Israel. In the past few years the number has been a trickle, between 2,500 and 3,000 a year, most Orthodox and likely to have remained Jewish if they stayed in the U.S.

Realistically, large numbers of American Jews will not leave the material comforts of the U.S., where they legitimately have strong bonds of affection, to move to Israel. To expect otherwise will only lead to disillusionment.

Aliyah should be seen as the highest rung on the Zionist and Jewish ladder. But the perfect should not become the enemy of the good. We must encourage extended contact with Israel—in study and work programs, summer activities and volunteer programs that put American Jews in contact with Israelis building the third Jewish commonwealth. The Jewish state in action can convince American Jews that their Judaism is worth keeping.

I suggest that the core of committed Jews set an example, taking a page from American Mormons, who expect their children to serve on a mission abroad, by establishing a one-year mission to Israel for our children between high school and college.

• Another option is a turn to Orthodoxy or, at least, to greater religious piety. In Israel Jewish survival can be sustained by being in the land. In the U.S. Jewish survival can be assured only by identification with Judaism as a religion. Nostalgic memories, a love of Jewish cooking, a vague resonance with Jewish secular culture are insufficient to sustain American Jewish continuity. Only a firm root in Jewish religious practices and traditions will suffice—both in synagogues and at home.

American Jews must create Jewish space. Orthodox Jews have done the best job of walling off the outside world and creating a distinctly Jewish environment. Their growing movement offers one of the most certain avenues to Jewish identification in America. Orthodox children are far less likely to intermarry than non-Orthodox.

As Zionism has a range of possible expressions, so too Orthodoxy is but one religious option. For many American Jews, Orthodoxy is too limiting despite the beauties it affords. Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist

Jews must demonstrate they too can inculcate in their congregants—while drawing in the non-affiliated—religious bonds that will last a lifetime. At the moment, they are failing. Rabbis must make services more meaningful, more relevant, more interesting.

All Jewish denominations in America must make greater efforts to encourage the non-Jewish spouse to convert, for children of interfaith marriages with a Jewish conversion generally have at least as great a Jewish identification as children of all-Jewish unions. Conversion must be less difficult and less painful. The subtle discrimination and chilly attitude we take toward converts should be changed into loving welcome.

• Only sound knowledge of Jewish history, culture and, perhaps most important, Hebrew language, provided by a first-rate Jewish school system of day and supplementary schools can insill a strong enough Jewish identification to ward off the temptations of assimilation. But Jewish education in the U.S. is catastrophic. Teachers' salaries are too low to draw the most talented people, most Jewish children are only briefly exposed to Jewish education, Jewish college students are unarmed with basic information about Israel when Israel is attacked on American campuses, and even day schools rarely turn out students fluent in Hebrew.

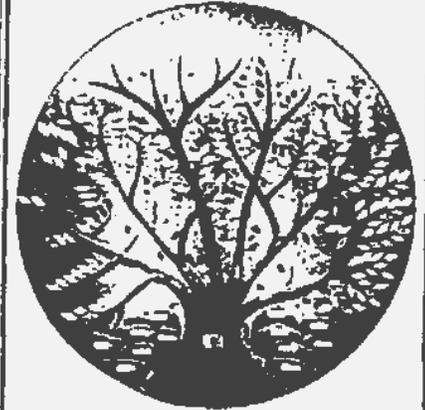
Jewish education must become the American Jewish community's top domestic priority, receiving a far larger share of UJA/Federation money—even at the expense of a smaller percentage going to Israel. The Commission on Jewish Education in North America, initiated by Morton Mandel of Cleveland, has a sound program to resuscitate Jewish education. His follow-up organization, the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education, is selecting three model communities to analyze how to improve Jewish education.

Jews in Israel must defend their lives against external enemies. American Jews face a struggle for survival against the enemy within. It is time for a trumpet's blare to awaken us to the danger, before it is too late. ❧

Stuart E. Eisenstat, a lawyer in Washington, D.C., was assistant to President Jimmy Carter for domestic affairs and policy and executive director of the White House domestic policy staff from 1977-1981

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