

WORLDS IN COLLISION OR COLLABORATION: SYNAGOGUES, SCHOOLS AND YESHIVOT

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FOCUSSING ON THE CHALLENGE

I was asked to share with you my particular perspectives on the topic "Worlds in Collision or Collaboration: Synagogues, Schools and Yeshivot." I'm more than happy to do this as Hazal would have it: *Yoter meemah she-ha-eggel rotzeh leenok, happarah rotzah lehaynik.*

I have thoughts I would like to share on the subject not in the form of kazzeh re'eh vekaddesh, but rather to highlight several challenges that Modern or Centrist Orthodox rabbis, individually and collectively, should consider now and in the future.

When it comes to Jewish education, my own perspective about the future is clear. According to the *Mechilta: yesh mahar achshav ve-yesh mahar le-ahar ze-man.* Given the American Jewish condition of "hemorrhaging out", as University of California social scientist Seymour Lipset calls it, or "the spiritual holocaust" as Bar Ilan Professor Charles Liebman refers to it, with 54% of Jewish youth up to the age of eighteen being raised outside the Jewish faith, Jewish educational challenges must be addressed with the urgency of *yesh mahar achshav.*

And, so the topic at hand requires our urgent attention. Serving as you do in various urban and suburban settings, my comments will relate to many of you some of the time, but probably not to all of you all of the time. Are synagogues colliding or collaborating with day schools and yeshivot? At first blush one might ask, "Is collision between synagogues and Jewish educational institutions possible given the orientation of the Orthodox synagogue?" On closer examination, the synagogue day school/yeshivot relationship raises many questions that beg to be addressed. Many of these queries I will share with you today.

Orthodoxy's pioneering role in establishing day schools was a lonely battle. Not all Orthodox leaders, including leading rabbis, supported the idea of all-day Jewish education in the early and mid 1900's. But, the zealous advocates of the Hebrew day school prevailed. Among the earliest pioneers were the religious Zionists -- people whose Judaic outlook could well be dubbed "Centrist Orthodox." Among the schools they founded were Etz Haim in 1914, Torah Vodaath in 1918 (by Rabbi Zev Gold, the outspoken Mizrachi leader), Flatbush Yeshiva in 1923, and Shulamith School for Girls in 1929.

The Vaad Hahinuach Haharedi of the Mizrachi played an active role in the early 1900's until after World War II in the development of the day school idea. Because of poor organization and lack of leadership, it was overshadowed on the national scene by organizations with a more sectarian ideology. Today the key players in all-day Jewish education are Torah Umesorah, Agudath Israel, Yeshiva University's Communal Service Division, and the United Synagogue Solomon Schechter School Association. To these we might add RAVSAK, the association of communal day schools and PARDES, the small group of Reform day schools.

Our concern today is obviously not with the total spectrum of day schools and yeshivot, but focuses on

educational institutions under modern Orthodox auspices -- those which would associate with Yeshiva University Communal's Service Division, institutions whose principals and faculty are, would or should be members of the Educators Council of America, the educator counterpart to the Rabbinical Council of America. Approximately 75% or 135,000 of the 180,000 pupils in Jewish day schools and yeshivot in North America are in schools under Orthodox sponsorship. Of these, about half are in modern or centrist Orthodox institutions.

As far as the first part of the title of my talk is concerned, I view the word "Collision", not necessarily as a conflict or clash with negative fallout, but in the positive sense, as used in physics -- a meeting of particles or bodies in which each exerts a force upon the other, causing the exchange of energy or momentum.

Accordingly, the question is, "Does the collision or contact of the different bodies relating to hinuch lead to meaningful collaboration between them?" And prior to that, we may ask, "Is there contact between them?"

The threefold formulation Bet Tefillah -- Bet Midrash -- Bet K'neset -- posits that the synagogue and its rabbinic and lay leadership have both a "unique identity" and a "shared identity" as they relate to Jewish education.

Bet Tefillah refers to the synagogue's "unique identity". From the time the *Anshay Knesset Hage-dolah* organized *betay kneset le-tefillah*, simultaneously with the establishment of *sefer ha-tefillah*, synagogues in different locales in the Diaspora developed their own *nus-ha-ay tefillah* and customs regarding the prayer service. Largely organized to express a particular East or West European tradition, Orthodox synagogues in America all acquired their own individuality and uniqueness regarding *tefillah*. This aspect of synagogue life is beyond the purview of our discussion - although there might be a relationship between a synagogue and the particular *nusah tefillah* and *minhagay tefillah* that are taught in the yeshivot and day schools in its locale.

Our interest lies in the shared identify expressed by the terms *bet midrash* and *bet kneset*.

BET MIDRASH CONCERNS

The origin of the Jewish elementary school is closely identified with the beginnings of the synagogue, both deriving from the conditions developed by Ezra and his followers -- the simultaneous popularization of religious observance and Judaic knowledge. The school was originally housed in the synagogue and formed an integral part of it. Later on, both in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora, the school was separated from the synagogue and became either a communal institution or private enterprise.

While the Jewish school in Eastern and Western Europe -- which was the prototype of the American Jewish day school -- has generally been a separate entity beginning with the 19th Century, the synagogue became more and more a place of learning as well as a setting for prayer, particularly with the influence of Hasidism. In Germany, the synagogue was dubbed a "shul" because the synagogue was also used as a school for children -- known by Germans as a Juden Schule.

In this light, we might ask what should be the relationship of the synagogue to the Jewish education of Jewish children and youth in our times on the North American continent? This question is underscored by the reality that hardly any Orthodox day schools and yeshivot, with the exception of the hasidic movement where the *kehillah* -- the synagogue and yeshiva -- are all under the singular auspices of a rebbe. The independence and autonomy of Orthodox all-day schools, which has both advantages and limitations, might be viewed in context of their younger Conservative siblings.

Initially, after the Conservative Movement officially became involved (in 1957) in founding day schools, they were established by individual synagogues or groups of synagogues. While the rabbis generally favored the idea, in most synagogues the laity was divided in its support of the day school. As the day school idea took root (there are now some 65 Solomon Schechter Schools in North America), the schools moved out of the synagogues. According to Dr. Robert Abramson, director of education of the United Synagogue, the Solomon Schechter

Schools have increasingly attracted the support of the more committed and more forceful and often the more wealthy lay leaders. This had caused many Conservative rabbis to vacillate between support of the local day school and support of their own synagogue establishment. In Greater New York, with the exception of a new day high school housed at the Jewish Theological Seminary, there is no local Solomon Schechter High School. A major reason for this is the lack of support of Conservative Synagogues. This is largely why Conservative day high schools in Brooklyn, Queens and Long Island could not succeed.

The RCA Centrist point of view embraces a variety of ideological positions regarding Torah U-Madda, the place of general studies in the curriculum, the integration of Judaic and secular studies, the role of Israel and Zionism in the school program, the place of *Yom ha-Atzmaut*, *Yom Yerushalayim*, the *tefillah le-sholom ha-Medinah*, and the *tefillah le-hayalay tzahal* in synagogue and school.

How are these positions expressed in the local day schools under Centrist sponsorship? Do the principal or dean and faculty help implement Centrist and Zionist ideology in their schools? How is the Centrist Orthodox day school guided by the Rav's creative blending of Jewish tradition and Western culture? How do we treat the matter of Torah U-Madda in our schools? What attention is given to the Rav's thought as expressed in The Lonely Man of Faith by his two Adams philosophy and the balancing of *ish hadat* with *ish hada-at* in his *Ish Hahalachah*? This used to be called "synthesis". Indeed, some schools, to be sure, the more liberal institutions, have attempted to integrate Jewish and secular studies.

In their general studies curricula, day schools are mandated to fulfill the requirement of their respective host States. The questions about Torah U-Madda go beyond the matter of required general education standards. What is the commitment of the school to general studies excellence beyond State requirements and the need to satisfy parents' demand for quality secular education? More important are the challenges relating to the Jewish studies curriculum. Current curriculum development theory underscores the importance of considering the needs and roles of pupils, parents, teachers, administrators and community. In a real sense, the Orthodox day school or yeshiva is a Jewish communal enterprise, certainly an Orthodox communal institution. The community of the day school under Orthodox sponsorship is the Modern Orthodox synagogue. Does the Judaic studies curricula reflect the input of the Centrist Orthodox rabbi(s) in the community?

Prior to responding to this question, we must be clear about the key objectives of Centrist Orthodox education -- a challenge not fully addressed by Orthodox leadership. Education and/or curricular problems often require halachic input or resolution. A prime example is the question of co-education. Another is the matter of teaching Talmud to girls. On both of these matters, the Rav's response is expressed in his founding of the Maimonides School in Boston in 1937. How does Centrist Orthodox leadership treat with this model of Jewish all-day education, particularly in light of the new realities in the yeshiva world?

Research into the effects of parental involvement in general education -- public and private -- clearly demonstrates its benefits at every level of schooling. Long term studies show that schools with parent programs, whatever the nature of the programs, have realized immediate and positive results, including increased attendance, increased pupil motivation, higher academic achievement and decreased operating costs. Because of these benefits, the Coalition of Essential Schools (a Brown University program involving select schools throughout the United States dedicated to heightening educational improvement) is hard at work advocating, guiding and supporting collaboration between parent, community and school.

Is this research and practice relevant to Jewish education? Involving parents is a matter we cannot afford to neglect, particularly in relation to non-Orthodox parents in Orthodox-sponsored schools. Enrollment in day schools under Orthodox auspices comprises significant numbers of children from non-observant homes, ranging from 10% to 80% of the respective student bodies, and averaging about 40% of the total pupil population.

How should the Orthodox community-qua-community relate to non-observant parents of day school children? What should be the role of the local Orthodox congregation vis-a-vis the non-Orthodox children? Clearly, the challenge here is outreach and Jewish family education. To be sure, Jewish family education is a fast

growing endeavor in the non-Orthodox Jewish educational community. Should it be less for Orthodox schools? How do Orthodox rabbis best address this challenge? How should they collaborate with day school administrators in order to achieve the greatest benefit from parent involvement, activity and education.

Continently, I would estimate that there are between 30,000 and 40,000 children from non-observant homes in modern Orthodox day schools. The day schools are generally making valiant efforts at Judaizing their non-orthodox populations. But, to be effective and to maximize the potential of outreach, it is clear that this challenge requires a broad, carefully planned total communal Orthodox approach which includes the local synagogues.

Another outreach challenge relates to the Jewish supplementary school -- the afternoon and one-day-a-week programs in Orthodox synagogues. In 1962, the peak year of Jewish school enrollment in North America, there were about 70,000 children in Orthodox congregational supplementary schools. Today, for a variety of reasons -- good and bad -- that number has precipitously declined to about 15,000 pupils. In the first place, committed members of Orthodox synagogues now generally send their offspring to a yeshiva or day school. Secondly, not unlike the supplementary school enrollment in the Conservative and Reform settings which declined from 470,000 to 250,000 in 1992, the decrease in the modern Orthodox congregational school pupil population is due significantly to falling birthrates and opting out of uncommitted families. In the Orthodox sector, there is the added fact that many synagogues and rabbis exerted no effort to maintain smaller congregational schools -- as the enrollment dropped -- due largely to the extra financial costs. Some rabbis heralded the disappearance of the supplementary schools in their synagogues because it relieved them of the extra educational burdens, which some felt were to no avail. The truth of the matter is that, as a whole, during the 1960's and 70's, Orthodox synagogue leadership did not consider the supplementary school a target for outreach activity. Moreover, it seemed to interfere with Orthodox support for the day school.

I recall pleading with many rabbinic and lay leaders at a UOJCA Convention thirty years ago not to abandon the supplementary school, but to use it to do outreach to families and as recruiting grounds for the local day schools. The synagogue school also could provide an additional source of income to day school teachers, a not too insignificant matter.

Had we had then the experience of outreach that we have now, and our current sensitivity to the need for and potential of outreach, I think we would have responded differently to the challenge of tens of thousands of unobservant children in our supplementary settings.

The question now is, what is the best way to deal with the small pockets of children in the synagogues that still maintain supplementary schools? Clearly, this challenge suggests Jewish family educational approaches. As I noted in a recent article in the Journal of Jewish Communal Service, Jewish family education is a fast growing enterprise in the overall Jewish community. It is a need both for the supplementary school and day school under Orthodox auspices.

BET HAKNESSET CONCERNS

Besides referring to the obvious social and communal roles, the term *bet kneset* suggests that the synagogue has a shared identity, a shared responsibility with the Jewish community regarding a variety of Jewish concerns, chief among them Jewish education. For some communities, the synagogue's shared responsibility means an individual synagogue effort. In others, it requires collaborative synagogue endeavor to support local yeshivot.

How does the Orthodox synagogue acquit itself of its obligation to help yeshivot and day schools maintain themselves on the local and broader communal and national scenes? How do synagogues relate to school efforts to obtain funding from local Federations, either directly or through the local bureau of Jewish education? What is the nature of collaboration among synagogues and between synagogues and local day schools regarding

yeshiva support?

In 1991, the latest year for which fiscal data is available, Federations throughout North America allocated 265 million dollars to local needs. Of this sum, 67 million dollars was allocated to Jewish education, 35 million dollars of which was distributed to yeshivot and day schools, and the rest, largely to central agencies for Jewish education. This means that 25% of every Federation dollar expended for local needs was granted to Jewish education. Slightly more than one half of this amount was given to local day schools.

While this is a substantial sum of money (and has increased regularly each year since the mid-sixties, when the first Federation grants to day schools were made), it falls far short of the real need. Moreover, the current level of distribution is endangered by a variety of factors: the current economic crisis and poor Federation Campaigns; the increasing weariness of Federation leaders in providing funding for Orthodox institutions which educate children from all denominations and from secular homes, and the development of local Federation Jewish continuity commissions which stress the need for support to informal Jewish education, including Jewish community center activities and youth trips to Israel. In times of lean financial ability, the support of the continuity commissions and related activities will compete heavily with day school allocations.

Added to the possible diminishing of Federation support because of the economy and competing interests is the statement made last fall by sociologist Egon Mayer that neither the Jewish day school nor any other form of Jewish education has a singular effect on the adult Jewish behavior of its former students and no real impact upon intermarriage levels. Mayer arrived at this conclusion by using a statistical procedure, a multiple regression analysis, with regard to the data of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study. You will recall that this survey demonstrated a 52% intermarriage rate among American Jews.

To be sure, Mayer is dead wrong. Several researchers have shown his analysis to be faulty. Yet, in the current economic climate, his pronouncements carry weight with the makers and shakers of Federation. Having spent a good portion of my adult life in trying to convince Federation leadership about the need for and value of supporting yeshivot and day schools, I find it a jolting, most disturbing experience to hear some of my Federation friends question the wisdom of expending so much money, when funds are tight, on day school education at the expense of other "Jewish" and Jewish communal activities.

That is why I am currently involved in a major study with my students in YU's Azrieli Graduate Institute profiling some 9,000 graduates -- 20-40 years of age -- from 26 representative Jewish day schools in the United States. The study will show the relationship between Jewish day school education and the adult Jewish behavior of its graduates. I'm fully confident that the findings will show a high correlation between all day education and adult Jewish lifestyles.

On another level, what happens in a community with an existing Orthodox day school, when there is a ground swell to organize a non-Orthodox communal day school which would seriously impact the Orthodox sponsored school and possibly force it to close? What happens if Federation leadership is unhappy with the ideological thrust of one of our schools? How do we respond? There is no single universal response for all situations. Yet, there is a need to develop possible approaches via local, regional and national collaborative efforts between the leadership of the synagogue, community and the day school. Collaboration amongst synagogues and between synagogues and day schools to insure continued flow of Federation support for all-day education is the crucial challenge of *yesh mahar achshav*.

On the synagogue level, it is not always easy for lay leaders to balance their activity on behalf of the shul and the yeshiva. Recently, in Rochester, at a meeting with Rabbi Shaya Kilimnick and several lay leaders regarding the Hillel School, the chairman of the education committee of the Hillel School exclaimed: "The Hillel School draws all my energy. I don't have enough time or energy for the shul". The refrain from other day school leaders was that there were many synagogue leaders who don't find the time or interest to become involved in the local day school and its support. Because of the difficult fiscal situation, the day school leaders were most anxious to harness the potential financial resources of the synagogue leaders to benefit yeshiva education.

There is another condition about the relationship of members of some Orthodox synagogues to day schools that merits mention. When I was recently in Washington, D.C., I learned from Nat Lewin and Rabbi Joel Tessler that a significant number of Orthodox synagogue members and shul goers in Potomac, Maryland do not send their children to the local day school. In response to this condition, Rabbi Tessler is heavily involved in outreach with adults and with children in the afternoon school program which the shul sponsors. Is this the norm in other suburban Orthodox synagogues? Is day school scholarship aid an answer? Or should we pray that more local public school systems become integrated?

Given the poor record of Jewish supplementary school accomplishment, especially when home support is lacking -- how can the Orthodox community best acquit itself of its responsibility towards these children?

Ending this address with questions is to demonstrate the seriousness of the problems facing Jewish all-day education under Centrist Orthodox auspices, the resolution of which requires planful, assertive rabbinic leadership. And, so ends our brief journey into the world of hinuch with the hope that "collision" in the positive sense will bring together the Orthodox worlds -- the synagogue, the yeshiva and the day school -- for the purpose of *le-hagdil Torah ve-ha-adeerah*. *B'hatzlahah!*