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The Values of Spiritual People: The Mehayeh Metim of Mordecai Kaplan's Educational Philosophy

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The case for a values based approach to Jewish education can be made from a number of different perspectives. The most ancient framing of the argument issues from the conflicting accounts of the three most fundamental Jewish values in Pirke Avot by Shimon Ha-Tzadik (1:2) and Shimon Ben Gamliel (1:18). Contemporary cases for the centrality of Jewish values for Jewish life and education have been made by Michael Rosenack (1983) and Alvin Mars (2003).

In the Reconstructionist movement, the centrality of Jewish values is implicit in Mordecai Kaplan's chapter about the future of Jewish education in Judaism as a Civilization (1934). In 1984, Schein and Staub sought to make the values based approach to Jewish education explicit through the construct of the "values of spiritual peoplehood" elaborated in Creative Jewish Education. The six core values of *hokhma*, *hidur mitzvah*, *kedusha*, *Ziyonut*, *Tikkun Olam*, and *derekh erez* have anchored the development of family and intergenerational programs as well as the newly emerging national Jewish reconstructionist camp (2002). As with any educational construct, growth occurs organically over time. The values of *kehilla* and *shemirat ha-guf* have recently been added to the contemporary lexicon of Jewish/reconstructionist values. This paper will explore the values of spiritual peoplehood from three different perspectives:

- 1). The evolution of an educational construct ("Jewish values") in a particular context (Reconstructionist Judaism) as it goes through three periods of developmental (1934, 1983, and 2003)
- 2). A critique of the Kaplanian identity construct of "peoplehood". The nuanced distinctions between the value of "peoplehood" and the "values of spiritual peoplehood" will be analyzed in terms of contemporary Jewish identity. In 1984, Schein and Staub argued using familiar Kaplanian language that educational constructs needed to be transvalued in the light of the circumstances of each generation. One could easily say *dayenu* to Kaplan's focus on peoplehood and belonging providing a strong Jewish identity given the forces of assimilation and anti-Semitism in the first third of the 20th century. The last quarter of the 20th century and the first quarter of the 21st century had made Jewish identity an easier educational accomplishment. Peoplehood came easily to a generation of Jews whom Eugene Borowitz could characterize as inverse Marranos, Jews who proudly wore Magen Davids in their public life but shuttered at the prospect of intimate Jewish ritual and deeply Judaized life-styles. Schein and Staub argued that "spiritual peoplehood" was a more appropriate goal for Jewish education in our 1984 context.. Is this the case today in 2008?
- 3). Related to the challenge of constructing complex and multiple identities, we would suggest that some of the same dynamics that allow for limited, surface Jewish identities for American Jews also affects the development of Jewish identity in Israel. Mordecai Kaplan's philosophy of peoplehood and Judaism as an evolving religious civilization is often cited as being the paradigmatic experience of Jewishness for many Israelis who are "non-religious" but feel something larger than a "national" identification with the Jewish people (Bar-On 1977; Levine 1984). Using a set of metaphors developed by Adin Steinsaltz suggesting that Jewish life in and outside of Israel can be understood as the difference between "marine" and "mammalian" Jewish life, we will explore the values of spiritual peoplehood as an "amphibious" construct that can work effectively but differently for both land and sea Jewish identities.

The Evolution of the Values of Spiritual Peoplehood: Last Things First

At the turn of the 21st century, the perennial idea of starting a Reconstructionist Summer camp was finally airing among the leaders of the movement. The opportunity to create and apply experiential learning at a total 24/7 Jewish living environment was now about to emerge. But the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation Board had important and challenging questions.

The concept of Jewish camp was not new and in fact many of our congregations were already sending their Reconstructionist children to Ramah, URJ, Habonim Dror, Young Judea JCCA residential camps.

Why should we start yet another Jewish Camp.? And ‘Mah nishtana’ how would this camp be different?

The answer we gave to convince our board was the actual work of Dr. Jeffrey Schein and Dr. Jacob Staub from Creative Jewish Education. Their central thesis along with Dr. Jeffrey Schein’s future education school models of the values of Spiritual Peoplehood were the reasons for us to develop a program that would have all the wonderful elements of summer immersion camps but would have the rubrics of these adapted values as the kernel of our total program. Rabbi Jeff Eisenstat was fortunate enough to work with Dr. Schein on faculty of the Reconstructionist Rabbinic College and staff of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation when model schools were selected to create curricula based on these values. Later he would be the Rabbi of one of these schools and developed on going value for classrooms, family education and the home based on the values of spiritual Peoplehood, similar to the work done at congregation B’nai Keshet referenced later in the paper.

It was therefore a natural progression in educational theory to continue the Values as the basis for our work at camp and for our emerging Reconstructionist Youth Program, No’ar Hadash. Most importantly the JRF board then recognized that there were certainly values from Wisdom to Spirituality, Arts to Tikkun Olam, that were unique as an emerging paradigm in the educational philosophy of our movement.

In the original values from Creative Jewish Education Schein and Staub developed core values of Jewish education and applied them to age appropriate learning:

Grade Bet- Jewish Symbols and Hiddur Mitzvah

How have the Jewish People employed symbols to express important thoughts and feelings.

Grade Gimel- Menschlichkeit and Kedushah

What does it mean to be a good person and a good Jew?
Bein Adam l’havero and ben Adam l’makom

Grade Dalet- Jewish Arts and Aesthetics

Jewish art forms-music dance, liturgy poetry crafts.etc.

Grade Heih-Tziyonut -Attachment to the land and people of Israel

Grade Vav-Tikun Olam-Responsibilities to improve the world

Grade Zayin **Hohmah**-Philosophy and theology Nature of God of humanity and the world

The adaptation to a camp setting of these values led to conceptual refinement of the existing values as well as the addition of the value of derekh erez (here understood as character development).

חכמה □ □ **Hohmah (Wisdom)** takes us to texts both ancient and modern as we delve into the style and methodology of learning that is steeped in our Jewish tradition

הדור מצוה □ □ **Hiddur Mitzvah (Creativity)** reminds us of a time in our observant past when the visual arts could be used only in beautifying a *mitzvah*. It is now our joyous task to open these avenues and many more roads to informal learning, enhancing the connection to our heritage in the modern and ancient world.

קדושה □ □ **Kedushah (embodied Spirituality)** takes us to a different realm – a way in which we can encounter the Divine. For many, prayer has been offered as the first step in finding a spiritual connection, but it need not be the only path. Community expression, nature and the environment, music and meditation, rhythm and dance – all of these vehicles can have a mystical approach for the individual and the group.

ציונות **Ziyonut (Peoplehood)**, which might better be known by the non-political term of *am Yisrael*, signifies the connection of the Jewish people to the land and the people of Israel with language, culture and heritage.

תקון עולם (Repairing the World) makes us ask the question, “How can we as Jews and as human beings bring about a better world.

דרך ארץ **Dereh Eretz (Character)** focuses on the manner in which we should behave towards one another. Using the language of the Holiness Code, we strive to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Ultimately, this focus on the values of spiritual peoplehood derives from basic Jewish and Reconstructionist educational values. Ironically, however, it wasn't until after Schein, Staub, and Eisenstat created the Values of Spiritual Peoplehood that the authors examined the chapter on Jewish Education in Judaism as a Civilization.

Kaplan, once again was quite ahead of his time as he posited these values which certainly overlap with the newer generations evolved lexicon of Jewish values:

“Bearing in mind the elements into which it has been found convenient to analyze the Jewish Civilization, the aim of Jewish education may be defined thus: to develop in the rising generation a desire and capacity:

1. to participate in Jewish life
2. to understand and appreciate the Hebrew language and literature
3. to put into practice Jewish patterns of conduct both ethical and religious
4. to appreciate and adopt Jewish sanctions and aspirations
5. To stimulate artistic creativity in the expression of Jewish values.”

The application of Kaplan's values continues to strongly influence Camp JRF as well as other educational pockets in the Reconstructionist movement.

Backstage Developments in Jewish Identity: The Evolution from Peoplehood to Spiritual Peoplehood and the Origins of the Values of Spiritual Peoplehood

Mordecai Kaplan fought his best battles in the 1920s and the 1930s against two particular problems which confronted the American Jewish community of the time: assimilation into the non-Jewish society, and strife within the Jewish community. The concept of peoplehood thus served two very different purposes. For Jews who were already assimilated into American society, Kaplan's concept of peoplehood, with its emphasis on belonging rather than on believing, offered a path back to the affirmation of Jewish identity that would not sever important intellectual commitments. It enabled them to acknowledge deep nostalgic connections to Judaism in a way which was acceptable both to themselves and to the wider intellectual circles in which they moved. It built on their established Jewish identities without requiring them to sacrifice their intellectual commitments.

The second use of Kaplan's concept of peoplehood was directed toward the overcommitted. The Jewish community of the period was populated by significant numbers of Jews who stylized their Jewish identities with rigid ideological constructions. Kaplan saw how often these dogmatic ideologies led to intracommunal strife. By addressing common concerns that transcended such factionalism, and by elevating the value of belonging to the Jewish people over other ideological commitments, Kaplan sought to strip bare the ideological armor of the dogmatists whether Zionist, religious, or Socialist-so that all parties could discern their common commitment to Jewish survival. Thus, the concept of peoplehood - both in the popular sense of the primacy of belonging to the Jewish people, and in the more theoretical sense in which it designates the civilizational character of Judaism and the interconnections among and common concerns of Jews around the world - was addressed both to the uncommitted and to the dogmatically committed Jews of the period. One notes a Reconstructionist understanding of both of these problems as it influenced the response of Jewish educators to various educational challenges. Character Education, for example, became an influential force in secular education during the 1920s. The Character Education movement insisted that a good education consisted not only of the teaching of skills and information but also in the teaching of the content of American moral virtues. Jewish educators began to ask whether Jewish education should not, in an analogous way, teach students about Jewish morality. The response of Jewish educators, documented in the early issues of the periodical *Jewish Education*, reveals a sensitivity to each of the groups described above.

The consensus that emerged among Jewish educators was that Character Education ought not be a primary goal of Jewish education. The greater contribution of the educator to the overall development of the Jewish child was to help him or her affirm a Jewish identity in the face of assimilationist and anti-Semitic pressures. The affirmation of peoplehood would be more than sufficient; the substance of such an identification was not of pressing concern. The response to Character Education also reflects Kaplan's sensitivity to the issue of conflicting ideologies. Such a sensitivity is manifest, for example, in Alexander Dushkin's "Character Education" (*Jewish Education*, January, 1929) and Eugene Kohn's "Character and Education in Jewish Schools" (*Jewish Education*, January, 1931). Were educators to have agreed to teach Jewish moral virtues, they would not have been able to agree upon criteria for selecting and defining those virtues.

Amidst competing conceptions of the purpose of Jewish life, Kaplan and his disciples in Jewish education attempted to create a climate in which Jewish education would become a communal responsibility. Jewish identity was thought to be a promising common denominator for such undertakings.

The nature of the impact of these two major forces in Jewish life assimilation and what might be called Jewish dogmatism-upon Jewish children today bears little resemblance to the situation fifty years ago. Of necessity, the change in circumstances demands a change in the response of Jewish educators. It is nearly five decades since Daniel Bell, the noted sociologist, first referred to the post-ideological era of post-war America. Because of this shift in the general climate, because of the wide acceptance among American Jews of the Reconstructionist definition of Judaism and its emphasis on peoplehood, because of the reaction to the Holocaust and to the establishment of the State of Israel-for all these reasons and more, the issue of ideological dogmatism is not a significant one for Jewish educators today. Jewish children generally identify themselves as Jews, rather than as Reform or Conservative or Zionist Jews. If anything, contemporary Jewish life can be said to suffer from a parve and uninspired consensualism about the issues of the survival of Israel and of remembering the Holocaust. In such circumstances, vital ideologies would be a contribution to American Jewish life.

The issue of assimilation has altered in a corresponding fashion. Ethnic and cultural pluralism is far more acceptable in today's intellectual and social climate. It is chic to be ethnic. American Jewish children do not need to struggle to feel comfortable and even smug with their Jewishness. The fights which their grandparents-Kaplan's original audience - fought to establish American credentials are beyond the imagination of most of this generation.

But if the affirmation of Jewish identity nowadays comes easily, it also comes cheaply. The concept of peoplehood fostered by contemporary American culture involves a ready acceptance of ethnic differences without demanding cultural or moral creativity and discipline as an outgrowth of ethnic identification. The form of ethnicity is everything. Public display is essential. *Mezuzot* and Stars of David are proudly exhibited, Hebraic names are given, *Yom Ha'atzmaut* parades are well attended, but the real substance of the ethnic commitment is unimportant. When Jewish educators in the past struggled to legitimize a Jewish identification, they were addressing a generation which knew from firsthand familial experience the feeling of Shabbat, the Yiddish language, the differences between Shabbat *nusah* and *Yom Tov nusah*. Today's educators face a generation of inverse Marranos who proudly display Israeli flags in public, who fight fearlessly for the rights of Jews to be different in the public schools, and who yet have little or no Jewish ceremony and study in their private lives.

This is not the concept of peoplehood which Mordecai Kaplan and other Reconstructionists labored to create. The old logo of the *Reconstructionist* magazine represented the paths of Zion, arts, and religion as intersecting at the centripetal force of peoplehood. Just as the bond between the Jew's universality as a human being and particularity as a Jew was thus declared to be indissoluble, so too was the link between a Jew's commitment to Jewish peoplehood and his or her expression of that commitment through a particular spiritual path. From the Reconstructionist perspective, as the affirmation of universalistic concern cannot resonate without the acceptance of one's Jewish particularity, so the affirmation of that particularity is hollow unless it reflects a substantial involvement in the Jewish civilization and furthers the spiritual paths within the contours of that civilization.

In light of these changed circumstances, Reconstructionist educators need to alter the meaning of the sense of peoplehood which remains at the heart of our current educational efforts.

Required no longer to convince students that they are members of the Jewish people, we should instead adopt as our goal the inculcation of a sense of purposeful or spiritual peoplehood. No longer called upon to justify the survival of the Jewish people in terms of its potential contributions-as a religion of ethical nationhood, for example-to the greater good of human civilization, we are faced with the challenge of motivating our students to enrich their lives with Jewish content by exposing them to experiences that capture the moral and spiritual dimensions of Jewish life.

The suggestion here that Reconstructionist educators should begin to add "purposeful" or "spiritual" to their conception of peoplehood as they formulate curricula is no more than an explicit articulation of Kaplan's original intentions. His writings abound in a variety of suggestions about the purpose and meaning of Jewish existence-about the potential for self realization that Judaism offers, about the social and political agenda to which the Jewish heritage moves us, about the sanctification of our everyday lives, about the mission of the Jewish people in working for peace and justice. When he wrote about nationhood, it was ethical nationhood; when he championed Jewish survival, it was creative and spiritual survival for manifest and pressing purposes.

Perhaps Reconstructionists themselves are responsible for the need to qualify the term "peoplehood." It is, after all, self-congratulatory to think of one's philosophy as being at the heart of the American Jew's identification with Judaism. With the congratulations, however, comes a concomitant conceptual responsibility: to make sure that the idea of "spiritual peoplehood" clear and accessible to educational theorists and practitioners alike.

In the spirit outlined above we now attempt to make the notion of spiritual peoplehood concrete enough to teachers, curricularists, and Jewish educational leaders by exploring in some depth that might, in levels *bet* through *Zayin*, be devoted to the spiritual element of purposeful peoplehood. The goal here would be to elaborate the *derakhim*, the paths, which have spawned lives of moral and spiritual purpose for Jews throughout the ages. Students would be exposed to the ways in which membership in the Jewish people opens up these possibilities for individual Jews.

The educational framework for such a curriculum is linked in our minds to a major thesis of Philip Phenix in his book *Realms of Meaning* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). Phenix argued that a viable curriculum for general education would do well to guard against, in his terms, "the fragmentation of meaning." According to this view, human beings are essentially creatures who are capable of experiencing meanings - of finding meaningful patterns in their interactions with the world. A curriculum's philosophy, therefore, must be rooted in an approach that presents the student with the full range of those patterns of meaning, rather than one that selects patterns more narrowly or presents those patterns as unrelated.

For Phenix, who was dealing with general education curricula, this approach entailed an educational approach grounded in six different realms of meaning: 1) symbolics (language, mathematics); 2) empirics (the sciences); 3) aesthetics; 4) synoetics (knowledge of personal relations, e.g., as described by Buber in his discussion of I-Thou relationships); 5) ethics; and 6) synoptics (the study of history, religion, and philosophy). Each of these realms of meaning, he asserted, has its own unique epistemological status. Each allows the individual to experience patterns of meaning through a different faculty of perception, insight, or cognition. Each has its own structure for storing the collective knowledge of the human species.

Phenix hoped that a curriculum that approached education in this way could support the individual's search for meaning and pattern in life. Unlike curricula built around such organizing centers as "subject matter," the "disciplines," "relevance," or "problem solving" (all of which were competing notions, in 1964, for a philosophy of curriculum for general education), Phenix proposed a curriculum based upon the most fundamental consideration of human nature: that we are beings capable of experiencing meaning.

We suggest an analogous approach to Judaism and Jewish education. As Jews, we are individuals capable of experiencing all of the spiritual patterns of meaning available to us in the Jewish tradition. As educators, we want to avoid a curricular approach that presents students with a narrow selection of meaning patterns or that presents a variety of patterns as unrelated alternatives. If we take the Reconstructionist civilizational conception of Judaism seriously, then we want to expose students to the greatest possible number of facets of Jewish civilization, all of which are interrelated but epistemologically distinct patterns through which Jews have experienced and interpreted the meaning of life. Thus, a *halakhic* approach that presents students with a Judaism that can be understood as a legal pattern alone, or a Classical Reform approach that focuses exclusively on ethical realms of meaning, or a Zionist approach rooted in the communal and national structures of Jewish history—all of these are unacceptable in their narrow and fragmentary natures.

Even a Reconstructionist approach, which attempts to present a broader spectrum of Jewish experience but which presents mysticism and rationalism, for example, or ritual observance and ethics, or supernaturalism and naturalism, as competing and incompatible alternatives, is not acceptable. It should be the conscious objective of the Reconstructionist educator to allow and encourage students to emulate our ancestors' integrated experience of the various realms of Jewish meaning—so that one's halakhic and aesthetic and rational and mystical perceptions, for example, are all experienced in the course of one's Jewish education, in as integrated a fashion as possible. This is what it means to live in the Jewish *civilization*. What follows immediately is a preliminary sketch of a one-hour-per-week curriculum in which the spiritual meanings of the Jewish tradition are pursued in a Reconstructionist fashion.

This section of the curriculum would begin with the *bet* year in the six-hour afternoon school and would continue through confirmation. (The extra hour in the *alef* year might be best devoted to basic skills and Hebrew language.) Each year, the curricular component would focus upon a different aspect of Jewish spirituality. While the choice here of six categories is inevitably arbitrary to some extent and is not intended to be exhaustive, the themes have been chosen because of their centrality within the Jewish civilization. They are slotted into different grade levels on the basis of the conceptual abilities of students of different age levels. In this regard, there is a progression from more concrete to more abstract approaches to spiritual meaning that parallels the child's transition, according to Piaget's understanding of child development, from concrete to formal operations as outlined earlier in the essay. Additionally, a Confirmation year program would revisit the values of spiritual peoplehood in order to sculpt a comprehensive view of Judaism with a focus on how each of the six core values shaped Jewish life and civilization.

B'nai Keshet and the Values of Spiritual Peoplehood: The Middle Stages of the Values of Spiritual Peoplehood

A few years after the publication of Creative Jewish Education a young Reconstructionist rabbi who had studied the essay on spiritual peoplehood received a grant from the Metrowest federation to develop an innovative family and adult learning program. He hired his former professor to write a curriculum and proceeded to develop the program based on the values of spiritual

peoplehood. The program took immediate root in the synagogue and attracted national attention in 1992 as B'nai Keshet became the flagship of twelve Reconstructionist congregations utilizing this template to develop their educational programs.

Focus groups in 1996 conducted with JESNA and in 2008 conducted by one of the co-authors confirmed the impact of the program on participants. While there were small-scale criticisms and helpful suggestions emerging from both these focus groups, the overwhelming weight of the evaluation underscored the

- Power of the program to build community within the various grades of the religious school;
- Deeply engrained image of life-long Jewish learning created by parents walking the walk of life-long Jewish learning as well as talking the talk;
- The value of ongoing Jewish conversations between children and parents

In a different scholarly setting, it would be of great interest to explore the staying power of this program amidst the more typical ephemeral successes of Jewish education. Is it the pedagogic power of the program? The dynamic family educator? The grounded in educational commitment rabbi? The particular milieu of Montclair New Jersey where the program takes place? Or perhaps Joseph Schwab and his many disciples would find this fertile ground for this as a case study of the search for co-ordinacy among the commonplaces.

In the context of this paper, however, the brief analysis turns in a different direction. The general thrust of synagogue and educational change projects in North America (ECE, Synagogue 2,000, Synaplex, etc.) these past two decades has often assumed that you can't change the educational environment without changing the host environment of the synagogue.

Perhaps Bnai Keshet is the exception that proves the rule as a good deal of the energy for synagogue change has come from the family and adult learning within the religious school. This is explained by informants from the latest set of interviews in a two fold way. First, many others in the synagogue caught glimpses of this dynamic learning and asked how they could be involved. Secondly, some members of the congregation began to ask how the values of spiritual peoplehood might become the basis for congregation-wide learning and action. In 2006 with the help of a Legacy Heritage grant a Values in Action committee was formed. Each year a different one of the values of spiritual peoplehood was to guide synagogue wide programming include the High holiday sermons which would kick off the exploration. In the late spring a culminating retreat would lead to a synagogue brit embodying new commitments to putting the values in action. Simultaneously, a curriculum development process would begin which would feed more thematic material back into the religious school related to this value. For a variety of reasons the full extent of the program's ambition has yet to be realized but even the preliminary successes show the way in which this construct of the values of spiritual peoplehood continues to take deeper and deeper root in the educational soil of the congregation

Marine and Mammalian Forms of Jewish Existence

How can we understand the success of the values of spiritual peoplehood—a single educational construct- in environments as different as Camp JRF and congregation B'nai Keshet? Rabbi Barbara Penzner begins an article in the 1995 Reconstructionist magazine revisiting Mordecai Kaplan's New Zionism with the following epigram attributed to Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz at a Jerusalem lecture in 1994: "All creatures live in water. The difference between sea creatures and land creatures is that land animals draw the water into themselves." As we extend this metaphor in several different directions, we hardly need to remind the reader of water itself

as a metaphor for Torah and Jewish living established in as diverse Jewish literary contexts as Jeremiah (cisterns of living water) and Rabbi Akiva(a Jew without Torah is like a fish out of water)

This distinction between marine and mammalian Jewish life can be made concrete through a colleague and a teacher of both the authors. The colleague made Aliya to Israel 12 years ago. In an educational video he made very clear his reasons for making *aliyah*. This Rabbi was fatigued by what we might call the Herculean mammalian efforts it took to sustain a Jewish life. He found in Israel the marine currents where the natural rhythms of the nation supported his and his family's Jewishness. A whole legion of Zionist thinkers (Ber Borochov, Ben Gurion., etc.) might be applauding as our colleague's relishing of marine Judaism can easily be interpreted as one facet of Jewish "normalcy".

Our teacher at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Rabbi Ludwig Nadleman was a principled Mammalian Jew. With a bit of ambivalence but a firm German-Jewish resolve, he refused to spend time in Israel. He enjoyed doing everything with absolute kavana. He feared being in Israel would mean that his Jewishness was experienced in too casual and non-intentional fashion because being Jewish in Israel was—simply put—too easy. From his perspective, a happy Jewish fish is less interesting than an intentional (even if somewhat neurotic) Jewish existence in the Diaspora.

The Epigram in an Israeli Nusach: Can Christmas be an Interest of an Israeli Jew

Perhaps no incident so captures the differing sociological vectors affecting North American and Israel Jews than the following vignette emerging when one of the authors lead a group of family educators on an Israel tour. The group had just explored the marine and mammal distinctions discussed earlier in this article. This insight was particularly poignant as they were touring Israel during Hanukkah and almost giddy with the experience of living Hanukkah in a way that had none of the challenges and tensions of defining ones celebration over and against the dominant American civilization.

Our next stop was the Frankel Jewish day school in Jerusalem. The educator relayed to us that in a neighboring Jewish school there was a Hanukkah educational custom of at this time of the year to do some creative thematic learning. Each year several grades chose a theme to explore in an educational fashion. The theme for this year: Christmas.

When identity is constructed religiously, Christmas and Judaism are as fish and fowl as one can imagine. The North American educators hence responded with shock and disbelief. Jewish children studying Christmas smacks of all the specters of assimilation and intermarriage. Yet, these educators are aware that their own "knowing" is situated knowing.

They realized that their instinctive response that a group of Jewish children studying Christmas might only felt like an oxymoron in their own North American Jewish context. The relativity of their own response leaves open viewing the phenomena from the other side. Is the notion of Israeli children studying Christmas a sign of weak or strong Jewish identity. Is there something too "fishy" (marine) about it. Could this be the modern educational equivalent of Bialik rejoicing that in Tel Aviv one found Jewish prostitutes as a great siman/sign of the normalization of the Jewish people?

At a different level, one can use the Steinsaltz epithet to understand more ideational conflicts. One of the authors compares and contrasts selections from the essays of Menahem Brinker, Michael Meyer, and Moshe Greenberg in the Visions of Jewish Education volume in terms of their relative optimism or pessimism about sustaining Jewish life in marine and mammalian host environments

In the following section, we seek to provide an example of marine and mammalian educational thinking drawn from the craft of educational programming. It will be helpful to conclude this section by making absolutely explicit what educational implications are implicit in our midrashic explication of Steinsaltz's insight. Marine educational environments have an enormous capacity for "happiness", "naturalness" and "organicity." In many ways its chief virtue is that learners are hardly consciously aware that they are learning. Mammalian environments are built out of the mammals (at least the combination of homo ludens and homo sapiens that constitutes the human mammal) capacity for using language as an intentional tool, in this case a tool for building Jewish identity and community

B'nai Keshet to Camp JRF: Values of Spiritual Peoplehood from Synagogue to 24/7 Camp Environment

In Steinsaltz's terms we might see B'nai Keshet as the best experimentation done with the values of spiritual peoplehood in the relatively mammalian milieu of the synagogue. It became the privilege and responsibility of the Reconstructionist camp to transplant these values back into the environment of a living Jewish camp, a marine life for the values of spiritual peoplehood as it were. The annotated notes below summarize some aspects of the transformation and come from JRF camp communications.

חכמה □ □ H □ oh □ mah (Wisdom) takes us to texts both ancient and modern as we delve into the style and methodology of learning that is steeped in our Jewish tradition. As Reconstructionists we have engaged in this study in formal ways, but there is an added excitement as we make the text come alive with innovative and creative activities. It has always been our duty to examine texts and hear the words and thoughts spoken to us in each civilization and in each culture.

Although there is one specific time during our camp day that embraces learning which we call "havvayah" experience we take any opportunity for a Jewish teachable moment. Starting with traditional texts is always essential but finding modern relevant texts in poetry, song, American or Hebrew, folk or pop music, Stories of our heritage of any other culture is a valued way of learning experientially.

הדור מצוה □ □ Hiddur Mitzvah (Creativity) reminds us of a time in our observant past when the visual arts could be used only in beautifying a *mitzvah*. The creation of ritual art for centuries was the major product. Ritual objects from *menorahs* to *kiddush* cups, wimples to *tallitot*, *mizrah* □s to *ketubot*, Torah mantels to Shabbat table cloths were all beautiful ways to enter into the world of art. It is now our joyous task to open these avenues and many more roads to informal learning, enhancing the connection to our heritage in the modern and ancient world. At Camp JRF we use drama, music, drums, dance, glass making, wood shop, fabric, yarn, etc. to be the medium for creativity. When campers write plays or songs that reflect the values of camp and then build the backdrops and build the lighting system all of this falls into our understanding of Hiddur mitzvah.

קדושה □ □ **Kedushah (Spirituality)** takes us to a different realm – a way in which we can encounter the Divine. For many, prayer has been offered as the first step in finding a spiritual connection, but it need not be the only path. Community expression, nature and the environment, music and meditation, rhythm and dance – all of these vehicles can have a mystical approach for the individual and the group. It is an essential (yet not always easy) journey to find that spiritual chord.

In an entry from the Kaplan Diary, he writes about his utter dismay of visiting his daughter Judith at Camp in the 1920's and having children praying without any kavvanah or meaning in their assembly. I read this encounter to our own campers and they said that Rabbi Kaplan would have a very different opinion as he observed the meaningful intentional approach our camp has towards prayer and spirituality.

ציונות Zionut (Peoplehood), which might better be known by the non-political term of *Am Yisrael*, signifies the connection of the Jewish people to the land and the people of Israel with language, culture and heritage. As Reconstructionists we feel the connection to cultural Zionism but we also attempt to be sensitive to a way in which the children of Isaac and the children of Ishmael can be brothers and sisters in a world of peace.

Over the past years at Camp we have had a most successful Mishlahat from Israel that has helped infuse our camp with Hebrew language, culture, politics, and most significantly shared Peoplehood understanding. It is not unusual for us as North Americans and Israelis to discuss and debate with our own socio political values what the essential commonalities and differences of the land and people of Israel might be. A strong emphasis over the past years has developed as we now send our rising 11th graders to Israel for a month which begin and end at camp so our younger campers can be excited and influenced by this important pilgrimage.

תקון עולם (Repairing the World) makes us ask the question, “How can we as Jews and as human beings bring about a better world?” There can be no doubt that we should incorporate into our lives a sense of *tzedeck* – social, political, and economic justice – and a vision of working towards mending the local and global parts of our universe.

For urban and suburban children camp has always been a way to get out into the country and away from the hustle of the daily city life. But a new era of environmental concerns and nature have enable and energized our staff with our campers to recycle, compost, plant our own food, green our own camp, take to the woods with zero impact camping.

Teva has taken an important turn in the 21st century and camp is a leading factor in environmental education.”

Al shelosha devarim, “On three things the world is established; Torah, Service, Acts of Loving Kindness” .Perhaps we need to reclaim Service, Avodah as true dedicated work outside of oneself. In our first year at Camp JRF on the Aaron and Marjorie Ziegelman campus we realized we did not have a space for an outdoor sanctuary and our entire camp built with holy service a Beit Tefillah in six days and on the seventh we sanctified that space with our worship of the Shabbat. But we wanted to reach outside our own site and try to be a beacon of workers and members in the local community. With the partnering of the United Methodists, our campers and our camp families have now begun ongoing construction for members of the local community who are in dire need of reconstructing their homes. This ultimately is mending the world and allowing us to be part of the greater community.

דרך ארץ Dereh Eretz (Character) focuses on the manner in which we should behave towards one another. Using the language of the Holiness Code, we strive to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Our Jewish community at camp is based on an organic holy covenant for the treatment

of ourselves and each other based on the values of our tradition. Within this we remember that it should be our task to be good people. “*Sei a Mensch*”.

There is an anecdotal story that relates a camp aggadah about two campers in a heated conversation in our second season. A first year camper interrupted the conflict and said “that is not the way we treat one another here at Camp JRF”

Menschlichkeit truly matters at Camp JRF and perhaps with all we do at camp this is the basis of how we intentionally treat the members of our community.

The Values of Spiritual Peoplehood Expanded: Sh'mirat Haguf and Kehilla

The natural evolution and exigencies of camp life has raised to consciousness the need to dramatize two other Jewish values:

שמירת הגוף Sh'mirat Haguf (Minding the Body)

As we take our children from the city and immerse them in a marine environment we are also aware that how they eat, play, pray, hike, swim, are all part of the nurturing of the body and soul. Sh'mirat Haguf (minding the body) has evolved to become an important new value that could not fit into any of the previous values. Although competition in sports is much more geared for the training of good sportsmanship and ‘Yasher Koahs’ are offered regularly, one can definitely feel the growth and development of healthy bodies that assist healthy minds. Koah with Moah- physical strength with careful thought.

קהילה Kehillah (Community)

Perhaps all the above Values of spiritual Peoplehood are all reflected in a holistic setting, where learning, praying, playing, eating, creating dancing, singing, relating, mending and minding can be united in one generous community.

Kehillah (Community) has now become our newest value although it certainly is implicit in each value. This vision of camp could only happen as we expand the boundaries of Kaplan’s meaning of Peoplehood and community.

In the following section, we seek to provide an example of marine and mammalian educational thinking drawn from the craft of educational programming. It will be helpful to conclude this section by making absolutely explicit what educational implications are implicit in our midrashic explication of Steinsaltz’s insight. Marine educational environments have an enormous capacity for “happiness”, “naturalness” and “organicity.” In many ways its chief virtue is that learners are hardly consciously aware that they are learning. Mammalian environments are built out of the mammals (at least the combination of homo ludens and homo sapiens that constitutes the human mammal) capacity for using language as an intentional tool, in this case a tool for building Jewish identity and community

DEEPENING AND BROADENING STEINSALTZ EPIGRAM: STAGED CONFLICT AS A MAMMALIAN EDUCATIONAL VIRTUE

A line of developmentalists that include Jean Piaget (cognitive development), Lawrence Kohlberg (moral development), and James Fowler (faith development) have argued that the schemas for our intellectual, moral, and religious lives are fluid in a way that is both dynamic and fragile. We are

creatures who can grow into new structures for experiencing and interpreting the world. The key to such growth might be called “moderate novelty. “If we are exposed says Kohlberg, for instance, to moral reasoning that is below our stage of comprehension or below we are remarkably unengaged in that reasoning. If our exposure is to reasoning that is several stages beyond we are bewildered and uncomprehending. Exposure to moral reasoning one stage beyond ours (of “moderate novelty”) is a doable stretch and challenge us to think (and arguably act) in more sophisticated ways. In the world of Jewish education the book by Earl Schwartz *Moral Development for the Jewish Educator* (out of print but available through a variety of distributors) remains a leading example of such thinking.

The value of cross-age teaching and more generally intergenerational learning flows from this particular understanding of human development. Here the educator has both direct and indirect roles. Directly, the educator who is tuned in to a child or adult’s present stage of development will create disequilibrium by asking a stretching question or exposing the learner to the new cognitive structure. A ten year old, for instance, who pictures *matan torah*/the giving of the Torah will be exposed to another midrash calculated to present a new way of thinking about God. Instead of the polysyllabic revelation of the entire Torah perhaps the ten year old will be allowed to focus on the possibility that only the *aleph of anochi* (the first commandment I am the lord your god) was revealed. Not the entire *shivim panim* /seventy faces of Torah but the correlation of a particular face with a particular developmental stage is the challenge for the educator working in this mode.

More indirectly, the educator has a second role as intergenerational shadchan. The rich chemistry of different structures of experience and understanding is best unleashed through exposure to other learners at other stages of development. Creating the community of learners where an individual will experience these developmentally differentiated perspectives becomes the educational challenge.

Environmental Design and Immersion: Mordecai Kaplan’s Aquarium

Anyone who has attended an ulpan, a Jewish summer camp, or studied at a yeshiva knows this strategy. The key to moving through the life cycle lies in creating “hot-house” environments where the learning is of great intensity and earnestness. Only by reaching points of great intensity within a given stage of development will the seeds for moving on to another stage of Jewish living be properly sown and later reaped. In contrast with the “managed conflict” strategy outlined above the key for the immersion method not exposure to a higher stage of development but the maximal engagement of ones present stage. The process of moving on to the next stage will presumably happen of its own accord.

We believe Mordecai Kaplan believed deeply in such a strategy at a communal level. The following paragraph from the chapter on Jewish Education in *Judaism as a Civilization* still motivates many of us as a dream for an organic Jewish community with many entry pathways and much intensity along any trail (6)

Jews must abandon the notion that the Jewish school, or the class for adults is the primary conveyor of Jewish education. The mistake of limiting education to formal instruction is the primary cause of the complete failure and breakdown of the Jewish educational endeavor. ...

The solution lies in altering completely the conception of the Jewish educative process, and in learning to regard formal classroom instruction as only one link in a chain of agencies, which

must be instrumental in transmitting the Jewish heritage to the young. All organizations and institutions, which represent the body of Jewish life and manifest the Jewish collective will-to-live should make provision for training the young so that they will ultimately take over these activities.

A rabbi, educator, or lay leader who believes that this is the path to greatest Jewish growth might create week long summer or winter camps or ulpanim in their congregation, might switch the hours of religious instruction from school to Shabbatonim, etc out of a belief that “business as usual” religious school lacks the quality and intensity to move our learners forward in their Jewish journey.

The designer of immersive educational environments will have an abiding belief that designing educational “greenhouses” where learning can occur holistically and from many different angles (to use the camp example: in the bunk, through the peer group, in the Jewish living) is the key to the organic Jewish educational environments Kaplan suggests.

Related to the analysis of Congregation B’nai Keshet and Camp JRF one can recognize their primary orientation within these frameworks. The values of spiritual peoplehood program at B’nai Keshet utilize carefully crafted conflicts and a finely crafted use of language and vocabulary to craft its educational program. It is a mammalian project at its heart. The values of spiritual peoplehood at Camp JRF depend upon the rich immersive (hence marine) environment of camp to accomplish its educational goals.

Concluding Perspective: The Kaplan Cronson Report 100 Years Later

It is interesting—perhaps ironic—that this paper appears at the time of the 100th anniversary of the famous Kaplan Cronson (1909) report that gave birth to the New York Bureau of Jewish education. The powerful Deweyan belief that education could not only mirror society but critique and reconstruct it lived and breathed in the innovators who tried to create a different form of Jewish education. In New York Jews Quest for Community Arthur Goren reminds us that thinkers and doers like Kaplan, Magnes, and Benderly believed that simulating the forms of organic community would have deep affect on the substance of Jewish life itself, so integrally related were form and function in their minds.

With the benefit of hindsight, one recognizes these beliefs as somewhat Utopian. Schools just as likely mirror societies as reconstruct them. What one can more realistically believe is that there are two great virtues available to the North American Jewish community 100 years later:

- The ability to create intentional communities in the form of strong synagogues and creative educational programs that have the Mammalian virtue of nurturing those (likely a minority) whose need for a Jewish identity is strong;
- The ability to create aquatic, marine environments like Jewish camps where immersion makes Jewish living powerful and organic
-

This leaves open the question of whether a truly amphibious form of Judaism that embodies the virtues of both organic Jewish living and intentional Jewish striving will yet emerge sometime in the 21st century. What would a Jewish education look like that looked for meaningful and eclectic blends of these two modes? Would this provide Jewish educators with the tools and

impetus to IGP's (individual growth plans) for students and families? Perhaps a perspective on policy and evaluation that might challenge parents to commit to both forms of Jewish experience or lose their inalienable Jewish right to kvetch?

The same question might be posed of marine Israeli Jews from the opposite side of the fence (or pond). Is it possible for them to come on land and lose their sea legs long enough to experience the virtues of the conscious deepening of a Jewish identity that marks so much of the life of committed Jewry outside of Israel?

It is, these authors believe, in the conscious creation of thoughtful blends of marine and mammalian Jewish environments that one will experience in the 21st century the mehayeh metim of Mordecai Kaplan's educational philosophy.

Postscript

It has been famously observed of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan (by Israel Sheffler and others) that Kaplan knew how to frustrate his students. One anecdote of this genre is the student who met with Rabbi Kaplan a week prior to class to carefully prepare for his sermon in the JTS Hermeneutics class. The student assiduously noted all Kaplan's suggestions and incorporated them into his presentation. After the presentation Kaplan proceeded to critique the sermon in rather harsh terms. The student of course was dumbfounded: "But Rabbi Kaplan I did what you told me last Tuesday." Kaplan was said to have responded "yes but that was last Tuesday and today is a week later. I've evolved."

The authors feel very much like b'nai Kaplan if we share this last insight as a postscript to the paper. We now note a paradox we could not see as we began this paper. On the one hand, we have presented "peoplehood" as a more obtainable educational goal now that it had been for Kaplan in 1934 or Schein and Staub in 1983. On the other we note that at Camp JRF "kehilla"—a basic sense of community and peoplehood—has been consciously added to the list of values of spiritual peoplehood since it no longer can be assumed that campers come with this value in place to their summer camp experiences.

This seems like a paradox to us: peoplehood is both an easier and harder to reach educational goal. We suggest a few ways to begin to understand this paradox. Perhaps the key is to parse the phrase peoplehood in some of the same ways that scholars like Eisen, Cohen, and Horowitz have done in various contexts. Perhaps peoplehood has a private (sacred self) and a public (human capital in service of the Jewish people) dimension. Or perhaps the famous rubric of Rabbi Kaplan and Neil Gilman of believing, belonging and behaving as dimensions of Jewish life have themselves undergone a transformation. In this post Kaplanian, post-modern, deconstructionist milieu perhaps a 4th B ("becoming") is the key to unlocking the mysteries and joys of Jewish people.

Mi yodea? Perhaps we all can as we continue to wrestle with the challenges of imparting an abiding sense of Jewish peoplehood into a next generation of Jews in Israel and around the Jewish world.

In Mordecai Kaplan's basic understanding of Peoplehood Reconstructionism suggests that being a member of the Jewish community is about belonging and behaving before it is about believing. While creating the Camp JRF culture the formation of the group collective identity was foremost in our early theory for one does not (and perhaps cannot) have a strong and connected belief in Jewish theology without first belonging to the community in some way and behaving as such..

First comes **Belonging**. In order to have a successful camp program, there must be committed and involved participants. The camp community of staff and campers need to feel that they are part of something greater than themselves, and the first programs of the camp season begin by bringing all members into an environment where they can make a place for themselves. In our very first season there was a creation of a community brit (covenantal agreement) f how the members of our community committed the aims of the group. Group collective understanding of this value of our involvement is the underlying value of the Camp JRF concept of how we are connected first in the *kehillah*.

Behaving like a member of the community comes only after our participants are invested in being part of that community. Campers can focus on behaving by taking responsibility for the way the camp community lives and interacts, and as part of a Jewish camp they can see how these behaviors take on larger meanings as they leave camp and bring them into their everyday lives. We take our texts from Mishnaic sources like Pirkei Avot which show how we interact with others to create by our behavior this holy community. Camp programs focus on what it means to act as a Jew in a typically secular world and why it is important to be part of a Jewish community in the 21st Century.

Programming can begin to focus on **Believing** only after there is a core group of youth who are committed to and invested in the camp community and who have a sense of what it means to behave as part of that community. At this point programs can focus on issues of spirituality, belief, practice, and other topics that might be considered "religious." By waiting until this point in the process, the youth are given plenty of time to build a community in which they feel safe to share these personal ideas with their peers. Believing does not necessarily mean that all members of the community must have the same commitment to Jewish spirituality and theology. Believing means taking a vested interest in the future success of the camp program, allowing new youth to be engaged in their own similar processes of belonging, behaving, and believing. More than this, believing ensures the future involvement of the youth in personally meaningful Jewish experiences.

After the above 3 B's set by Kaplan's theory Camp evolved with a fourth-**Becoming**. What does it mean to create a movement camp and not infuse the future ideas of the movement? Becoming Reconstructionists was our fourth year's theme where we took the basic elements of Kaplan from Living in Two Civilizations, The Past has a vote not a veto, the Process that makes for salvation and the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish People and expose our central theories critically and experientially for our community to wrestle with. We even learned to highlight specific learning days as we created each Civilization to experience a given topic, a key focus of Kaplan's understanding of Judaism as a Civilization.

הדור מצוה
Hiddur Mitzvah,
Creativity

חכמה
Hohmah,
Jewish Education
and
Wisdom

דרך ארץ
Dereh Eretz,
Building Character

ציונות
Ziyonut,
Peoplehood

תקון עולם
Tikkun Olam,
Repair the World

קדושה
Kedushah,
Embodied
Spirituality

קהילה
Kehillah,
Community

שמירת הגוף
Sh'mirat HaGuf,
Minding the Body