

Gems from Kaplan's Chapter on Education in Judaism as a Civilization

Three different groups of educators re-engaged with Kaplan's chapter on Jewish education between 2017-2019 as we developed our 21st Century Kaplanian Vision of Jewish Education. Certain gems jumped out of the "dusty" and "old" volume as being full of brilliant light and relevance today. [This is Option A – Kaplan in his own words without comments or questions.](#)

The Ultimate Goals of Jewish Education

When a child grew up (in previous Jewish times) Judaism helped him in the conduct of his daily affairs and qualified him for membership in the social group without which he would have had no status as a human being. It transmitted to him what he needed for the attainment of life eternal. That in turn gave worth to his life in the world....

If Jewish education is to be established on a permanent basis, it must similarly provide the equivalent of those it served in the past (of salvation and ultimate meaning).

- *Judaism as a Civilization*, page 479

The danger is that the Jewish training might be altogether crowded out of the life of the Jewish child. The only way to prevent that danger is making the Jewish training so effective in enlarging the mental scope of the child's life, in socializing his attitude fellow man, in inculcating in him an appreciation of life's worth and sanctity, that parents will rejoice to have such training imparted to their children.

- *Judaism as a Civilization*, page 480

Jewish Art and Civilization

Creativity is the result of whole-souled and organic reaction to life's values" of a reaction in which senses, emotions, imagination, and intelligence are fully aroused. It is not enough for a civilization to be rich in values of a religious or esthetic nature . Unless its people respond wholeheartedly to those values, the civilization is artificially sterile.

- *Judaism as a Civilization*, page 485

The very significance of Judaism as a civilization would be lost, if artistic creativity in the expression of Jewish values were treated as something secondary to American Jewish life.

- *Judaism as a Civilization*, page 486

The Individual Child

No whit less important than reckoning with the perpetuation of Jewish life and culture is it to reckon with the well-being and growth of the individual child. The Jewish educative process must start with the actual experiences of the child as he lives them in the present, and lead him constantly so to reorganize and reinterpret his experience that he comes to identify his own good with the good of society. To achieve this end the child must be given increasing control over his own experience so that he will himself be able to shape and direct it toward aims freely and intelligently chosen.

- Judaism as a Civilization, page 486

The Scope of a Child's Jewish Education

It is necessary to change radically the very notion of what is to constitute the educative process. . . If Jews rely solely upon Jewish schools to achieve these aims, they are bound to fail. . . 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. . . (camp, community, art , dance and music clubs, youth groups as articulated later in vision.)

- Judaism as a Civilization, pages 488 - 489

Two objectives of Jewish education which are so difficult to attain during the regular school term-- the ability to read Hebrew and the acquisition of Jewish interests-- can easily be achieved by camps.

- Judaism as a Civilization, page 494

The Body, Soul, and Mind in Jewish Education

Activity and participation in actual life, though of primary importance in the educative process, must not be permitted to crowd out the element of ideation. If action is the body of Jewish life, thought is the soul.

- Judaism as a Civilization, page 498

The Jewish Home and Parent

The home seems to be the logical place where the good life might be taught not as a theory but as an art and in practice. . . The need for arriving at some method of energizing the moral and spiritual possibilities of the home is but part of the general problem of character training. All the schools and religious organizations and books on ethics aim to foster social efficiency, moral health and capacity for cooperation. Yet, when the individual tries to translate their inspiration into specific habits, he is left without health or guidance. In this

respect Judaism fares no worse than the generality of organized attempts to improve human character and conduct. But this is no consolation for Judaism, since it cannot afford to remain morally impotent. Its survival as a civilization is contingent upon its power to mold character and personality. It must therefore help its adherents translate ideals into concrete acts.

- Judaism as a Civilization, page 496

Jewish Parent and Teacher

The field of the Jewish teacher's activity and influence must be enlarged or there will soon be no teachers. If Jewish education is to prove its worth in this, the scope of the Jewish teacher must be enlarged to include the home of the child he teaches. In fact, most of the influence he wishes to exert upon the child he must learn to exert through mediation of the parent. The teacher should be the one to establish the point of contact between the moral and religious generalizations and the specific situations and occasions in which they should be embodied. He should be the pastor to the families of the children in whom he has to inculcate the patterns of Jewish conduct.

- Judaism as a Civilization, page 496

On Teaching Bible and Religion

At the age of seven and eight children often begin to question the veracity of stories about miracles. Jewish teachers who feel the conclusion of science and anthropology inescapable begin to question the veracity of stories about miracles. Jewish teachers who find the conclusion of science and anthropology inescapable have given up the traditional religious beliefs. Yet most parents who send their children to a Hebrew school expect the teachers to indoctrinate their children with the belief in the historicity of theophanies and miracles. A great many Jewish teachers, who find themselves in the predicament of having to teach what they cannot conscientiously believe, arrive at a kind of solution which may be ingenious but hardly moral. It may be described by words which Emerson used with regard to the English when he said "Their Religion is Quotation". They salve their consciences by completely depersonalizing themselves, as it were, and acting a mere transmitters of Jewish tradition...

But no child listening nowadays to a teachers half-hearted avowals of belief and ambiguous explanations will be strongly influenced to remain a Jew.

- Judaism as a Civilization, pages 499 - 500