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Coping I - Let Thy Days Be Long, 1977.

COPING I - Let Thy Days Be Long
Daniel Jeremy Silver
October 10, 1977

The basic issues, well, I guess in some ways they can be very simply stated. Everybody wants to live long but nobody wants to grow old, and I guess for a modern edition we would add that medicine has added years to our lives but has not necessarily added life to our years.

I'd like tonight to say a few words about the overall field and then to limit myself in the formal presentation to the traditional Jewish approach to some of these problems, that's my field of expertise, obviously, and I'd like to leave some time at the end for some questions and discussion so that we can have a better idea of the problems that face all of us and form some of the future sessions around those ideas.

Age is a new frontier and a new problem. Now the statement sounds surprising because we're accustomed to thinking of age and aging as having been part of the human experience for at least as there has been recorded history and this is particularly true if we think of our own religious tradition. The Bible speaks of long life. We have the Jewish hope, you should live to be 120, which was the symmetrical number of years which added up to three complete generations, the number of years in Moses' life. The Bible contains a number of references to people like Methusaleh who lived inordinately long if the Biblical chronology is to be accepted, Methusaleh has the record 969 years according to the myth in Genesis, but I'd like to suggest to you that the problem is new in the sense that ours is the first or second generation in which there have been a sizeable number of aging, aged, in the population and in which aging and the aged have not been limited to the upper classes. If you look back in recorded history you'll discover that only the rich, really, lived long. They were the only people who could afford the supports that permit long life. They were the only group with guaranteed nutrition, family support. They were the only group which was not brutalized and ultimately brought to a premature grave by the severity, the cruelty, of the work which they had to do, and there were exceptions, obviously.

But the existence of the sizeable number of the population over 65 or over some age which we determine to be the age in which we describe aging's beginning or having intruded in our lives. It is a relatively new phenomenon. Let me give you some figures. In 1900 one in 25 of the American population was 65 years of age or older. By 1970 one in ten in the American population was 65 years of age or older. And demographers tell us that in 1980, which is not so far from now, the figure will be one in six. Eighteen percent of our population by 1980 will be 65 years of age or older and the growth is much larger, of course, than the growth of any other part of the population. From 1900 to 1970 the population under the age of 65 grew two and a half times, and the population over the age of 65 grew six and a half times, so we face a new problem both in fact in terms of the range of the population and in terms of the quantitative size of the problem which is before us. Now, of course, most of this is the product of the miracles, the triumphs, of modern medicine, but, unfortunately, medicine is a limited field. It solves the problems which afflict our physical frame, illness which keeps us from dying prematurely, but it cannot solve the economic, the emotional, the family problem which are concomitant with age, which are inevitable.

A number of very serious problems have emerged. The first is that it is the first time in the world, really, that the adult population, that is the adult working population, has had to provide financially not only for the children but for the aged. Up till now historically it was the upper classes, those who could most afford it, who had the aged. The aged controlled a good proportion of the wealth of society and so the fiscal burden was not as sharp as it is now. Today you have only to look at Social Security in the United States to recognize the pressures exerted on social budgets and on family budgets as the working population tries to pay on the one hand for the high cost of education, and on the other hand for the high cost of institutionalization. These are tremendous costs to be put against the laboring man or woman.

The second problem that we face is that up till the last two generations, perhaps the last three generations, it has been assumed throughout history that the aged and the aging were the problems of the family. The family was equipped to take care of the human problems of aging. It provided the financial support if such were needed, and the society as a whole did not accept the responsibility, was not assumed to have to accept the responsibility for the aging. This tremendous increase in the numbers of the aged and the aging has come precisely at the time when the family itself is most embattled. The extended family gave way to the nuclear family. The nuclear family itself is giving way - to what, we are not quite sure. The mobile family has emerged which means that it is not at all unlikely that the aged will be in one community and their children will be in another community, or the aged will be in one community and only one of the siblings will be in the parents' home community with all kinds of pressures of time and service and attention resting upon only one small part of the family.

Now as the society has had to take up the slack, we've obviously had to exchange the family as the place in which aging takes place for institutions, and we have inherited any number of prejudices against institutions. Many of those who were raised in another era believe that when children allow their parents to be put into some kind of support institution they are somehow defaulting on their duty, showing indifference to the real needs of the parents, and many parents balk against going to institutions for that reason and in point of fact many children feel guilty when a parent or parents have to be institutionalized. And short of institutionalization the society must provide a whole number of supports for those whose free time is now full time and the must provide all manner of encouragement, of developmental opportunities, and we are simply not ^{yet} geared up, we haven't really thought through the problem of what to do and how to do it to help care for those who are not yet ready for institutionalization and perhaps may never be.

Another problem which faces us as we confront this problem of aging is the problem

of the health of the aged population. Four out of five people above the age of 65 suffer from at least one chronic disease. The demands made by this cohort of people who are in the aging population on our medical service is enormous. When someone over 65 goes into the hospital their average stay will be three times the average stay of one under the age of 65. Now the aged, of course, are precisely at that period of time when their incomes are limited, medical services are precisely that part of the population where the costs have increased most astronomically. There's a whole aged population out there that is almost beyond the reach, cannot reach out to adequate medical services. We're not sure what medical services ought to be provided, how these ought to be provided. There's a whole ambit of problems which need to be faced.

Finally, it is surprising how little we know about this new problem. Compare with me for a moment what our attitudes and what we know about childhood to what we know about age. We know that there are various periods to childhood: infancy, the child, puberty, the adolescent. The Giselle Institute and Dr. Spock and all of their successors taught us to recognize the different patterns in the two-year old and the two-and-a-half year old, the five-year old and the seven-year old. We have all manner of tests to evaluate their emotional development, their physical development, their intellectual development. We have child psychologists and child psychiatrists. We have day schools and nursery schools and free nursery schools, Head Start schools and all manner of schools and we know to the day whether a child should go into kindergarten or he should not be held back for the year or pushed ahead half a year. The degree of sophistication which we bring to our children is remarkable. The degree of ignorance which we bring to the process of aging is equally remarkable. All we know is that there is some kind of difference between senescence and senility; between those who need certain supports and those who can really no longer manage adequately in the open society, but we don't know the stages of aging. We don't really know very much about why certain people age much faster than

other people. No one has really worked out systematically the stages of aging. There are preliminary studies but they are very preliminary and the problem is that we are at the stage where we tend to treat age as if it is a simple problem, a single problem, we have no other word to speak of, really, we call it the aged or aging and there you have it, but clearly, the man of 70 who is capable of going downtown to his office and working a full day, competing quite easily with a 30-year old or a 40-year old is not the same person as the 70-year old man who has had to withdraw from his work and whose energy levels are low, whose memory is failing, yet, they're both 70 and they're both going through a process called aging.

Obviously, we need to learn a great deal more and obviously, we've got to confront some social and some welfare problems and financial problems, some questions of human relationships of immense proportion and we're only making a beginning. When we try to put together the bibliography which you received tonight all of us were startled by the posity of material which was available to us, that is, to an intelligent, concerned public having to do with this problem of age and aging. There's a great deal of good will, there's a great deal of concern, but we're only beginning to develop the basic research. And obviously, given this situation most of us, all of us I am sure, are caught up in a series of assumptions which we learned from our parents, which we picked up from the conditioning of our childhood about aging, about independence, about dependence, about the responsibilities of children, about the responsibilities of parents, and we may be very wrong in these assumptions. We may be right, but the point is we really don't know as yet. What we do know is that all of us are going to have to cultivate a new attitude towards aging. The aged are going to have cease thinking of themselves as in retirement, as having pulled away from life, as being over the hill and, therefore useless to themselves and to others; and the young are going to have to cease thinking of the aged as dependent upon them, as growing burdens, as people whom it is best for the society to put out to

pasture because they have nothing constructive, innovative, creative, you know those terrible words of the youth culture, to contribute to the society.

Now that's the range of the problem as I see it. It's a problem which is going to call for ^a massive investment of time, personnel, of attention, of money, proportion of the national budget. It's a problem which is going to force all of us to rethink our attitudes towards ourselves and towards our own development because if I am convinced of my reading of anything it is of this simple truth - that age is not simply a state that you happen upon one day when you hit 65, but like every other stage of life it is an opportunity which you must prepare for, study for, equip yourself for, with the same diligence and the same amount of determination and discipline that ^{you} applied when you were 16 and 18 and preparing yourself for adult life. There are so many things that can be done besides spending your day puttering with this or that or on the telephone if you have an interest, if you develop certain skills, if you have some identity outside of the role of mother, outside the role of lawyer, doctor, rabbi, whatever it is that has occupied you during your so-called productive life, a terrible word. Why should life cease to be productive simply because you're not doing what you did between the ages of 25 and 65? Were you not being productive when you were in school? Can you not be productive at 70 or 75 babysitting with your grandchildren, helping out as a volunteer in some community organization, acting as a counselor in a school, offering your skills in a new way to a generation of students, there are so many ways in which one can remain productive if one is determined to and that's a major part of the battle.

Now let me try and focus in on the Jewish attitude towards aging or the aged and let me begin by a non-Jewish source which thought that it was capsuling the Jewish understanding and misunderstood our Jewish tradition completely. Robert Browning wrote, as many of you remember about 150 years ago a poem called Rabbi Ben Ezra and at the very beginning of this poem he has the rabbi say: grow old with me, the best is yet to

be for which the first was made. Now, it's beautiful poetry, but an absolute lie. Age is not the best of time. Whoever invented the phrase the Golden Age misdirected a whole generation of the aged. Aging is a difficult time, it's a time of diminished energy, you nap, you need to take some time off during the day, it's harder to get up in the morning, it's a time when you're never very far from aches and pains, arthritis, the back, it's a time when your senses are diminished, it's harder to see, you don't hear as clearly, you don't write as boldly as you did before. It's not grow old with me, the best is yet to be at all. Aging is a stage of life. As someone said, it's better than the alternative, but it's not the best of times and our Biblical rabbinic tradition has no illusions about aging. If we turn to the scroll of Ecclesiastes and it's a Hellenistic work written probably in the 4th, 3rd pre-Christian century and you turn to the last chapter. You find an effusion there, probably by a man who was in his mid-sixties or mid-seventies. He had been a member of the upper class. He had seen a good bit of life. He says this by way of advice to the young:

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the time of trouble comes, before the years draw near when you say, 'I see no purpose in them.' Remember him before the sun and the light of day gave place to darkness, before the moon and the stars grow dim, and the clouds return with the rain = when the guardians of the house tremble and the strong men stoop, when the women grinding the meal cease work because they are few, and those who look through the window look no longer, when the street doors are shut, when the noise of the mill is low, when the chirping of the sparrow grows faint, when the song birds can no longer be heard, when men are afraid of a steep place, when the street is full of terrors, when the blossom whitens on the almond tree and the locust's paunch is swollen and caper-

buds have no more zest, for man goes to his everlasting home and the mourners go about the street. Remember him before the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is shattered and the pitcher is shattered at the spring and the wheel is broken at the well, before the dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

There's no more heart-felt prayer in all of our Bible than a line from the 71st Psalm: Do not forsake me when I become old - when my strength weakens do not forsaken me. The Bible has no illusions about the Golden Age. It has no illusions about the losses of power, about the manipulation by the young of the aged for their own sometimes greedy purposes. It has no illusions that all families honor the aged or respect them or treat them appropriately and it has very few illusions about the inevitable wisdom of the aged in handling their relationships with their children and their grandchildren.

You remember the story of Jacob, the patriarch who had so many sons, 12 in all. He had been a strong man. He had been a very effective chieftain to his tribe. As a young man he had been very ambitious. He'd worked hard. He'd made something of himself. He had prospered and then when he became an older man and he was fortunate enough to have a child of his old age and he doted on this boy more than on all of the other children put together. Here was a new relationship. He thought that there would no longer be a child, a young boy in the tent, and where the other sons were now grown and burly and they sometimes grumbled at his leadership and they sometimes opposed him in the counsel, this young boy catered to him and was soft-skinned and obviously played up to his father. And Jacob loved Joseph more than all the others and you remember he gave him that beautiful coat of many colors and he created such animosity towards Joseph and towards himself among his sons, his other sons, that you remember one day they snatched the boy, they kidnapped him, and they sold him into slavery in Egypt and they tortured their father by telling him that a young lion had got hold of Joseph and torn

him to pieces and they brought in a piece of his ^{famous} coat of many colors, blood-stained, as proof of the boy's death. For years this old man lived on the assumption that the son whom he loved too much had in fact been killed. And the relationship of aged to the young is a fascinating and very complicated one. Sometimes demands are made on our children when we are aged that ought not to be made. Sometimes we show obvious preference to the one who pays least attention to us or most attention to us and we create tensions among our children which we should not create. Our judgment is not always sound. The world closes in on us as we get older and we often exaggerate imaginery or real petty grievances into something of consequence and we spoil relationships which we've worked otherwise all of our lives to hold close.

You remember the story in the Bible about Isaac, the patriot. Isaac again had been a strong chieftain, a man of skill, a man of the hunt, a man of fields, but when he had grown old, as it is with so many, his eyesight became dim and he became nearly blind, and then in a situation that does arise, I am told, the children began to squabble over the inheritance, who would get the most money. And the Biblical tradition was that the eldest son should inherit the double portion and he was declared to be the elder by a ceremonial blessing. Well, in the harem there was a young woman, Rebecca by name, who had a child when Isaac was already an elderly man, she had had twins, but she preferred the youngest of the twins, Jacob, and she dressed Jacob up in the hairy skin of his brother and she had him bring to the old man a particular delicacy that the old man doted on, some lentil soup, and they were able to control the old man and wheedle him into believing that Jacob was in fact Esau and he pronounced upon Jacob the ceremonial blessing, thus investing him with the double portion and authority over the tribe. And that, too, is a situation that has come up again and again I'm sure in the history of the human race. Children ought to respect their parents, but often parents represent to their children money, an inheritance, power, something that they want to get their hands on, and we

are foolish and imprudent if we're not conscious that in all human relationships there is love and there is self-serving and that's the way it is and that's the way I suspect it always will be.

And we find in the Bible the story of David, a young man, strong, a military hero, a poet, a lover, a man who was robust, filled with all of the joys of life, a man who I am sure gave not one thought to old age, a man who came to the throne of Israel and built a great empire out of Israel. His word was the law, no one could stand before his word, and then as is the case with all powerful people he aged and his strength was diminished and ultimately it disappeared. He became a trembling old man, cold to the touch, who had to be warmed by his courtiers in any way that they could, and ultimately his counselors and even his sons took advantage of him, tricked him, because they wanted the power, the authority that was his.

I take it that the Biblical tradition emphasizes to us that in matters of age it is not quantity, but quality, that you can live too long, that you can live in such a way that existence is a burden, that so much of what happens to us when we age depends upon the actions of those who are around us. We can't completely be responsible for ourselves, take care of ourselves, any more than we can really at any stage of life. If the Biblical tradition has any meaning for us it is that we ought to disabuse ourselves of any romantic notions about age. Age is not the best of time. Age is a time when many of those who have catered to you all your life suddenly look right through you. You're no longer president of the corporation. You're no longer head of the bureau. You're no longer chief of medicine at the hospital. You're now just a nice old man or old woman, notice how we categorize, we push away, we're not looking at the person, simply at their age, and those who are out for the main chance, out for themselves, now suddenly have no time, no interest in us. And those of power and those of authority and those of accomplishment in our society find aging, retirement particularly, to be a humbling experience, one

which puts pressures on their ego which many of them are not prepared or capable of meeting. Aging is a time when many of those who thought we were so important in their lives suddenly find we are no longer important in their lives. They have no time for us and in age no one has time for us, the aches and the pains and the loneliness.

I heard someone say the other day, I'm just killing time until time kills me.

Now, how did the Bible handle age? The Bible ^{not} is simply interested in a gray, dismal picture of age. The Bible was interested in establishing a social order in which there would be at the very least a formal respect for age. In the 28th chapter of the book of Deuteronomy there is an attempt by the author to establish there a criteria of a civilized society and a barbaric society, a society of decency and an animal-like society, and one of the major differences between the civilized community and the uncivilized community is what Deuteronomy calls, in the barbaric community fails to respect age and the aging, they treat the aged as if they are non-productive and, therefore, useless in the social order. They cast them out, they pay no attention to them. In the families of the Middle Ages once the father could no longer hold his own against the son he was unceremoniously pushed out of the bedroom, the main room of the house, by the oldest son and he and his wife had to go and live in a shed in the back if there was in fact a shed. That's an uncivilized social order.

The Biblical society was patriarchal, of course. To a certain degree it was authoritarian, but more than the system of authority within the tribe and family structure, there was this emphasis on the formal courtesies which a young person was obligated to show to the aged. You shall rise before the white-haired and you shall honor the elderly. When the aged come into a room open the door, stand up, greet them show them the deference of their years, look upon them not as an object to be pitied, but a person to be revered. You have no way of knowing the pressures, the challenges that they have met, the accomplishments which have been theirs.

In the Hebrew the word for an aged person is zakane and it means precisely that, one who is aged, but it also means a counselor, a minister, an elder in that sense of the word. We've lost that sense in American society. We speak of the aged, not of the elderly, really. An elder had the sense of one who is consulted, one who sits in the councils of the community. Biblical society had that emphasis to it and so did the Greek social order. We use the word geriatrics today to describe the branch of medicine dealing with the problems of aging, gerontology is the skill. The word geron in Greek has precisely the two significations as zakane in Hebrew. It means aged, aging, and it means also one who is a minister, a counselor, whose advice is sought. There was, because of the formal courtesies which Israelite society imposed upon the young towards the elderly, there grew up this association of age and advice, age and wisdom. The aged were those who were consulted about what the society should do. Now, of course, some of this was political. In the tribe the elder had ultimate power, he did not give over that power willingly, it could not be taken from him by force, it was his by right, but still it shows an attempt by the society to see the aged not as objects but as people and to find in them some quality which was useful to and valued by the social order as a whole. Now whenever a society tries to set up formal requirements of courtesy or respect there are obviously going to be young turks who will have no part of it. And in the book of Job we find an interesting figure, the figure of Eliyu. As you know, Job is the man who proclaims his righteousness, but is punished by God and is made to suffer by God. And when everything has happened to Job that can possibly happen to a human being except the fact that he is still alive, three comforters appear, three men who try to explain to Job why all this has happened, to make Job say I deserved it and Job is unwilling to do it. And the burden of the book, the majority of the text of the book of Job, deals with the discussions between these three comforters and Job and the discussions really are interesting and fascinating, but they get nowhere, neither the three nor Job convinces

the other. And then suddenly, towards the end of the book, another man appears, this Eliyu. He is a younger man and he has some new ideas he wants to introduce into the conversation. Now the ideas are not as interesting as the introduction of his speech.

Eliyu says in the 32nd chapter of Job:

I am young in years and you, you three, who have talked so far are old and that is why I have held back and shrank from displaying my knowledge in front of you. I've acted the way the young are supposed to act to the old. I said to myself, let age speak, let length of years expound wisdom, but the spirit of God Himself is in man and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding. It is not only the old who are wise or the aged who understand what is right.

You have in the Biblical tradition then a counterpoint, an argument against this automatic deference given to age, at least if that deference goes too far. And as with all virtues there obviously has to be a middle ground and that's what the Biblical society struggled to find, a middle ground which would allow the society to show respect for the aged but not allow the aged to dominate the social order and to frustrate its growth the way the aged dominated the social order in China over the long centuries.

And so you find again these arguments of the young with the old, better as a young man, poor and wise, as a king old and foolish. Wisdom is with the aged and understanding is in length of days, but the ignorant as they get older only get more foolish, which I think is a very well taken point. There is no automatic ennoblement to age. You don't suddenly become wise and learned and a person of discernment and great judgment, a truly civilized human being, simply because you reach 65. You can be a fool at 64 and the same fool at 66, but if you've spent your life learning, growing, developing that's another story. Then you can grow at 64 and you can grow at 65 and you can grow at 66.

Now Biblical wisdom is, therefore, how shall we put it, realistic? Yes. Cynical? No. Convinced that age must be respected, yes. Convinced that there are limits to the respect due the aged, the automatic deference, yes. You have to earn respect, to be sure. At the same time you must respect those who can no longer command by their quality the respect that they really once deserved. You must respect the aged even if they've lost their capacities, even if they no longer are what they were before. And in that society there was a kind of ruthlessness which I suspect is part of almost every social order, but it was a ruthlessness which associated the sense of self, of worth, with what one did. There was no retirement. There were no second occupations or second professions. When you ceased to be king you were dead or somebody had deposed you from the throne and then you were considered as little except in this automatic sense. And so a good bit of the wisdom of the Bible is prudential and it advises the elderly not to give over those attributes, those qualities, those possessions which gain for them respect. If you're no longer king somebody has power over you. If you're no longer chief somebody has power over you. If you are no longer mistress in your own house somebody else is the mistress. As long as you have life and breath, ~~never~~ change places with anyone. It is better for your children to ask from you than for you to be dependent on them. Whatever you are doing keep the upper hand and allow no blot on your reputation. Let your life run its full course and then, at the hour of death, distribute your estate. Prudential wisdom, but it says something about human relationships. Children love parents and they want something that their parents have. Parents love their children, but they want to assure themselves of an attention that they may not be able to command simply because they would love to have it. There is a degree of prudence which has to be exerted and exhibited in human relationships.

Now what of the rabbinic tradition? It is very much like the Biblical one. The rabbis also praised age and they also knew something of its limitations. There's a long

midrash, a very lovely midrash on that portion from Ecclesiastes that I read to you in which everyone of these phrases is equated with what happens to part of our body as we age.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth and so on - when the guardians of the house tremble, when the bones begin to rattle, when the strong men stoop and the legs begin to bow out a little bit, when the women grinding the meal cease work because they are few, the teeth have fallen out and it's not easy to chew any more, when the noise of the mill is low and the chirping of the bird can hardly be heard, you don't hear as well as you used to.

Each one of these phrases is associated in this rabbinic midrash with the diminution of one of our senses, the limitation of some capacity that we had before. At the same time the rabbinic tradition continued the emphasis on the respect due the elders, the formal respect, and there's a whole body of learning which is based on the well-known commandment, one of the ten, honor your father and your mother. The virtue of respect for the parent, honoring the parents, is the title around which almost all discussion of the relationship between the generations, the concerns of aging and the aged, is developed in the rabbinic tradition which says something about the truth that the family was the unit through which all of these problems had to be handled. You had to be cared for by your children if you could no longer care for yourself, and they're very specific as to the care that the children owed the parent. They owed them sustenance, they owed them support, they owed them hospitality, they owed them deference, they owed them courtesy, they owed them attention, they owed them a place in their home, and all this is spelled out in the rabbinic tradition.

We think of our old age homes as relatively familiar Jewish institutions. The Moshav Zekanium sounds like an old old word that comes out of the depths of the rabbinic tradition, but actually, the first old-age dormitory was not created until the 1840's in the city of Frankfort. The concept of Menorah Park and Montefiore then is hardly a century and a half old. Up to that time the aged were taken care of by the family or if there was no family, as was often the case, it was a mitzvah to take care of someone else's elderly, but the burden was not on the organized community as such because the community was not organized in this way, in such a way as to be able to make possible this kind of service. If we want to know why one of the critical emotional problems which face all of us when we think of aging and of going into an institution, of being hospitalized, it comes out of our relative unfamiliarity with what an institution designed to provide for the elderly should be. We tend to think of these institutions largely as places where one goes to die. Who wants to be mothballed into such a place? Surely our society could be far more creative and in fact in its better areas it is being far more creative, in terms of a whole variety of support institutions. We now have apartment complexes where there is complete freedom, certain shared services. We now have retirement villages and retirement towns where there's a full range of recreational and social and cultural activity geared to the interests of those who are aging. The institutions of this society will ultimately provide not simply the ultimate institutions to which one goes like the elephant to his place of death in order to die. We need those, too, obviously, but these institutions will be costly and they require a great deal of imagination and we've only really begun to think through what should be done and moreover, many of these institutions are inadequate and some are, in fact, scandalous.

We have not invested any proportion of our national wealth in providing decent care, imaginative care, responsible care, by the community for the aging. Now, in the rabbinic tradition the emphasis on the respect due a parent, due the aged, was

maintained. In the synagogue the aged sat next to the ark, a place of respect. In the home they sat at the head of the table. Insofar as it was possible to show respect for the aged, this was built into the social order. Now obviously every home was virtuous, but part of the conditioning of the Jew, certainly through the centuries, was this conditioning of respect. We can see that in the kinds of questions which were addressed to rabbis during the Middle Ages which asked questions about how far need this respect go. After all, just as a parent - here are three of the questions addressed to rabbis which have come down to us, this is a 16th century question:

You have asked about a father who forbade his son to speak to a certain Jew or to pardon him and to specify a date. The son wishes to become reconciled with the man, but hesitates because of his father's command. In other words, the father had an argument, vendetta, against this particular family and wants to make peace. The answer: Know that it is forbidden to hate any Jew unless he is a sinner who violates the criminal law. The father who commanded his son to hate a man does not have the right to command him to violate the words of the Torah. Furthermore, the father is violating the law himself in not behaving in this manner as a member of the Jewish people ought to and in this respect he is not to be honored.

There are things that an aging parent requires of a child, son, daughter, who are grown up which you need not fulfill simply because the parent puts those demands on you.

This question was asked of Mayor Rothenberg in the 13th century: You have asked, can a father prevent his son from going to the land of Israel since we ruled that it is a mitzvah to make aliyah. Must the son in this respect honor the parent's request. The response: No. In performing a mitzvah one need not be limited to the demands of the parent. If a child to fulfill their destiny, their sense in what they need to do professionally, needs to move to another town the parent has no right to preclude that movement. There

are limits to what a parent can demand of the child.

This is from 16th century Greece. A father in the Greek town of Petras forbade his son to marry the woman whom the boy loved. Does the son's parental responsibility demand compliance? A man named Elijah Kapsali of Crete ruled that it did not and this is his logic. Though the command of honor and reverence is inexpressibly great, nevertheless, it appears in my humble opinion that the girl about whom you ask is a proper wife for the aforementioned Reuben, that is, that there is in her or her family no blemish, then the command of filial honor and reverence is irrelevant and the son is not to abandon her so as to fulfill his father's command, for it is nearly certain that this father virtually commands his son to violate the Torah for we see in the Torah that a man ought not to marry a woman who does not please him. When the father commands his son not to marry the woman it is as though he commands him to violate the Torah and it is well known that the son is not to obey his father in such cases.

Again, there are limits to the deference that an adult child needs to show to the parent. Jewish life did not solve the problems of age or of aging. We have any number of evidences from our tradition of the aging who were left to suffer a bitter old age. We have any number of evidences in our tradition of bitter old people who tried to impose their bitterness, their will, upon unwilling children. I do not know how you would weigh these lacks. I suppose they could be equally weighed, but this much emerges, that there is a determination in the tradition not to see the aged as people who are over the hill, out of it, objects. They are to be part of the social order. They are to be treated with respect. They are to be consulted. They are to be part of the family. They are to be supported by the family, the family is transgenerational. They are to be brought into the counsel of the family whenever it is possible. Can we transpose this to modern life? What emerges? First, I think, the truth that aging must be looked at as a time of possibility and not of retirement; of moving into a new stage of one's life, but not necessarily

a time when we've gone stale, when there's nothing more for us to do. There's an old rabbinic tradition that long life is a gift of God to the person who deserves it, that you earn long life. I'm not so sure that's true. I'm sure it's not true, but I am equally convinced that those who live a good old age, that they're fortunate to be healthy, whose age is a time of activity that gives pleasure to them, when they are doing things that satisfy them, are by and large people who have developed the will, the sense of vitality, the interests, which allow them to do something more than to vegetate. In that sense a long life is an accomplishment which rests largely with us. It's true that the support system which has been relied upon for the centuries of family is no longer adequate to the task and that's going to require new attitudes on the part of all of us, the question of aging. We're going to have to make certain kinds of social provisions for the aged, a new welfare system, a new social security system, a new range of institutions and we're only beginning to understand what is required, but we have to find some institution with which we can supplant the family to the degree that the family cannot fulfill today's needs. We're going to have to do new research, to be able to describe the processes of aging, to do what we can to increase the vitality of those who are aging, to increase their ability to cope with the problems, to keep them alive physically vitally, vigorously, insofar as we can. And above all, I suspect, we're going to have to recognize that everyone who ages and everyone who is related to somebody who is aging is a single individual. And in every relationship which involves age is a complex one which cannot be solved by any simple formula. What's right in one situation is not necessarily the appropriate answer in another situation. There are children who spend too much time with their aging parents and there are children who spend too little time with their aging parents and the parents are not always the best judges of that because I've seen parents with whom the children spend very little time who are satisfied and I've seen parents with whom the

children spend an inordinate amount of time, sacrifice their own lives almost completely and often the lives of their own children and the parents are not satisfied. And the reverse is equally true. There are aging people who exercise their will and determine to make something of themselves and there are the aged who simply crump out and want to be served and catered to and nursed and cared for and demand a service and an attention which is not good for you and besides which you will probably not get.

I have solved no problems. The Jewish tradition cannot solve problems. It's our job in the life situation, but I do know this, that this subject we have embarked on is worth the discussion and I'd like to stop now and to have a little bit of give and take with you of things that have come to your mind or are uppermost in your mind in this area. Thank you.

The question is what do I feel about the compulsory age of retirement. It seems to me that if you accept the proposition that we're not all the same, that everyone of us is an individual, any kind of compulsory age is a mistake. There are some of us who are prepared to go to college at 15 and some of us are not ready until we're 20 and some went back for the first time when they were 50. There are some people who ought to be retired when they are 25, and there are some people who are capable of doing a full year's work and more when they are 80. I was always impressed with, I guess in my lifetime the man who symbolized the vigor of age was Justice Douglas who was mountain climbing and acting as an associate justice of our Supreme Court way beyond the mandatory ages of retirement. I think you're going to find just as a matter of course the pressure for arbitrary retirement at age 65 which is really the pressure of the young against the old, I want your place, therefore, I'm going to force you out and if I can't force you out at

surrounded by people who are vegetating, who have lived in the lap of middle class, upper

your own will I'll force you out by some arbitrary rule will diminish as there are more and more older people because in a democracy the vote counts and you represent today probably a third almost of the voting public and the aging could be a potent lobby if they were ever willing to draw together a set of interests and there are beginnings in this direction, but they are only very very rudimentary. At the same time, if we're going to live in a mass society there are going to be some rules because if we're going to be living in a society of computers, when we're nothing but a printout, a series of holes punched into a card, business and big corporations, big institutions, are going to look upon easy ways to handle the personnel problems because how do you tell a man who has worked for you for 40 years you're over the hill while the man who's on the bench next to his is allowed to continue to work. Obviously, there's the concern of favoritism, the suits and countersuits and it will be a very serious problem. In any case, put the question in another way. How many of us really ought to work doing the same thing for 50 years or 40 years? And should it not be a real challenge for most of us to find a second profession, something that will freshen us up. The old routines, you know you get very used to them, there's very little that keeps you vigorous, energetic and eager to go to the office in the morning. There's a limit to how long you ought to do the same thing. Theoretically, I think that the arbitrary ages of retirement are like all arbitrary rules, unfortunate. I think we all of us ought to have the idea that there's something more to life than the work that we do and we ought to be thinking when we are 25, 35 and 45 about what we can do when we get to that stage in life. The old Jewish tradition is an interesting one. It said never stop living. If you're 87 and your wife dies, get married again, literally, never stop living. And it's a good rule. If you set out to live you're not going to vegetate until you get to that point you can't do anything else, but I am surrounded as you are surrounded by people who are vegetating, who have lived in the lap of middle class, upper

middle-class security and who have spent their years really not doing much and doing less each succeeding year. Why? Because somehow they couldn't find the guts - that's what it takes - the will, the guts to get out and do. When I go and make a call some time after a funeral on a widow, and I'm talking now about people in their late sixties and early seventies, and I try and talk with them about doing something, yes, rabbi, you're right, you're right, and we talk and generally that's the end of it. It's a little bit like the man who's had the heart attack who's going to reform. But, really, you know there's so much more to be done. There's so many ways that you can be of service if you're only willing to do it. Thus ended my sermon for the day

* * *

What the elderly get in our society is so minimal that it's tragic. We live in a society which has institutionalized inflation and the aging are the people who worked during the years of the hard dollar and sure, there's a small percentage of them at the top who put away sufficient money, but that percentage is tiny compared to the total need. And every year the money buys less and less and more and more of them have to make do with aid to aged, public welfare plus the social security which is minimal, and if you're looked at what catastrophic illness can cost, you know, those checks of 3, 4, 5 hundred dollars a month hardly begin to cover. And there are all kinds of needs that ^{they} have to be helped with, nutritional needs, budgeting needs, needs to provide the basic utilities. The great State of Ohio just yesterday passed a bill, the governor signed a bill so that the elderly who are in need can get reduced rates for heat which says what, that last winter they didn't have money to have heat and some of their heat was turned off. The elderly are really the other America today, and it's a growing number and it's a number which is not limited to blacks and Chicanos. If you want to see the poor elderly you can find them among Jews in every community, people on food stamps, people who are

don't worry about the non-citizens. As far as citizens are concerned, you're going to

struggling to make ends meet, who need to have food brought in. Think of the terror of living by yourself and suddenly finding that you don't have the strength, the ability or the money to go out and buy the little food that you need. If that happens people live in that condition every day of their lives. So I don't worry too much about the tradeoff. I think we've got to make a quantum jump in terms of basic supports and basic services and necessary institutions. The cost is going to be astronomic, make no mistake about it. You and I and the people who are working now are going to pay a very high tariff for these services. We can talk easily about them, but they're going to come dear, they've got to come. And interestingly, they haven't come despite the fact that everyone of us knows that some day we're going to need them. That's the thing that's most interesting. We all want to live long, we all assume that we're the ones who are going to live long, somebody else is going to be the actuarial statistic and yet, we do almost nothing to provide the services which we may in fact need, to see that they are legislated into the social order. Freud could explain that, perhaps, but I find it very difficult in terms of a society of reasonable men and women.

* * *

The statement was Sweden provides very well for their elderly, how do they do it? They do it with a high rate of taxation and a low rate of defense spending. They do it because they have a relatively small homogenous social order where somehow taxes are not what you spend for somebody else, but you recognize it is what you spend for yourself. That's one of the problems in America. We assume that ^{if} we have to tax ourselves for new institutions it's going to be for somebody else's benefit, but in Sweden, in Denmark, in these other Scandinavian countries, the society, there's no group you don't like out there of any size, at least not in the social order. In Sweden the Algerian workers who are there and the Yugoslav workers who are there get none of the social benefits so they don't worry about the non-citizens. As far as citizens are concerned, you're going to

get the advantage ultimately. We don't have that feeling, so we don't vote the taxes. It's not popular to talk of higher expenses so none of the politicians talk about it. When is the last time you heard a politician talk seriously about building adequate facilities, providing adequate services for the aged? That's just not politics as yet.

* * *

You know that the CMHA projects ^{had} some intermingling of families in the aged for 20 years here in Cleveland. Israel has one interesting phenomenon and that's if you examine the kibbutz because the kibbutz takes away all the economic consequences of age because everybody is provided for, there's none of these problems. But the problem of age remains and the kibbutz has not known how to handle it because everything is determined in terms of your usefulness to the social group and since the basic philosophy which went in was one of agriculture, physical labor, all of the things that the aged ^{increasingly} cannot do, many of the kibbutzim have not been able to make idealistic or ideological transformation to value the things which come from here and here and patience and love and sensitivity and not from brute physical force. We've got to get beyond the kind of mechanistic materialistic evaluation of people as human resources for the social benefit. That was Hitler's way. There was a simple problem to solve the problem of the aged. You go into the old folks' homes, you take them all out, put them in a train and you gas them or you inject them while they're still in the home with some kind of lethal poison. Why? Because Plato had said long before that the aged are useless to society, they outlived their functions and many social groups put them on ice flow and let them sail off into the great beyond, but if we're going to talk about the sacredness of human life and the possibilities of human life with everything that our Jewish tradition stands for, we can't go that way and that means a complete transvaluation of values as far as people as people instead of people as objects are concerned. And that's the way I think we're going to have to go.

* * *

One more question - you'll have to remember Leslie, that no social experiment is ever successful by definition. We simply don't know how to cultivate the arts of living easily together and yes, there are problems of class and problems of place and what may work in one middle-class environment may not work in one street environment or inner city environment, but at the same time there are no panaceas, there is no way which guarantees that a mixing of age groups or a homogeneous age group or something of this type is desirable. If you go to some of the old folks' homes you'll find terrible battles going on between people in beds or people in adjoining rooms or people on different floors and they all come out of the same social environment. They may have played bridge with each other for 50 years before they got in this situation, but now it's a different kind of ball game. We're not socialized yet very effectively and the fact that we can tell some horror stories about one experiment or another does not preclude the possible advantages which come in a different setting in the same experiment.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the time of trouble comes and the years draw near when you will say, 'I see no purpose in them.'^a Remember him before the sun and the light of day give place to darkness, before the moon and the stars grow dim, and the clouds return with the rain—when the guardians of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the women grinding the meal cease work because they are few, and those who look through the windows look no longer, when the street-doors are shut, when the noise of the mill is low, when the chirping of the sparrow grows faint^b and the song-birds fall silent;^c when men are afraid of a steep place and the street is full of terrors, when the blossom whitens on the almond-tree and the locust's paunch is swollen and caper-buds have no more zest. For man goes to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets. Remember him before the silver cord is snapped^d and the golden bowl is broken, before the pitcher is shattered at the spring and the wheel broken at the well, before the dust returns to the earth as it began and the spirit^e returns to God who gave it. ~~emptiness, emptiness, says the Preacher, all is empty.~~

~~Unit 7~~ ~~Unit 1~~

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The Temple

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DANIEL JEREMY SILVER - RABBI
STUART GELLER
Associate Rabbi
STEPHEN A. KLEIN
Assistant Rabbi
LEO S. BAWBERGER
Executive Secretary



- 35 Let me but call a witness in my defence!
 Let the Almighty state his case against me!
 If my accuser had written out his indictment,
 I would not keep silence and remain indoors.^a
- 36 No! I would flaunt it on my shoulder
 and wear it like a crown on my head;
- 37 I would plead the whole record of my life
 and present that in court as my defence.^b

Job's speeches are finished.^c

Speeches of Elihu

- 32 So these three men gave up answering Job; for he continued to think himself righteous. Then Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, grew angry; angry because Job had made himself out more righteous than God,^d and angry with the three friends because they had found no answer to Job and had let God appear wrong.^e Now Elihu had hung back while they were talking with Job because they were older than he; but, when he saw that the three had no answer, he could no longer contain his anger. So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite began to speak:

- I am young in years,
 and you are old;
 that is why I held back and shrank
 from displaying my knowledge in front of you.
- 7 I said to myself, 'Let age speak,
 and length of years expound wisdom.'
- 8 But the spirit of God himself is in man,
 and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding;
 9 it is not only the old who are wise
 or the aged who understand what is right.
- 10 Therefore I say: Listen to me;
 I too will display my knowledge.
- 11 Look, I have been waiting upon your words,
 listening for the conclusions of your thoughts,
 while you sought for phrases;
- 12 I have been giving thought to your conclusions,
 but not one of you refutes Job or answers his arguments.
- 13 Take care then not to claim that you have found wisdom;
 God will rebut him, not man.
- 14 I will not string^f words together like you^g
 or answer him as you have done.

^a Line transposed from verse 34.

see note c).

^c The last line of verse 40 retained here.

^d Or had justified himself with God.

^e Prob. original rdg., altered in Heb. to and had not proved Job wrong.

^f Prob. rdg.; Heb. He has not strung.

^g Prob. rdg.; Heb. towards me.

If these men are confident
 if words fail them,
 am I to wait because
 because they stand there?
 I, too, have a furrow
 I will express my opinion
 for I am bursting with
 a bellyful of wind griping
 My stomach is distended
 bulging like a blacksmith
 I must speak to find
 I must open my mouth
 I will show no favour
 I will flatter no one,
 for I cannot use flattery
 or my Maker would

Come now, Job, listen
 and attend carefully
 Look, I am ready to
 the words are on the
 My heart assures me
 and that my lips speak
 For the spirit of God
 and the breath of the
 Answer me if you can
 marshal your argument
 In God's sight^b I am
 I too am only a hand
 Fear of me need not
 nor any pressure from
 You have said your
 I have listened to the
 'I am innocent', you
 blameless and without
 Yet God finds occasion
 and counts me his enemy
 he puts my feet in the
 and keeps a close watch

Well, this is my answer
 God is greater than
 why then plead you
 for no one can answer
 Indeed, once God speaks
 he does not speak a

^a Prob. rdg.; Heb. I will

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some he blessed and lifted high, 12
some he hallowed and brought near to himself,
some he cursed and humbled
and removed from their place.
As clay is in the potter's hands, 13
to be moulded just as he chooses,
so are men in the hands of their Maker,
to be dealt with as he decides.
Good is the opposite of evil, and life of death; 14
yes, and the sinner is the opposite of the godly.
Look at all the works of the Most High: 15
they go in pairs, one the opposite of the other.

I was the last to wake up, 16
I was like a gleaner following the grape-pickers;
by the Lord's blessing I arrived in time
to fill my winepress as full as any of them.
Remember that I did not toil for myself alone, 17
but for all who seek learning.
Listen to me, you dignitaries; 18
leaders of the assembly, give me your attention.

As long as you live, give no one power over yourself— 19
son or wife, brother or friend.
Do not give your property to another,
in case you change your mind and want it back.
As long as you have life and breath, 20
never change places with anyone.
It is better for your children to ask from you 21
than for you to be dependent on them.
Whatever you are doing, keep the upper hand, 22
and allow no blot on your reputation.
Let your life run its full course, 23
and then, at the hour of death, distribute your estate.

Fodder, and stick, and burdens for the donkey; 24
bread, and discipline, and work for the servant!
Make your slave work, if you want rest for yourself; 25
if you leave him idle, he will be looking for his liberty.
The ox is tamed by yoke and harness, 26
the bad servant by racks and tortures.
Put him to work to keep him from being idle, 27
for idleness is a great teacher of mischief.
Set him to work, for that is what he is for, 28
and if he disobeys you, load him with fetters.

Do not be too exacting towards anyone 29
or do anything contrary to justice.

AGING IS PAINFUL ~~fat~~

The moment of easy life fades in ~~seconds~~ ^{minutes} ^{new problems} -
medicine has added years to your life -
but not life to your years.

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(1) not to give away power or influence
 to the young - NOT to be over-whelmed

Ben Jink

33 : 26-23



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AND property

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tinomian act, but even if he requires an act of service that would willy-nilly force the son to violate the law (e.g., that the son cook food for him on the Sabbath)²⁰ Loyalty to God and right take precedence for both parent and son over filial reverence and honor.

An elementary example of the workings of this doctrine is afforded by a responsum of R. Asher:

You have asked about a father who forbade his son to speak to a certain Jew, or to pardon him . . . until a specified date. The son wishes to become reconciled with the individual, but hesitates because of his father's command. . . .

(Response) Know that it is forbidden to hate any Jew, unless he is seen violating the law. The father who commanded his son to hate a man does not have the right to command him to violate the words of the Torah, which says, "I am the Lord"—reverence of Me precedes reverence of yourself." Furthermore, the father is thus violating the law himself and not behaving in this matter as a member of the Jewish people ought to, and he need not be honored.²¹

Both the argument and decision of R. Asher flow quite naturally from the talmudic sources themselves.²² It is interesting, nonetheless, to recall a complementary responsum of R. Me'ir of Rothenberg, the master of R. Asher. The case concerned an informer who was judged liable for the damages he caused another through his informing. The defense of the informer (a defense acceptable, apparently, to some, as the responsum indicates!) was that his act was motivated by a desire to strike a blow for his father's honor, inasmuch as his father had been physically assaulted by the plaintiff. R. Me'ir briskly ruled that the argument of the defendant holds no water, "for even if his father had commanded him to turn informer, he ought not to have done it . . . certainly, now, that his father never did so command him; furthermore, it was his father who struck the first blow. . . ."²³

It is relatively simple to declare that a parental desire that would violate an ethical or ritual norm is itself to be rejected. What, though, if one is faced with the choice between fulfillment of a parental wish and fulfillment of some other divine command, the opportunity to rejoice with the bride, engage in an act of social welfare, or hear the *shofar* blown, for example? Tannaitic authorities disagreed:

El'azar ben Matya said, "If my father says, 'Give me a drink of water,' and I am simultaneously presented with an opportunity to perform another divinely commanded act, I must waive the honoring

①
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obedience

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vice—which are to be seized—and purposeless impositions upon the child—which may be ignored.²⁷

The logic and implications of this latter position—which I believe reflects the stance of most authorities—are most suggestive. On the one hand, there is no limit to filial obedience—whether selfishness of motive on the part of the parent or difficulty of accomplishment for the son—when the parent desires to derive some concrete benefit from the child; “service,” again, is the crux of “honor.” If, however, the parent’s goal is self-assertion, and he chooses for that purpose the most casual and minor of arbitrary requests, the son need not comply. (One is, indeed, tempted to speculate about the right of the son to adjudge even an objectively beneficial request as proceeding from an objectionable motive.) This halakhic dialectic is controlled, obviously, not by considerations of stress—whether physical or psychological—but by an indigenous dynamic flowing from an understanding of *kabbed*, a dynamic best described as ethical in the broadest sense of that term. The limits of “parental authority” are determined by its source and essence, the responsibility of the child to serve and revere his parents. Service, especially, requires selflessness in constructive pursuits. Thus, the assertion of authority *per se* is rejected.²⁸

Revealing as this theoretical discussion has been, it is only through an examination of some concrete problems treated in the responsa literature that one can gain an appreciation of the ethos of the Halakha and see its contextual crystallization.

Various problems were discussed in light of the first rubric summarized above: when the son wished to perform a divinely commanded act and the parent objected, the respondent generally supported the son.

Thus we find the following question asked of R. Meir of Rothenberg:

You have asked: “Can a father prevent his son from going to the land of Israel, since we rule that it is a *mitzvah* to go up to the land, and it is stated, ‘I am the Lord,’ that wherever a parental request conflicts with a *mitzvah* the parent is not to be obeyed, for the honor of God takes precedence over the honoring of parents. . . .”²⁹

The response of R. Meir is, apparently, not preserved. A similar question was asked of R. Moses of Trani, who responded that “the son need not heed the command of his father and mother,” since he would be fulfilling a divine command by settling in the land of Israel, “and he is not punished for neglecting the honor of his parents, since they can go

the land of Israel with his tling of the land and the h

R. Israel Isserlein wrote wished to leave his home whose guidance he was s ther objects strongly, say cause me great distress, f have been imprisoned or mon in that place. . . .”

R. Isserlein rules that for he goes to perform a not appear correct to dis parents and disobeying t pain when he disobeys h equally positive comman parent if one is ergaged cause them pain. This la spondents, as we shall s ing allowing the child to the scope of the priority as against the honoring o principle employed by R ments as well: “If one wi gregants pray with grea jects, he need not obe responsum.³² Responde of “divine imperative” as vowed to study in the L voyage when it was disc his widowed mother.³²”

The Mitzvah of Marriage—

Over and above the ma its interpreters were call elicit the most persistent lakha was forced to artic flict of the primary categr ance with parental wishe macy of *mitzvah* over pa nonconstructive parenta evaluated. Challenges to

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serving as opposing arms of an integrated halakhic instrument. The former allows the evaluation of the act contemplated by the son, while the latter demands the independent evaluation of the parental wish.

Sixteenth-century Greece provided the fullest exposition of the landmark responsum of Maharik. A father in the Greek town of Patras forbade his son to marry the woman whom "his soul desired." Does the son's filial responsibility demand compliance? R. Elijah Capsali of Crete ruled that it did not, in a responsum that richly embroiders that of Maharik; special stress is here laid upon the bonds of marital affection:

... Though the command of filial honor and reverence is inexpressibly great . . . nonetheless it appears in my humble opinion that if the girl about whom you ask is a proper wife for the aforementioned Reuben—that is, there is in her or in her family no blemish⁵⁵—then the command of filial honor and reverence is irrelevant, and the son is not to abandon her so as to fulfill his father's command.

For it is nearly certain that this father virtually commands his son to violate the Torah. . . . For we see (in the Talmud) that a man ought not to marry a woman who does not please him. So that when the father commands his son not to marry this woman, it is as though he commands him to violate the Torah; and it is well known that the son is not to obey his father in such cases. . . .

Now, if we were to decide that a son is obliged to obey his parents and marry though his heart is not in the match, we should cause the growth of hatred and strife in the home, which is not the way of our holy Torah. Most certainly in this case, where he loves her. Indeed, we can cite in this situation: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it . . . (Song of Songs 8:7)." Were he to marry another whom he does not desire, his entire life would be painful and bitter.

... Moreover, we may also argue that the Torah obliges the son to filial honor and reverence only in matters that affect the parent's physical well-being and support . . . but in matters that do not affect the parent in these areas, we may say that the Torah does not oblige the son to be obedient. Therefore, the son is not obliged by the rubrics of reverence and honor to accept his father's command in the matter of marriage.

... All this is according to the letter of the law (*shurat ha-din*). However, so far as behavior beyond the line of the law (*lifnim mishurat ha-din*) is concerned, the son should not do anything—whether important or not—without the agreement of his

parents.

And it is proper for the son to subdue his own desires as possible so as to fulfill the desires of his parents. . . . But that it is impossible for him to do so, let him do as seems proper to him in the matter of his own marriage; for God's marriage to depend upon the will of the son, as I have explained.

Here we see the arguments of Maharik marshaled and expanded: marriage is a *mitzvah* and love is a necessary component of marital authority, moreover, extends only to the areas of parenthood for which the son is responsible, not beyond.

R. Elijah Capsali is hardly intent upon undermining the institution of filial reverence. His last paragraph above, in which the son is required to render general submission to a parent's wish, is typical of his writings on the subject; the argument that filial responsibility extends to areas of parental well-being is offered quite grudgingly. Moreover, the only author to write an entire volume on the topic of filial responsibility (the volume, *Me'ah She'arim*, is still in manuscript) and we may safely assume that it encouraged dutifulness. Indeed, he tells us elsewhere⁵⁷ of his admiration for a custom he saw in Italy where "every Sabbath and festival, after the evening prayer, the sons come to their fathers to prostrate themselves, bow down on their faces and kiss their palms. . . . From the time I observed this custom, 'This must be an old tradition of the pious.' . . . I also said to myself, 'I shall follow this practice myself. And so I did. . . . And if God grant me sons, I would instruct them in this same custom. . . .'" The responsum on marriage, therefore, results from the weighing of filial responsibility so as to provide guidance in an area where the two sides have just claims.

The ruling of Maharik was codified by R. Moses Isserles, and its analytical underpinnings are considered normative by many successors of this problem.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, some opinions required, with varying degrees of filial obedience even in this most personal of decisions. Anonymous—and in its context, irregular—Gaonic responsum had it that a proper daughter of Israel would never refuse to marry him whom her father had chosen, and had constructed a legally effective prohibition of this observation; this opinion remained an eccentricity ever (see note 48). Some centuries later, the pietistic *Sufur Ha-* cautioned: "If the mother or father sees that the daughters of Israel are evil, and the son wishes to marry one of them, and the father commands him to desist, the son sins if he proceeds to marry, for

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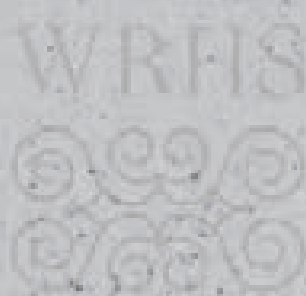
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The Aged, in Jewish Tradition and Contemporary American Society



Submitted to Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver
For Religion 431
By Deborah L. Malone
May 26, 1978

Do not reject us in our old age; do not
abandon us when our strength has left us.
Even in old age and hoary hairs, abandon
me not until I have declared thy strength
unto the next generation, thy might unto
everyone that is to come.

Psalm 71: 9, 18

The percent of people over sixty-five years of age has been climbing rapidly in this country - from 3% in 1900 to more than 10% now - and an estimate of 20% for 2020A.D. Moreover, there is a rise in numbers of people living into their seventies and eighties. We are involved, as Newsweek so aptly described it, in "the Greying of America." This phenomenon has had different meanings for the individual, the family, and the society.

The elderly are an extremely heterogeneous group, but they share some common experiences. Forced retirement requires many competent aged people to give up roles which have been central to their daily activity for a major part of their lives. The consequences are devastating; change in role status from independent and useful to dependent and burdensome, loss of self-esteem, and loss of income, often sufficient to place one at the poverty level. Over 80% of the elderly experience chronic illness and changes in vision, hearing, endurance, and mobility which estrange them from their physical and social environment, particularly in our youth-oriented culture. Patterns of socialization are changed because of death of a spouse or family members and the death or migration of neighbors and friends. The combination of status change, income loss, illness, and decreased social contacts generates fear, loneliness, apathy, and boredom. Difficulty coping is often aggravated by societal stereotypes, all too frequently internalized by the elderly themselves, that the aged are incapable of work, intellectual growth, and creative use of leisure time.¹

One might expect the elderly to turn to the family for support in coping, but for several reasons the American family

has not, by itself, been up to the task. First, until the present century, the United States was a frontier society in which the children tended to move. The large household of the extended kinship family was probably never the prevailing mode.² The Industrial Revolution, accompanied by rapid change, mobility, and urbanization, further weakened kinship ties and helped establish a "generation gap" as the aged became carriers of a dying culture rather than sources of wisdom based on experience and ties to tradition.³ Third, the cultural emphasis on youth, with its prolonged period of dependence and education, has placed additional burdens on families.⁴ Middle-aged adults are hard-pressed to cope with the emotional and financial burdens of both children and elderly parents,⁵ who may live twenty years or more beyond retirement.

Because the nuclear family has not been able to provide solutions to the aging problem, private and public agencies have had to accept some responsibility. Initially church and fraternal organizations provided some assistance to the elderly poor, but the "Puritan Ethic," the belief that poverty was due to poor planning or lack of saving or actual laziness and irresponsibility, limited programming. The government, adhering to an emphasis on rugged individualism and voluntary effort, was slow to respond. The Depression of the 1930's established the obligation of the government to assist the elderly poor, first with Old Age Relief and Old Age Assistance and then with Social Security.⁶ But it was not until 1965, with the passage of the Older Americans Act that legislation was passed which was aimed expressly at the needs of the aged population.

Robert N. Butler eloquently points out in his Pulitzer

Prize-winning bokkd, Why Survive, Being Old in America, that the government has failed to make the elderly a priority. This country grosses almot a trillion dollars a year and spends only 4.2% of it toward aiding the old.⁷ Over half of the elderly are so financially deprived that they cannot supply themselves with basic needs.⁸ Thirty percent (compared to 25% of the general population) live in housing that is dilapidated, deteriorating or lacking some facilities.⁹ The majority of older people cannot afford proper medical care; medical personnel are not trained to deal with their unique problems and, indeed, do not consider them interesting.¹⁰ Old people are the victims of crime more than any other group.¹¹ The Older Americans Act established objectives to deal with these problems, but the Administration on Aging, which was to be responsible for carrying out the law's mandates, has been hampered by lack of funds and authority. In the first seven years of its life, the AOA reached less than 5% of this country's elderly.¹² Clearly, more must be done to combat the "ageism" whcih pervades our society and limits the quality of life for our elderly just as surely as racism has limited quality of life for minority groups.

Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath notes the sharp contrast between American values reflecting contempt for the aging and the Jewish tradition which instills an attitude of honor and respect. "The Bible, the Talmud, the whole of our tradition is replete with a plethora of sensitive mitzvot reflecting profound respect and solicitude for the aging."¹³ He also states that Jews need to return to these traditional values - for the benefit of those who have reached advanced age, for the benefit of

the synagogue, and for the advancement of Jewish life and teaching.¹⁴ In the remainder of this paper, I will explore aspects of his statement. (1) What is the traditional Jewish view of aging? (2) Do contemporary American Jewish families adhere to the tradition or not? (3) What is the scope of the "aging problem" in the Jewish community? (4) What do the professionals envision as solutions?

A careful reading of Biblical references to aging reveals a moderate, common-sense attitude toward advanced age. Longevity is regarded as a blessing (eg., Isa. 65:20, Zech. 8:4, Ps. 92:15) and as a reward for observing certain commandments (eg., Ex. 20:12, Deut. 22:7, 22:15), but the problems associated with old age are also described (eg., II Sam. 19:33-38). In Hebrew the work for an aged person is zakane, which also means counselor, minister, or elder; wisdom and old age are closely, but not automatically, associated. There is emphasis on the relationship between living a righteous life and having wisdom and longevity. Oldness itself is not a virtue; wisdom and knowledge of the Torah determines its value. The truly successful life grows and develops to the very end (Deut. 34:7). cf. El. he
[note] in
Job

It is the Biblical view, amplified in Rabbinic literature, that the aged are owed respect and reverence because they have a certain wisdom which comes from personal experience even if not from academic learning. The old should be honored "for having been in God's world longer than most others and for having suffered His judgment and experienced His miracles more extensively than others."¹⁵ Disease and injury, whether physical or financial, are accidental. The powerlessness of old age is natural and the common lot of most who survive to old age.

Together with all of the weak and infirm, the elderly are entitled to society's compassion and assistance.¹⁶ Indeed, the society which does not provide for its elderly is considered barbaric (Deut. 28).

A whole body of learning is based on the Fifth Commandment to honor one's father and mother. Chill underlines three basic reasons for keeping the commandment: (1) respect for parents leads to respect for God, (2) gratitude for talents and capacities which have been provided by parents, and (3) setting an example for one's own children, who will then grow up to provide tender care in one's old age.¹⁷

The commandment to honor and fear one's parents places different obligations upon adult children than upon young ones, according to Linzer. He says the Talmud's definition of honor means provision of food, drink, and clothing i.e., meeting physical needs. Fear is more equivalent to reverence and is expressed by refraining from standing in one's parent's place, sitting in their seats, or contradicting them. It is an emotional response, based upon restraint.¹⁸ The thrust of the commandment, and the Biblical tradition as a whole, has been to build respect for the aged into the social order. There has been an emphasis on seeing the elderly as people rather than objects, people who remain part of the family and the community and are to be consulted.¹⁹

A very brief look at the history of Jewish care for the aged reveals how respect for the aged has varied in expression through time. In ancient Israel the elderly were highly respected and given a central position in family life and in the tribal structure; they sat next to the ark in the synagogue and at the

NO SYNAGOGUES IN ANCIENT
ISRAEL -

head of the table at home. In late antiquity, however, as society changed, the weak aged had difficulty earning a living. No attempt was made to issue specific regulations or to create special institutions to help the aged or care for them. People from the lower social strata suffered much if they lost the support and care provided by their families.²⁰

In the Middle Ages, Jewish ethics and general halakhic regulations (takkanot) singled out the aged as worthy of special charity and care. Voluntary associations of lay people were organized through the synagogue to help care for them. This attention was necessary because persecutions and massacres had resulted in massive family breakup. After Chmielnicki in 1650, the Council of Lithuania stressed the duty of supporting the aged. At the same time, the Jewish community in Rome introduced care of the aged as one of the four divisions of charitable activity. The aged may have been cared for in shelters for the sick (bikkur cholim) or places for the homeless (hekdesch). In general, the need for separate treatment of the aged did not come until modern times when industrialization and urbanization disrupted families. The Sephardi of Amsterdam, however, founded a Home for the Aged in 1749. By the beginning of the twentieth century, most large communities in Europe also had such an institution.²¹

Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, revolutionary changes in society occurred which profoundly affected attitudes toward and care of the aging: (1) a new appreciation of the psychosocial needs of both the young and the old, (2) demographic changes resulting from birth control and longer life, and (3) introduction of pension schemes and other social

legislation. Within the Jewish community (1) massive migration from Eastern Europe, (2) the Holocaust, and (3) force emigration from Arab and North African countries after the establishment of Israel also contributed to socio-cultural change.²²

In the United States, sponsorship of philanthropy came from many concerned but non-observant Jews; consequently, many social services for new immigrants and the aged came from a traditional sense of obligation but without reference to either the Law or the synagogue. Urbanization encouraged centralization of aged care, and professionalization of social work added to the separation of the synagogue and social service agencies, a separation which was virtually complete by 1930.²³ Before 1900 there were only nine Jewish homes for the aged in this country, but by 1970 almost every major Jewish community had one.

The National Population Study of 1971, completed by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, provides statistics which help to describe the aged Jewish population, both within the Jewish community and in comparison to the national aged population. In 1968 the American Jewish population totalled 5,869,000 or 2.9% of the United States population. About 12% were over 65 years of age. By 1990 this number is projected to increase by 40%. Because of declining birthrates and intermarriage, there will be many fewer youth and young adults, a slight increase in middle-aged persons, and a large increase in the elderly. In 1976 one third of the Jewish aged were over 75 years and 6% were over 85 years. On the average, the Jewish aged are six years older than the aged of the general population.

It is important to note here that the aged population within the Jewish community is highly heterogeneous. The "yound-old,"

those under 75 years, are distinguished from the "old-old" by continued vigor and social involvement and are likely to be in intact families. They are also much more likely to be native-born and to have more education, higher incomes, and, perhaps, a more secular orientation.²⁴

Over the age of 65 years, 75% of the aged are foreign-born, and the number jumps to 86% over 80 years. There is great diversity within this group. Simos estimates that 90% of Jewish immigration to the United States has been from the East European "shtetl," but notes that the immigrants who arrived in the ten years prior to World War I represented a threat to "higher-class" German Jews who had arrived in the 1880's. Class and cultural differences have also been highly visible in succeeding waves of immigration from Germany, Italy, Hungary, Cuba, Poland, Africa, the Middle East, South America, and Russia.²⁵ These "old-old" tend to have more health problems than the "young-old" and to be poorer, but, surprisingly, 40% of those over 70 years continue to live alone.

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The problem of poverty is worth special mention because of the common assumption that there is extremely little poverty within the Jewish community. While 8% of the elderly are estimated to have an income over \$20,000, 44% are at the opposite extreme with incomes under \$4,000. Poor unrelated individuals comprise 61% of the total Jewish poor, and most of these people are elderly. Kaplan has labelled these people "the invisible Jewish poor."²⁶ Even when they are identified, many are reluctant to accept the help which is rightfully theirs.²⁷

As with other aged people in American society, the Jewish elderly find themselves neglected because of the emphasis

on function in our society. They lack opportunities to use their productive skills. They, too, must cope with the loneliness that comes with the loss of friends and relatives. Four-fifths of those over 65 years suffer from physical deterioration or chronic illness and many must cope with mental changes.²⁸ What does the Jewish community, with its tradition of respect for the aged, have to offer these people?

When the Jews entered general Western society, either by emancipation or migration, the principal factor which made the Jewish family different from other families - its isolation from general society - began to disappear. Eager for equality and opportunity, they began to divest themselves of what had distinguished them from others. The family had always occupied a central place in Judaism. It had been the primary socio-religious unit, mediating socialization, clarifying role expectations, instituting standards of behavior based on spiritual and ethical considerations related to all phases of daily living. The family was a stable unit, patriarchal and three-generational, which fostered wholeness and continuity of life, and could counteract fragmentation.²⁹

In the open and changing society of the United States, Jewish families found themselves experiencing changes similar to those of their Christian neighbors: traditional values became weaker, religion more secular; role diffusion developed with identity crises, a generation gap occurred both in communication and in identification with parents; there was compartmentalization of family responsibilities and delegation to surrogate institutions. As a result, families have become less close knit, have less authority, and serve as poor role models and protec-

tive units of socialization.³⁰

In the early twentieth century, the immigrant needed his clan to survive culturally and in business, but the structure of the family and the place and esteem of the aged parent has changed with the aging of the second and third generation of Jewish Americans. Conflicts between older generations and the younger ones trying to escape the "old world image" have resulted in a form of "elder-rejection."

When the older person was maintained in a position as head of the family, problems of physical decline and emotional pain from loss of a spouse were eased by family support mechanisms. Today, however, the pattern of nuclear families is widespread and only 7% of elderly Jews live with their children or grandchildren. The adult child does not want the burden of caring for the parent and the parent does not want to interfere in the child's life. On one extreme are the lonely and isolated poor living in inner city tenements or in declining neighborhoods while their children and grandchildren live in suburbs or far-away cities. On the other extreme are the affluent aged who move into peer group retirement communities in Florida, Arizona, and California. "The fact that both adult children and elderly parents choose to live miles from their immediate family suggests that the desire for independence, mobility, freedom and economic advancement have become values more highly prized than the preservation of the family structure."³²

There are, of course, the frail aged, burdened with physical and/or mental deterioration who no longer live in the community but must reside in long-term care facilities. This part of the population, probably not more than 5%, has been the object of much comment in professional health-related journals

and the institutions themselves have received more critical appraisal since Nadar's investigations, and those of various U.S. Senate committees, and the exposés of nursing home horrors in New York City. No sweeping comments can be made about quality of long-term care except to note that proprietary homes, including Jewish ones, generally provide better care than governmental and profit-making ones.

Rabbi Shelomah Yosef Zefin has a harsh comment to make about institutionalization of the old:

(Our tradition) does not permit us the illusion that the moral obligation of the young toward the old can be discharged simply by paying a geriatric³³ social worker to keep the old folks occupied.

He goes on to label institutionalization a form of physical and psychological cruelty. He notes that the Talmud sees contempt of the young for the old as a sign of a culture's social, political, and spiritual disintegration, and that the Rabbis viewed it as a sign of the disastrous age which would usher in the Messiah.³⁴

Linzer takes a different view. He bases his stand on an interpretation of Jewish law which, he says, recognizes the limited capacities of children to cope with their parents' mental illness and so frees them from an obligation to devote the rest of their lives to futile attempts at rehabilitation. They are required, however, to secure psychiatric and medical care for their parents.³⁵ He lists mitigating circumstances in deciding whether to place an elderly parent in an institution: (1) physical limitations in the child's home, (2) unbearable financial burdens created by the parents' care, and (3) lack of personnel to provide essential helping services to the child. Even in an institution, he cautions, filial duty to supply love,

caring, and companionship remains compelling.³⁶

Novick presents a third stance, based on his work in an Orthodox Home for the Aged. He argues convincingly that such an institution can be extremely effective in helping the aged meet their psychological needs while at the same time fostering a continued sense of Jewish identity. He cites, as one on many examples, participation in prayer three times a day; hearing the Torah provides a sense of closeness to God and a feeling of belonging to the Jewish people while at the same time giving recognition and honor to those who perform special roles in the synagogue. Performance of the mitzvot, Novick states, can help geriatric residents meet their needs (1) to play a significant role in life, (2) to love and be loved by others, and (3) to enjoy activity in the company of other people.³⁷ The number of institutionalized elderly is small, and the number of pious and observant aged smaller yet, but Novick's point that the institution can be structured to provide a religious-ethical-social community, a ghetto as it were, not unlike the pre-Eman-cipation family, is worth a careful examination.

The traditional Jewish society emphasized ritual, celebration, and the art of inner devotion, but modern Jewish society in the United States has become preoccupied with work, productivity, and the public life. The private, inner development of the spiritual self has been relatively undeveloped.³⁸ People have been eager to save for financial security in old age but unconcerned about preparing for a spiritual income. In Jewish tradition, work was seen as a means to produce the necessities of life so that a person could fulfill the commandments; work was not the measure of a person's worth. But in

the United States, even for Jews, an overvaluation of work has resulted in feelings of uselessness and abandonment at the time of retirement.³⁹ Then work and its social auxiliaries are no longer available to fill one's time.

The late Dr. Abraham J. Herschel, discussing the role of recreation in filling one's post-retirement time, discussed what he called the "trivialization of existence:"

For thousands of years human existence was not simply confined to the satisfaction of trivial needs. Through prayer and ritual man was able to remain open to the wonder and mystery of existence, to lend a tinge of glory to daily deeds. Modern man has discarded ritual, failed to learn the art of prayer, but found a substitute for both in occupational routine. He severed relations to God, to the cosmos, or even to his people, but became engrossed in the search for success. The excitement of success took the place of inspiration. Upon his retirement from labor or business, games and hobbies, the country club or golf take the place of church, synagogue, ritual and prayer. The man of our time is losing the power to celebrate, instead of participating in spiritual celebration, he seeks to be amused or entertained. It is upon reaching the summit of his years, that man discovers that entertainment is no substitute for celebration.⁴⁰

A statement from the 1971 White House Conference on Aging underlines the importance of Herschel's analysis:

We believe that something is wrong with any society in which every age is not clearly of meaning and of value to that society. The spiritual needs of the aging really are those of every person writ large;⁴¹ the need for identity, meaning, love, and wisdom.

The disintegration of family life and the neglect of spiritual development have resulted in a (semi-conscious) rejection of traditional Jewish attitudes and responses to aging.⁴² Clearly, the problem of aged care is too large and too complex for the beleaguered family to solve - and probably too large also for the Jewish community to solve by itself.

It has been estimated that 30% of the Jewish aged need some community-based services, such as transportation or hot meals, to function more adequately. Another 15%, the oldest and most infirm still in the community, may be only partly ambulatory and need a comprehensive array of supportive services. The number of institutionalized elderly, only 5%, could be reduced if such services were available.⁴³ The professionals, particularly those in communal service agencies, have been speaking to these needs with increasing frequency.

In 1971 the White House Conference on Aging listed seven areas of concern requiring change to improve quality of life for the aged in the general population. A brief review of the literature reveals that professionals within the Jewish community have also spoken to these concerns. Listed below are the seven areas, followed by references to them in one periodical, the Journal of Jewish Communal Services.

1. Income - Miller-1973, Kaplan-1972, Warach-1977.
2. Employment and Retirement - Warach-1977.
3. Roles and Activities - Warach-1977, Sarnia-1974,
Berger-1966
4. Physican and Mental Health - Galpern-1968,
Salmon-1970, Bernstein-1970, Blonsky-1973,
Novick-1972 and 1975, Simos-1973.
5. Housing - Miller-1973, Warach-1977
6. Nutrition - Zeff-1976, Warach-1977
7. Transportation - Zeff-1976

Of course, there is a giant step between expression of concern and implementation of programs. Rabbi Maurice Eisen-drath, speaking to a conference on aging and retirement in 1974,

chided the (Reform) Jewish community for its inaction:

Before we begin, we are already too late. For more than ten years (since the 1961 White House Conference on Aging) we have dallied; we have procrastinated; we have had committee meetings and published articles. Now is the time to act. But we cannot act alone nor in frantic isolated cases. Our entire society must be re-evaluated in a new perspective.⁴⁴

Rabbi Silver also implies the need for new societal priorities and commitments if the aged are to receive what they need. He states that society must take a "quantum jump" in terms of basic supports and services and that the cost will be "astronomic."⁴⁵ Miller believes that the problem of providing services is not one of needing more data but one of vision, leadership, creative planning, risk taking, and, not least, financing. He believes that Federations rather than service agencies must provide leadership in developing new service patterns because they alone can mobilize total community sentiment, transcend functional lines, create new priorities, and shift allocations. He also states that there is "general agreement" that ensuring adequate income, housing, and health care are primarily public rather than sectarian responsibilities, and Jewish agencies must overcome their reluctance toward use of government funds.⁴⁶

It is not just the social workers and health-related professionals who are expressing concern for the aged. Religious leaders and lay people within the Jewish community are also showing increasing interest. Commissions on Aging have been established in each of the major Jewish denominational bodies. Agudath Israel of America has undertaken sponsorship of senior citizen service centers. Adult organizations such as the American Jewish Committee, the Council of Jewish Women,

and B'nai B'rith, have started programs for the elderly. The Synagogue Council of America has started a program, funded with a government grant, to promote the participation of the elderly in social and educational programs and religious services of synagogues.⁴⁷

There are some cogent spiritual and demographic reasons for turning to the synagogues to help solve the aging problem. (1) Jews look to the synagogue for Jewish answers to their problems. (2) The synagogue is a natural link between Torah teachings and their observance in the community and it provides an organizational model - committee structure, volunteer groups, interagency links and a setting - through which to integrate religious principles and social action. (3) Because it has a concentrated geographic focus, a defined constituency, and a relative proximity to the aged population, the synagogue is a convenient and accessible base from which to provide services. This is particularly important with increasing emphasis on maintenance of the elderly in their own homes. (4) Service-oriented volunteer groups exist which could involve the elderly - either as recipients or donors of service. (5) The synagogue is more personal and less complex than social service bureaucracies and does not bear the stigma associated with welfare. (6) A synagogue has responsibility to its members throughout the entire life span and is in a position to help the young develop positive attitudes toward aging, to offer intergenerational programming, and to establish surrogate family structures. (7) Demographic changes have put the elderly and "second generation" synagogues in similar positions in changing neighborhoods. Each needs to develop new vitality through community

involvement. The issue of aging may now be salient enough to arouse new responses in the synagogue and its members.⁴⁸

It certainly is salient enough to have aroused interest within the community. The question is - enough interest? Can the assimilated Jewish community, with its nuclear, mobile families and their professional care-giver surrogates, generate sufficient concern for the aged to make their quality of life a priority? Can the reawakening spirituality in the community lead to affirmation of the traditional respect for the aged? Will the Jewish community, with its unique history and commitment to social action, become a leader in comprehensive and innovative services to the aging or will it reflect the values of the dominant culture? The answers are not yet apparent.



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