WHERE JEWISH EDUCATION HELPS STUDENTS THRIVE:

A TRIBUTE TO *Dr. Jonathan Woocher*

INTRODUCTION

Dear Colleagues,

For more than thirty years, Jonathan Woocher was the preeminent specialist in Jewish education policy in North America. Part educator, part sociologist, part theologian, part anthropologist, and part pundit, he was unique in his role: He studied the work of our field and explained both what was and what could be.

For the two of us, Jon was a mentor and collaborator. He was also an image of what was possible. Each of us has developed a career in Jewish education policy, a narrow segment of the Jewish communal field that doesn't immediately make sense to an airplane seatmate. But we have loved living and working in this world, significantly because Jon led it. It been richer, deeper, more related to general literatures that help us make sense of it, and ever connected to the heart of Jewish ideas, blending the secular and the Jewish to help ancient Jewish wisdom become accessible and relevant to new generations of Jews and those in Jewish families. And we are, of course, not alone. In the days following Jon's passing, the tributes on Facebook, in response to articles in eJewish Philanthropy, and notes via email were voluminous. From around the world, educators, policy makers, philanthropists, and other practitioners shared their stories of how Jon listened, challenged, supported, mentored, and otherwise contributed to their work. His extensive writings were significant, but perhaps even more significant was his direct interaction with so many.

This *gedenkschrift* presents the work of (some of) Jon's colleagues in his honor. We sought to compile here something that extends his ideas for those new to his work, recalls his contribution for those of us who worked with him, pays tribute to his spirit, and carries forward his impact. It includes selections from those who were his closest colleagues in the professional journey that he forged, which was also personal. As he did us, he touched the writers here, as these essays will reflect.

Editing this volume has been a gift. We have immersed ourselves in the rich writing of our colleagues and in some of Jon's ideas that are the most enduring, which, going forward, have great potential for the growth of Jewish education, Jewish community, and the lives of Jews. We have here the beginnings of a prescription for Jewish education in the 21st century, naming all that is to do and identifying how we can pick up Jon's work and do the great good task of fulfilling his vision of what could be.

Our wish for the reader is that you can join us in immersing ourselves in this set of ideas; expanding our experiments with new forms of Jewish exploration, learning, and celebration; and helping the students of Jewish education thrive, informed by the richest ideas in secular discourse and the Jewish tradition as Jon would want.

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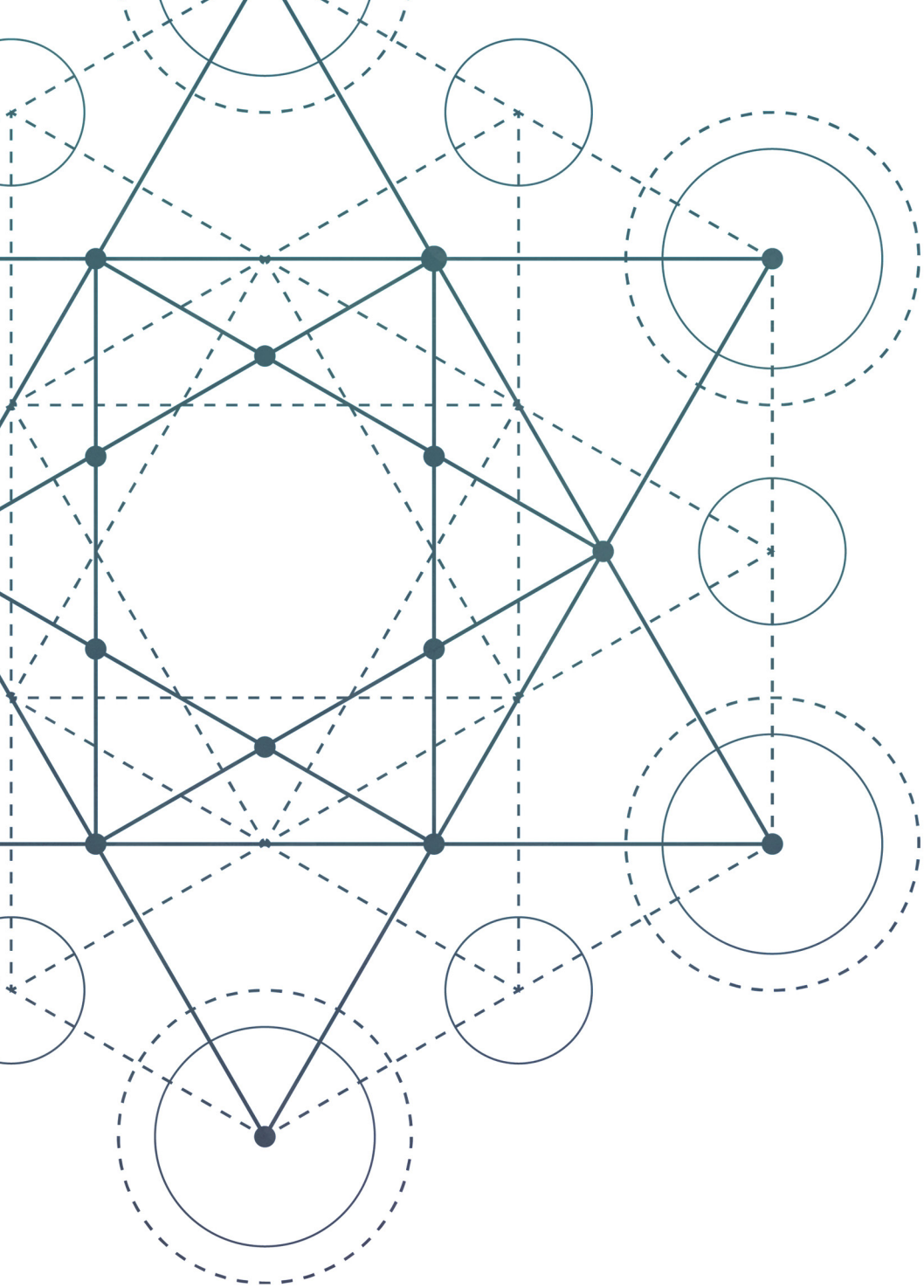

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Jonathan Woocher's Impact on Jewish Education: A Personal Reflection

David Bryfman, PhD

Following the release in 2013 of what is colloquially known as the Pew report ("A Portrait of American Jewry"), Jon and I had many conversations about what all of this meant for the future of the Jewish people. Jon pointed out that there was, in fact, nothing new about what some regarded as the alarmingly high 67% of Jews who now identified themselves as Jews of no religion. Not in a boastful way, Jon pointed to his own work, his 1986 book, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews*, which emerged from his dissertation, where he cited Jewish life that "legitimates a way of being Jewish and a program of Jewish activity within which the role of the synagogue and the rabbinate—the life of study and prayer, and ritual observance—are no longer primary" (p. 163). It was Jon's deep understanding of the Jewish people that allowed him to recognize that many proud and committed Jews did so without a primary affiliation to religious life and its institutions. This critical theme would underpin much of his thinking in the decades that followed.

That Jews could be engaged in ways other than synagogue life might not seem new, irreverent, or radical today, but at the time, this dramatically undercut a foundational element of the dominant view of what it meant to be a Jew in American society. What made Jon stand out even more was his ability to express these views from within the organized Jewish community.

While signaling a new way of Jewish living, Jon never dismissed the old. His respect and admiration for synagogue life was always articulated, even magnified when he saw synagogues actively engaged in reimagining themselves for current realities. Jon was able to be subversive and yet respectful. It would be fair to say that even those who were trying to motivate change believed that Jon supported and encouraged their work. That Jon was able to critique from within only served to intensify his influence as a thought leader within the Jewish community.

In the last few years of his life and career, one of Jon's favorite quotations was from William Gibson, a science fiction author, who declared, "The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed." Immediately following these words, Jon often referenced computer scientist Alan Kay who said, "The best way to predict the future is to invent it." In many ways, these two quotations categorize much of the last two decades of Jon's work. He was a sociologist dedicated to understanding the realities of the world in which we lived, and he was forward thinking and driven to harness the people around him to think, to discuss, to challenge, and ultimately to generate new ways of being and doing Jewish given these new realities.

Over the years, I have heard many people suggest that Jon had the best title ever in the Jewish community: Chief Ideas Officer of JESNA, the Jewish Education Service of North America. Jon certainly had many ideas. He read voraciously about almost any topic that he may or may not have seen obviously related to his work—yet he always seemed to make the most relevant connections. Jon also met with many people, often just to learn new ideas and hear opinions and thoughts different from his own, and more often than not just because someone had asked to meet with him. Whether he agreed with these viewpoints or not didn't seem to matter. Jon always enjoyed learning from others and always did so with gratitude and a smile.

However, to only regard Jon's work in the realm of "ideas" is to greatly undervalue his impact on the ground. He worked hard to translate his ideas into action so that the ripples could be felt by those whom he regarded as most important: Jewish learners. We spent countless hours discussing issues related to the Jewish Futures Conference at an altitude well above 30,000 feet. These were great conversations. Jon would almost always cite sources and authors from many eras and a broad diversity of fields. At a certain point in almost every conversation, one of us would gently

remind the other that we now needed to translate our dialogue into a meaningful experience for learners.

In that spirit, one of Jon's greatest contributions to Jewish education is his articulation of three design principles for Jewish education in the 21st century. These principles began as lofty ideals to which Jon and his coauthors believed Jewish education ought to aspire:

1. Empowering the learner as an active agent in fashioning his/her own learning experience
2. The centrality of relationships and the social experience of learning as dynamic forces that shape an evolving identity and build commitment and community in a fragmented world
3. Jewish learning as "life-centered," addressing the totality of our aspirations, concerns, and experiences (Ross, Woocher, & Woocher, 2007)

These three principles rapidly became the guidelines for many Jewish education initiatives across North America. We at The Jewish Education Project adopted them as our North Star for much of our work, recognizing that they not only captured much of what we had already known to be good Jewish education but also pushed us to consider new possibilities moving forward.

For a moment, pause to imagine what it could look like if each of these principles was embodied as core to every Jewish educational experience. It was in such moments of pause and reflection that Jon's brilliance was often most acutely felt.

The first iteration of these principles was coauthored by Jon, Renee Rubin Ross, and Jon's daughter Meredith. It is not incidental that Jon was always the first person to honor and respect his coproducers. In fact, despite always shining in the limelight, Jon seemed to enjoy mentoring others and being able to shine the light on them.

This was also not the only time that Jon coauthored something with his daughter, Meredith. In what I believe was one of Jon's most significant contributions to the field of Jewish education, Jon and Meredith coauthored "Jewish Education in a New Century: An Ecosystem in Transition" in American Jewish Year Book 2013. This article did what Jon often did so well: clearly and succinctly synthesize much wisdom and thought in order to make a compelling argument for specific change.

Jon and Meredith begin their article with a pointed understanding of who Jews are today:

> The past few decades have seen dramatic developments both in society as a whole and in the Jewish world that have created a new context for the time-honored task of educating new generations of Jews. American Jewry has gone from being an "assimilating" community to a fully assimilated one—but without the disappearance of a distinctive Jewish identity that some predicted. Viewed through a wide lens, Jews have by and large followed societal trends (and sometimes led them) in becoming more diverse as a group and more fluid in their identities (and in becoming more aware of these realities); in embracing "prosumerism" and seeking an active voice in choosing and shaping their own experiences (including Jewish experiences); in comfortably moving among multiple communities; in viewing institutions with diminished deference and without long-term loyalties; and in voraciously adopting new communications technologies that change how we work, connect, recreate, and learn. (2013, pp. 3–4)

Then the authors immediately proceed to describe the problem for Jewish education as they saw it:

> While the institutional structures of American Jewish life, including its educational structures, do not look dramatically different, at least at first glance, the *people* who populate (or fail to

> populate) these structures and the attitudes and aspirations they bring with them are quite different. In such a situation, Jewish education could not remain static, and, indeed, with accelerating speed, Jewish education has begun to change. (Woocher & Woocher, 2013, p. 4)

And as he would always do, Jon would never conclude without providing at least one solution, in this case, the breakdown of the dichotomy between Jewish startups and legacy institutions, and a desire to ensure that any changes that occur would ultimately influence the people who matter most—the learners (i.e., the Jewish people):

> Over the past decade, that ecosystem has expanded to encompass new actors and new resources, and many of its components have worked hard to adapt to the changing climate in which they function. Nonetheless, the ecosystem has changed more at its edges than at its core, which leads to the question of whether the scope and pace of adaptation have been sufficient to ensure its continued robustness, especially for its most important inhabitants: learners.
>
> There are times in an ecosystem's development when expansion and adaptation may not be sufficient. This may well be such a time for Jewish education. If this is the case, then what is needed for Jewish education to thrive going forward is a reconfiguration, a reorganization of its components and of the relationships among them to address more effectively some of the longstanding weaknesses of the system and some of the emerging challenges cited above. (Woocher & Woocher, 2013, pp. 51–52)

The Jewish innovation sector became the focus of much of Jon's attention. From his role in convening the first-ever Consultation on Jewish Social Entrepreneurship and New Leadership Development in 2008, to his ongoing involvement on the board of Bikkurim, as well as with Joshua Venture, Jumpstart, UpStart, and other important organizations in the Jewish innovation space, Jon saw innovation as critical to the thriving of the Jewish people.

But despite being deeply committed to innovation, Jon was adamant that it should never be for innovation's sake. He held the core belief that the institutions of 20th-century Jewish life would not be able to operate in the same ways, or not necessarily be the same ones, to get us where we need to be. Throughout his time at The Jewish Federations of North American (JFNA) (formerly United Jewish Communities [UJC]) and later at JESNA, Jon was often cited as one of the leading voices in the Jewish Continuity movement. However, as recalled by Joe Kanfer at Jon's funeral, Jon was also one of the first to recognize that unless we knew what it was that we were really committed to continuing, it was, in fact, a Jewish Renewal and Renaissance that was really needed. Over email, I once asked Jon to describe the communal shift from "Continuity" to "Renewal." Naively, I expected a pithy response. What ensued were many hours of detailed conversations traversing philosophical, educational, and identity theories, and, of course, Jewish communal politics. In some ways, communal politics was the least of Jon's favorite interests, and yet he, perhaps like no other Jewish educator, knew how to navigate the Jewish community and all of its various stakeholders, paying equal respect to professionals, lay leaders, funders, and educators, as well as learners and their families.

Jon's move away from "continuity" toward "renaissance" and "renewal" was accentuated further in the last few years with his simultaneous gravitation toward Jewish wisdom and positive psychology. In Jon's mind, the two were inextricably linked, as he held the belief that Jewish wisdom offered people the knowledge and skills that could help them flourish in the world today. In his tenure at Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, Jon was a major

catalyst for many educators and organizations that have begun to use a new set of outcomes for Jewish education and engagement. As he would write (with footnoted hyperlinks inserted into the blog post):

> Today, though, we see Jewish wisdom in a variety of forms being put to work deliberately and self-consciously to address a host of human needs and aspirations. From helping parents to pass on healthy values to their children to tackling the challenges of ecological sustainability and social injustice, Jewish wisdom is now being studied, interpreted, re-packaged, and enacted in a diverse array of programs and settings. Communities inspired by Jewish wisdom are multiplying, not only in traditional religious forms, but in new configurations with specific foci on Jewish learning, spiritual practice, social action, and cultural creativity. What all of these endeavors share is a commitment to using Jewish wisdom as a pathway to human flourishing. (Woocher, 2016, June)

Positive psychology also provided the foundation for The Jewish Education Project's recent commitment to establishing a new set of outcomes for Jewish education, particularly in the teen engagement space. Early on in our work, we had established that for Jewish education and engagement to be relevant to today's Jewish teens, it must help them grapple with three of the most critical existential questions being confronted by adolescents: Who am I? With whom and what am I connected? How can I bring about change in this world? Jon was involved in these discussions from the outset and brought a vast amount of intellect and rigor to this research. But Jon was also concerned that the outcomes framework we were establishing was too passive and did not give enough attention to the active roles that young people were playing, and ought to be playing, in developing their current and future selves. Through Jon's influence, we soon added a fourth question to guide our outcomes framework: "To whom and for what am I responsible in this world?" In this question, we get a further glimpse into Jon's commitment to the Jewish people as a collective, as well as his faith that individual human beings could contribute greatly to the world.

Jon would argue strongly that Jewish wisdom could contribute to all of life's existential questions. Even more, he would argue that if we as Jewish educators couldn't make those connections for our learners, we ran the risk of Judaism becoming irrelevant. The seriousness of his message, however, was tempered by an equally important commitment to Jewish education and experience filled with joy:

> "Finally, the message of Purim (and of many other anti-structural celebrations) is that **life is meant to be enjoyed**. Joy is not constant, nor does it come without trials and tribulations, but *simcha*—joy—is not only pleasurable, it is generative. It inspires us to be expansive, to share, to create more joy. Joy is contagious. For us at Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, ensuring that an individual's Jewish experience includes a healthy measure of *simcha* is a goal that permeates our work. To be sure, simcha is not the only Jewish sensibility we wish to see cultivated. But, at a time when too many people's experience of Jewishness is one of boredom or burden, making that experience more joyful can open the door to a richer engagement with Judaism's many dimensions." (Woocher, 2016, March, seventh para.)

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTtsFVg6RRQ&list=PLA4Ev1oJWKYmg4QGAnVvpcJmnsNmpGn4t
[2] http://hazon.org/we-are-how-we-eat-a-jewish-approach-to-food-and-sustainability/
[3] http://www.truah.org/
[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0LbwEVnfJA
[5] The full set of teen outcomes can be found at https://www.jewishedproject.org/resources/generation-now.

No conversation with Jon ended without a warm smile and a chuckle. Jon was always the optimist. This is not to suggest that Jon did not have concerns about the future of the Jewish people—indeed, he had many. But it does importantly reinforce that he had faith in individuals, the many he mentored directly and the countless more that he influenced through his written and spoken words.

One does not always get the opportunity to choose one's mentors. It is even rarer that these inspirational people in one's life can then become your colleagues. In Jon, I, like many others, found mentorship, colleagueship, and so often friendship. As was cited many times after Jon's passing by several people, *"aseh lecha rav, u-k'neh lecha chaver"*—find yourself a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend (Ethics of Our Fathers 1:6). This was one of Jon's favorite teachings, but also something by which he lived his life.

In the week before Jon's passing, I had reached out to him to see if there was anything that I or others could do. Jon's brief, but poignant response was, "Just plan a great conference." May that be our charge moving forward, that all of us committed to Jewish education and the Jewish people, in honor of and respect for our colleague, mentor, and friend, Jonathan Woocher, continue to strive for greatness in everything that we do for and on behalf of the Jewish people.

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2

Remembering Jonathan Woocher

Arnold Eisen, PhD

Long before I met Jon in person and experienced firsthand the remarkable powers of analysis and synthesis that enabled participants in any meeting with him to feel their time together had been well spent, I had encountered those talents in print. *Sacred Survival* (1986) is one of the best books ever written about the American Jewish community of the late 20th century. The author is obviously a communal insider. He understands what makes his subjects tick. His view of them is at once knowing and detached, sympathetic and critical. One leaves Jon's study of the "set of beliefs, myths and rituals which legitimate the work of the American Jewish polity and which mobilize support for its endeavors" (p. vii) nodding vigorously: "Yes, he got this right." What had been somewhat mysterious before is now obvious. "The quest for a shared religious self-understanding could not be met by any of the Jewish ideological movements which competed in offering systems of meaning" (p. 13). But "an American Jewish civil religion"—distinct from while integrally related to the American civil religion analyzed in the classic work by the sociologist Robert Bellah (1985)—could and did perform that role. Thanks to Jon's analysis, a generation of lay and professional communal leaders understood with greater clarity just what they were trying to accomplish and why. That understanding helped them to do the work of the "Jewish polity" more skillfully than they could have otherwise.

One highlight of the book is Jon's listing of the major tenets of "civil Judaism" (1986, pp. 67-68):

- unity of the Jewish people,
- mutual responsibility among Jews,
- the imperative to guarantee Jewish survival in a threatening world,
- the centrality of the state of Israel,
- the enduring value of Jewish tradition,
- the norm of *tzedakah* as both philanthropy and social justice, and
- the virtue of "Americanness."

A generation after Jon's study appeared, one wonders about the degree to which American Jews still subscribe to these tenets. I suspect that for "Gen X" and "millennial" Jews, the imperative at the core of civil Judaism—*am Yisrael chai* (the people of Israel live) and must continue to thrive—resonates far less than it does for the baby boomer generation or for those who lived through the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. Ethnic solidarity among Jews in North America is weaker than it was thirty years ago and has not been replaced by religious bonds in part because, as Jon tellingly observed (1986, p. 93), the absence of "theological content" in Jewish civil religion has "undermined an active affirmation of vertical transcendence." In his study, he speculated that some American Jews, sensing that lack, would find their way to "more serious religiosity" (p. 200), but only with—he implied—vast improvement in Jewish education at every level. That is, of course, the field to which Jon devoted the bulk of his effort in succeeding years, both in theory and in practice.

Two masterful surveys of Jewish education written by Jon in recent years demonstrate his incomparable knowledge of the field in all its bewildering complexity. The analysis in these pieces, as it was in *Sacred Survival*, is at once nuanced, persuasive, and generous. One feels that the author has gathered all the major players around a table, told them what they are accomplishing individually and as a group, and then pleaded with them to cooperate and learn from one another more than they generally do.

The first essay, a survey of the field written along with Meredith Woocher for the *American Jewish Year Book 2013*, "Jewish Education in a New Century," bears the subtitle, "An Ecosystem in Transition." "Ecosystem" is the key word in the piece. Jon taught those involved in various areas of Jewish education to see themselves as part of a larger whole that would better succeed as a cooperative effort. On the very first page, he takes note of the increased diversity of the community,

of the embrace by learners and educators alike of "prosumerism" ("seeking an active voice in choosing and shaping their own experiences"), unprecedented movement among multiple communities, and the "voracious" adoption of new communications technologies (2013, pp. 3–4). The Woochers (i.e., Jon and his daughter) are nonjudgmental to a fault, except perhaps when they observe that "efforts to address the challenges of professional training and development" in recent years have largely been "uncoordinated with one another" (p. 40). Turning to assessment, the authors point to issues of access and affordability, the need to bridge silos, and the need to adapt age-old paradigms to a radically new situation. One sentence in particular jumps out at me from all the rest, which I read as a gentle rebuke or, perhaps, a wish unlikely to be granted:

> Because there are so many different stakeholders involved [in Jewish education], it would be doubly desirable if one could assume that each stakeholder was both consistently engaged and well-equipped in terms of knowledge and experience to play a constructive role. This is rarely the case. (Woocher & Woocher, 2013, p. 48)

The piece concludes with a set of policy recommendations for "far-reaching reconfiguration," characteristically couched not as norms or obligations but as possibilities, such as the following: "Could (and should) complementary education for children be separated from preparation for bar/bat mitzvah?" (pp. 51–54).

Jon's other recent and masterful survey of the field, "Reinventing Jewish Education for the 21st Century" (2012), is somewhat more direct in its recommendations. The real question facing American Jewry is "whether Jewish life and learning are truly central to meeting the community's aspirations" (p. 189). Jon strongly suggested that they are not. One of this piece's major gifts is a table of the "paradigm shifts" that the author believes are required to improve the field (and revitalize the community) (pp. 196–197). Another is a perceptive listing of the failings of the current system, for example, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship at the margins, thereby inhibiting the spread of change beyond the margins (p. 204). An appendix provides a useful inventory of "new programs, initiatives, and organizations" (pp. 222–226). No one had a better handle on such efforts than Jon, and no one did more to encourage them. Indeed, the appendix itself implicitly challenges the reader to add to the list, having been shown that innovation is occurring in so many settings. "You too can do this," Jon implicitly declares. "I am here to help you."

I heard Jon convey this message on countless occasions, whether at board meetings of the Covenant Foundation or the Davidson School at the Jewish Theological Seminary, at conferences on Jewish education, or in personal conversation. Vigorous discussion would be summed up in a way that left all parties convinced that they had been heard and that their views had been synthesized and brought closer together. All of us in the Jewish communal world have benefited from Jon's encouragement and good judgment in his numerous and always-lucid writings. In the absence of his living voice, the writings will have to get us through—that, and Jon's personal example of how a great teacher teaches other teachers what it is to be a lifelong learner.

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3

Scholar, Activist, and Our Tenacious Teacher

Cindy Chazan, Rabbi B. Elka Abrahamson, and Larry Moses

"Everything I have observed—in business, in government, in philanthropy—leads me to believe that the decisive determinant of success or failure is leadership. Strong leadership enables good companies to become great. Weak leadership leads strong companies to disappointment. Ditto in government and in the philanthropic sectors. My impression is that Jewish communal leadership is not what it was. In the rabbinate. In Federations, Hillels, Jewish Community Centers and beyond. A strong Jewish future requires strong leadership."

Leslie Wexner

This core philosophy inspired Leslie Wexner to establish The Wexner Foundation in 1985. Because of his interest in excellence, the Foundation's founder sought the counsel of an esteemed group of scholars and institution builders. Dr. Jonathan Woocher, the preeminent leader in Jewish education in North America, was central in that cohort. The result of those early visionary conversations is an ever-expanding network of outstanding professional and volunteer Jewish leaders in North America. By focusing on a selection process that valued academic excellence, meaningful leadership experience, and emotional intelligence, The Wexner Foundation set out to build a cadre of leaders prepared for the challenges of contemporary Jewish life.

Jon brought a unique perspective to these conversations. He was a gifted scholar-practitioner willing to step out of the comforts of the academy. But he had within him the heart of an activist. His activism, his professional practice, was always based on deep knowledge and an ever-probing mind. There were few of his ilk in this respect, who left the university but never left scholarship after becoming a Jewish communal practitioner. And we at The Wexner Foundation were increasingly drawn to the model of the boundary-crossing leader, who brought special gifts from other domains. His work demonstrated the possibility of the Foundation's emerging vision of what it meant to exercise Jewish leadership for a changing Jewish future.

Jon also had a deep appreciation for the increasing number of Jews in our community who remained committed to Judaism without a primary affiliation to religious life and its institutions. Beyond this, he made the point that these individuals were not, as we might have once expressed it, "bad Jews"! This critical theme was one that would shape much of his thinking about Jewish identity in the decades that followed. As he saw it, Jewish identity takes many forms and cannot defined only in relationship to religion. This validation of secular Jewish identity in North America was no small feat. At a time when Judaism had been branded as a religion, parallel to Catholicism and Protestantism, Jon's message to the new Federation/Zionist-centric American Jews was that they were no less Jewish and no less authentic. Jon thus broadened our understanding of ourselves and opened an entirely new, even historic, window into how we understood ourselves.

That Jews engaged in ways other than synagogue life could be viewed positively by the organized Jewish community might not seem surprising, irreverent, or radical today, but at the time of his writing, this idea dramatically undercut a foundational element of what it meant to be a

Jew in America. What made Jon stand out even more was his ability to express these views from within that Jewish community without judging and being judged. In the 1970s, he embraced more grassroots Jewish organizations, including the Havurah movement, and helped shape the Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education (from the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education [CAJE]). He also maintained his commitment to legacy organizations, including synagogues, summer camps, and schools. Jon also understood that an individual could express his or her Judaism through professional work, in the home, and through connection with history, family, community events, and Israel. Jon could say things very few could say because he himself was learned, engaged, and credible. He was, it is worth noting, a man of tremendous spirit and energy, as well as a remarkably natural teacher and speaker.

Jon Woocher was not only instrumental in helping to lay the groundwork for what became The Wexner Foundation, he also played a significant role as a member of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship selection committee for many years. He had a rare ability to articulate the right questions in the right way in order to discern a candidate's passion to become a Jewish educator. With care, Jon pushed candidates to articulate a compelling vision for the future. Of particular interest to Jon was the role of Jewish educator beyond the school or academy, serving as an ambassador for Jewish learning in the greater community. He realized early on the value of educator as public intellectual.

Jon had a strong following of philanthropists who believed in him, such as Harold Grinspoon and Diane Troderman, Joe Kanfer and his family, and Jerry and Paula Gottesman, among others. It was Paula Gottesman who captured a particular view of Jon Woocher that inspired many. When Paula sought his guidance on how best to provide affordable day school tuition for middle-class families, he encouraged her family and collaborators (fellow funders) to move forward with an idea that might have appeared less than perfect on paper. "There is no magic bullet," Jon said. "Just try it. If you see a need, do it."

As great a thinker as Jon was, as smart a problem solver as he tended to be, he always maintained that the thickest problems are best solved with multiple solutions. If a challenge presented itself for one family or one school or one institution, it was on the shoulders of the greater Jewish community to consider it, tackle it, and solve it because rarely was it an isolated quandary. He did not shy away from taking on the big questions. Indeed, he was drawn to them and was predictably passionate about collaborative efforts to improve Jewish educational opportunities for all learners and educators in all places and stages. He wanted to transform the system to make every Jewish school setting more satisfying, all while acknowledging how complex such a change would be.

Some of Jon's own views about exercising leadership are built in to the DNA of the Wexner leadership initiatives. Jewish leaders should integrate reflective practice into their professional routine. They should learn to be appropriately self-critical and open, as well as push themselves to innovate, experiment, and act. Without these behaviors, revising the cultural norms around Jewish learning cannot happen. Given his understanding of good practice, it makes sense that Jon was always close to our Foundation. We sought out his wisdom, and he turned to us for opinions, for partnership, and to try out visionary ideas in the field of Jewish education. He was on our faculty for many years and taught a generation of Wexner Fellows to be unrelenting in asking great questions about and then solving even the most daunting challenges in Jewish life. He was determined in his advocacy of education as a cornerstone of Jewish survival. His clarity on this point was inspiring and appropriately goading.

Perhaps most of all, Jon was a lifelong learner

himself and a dogged researcher, forever mulling over the next idea. In his later years, he spoke about the centrality of how people learn, noting that we live in a fast-paced world and that the field of Jewish education would need to pivot and reinvent how content is delivered. Jon never backed away from rethinking ideas or reinventing organizational behaviors.

We so appreciated his counsel, but even more, his friendship. Our friend Jon lived what he believed. He left an important legacy to the Jewish education field writ large, and his thinking is woven permanently into the blueprint of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship, whose Fellows have achieved influential positions in Jewish life. He championed Jewish education within our Foundation, bringing Jewish education more into the mainstream of deliberations, funding, and priorities for the Foundation and beyond. His advocacy was particularly effective because he brought credibility as a scholar and analyst of Jewish organizational life. It is not a stretch to say that Jon's influence on the Foundation was to give the whole Jewish education portfolio of our work the credibility and respect it deserved, particularly at a time when synagogues and federations were still largely dominant. Jon brought Jewish learning and Jewish schools to the front of our minds and made sure these topics stayed at the forefront of all our work.

Jon was a role model and an inspiration for many of our earliest fellows who, like Jon, are always trying to be better, striving for innovative solutions, and aiming for new ways of engagement. They will be ever motivated by Jon's determination to accept nothing less than excellence in Jewish education.

4

Jewish Sensibilities as a Powerful Framework

Joseph Kanfer and Rabbi Lee Moore

In the four years that Dr. Jonathan Woocher served as the president of Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah, he warmly embraced and significantly developed our foray into the power of Jewish sensibilities as a framework for describing and inculcating Jewishness. Vanessa Ochs (2006) originally articulated a code of sensibilities to describe Jewish perspectives, as distinct from and in conversation with *halakha*, on health-care issues. Years later, the Foundation experimented with creating its own tools—to test the framework and observe it in action.

Ochs describes the sensibilities as cultural memes that "form a set of intuited guidelines," representing "a world view that [American Jews] have inherited and encountered—in both life and literature—which shapes how they see themselves, how they understand themselves as moral agents in the world, and how they interact with others" (2006). Sensibilities may change and get redefined over time, given socioeconomic shifts and other historical changes (Weiss, 2006).

The Foundation found Ochs' sensibilities construct to be quite useful. The categories enable a description of Jewishness without resorting solely to religious observance and also without negating it. The personal relevance embedded in the concepts supports the search for meaning that many now seek in their exploration of Jewish traditions. The terms themselves provide a vocabulary of "gateway concepts" that can inspire the learned and the less-Jewishly educated alike to easily and quickly engage in conversation.

As we explored the framework, a question repeatedly came up: Why not use the term "values"? As Woocher and Moore (in press) describe, the preference for "sensibilities" pushes the conversation about Jewishness and Jewish education toward language that implies the importance of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral realms.[6] Take, for example, a sensibility one might call *Shevirah* (brokenness), or embracing the imperfection of being human. A person who embodies this sensibility may carry ideas inspired by, for example, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, who reportedly said, "There is nothing so whole as a broken heart." They may engage in behaviors that acknowledge loss and guide them through a grieving process, as when losing a loved one. They may carry a felt sense that although life and what we hold precious can sometimes shatter like the tablets Moses broke, we can still choose to carry the broken parts along with the whole as the Israelites carried both the broken tablets and the whole in the traveling sanctuary. This attitude can then expand one's emotional capacities for empathy and for accepting life's struggles. In one fell swoop, a "sensibility" conveys all of these possible manifestations—cognitive, affective, and behavioral—making it both a flexible and a resilient construct.

THE AFFECTIVE EMERGES AS CENTRAL GLUE FOR SOCIAL TRANSMISSION

As time has gone on and we have observed sensibilities in action, one of these realms has emerged as possibly more important than the others: the affective. In fact, its centrality may be something we have been attempting to articulate for years.

In her response to Ochs' initial essay, Nancy Fuchs Kreimer (2006) notes that to be effective, any system that attempts to describe the power of a Jewish framework must "remain in serious dialogue with science and the culture of our time."

[6] Jon eventually added the concept of the "axial" realm, referring to the role of values when they are at the core of Jewishness, central and articulated.

She writes that

> the plausibility of our deep metaphors is related to our ability to enter into a critical conversation with the human sciences which have always implicitly, and more recently explicitly, offered their own metaphors and visions of the good life.

In this vein and under Jon's leadership, our foundation has also asked what we might learn particularly from behavioral sciences. What motivations cause people to choose the lives they do? How do cultural elements inform those choices?

Behavioral sciences of the past decade have pointed us toward the often-overlooked importance of the affective realm. Research by Jonathan Haidt (2012) and others has shown ways in which, although it may seem counterintuitive to our scientific, rationalist mind-sets, emotional factors have much more to do with how we make our decisions and inhabit our lives than do cognitive components. Haidt demonstrated the ways by which people their make moral decisions, first with their "gut," developing only later strategic reasoning to make sense of the direction to which their emotional intuitions took them. In *The Righteous Mind*, Haidt (2012) posits that emotions are not random firings of reactivity; they are instead a "kind of information processing" (p. 45) that leads toward sense-making and ultimately toward choice making.

If intuitions are essential to the decision-making process, how might we discuss and understand how they function precisely? How do those intuitions get formed? This type of inner knowledge that can feel so personal and seem to emerge from deep within may nevertheless be culturally constructed or, at least, culturally shaped. Might this be the same terrain Ochs suggested when she described sensibilities as "a set of intuited guidelines"? Perhaps the kind of feelings that enable certain thoughts and not others to dominate the emotional landscape—which then guide us toward particular ways of responding to a situation—are not solely forged inside of us as individuals but rather collectively shaped, transmitted, and cultivated.

Beyond a basic acknowledgement that the affective realm is important, there is much work to do in understanding how to use that awareness in crafting educational and immersive experiences. Successful Jewish educators have mastered some basics, for example, how to help people *feel* welcome at a program or service and how to nurture a *sense* of belonging. These are each important, and yet still there are other Jewish "feelings" that are equally so: How might people *feel* that divergent opinions are more valuable than threatening (sensibility: *Elu v'Elu*)? How can people feel comfort with taking a bold step forward, even in the face of uncertainty (sensibility: *Nachshon/Na'aseh v'Nishmah*)? How can we *feel*—in our bones—that every person deserves basic decency and basic human rights because we all come from the same divine source (sensibility: *b'Tzelem Elohim*)? If we approach each of these sensibilities primarily as "ideas" to be transmitted, we risk a shallow engagement with them. If educators want experiences to inspire certain types of behavioral responses, we must engage participants emotionally to ensure that the experiences stick. If emotions do not follow to support these lofty ideas, as soon as things get difficult, "values" risk being relegated to empty platitudes, instead of being lived and breathed. Unless those who choose a Jewish life can embrace and embody these feelings, nurture them, and find ways to transmit them, the tradition may lose the powerful glue that only the affective provides.

IMPLICATIONS

To the degree that the sensibilities framework offers a language for navigating the internal world and connecting the internal to an external sense of belonging, it can help soften the divide between the drive for personal relevancy in

Jewish traditions and the drive for communal sensemaking around ethics and collectively held notions of Jewishness. What "makes me Jewish" beyond parentage or choice is connected to powerful cultural ideas that I internalize, whether because I was raised that way or because I found them later in life, and they resonated as a good way to live.

If we want to think and speak more concretely about those inner landscapes that are not so easy to think and speak about, the sensibilities give us a starting point. Yet they are only a starting point, and many questions remain. How are sensibilities transmitted from person to person, or learned? Is there a way to teach them, beyond demonstrating them through role modeling? Must that transmission happen in early childhood to be sticky? In an era where Jewish social density has waned, does that mean transmission of sensibilities wanes as well? What does educating for feelings look like when we expand the realm of emotions beyond primary feelings, such as anger, sadness, joy, gratitude, fear, and yearning into more culturally constructed emotions, such as levels of comfort with confrontation, gut-reactions to violations of human rights, or capacities for handling ambiguity in the face of life changes? To what degree might more cognitive elements of the tradition, such as narratives from Jewish literature and Jewish history, play a role in augmenting transmission of sensibilities?

Ochs argues that conscious knowledge of sensibilities is not the prime factor for their transmission from one generation to another and that such transmission is nonsystematic and helter-skelter yet still effective. What if the keys to understanding transmission and stickiness lie not in how consciously sensibilities are articulated but rather in a more subtle emotional factor that we have yet to identify and work with? What if we were able to better understand how the affective system functions vis-á-vis cultural norms and possibilities? What might we then be able to learn and integrate into educational environments?

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5

Prescribing Jewish Sensibilities Off-Label

Rabbi Vanessa Ochs, PhD

Before me on my desk is a deck of thirty gray cards, held together by a thick, black rubber band printed with the words, "Jewish Sensibility Cards." Turn over the "SHEVIRAH/ brokenness" card, and you must answer, "What imperfection do you struggle to embrace in yourself?" It explains, "The Jewish approach makes room for both the joys and sorrows of life, and acknowledges that we are shaped by our struggles and losses as much by as our victories. In order to be whole, one must also experience brokenness." Were I not already familiar with the term Shevirah, and had I not heard sermons and read fiction and poetry about ways Jews shift between joy and sorrow, I suspect I might quickly forget the definition as well as what I had just learned about the relationship between Judaism and imperfection. I would probably remember, given my dislike for being asked to share intimate matters in public, that the activity made me uncomfortable.

It is strange to see my 2003 writing on Jewish sensibilities (Ochs, 2003, 2006)[7] morphed and expanded into a deck of cards with elaborate supplementary online resources. This is not like seeing my work referenced in scholarship or hearing my sister tell me her rabbi mentioned my book or article in a sermon. A deck of cards? There is something off, which I eventually discern. It's not the aura of trivialization playing cards suggest. It's using a framework of Jewish sensibilities in a way I think of as "off-label." Pharmacists use the term to refer to drugs being prescribed in a manner not yet tested by the FDA. For instance, anti-seizure drugs have been used off-label to treat depression, and antidepressants to treat nerve pain. When the benefits of using the off-label drug are still anecdotal, doctors and patients are warned to exercise caution until evidence-based scientific research has been done. The drug may work, but perhaps not—it might be useless, be no better than a placebo, or it might cause undesirable side effects.

Using Jewish sensibilities as pedagogy, to teach Jews how to be Jewish, is a possibility I had neither intended nor anticipated.

Sponsored by Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah (LKFLT), the cards were prepared before Jonathan Woocher arrived in 2013 to serve as the Foundation's president. Rabbi Lee Moore and Joe Kanfer had been brainstorming new strategies for transmitting Jewish wisdom, and, as I have been told, they were inspired by my writing on Jewish sensibilities. When Woocher joined the Foundation, he affirmed the work that Moore and Kanfer had already begun and pushed it forward, bringing to it his incisive intellect, a life of experience in Jewish education, and talent for giving shape to new ideas that were not obvious. That he is no longer with us means that the Jewish sensibility enterprise—one that has taken off in all kinds of directions—goes forward without his expertise, his capacity for envisioning future paradigms, and his ability to think out implications that lie down the road. And that is a real loss, acutely felt. His absence beckons stepping up, imagining, "What would Jon say?"

Writing this essay in Woocher's memory is my effort to step up, to move toward further addressing his important work on Jewish sensibilities.

I initially used the term "Jewish sensibilities" for the journal then called Sh'ma when I posited the existence of "particularly Jewish ways of thinking about what it means to be human, ways that guide and orient a person's actions and choices" (Ochs, 2003). It is unlikely that I would have developed

[7] In both contexts, several scholars engaged with the idea of Jewish sensibilities after my initial presentation.

such a theme without having read Woocher's 1986 book, *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews*. In it, he described practices—civil Jewish rituals—that I had not yet learned to notice or value. It was not an issue to me that these rituals—"missions" to Israel, fund-raising events, retreats, and major conferences—were relevant mostly to Jews active within Federation Judaism, a small sector of the Jewish population that has grown less central over the years. What mattered was Woocher's claim: that even while they were engaging in seemingly secular activities, American Jews were acting in ways they thought of as being Jewish, ways that intensified their experience of being Jews. Studying with Rabbi Yitz Greenberg at the Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL) at the time, it was easy enough for me to see myriad contexts, beyond the clearly religious, in which Jews were acting "Jewishly," so to speak.

In writing this initial piece, I enumerated key ways that American Jews predictably behaved, reasoned, and negotiated their Jewishness within their own lives and with other people. I was not offering techniques or a curriculum for raising wiser or more ethical Jewish children, or proposing a better method for transmitting Judaism in schools or synagogues. I was not positing an educational program for the socialization of Jews.

The sensibilities I selected and to which I gave fairly traditional names were based upon my experience living as a Jew among Jews of many sorts my whole life and upon years of both casual and deliberate ethnographic observations at multiple sites, primarily in America. Back then, I picked ten key sensibilities; were I starting from scratch now, in a world that feels as if it has shifted dramatically, I might choose different ones. Surely I would add more, including some of the very ones that have been wisely included in the cards. With the wisdom of hindsight, I now notice that the sensibilities I selected were all of a positive nature: they spoke to living well, with harmony, respect, and responsibility for others, both Jews and non-Jews. I neglected at the time to evaluate the potential negative aspects of the sensibilities I selected.[8] Further, I did not identify any sensibilities of a neutral or negative nature, something I would certainly do now.

The project came about when I was invited to speak about Jews and Judaism to the non-Jewish hospital chaplains and medical students I taught at the University of Virginia, who wanted insight into the Jewish patients and families they occasionally encountered in the hospital setting. My inviters believed that learning about Jewish law would satisfy the chaplains and medical students, as well as give them information they needed to know to improve their cultural sensitivity. Jewish law was not what they needed to know, I told them, as the majority of their patients at the Virginia hospital neither knew Jewish law nor concerned themselves with it. (And if they did have a question about Jewish law, they would have contacted their own rabbi.) Still, I had detected that Jews—even the many who say, "I am not religious, but I still like to think of myself as a good Jew"—had cultural competencies they were drawing upon and displaying in health-care situations.[9] It was that information that I wanted to share because I believed that it might make their health care more compassionate and efficacious.

I began with one situation I had observed over and again. Jewish patients—religious and secular—tended to seek out second opinions from specialists, ones the older generation sometimes still calls "big men in the field." This practice

[8] For example, in the May 2017 volume of Sh'ma Now, Susan Berrin gave me the opportunity to look back at the sensibility called Havdil [Distinctions]. While there is much good to say about distinction making, it also has a destructive potential, especially when making distinctions leads to discrimination and delegitimization.

[9] When anthropologist Michal Kravel-Tovi writes about converts to Judaism in Israel, she notes that they struggle to feel like bona fide Jews because of an absence of "the appropriate dispositions and codes of conduct over the course of one's upbringing, through the accumulation of formative routinized experiences in primary areas of socialization" (2017).

of feeling morally bound to hold off taking the first medical advice one gets until one has gotten a second opinion from someone who is highly regarded seemed linked to what I called the sensibility of *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life). This sensibility is related to Jewish laws about which instances require one to seek medical help for a sick person. It is related to Jewish narratives and traditions about the importance of learning and respect for those who are experts in their fields. But while there are textual sources one could point to, I knew that when diverse Jews in my community worked their connections to get to a top doctor, they were not turning to the Torah, Talmud, or even to our wise doctor-scholar, Maimonides. They were engaging in a habit of being, a "habitus" as Bourdieu (1980, Chapter Two) would call it—that is, a practice based on a lifetime of watching people act, hearing them gossip and analyze, seeing who is rewarded with praise or criticized and shamed. This is a messy kind of interactive learning that is usually picked up over a lifetime in the context of family and communal life. Such intuited guidelines about "what we do" are dipped into as a source of wisdom without much conscious thought; they seem to be so obvious that they feel "natural."

In the course of reflecting upon diverse Jews I knew who were wrestling with a range of complex decisions in the context of health care, I soon realized that individual sensibilities could be in conflict. Here is an example: On one hand, a family might want to keep their severely ill relative alive (one aspect of the *pikuach nefesh* sensibility). On the other hand, in a persistent vegetative state, his or her human dignity (another sensibility, which I have referred to as *tzelem elohim*) is potentially being disregarded. Once I observed that two or more sensibilities could rub up against each other, I decided that Jews themselves—and not just those who want to make better sense of us—could find that knowing about the most pervasive sensibilities could help in navigating through difficult challenges, not just in health care but beyond.

In one respect, Woocher and his colleagues saw sensibilities as I did. When he last described the sensibilities in his writing, Woocher did so with these words: "Sensibilities represent memes emanating from Jewish tradition and experience that serve as lenses through which individuals perceive and respond to life situations (*eilu v'eilu*—seeing two sides of an issue; *lech lecha*—taking risks; *yisrael*—questioning authority)."[10] I came to understand what they had in mind after seeing, in conjunction with a conference call with Moore and Woocher, a draft of an article they were preparing for publication (now titled, "Jewish Sensibilities: Toward a New Language for Jewish Educational Goal-Setting," 2016) and then attending a consultation on modes of transmitting Jewish wisdom (convened in New York City by LKFLT in October of 2016). They were proposing that Jewish sensibilities could be reframed as a pedagogic tool, one used to promote Jewish ideal behaviors. As they saw it, if one was trained in sensibilities, one could aspire to embrace them with regularity. If the learning took hold, one who had become especially fluent might even be able to transmit them in a more natural, unsystematic (i.e., mimetic) fashion to one's children. I see why this vision is compelling, especially when, in an age of increasing intermarriage, many Jews are now growing up with only one Jewish parent, one set of Jewish relatives, few engagements with Jewish institutions, and/or a Jewish educational experience limited to ten days on a Birthright trip to Israel.

[10] I did not know what a "meme" was until then; I learned that it is a term popularized by Richard Dawkins in 1976. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as "an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture."

Can Jewish sensibilities actually be taught as a curriculum? That is my biggest question—can one formally learn what one usually learns through living? The organization Hillel[11] has fashioned a curriculum as an enhancement to the deck of Jewish Sensibility cards, and I hear that college campus Hillel educators are being trained as facilitators. As far as I know, there has not yet been a formal assessment of the impact of Hillel's adaptation of the approach.

Expanding the curricular approach, *Sh'ma*, (linked to LKFLT and now incorporated within the online Forward) has been renamed *Sh'ma Now: A Journal of Jewish Sensibilities*. Each month, it features a different Jewish sensibility (from among those articulated by LKFLT), defined as "approaches to living drawn from Jewish wisdom." I have been reading the journal for years and writing for it too; it has been a congenial place to publish my new and sometimes audacious reflections on Jewish life and experience. Though *Sh'ma* was the place I first tested out my ideas about Jewish sensibilities and discovered that they could provoke a hearty debate, I am now bemused: How did *Sh'ma* itself get into the "Jewish sensibility business"? Given the new focus, framing the sensibilities as ideals, I wonder who the audience is, beyond those intent on leading Jewishly virtuous lives? As a pedagogic aid, the new *Sh'ma* offers a section called "Consider and Converse." It provides summaries of the short articles and reflective questions meant for private or group discussion over the Sabbath table or at a coffee shop to "help one to integrate the ideas in these articles [*about the sensibility in question*] with one's own sense of self" (*Sh'ma now*, 2017).[12] I know the journal has recently assessed its new approach, and I am curious to see if there are regular readers who are engaged by the articles or use the study guide.

The last writing I read by Woocher was his reflection called, "Transmitting and Applying Jewish Wisdom: Seven Challenges" (2016), which he quickly penned after the October, 2016, conversation in New York I mentioned above, in which experts, including myself, were invited to compare and contrast three different "New Frameworks for Transmitting Jewish Wisdom." They included values, *mussar* (traditional ethical traits), and sensibilities. The reflection, which addressed all three frameworks as they were currently being deployed, focused on "conceptual and practical challenges." In his piece, Woocher (2016) linked two challenges posed by Jewish sensibilities. He called the first "balancing accessibility with depth," noting the following:

> A variety of tools and activities have been ... designed to make the initial encounter with Jewish wisdom engaging and fun. . . . The challenge is to make sure that the encounter with Jewish wisdom doesn't end with a deck of cards (2016).

It would, he wrote, take skilled educators to move from engaging learners with an accessible tool to leading them "deeper into the complex body of wisdom that . . . tools can only hint at." Woocher's second challenge entailed "identifying and employing educational approaches that move learners from exposure to internalization to inspired action" (2016). Noting how many new Jewish initiatives relied on making Judaism personally meaningful, he called for systematic analysis of whether or not such study actually led to action within personal and communal contexts.

Woocher was enthusiastic about Jewish sensibilities; to his great credit, he also expressed concern about their efficacy when used "off-label." I trust that Jewish educators, those who follow

[11] In cooperation with LKFLT, but with no input on my part.
[12] This issue of Anavah, Humility, was dedicated to Woocher, who embodied this trait.

in Woocher's footsteps, will find productive ways of continuing to engage with Jewish sensibilities, both on- and off-label, as a resource in exploring Jewish wisdom and enabling multiple forms of that wisdom to flourish.

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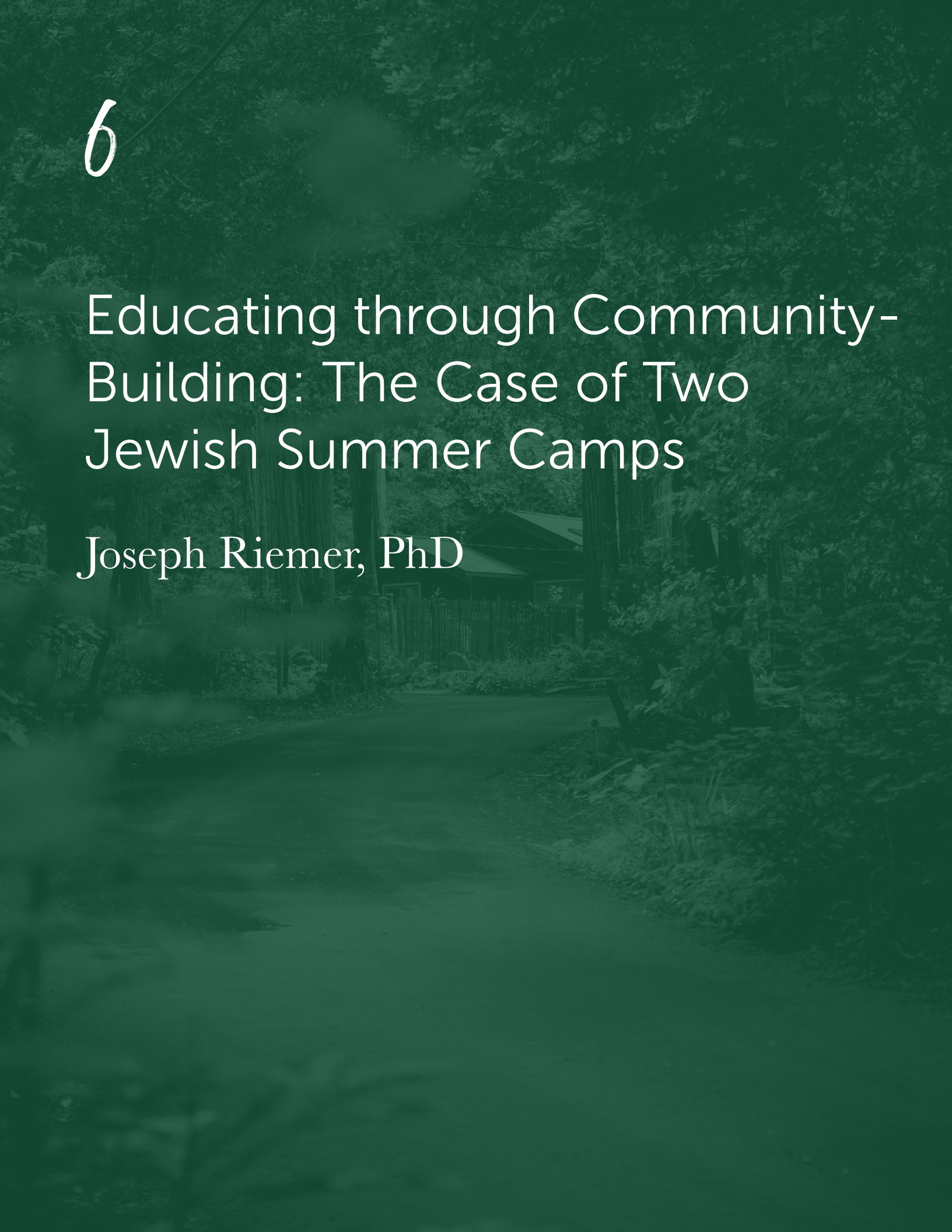

6

Educating through Community-Building: The Case of Two Jewish Summer Camps

Joseph Riemer, PhD

I met Jonathan Woocher in 1966 when we were both counselors in the oldest division at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires. That began a close relationship that lasted for decades. In this essay, I pay tribute to our relationship by returning to our meeting point and to the influence of his work on my research on Jewish learning at Jewish residential camps.

In 1994, Jon published a monograph, "Toward a 'Unified Field Theory' of Jewish Continuity," that has directed my thinking about the contexts of Jewish learning and identity development. Jon was pointing to the limits of thinking about identity development as a process that unfolded within the mind of individuals.

> If Jewish identity is the cart we wish to move along the path of growth, Jewish community is the horse that will pull that cart. Focusing on individual identity solely at the programmatic level, in isolation from the larger task of community and culture-building, is likely to prove frustrating. Community provides the context and culture for Jewish identity. (1994, p. 12)
>
> For education to be maximally effective, there must be a living Jewish community in which what is being taught and learned is already visible and valued. (1994, p. 25)

When we think of the goal of Jewish education as strengthening the individual's Jewish identity, we miss a key link between community and identity. "Identity" does not reside as much in the heads of individuals as in the shared life of a vibrant Jewish community. That is where Jews can feel the actuality of their Judaism and where the viability of living a Jewish life is established. And that is where, Woocher contends, researchers need to focus attention, to illuminate the ways that young American Jews learn to claim Judaism as their own.

I am not alone among researchers (Cohen & Kress, 2010; Lorge and Zola, 2006; Prell, 2006; Rothenberg, 2016; Sales and Saxe, 2004) in seeing residential Jewish camps as sites for studying the link between community-building and educating Jewish youth. Jewish camps build the kinds of vibrant communities where campers and staff can experience themselves as part of a living Jewish whole and where Jewish moments, such as Shabbat, can be joyously celebrated.

But how do we describe this link between community-building and educating youth? Sales and Saxe (2004) exemplify the socialization approach, which stresses that camp staff create a Jewish world that campers can inhabit and then internalize. In their view, if the camp works well and provides campers with the right Jewish inputs, they will be enticed to enjoy these Jewish activities, identify with their counselors, and build strong relationships with their peers. Being with their friends allows them to love being part of a Jewish community and form attachments that may last a lifetime.

While not disputing that these socialization processes take place at Jewish camps, I have argued (Reimer, 2007, 2012) that this model misses a crucial element. At dynamic Jewish camps, staff do more than invite campers into the camp's established Jewish life. These staff invite their older campers to learn how to make camp Judaism happen and, on occasion, to become active participants in extending the boundaries of that Jewish life. It is that invitation to become actively involved in an evolving camp kind of Judaism that older campers find most engaging.

What do I mean by older campers becoming involved in an evolving camp Judaism? Let me offer two examples from a recent study I completed on how Shabbat is celebrated at three residential Jewish camps (Reimer, in preparation). The first comes from Camp Ramah in Wisconsin (hereafter, Ramah), and the second comes from URJ Eisner Camp (hereafter, Eisner) in Western Massachusetts. Both are veteran movement camps

with a long history of dynamic Jewish celebration in the spirit of their respective denominations (Conservative and Reform, respectively). Both cases illustrate how the staff invite their teen campers to become active participants in co-leading and co-creating Shabbat celebrations.

Shabbat at Ramah is observed in a traditional manner, following the *halacha* of the Conservative movement. Ramah relies on Shabbat singing without instruments or amplification, at the all-camp Kabbalat Shabbat and on the other occasions when staff and campers gather to sing Shabbat songs. One such occasion is the *seudah shlishit* (third meal) on late Shabbat afternoons. One visit, in 2013, I was introduced to the traditional singing that had grown up around *seudah shlishit*. This moment attracted many of the teen campers from the oldest division. At least half the campers from that division voluntarily joined in this staff-led intense Hebrew spiritual singing, at a time when most of the younger campers were running free outside enjoying the last rays of sun.

When I returned in 2016, the number of older campers singing at *seudah shlishit* had dramatically dropped. When I asked why, staff told me the campers had switched their singing allegiance to the *mishmar*, the unit's evening activity, that takes place on late Thursday night. When a year later I attended *mishmar*, I discovered that at 10 PM, more than half of the campers from the oldest divisions regularly sang together intensely spiritual Hebrew songs. *Mishmar* is coordinated by one staff member, but the campers give this event its energy. The staff member told me of a week when, due to a storm, camp had lost its electricity, and the campers still insisted that *mishmar* had to go on.

This switch in allegiance caught my attention. What I witnessed in 2013 at the *seudah shlishit* fit perfectly with the socialization model. That was an occasion begun by staff for staff, and the staff were delighted when more campers decided to join them—but the format remained staff-controlled. *Mishmar* was also first begun by staff, but by 2017, I observed, it was driven by camper passion. This was confirmed for me the next night. Walking out of the dining hall after the Shabbat meal, I came across two circles of campers standing on the dark lawn and singing the same songs I had heard at *mishmar*. When I asked a counselor what I was hearing, he told me that this group on their own had begun this practice two summers earlier. Each Shabbat after dinner, they organize themselves by gender into two circles of song. They sing soulfully for about 10 minutes, a mini-*mishmar* imported by campers into their *erev* (evening) Shabbat routine.

I find this progression telling. It starts with staff modeling for campers a spiritually intense Shabbat singing that the campers choose to join. But over time, the campers want to make the singing their own. They ask a staff member to coordinate the *mishmar*, invest it with their adolescent energy, and suddenly *mishmar* becomes cool. Then, some campers take the initiative to begin the camper-led Shabbat singing circles. This, I believe, is what community-building looks like when it is most educative: Campers take what they have been given and make it their own. By doing so, I hypothesize, they learn how to ritually innovate within the realm of this camp's traditional Shabbat celebration.

Erev Shabbat at Eisner has a different sound and feel than at Ramah. In the spirit of the Reform movement, Eisner celebrates Shabbat with instruments and amplified music. Their *erev* Shabbat celebration entails an all-camp Shabbat meal, *tefillah*, and both song and dance sessions. I was drawn to the song and dance sessions, where the staff assigned the oldest unit, Olim, special leadership responsibilities, which I will highlight.

Eisner's song session takes place in a large social hall. After the camp *tefillah*, the younger campers have a snack break, and the Olim campers and staff go up to the gym to change into gym clothes. They hold a kind of pep rally and line up in front

of the social hall to high-five everyone else as they enter the song session. The Olim are the last to enter the social hall. The song leaders are already set up on their platform, and the Olim place themselves squarely in front of that platform. The Olim campers throw themselves into the music; tightly bunched together, they jump up and down to the music and sing along with intensity. They move as a unit. They are priests on the altar, devoted to the song session, ready to throw their whole bodies and souls into the music. This is a picture of teen rapture, a group giving itself up to sound and movement.

After song session ends, the Olim campers change again. This time, the boys put on long skirts while the girls put on colorful boxer shorts. In these costumes, they rush down the hill to the dance session. The dance session is held outdoors and led by an Israeli dance instructor standing on another platform. Prerecorded dance music plays throughout the session. All the participating campers and staff form lines for line dancing. The costumed Olim campers stand in the front row, centrally placed. They seem to know all the dance steps. Everyone in Olim dances every dance. After each dance, another younger unit is sent back to their cabins. By the end, it is just Olim and the staff dancing.

This change of costumes seemed most unusual to me. Like everyone else, the Olim campers begin Shabbat wearing white shirts and blouses to the meal and *tefillah* (prayer). Then they change into gym clothes to lead the song session. Finally, they cross-dress for the dance session: boys donning long skirts and girls the colorful boxer shorts. Curious to learn more, I spoke with the staff and discovered that this was originally a practice for the oldest boys where each *erev* Shabbat, they would don these long skirts for the dance session. At the end of the camp season, they would put their names on their skirt and pass this skirt on to a selected boy from the next younger unit who would inherit this skirt for the next season. It mattered who had worn the skirt previously. One senior staff member told me how significant it was for him that he wore the skirt that his older brother had worn and that his younger brother wore several years later. Where there are no family relations, boys carefully hand on this skirt to a boy they select to be the next in line. They enact a *masoret*, a handing down of this camp tradition from one "generation" to the next.

For years, the girls watched the boys enact this ritual but did nothing themselves. Then, in 2015, the girls decided to act. They selected colorful boxer shorts as their equivalent to the skirts, identifying those shorts as male garments. Each girl got herself a pair and wore that pair each *erev* Shabbat on the same schedule as the boys. Then at the end of the season, they put their names on their shorts and carefully selected a younger girl to receive their shorts. By 2017, these shorts were being worn by a third "generation" of Olim girls.

The skirts and shorts provide a clear example of ritual innovation (Ochs, 2007). No one could tell me why the ritual involves this cross-dressing or why these garments are worn only for the dance session. But everyone could tell me how significant this particular ritual practice is for them. It is unthinkable that they would not don these garments. That would be a violation of the ritual order. And once perceived as sacred, the ritual donning of these garments becomes for these campers and staff an essential part of their enacting Shabbat at camp.

What I see at Eisner are two different instances of the staff positioning the older campers to take a leading role. During the song session, that leadership is simpler. What the Olim campers are asked to do is to throw themselves into the music and be "full in" with their voices and body movements. Their role is to collectively model that devotion to the younger campers, who one day will also stand in their place. But with the dance session, something more complex is happening, for here each camper dons a ritual item—skirt or shorts—that was directly passed down and

that they will in turn pass down to a next group of campers. That they place their own names on these garments and select someone younger to receive their garment signifies a personal stake in the Shabbat ritual. For the first time, they have included their names among those responsible for keeping the Shabbat celebration alive at camp. And that the girls were ready to don the shorts as their ritual garments tells me that these campers feel empowered to innovate when that innovation allows them to claim this Shabbat practice as their own.

I bring these two cases to make a larger point. When Woocher argues that "there must be a living Jewish community in which what is being taught and learned is already visible" (1994, p. 25), we might think it is enough that the youth see those older than them enacting that community. I believe that is not enough, that witnessing others living a vibrant Jewish life is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. For meaningful Jewish education, what is also needed—especially during the adolescent years—is becoming actively involved in building and extending that Jewish community. Education entails more than receiving rich inputs. It also involves active engagement with a cultural system and learning how to innovate within its traditional patterns. The innovations—such as *mishmar* singing at Ramah or costume changing at Eisner—might seem like minor activities. But I believe they are significant in opening up the teens to becoming partners in making camp Judaism happen and in feeling joy and pride in their anticipating becoming dynamic leaders during their college years and even beyond.

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7

From Thriving to Striving: Jewish Education for a World of Uncertainty and Opportunity

Miriam Heller Stern, PhD

I was preparing to graduate from Brandeis University with an undergraduate double major in history and Near Eastern Judaic Studies, and a minor in what was then called Women's Studies. As I wondered how I might apply my academic interests to do meaningful work in the world, one of my mentors suggested that I needed to try to meet with someone named "Jonny Woocher." Jon generously made time for me; I recall how he encouraged me to take my love of history and connect the Jewish past to a living present and future. He was one of the first people to inspire me to dedicate my career to thinking expansively about Jewish educational history, policy, and practice.

Jon was a leading light and trailblazer in framing and reframing the purpose and aims of Jewish education. He always posited ideas in creative and thoughtful response to the evolving needs of Jewish learners in North America. He challenged the field to think beyond the "survival" paradigm of Jewish education and align educational practice with the value proposition of living a Jewish life (Woocher, 2012, 2015). Surely in part because of Woocher's influence, recent thought leadership has emphasized "thriving" as an aim of Jewish education, drawing upon research in positive psychology (Bryfman, 2016; Robinson, 2018). This essay proposes that our particular moment in American and world history demands that Jewish education build upon our instinct to survive and our personal need to thrive, and become a tool for striving for a stronger society, as the world changes rapidly before our eyes.

THE EVOLUTION OF AIMS IN AMERICAN JEWISH EDUCATION

Organized public education in America has historically been used as a tool for responding to changes in society. In the mid-19th century, a group of evangelists for "common education" launched a crusade to create schools for all, in the hopes of stabilizing a young upstart nation of colonies who were tall on freedoms and short on order. Public schools were founded in the age of industrialization, as American society shifted from an agrarian system of farms to one of factories and mass production; it was an age of urbanization, as the bucolic life of American towns gave way to burgeoning city centers; it was an age of immigration, as millions of immigrants streamed across the Atlantic from Europe, as waves of industrialization, oppression, and dreams of opportunity pushed them across the sea. In the midst of this rapid change and growth, we had a Civil War, followed by Reconstruction. Compulsory education and child labor laws followed. Literacy was seen as a tool for creating a shared culture and a common heritage in a fragile society that needed an informed citizenry in order to survive as a democracy (Cremin, 1980; Kaestle, 1983).

Against this American landscape, Jewish educators continually attempted to define which genres of knowledge and experience were needed to ensure their desired combination of survival and integration of a rapidly assimilating population; Jews' great success on American shores was perceived to be a double-edged sword as Jewish distinctiveness waned. Rebecca Gratz launched her Sunday school in 1838 as a defense against the Christian missionaries who sought to save the souls of Jewish youth. In the early 20th century, a band of progressive survivalists composed of Dr. Samson Benderly and his disciples adapted the education technologies of their day in order to ensure the survival of Judaism. With a new tide of immigration and in the face of assimilation, Jewish education was positioned to withstand too much outside influence and ensure Jews' survival as a people. A century ago, pioneer progressive Jewish educational leader Alexander Dushkin (1918) characterized the dilemma of Jewish education this way:

> In this land the Jews are making a struggle for adjustment to their American environment. . . . How much of their cultural and religious

> heritage, how many of their folkways, how much of their social organization shall they preserve, in order to live complete lives in America? How shall they educate their children to as to make them heirs of their social heritage, and at the same time, insure their full adjustment as American citizens? (p. 1)

Cultural preservation remained a motivating force in Jewish curricula and education through the post-war era, as American Jews increasingly assimilated and settled into the patterns of suburban life. Jews enjoyed the same levels of civic and social participation as their white neighbors, and as a multicultural consciousness emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, the goal of Jewish cultural preservation among the Jewish elite resurged and continued.

But there was a cultural shift to come. By the 1990s, scholars of Jewish life were documenting a sharp rise in individualism in American Jewish practice. While Jewish educators and rabbis endeavored to preserve the canon and heritage, American Jews seemed more interested in preserving their individuality. *The Jew Within* by Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen (2000) dubbed this the age of the sovereign self, while sociologist Bethamie Horowitz (2000) highlighted the individual "connections and journeys" of Jews. Jewish commitments seemed to mirror American social trends: Americans "bowled alone" and worshipped their own self-defined "isms," and Jews were no different (Putnam, 2000; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996). This rise of autonomy, with its frequent opting out of Jewish institutional life, posed a crisis for Jewish policy makers and educators as articulated in *A Time to Act* (1991), prompting calls to make Jewish education more "compelling," "meaningful," and "relevant"—language that dominated the Jewish education policy discourse of the 2000s. The survivalist, preservationist agenda in Jewish institutional life was slowly recast in the positive and proactive terms of "continuity" and then "renaissance and renewal," to highlight the value of choosing Judaism in an age of abundant choice (Woocher, 2015).

These sociological trends were coupled with a progressive educational impulse to understand and address the individual needs of learners, as in Howard Gardner's (1983) *theory of multiple intelligences* and Carol Ann Tomlinson's (1995) *differentiated instruction*. Advocacy for individual choice, experiences, and differentiated instruction gave educational credence to a customized approach to Jewish learning that mirrored the sociological impulse of the day. Gradually, the old, collective "survival" paradigm seemed increasingly anachronistic within the culture of choice. Building on this evolution, which he had helped shape over the previous three decades, Woocher issued a new post-continuity call to action in his 2012 *Journal of Jewish Education* article and symposium, "Reinventing Jewish Education for the 21st Century":

> Jewish education in the 21st century needs a new paradigm (or set of paradigms) built around the idea of placing learners at the center of its thinking and asking how it can help these learners achieve a more meaningful, connected, and fulfilling life. If Jewish education can deploy the rich resources of Jewish tradition and contemporary Jewish life to help learners answer their authentic questions and experience the mix of joy purposefulness, wonder, invigoration, and peacefulness that most humans seek, then it can thrive. (p. 218)

In a retrospective on the continuity years, Woocher (2015) offered a further corrective to the continuity agenda of the 1990s: "Ultimately, this is what 'Jewish continuity' should have been about: equipping Jews—and others, if they so wish—with the motivation, ability, and opportunity to utilize Jewish teaching and practice to live better

lives and shape a better world."

STRIVING FOR A STRONGER SOCIETY

The world we face in 2018 and beyond is newly complicated and demands new perspective, coordination, effort, and grit if we are to contribute to its improvement. We are witnessing what is arguably as tumultuous an era as the pre-Civil War sea change that begged for the standardized institution of public schooling as an equalizer and stabilizing force.

The world is on fire, and underwater—threatened by gun violence, sexual harassment, radicalism, and terrorism. Our political discourse is beleaguered by deep distrust. Our modes of communication are fragile and abused, even while our technology is revolutionary. Studies chart the negative impact of social media tools on mental health, particularly in youth (Davey, 2016; Denizet-Louis, 2017). In an age of fracture and fragmentation, individual "thriving" is limited by the instability of the ecosystem. Against the current landscape, it is time for Jewish education to articulate and reassert a collective aspiration, not just to survive and thrive but also to strive: yearning and working, both individually and collectively, to build a stronger society.

Are we equipped as a Jewish community to heal the wounds that are festering both within our circles and in the world beyond? Many progressive Jews turn to tools of advocacy to advance a social justice agenda. Slogans are easy to repeat, but they often fall on deaf ears. We might use education as an essential tool, that is, as a quest for learning, an abiding curiosity, a commitment to ask genuine questions and search deeply for hidden answers, and the skills to weigh and discern information in a world of competing truths. Jewish communal leaders are not united in their politics, their definitions of the concept of justice, or their assumptions about how to achieve a better world. This is why a learning stance is essential. I submit that "striving" is not an outcome, but a stance: open to learning more, embracing the discomfort of disagreement, leaning into challenging conversations, listening with resilience, probing challenging texts or ideas, and discovering the other—all in service of deepening empathy and producing creative solutions to the problems of our day.

Our precious and ancient texts remind us of a long history of confronting the discord that is at the heart of the human experience, be it in the complicated intimate family dynamics of the matriarchs and patriarchs and their children or on the societal level of the Tower of Babel and the flood, or the Exodus, when we struggled to become a people with a purpose. Stories of human struggle and striving are part of our narratives of having been strangers, welcoming strangers, fearing strangers, and becoming ever more curious about what seems strange.

Educators often avoid argumentation as a pedagogic tool because they tend to lose in the conversation the opportunity to teach and are ill equipped to manage controversy. But Jewish education must boldly seize *machloket* (conflicting opinions) and unpack the challenges within. Today, the voices of advocacy are drowning out the voices of curiosity. We have more tools for communication than ever before in history, and yet, our ability to communicate with nuance and communicate outside our own echo chambers seems increasingly limited. Our wholeness as individuals will depend upon stabilizing the world around us; we will preserve our individuality only if we can learn to discuss and debate our differences.

How does this vision align with the social trend toward customization and curation of experiences around individual tastes? How do we invite people to step into the ring rather than retreating to their own corners? Recent research by social scientists Kelman, Belzer, Hassenfeld, Horwitz, and Williams (2016) studying post-baby boomer American Jews posits that their

"expression, description, and construction of self" happens in relationship to the other people in their lives; while they may yet be heirs to the autonomy prized by the generation before them, they construct their narratives in terms of the connections, comparisons, and conflicts that define their relationships and encounters with others. As the authors of this groundbreaking study conclude, "There is no self and thus no identity without other people." Our destinies are bound up with others; perhaps shared learning and inquiry can be an enterprise that binds us together with shared purpose.

This research suggests the possibility that with an intentional and inclusive set of methodologies, along with a well-articulated trove of shared values, language, and literature—all situated in an understanding of how modern Jews create and maintain social bonds—a newly imagined enterprise of Jewish learning may be a powerful tool to weave together community. A more detailed discussion of possible tools, methods, and content is a subject for another article, but as an illustration, I turn back to Woocher for one framework for defining a shared Jewish aspiration: the mind-set of Jewish sensibilities, which he adopted and adapted from Vanessa Ochs (2003). In a forthcoming essay, Moore and Woocher define these sensibilities as the "particularly Jewish ways of thinking about what it means to be human, ways that guide and orient a person's actions and choices." They suggest that these Jewish sensibilities are "mindsets through which the core activities of perceiving the world, processing those perceptions, and responding to them take place." The connection here between "ways of thinking" and "actions and choices" requires a Jewish education that aims to inform both thought and action, what our sages called *talmud* and *ma'aseh*, respectively.

Important among these sensibilities, and particularly germane to the present zeitgeist, are

> *"elu v'elu divrei elohim chayim"* (these [words] and these [words] are the words of a living God), meaning that differing ideas can co-exist, and Shabbat as a time to rest from the hard toils of the week's works of creation and problem-solving, and *teshuvah* as a charge to "take responsibility for your actions." Humans often fail to live up to our best selves, so we must learn from our mistakes. Change is always possible.

The list is dynamic, sourced from texts and tradition, and also expressed through folklore, humor, and our lives as they are lived. As American education reformer Deborah Meier famously argued in *The Power of Their Ideas* (1995), an essential outcome of education must be the development of the "habits of mind" that enable us to learn, to challenge and refine ideas, and to build respectful, caring communities. I want to suggest that our Jewish sensibilities, or habits of mind, can uplift our public discourse, help us pause and reflect, hold values in tension, strengthen our human bonds, and refortify our communities. We need more spaces where we can practice these tools, so that we can elevate the discourse in the public square and imagine bold solutions to seemingly intractable problems.

A century ago, Samson Benderly and his colleagues envisioned a progressive Jewish community organized around learning centers that combined schooling, culture, summer camp, and community. Education would be the binding enterprise of the community they imagined, animated by a Jewish spirit that would unite the Jewish people and carry on through learning and living in harmony with contemporary society. They firmly believed that Jews and Judaism could contribute to democracy and its citizenry. That belief echoes today. I submit that this moment in history demands a Jewish educational enterprise that prioritizes learning that is engaged with the world, as well as participation in civic and Jewish life that is fueled by wisdom, inquiry, and empathy. Our social networks can be woven

together intentionally through shared learning and leadership in order to strengthen community. If we aim narrowly to nourish the souls of individual Jews, we will miss the opportunity to nourish the soul of America. The world can use more; Jewish education must provide the tools to strive for more.

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8

Jonathan Woocher and the Imperative of Jewish Community in the Age of the Sovereign Self

Jonathan Krasner, PhD

Jonathan Woocher's 2012 essay, "Reinventing Jewish Education for the 21st Century," offered a distillation of concepts and prescriptions he had been incubating for the better part of a decade (Woocher, 2012a). At its core was a vision of a learner-centered educational system where Jewish wisdom (i.e., Torah) becomes a resource for personal meaning-making. Those familiar with the trajectory of Woocher's thinking were surely not surprised by his enthusiasm for prosumerism or his relative sanguinity about the decline of legacy institutions. But they might have been caught off guard by the virtual absence of any reference to a role for community and Jewish peoplehood in his proposed educational paradigm. For Woocher, Jewish community had been an animating concern that presaged his interest in communal dynamics, guided his work as the longtime executive director of the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA), and grounded his efforts on behalf of Jewish continuity and renaissance. Was Woocher's silence on community in "Reinventing Jewish Education" indicative of a radical rethinking of the bases of Jewish life?

WOOCHER AS APOSTLE OF AMERICAN JEWISH CIVIL RELIGION

When Jonathan Woocher emerged onto the American Jewish communal scene in the mid- to late 1970s, first as an academic and later as an organizational leader, the era of mass mobilization was still in full swing. When the American Jewish communal agenda was not preoccupied by Israel-related crises and the plight of oppressed Jewish communities the world over, it was energized by the imperative of Holocaust commemoration. Woocher documented the ethos behind the era of mass mobilization in his 1986 book *Sacred Survival: The Civil Religion of American Jews*. His point of departure was the concept of civil religion, which was popularized in an American context by sociologist Robert Bellah. Bellah defined civil religion as "a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals" (1967) that provide a society with a unifying and transcendent sense of purpose. In *Sacred Survival*, Woocher argued that American Jewish civil religion was animated by seven major tenets—Jewish unity; mutual responsibility; the state of Israel; the value of tradition; philanthropy and social justice; Americanism; and Jewish survival—and a triad of sacred stories, reinforcing the core themes of destruction and rebirth, mission, and American Jewish exceptionalism. If Daniel Elazar (1995) adroitly described the dynamics of the American Jewish polity, Woocher explicated its *raison d'être*.

Woocher's ability to distill the themes and tropes of American Jewish civil religion stemmed from his powers of observation and analysis, but also from his gut. Although he was ostensibly describing the beliefs of Jewish organizational men and women, American Jewish civil religion was also a personal creed. Whatever his religious beliefs, Woocher was a *k'lal yisrael* Jew, a community Jew, through and through, a proponent of Jewish unity across organizational and movement lines, and a believer in the inspirational power of living in community. He assumed that most other American Jews shared his communitarian bent.

FROM CIVIL RELIGION TO THE SOVEREIGN SELF

What Woocher did not realize was that the American Jewish community was on the verge of a paradigm shift from mass mobilization to personal engagement (2014, pp. 8–9). The central features of this new approach, which Ted Sasson (2014) identified as personalization, organizational diversification, and polarization, were driven in part by American Jews' evolving understanding of their Jewishness. Steven M. Cohen and Arnold Eisen (2000) documented the new mind-set in *The Jew Within*:

> The first language that our subjects speak is by and large one of profound individualism. Their language is universalist, liberal, and

> personalist. Community and commitment, in fact, are repeatedly redefined and apprehended by our subjects in terms acceptable to sovereign and ever-questing selves. (p. 7)

Cohen and Eisen (2000) viewed their findings as evidence that American Jews were prone to the same patterns of behavior that Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (2007) had identified a decade earlier in *Habits of the Heart*. The trends identified by Cohen and Eisen should also be contextualized in the propagation of a therapeutic ethos, and its cooptation in the late 20th century by the forces of neoliberalism that privileged values such as individual freedom, self-fulfillment, consumption, and entrepreneurialism (Foster, 2016, pp. 90–91).

Simultaneously, as Lila Corwin Berman (2017) has demonstrated, the development of the American system of public, private, and nonprofit capital, that is, the rise of philanthro-capitalism, undermined the democratic underpinnings of the Federation system and paved the way for the emergence in the 1980s and 1990s of a new breed of Jewish mega-donors. These forces fundamentally re-centered the locus of power in the American Jewish polity and weakened core tenets of American Jewish civil religion, such as Jewish unity and mutual responsibility. Even as mega-donors and contributors to Federation-managed donor-advised funds were ostensibly acting for the public good, they applied individualistic and idiosyncratic valuations of need rather than deferring to the collective will of the community (Berman, 2017).

If Woocher had any feelings about neoliberalism's role in restructuring the American Jewish polity and its culture, he did not commit them to writing. But he was clear-eyed about the mixed blessing presented by the quest for personal autonomy and yearning for meaning that had become a signature calling card of his fellow baby boomers. On the one hand, by 1990, he acknowledged that

> neither ethnicity nor activism alone can sustain American Jewish life over the long run. . . . History changes, great events fade into dim memory, the power of the private and the biographical reasserts itself, and what seemed like a myth that would compel commitment forever, no longer seems to work.

In order to provide a ballast to the Jewish masses, Judaism needed to give meaning to daily life.

On the other hand, he was leery about "the radical individualization of Jewish identity" (Woocher, 1990), the sovereign self run amok. Woocher's use of the term "alone" in the previous quote signified an unwillingness to give up on civil religion and its power to "sacralize historical events and public duties" (1990). Let there be multiple Jewish entry points and myriad flavors of Judaism to attract contemporary seekers—but Judaism must not surrender its insistence that commitment be based on a sense of obligation. Woocher bristled at the image of American Jewish professionals as kiosk proprietors in "a Jewish shopping mall, seeking to offer as many products with Jewish labels as we can to our sophisticated (though often Jewishly *unsophisticated*) customers" (1990). Agreeing with philosophers such as Eugene Borowitz and Irving Greenberg that "recovenanting among Jews must occur on a voluntary basis" he nevertheless maintained that commitment be grounded in a Buberian conception of community. Only through the revitalization and reinvention of communal institutions as hubs of Jewish activity, communion, and fellowship, would Jewish living be grounded—as he felt it must be—in *communitas*. Woocher wanted to transform "*consumers* of Jewish services" into "*participants* in an ongoing endeavor" (1995, p. 132). Thus, Woocher was advocating that the quest for meaning and personal faith be leveraged toward the building of community, arguing that the (re)affirmation of Jewish conceptions of faith and religious expression finds its most authentic expression in the context of religious community.

Judaism, he believed, was inherently a social phenomenon. Channeling Peter Berger (2015) in *The Sacred Canopy*, Woocher argued that the ways in which individuals think and act are shaped by their social relationships and cultural milieu. In order for individual Jews to habitually think and act Jewish, they needed the backstop of community and its attendant plausibility structures. "If *Jewish identity* is the cart we wish to move along the path of growth, Jewish community is the horse that will pull that cart," he asserted. "Community provides the context and culture the content for Jewish identity" (1995, p. 132).

COMMUNITY AND CONTINUITY

Indeed, Woocher's belief in the contingent relationship between durable personal identity and community significantly contributed to his enthusiasm for and involvement in the Jewish continuity and renaissance movement of the 1990s and early 2000s (Woocher, 2015). His recognition that identity required both context and content accounted for the centrality of Jewish education in his continuity strategy (Woocher, 1994). For Woocher, survival for its own sake was an insufficient rationale for continuity. Judaism's enduring value was grounded in its ethical teachings (Jewish wisdom, in Woocher's parlance), its unending mission to make Jews a kingdom of priests and a holy people as embodied in its master story. Although he recognized that Judaism and Jewish identity were fluid, he posited the existence of an essential Jewish core, which comprised an indispensable building block of continuity. "The pure existentialist position in which Jewish is as Jewish does . . . cannot be accepted as a framework for designing serious Jewish communities," Woocher wrote (1995, p. 132). Judaism would necessarily be variegated, but it could not survive long-term if it were shorn from tradition and became radically individualistic. Thus, socialization and enculturation were essential processes of Jewish education.

Significantly, although Woocher was one of the continuity movement's architects and most enthusiastic cheerleaders, his involvement was never premised on the concerns about intermarriage and assimilation that motivated funders and dominated the communal discourse.

He was more worried about entropy, the threat to the collective Jewish community posed by denominational fragmentation, the weakening of the Federation system, and, most importantly, the privileging of personalism over communal belonging (Woocher, 1998). "The era of sacred survival may indeed have passed," he acknowledged, while expressing hope that "the era of sacred community" was only beginning. "American Jewish life will not flourish if Jews do not continue to regard themselves as part of a religiously and ethnically based polity" (Woocher, 2005).

"REINVENTING JEWISH EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY": WHITHER COMMUNITY?

Thus, it is striking that less than a decade after writing those words, any discussion of fostering and strengthening Jewish community was almost entirely absent from his blueprint to reinvent Jewish education. In "Reinventing Jewish Education," Woocher (2012a) gushed with enthusiasm about the promise of learner-centered education and prosumerism, without giving voice to previously articulated concerns about the potential impact of radical individualism and the culture of personalism on group identity. A tract that was filled to the brim with language of economic and religious psychology, design thinking, systems theory, and futurism, had nothing to say about peoplehood and Jewish unity. At most, Woocher gave a nod to Ron Wolfson's notion of "relational Judaism" (Woocher, 2012a, p. 203). But this excursus comprised no more than a few paragraphs of a 44-page article, and its main takeaway was the importance of social networks in facilitating personal *Jewish journeys*. Thus, even when Woocher affirmed the benefit of

community, it was framed in purely instrumental terms, with the focus remaining squarely on the individual.

Woocher's de-centering of community did not escape notice. Yossi Prager, Executive Director of AVICHAI North America, cautioned that "transforming Judaism into a resource bank for leading meaningful human lives twists Judaism inside out by putting the individual in the center, rather than God or the Jewish people" (2011, para. 4). Likewise, educational philosopher Daniel Pekarsky (2012) invoked Philip Rieff's (1987) prescient warning in The *Triumph of the Therapeutic* about the devolution of religion into a form of therapy. The replacement of covenant and commitment with choice was destabilizing in that it rendered those choices utterly subjective, divorced as they were from any system of authority. Covenant and commitment, by contrast, conferred membership and solidified identification (Pekarsky, 2012).

Pekarsky also pointed out that the paradigm of learner-centered education championed by Woocher and others as a 21st-century innovation had found its most elaborate and fervent articulation in the work of the early 20th-century philosopher John Dewey. But Dewey had always balanced the emphasis on the learner with the needs of society. The purpose of education was not only personal enlightenment and meaning-making but also preparation for democratic participation and societal perpetuation. Indeed, Dewey envisioned the school as "a miniature community, an embryonic society" (1900, p. 32). Dewey wrote: "The young have to be brought within the traditions, outlook and interests which characterize a community by means of education" (2008, p. 331).

Woocher's appropriation of the language of "Jewish journeying," which was popularized by Bethamie Horowitz's (2000) publication for UJA-Federation of New York, and his focus on elaborating learner-centered Jewish educational models, may suggest to some a late-career concession to the zeitgeist of neoliberalism, and the commodification and consumerization of a Judaism that is tailor-made for the one-percent—the hyper-educated, hyper-wealthy, and hyper-privileged. Likewise, his use of metaphors from the domain of computing and information technology—such as "operating systems," "windows," and "networks"—could be interpreted as reflecting an unexamined embrace of the digital revolution's atomizing effect on society. Woocher's intellectual curiosity about and enthusiasm regarding innovation in fields such as behavioral economics, organizational psychology, and the sociology of knowledge, did at times devolve into faddism. For example, his unabashed enthusiasm for social networking and open sourcing in his 2012 article, "Reinventing Jewish Education for the 21st Century," exudes what can be felt as an almost childlike naïveté when read in the Trumpian era of "alternative facts," data mining, and the collapse of civil discourse (Woocher, 2012a, pp. 183–198, 215–218).

But I do not believe Woocher had given up on community. Instead, his reluctance to write about it stemmed from his sense that Jewish community was becoming more contingent and that the nature of community was in flux. Woocher recognized that legacy institutions such as synagogues and JCCs—the traditional hubs of community—were losing their mojo. His silence telegraphed an anxiety, or at least a lack of certainty, about the shape of the Jewish community of the future (Woocher, 2008, 2012b): "Perhaps, the challenge to Jewish community today is less about substance than about form" (Woocher, 2012b, para. 5).

Even so, Woocher's seeming capitulation to America's therapeutic culture and its ethos of extreme individualism did mark a radical turn in his thinking. An instrumental Judaism leaves little room for covenant and commitment, even on a voluntary basis. As Rieff (1987) warned, when the self becomes the center, life is sapped of any larger

meaning and becomes devoid of purpose. The implications for Jewish unity and (non-Orthodox) American Jewish-Israeli Jewish relations, already strained, become ominous as the very conception of Jewry as an ethnos is called into question.

Since Woocher's death, there has been a resurgence of tribalism throughout the West. While many American Jews view this turn of events with alarm, it speaks to the resiliency of identity despite the prevailing forces of homogenization and atomization. Perhaps Woocher was so enamored of the promise of the digital revolution and disruptive innovation that he lapsed into a Whiggish presentism, allowing him to underestimate the human need for group membership and belonging as a prerequisite for self-actualization. "The drive to join is deeply ingrained," socio-biologist E. O. Wilson (2012) explained. "Everyone, no exception, must have a tribe, an alliance with which to jockey for power and territory, to demonize the enemy, to organize rallies and raise flags" (Wilson, 2012, para. 2). If Judaism abdicates its tribal function, the vacuum will soon enough be filled by competing tribal identities, whether they be political, social, or cultural. If contemporary American Jewish institutions are unequal to the task of promoting group cohesion, new models will be fashioned to take their place. Some of these will be virtual, while others will cater to the human need for direct interaction (Royal Society for Public Health, 2017; Primack et. al., 2017).

Of course, none of this is to say that Woocher's overall diagnosis of what ails Jewish education and his call for a greater variety of educational pathways and greater learner empowerment were off the mark. Criticisms notwithstanding, Woocher's manifesto arguably remains the most coherent and cogent road map for the future of Jewish education—and it embodies the positivism and humanity that were Woocher's hallmarks. Even when sounding the alarm, he managed to reassure. This pragmatic optimism defined Jonathan Woocher's approach to Jewish life; it buoyed him through a period of accelerating change and was a source of chizuk (strength and inspiration) in moments of setback.

JON WOOCHER AND ME

Perhaps my struggle with Woocher's late-career reassessment of the viability of community stems in part from the role he played in shaping my own commitments and career trajectory. I first met Jon at a Wexner Graduate Fellows Institute in 1994 where he was presenting on *Sacred Survival*. I was in an MA program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, trying to figure out whether to focus my doctoral studies on teaching and curriculum or on history. Jon's distillation of the ethos undergirding the Federation system, and his charting of its evolution from a movement committed to noblesse oblige to one that was animated by the imperative of survival, hit me like a revelation. Not only did he demystify this familiar yet nebulous system, but he used it to explicate an entire century of Jewish life in America. And then Jon went further, momentarily setting aside his academic garb and donning his vestments as the high priest of Jewish continuity. We were at the cusp of a great Jewish revival, rife with opportunity and demanding enlightened stewardship, he told us. We had the uncommon opportunity to make a difference. Jon was positively buoyant if characteristically perspicacious. But he was also inducting us into the organized Jewish community. Our job was to serve the Jewish people, not to tear it asunder; to question and challenge assumptions from the inside, not to foment revolution; to strengthen community by speaking and cooperating across denomination and cultural outlooks, not to retreat to our own individual safe spaces.

The years 1990–2008 were a high-water mark for Jewish pluralism, and the Wexner Graduate Education Fellowship provided a compelling model of how American Jews of various convictions (outside of the *haredi* community) could transcend the divisions that seemed to be

tearing the Jewish people apart through mutual respect, dialogue, and collaboration. It was that same pluralistic vision of community that later attracted me to a start-up community high school in the Boston area, now Gann Academy, where I became one of the founding faculty members. It also helped to shape my academic interest in the history of the Talmud Torah (communal supplementary school) movement and the Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) system, which was incubated by the New York Kehillah, a radical experiment in transpartisan community organization (Krasner, 2011).

The educators in the Talmud Torahs and BJEs, led by Samson Benderly, became the champions of *klal yisrael* Judaism and Hebrew as the unifying language of the Jewish people. Even when the community schools gave way in the postwar period to congregational schools, day schools, and Jewish summer camps, Jewish education continued to be guided by a vision of community that facilitated and reinforced the "We are One!" message of the United Jewish Appeal and the Federation system. Jon was correct in his 2012 essay that the realities and needs of the moment demand a new educational model addressing a new set of challenges (Woocher, 2012a). The purpose of Jewish education today is no longer to help young Jews find an equilibrium between American assimilation and Jewish survival, through the forging of an "American-style Judaism." But I continue to believe in the utility of expanding circles of concern as a template for identity that balances the personal, the tribal, and the universal.

Community remains the most potent antidote to egocentrism and materialism. We dare not abdicate the responsibility of educating the next generation of Jews to find a new equilibrium between the individual search for meaning and the imperative of living for something larger than oneself. When considering educational outcomes, let our Jewish educators be inspired by the model of Reb Simcha Bunim who carried two slips of paper, one in each pocket. On one, he wrote, *Bishvili nivra ha-olam*—"for my sake the world was created." On the other, he wrote, *V'anokhi afar v'efer*—"I am but dust and ashes." Each served as a reminder to maintain an equipoise between egotism and self-abnegation, between the quest for personal meaning and the imperative of communal responsibility. This is what it means to be an American Jew in the 21st century. If this is a countercultural educational message in the 21st century, so be it. That should not cause us to shirk from imparting it.

In 2008, Woocher had identified the building of "commitment and community in a fragmented world" as one of his core design principles for 21st-century education, alongside (and balancing) learner empowerment. On that occasion, he argued that personal meaning should be experienced "in and through connectedness and community (3)." I recommend that we read "Reinventing Jewish Education in the 21st Century" in conjunction with this earlier declaration of principles, which is more consistent with Woocher's thought and policy advocacy over the course of his 45-year career.

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9

Encouraging Innovation in Jewish Education

Leora Isaacs, PhD

I was born in 1949, and, like Jon, I came of age in the '60s, and began "adulting" in the '80s and '90s. How I experience and understand the world was shaped by a period of astonishing change in the world at large and of transformation in the Jewish community. These changes encompassed nearly every aspect of our existence, from geopolitics to technology to popular culture to personal identity and identification. In our lifetimes, the phenomenon of choice became the dominant defining characteristic of postmodern life and of Jewish existence, and with it the flowering of diversity and the crossing and blurring of boundaries that was unprecedented in Jewish history. We now live in a world where technology makes instant global communication ubiquitous, and mass customization gives consumers power to get what they want, where and when they want it. Brand and institutional loyalty has declined. As Jews, we enjoy acceptance and opportunities for leadership in all arenas in the secular world, surpassing the Golden Age in Spain. "Everyone eats bagels—and drinks lattes." … Israel is seen both as a troubled occupier and a high-tech power. High-level Jewish studies may be pursued at nearly every elite college and university. The web makes a vast virtual library of Jewish learning accessible to anyone." Affiliation with legacy Jewish organizations and enrollment in synagogue-based Jewish education programs has declined. "And 'Jewishness' is continually being reinvented in dozens of traditional and new ways." All of these changes (and more) have resulted in significant disequilibrium in the world at large and in the Jewish world (Ross, Woocher, & Woocher, 2007, p. 9).

As the impact of these massive changes became more and more apparent beginning in the 1990s, Jewish organizational leaders established Continuity Commissions to address the challenges of intermarriage and assimilation and to restore the strength of the Jewish community. Initiatives were aimed at particular cohorts (teens, young families, adult leaders, "intermarrieds"). In the educational arena in particular, interventions focused on key "levers for change" (school leaders, teachers, curriculum). Influenced by an emphasis on accountability in American society at large (and especially in nonprofit and educational worlds), planning and assessment techniques were largely linear (e.g., using tools, logic models, and outcome evaluation), and the dominant mind-set focused on isolating variables and understanding cause and effect in order to maximize attainment of prescriptive goals.

It soon became apparent that while changes on the institutional or programmatic level were clearly necessary, they were dismally insufficient to bring about the magnitude of change required to transform the field of Jewish education and the Jewish community in a rapidly changing, interconnected world. In addition, it was clear that a linear, mechanistic model could not help us understand the intricacy and dynamism of the Jewish ecosystem. Seismic changes in society demanded different paradigms for understanding our place in it. It was about this time that Jonathan Woocher began exploring and applying axioms of complexity theory, broadening and deepening our understanding of the role and place of Jewish education in the ecosystem of Jewish life. As he wrote in 2010,

> I've long believed that complexity theory has a great deal of relevance to how we envision and pursue change. Once we understand that we can't control or tightly plan what happens, but that we can recognize phenomena like emergence, co-evolution, "strange attractors" and "fitness landscapes" at work and use these to help gently steer change, we're (ironically) on a much firmer footing.

Jon was actively grappling with these ideas even as illness overtook him. In truth, complexity theory itself suggests that application of the theory is a never-ending process, even as the system becomes stronger and thereby more complex. How I would have loved to sit with Jon to draw out concepts

from complexity theory that are most relevant for the educational niche of the Jewish ecosystem and to juxtapose them with the ideas he advocated and with which he experimented tirelessly. Perhaps the conversation might have yielded something like this.

COMPLEXITY THEORY

Complexity theory asserts that phenomena must be viewed holistically. To atomize phenomena into a restricted number of variables and then to focus only on certain factors is to miss the essential dynamic interaction of reality (Gleick, 1987; Morrison, 2002).

Seeing the organized Jewish community as a complex adaptive system leads us to focus on the dynamic networks of interactions that mutate and self-organize in response to both internal and external forces. Emergence, uncertainty, unpredictability, and diversity characterize complex adaptive systems. Organizational learning, communication, networking, distributed control, feedback, and recursion are adaptive behaviors that bring about surviving and thriving (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 1971). In this model, disequilibrium is the catalyst for change and growth.

Systems evolve and develop spontaneously only when there is diversity and deviance. Under such conditions, complex adaptive systems scan and sense the external environment and then effect internal adjustments and developments in order to meet the demands of the changing external environment. As systems move toward greater degrees of complexity, change, and adaptability in order to survive (and thrive) in changing environments, they evolve toward "the edge of chaos" (Waldrop, 1992, p. 12). This is the space in which individuals and organizations can generate creative, open-ended, imaginative, and rich behaviors, ideas, and practices due to connectivity, networking, and information sharing. According to complexity theory, an organism or organization senses and responds to its environment, thereby changing it, which changes the organism again, so that the organism reacts to and thereby proactively changes its environment. The process, in iterating itself, produces dynamic and continuous change recursively (Stewart, 1991). Small-scale changes in initial conditions can produce massive and unpredictable changes in outcome (the way a butterfly wingbeat in the Caribbean, apocryphally, can produce a hurricane in America), and very similar conditions can produce very dissimilar outcomes.

"THE ADJACENT POSSIBLE": WHERE EVOLUTION AND INNOVATION COME TOGETHER

In his thought-provoking book, *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation*, Steven Johnson posits that "Good ideas are not conjured out of thin air; they are built out of a collection of existing parts" (2010a, p. 15). He argues that innovations actually don't spring from a vacuum (or a single brilliant mind) but rather evolve over time and are the product of the serendipitous juxtaposition of sometimes-disparate ideas and conditions in an evolving interconnected ecosystem. Johnson's notion of "the adjacent possible" adds yet another dimension to our thinking about conditions that encourage innovation and how we can capitalize on them to advance Jewish education.

Johnson theorizes, "At any moment the world is capable of extraordinary change, but only certain changes happen" (2010a). Both evolution and innovation tend to happen within the bounds of the *adjacent possible*, the realm of possibilities available at a given moment, and so the trick to innovation is to figure out ways to exploit the edges of possibility that surround us. One path to these edges is to maximize liquid networks. "Every idea is fundamentally a network of ideas," Johnson writes. "When you create an environment that allows the kinds of serendipitous connections to form, innovative ideas are more likely to happen"

(2010a, pp. 123–127). Environments that bring together a wide and diverse sample of spare parts—such as from technology and business, or religion and the arts, or gaming and learning—are better at helping their inhabitants explore the adjacent possible because they encourage novel ways of recombining those parts. Such connectedness requires a distributed knowledge system with robust communication channels.

Time and timing both constrain and enable innovation. Johnson (2010a) observes that world-changing ideas generally evolve over time as slow hunches rather than sudden breakthroughs. They may start with a vague sense about an interesting solution that hasn't yet been proposed and require a long incubation period and cultivation to bloom. These incubation periods often proceed in fits and starts, punctuated by errors that lead to abandoning old assumptions and searching the adjacent possible for more options than just the obvious ones. As stated previously, great discoveries evolve as slow hunches, maturing and connecting to other ideas over time. Sometimes ideas emerge "before their time" and can't take hold because they depend on the emergence of other developments, and each new innovation opens up new paths to explore.

In the ecological realm, evolution is often facilitated by keystone species, organisms that are disproportionately important to the welfare of the ecosystem (as when on a small island with no other predators, wolves keep the population of sheep under control, preventing them from eating the island bare and collapsing the whole ecosystem). One particularly important type of keystone species is the ecosystem engineer, who actually creates habitats for other organisms by building platforms from which others benefit (e.g., beavers that dam rivers, turning forests into wetlands, or coral that build thriving reefs). The platforms they create serve as springboards that make the leap into the adjacent possible. Platforms often stack on top of each other, providing the foundation for more platforms that again produce countless innovations. In this way, new structures initially emerge as a result of the interaction between organisms and the evolving environment.

COMPLEXITY THEORY, THE ADJACENT POSSIBLE, AND JEWISH EDUCATION TODAY

Woocher often quoted William Gibson's observation that "the future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed." Combining the principles of complexity theory with the notion of the adjacent possible suggests potential ways to spread and thereby spark further innovation, whether on the meta-level or more local levels of the Jewish education ecosystem.

- **Focus on the dynamic networks of interactions that mutate and self-organize in response to both internal and external forces.** Over the past five to ten years, there has been significant reorganization within Jewish institutional life, with a shift toward organization by network: the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA) (where I worked with Jon for decades) dissolved, even while networks such as JEDLab, Nitzan Network, the Jewish Emergent Network, and SHINUI[13] emerged as dynamic forces for building relationships, communication,

[13] **JEDLab** is a Facebook group for people working in Jewish education of about 8,000 members. **Nitzan Network** is a collective of organizations facilitating after-school Hebrew school models. **The Jewish Emergent Network** consists of leaders of seven new spiritual communities across North America. **Shinui: the Network for Innovation in Part-Time Education** is a partnership of central agencies for Jewish education/Federations in ten North American communities that are working to spread educational innovation in part-time Jewish education within and beyond the ten communities.

and organizational learning. Vibrant networks require skilled network weavers to ensure their vitality. Jewish institutions and philanthropists (nationally and locally) can invest in establishing and supporting such networks.

- **Enlarge networks for impact.** Recognizing that innovation and evolution thrive in large networks, leaders of organizations in a variety of spheres have joined together to unleash greater impact and creativity. The consolidation of UpStart, Bikkurim, Joshua Venture Group, and PresenTense (four of the Jewish community's leading support services for innovators) has created a more robust platform to empower innovators and institutions to take risks, to develop creative engagement strategies, and to maximize the potential of their community-changing ideas. The five leading Jewish day school organizations (PARDES, PEJE, RAVSAK, Schechter, and YUSP) have come together as Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools to provide programs, services, knowledge, and resources on governance and development, teaching and learning, leadership development and placement, 21st-century learning, field-wide data and research, and administrative support. These emergent organizations need the support and patience of Jewish institutional leaders, particularly as they grow from infancy to adulthood, as do collaborative networks in other arenas of Jewish education such as Jewish early-childhood education, adult Jewish learning, and teen engagement and learning.

- **Make space for serendipity.** Lucky connections between ideas drive innovation. Random connections drive serendipitous discoveries. We can cultivate serendipity in the way we absorb ideas from the outside world. As Johnson (2010a) writes:

> The trick is to figure out ways to explore the edges of possibility that surround you . . . innovative environments are better at helping their inhabitants explore the adjacent possible because they expose a wide and diverse sample of spare parts—mechanical or conceptual—and they encourage novel ways of recombining those parts. Innovation seemingly occurs serendipitously. But it only happens when all the pieces are in place and all the powder is poured—but there is still a need for a spark. (p. 38)

  As a corollary to their grants and awards that recognize and support excellence and innovation in Jewish education, the Covenant Foundation brings its grantees and award winners together with leading lights and groundbreaking thinkers from diverse disciplines of arts, sciences, business, and more. Local communities can also create opportunities for the creative cross-pollination that is a catalyst for new working relationships and out-of-the-box experiments. On an individual level, facilitating serendipitous connections can be a simple matter of simultaneously introducing ideas from different disciplines into one's consciousness by working on multiple projects simultaneously or reading several books from different (and perhaps unfamiliar) genres at the same time.

- **Reinvent and reuse the old.** Jon and I shared a love for Rav Kook's maxim *Hayashan yitchadesh v'ha-chadash yitkadesh* ("renew the old and sanctify the new"). In his article on "The Genius of the Tinkerer" in the *Wall Street Journal*, Johnson (2010b) describes how innovation thrives on reinventing and reusing the old. Lippman Kanfer Foundation for Living Torah works with a network of organizations that uses modern means and technologies to connect Jews and others to Jewish wisdom, sensibilities, and experiences that enrich their lives and inspire them to incorporate Jewish insights and practices

into their daily lives. The Mussar Institute is reintroducing and spreading the study and practice of Mussar, a time-honored ancient Jewish path of character development and growth leading to awareness, wisdom, and transformation, in a modern context. As Jewish educators, we should resensitize ourselves to ways to reinvent, recombine, and reuse elements of our tradition and the world around us in innovative ways.

- **Allow "slow hunches" to develop.** Contrary to common belief, most innovations are not sudden breakthroughs. They are fragile insights that need time, space, and careful nurturing to blossom. All too often, communities and/or funders are impatient with innovation. When grants are limited to three years, evidence of impact is expected nearly instantaneously; when funding is only available for "the next new thing," there is no opportunity for new initiatives to take root, acclimatize, and blossom. Jewish communities and funders need to provide support and time for slow hunches to develop.

And as a corollary . . .

- **Fail forward.** Johnson reminds us that great innovations emerge from environments that are partly contaminated by error. Error is present in both the evolution of life and the innovation of great ideas—and it is not always a bad thing. Creativity thrives in chaos. Unexplained errors force us to abandon our old assumptions, to consider more possibilities than just the obvious ones, to experiment and piece together new techniques and existing concepts, and to come up with new strategies. Consequently, innovators in Jewish education must adopt an approach to evaluation that supports experimentation, analysis, and adaptation. "Developmental evaluation," an approach pioneered by Michael Quinn Patton (2011), applies complexity concepts by using data in an interactive way to help innovators fine-tune what is going on, consider and adapt to uncertainties, and inform their decisions going forward. It helps discern which directions hold promise and which should be abandoned, and suggests new options to try. The evaluator is in ongoing dialogue with the program provider and participants that focuses on immediate feedback to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments.

- **Support "ecosystem engineers."** Leadership for innovation is best conceived of as a constellation of behaviors rather than as a role or position. "Ecosystem engineers" enable evolution and innovation by building platforms that serve as springboards to enable the leap into the adjacent possible. They are the network weavers, the conveners, the information proliferators—the ones who make space for serendipity. They are flexible, people-centered visionaries who empower others and are led by them. They are prepared to find new routes to agreed-upon destinations and are not afraid of getting lost, trusting that the edge of chaos is the ground of real creativity and development for all. In the words of Daniel Nesbit, for them, "problem solving looks less like looking for solutions and more like changing the recipe" (Nesbit, 2015). More opportunities for training and supporting ecosystem engineers are needed in the Jewish community.

Jon's work set out no less than this tremendous agenda of growth and change. And, he wrote in the conclusion of "Reinventing Jewish Education for the 21st Century":

> We should welcome this change, these new circumstances and the opportunity to try to recast Jewish education to respond to them. For those who believe that Jewish tradition has something important to say to every era and to every human, it is a sacred opportunity. May we seize it with courage and enthusiasm,

> and create a Jewish education for ourselves and our children that will be a worthy link in an eternal chain of Torah. (2012)

We can do so by expanding our collaborative networks, increasing opportunities for serendipitous connections, and providing nurturing, growing environments where "slow hunches" can blossom and connect to other ideas over time. This is both our tribute to Jon and the very best we can do for Jewish education.

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10

Learning from Jon: Federations' Work in Jewish Education and Engagement

Beth Cousens, PhD[14]

I first saw Jon speak in 1995 at a meeting of Baltimore Jewish communal professionals. He spoke to a full room about what he knew best: Jewish education, Jewish life, and the potential for Jewish organizational leaders to help Jewish education change the lives of Jews. I don't remember what he said, but I remember feeling as though I had met someone I would follow anywhere. I wanted to listen to him, and I got to, repeatedly, over the decades that we worked in parallel and in partnership.

I find myself today in the strange place of working in a position that Jon held, supporting the agendas of Jewish education and engagement in the work of Federations. From this perspective, it is evident that, in many ways, the work we are doing follows directly from the calls that he issued throughout his career. These calls include the following.

"JEWISH EDUCATION"—AND THE LIVES OF JEWS—CHANGE WHEN WE CHANGE COMMUNAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Jewish education is many things: a process of human growth, an interaction with Jewish ideas, and the acquisition of information about how Judaism is celebrated. It is also a series of structural opportunities, facilities, initiatives, and systems that Jews put into place to make possible the exploration of Judaism. The role of Federations, Jon wrote, is to link the "microscopic" living of Jewish life with "the macroscopic—communal policy-making—in ways that promote confidence that our endeavors in the latter arena will make a difference in the former" (1995, p. 15). In other words, "[i]f *Jewish identity* is the cart we wish to move along the path of growth, *Jewish community* is the horse that will pull that cart" (Woocher, 1995, p. 22). In order to change lives and living, Federations focus on institutions and community forms and frameworks.

What does it mean to change Jewish educational infrastructure? Woocher (with coauthors in Ross, Woocher, & Woocher, 2007) created "design principles" in "Redesigning Jewish Education," the very concept suggesting that we can *design* Jewish education, that it is designable, and that where and how it happens is in our hands. The concept of "planning" in the Jewish communal system, and particularly in Federations, is grounded in the belief that we can proactively manipulate communal landscapes based on the studied and perceived needs of the community, rooted in a given institution's vision (and the vision of its leaders). Planning combines needs assessment and program management drawn from the world of social work with some aspects of strategic planning drawn from the world of business.

When Woocher spoke, he spoke as a planner, assuming those in the room would be taking his ideas and using them to build the Jewish educational landscape—that they would see themselves as responsible not only for maintaining institutions, but for continually serving American Jews through support, change, and innovation. These are all needed because we are constantly catching up with American society as it changes, and also because we always could have done a better job in the first place.

In the biggest picture, the infrastructure opportunities that are available directly influence the educational trajectory of the Jewish people. Whether American Jews and those in their families get to sing Hebrew songs at a bookstore, have Friday night parent/preteen conversations

[14] This piece is drawn from a larger article published in the *Journal of Jewish Education*, Volume 84, Issue 3, "The Pedagogy of Jewish Community: Reflections on the Work of Jonathan Woocher."

as part of the *b'nai mitzvah* process, or go to a premarriage class with a rabbi is all dictated by what institutional leaders create. Understanding the broad and diverse Jewish communal enterprise of Jewish education—how much is spent, where it is spent, and why; how initiatives are designed; which organizational collaboration and actions are rewarded or ignored, including traditional and mainstream organizations as well as new, upstart projects—this is all both art and science. Truly understanding this work calls for risks, bravery, learning, collaboration between diverse leaders (professional and lay), and ongoing reflection about how to do it well. At the center of this field of Jewish education planning and policy for several decades, Woocher offered an opportunity to see that Federations' allocations work is not just grantmaking, but grantmaking within the context of planning. It is the strategic awarding of funds in order to address need in the context of a thoughtful and strategic vision. "Redesigning Jewish Education" is a subset of the intentional design of community opportunities that matter.

THE IDEAS THAT ANIMATE FEDERATIONS NEED GROWTH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In Woocher's formulation, Judaism in America makes sense a little bit as a religion and a little bit as an ethnicity, but not fully as either one. Like many religionists and committed ethnics, Jews in America found themselves in a complicated and textured place of negotiation: "between particularism and universalism, between tradition and autonomy, between messianic expectation and human initiative" (Woocher, 1986, p. 199). America would give Jews a chance, but not a mandate, to assimilate completely. In America, Jews could keep their Jewishness, even without activating it significantly.

The Federation system was born in part from an effort to negotiate both Jewish and American identities. "National culture would replace traditional religion as the glue holding Jewry together," Woocher wrote (1986, p. 9). The system made sense in America; walking in and out of Jewish organizations, dabbling in Jewishness but able to leave it behind, Jews could demonstrate their Jewish commitments without being hostile to their American home. If halachic Judaism was about separation and marked Jews as uniquely different, the Federation system looked just like any other set of American fraternal organizations. Jews could drop in and drop out, and even prioritize over Judaism their American life, their engagements with non-Jews, and their interactions with the larger American society. In America, this system, Woocher (1986) wrote, became sacred—a civil religion.

In America, according to Woocher (1986), the Jewish communal system came to be animated by certain myths—central stories—that served as goals and sources of inspiration and were uniquely shaped by America. Jews saw the new world as the *goldene medina* ("the land of opportunity"); it represented an opportunity for growth that was made all the more critical in the shadow of the Holocaust. America provided particular fertile territory for genuine rebirth and the flourishing of American Judaism: American Jews *must* thrive, as human beings and then as Jews, in order not to award Hitler a posthumous victory. A first central myth, then, inherent in American Judaism and a rationale for behavior and future decisions, is the memory of the Holocaust (Woocher, 1986, Ch. 5).

This kind of thriving in America was not inherently imbued with sacred or particularistic Jewish principles, and "never again" can, at its core, be a catchphrase to prevent any human suffering. But support for Israel became a second, undeniably particularistic myth animating Jewish communal life in America. Support for Israel legitimized their American success, lessening their guilt at their happiness that they had made it, and offering "continuity of present with the Jewish past" (Woocher, 1986, p. 134). Such support also allowed American Jews to exercise their

engagement with each other as one, particular people, without asking them actually to abandon their true home.

The Federation system, in some sense, exists to build community as tribute to these events in Jewish history. These two myths have developed in the broader communal system both subconsciously and intentionally, implicitly but also according to deep communal will, and have influenced the specific project of Jewish education significantly—making remembering the Holocaust and falling in love with Israel two central goals of the Jewish educational system.

This system, and its animating ideas, made sense through the 1960s. But as baby boomers aged in the 20th century and as American ethnic and religious identification changed and weakened, these myths stopped being enough to animate Jewishness with real meaning. Distant from the memory of the shtetl, Holocaust, and founding of Israel, American Jewishness became "hyphenated . . . fragmented . . . truncated . . . episodic . . . pluralized . . . marginalized . . . and homogenized" (Woocher, 1995, pp. 16–17). Jews, he suggested, were mainly only infrequently connecting to their Jewishness; their Jewishness was irrelevant to most of their life, blended with other elements of their identity and so not terribly distinctive, and was otherwise lessened. The communal system had become the sacred, but by the late 20th century, it too was sacred for an ever-decreasing population. A person's Jewishness had come to sit "in the innermost recesses of the individual psyche" (Woocher, 1995, p. 14). Most Jews put their Jewishness away most of the time. America, not Judaism, had become sacred to Jews.

IN AMERICA, JEWISH EDUCATION NEEDS A "COPERNICAN SHIFT," THE INFRASTRUCTURE MOVING FROM PROGRAM TO PERSON

In this context, Woocher called for "person-centered" Jewish education, an infrastructure driven by and composed of people, that moves educational experiences out of institutional contexts and into the context of relationships. In the 21st century, learning is on the computers in our pockets. Jewish learning, too, needs to be immediately accessible, focused on our own questions, and deeply meaningful in order to capture our attention. This is not to say that the organizational system is irrelevant or that Jewish education will cease happening altogether in institutions. But to engage more Jews in Judaism and also to engage even the core of Jews more deeply in their tradition, Woocher called for a redesign appropriate to American life today: the integration of content into networks, as Hillel International has defined it. Putting content into networks—adding an educator to a group of friends—democratizes learning as it gives people more direct control over their choice of and relationship with a teacher. Woocher explained:

> Deliberations on how Jewish education should be conceptualized, designed and delivered that begin from our conventional starting points—programs and institutional settings, content to be taught, or even visions of "the educated Jew"—assume, tacitly or explicitly, that the learner is the "object" of our educational efforts. Such an assumption is, however, increasingly problematic. Beginning with the learner—her/his needs, desires, and capacities—necessarily reframes a host of critical questions—what we seek to teach, why, how learners are involved in the educational process, the role of the educator, how we make education accessible and attractive, and what the learner's journey looks like beyond the boundaries of single programs and institutions—in ways that open up and may even demand new answers. This is not merely a tactical change or a pedagogical stance (so-called learner-centered or constructivist learning). **It calls for rethinking what we do and how we do it from the bottom up.** (emphasis added) (2007, pp. 13-14)

Moving from program-centered to person-centered Jewish education moves from a vision of the learner as a vacant (or empty) receptacle to be filled by the knowledgeable teacher, to a vision of the learner and teacher—or facilitator—designing together the Jewish experience in which the learner might be interested, and of the facilitator responding directly to who the learner is. In this work, experts trust the ideas and capabilities of the learners and listen to them as co-producers. As a whole, this is not the learning framework in which Jewish education (or American education) has taken place in America—hence Woocher's "Copernican shift," a true revolution in the fundamental ways that we conceptualize Jewish education.

Relational education—that is, person-centered education—not only responds to individual needs but also facilitates connectedness and a larger sense of community. Learners understand by doing, by living through the educational process, that they are part of something greater than themselves. In addition, in person-centered education, the "classroom" is driven by where the learner is. Learners don't go to a program for education; education happens where learners are living their lives. Finally, learners cannot just be sat next to each other, or a learner and teacher placed together, and their relationships expected to flourish. Real techniques are required for building trust and developing safe encounters, for cultivating interdependence and caring. Educators, then, need not only to know their content but also need to have pastoral skills, to be mentors, to understand life stages, to be coaches, and to understand how Judaism speaks to life and vice versa (Daloz, 1999).

JEWISH EDUCATION NEEDS A NEW ENCOUNTER WITH THE JEWISH PAST TO BE RESTIMULATED BY JUDAISM

As Woocher's career evolved over more than four decades, religion and ethnicity weakened in America, privileging universalism over particularism. Woocher was prescient in predicting this development. He had suggested, albeit with great respect for the organizational tradition, that "civil Judaism" would not survive the call of American assimilation without a greater marriage to deep, textured, challenging, and authentic Jewish ideas. Civil tradition, he argued, "must be recognized as the bearer of a serious religious message" (1986, p. 160), a vision and sense of purpose animating its work that could explain the relevance of Judaism, its meaning in the world today, and what its celebration could look like for a generation of people without a deep ethnic lens on the world.

Woocher advocated a move from history to "biography," from a focus on memory and the Jewish people's experience through time to a focus on the person and their needs, today. He wrote:

> Many Jews are seeking in Judaism not a public cause, but a guidepost and rationale for their daily lives. Can Judaism provide a spiritual focus, a moral compass, a transcendental purpose in immediate and personal terms? Can it enrich their family lives, restore a sense of personal worth, help them cope with success and failure? (1986, p. 167)

In other words, can the celebration of Judaism start with the adherent and not the narrative, with the person rather than the tradition?

In "Redesigning Jewish Education," Woocher assigned this shift toward the person to Jewish education, the system of instruments that can help people find their place in Jewish community (Ross et al., 2007). That gathering of people and reconnecting them to Judaism would happen, in Woocher's formulation, by helping people to feel that Judaism speaks directly to their daily existence, that it informs their experience of being human, and that they find Judaism personally relevant and find a personally relevant way of celebrating it. This is the ultimate definition

of learner-centered Jewish education: It brings authentic Jewish ideas to learners' authentic human needs, helping them live their lives in direct dialogue with, rather than mere allegiance to, the Jewish narrative.

In Woocher's words, this asks "that the content of Jewish education grow out of, reflect, and respond to authentic questions, aspirations and life experiences of the learners." Starting with the learner means that Jewish education can "avoid spending large amounts of time trying to answer questions that no one is asking," while ensuring "that genuine concerns—what is really on people's (including children's) minds—are being addressed." The Jewish past becomes a tool in the Jewish present, and Judaism not "something largely confined to specific times or special places (like synagogues)," not "external to the individual, disconnected from large segments of his/her experience, and ultimately of doubtful import or interest," but something integrated into daily life, useful, a tradition to be lived. "Jewish identity is a means, not an end in itself," Woocher wrote. It is a way to be human. And, through this kind of Jewish education, Judaism is not a "subject" to be studied; it is a way of life to be lived (Woocher, 2007, pp. 20-21).

In narrative portraits that accompany "Redesigning Jewish Education," Woocher offered innovative illustrations of this kind of learner-focused pedagogy (Ross et al., 2007). Families could enroll in after-school Hebrew school, making Jewish education a project of childcare and not of bar mitzvah. Preschools would give families Shabbat *challot* and dinners at Friday pickup, making observance and family time easy. A Jewish "coach" could work with couples to help them map their Jewish engagement and the engagement of their children at their birth. Today, we see examples that take this work a step further and demonstrate the encounter that Jewish education needs to have with its deep Jewish past. Senior Jewish educators at Hillel work with college students on their hopes for their futures, their priorities and values, the choices they will make in their lives. PJ Library playgroup facilitators talk with parents about their fears and hopes related to raising their children. Honeymoon Israel educators coach newly married couples through complex conversations about the kinds of homes they will build. All of this is a natural part of these learners' daily concerns.

Starting with the learner doesn't mean that Judaism simply becomes molded in the learner's image; Judaism is too strong and complex a tradition to succumb to the self-absorption of any individual learner. Moreover, learners can easily sense a fake. They will only be compelled out of their everyday by something that is truly substantive and that has integrity. The Jewish educators who authentically weave together Judaism and genuine living need to understand Jewish wisdom in the deepest way and be able to work with Jewish ideas, memory, and time in sophisticated ways. They will need new and different training, including extensive experience with Jewish texts and the ideas within them, as well as immersion in skills related to pastoral care and mentoring, and related to leading small-group conversations and conversation-based learning

If the result of the first negotiation between American universalism and Jewish particularism was the Jewish civil tradition and communal system, its product today needs to experience a kind of reckoning. Only a deep encounter with Jewish ideas can provide content that is meaningful, relevant, and important enough to get the attention of American Jews, via a learner-centered delivery system of the kind described here. That is the marriage of American Jews' lives with rich Jewish content; that is the radical redesign of American Jewish education, with the goal of American Jews being in covenant not only with each other but also with their tradition. That redesign continues the goals of civil Judaism in that it helps humans live better, contributing through Jewish tradition to human flourishing. Woocher wrote:

> Civil Judaism has reflected and helped to shape American Jewry's passage from a community of adjustment to a community of survival. It is now poised to mold and to mirror an even more portentous transition: from being a community of survival to a truly covenantal community once again. (1986, p. 200)

The purposes of Jewish education cannot be about the survival of the Jewish people or existential threats to the state of Israel. They have to be about living meaningfully, now, in the present, in the context of the Jewish narrative and in the learner's own, real context. These kinds of experiences will help individuals move Jewishness from the periphery to the center.

Although these ideas were first articulated in the 1980s, until his death, Woocher recognized that the work had only begun. He was fond of quoting William Gibson, cyber pundit and science-fiction writer, who observed at the dawn of the internet age, "The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed." True innovation, in other words, had come to Jewish education, but there was still much remaining work needed to spread those images of the possible and help them take root. The American Jewish communal system and Jewish educational infrastructure have indeed adapted in some ways to a new American ethnic and religious reality, but change in the general culture outpaces change in Jewish communal life. Jewish Federations now need to change their modus operandi, given change not only in patterns of religious and ethnic identification but also in the roles of organizations in America. In this revolution, legacy institutions will not completely disappear; the learner-centered approach, involving relationships and Jewish wisdom both, is salient for emerging Jewish organizations as well as for traditional ones. Woocher called for institutions to "renew" and "revitalize," for emerging and traditional organizations to sit side by side and for old power dynamics to dissolve. He called for educators—our greatest resource—to represent learners and not host organizations, and for a fundamental understanding of Jewish education and even organizational involvement as a tool to "equip . . . Jews—and others, if they so wish—with the motivation, ability, and opportunity to utilize Jewish teaching and practice to live better lives and shape a better world" (Woocher, 2015, para. 12).

In researching this piece, I stumbled into a quirk of our electronic age: preserved comments of Jon's, and mine, and others, to blog posts and on Facebook pages. The sincerity and passion of those conversations are palpable. They also offer a chance to learn not only from Woocher's intellectual contribution but also from his personal leadership: to be humble, to listen closely whomever the teacher, to laugh easily, to seek ideas from all literatures, to engage respectfully with each other, to inhale popular culture, to be bold, to read voraciously, and to do our very best on behalf of the Jewish people.

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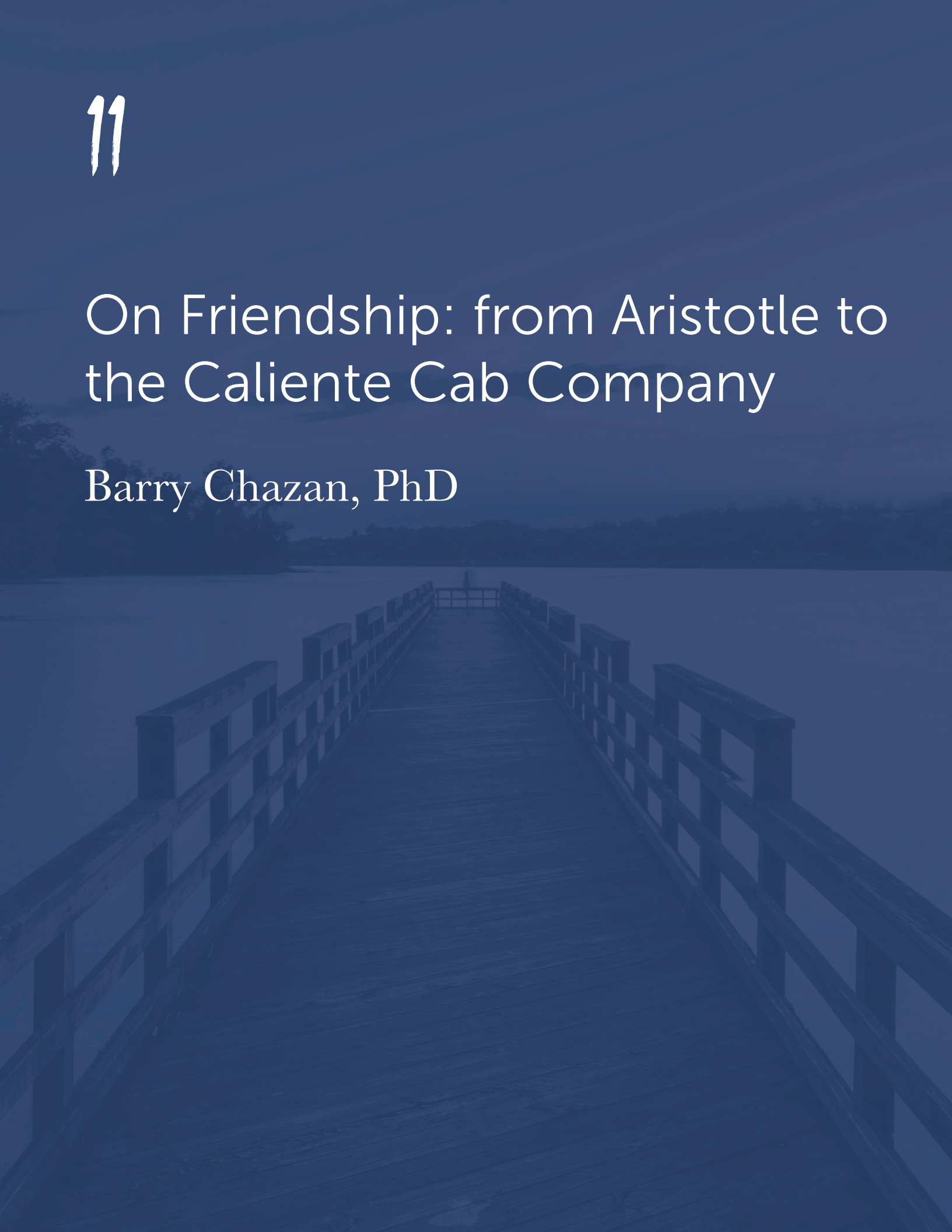
11

On Friendship: from Aristotle to the Caliente Cab Company

Barry Chazan, PhD



What is friendship? Philosophers, theologians, poets, novelists, social scientists, authors of children's books and self-help books, daily columnists, pop music writers, and artists over the ages have devoted time and energy to answering this question. The 622-page Norton Book of Friendship (Welty & Sharp, 1991) is a collection of poems, essays, letters, sacred texts, memoirs, fables, and folktales from the world's cultures that propose to explain friendship. Its contributions are from writers and sources as varied as Aesop, Hannah Arendt, the Book of Ruth, Emily Dickinson, Groucho Marx, Herman Melville, Mozart, William Shakespeare, and Walt Whitman.

ARISTOTLE ON FRIENDSHIP

In asking the question of the meaning of friendship, all roads lead back to The Lyceum Academy founded in Athens in 335 BCE by the then-49-year-old philosopher, Aristotle (384 BCE – 322 BCE). Aristotle's discussion of friendship is found in *Nicomachean Ethics*, which to this day is regarded as the starting point for any discussion of the subject. A 2016 book entitled On *Friendship*, by Alexander Nehemas, presents a wide-ranging investigation of these origins of the friendship discussion and its expressions in subsequent philosophy, literature, art, and drama. Nehamas begins his book by indicating that

> Aristotle has always been not only the inspiration of most of our philosophy of friendship, but also of much of our common sense about it. . . . On the whole, and to an extent unparalleled in a field that sometimes considers agreement a form of discourtesy, the philosophical tradition is overwhelmingly on Aristotle's side. (2016, p. 12–13)

In book VIII of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle affirms the centrality of friendship to life:

> For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods; even rich men and those in possession of office and of dominating power are thought to need friends (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8).

He then proceeds to discuss three categories or kinds of friendships (*Nicomachean Ethics* 5–15): (1) utility, (2) pleasure, and (3) *philia*.

The first category, friendships of "utility," refers to a person's connection with another person that is useful for enhancing social standing, career, financial advancement, or the like. This type of friendship is utilitarian at its core and is essentially about, "Is it good for me?" Such friendships are typically fleeting, often shallow, and frequently have clearly denoted beginnings and ends.

> Now those who love each other for their utility do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each other. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 5–15)

The second category of friendships refers to those that bring "pleasure." Such friendships are rooted in aesthetic, emotive, and sometimes physical connections, but in distinction from Socrates, Aristotle does not regard pleasure as necessarily only physical. This type of friendship, often typical of the young, can be short-lived because what is pleasant often changes and lasts only as long as it arouses good feelings:

> Those who love because of pleasure do so because of what is pleasant to themselves and not because of who the loved person is but insofar as he is useful or pleasant. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 5–15)

The third category of friendship—which, for Aristotle, was the most important—is *virtue philia*, which refers to connections rooted in the intellectual and moral virtues of the friends. Such friendships are about neither personal gain nor personal pleasure, but rather about the shared search for and experiencing of the virtue of goodness. They require mutual affection,

mutual recognition of the affection for each other, sharing of experiences, and a shared process of deliberation about values. This is an ongoing connection between people who both are virtuous and believe that there is a highest virtue—the virtue of goodness.

> Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good and alike in virtue, for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good in themselves. Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are mostly friends, for these do this by reason of their own nature and not incidentally. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 5–15)

This cursory summary of Aristotle's thinking on friendship suggests its achievements and complexities. Aristotle succeeds in a very concise manner to quite clearly distinguish between three diverse types of friendship as well as to make the first types relatively clear. However, when it comes to clarifying the nature of what Aristotle regards as true or deep friendships (*philia*), his words are often regarded as complex and obscure, which has led to centuries upon centuries of explication of and commentary on the Aristotelian perspective on this highest form of friendship (Prangle, 2012).

FROM ARISTOTLE TO CAROLE KING

The analysis, elucidation, and often emendation of Aristotle's views has been undertaken by diverse thinkers over the ages who reflected significantly diverse cultures and world views, including Marcus Cicero (106–43 BCE), Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), and C. S. Lewis (1888–1963).

The Aristotelian perspective experienced serious challenges in the age of modernity from economic, political, philosophical, and psychodynamic perspectives that tended to actually regard not *virtue philia* as the highest form of friendship, but instead friendship for utilitarian and pleasurable purposes. In more recent times, this new order was reflected in the replacement of "virtue ethics" by identity politics focusing on "*my* friends," "*my* nation-state/ nationality," "*my* religion." In response to this dynamic, a late-20th-century neo-Aristotelian philosophical literature emerged that critiqued the modernist notions of friendship and proposed instead alternative perspectives of a contemporary "virtue ethics" and "virtue *philia*" (MacIntyre, 2007; Taylor, 1992; Williams, 1986; Zagzebski, 1996).

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Friendship remains an important part of each of our lives. We experience it daily, and we hear about it on our headphones or see examples of it on the big or little screen. A useful mirror of current ideas about friendships can be found in online lists of "Top Contemporary Songs about Friendship," revealing incontrovertible loyalty, responsibility, protection, support, and love--from Carole King (1972) ("winter, spring, summer, and fall, all you have to do is call,"), to Dionne Warwick, Elton John, Stevie Wonder, and Gladys Knight (1986) ("you can always count on [us], for sure, that's what friends are for)," to LCD Soundsystem (2007) ("if the trip and the plan come apart in your hand . . . where are your friends tonight?"), to Bruno Mars (2010) ("if you ever find yourself lost in the dark and you can't see, I'll be the light to guide you").

These modern "music philosophers" of friendship emphasize the importance of being there for a friend in hard times and helping the other when in need. But sadly, in practice, the tools of contemporary friendship seem to be cell phones, tweets, and "friending," often at the expense of actual interpersonal connections—an iteration of friendship very distant from the Aristotelian *value philia* of days of yore.

JON AND BARRY

I first met Jon at Brandeis University in 1974, when he was beginning his Jewish academic career and I was on sabbatical from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. We quickly connected with each other that year, having coffee together and talking about common interests and shared dreams. We were both East Coast, suburban, golden oldies, sports-obsessed, Camp Ramah, Ivy League, "Young Turks" who wanted to change the world.

My connection with Jon continued from that year until that sad day in July 2017. Although we lived on different continents and in different cities, we connected through ongoing personal meetings, phone calls, faxes, emails, and joint projects. Jon came to Israel often, and we would have dinner together at a favorite fish restaurant, and I came to New York often, where meeting Jon was usually a fixed part of my itinerary. We frequently appeared together at conferences, seminars, The Jewish Federations of North American (JFNA) General Assembly, and academic symposia.

Our conversations flowed wherever and whenever we met, as if we were engaged in one ongoing conversation. The topics were varied, encompassing the big and little issues of life; indeed, the difference between the two was not always clear to us. We spoke about Jewish education and our shared belief in both parts of the phrase, "Jewish" and "education." We agreed on the idea that Jewish education was part of the larger venture of making the world a better place and its inhabitants better people. As the years went by, our shared beliefs remained strong, and they were tempered (and sometimes saddened) by the realities of communal and organizational life. We shared a deep excitement about the new Jewish philanthropists and their focus on Jewish education, alongside questions and sometimes even melancholy about the translation of big ideas into praxis.

On the very personal level, we devoted a significant amount of our discussions to sports—perhaps we shared the belief that, in the end, "all the world's a stage"—or a football stadium or basketball court (Jon with his beloved New York Giants and me with my championship Boston Celtics). We particularly spoke of our children with pride, as "good" people. We frequently exchanged stories of fathers of same-aged sons growing up on different continents and with different life-trajectories. At the same time, Jon was a private person, and while I have certain probing tendencies, there was no need to enter into the corner of every personal domain; the ones we did discuss mattered to us, and we each spoke from the head and the heart.

One important period of our meetings took place in the early years of the 21st century when I was on a two-year sabbatical in New York City. We would meet every Friday afternoon at a downtown venue, most often the Caliente Cab Company, as he was getting ready to take the train to New Jersey and I was to take the subway uptown, both of us getting ready for *Shabbat*. I vividly remember how as we left each other and went our separate ways, my heart and my head felt better.

So, Aristotle, what was our friendship? It had its utilitarian moments: Jon helped me spend a sabbatical year in New York, and I helped him to establish the Lainer fellowship for emerging Jewish educators in Jerusalem. At the turn of the century, we worked together to publish a series of pamphlets called *Israel in Our Lives*, advocating for the importance of Israel in all domains of education and life.

Our friendship was also about pleasure. Jon loved life. He enjoyed a good meal and especially chocolate. He was not a prophet of doom or a constant complainer. Ours was a multiyear friendship, reflecting many moments of pleasure and enjoyment that were neither fleeting nor temporal.

But of course, the Jon-Barry friendship was more than utility or pleasure. When I was with Jon, I felt that I was in the company of a man of virtue and goodness. He respected intelligence, thinking, analyzing ideas, and careful reading of texts. Moreover, the two of us enjoyed and respected the great ideas and works of the "twin nobilities"—Jewish and general cultures—with which we were both raised and nourished. Indeed, I felt that Jon brought out the better in me, while also at times calming the sadness and/or melancholy about the world to which I would sometimes revert. It was through him—and a few other dear friends—that I felt I understood Aristotle's friendship of virtue. He was in many ways a "virtue" mirror that caused me to look critically at myself for flaws and successes. I do not want to suggest that I definitely knew what virtue was, but I did have a good sense of when I was in the company of a person of virtue. Moreover, I came to understand the "connectedness" or "viral" theory of virtue, which holds that if you want to become virtuous, hang out with virtuous people. Indeed, I believe that our years and hours together made us both feel better about the possibility of virtue and about the good yet finding their place in this world.

It is now some time since Jon's departure. I think of him often. Periodically, my children will see me going to the cabinet to bring out two mugs with the name "Caliente Cab Company" imprinted on them. They will say to me, "Talking to Jon again, right?" I gently nod my head, with a tear in my eye but a smile on my face.

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Reinventing Jewish Education for the 21st Century:

"Jewish education in the 21st century needs a new paradigm (or set of paradigms) built around the idea of placing learners at the center of its thinking and asking how it can help these learners achieve a more meaningful, connected, and fulfilling life. If Jewish education can deploy the rich resources of Jewish tradition and contemporary Jewish life to help learners answer their authentic questions and experience the mix of joy purposefulness, wonder, invigoration, and peacefulness that most humans seek, then it can thrive." (p. 218)

- Dr. Jonathan Woocher

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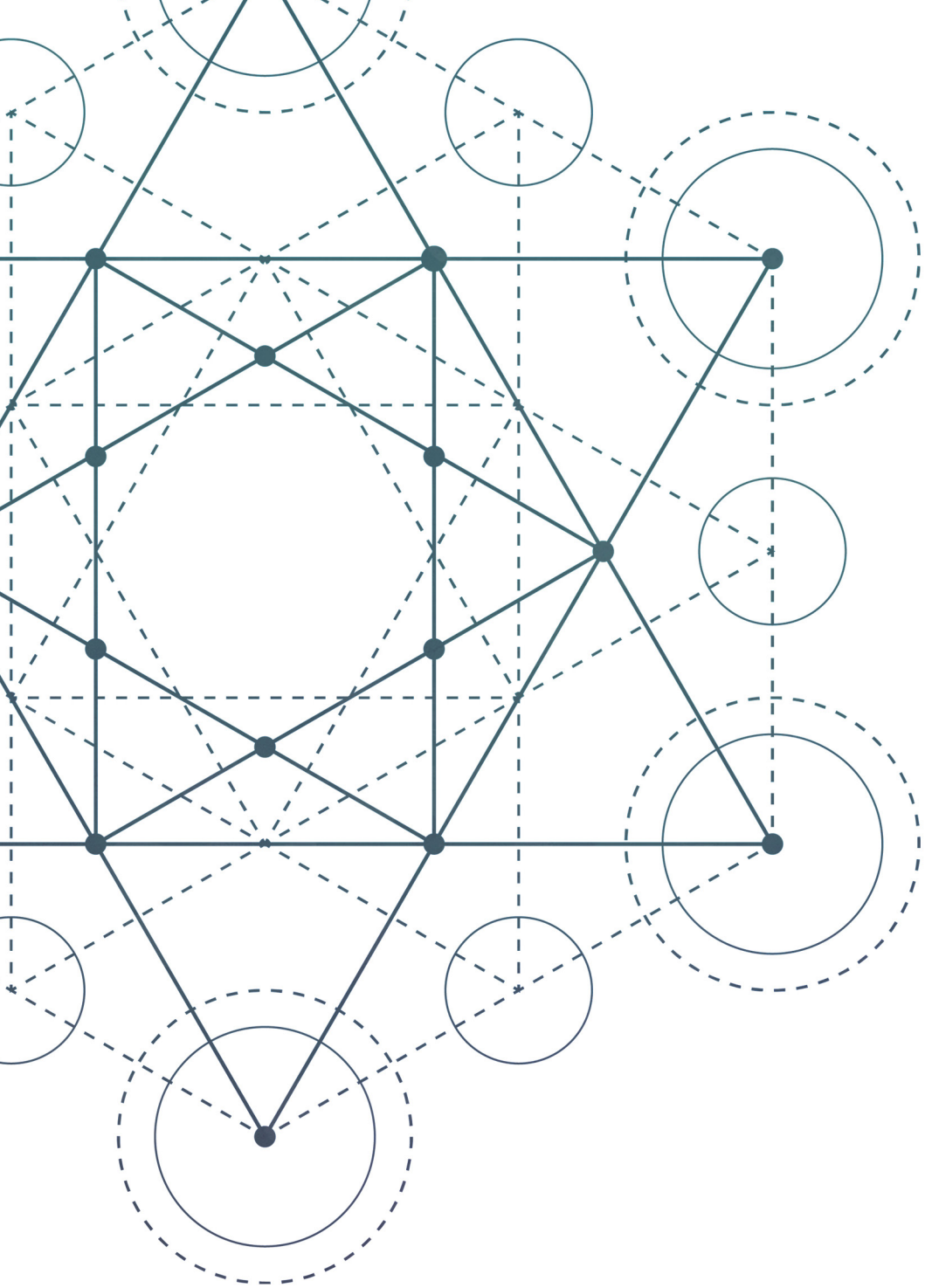

Remarks delivered at the Jewish Theological Seminary on May 18, 2017:

"The creative reinvention of Jewish life in the 21st century must be grounded in a serious appreciation, study, and application of the accumulated wisdom of Jewish teaching and practice as these have developed over the past three millennia. That is to say, as Jonathan Sarna might put it, that the discontinuities that we introduce must be grounded in continuities; we seek innovation that simultaneously disrupts and sustains. Our watchword is Rav Kook's: Renew the old; sanctify the new. This is not about balancing tradition and change – it is about embracing a tradition of change, one that enables Jewish teaching to speak authentically to the evolving needs and aspirations of successive generations."

- Dr. Jonathan Woocher