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**CAPE PROFESSORS SEMINAR
JULY 12, 1996**

I. General Announcements

Notes were distributed from Thursday and the trip to Machtesh Ramon. It was announced that on Sunday the schedule will be rearranged a bit to allow for a fuller discussion of questions and issues that have emerged during the first week of the seminar. Participants were asked to review all the notes from the first week in preparation for this discussion session.

In addition, Gail mentioned that it is important to hear from the invited guests. Now that the seminar is at the half-way point, and there is a better idea about the work of CIJE and the context of Jewish education, it is a good time to learn more about the work of each of the invited participants and how their work and areas of expertise may connect to the work of CIJE. CIJE is interested in hearing from the participants not only in relation to its current projects, but in terms of other domains that CIJE should be thinking about.

II. Reading Session

The seminar broke up into small groups for the study of Soloveitchik's The Halakhic Man.

III. Lecture on Soloveitchik's The Halakhic Man - Yaakov Blidstein

Professor Blidstein started with some general comments about the text. He mentioned that: 1) the book is very difficult to comprehend, irrespective of one's understanding of Halakhah, and 2) the book had an underground existence until it was translated in the 1980's. That book was written in 1944 as a monograph that had great significance, but most Jews could not read it since it was written in Hebrew. This "mystery" increased the book's significance.

The significance of this text is not in its details, but in its basic, overarching themes, subtext or claims. These themes pertain to what Jewish life is all about. The two claims are:

1) Jewish life was facing secularism and Orthodox Jews were not poised to deal with these issues. In response to this, the major claim of the book is that Halakhah is an important part of Judaism, not only for the Orthodox Jew, but for all Jews. Halakhah must be confronted as the center of Judaism.

Not only is Halakhah the center of life, but Judaism should not say anything philosophical that does not pertain to Halakhah--anything significant about Judaism must find a correlate -a norm- from Halakhah. The text is emphasizing the normative aspects of Jewish life, not only the metaphysical.

2) The second claim, as evidenced from the text in Chapter VI, "When halakhic man approaches reality, he comes with his Torah, given to him from Sinai, in hand." The centrality of the Torah, according to Soloveitchik, is that it is given from Sinai. The essence of the Torah cannot be reduced to other positions; one cannot reduce holiness to the products of the best minds of people.

Professor Blidstein then explained that this text was written as an ideal: the way Jews should be. However, Soloveitchik was influenced much by his father. (In fact the book begins with a Midrash about this.) It is likely that although he was writing about an ideal, his father influenced his claims about looking at the world through Halakhah.

The presentation turned to Soloveitchik's method of teaching. What is the Soloveitchik method of studying Halakhah? His method, called BRISK (??) is unique in two major ways: 1) The method tried to get back to certain Medieval figures to study the more lucid, less cluttered thinkers, and 2) It focused on those pages of Talmud that were most important to bring to light the most important and immediate disagreements, rather than focusing on large numbers of texts at the same time. This allowed students to get to the heart of the matter and build conceptual building blocks.

Although his method is unique, and there are tapes of his teaching, there is little written about the method. He did teach more than he wrote. Some people claim that his writings are new and original, while his teaching method is not really new. Alan suggested it would be a wonderful project if we can get the tapes of his teaching and analyze them as case studies to arrive at "his theory of practice".

We then returned to the text itself. Soloveitchik's major contribution is that he claims that Halakhah is a way of looking at the world; it provides a coherent way of cognizing reality. Soloveitchik tries to uncover structures of the normative world. He claims that maybe there is a philosophy of Halakhah that could describe the whole world.

The example of the Halakhic man is when he sees the sun. He says, "Oh, is it time for Ma'ariv?" This is contrasted to the religious man, who may say, "Oh, what a wonderful world God has created", while the scientific man, the man of knowledge, may think about principles in physics. One participant explained how these three ideas could be used in concert with one another as a way of understanding ourselves in a world that is "external" and outside ourselves.

The Halakhic man experiences religion differently as well. He experiences religion in a somber, controlled manner, and he "knows" God through Halakhah. The Halakhah and its coherence are proof of the existence of God.

Another important part of the text is Soloveitchik's emphasis

on creativity. Creativity is an important value in the text with an emphasis on self-creation through study.

In addition, the text emphasizes the normative translation of ideals. Professor Blidstein explained the relationships between normative, quantitative, and democratic. The Halakhah provides norms that are quantified about how to live (such as, which types of work are allowed on Shabbat). This leads to democracy because everyone can participate in the same manner. Participation is not dependent upon spiritual talents.

One participant mentioned that quantitative norms also become opportunities for sanctions. In addition, it was mentioned that Soloveitchik's description allows the normative behaviors to be communal; everyone has equal access to the performance.

In the discussion questions were raised about the relationship between The Halakhic Man and his other writings, and whether Halakhah is the exclusive lense by which one should cognize reality?

Professor Blidstein suggested that most of the time Soloveitchik would be willing to acknowledge that the Halakhah is not the only way to cognize the world, and in fact in other writings he explored these areas, but in this text he viewed the halakhic lense as a total world view.

One participant asked if the text has bearing to the non-Jews?

Professor Blidstein suggested that answer could be yes, to the extent that non-Jews were interested in learning about another cognitive universe or learning an intellectual way to "read" culture. However, he suggested this text was a Jewish response to what was happening at this time (the Shoah). He was saying that the world must find a normative mode of existence and should not let itself get swept up in the subjective universe.

III. Translating Soloveitchik for Education-Jonathan Cohen

This discussion is an attempt to demonstrate the implications of theory for practice by asking, what is the "ideal human type" according to Soloveitchik?

We started with a discussion of Soloveitchik's method of philosophy and why his writings are suitable for translation. His philosophy is different from other philosophers.

Soloveitchik uses a 'ladder' which is useful for translating philosophy into education: The ladder is as follows:

1) Principles: These are the highest order questions, the overarching principles, such as, what is the good? what is reality?

2) Ideals: These questions are more specific, such as, what is the ideal human type that is evident when the principles (from above) are activated?

3) Ends: The long range strategies of educational planning in light of the ideals. If my ultimate goal is....then what are my educational ends? How do I train teachers towards these ideals?

4) Means: This refers to specific tactics. What would I have to do to build a specific program that would take the ideals seriously?

Soloveitchik does not only speak at the level of principles. He employs phenomenological philosophy. He brackets questions about the truth of his world view, and presents a description of the structure of human experience. Soloveitchik does not try to prove that the categories he uses to describe human experience are true. He shares the structure of those experiences, such as the experiences of the halakhic man, or Adam I and II, to present a compelling picture of certain human types.

His writings also suggest a certain educational diagnosis. He does not think that people are convinced that Judaism is not true, but yet he suggests that people are put off by it because of certain personality types of many Jews, the obedient, slavish Jew that does not embrace creativity and autonomy.

Next we compared Soloveitchik's perspective of individuality to that of Schweid as a way of introducing the group to issues in translation. Soloveitchik is concerned with the question, how does one go from individuality to identity, if he assumes that radical individualism is essential?

In contrast, Schweid thinks individualism is a sickness and therefore the ends and means of education would be to re-connect the individual to his/her community, people, etc. The ultimate aim, according to this perspective, would be to cure the alienation.

Educators, according to Soloveitchik's perspective, would ask very different questions. They would not ask, how can I cure this alienation? but, would address such questions as, if this type of individualism is essential for all humans, how can we as educators develop people who can have this types of sense of unique individualism? Deliberations would have to occur with various experts to discuss, when could such education begin? Others, such as psychologists, may suggest that all kids do go through this stage of individualism and our role as educators is to help them deal with it.

At this point in the lecture participants asked questions. Some participants questioned how this type of perspective could be explained to parents. Seymour responded that this is exactly the type of deliberation that occurs when translation is taken seriously. Family educators should be asked the question, how to teach or tell parents about this? Seymour suggested that these philosophical principles release creativity amongst educators. In these discussions with

educators it may often be necessary to go back to the philosopher, and request him/her to re-think principles and ideals.

Concerns about social engineering and manipulation were raised in the group. Seymour responded that social engineering also has principles and should be raised a topic for discussion at joint deliberations. This is an example of the difference between philosophy **of** education, and philosophy **for** education.

There was an extensive discussion about **vision-driven schools**. Participants discussed research that suggests that schools with a shared vision are considered more 'effective'. They shared their experiences about the lack of vision in many schools in the US and processes used in those schools to get all stakeholders involved. The processes often mirrored a vision of democratic society. Various explanations were presented for these difficulties in the US, such as very heterogeneous school populations, the shopping mall curriculum, etc. Others indicated that although many schools do not have explicit visions, most schools have implicit visions, that are often swept under the carpet. These implicit visions would not always be embraced if they were made public. Others discussed the use of school choice as a method at arriving at more homogeneous populations within schools.

The importance of enriching the content of the deliberations when discussing vision was mentioned. The struggle with ideas of "great thinkers" can raise the level of conversation. This type of discussion says to educators, there are sets of philosophical assumptions that need to be taken into account. These conversations need to have many folks around the table, but also need to have the "content" of great thinkers to arrive at "rich" ideas.

Participants suggested that Jewish education may be better situated for these types of deliberations about vision because, the populations are already more homogeneous and value-based issues are "the name of the game". Also there are many 'great thinkers' that can be used. Other participants were concerned about beginning such deliberations when so many members of the Jewish community are not even aware of the possibilities, and do not have a basic understanding of the richness of Jewish culture. Johnny concluded by suggesting that Jewish thought can arrange an array of choices for educators.

Israel Seminar
Tuesday, July 9

I. Michael Rosenak on Maimonides

Mike Rosenak explored the issue of “translation” as he saw it in Maimonides’ work. He began with an example from Yaeger’s book on Paideia in which the author asserted that ancient Judaism had no idea of Paideia. This Mike saw as an example of the inability to use the tools of translation in order to understand another culture. In fact, Jewish culture did have a rather defined Paideia, but it was expressed in midrashic rather than Greek modes. How, he asked, does one translate from one culture’s language to another’s, such as from Greek to Jewish? This was, at least in part, the enterprise that Maimonides engaged in-- taking the classical Jewish worldview and reinventing it for Greek-dominated culture of Medieval philosophy.

Mike turned to Paul Tillich for some illustrations of translation. Tillich sees faith as “having ultimate concern.” A person’s faith must be in that which both can demand everything and give everything back to the person. Idolatry, according to Tillich is giving everything to that which cannot give everything back. The example of the person who loves (and has ultimate concern) for a red car. The problem with the red car is that doesn’t fit the criteria that Tillich outlines: the ultimate must be central to a person’s life, have depth, be comprehensive, be beyond full comprehension and must have clear moral dimensions. This example of Tillich’s notion of faith represents a *translation* of a classic religious concept into modern theological idiom.

But translation presents complicated problems with serious implications for the practical work of education. Mike turned to an example of Uko who says that a person “has character” when he can have a conversation with himself (one’s ideal self) about whether he had acted well (in a given circumstance). Character means that you stand in judgment before yourself. Now the story of Yochanan ben Zakkai thinking about his impending death (given out at the session) could be “translated: into the Uko view. In that view: God= a conversation between me and myself.

But translation now can be seen to raise a problem: once you translate the passage, it make sense, but you wonder what has been lost, is that all that the text is saying, is that really what the passage is saying? The problem is the conflict between the authentic and the relevant. Relevant in communicable, but maybe you’ve missed the point! Mike argues in favor of “partial translation” retaining the tension between the authentic and the relevant. This is summed up in the phrase “Look at it this way for a moment. . .”

Mike then turned to the Ian Ramsay’s distinction between discernment and commitment.

Ramsay's example of the man on the train (who introduces himself one day and asks for a loan the next) illustrates the distinction and the point that discernment (knowing John Brown) leads to commitment (lending the money).

But actually commitments can also lead to discernments. This is a Jewish idea expressed in the biblical phrase "na'aseh v'nishmah" ("we will do and we will understand") as interpreted the midrash: that Israel accepted the Torah (we will do) even before they knew what its content was. The relationship between discernment and commitment was explored as a rubric to understand Maimonides. Maimonides looks at the question of idolatry and views it as the problem of wise men who began to discern incorrectly and this led them to incorrect commitments. Maimonides comes to the story of Abraham and reads Abraham as a philosophic teacher (along with his children). Hence Maimonides "translates" Abraham into the mode of Greek culture-- Abraham the philosopher! Abraham in Maimonides' view gave good discernments to people, but did not give commitments. The commandments are necessary because discernments alone cannot hold a people together. Hence Moses comes along to give both discernments and commitments.

Mike contrasted Maimonides' view with that of Judah HaLevi and how he tells the Abraham story. HaLevi was a man of experience, not thought (like Maimonides). In the *Kuzari* the king says to the philosopher "you think correctly, but you don't act correctly." That is, what is the right way to live (not the right way to think). The philosopher's exposition doesn't conform to the king's *dream*. For HaLevi the crux of the matter can be summed up by the two words used for God in Genesis 1 and 2-- *elohim* ("God") and the four lettered name for God ("tetragrammaton"), *adonai*, "Lord." Knowledge of God (*da'at Elohim*) in HaLevi's view is worldly knowledge, not limited to Israel; the real point is to gain *da'at Adonai*, knowledge of "Lord"-- which in HaLevi's view is *experience* of God. Israel's specialness is that experiencing, not the ability to speculate about God.

What we have here, according to Mike Rosenak, are two views of Abraham translated by Maimonides and HaLevi. For Maimonides "Judaism is like a philosophy." For HaLevi "Judaism is like a marriage."

Mike asked, can you put discernment and experience together? This is an important issue for the practice of education. Perhaps this is a developmental issue-- one should come before the other. Perhaps it's a personality/temperamental issue-- some people are just attracted to one or the other.

Many Jewish stories offered to children might-- in unpredictable ways-- lead to discernment. Likewise for some commitments can lead to good discernments, although

they might keep people going even without discernments!

In Maimonides tract on Perek Helek (a chapter in the Mishnah) the issue of discernment and commitment is explored in a different way: To be a Jew means to have true ideas, but Maimonides asked how do people who aren't so smart have true ideas? This was explored through various interpretations of the idea of the world to come. Many of these ideas are viewed negatively by Maimonides, but Maimonides wants to find those views that though they may not be of the philosopher's level are "good enough." He wants in Mike Rosenak's words to "distinguish between things that are true enough and things that are truly false." For Maimonides discernment-- love of God-- is the ultimate end of Judaism; commitment is the daily life of Judaism.

Mike concluded by talking about necessity of translation in a modern world. Perhaps in Meah Shearim translation is not needed, but in our world some degree of translation will be required, an idea that Maimonides recognized as well, as we saw in the various discussions and texts above.

II. Yehezkel Dror

Prof Dror's remarks were well summarized (by him) in the handout that he brought to the presentation. I will add issues that were raised in the discussion and Prof. Dror's reactions:

1. Can you fight the power of the main stream culture (e.g. the media)? He claims a need to create culture.
2. How do you create loyalty (he prefers "identity")? Different elements will appear to different people; need to create a big menu.
3. But what about the fact that in our culture there are *too many* choices for young people, no boundaries for them? He asserts that his "15 elements" are really part of an integrated system and hence will not seem as a long list of unconnected matters.
4. Does this list create the image of the ideal Jew? Do they guarantee the survival of the Jewish people?
5. What about other factors aside from education? He supports emphasis on family, parents, peer groups. (E.g. youth movements).
6. Can this list work in a world without binding authority?
7. How will know if there is success? Prof. Dror indicates 4 indicators: number of Jews, impact of Jews on the non-Jewish world of ideas, Jews are happy being Jews, *I missed the fourth!*
8. But is this enough without knowledge? He answered: Yes, you need content, but you

can't have content without the frame of meaning. He suggested beginning with the idea of idolatry as a good place to start and translating idolatry into a modern idiom.

Barry Holtz

Tuesday afternoon - Wednesday — July 9, 10

OUR TRIP TO MACHTESH RAMON (alternatively, Jews in Nature or Let's Hear it For Yehuda Halevi)

Although our trip was relatively short, it raised questions about the relationship of human beings and the natural world. We had already encountered two approaches to this relationship in our previous days of study. The trip deepened our experience and understanding of these two approaches and made them more complicated by adding both more approaches and more experiences. The trip had four parts (not counting "Glidah Montana" and the "Bedouin" rest stop):

1. Our First View of the Machtesh: Nature itself can be understood as a text
2. On Considering the Vastness of the Universe: The Stars
3. Hike in the Machtesh
4. Sde Boker: The Zionist Experience/ Reflection on our experience.

At our first stop, we began by trying to "read" nature like a text and actually found as the 24 hours passed that we were more and more attuned to "seeing" the world around us and being able to read better. Elon, however, did not rely only on our eyes to see; he used his eyes to help us see and he introduced us to geological information that allowed us to understand even more. We also read a selection from John McPhee that further deepened our experience. These steps: the looking, the talking, the reading of a variety of texts were steps that we repeated in each phase of our trip.

We used these lenses in our encounter with nature:

1. Personal Encounter
e.g., At one spot on our hike, we stopped, sat alone, and drew or wrote about our experience.
e.g., We spent time just looking at the stars
2. Scientific Explanations
e.g., deep time (McPhee: If you free yourself from the conventional reaction to a quantity like a million years, you free yourself a bit from the boundaries of human time. And then in a way you do not live at all, but in another way you live forever?
e.g., the stars we are seeing are "x"
3. Historical Explanations
e.g., trail on which we hiked at the beginning was part of a Nabatean spice route
e.g., when we talk about Jewish people's encampments in the dessert, we think we are talking about the region to the (south, north.....)
4. Literary (we used a variety of literary sources -- Biblical and Rabbinic, Zionist writings, Literature (Examples interspersed throughout)
e.g., looking at stars and recalling Biblical promise to Abraham to make his descendants as numerous as stars of heavens

Questions: Should Biblical and Rabbinic writings be in a category all their own?
How do various lenses work to mediate our experience of nature? Or, is this translation, interpretation or what?

In our discussions of nature, Elon identified at least 3 different Biblical "takes" on the relationship between humankind and nature (I actually think he talked about 4 perspectives on this and Zionism, but I can only remember 3):

Genesis 1: "Conquer and rule the earth" (on the other hand, even the mosquito was created before you)
Genesis 2: "Till the earth and care for her"
Job: "Where were you when I laid the earth's boundaries"

He then identified different Zionist "takes" on the relationship of people to the land. We noticed some parallels between these perspectives although the early Zionists did not seem to make these connections (at least in that which we read).

Alterman's poem: A Song to Moledet clearly reflected the mandate of Genesis 1 to "conquer and rule the earth" when he wrote "The desert--we shall pave a road through it...."

A. D. Gordon's writings reflected a more harmonious relationship with nature --"you will return to nature,...and you will know you have returned to yourself."

S. Yizhar's writing talked about the total separation of humans from the natural world, using the desert as the particular example. "Man learns in this way a measure of humility and modesty..."

Over the course of the trip, we addressed the following questions:

What is Judaism's attitude toward nature?

Is it a distraction? ("Scripture regards him as if he had forfeited his soul")

Is it communion with God? (Dillard, Buber)

What is the relationship of knowledge (text, science) and nature?

Does it enrich the experience of it? (Darwin,

Does it contaminate the experience of it? (Twain...the romance and beauty were all gone from the river; "in my youth I saw that too")

And last, but certainly not least: Was this experience Jewish education?

Notes from Monday, July 8, 1996 Sessions

I. Comments on yesterday's notes (thanks to DP)

Themes articulated during reflections on the summary of yesterday's proceedings:

1. There was some discussion concerning whether Menachem Loberbaum intended to suggest that, like Maimonides, Plato believed that the ascent from the cave begins with the experience of perplexity.

2. The view was expressed that perhaps because Menachem was speaking with educators, he may have not given enough time to the characterization of Maimonidean perplexity in its own terms, and jumped too quickly to questions concerning contemporary forms of perplexity (which have a very different character).

A point not reflected in the notes: Perhaps perplexity in the sense suggested by Maimonides need not be the starting point for everyone's learning; people being very different from one another, it may be that the conditions under which they learn and grow are very different. This view recalled the point someone made before that perplexity may not be a necessary condition for the ascent to wisdom.

One person contextualized Maimonides' view by reminding us that while many of us take the desirability of perplexity for granted, this was not true in his day. In effect, he had "to sell" his contemporaries on the desirability of perplexity (the way we might have to sell our own contemporaries on the desirability of, say, commitment or faith).

II. Small group study

We broke into the small groups to which we were assigned yesterday for study of text by Maimonides.

III. Lecture: Translating Jewish thought into education (Part 1) -- Seymour Fox

According to Seymour, it was very difficult for the planners involved with the Commission to decide on a strategy for Jewish education, but they ultimately framed the "Mandel gesheft." The central elements of this strategy, relevant for today's lectures, are: (1) Invest in people (professional educators and community lay leaders) (2) Promote "great ideas" (Jewish subject matter of great significance). These elements were consciously chosen over a more programmatic approach to the issue; A Time to Act reflects this prejudice.

This lecture focusses on the second of those elements, and argues for the necessity of translating, or readying for application, those examples of Jewish thought chosen to be taught. Many eminent philosophers of education, including James, Dewey, Schellfler and Schwab, among others, support this assertion that such preparation of subject matter is essential. They underscore the difficulties in successfully negotiating this move from

theory to practice. .

Why is this translation critical to our enterprise? Seymour identifies two characteristics of education that make it so:

1. Education is multi-disciplinary. There does not yet exist a successful "science of man" -- an integrated theory of human behavior and development that cuts across the social sciences, biological sciences and humanities. Therefore there is no common language, or agreed upon assumptions about the nature of human potential and how best to elicit it. Each attempt to convey or transmit a body of information, then, must be negotiated *de novo* -- disciplinary assumptions about how children best learn, and teachers best teach, given particular contexts (in this case, for example, the day school or the supplementary program) must be laid bare and offered for discussion and reformulation by a multi disciplinary group. How could it be otherwise?

2. Education is a practical endeavor. This has been partly addressed above. There are, in essence, three bodies of theory to consider here. Two pertain to the selection of content, answering the question of **what subject matter should be taught**; we might clumsily categorize these as secular (e.g. psychological) and Jewish understandings of the nature of human potential. The third pertains to the selection of modality, answering the question of **how this material is to be conveyed**. This body of knowledge can be considered "intervention theory," or understandings of why teaching strategies (e.g., material taught **by** certain personnel, in particular concentrations, to certain ages of children, etc.) should yield certain results. As a practical matter, having put all this energy into selecting material to be transmitted, we want to give it the best shot at actually being learned. This requires a "translation" of sorts -- from theories of human capacity to their practical applications. (Some from our group would argue that this process -- selecting material and choosing a strategy -- is not sequential or linear, but rather interactive. One's choice of subject matter is contingent on the options available for transmitting it.)

The search for appropriate subject matter, however, is not solely functional. That is, the conversation is not only about what information can be best learned in certain contexts. Educators must consider what **should be learned**, based on conclusions about what is important to know to be educated in a particular area. A major part of our work, then, is to identify the elements of Jewish thought that are critical to becoming an educated Jew. Which texts should be part of the canon, and how should those determinations be made? (Obviously, these texts are chosen independent of their contribution to our understanding of human potential.)

Seymour asked (rhetorically?) whether disciplinary "experts" should tell us what to teach -- whether these decisions should be made primarily by those who know the texts best. The implicit answer was that collaboration between scholars and educators is necessary. This collaboration can only be done if both groups disclose the principles by which they are working --for example, explicating why a particular text is considered essential, or why it does or does not yield itself to a particular teaching strategy. Seymour noted Schwab's four commonplaces (the learner, the subject matter, the societal milieu, and the teacher) as categories of information or assumptions that must be disclosed. Then, Seymour argues, policy makers can become better consumers -- they will know better what they are buying. And evaluation cannot be undertaken without these

disclosures.

Participants raised a ranged of questions, some of which were addressed during this session and others held until the afternoon. They included:

Is there a difference in teaching Jewish texts and other subjects, e.g. biology?

On what basis do we privilege certain subject matter over other?

What is the argument for teaching Jewish thought over all other responses to the question, "why should I remain a Jew?"

By applying the commonplaces as a diagnostic measure, are one's decisions about what and how to teach overly constrained by present shortcomings in one or more of them? To what extent should one work within current constraints, on the one hand, and within a vision for the future, on the other (e.g., a better trained workforce able to manage and present complex material)?

Are these four commonplaces the elements we find most important to our topic?

Why is teaching Jewish texts the preferred approach in Jewish education? What is the reasoning that preceded the choice of this strategy?

IV. Lecture: The Jewish community in North America: Present and future trends -- Charles Liebman

Charles structured his lecture around two questions:

1. What does a Jewish community mean?
2. What are the conditions necessary for its survival

Community

Communities are social entities that provide a sense of boundaries, belonging and responsibility to their members. In most instances, and certainly for Jewish communities, they provide an ethnic identity. A strong sense of ethnicity is central to a strong sense of Jewish community.

How did the strong 1st and 2nd generation American Jewish communities of the past create this sense of ethnic identity? Liebman notes several structural features of those communities that contributed:

1. Propinquity: Jews lived among Jews. They saw being Jewish as the norm, not the exception. Their dealing, in stores, schools, etc., were primarily with Jews.

2. Shared culture and folkways: Jewish culture was normative in these communities. For example, Jewish holidays were marked and celebrated as public occurrences.

3. Shared occupations and politics: Jews disproportionately entered certain occupations, making for a reinforcing Jewish context at work. Jews also generally shared political sentiments -- belonged to the same party, etc.

4. Common religious tradition: Although not all Jews practiced in the same way,

they all know something of the Jewish tradition. They also felt some comfort in the consanguinity of their co-religionists (hence the communal psychological difficulty of integrating converts into the community).

These features of Jewish life strengthened Jewish ethnic ties, making being Jewish a "natural," assumed state.

Since the 1950's, these elements are in decline, though for perspective, Charles noted that the Jewish decline is less serious than that among other ethnic groups. He believes that Jews are able to maintain a higher level of ethnic commitment because of their use of two "quasi-religious," sacred symbols: the Shoah, and Israel. These have been linked to one another since 1967, and together strengthen ethnic sentiment among Jews. Among Jewish communities, he suggests that the more religious practice is evident, the more strongly identified as Jews their members appear.

American culture undermines all ethnic identity. Three characteristics of this culture, seen as particularly troublesome to Jewish ethnicity, are the following:

1. The cult of individual autonomy: Dominant American culture asserts that the individual is responsible, first and foremost, for herself. Self-interest is considered a virtue and a necessity. In this context, then, one is not inclined to make choices based on an assessment of collective or communal need; virtually all choices are seen as personal, and the beneficiary of the choice is the individual, not the community.

2. Universalism/moralism: American culture is a rational culture -- it supports the search for rational explanations for phenomena, and rational reasons for actions. The rational approach is preferred to the religious or spiritual.

3. Pluralism: Pluralism used to be applied primarily across groups. It held that these groups could expect to coexist, as virtual autonomous entities, with similar secular rights. According to Charles, it now has a different meaning and application: It is now used to suggest that all expressed ideas and values are equally valid -- that there are no agreed upon rules for what is right or wrong -- and this principle is applied within groups as well as across them. So I now get to define for myself what a proper Jew is, and my definition is as valid as anyone else's, including the leaders of my community. This position undermines organized religion by removing any suggestion of religious authority. One person, one vote.

As Jews have moved out of communities in which they are physically concentrated, these factors have exerted a greater influence on Jewish identity. To the extent that this identity remains, it appears more related to the religion than to ethnicity. Indeed, Charles asserts that "ethnicity is virtually gone" from the American Jewish community. That is problematic because religion appears to many to sit within the realm of "choice" while ethnicity does not. In this way, Jews can choose not to be Jews if they are not drawn to the practice of Judaism. And they can opt out of any sense of collective obligation, hence the eclipse of issues such as Israel-Diaspora relations.

Solutions

So, Liebman concludes that the American Jewish community is in a crisis. He notes that at least a portion of the community acknowledges the crisis and is attempting

solutions. These include:

1. The Jewish renewal movement. There are many strands to this movement. It seems to be based in the quest for individual spiritual fulfillment and a rejection of the material values of American society. Because it is so individually-oriented, with no talk, for example, of Israel, Liebman does not view it as a real solution.

2. Adaptations in the organization of Jewish communities and the requirements for membership. Non-Jews are being integrated into the religious life of the community with greater frequency and depth. Patrilineal descent is another example.

3. The growth of insular Jewish institutions. The day school movement is a case in point. Especially among Conservative Jews, it reflects the desire for a socially-controlled environment. If American Judaism had a strong ethnic component, this would not be necessary.

Participants raised the following issues:

1. These observed phenomena are more characteristic of big city/suburban Jewish communities than of those in less likely locations across North America.

2. Ethnic identification is "in vogue" now in the US. This might stimulate the growth of ethnic identity among Jews.

3. Maybe what is being observed is not a decline, but rather the downside of a cycle, and the community will be revived with new solutions and institutions.

V. Lecture: Translating.... (Part 2): Seymour Fox

Seymour conducted this session as an opportunity to respond to questions that had been raised in the morning, and to stimulate conversation among participants. The list of questions to be answered was as follows:

- 1, Are the commonplaces fixed? Can we move towards an ideal?
2. Are these the four commonplaces we agree are important for discussion of Jewish education?
3. Why a reliance on Jewish thought, sources, as the basis of Jewish education?
4. How do we answer the question when it is posed to us of why anyone should continue to be a Jew?
5. Why did the Commission recommend the two building blocks it did?
6. In what ways is thinking about theory-in-practice, the reflective practitioner a la Schoen, integrated into Seymour's vision of Jewish education?
7. Seymour wanted to correct the misreading of a Dewey example.

Responses

Re: the commonplaces: These are the commonplaces of curriculum, not of education. The premise of commonplaces is that they are neutral elements that are essential to any conversation on the topic. If you can suggest some that can be had without one of the commonplaces, then it isn't a commonplace. It's an empirical (theoretical) question, and the person asserting the commonplace has to defend t.

Teaching is the leading commonplace in the practical four for these discussions. For the Commission's work, however, content was off-bounds. If it had been on the table, this priority might have changed.

Re: Why be a Jew?: Seymour's assumptions are the following:

1. Human nature is such that humans need spirituality for living in the modern world. (This is a psychological argument.)
2. Humans need to feel as though they belong to an entity larger than themselves. Judaism affords that. Jews can feel membership in an enlarged family -- the Jewish people. (Also a psychological argument.)
3. People need discipline and habit. Our Halacha is a good system, and it can liberate individuals so they can move on to larger questions.
4. Others would argue that Judaism has been good for the world; that there are larger social benefits to be derived from individual choices to remain Jewish.

Re: Why rely on Jewish thought

The sources have a lot to offer. There are, within, a multiplicity and a plurality of options for guidance on how to live. Seymour conceives of "sources" very broadly, and by so doing, includes even contemporary texts within the tradition of commentary. He thinks these options should be arrayed, both within communities and for individual students, as a shmorgasboard from which choices can be made. He is not convinced of a best approach -- there is room for experimentation.

Continuing and New Issues:

1. Can there be no more guidance in choice of materials and approaches than what is available in a shmorgasboard?
2. Discussion is partly about education and partly about schools. We appear too dependent on the institution of schools to make our case. Instruction rather than acculturation. This may not be a wise strategy.
3. The discussion has ignore the potential and actual role of families in this process.

CAPE PROFESSORS SEMINAR, DAY 1

Introductions. After words of welcome from Annette Hochstein representing CAPE and Alan Hoffmann representing CIJE which served to contextualize the seminar and its challenges, the heart of the morning consisted of short autobiographical presentations by the participants, organized around three themes: 1) something about oneself that would be unknown to the others; 2) the character of one's professional work; and 3) one's expectations of the seminar. Members of the group used these themes as opportunities to begin getting to know each other. Along the way, varied commonalities and differences were discovered. Among the commonalities: many or all of us (Well, with one exception!) welcomed the opportunity to study Jewish texts without the responsibilities associated with leading the discussion, making a formal presentation and so forth.

Structure of the seminar. Following lunch, Barry Holtz and Shmuel Benalal took us through a brief overview of the seminar, an overview which emphasized four dimensions: Study of classical and more contemporary Jewish sources, Jewish education (including an opportunity to think about the social context in which the current interest in Jewish education has emerged), an opportunity to get acquainted with Israel (in ways that allow deepening the exploration of themes encountered in study-sessions); and opportunities to grow acquainted with the varied dimensions of CIJE's work. It was explained to us that as part of the text-study piece of the seminar, we would be working in small groups in ways which, it is hoped, would not only prepare us for more formal lectures but would also give us a chance to get better acquainted. Following this overview of the seminar, we moved into the first small-group sessions.

Small group sessions. Under the guidance of the different faculty members, each small group began to explore the theme of "human potential" using biblical and Midrashic sources. The biblical passages we explored came from the very beginnings of the Book of Genesis, where two accounts of the creation of human beings are offered. The Midrashic material, which came from Masechet Avot and Midrash Rabbah, pointed to different views of what it might mean to be made "in the image of God." Since these discussions probably went in a multitude of directions, no attempt will be made to say anything about them.

Menachem Lorberbaum's lecture on "human potential according to Maimonides." After some biographical comments concerning Maimonides, Menachem distinguished between two kinds of philosophical thinking -- "systematic" and "therapeutic". Whereas systematic philosophy is designed to give the student a systematic account of its subject-matter, therapeutic philosophy is designed to speak to the needs of the learner -- to take the learner, or novice, on a journey that will prompt important insights or changes in perspective. While Maimonides is fully capable of systematic philosophy, THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED is an exercise in therapeutic

philosophy: it is designed to offer guidance to a particular species of learner who is, in an important sense, "perplexed".

Menachem paved the way for his explanation of the kind of perplexed individual he was writing for by discussing Maimonides' approach to the interpretation of biblical texts. The passage we examined was the one in GENESIS, Ch. 28 in which, in his dream, Jacob observes the angels ascending and descending a ladder that reached up into the sky. In the course of examining this passage, it emerged that for Maimonides this passage was not to be taken literally but allegorically. The ladder is akin to the Great Chain of Being that leads from the material world of everyday life to God the source of all Being. And the angels are the prophets whose spiritual ascent up the chain of being afford them wisdom or insights which they then carry back down with them so as to be able to govern and educate the unenlightened majority.

The situation was compared by one member of our group to Moses climbing Mount Sinai and then coming down again with the Tablets of the Law. It was also compared to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, in which the Philosopher turns away from the Appearances on the wall of the Cave and makes his/her way towards the light (representing the ultimate reality). In this case as well, the enlightened philosopher is to return to his compatriots in the cave so as to be able awaken them from their dream and to order their common life as it should be ordered.

Here Menachem asked us to pause in order to focus on the individual in the cave whose head has suddenly been turned away from the shadows on the wall to the light that is in back. All of a sudden, this person is looking at his/her situation in a slightly different way; the old understandings, ways of seeing things, no longer seem quite right, but new ways of understanding have not yet been devised. This person, Menachem suggests, has entered into a state of confusion and perplexity and is in need of help. THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED, Menachem went on to explain, is aimed at a person who is perplexed in this kind of sense.

This point emerged more clearly when we looked at the Introduction to Part I of the Guide. Here the reader is informed that the book is aimed at a religious person "for whom the validity of the Law has become established in his soul" but who, by virtue of the intellectual encounter with the sciences of the philosophers, has become perplexed: such a person, Menachem explained, is distressed, even embarrassed by "the externals of the Law", including terms that anthropomorphize God. The state of perplexity or confusion is this: "should a person follow his intellect and end by renouncing the foundations of the Law, or should he hold fast to traditional understandings and turn his back on where his intellect has led?" Put differently, the perplexity concerns whether to honor a religious sensibility and outlook that is deep in one's soul or to honor the integrity of one's intellect. This is the perplexed person to whom THE GUIDE is addressed. The challenge of THE GUIDE is to offer this person

an approach to interpreting traditional terms and ideas that will enable this person to be true both to his/her intellect and to his/her religious foundations.

Menachem's presentation evoked a variety of reactions. One person wondered whether Menachem was suggesting that, for Maimonides, the road to wisdom necessarily began with the state of perplexity -- or whether some people might travel the road charted by the Guide without first being perplexed. Menachem seemed to suggest that for Maimonides the state of perplexity was a necessary step on the journey to wisdom; it is that moment at which the meanings we internalize through socialization begin to drop away and we are in a sense for the first time able to genuinely learn who we are. In this sense, the state of perplexity is a starting-point to our effort to realize our potential.

In the context of our discussion, it was suggested that perhaps one of the challenges of Jewish education is to evoke perplexity in students as a way of stimulating genuine learning on their part. One response to this was that one must be cautious in this area -- for it is possible to induce perplexity in ways that are counter-productive (for example, by rendering the individual too frustrated or overwhelmed to be able to think further). Here, one person suggested, one needs to ask: what are the conditions (attitudinal, intellectual, etc.) under which inducing perplexity is likely to stimulate growth rather than having destructive effects?

Another response to the "inducing perplexity" discussion is that in our own day, perplexity often arises spontaneously without anybody inducing it. That is, many of our generation are confused about the relation between traditional Jewish beliefs and concepts and their own, "more modern", outlooks. The suggestion was that perhaps the educator needn't induce or engineer perplexity since it's often already there. The problem, he went on to suggest, is that we sometimes protect people from situations in which they are likely to encounter perplexity (a sometimes-Orthodox response) or else fail to use people's genuine perplexity as a catalyst to education. Philip Roth's "The Conversion of the Jews", which focuses on a child who is brow-beaten by his Hebrew School teacher for voicing his perplexities ("If God could create the world in 6 days, why couldn't He arrange for a child to be born without intercourse?"), was used to illustrate this point.

Another question raised was this: is the perplexity described by Maimonides, a perplexity grounded not just in intellectual questioning of conventional beliefs but also in the individual's own strong rootedness in the tradition, to be compared with the perplexity of a contemporary whose skepticism concerning traditional beliefs does not have as its counterpart any deep immersion in, knowledge of, and commitment to the Tradition? This question elicited at least two responses: first, whether or not contemporary forms of perplexity are directly analogous to the kind identified by Maimonides they are worthy of attention; second, there are in fact significant numbers of people whose perplexity does

reflect the kind of immersion and doubt that Maimonides describes for us.

Yet another discussion focused on Maimonides' elitism. While at least one person in the group expressed discomfort with Maimonides' view that only an elite was capable of the highest kinds of wisdom and knowledge, another member of the group wondered out loud whether the attempt to democratize knowledge of the most serious matters would result in its being distorted or trivialized.

Towards the end of the session, Menachem reaffirmed his own view that perplexity represents a critical stage in our growth. He suggested that the educational challenge is to be able to continue affirming one's identity even as, on the road to more adequate understandings, one has entered into the state of perplexity.

Missing points: Adam's opening question.....and Shmuel Wygoda's point (which Menachem agreed with) concerning different.....

Participants in Seminar for Professors of Education

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