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# JEWISH EDUCATION FOR JEWISH COMMITMENT

## An Assumption that Deserves Consideration and Reflection

Professor Isadore Twersky, z"l, presented the "meta-goal" of Jewish education at a meeting of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America in 1990: "(Jewish) education, in its broadest sense, will enable young people to confront the secret of Jewish tenacity and existence, the quality of Torah teaching which fascinates and attracts irresistibly. They will then be able, even eager, to find their place in a creative and constructive Jewish community."[1] Implicit in Prof. Twersky's comments is the theoretical assumption that Jewish education should be viewed as a major, if not the most essential element in assuring Jewish continuity and the active participation of Jews in their community. Twersky's words imply that whereas those not receiving substantive instruction in their religious heritage cannot reasonably be expected to be other than indifferent to Jewish life and Judaism, the beneficiaries of Torah teaching[2] will view their lives and responsibilities differently, understanding and positively accepting the obligations entailed in being a member of the Jewish people. While agreeing in principle with Prof. Twersky's vision, I would strongly argue that generic Jewish education, i.e., Jewish students in Jewish schools and/or other educational contexts, in and of itself, will not achieve the reversal of the self-destructive course of modern Jewish life. Unless educational experiences are specifically and self-consciously designed for inspiring and instilling Jewish commitment within the student during the many

years that will follow his/her graduation from a formal Jewish educational context, Jewish education will not live up to the expectations that the broader Jewish community has created for it, i.e., to stem the tide of Jewish disaffiliation and indifference.

## Practical Ramifications

The necessity to engender tangible commitment within the recipients of Jewish education has a practical dimension as well, regarding potential financial support for institutions and programs of Jewish learning. Interest in day schools in particular has recently become heightened, as evidenced by the increase in the number of community day schools and the establishment of a major fund intended to encourage the founding of additional Jewish day schools. Yet unless it can be unambiguously demonstrated that graduates of such institutions do not follow the negative general trends being observed in the Jewish community as a whole, these institutions might quickly find themselves with even less support than before. During my tenure as a Jerusalem Fellow in 1985, Seymour Fox often commented that if and when the Jewish communal leadership would acknowledge that Jewish education in general, and day school education in particular, constitute key means by which to hedge assimilation and other negative trends affecting Jewish identity and affiliation, it could in fact be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the investment of substantive and appropriate resources in day schools will, at least on paper,[3] enable these institutions to maximize their potential as forces for the development of Jewish identity and allegiance, particularly at a point in Jewish history when Jews in the Diaspora can no longer rely upon either the family unit or the immediate communal environment to guarantee the formation in children of strong Jewish sensibilities. Yet, if powerful indications of the effectiveness of such an approach to countering the worrisome trends that are eroding significant numbers of identifying Jews are not forthcoming, then a retrenchment could result which would leave day school education in greater disrepute than before, and an even less desirable object of investment and financial support. Therefore, it appears that it is incumbent for the day school movement as a whole, and for the schools associated with the various denominations specifically, to clearly delineate among their educational goals the expectation to

foster and develop a sense of overt, positive and tangible commitment to Judaism and Jewish identity on the part of their graduates. In this manner curricular emphases which in the past may not have been priorities will emerge, profiles of the requisite staff members and the training which they will need will be refined, a clear demonstration of the effectiveness of an institution's educational program can be developed by means of studies of alumni,[4] and donors and investors can be provided with a clear rationale regarding why they are being asked to invest so substantially in these institutions.

## What Does "Jewish Education for Commitment" Connote?

A prerequisite for the delineation of the educational goal of Jewish commitment, is a working definition of education in general, and Jewish education in particular. "Education can be thought of as the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society. In this sense, it is equivalent to what social scientists term socialization or enculturation. Children... are born without culture. Education is designed to guide them in learning a culture, molding their behavior in the ways of adulthood, and directing them toward their eventual role in society."[5] While the general enterprise of education could be defined in the "value-neutral" terms of the above statement, Jewish education would appear to be concerned not only with equipping students with the means by which they will be able to participate in society, but also that these means be informed by spiritual and moral considerations. Therefore, not all disciplines, nor all that is contained in a single discipline, might be deemed appropriate for a Jewish educational context. A refinement of the conception of education that more naturally conveys the enterprise of Jewish education is supplied by William Frankena, who approaches education as "the activity of fostering or transmitting excellences."[6] The term "excellences" suggests that there are standards, and that a key evaluative question that must always be asked in conjunction with developing an educational program is: "What is good to teach and how do we know that it is good?"[7] Michael Rosenak explains that one of the "excellences" that educational thinkers ponder is "the issue of culture and cultural continuity, basing themselves on the dual assumption that (a) the educating society wishes to be continued, and (b) individuals must live the cultural

heritage in ways somehow congenial to them as persons."[8] Since cultural continuity appears to be uppermost in the minds of much of Jewish contemporary religious and lay leadership, the idea that such continuity is an avowed educational objective should serve to justify why Jewish educators must focus upon not only equipping their students with cultural literacy in terms of mastery of language, history and various forms of literature, but also upon how this knowledge and these values will be enacted and applied outside of the classroom, and then transmitted to subsequent generations.[9]

## Problems Facing the Development

Nancy Schauber[10] has distinguished between what she terms active and passive commitments. Whereas active commitments are the types of obligations that others have a right to require one to honor, e.g., promises, vows, etc., passive commitments are important to one's self-concept rather than to how one appears in the eyes of others. Passive commitments are not dependent upon anyone but the individual who possesses them. These commitments reflect one's deep-felt desires, concerns and projects, and are not always subject to our conscious will. Schauber's distinction is helpful in recognizing the limitations that are inherent within a school-based program designed to inspire Jewish commitment. At least initially, the school can only influence students to externally conduct themselves as if they were truly committed to the causes that the school holds dear, e.g., Torah learning, charity, Zionism, and community service. But these activities might remain external and therefore constitute no more than active commitments. As soon as the school context is removed and the expectations of adults in the school environment no longer relevant to the graduate, these commitments may be given up and never returned to. Nevertheless we have no choice but to invoke Rabbi Yehuda's dictum[11] that it is better to do the right thing, even for the wrong reason, because there is still the potential that eventually the individual will perform the action for the right motivation. Furthermore; we also have the admonition of the author of *Sefer HaHinukh,*[12] who states with regard to several Torah commandments, that they are external actions that are designed to become internalized by the practitioner. Hopefully a similar process will take place with regard to the development of Jewish commitments.

With respect to moral education, William Damon and Anne Colby note that it is impossible for a program that is centered on the school to turn around powerful cultural trends such as a negative shift in youthful morality.[13] When taking into consideration the state of Jewish practice and observance as well as the support of Jewish cultural and philanthropic organizations, it could similarly be said that the majority of Jews are not participating in these activities, and therefore is it necessarily realistic for a school to undertake such an approach? Neil Postman would appear to claim that the lack of commitment to things Jewish on the part of the majority of Jews is precisely why Jewish schools should be involved in such projects.[14] Postman advances the "thermostatic" view of education, whereby it is assumed to be education's role to serve as a balancing factor with regard to the general trends within society. When society is excessively rigid, schools have to emphasize flexibility; when too much is in flux within the broader culture, schools have to engage in stabilizing knowledge and ideas. Therefore, by extension, it is specifically the school from which should emerge the "counterculture" trend of Jewish commitment. But one has to admit that if the Jewish people are suffering from a lack of commitment, and overemphasis upon the values of being unencumbered and autonomous is ubiquitous, it will not be easy to encourage commitment in schools.

## Are there Classical Precedents for the Ideal of Jewish Education for Commitment?

The concept of commitment to Jewish values and practices is firmly grounded in the primary sources of the Jewish heritage. Jewish tradition is replete with accounts of the heroism of individuals who under extreme duress are ready to give up all they possess, including their very lives[15] in order to avoid being unfaithful to their beliefs and traditions. Yet from the words of Rambam, Mishneh Torah, *Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah* (5:4), it would appear that there are substantial numbers who are not possessed of such massive personal courage. It is probably the exception rather than the rule, who, when confronted with the choice to either transgress and live or to resist and be killed, will choose the latter over the former. However, in addition to the

obvious sense of sacrifice and commitment that is evidenced in times of persecutions and severe religious trials, one can also identify in classical Jewish sources an expectation for courage and heroism on a daily basis in terms of how the seriously devoted individual goes about meeting the obligations that arise as a result of being a Jew. In this respect, all Jews are assumed to be able to conduct themselves heroically. An example of such an expectation appears in the introduction of R. Yaakov *Ba'al HaTurim*, the 13th century author, to his classical work on Jewish law, *Arba'ah HaTurim*, consisting of a lengthy gloss on Pirkei Avot 5:23 (Rabbi Yehuda ben Teima said: Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion, to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven):[16]

> He (R. Yehuda b. Teima) specifically mentioned four qualities concerning the service of God.
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> a) He began with "bold as a leopard" because this is a central principle in the performance of the commandments, for sometimes an individual wishes to do a *mitzvah*, but in the end does not because of a fear of being ridiculed by others. Therefore he is being instructed to be strong and ignore detractors by fulfilling his spiritual responsibilities... sometimes one is more embarrassed before a peer than before God.
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> b) "Light as an eagle" is addressed to the power of sight, which is compared to an eagle, because just as an eagle is able to quickly ascend in flight, so should you use your sight, i.e., quickly avert your eyes from gazing upon evil or temptation, for such seeing is the beginning of sin. The eye sees, causing the heart to desire, which results in the body carrying out the questionable activity.
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> c) "Strong as a lion"— this corresponds to the heart, for the courage requisite for serving God properly originates from the seat of passion and desire.
>
> d) "Swift as the deer"— instructs that your feet should quickly carry you to the performance of good deeds.[17]

For each of R. Yaakov's interpolations on the statement in *Pirkei*

*Avot,* numerous additional Biblical and rabbinical sources can be brought into play, deepening and expanding upon the theme of commitment. The setting of expectations that one will not be cowed by what others think, underscores the deathbed blessing of R. Yochanan ben Zakai to his students: "Let it be God's Will that the Fear of Heaven be upon you comparably to your fear of other people." And when the disciples questioned the importance of such a wish, their teacher responded: "If only it could be true. You should know that when an individual transgresses, does s/he not say, 'I hope that no one else sees me!'"[18] For an individual to recognize that behavior that can alienate one from his/her lifestyle, community and heritage is in fact a slippery slope and that the types of actions that can begin a slide into disaffiliation have to be acknowledged and rejected quickly and forthrightly, lies at the heart of the juxtapositioning of a series of actions listed in *Devarim 11:16.* "Take great care, lest your heart stray and you turn away, and serve other gods and prostrate yourself before them."[19] The type of passion that ought to inform the commitment to Jewish life and the will of God is strikingly stated by Rambam in his description of the individual who is truly spiritual: "And what is the type of love that is worthy of the Divine? It is the type of intense, powerful love that leads the individual to feel that his/her soul is bound up with the love of God, and as a result s/he contemplates God incessantly, as if s/he was infatuated to the point where s/he cannot think of anything other than the object of his/her love..."[20] And the encouragement of the virtue of diligence, as opposed to procrastination, is poetically reflected in the rabbinical interpretation of *Shemot 12:17.* "And you will guard the matzot (for Pesah)... R. Yoshia said: "Rather read 'And you will guard the mitzvot.'[21] In the same manner that one is not to allow *matzah* to become fermented *(hametz),*[22] so too the mitzvot are not to be allowed to ferment. Therefore, when a mitzvah comes to you, fulfill it immediately."[23] Consequently, it is entirely appropriate, as it is necessary, to include on the educational agenda of any institution or program dedicated to educating students in Jewish thought and practice, the expectation that commitments and attitudes ought to be developed that will help these students to think and act independently and courageously for the sake of things Jewish, that they will be endowed with self-control and good judgment that will help them make decisions in the best Jewish interests of themselves and their community, that they will care deeply and

passionately about things Jewish, and that they will be proactive in their pursuit of the best aspects of Jewish life and culture.

## Jewish Education for Commitment — to What?

Earlier[24] we presented a definition of education that included: "...molding their (the students') behavior in the ways of adulthood, and directing them toward their eventual role in society." With regard to molding adult behavior and participating in Jewish society, the following types of commitments should obviously be nurtured: [25]

a) *Jewish tradition and heritage.*

Those who have received a Jewish education should be expected to demonstrate familiarity with and loyalty to their people's past, and readiness to assure that these traditions will be defended, preserved, and modeled not only in word but also in personal deed. Jewish observance should manifest itself both inside and outside of the individual's home.

b) *The Jewish people as a whole.*

Educated Jews should feel themselves a part of a greater people, and therefore required to be at the forefront of efforts to help Jews anywhere in the world who are experiencing difficulty. Furthermore they should admire, respect, and support their fellow Jews of all persuasions and orientations. Such individuals should subscribe to numerous newspapers and journals, keep abreast of Jewish current events, and participate in fund-raising projects on behalf of hard-pressed Jewish communities.

c) *Israel.*

A knowledgeable Jew should be able to appreciate the religious, historical, and sociological significance of the State of Israel, and thereby link his/her fate with that of the country and its citizens. Short of making Aliyah, significant time spent studying in and visiting Israel would constitute further manifestations of such a commitment.

d) *Study as a lifelong value.*

The learned Jew should have internalized the commitment to studying Jewish sources throughout his/her life. In this manner the individual can continue to grow Jewishly well-beyond his/her school

years. Regular attendance at classes in Jewish studies, a serious home library of Jewish classics, and a daily or weekly *hevruta* reflect the existence of such a commitment.

e) *Kiddush HaShem.*

The educated Jew should be self-conscious about his/her role as an *'or lagoyim'* and therefore be concerned that s/he represent the Jewish people as well as him/herself in all dealings with other Jews, particularly the non-observant, and non-Jews. Jews with such an orientation will not be embarrassed about calling attention to their Jewishness and observances, even in a non-sympathetic environment.

f) *Local Jewish community.*

It is incumbent upon the recipients of Jewish education to feel particularly responsible to participate in Jewish institutions and organizations. Formal affiliation should be expected, and contributions of time and money should be encouraged. Support of organizations such as UJA, Jewish Social Services, etc. would be considered appropriate.

Were some, if not all of these commitments to be successfully communicated to the overwhelming majority of individuals receiving a Jewish education, the endeavor would clearly be extremely worthy of maximum communal and individual philanthropic support. On the other hand, if it cannot be demonstrated that Jewish educational programs have significantly influenced their graduates' tangible and serious commitment to these areas of life, a reevaluation of what is taking place in our schools perhaps is in order.

## How Can Jewish Commitment be Developed in an Educational Context?

I would suggest that a school could utilize the following areas in order to significantly impact upon students' degree of Jewish commitment.

a) *Curriculum.*

The choice of subject matter and the approach used in presenting the selected material always has the potential to effect more than merely

imparting skills and information to the learner. Many different sources can be substituted for one another in order to develop literacy, research techniques, or survey broad subject areas. Were the choices to focus upon the objectives of commitment listed above, ample opportunity would be provided to both deal with commitment overtly and subtly. For example, if the issue of philanthropy would be chosen as an area to promote, interdisciplinary material could be amassed that would satisfy objectives in areas of Talmud, Mishnah, Tanakh, Halakhah, Responsa, History, as well as in secular areas, particularly the humanities. Subject matter specialists might have to be convinced that the curricular choices that are to be made would not be exclusively up to them, but that should be an administrative rather than teaching staff issue.[26]

b) *Modeling.*

It is of the highest order of importance that the staff throughout the institution exemplifies as much as possible the commitments which, ostensibly, the school is interested in developing within its student body. If the educational staff truly supports these ideals, they will inevitably come up in classroom discussions as well as in interactions between students and teachers outside the classroom. It is of great importance that all members of the school staff, including coaches, club advisors, office staff, cafeteria staff, etc., act as examples of commitment to their various enterprises.[27] Furthermore, opportunities for community service, senior internships, presentations by communal leaders, etc., can all be geared in this direction.

c) *Repetitions.*

Schools are deeply traditional institutions with patterns of behavior that are developed over many years. Traditions include projects that various classes undertake, expectations for school officers, and ceremonies that honor certain individuals of ideals that exemplify the values that are being promoted. To the extent that these activities are incorporated as intrinsic parts of the school atmosphere, they will serve to alert students to the commitments expected of them as well as help them internalize activities that they are repeatedly called upon to enact during their school experience.

d) *School philosophy.*

The institution should develop a statement of purpose which it

shares with all of its constituents, staff, students, and parents, and which it evaluates on a regular basis to see if it is doing all that it can to adhere to and advance its stated goals. Placing these matters before all members of the school community not only acts as a self-corrective in the event that avowed commitments are not being stressed throughout the school experience; the exercise also serves to give these matters a high profile in the consciousness of the entire school community.

## The Problem of "Full and Partial Translation"

Understandably there will be differences among schools associated with the various Jewish denominations regarding what specifically constitutes mitzvah observance and Jewish commitment. To the extent that curriculum and programming is based upon classical Jewish sources, all teaching staffs, even those working in the most traditionally Jewish institutions, will engage in what Rosenak refers to as "translation."[28] Not only are choices made regarding which subject matter should be taught by a school and its individual teachers,[29] but once a particular book of the Bible, a tractate from the Oral Tradition, a philosophical theme, or halakhic topic is chosen, the specific implications, meanings and emphases that are drawn from the classical writings by individual teachers are still subject to considerable variations in interpretation. If this is the case within an individual school, it will be all the more true when schools affiliated with the same religious movement, let alone those connected to different Jewish movements, approach the same or similar material.[30] Nevertheless, a strong argument must be made that some sort of baseline expectation of Jewish commitment on the part of each graduate must be forthcoming from whole school movements as well as from individual schools. Only in this manner can we begin to harness the potential inherent in our educational institutions to actively combat the self-destructive trends in which the Diaspora Jewish communities presently find themselves.[31]

## Endnotes:

1 Quoted in *A Time to Act*, The Report of the Commission on Jewish Education in North America, University Press of America (Lanham, MD), 1991, p.19.

2 It does not appear obvious to me that "Torah learning", the term so felicitously

employed by Prof. Twersky, and "Jewish education", the catch phrase that appears throughout *A Time to Act*, are necessarily synonymous. Can a case be made that the study of Hebrew language and its modern secular literature, Jewish history, Israeli politics, etc., will have the same seminal and emotional effect on the formation of Jewish identity as the study of Jewish law, Biblical and Talmudic literature, and Jewish moral teachings? There are obvious curricular implications for the "effective *Jewish* school", to borrow Theodore Sizer's turn of phrase, if such a dichotomy were to be accepted.

3 While financial investment goes a long way to meet budgetary needs of day schools, additional questions must also be positively addressed in order to assure both the immediate effectiveness as well as the long-range impressions to be made by day school education:

a) Is the manpower is available to staff these schools with the appropriate personnel;

b) Are curricular materials extant that are relevant as well as potent for the contemporary day school student;

c) What is the availability of appropriate extra-curricular resources, e.g., camping experiences, youth movements, synagogue activities, cultural opportunities, and programming on the college campus, all necessary for reinforcing the lessons and experiences of a student's formative years of schooling;

d) What sort of adult education program is in place to allow for not only educating students in the classroom, but also other family members, with whom students spend significant amounts of time and who could encourage and reinforce learning that takes place in school?

Although one could argue that a partial plan is better than none at all, on the other hand, can a partial program expect to produce significant results when the schools themselves as well as other contexts in which students spend significant portions of their lives, exert contrary influences and messages?

4 Some studies have been done regarding the number of hours of Jewish education in a day school that is required in order for some sort of impact to be observed with regard to issues such as intermarriage, affiliation with Jewish organizations, visits to Israel, etc. However, these studies appear to be quantitative, i.e., the only variable being considered is hours per week of Jewish instruction per years of education. It would appear that considerable fine-tuning of such studies is necessary in order to evaluate the content of these many hours of education and thereby further maximize the effectiveness of day school education, particularly now that there are so many more students participating in the day school system, than when most of the studies were done. Yeshivat Ramaz of New York developed a sophisticated questionnaire to poll and evaluate their graduates on the occasion of their 50th anniversary, the results of which were published in *Ramaz: School, Community, Scholarship & Orthodoxy*, ed. Jeffrey Gurock (New York, 1989), as did the Akiba Academy of Philadelphia, the results of which are as yet unpublished as far as I can determine. In his report to a colloquium marking the occasion of Akiba's 50th year last February, the sociologist who conducted the

study raised extremely provocative questions that further highlighted the issue of Jewish commitment as a function of Jewish day school education in my own mind, e.g., what constitutes a successful graduate of a Jewish day school—an individual who is an accomplished professional, one who has maintained his/her affiliation to the Jewish community in one form or another, an individual who is an active practitioner of Jewish law and ceremony, someone who has moved to Israel, a person who continues to study things Jewish and expand his/her knowledge base, all of the above, none of the above, etc.

Autobiographically, the linkage between day school education and subsequent Jewish commitment was first raised before me by Prof. Alvin Schiff, when he noted that he had asked each of his graduate students over a number of years to follow the Jewish involvements of five high school classmates. He led us to believe that the results demonstrated a major discontinuity between the formal education that these individuals had received and the lifestyle that they were presently living. While it could be maintained that eventually, when these individuals would marry and raise families, they would revert back to the lessons of their earlier years, this is not necessarily the case. The question that is consequently raised is whether or not the schools could have done more to try to secure the commitment of a greater percentage of their students. The matter was presented to me as a personal challenge by Mike Rosenak, when he served as my tutor for my research during my stint in the Jerusalem Fellows. Probably as a result of recognizing that a large percentage of my students in the day school where I had taught were from irreligious homes and had little intention of becoming more Jewishly committed, I had always adopted the attitude, perhaps defensively, that I would try my best to influence my students' commitment to Judaism, but if my efforts proved unsuccessful, I would not feel personally responsible. Prof. Rosenak disagreed with such an approach, stating that it allowed a teacher to be irresponsible and not set for him/herself as well as for his/her students expectations that would reflect whether or not the teaching had been taken seriously and perceived as personally meaningful by one's students. While the expectation level for commitment will vary from school to school, and for that matter from student to student,some sort of standard must nevertheless be ascertained in order to establish a baseline which can then be used to determine whether or not the educational process that has taken place has been worth the time, effort and resources that it has consumed, and how the process may have to be altered in order to heighten its effectiveness.

5 *Britannica CD97*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1996.

6 William Frankena, *Three Historical Philosophies of Education* (New York, 1965), p.8, quoted in Michael Rosenak, *Roads to the Palace* (Providence, 1995), pp. 4-5.

7 Rosenak, *Commandments and Concerns* (Philadelphia, 1987), p. 27.

8 *Ibid.*

9 As part of encouraging his students to enter the field of Jewish education, HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein told his class at Yeshiva University in 1969, that it was at least figuratively a situation of *Pikuah Nefesh*, i.e., lives were in danger of being

lost. Unfortunately, he noted, even those entering the field wish to be *rashei yeshivah,* teaching only the highest level classes. They don't realize, he sadly told us, that if good teachers are not teaching on the lower levels, there would not be anyone around to enter the *rosh yeshivah's shiur.* Thus, concern for cultural continuity is not only necessary between one generation and the next, but also within a single school. Who will motivate those in the lower grades to desire to progress and develop in Jewish learning and practice, so that they will still be involved and intensely interested when they are ready to move on to Middle School, High School, and graduation, let alone many years afterwards?

10 Nancy Schauber, "Integrity, Commitment, and the Concept of Reason," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 33:1 (January 1996), pp. 119-29.

11 *Pesahim 50b; Nazir 23b; Sotah 22b; Ibid., 47a; Sanhedrin 105b; Horiyot 10b.*

12 *Sefer HaHinukh* #99, *Mitzvat Levishat Bigdei Kehunah.*

13 William Damon and Anne Colby, "Education and Moral Development" *Moral Education*, 25:1 (March 1996), pp. 31-37.

14 Neil Postman, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity* (New York , 1979), Chapter 1.

15 A poignant, fatal example of the priority of cultural continuity is illustrated by the events that surround Rabbi Akiva, as described by the Talmud. On the one hand, there is the notable interpretation of *VaYikra* 25:36 appearing in *Bava Metzia 62a* that when faced with a life-and-death situation, one is not only entitled, but even obligated to save oneself and not another. However, in *Berakhot* 61b, R. Akiva is depicted as throwing self-preservation to the winds by publicly teaching Torah, an act punishable by death. It would appear that R. Akiva' s calculus provides for preference given to the self when confronted by a dilemma that involves a single other person. But when the continuity of the Jewish people is at stake, then individuals are dispensable in order that the group and its values may be preserved.

16 It is notable that R. Yehuda ben Teima turns specifically to the qualities of animals for paradigms of consistent human behavior. A parallel source is to be found in *Eiruvin* 100b, where R. Yohanan claims that had the Torah not been given to man we could still have derived the moral virtues of modesty, honesty, and monogamy from various members of the animal kingdom. The point is made in even more extreme fashion by *Sifre Ha'azinu* #306, quoted by Rashi on *Devarim* 30:19, d.h. *ha'idoti bakhem hayom et hashamayim*, wherein it is claimed that moral lessons regarding consistency can be derived from the movement of the very Heavens and Earth. In all of these sources, it is implied that while man is endowed with free choice, he should ideally reach the point where doing the right thing is as involuntary and inevitable as the rotation of the earth on its axis. Aldous Huxley has put it well in explaining why such behavior does not come naturally to humanity: "Consistency is contrary to nature, contrary to life. The only completely consistent people are the dead." ("Wordworth in the Tropics," in *Do What You Will*, anthologized in *Collected Essays* by Aldous Huxley (New York, 1966), p.7.) A response to Huxley would assert that whereas an ideal expectation is that an individual will act with

consistency, s/he nevertheless could be existentially deciding on each occasion that what s/he is about to do, based upon his/her own free will.

17 Tur, *Orah Hayyim*, 1:1. Commentators on the Mishnah in Avot reflect their own perspectives on the qualities that R. Yehuda ben Teima is advancing:

| | *bold* | *light* | *swift* | *strong* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *R.Ovadia of Bartenura* | Ask your teacher to explain what you did not understand | Run after opportunities to study without tiring | Run after the chance to perform *mitzvot* | Subdue the Evil Inclination preventing *mitzvah* performance. |
| *Rabbeinu Yona* | Rebuke transgressors fearlessly | Isaiah 40:31 Those who trust in God will find renewed strength | Exertions on behalf of *mitzvah* performance will not prove exhausting | |
| *Maharsha* | The poor should overcome adversity and fulfill their responsibilities | Overcome astrological fate, not allowing oneself to be controlled by the planets | Run to place where government and society allow religious freedom | Avoid influence of Evil Inclination (EI) |
| *Tif'eret Yisrael* | Have self-confidence to in ability perform *mitzvot* | Seek out Torah study and you will be enlightened by Heaven, just as the eagle has the sun shine upon it | Avoid the intellectual issues that might be harmful to belief | Struggle against the E.I. with all your might. |
| *Magen Avot* | Don't let the E.I. discourage you from repenting due to your past | You can reach a level higher than the angels. Yet you must periodically come down to earth | | |

While some of these interpretations are more attitudinal than educational in nature, the challenge would be to design an educational program that would promote personal qualities similar to those listed, within a day school's student

body. Were individuals able to exemplify qualities such as these, it would appear that commitment to Judaism and things Jewish would certainly be assured. On a very mundane level, while on the staff at Yeshivat Ramaz in New York City, during the course of a discussion of characteristics of the ideal graduate of a day school, Dr. Sarrot, a chemistry teacher, suggested that the ideal student would be endowed with the courage to be different, a sentiment that would appear to fall within the parameters of the approach of the Tur as well as others cited above.

18 *Berakhot* 28b.

19 Rashi, d.h. *va'avadtem elohim aherim*, notes that turning away from Torah inherently constitutes engaging in idolatry, implying that individuals can be committed either to one thing, or in the absence of that, to its opposite number. A similar concept lies at the heart of Viktor Frankl's discussion of the existential vacuum. See *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York, 1972), pp. 167-71.

20 A paraphrase of Mishneh Torah, *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, 10:3.

21 R. Yoshia is engaging in word play revolving around whether the *vav* of the word is to be pronounced as a vowel, *matzot* or a consonant, *mitzvot*. The absence of vocalization in a Torah scroll allows for such word plays.

22 The process by which that which is not fermented and therefore not *hametz*, becomes *hametz* is by allowing the mixture of flour and water to remain dormant for 18 minutes or more. Consequently, prior to placement into the oven, the mixture will be constantly kneaded in order to retard the onset of fermentation, *himutz*. The metaphor extended to the fulfillment of Jewish ritual asserts that the actions should be taken immediately rather than pushing off the opportunity for the fulfillment to a later time.

23 *Mekhilta* #63.

24 See p.3 above.

25 It might be worthwhile to ask interested individuals their opinion regarding: 1) what is the meaning of each of the elements appearing on this list, 2) have any crucial elements been omitted or improperly represented, and 3) should there be a prioritization of these elements, or are they all of equal importance?

26 Robert Coles: *The Call of Service* (Boston, 1993), p. xxiii, writes of the effect of literature, specifically that produced by Eliot, Dickens, Hardy, and Tolstoy, upon his parents. Coles' parents were both deeply devoted to idealistic causes, and they looked upon novels and stories as inspirations for their moral commitments. It stands to reason that similar curricular choices can be made by schools interested in engendering similar behaviors in their students. Furthermore, Coles' book in which he attempts to analyze why people choose lives of communal service, and the volume written by Samuel and Pearl Oliner (*The Altruistic Personality,* New York, 1988) discussing the make-up of individuals who put themselves at risk in order to save Jews during the Holocaust, are both vastly informative in terms of thinking about how to create contexts that will inspire commitment and service.

27 At a professional development day at the Hebrew Academy of Greater Washington earlier this year, the assistant principal of the Kimberly-Milburn Academy, of Milburn, New Jersey, came to speak about the orientation of his school. Under the direction of the headmaster, the entire school endeavored to treat moral education seriously. Before a staff member is hired, s/he is advised of the philosophy of the school and is assessed as to whether s/he will fit into the school's framework. The same is true regarding students and others working in the school. There are specific courses given in citizenship and civics, all students take several semesters exploring the nature of virtue, there are classes after the end of the school year for the entire staff at which philosophical treatises on ethics are contemplated — in other words, a total approach. Were a similar undertaking to be instituted vis-a-vis Jewish commitment, it would be interesting to track and see if it makes any impact on our student and parent body.

28 Rosenak, *Roads to the Palace,* pp. 98-100.

29 Not only is it not uncommon, but probably more the rule than the exception, to have individuals teaching in a particular school who will take the same classical source and present emphases to their classes which will differ philosophically, theologically, and practically. Therefore the uphill battle to inspire Jewish commitment on the part of a school's student body has to contend with the additional problem that oft times overt as well as subtle messages emanating from a student's teachers can serve to confuse rather than clarify, lead to ambivalence rather than commitment.

30 See Rosenak, *Ibid.,* "Five Educators Explore *Yir'at Shamayim,*" cpt.. 7, pp. 108-129. I am not convinced that even if various religious orientations can productively and respectfully discuss a common text, they will necessarily reach a common understanding that will enable students with whom they will share their conclusions, to strengthen their specifically Jewish commitments.

31 Having asserted the importance of day schools setting standards of expectations of Jewish commitment for their graduates, I wonder how feasible this is for the growing movement of community day schools. To the extent that a school does not have a specific ideological orientation, it will probably become that much more difficult to determine what the expected ideal commitment of its graduates might be, given the necessity to be non-judgemental regarding the various levels of Jewish expression that will be reflected in the school's parent and student body. Nevertheless, while the standards might have to be more general and broadly defined, avoiding setting such standards due to the difficulty entailed in such a process would, in my opinion, be profoundly unfortunate.