

JEWISH

**CONSCIOUSNESS
RAISING**

PAPERS BY

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FAMILY VALUES AND FAMILY BREAKDOWN: ANALYSIS AND PRESCRIPTION

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Of the two parts of the main title, "Family Values and Family Breakdown," I feel more comfortable with the last half – Family Breakdown – because it is a much clearer concept and easier to grasp. You can identify it with divorce, widowhood, conflict, coldness, generation gap, drugs, and poverty (although this last item is a relative term, depending upon the gap between needs and wants). When we speak of family breakdown, we know more or less what we are talking about. The first part – Family Values – leaves me a bit dissatisfied because as a term it is just a bit too vague, too abstract, too cold, and too remote. It is too disembodied to be real.

Let it be understood that when I do use the term "family values" or "Jewish values," I refer to the whole context of routine and custom and ritual; the whole nexus of emotions and responsibilities and intermeshing relationships which alone can justify the use of the word "values" in the sense in which I think the organizers of this symposium meant it.

One more caveat, in the form of an apology. I am only a rabbi and my interest is in Jewish thought and philosophy. I am not a social worker. Therefore, both my professional experience and my technical terminology with regard to the theme of this lecture are seriously wanting. Whatever I say issues only from my own limited experience, and I leave it to you, in your charity and compassion, to recast it in the appropriate technical terms of your metier.

ANALYSIS

The subtitle of the lecture assigned to me is, "Analysis and Prescription." Let me begin with the analysis part. First, I have found in my experience in the

Jewish community that there is a very strong reciprocal relationship between family wholeness and solidarity on one side, and Jewish survival and commitment on the other. A great and intense commitment to Judaism will somehow reflect well on the tone of the home and domestic life. There is no guarantee, of course; there are no panaceas. But in some manner, the closer a family is involved in the whole rubric of the Jewish tradition, the greater is its stability. Conversely, I have found that Jewish continuity and survival are even more a function of the home than of the school. This is an opinion I would hesitate to state publicly, because I have a vested interest in Jewish education, and unquestionably Jewish education is terribly important on the agenda of the Jewish community for the future. Without education there can be no Jewish future. But I have a suspicion that in a home which is fundamentally "happy" (and I am intentionally using a vague lay term), you will find a far greater tendency towards Jewish continuity than you will in an unhappy home, beyond a certain minimum level of Jewish education. As a general rule, the transfer of Jewish commitment from one generation to the next is more a function of domestic tranquility than of formal education.

Now our main concern is not so much Jewish continuity as it is the home. I find five areas where traditional Jewish values for the family tend to conflict with contemporary standards – perhaps "mores" rather than "standards." (My methodology requires an apology: I am going to set up a contrast between two arbitrarily designed models, one of a traditional and the other of a modern Jewish home. My excuse is that I am not aiming at sociological accuracy but at clarity of exposition.) First, the idealized version of the traditional Jewish home is characterized by a high degree of intimacy, of love, of devotion, usually non-demonstrative. The husband normally is a monogamist and the wife is satisfied to be at home. As opposed to this, contemporary parents are more remote. They are encouraged to follow their own interests. The mother is told that she should not allow her life to be wrapped up entirely in her children and in her home, but should find outside interests. The father, when he comes back from the office, seeks out a peer group or other kinds of involvements. As a result, the parents seek their own particular levels of interest, or areas of interest, and are removed from the nexus of the home.

Second, in traditional Jewish homes there is a special esteem for age, which is cherished for its own sake. Of course, this goes back to the Biblical commandments of "Honor thy father and mother" and honor for the teacher and elder, but sociologically speaking, it is not so much a revealed norm as a lived value. The traditional home likely as not included an extended family larger than the nuclear family. Most Jewish children grew up in the presence of a grandfather or a grandmother, some kind of living relic of the past, and developed a natural respect and reverence for age not because of any specific function of the elderly, but because age itself was valued. Compare that now to the contemporary emphasis on youth and youthfulness, especially in America but all over the Western world as well.

That the focus of our culture is the young is often revealed in some of the inanities of the Jewish community organizations and its press. We are so geared to the young that when we want to decide the great questions of the day, we send out a researcher to take a statistical analysis of what high school sophomores are thinking, because that represents "the wave of the future" which ought, by implication, determine our stand, not only with regard to dress and speech but even with regard to policy, religion, etc. I am presenting a caricature, of course (although I have certain specific incidents in mind), but it does contain the kernel of a true reflection of the quality of life in America.

Third, in this idealized picture of the traditional Jewish home, there were more or less well defined roles for father and mother. Probably, this was not only true for the Jewish home; it was the case for general culture in which Jews found themselves in pre-modern or pre-contemporary times. A little boy knew what was expected of him when he became a big boy and a big man, and a little girl knew the role into which she was emerging and for which, therefore, she ought to be striving. This clear role definition is increasingly absent in the contemporary home, where there occurs a great deal of blurring and interchanging of roles, with consequent functional chaos when it comes to identifying the roles of father and mother as separate and distinct from each other.

Fourth, the traditional Jewish home emphasized the value of self-restraint, of renunciation, "Thou shalt not." The modern home, in our pop-culture, regards "Thou shalt not" as an excessive inhibition which can harm the emotions and mentality of the growing child. Morally, the modern home is characterized much more by permissiveness than by renunciation and restraint. Perhaps one can best describe the difference between the traditional Jewish home and the modern Jewish home by the polarity of duty and right. The traditional home emphasized duty. What am I supposed to do? What must I do? The modern Jewish home is more a matter of rights: the children's right, the wife's right, the mother's right, the father's right. Everyone has his or her rights, and in this competition of rights a balance has to be struck and a harmony established so that everyone gets his due. The emphasis is not on the contribution that I must make, but rather on what my fair share is, what my rights are.

Finally, in the traditional Jewish home there is understood and presupposed a commitment by all members of the family to a goal or a source that transcends the family. There is some kind of transcendent commitment which binds the members of the family. This transcendent commitment is usually some aspect of, or combination of aspects of, the Jewish tradition — the Jewish people, Jewish law, Jewish religion, God, Torah. The modern home lacks the axiological or ideological cohesiveness. If a religious or nationalistic commitment is present, it is not con-

sidered particularly important. It never really plays a central role in the life of the family. Again I ask you not to charge me with being unscientific. I am setting up models, and not insisting, of course, that every modern family follows one path or every traditional family the other.

These five elements, for the purpose of our discussion, may be reduced to three more basic issues: love, authority, and commitment.

LOVE

Let us begin with the first one, love. The traditional Jewish family structure is disintegrating. As time goes on and assimilation increases, you find that the whole pattern I have described as the paradigm of a Jewish family that we have inherited from the past, is falling apart. We are experiencing an accelerated decentralization of the family as a result of the various centrifugal forces which tend to pull the family apart. As it is wrenched out of the context of a stable, self-sufficient Jewish community life, the family begins to disintegrate at the edges. Eventually, the community as a whole follows suit. Furthermore, modern goals such as the desideratum of self-fulfillment and self-realization, which really are basic and important values for moderns, tend to polarize individuals in the family. They diminish the virtues of self-sacrifice, of loyalty, of restraint which had previously acted as centripetal forces in favor of the family unit. If I must seek my self-fulfillment and my self-realization, I will find that that often conflicts with what I might otherwise consider my specific duties to my parents, to my wife, to my children, to the family as a whole. I believe that this particular value of self-realization has played an especially important role in changing the function of the Jewish mother, as parodied by Philip Roth.

Let me give you an idea of how important the conception of the mother-role is in Jewish life. Unlike the popular assumption that the traditional figure of the Jewish mother was fashioned in the ghetto and the East European *shtetl*. I think it goes deeper into the Jewish psyche and much further back into Jewish history and tradition, even to the Bible. (Of course, it is not only a Jewish phenomenon; other cultures have known it and do know it as well. But that does not vitiate what we have to say about Judaism's conception of this archetype.) Consider the figure of Sarah as she is depicted in the sparse but sublime verses of Genesis. Sarah is a Jewish mother. Compassionate to others she certainly is, but she is far more concerned for the welfare of her own son – so much so, that she is willing to become vindictive in order to protect him. She is going to fight off the whole world and even turns against her husband in order to protect her son. If you read the story objectively, her husband Abraham in his argument with Sarah is morally in a far stronger position. We can only admire Abraham who will not allow Hagar and Ishmael to be wronged because of Sarah's over-protectiveness for her son Isaac.

And yet, in a special revelation God tells Abraham to hold his peace, to listen to what Sarah is saying. Morally Abraham may be right, but he must listen to Sarah. The Jewish mother sometimes prevails even against what may seem to be objective moral standards, and she is going to prevail even if she has to invoke a divine revelation to help her. Unfortunately, social workers and marriage counselors cannot rely on special divine revelation, but Father Abraham found himself overwhelmed when the odds were tilted against him and God took Sarah's side.

Consider the next generation — Rebecca, the wife of Isaac, the second of the three patriarchs. Think of how she acts toward her children. She is a Jewish mother, not a Jewish grandmother. There is very little of the soft, gentle, romantic, loving quality about her. She, like Sarah, becomes fierce in defense of a child. Not only that, but she is manipulative as well. (Remember, in studying Rebecca, that the Bible never moralizes. It teaches morality by telling you a story and leaving it to you to draw the consequences and make your judgment.) Rebecca over-manipulates, and she destroys her family's happiness in doing so. She perhaps is not a typical "Jewish mother" in the attitude she takes towards her not-good son, Esau. But ultimately she saves her favorite son, Jacob. Shrewder than her husband Isaac, she can distinguish between a child who is basically good and the one who is irremediably wild. Now turn back a few pages in the Bible, and read the story of Abraham's wife whom he took at the urging of his wife Sarah — Hagar, the mother of Ishmael. This mother (again, an archetype) sins in the opposite direction. Sarah loves her child so much that she may overprotect. Hagar underloves her child; she is so self-centered, so narcissistic, that when the child is in trouble she retreats into herself and forsakes him. Instead of holding and cradling Ishmael in her arms while he gasps his last breath, she leaves him in the desert and walks away. She doesn't want to see the child die — it will hurt her too much, so she abandons her child because of self-pity. Later, when the angel in the story appears in order to save them, we are told not that he hears *her* crying — because her tears are unworthy. She is self-centered. He hears, rather, the crying of the child. The angel tells Hagar *how to be a mother*. He says, in effect, "Go to the child and *hold his hand* (Gen. 21:18). You will see things you never realized before if you will creep out of your own egotistic shell and learn how to be a mother, how to attain maternal altruism.

I mention these points only to show that the self-fulfillment or self-expression element of modern life does have a very important function in our analysis of why families are weaker now than they have been before. I should add that to a large extent the same thing is true of the father too. The self-fulfillment kick has caused the diminution of his role as well. Look at the highly motivated father who is consumed by the ambition to make a million dollars or a great reputation or change in world. What happens to his attitudes towards and relations with his family? He

finds his children very often are a drain and a burden. They require attention in matters that he has long surpassed. They mean nothing to him. His emotional investment in his children is very thin indeed, and his own self-fulfillment causes him to neglect his children. The value of the family as such plays only a minor role in his own ambitions. Consequently, the family again suffers and becomes weakened.

It should be clear that when I speak of the distinct roles of father and mother I intend no simplistic analysis or division of functions, at least not insofar as traditional Jewish typology is concerned. The mother is loving, but at the same time, she can be quite aggressive. The father is the aggressive one; in the patriarchal social structure, he is the head of the family. But, he is also maternal in many ways. The male/female division is not such that the father is all "male" and the mother all "female". They sometimes exchange functions. Thus, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the great models and paradigms of Jewish fatherhood – each reveals what we might call a maternal function in his concern for and gentleness with his children.

Now, in the highly structured traditional Jewish family, especially the patriarchal one, where there is a clear source of authority (which we shall discuss in more detail later), the family enforces a practical conformity with its norms and its ideological commitment. Sometimes, however, the traditional Jewish family, in enforcing this ideological pattern, this whole routine of life for all its members, overuses its discipline which overwhelms the element of love. In this model we have set up of the traditional Jewish family, love and devotion were ever-present, but so was discipline, which guaranteed family cohesion. But sometimes it happened that the discipline was too strong, so that it became rigid, thus diminishing the element of love, warmth, spontaneity, and the sense of intimacy. That is why you find sometimes that within Orthodox families – especially in the modern or contemporary period – there is a rigidity and a defensiveness against the "outside world" that was not true when the entire community was more or less traditional. Often an Orthodox family in our days finds itself on the defensive as a cognitive minority and develops a kind of "man the ramparts" psychology, and even philosophy, that undergirds it. It is not always the healthiest thing for the development of a family's solidarity to feel that they are living in a beleaguered fortress. Sometimes it helps, sometimes it doesn't. But because of it, parents in a truly Orthodox family will sometimes be harsh with children – overly harsh – neglecting, in this sense, some of the wisdom of their own tradition.

This wisdom can best be recapitulated in a famous story told of the founder of the Hasidic movement, the Besht (Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov). A father once came to him to complain that his son was going off on the wrong path and leaving Jewish morality and Jewish religious practice. He said to the Rabbi, "What can I do? He

is destroying my life, he is destroying everything I've stood for." The Besht answered in three words: "*Love him more.*" Instead of bearing down on him, love him more. And with love you probably can achieve a great deal more than by cracking the whip. If you are overly harsh, if you are overly insistent upon conformity to standards that you have inherited which you cherish, then this kind of strictness can be counter-productive.

AUTHORITY

This leads us into the second of our themes, that of authority.

The center of gravity in the family makes it a family and not just a group of biologically related people who happen to live under the same roof. The father is usually the source of authority in the traditional Jewish family, but not always. Sometimes it is the mother. In a number of very pious families today in this country, as in the *shtetl*, a young husband will spend several years of intensive study in a *Kollel*, a school of advanced Talmudic research. If he was a great or at least a good scholar, he usually was the source of authority. It sometimes happened that the father who went off to study was not quite that competent and never amounted to much. In that case, the mother, who had much less education and was sometimes illiterate, often was, by virtue of her own gut wisdom, the real and effective head of the family. (One can cite similar instances of a secularized version of this pattern. There are young men in modern, non-religious families who go off to graduate school with their fellowships and scholarships to earn their degrees, while the working wife is the one who really is the "smart" one and runs the family.) However, as a rule it is the father who represented the patriarchal communal authority for his particular family. In the discussion that is now to follow, if I use the term "father", you may easily substitute "mother" if the particular family circumstances call for it. He or she is the one person who above all others represents authority for the entire family.

This father in the traditional Jewish family is an *authority*. He is not a "pal" to his children. He does not run the family along the lines of a participatory democracy where every important problem is taken to a vote with children possessing one-man, one-vote rights equally with father and mother. In this family you do not find the contemporary penchant for an unconscious divination of the future by a reverential observation of the "younger set". Here, then, is no assumption that, since the future is always an improvement over the present, a higher point in inevitable "progress," therefore, children possess some intuitive wisdom to which parents must make obeisance. Not here do you find the phenomenon of treating children as the brokers of the peer group, who actually inform parents how to be "with it" and run things. Often, as you are well aware, the failure of parents to

exercise discipline is not really a sign of their love for their children, but rather a disguise for their fundamental lack of concern. If I don't genuinely care for my child, then I will act like a "pal", let him do as he wishes, and delude myself into thinking that in this manner he will think better of me. But with such an attitude, the role of the authority in the family is eroded. This liberal posture, and in radical circles, this conscious and deliberate egalitarianism, represents a frontal attack on the structure of the family by gutting its source and focus of authority.

One must bear in mind that the authority of parents in traditional Judaism was never considered absolute, even in Biblical days. The father was not acknowledged as a kind of petty tyrant who could do with his family as he liked. He was, to follow the metaphor, a constitutional monarch. To give you one example, there is a famous passage in Deuteronomy (21:18-22) about the *ben sorer umoreh*, the rebellious child or juvenile delinquent who had to be brought by his father and mother to a Jewish court where he could be sentenced to death. That is quite a harsh thing for parents to do, although I suppose it's not unusual for parents to have an unconscious death wish for rowdy children. But to put it that boldly — that parents had to bring the children to the judge and the judge had to sentence them to death — certainly does not inspire great reverence for the lovely romanticized Jewish family that we are speaking of. Of course, the Talmudic tradition does teach us that this particular passage was never enforced. One Rabbi disagreed and said that it was enforced — but only once in all of Jewish history. Why does the Torah mention it at all? Probably, because it is held out as a theoretical extreme with implicit moral instruction — teaching the responsibility of parents for children, and more important for our purposes, the limits of parental authority. The father must never kill a child or abuse him. In certain circumstances, it had to be an objective court which pronounced judgment. The father was not the absolute sovereign of that family. This Biblical and Rabbinic teaching must be compared to the then contemporary or even later cultures. In the Grecian and Roman times, a father had the legal right to put a child to death for disobedience. In Greece, a child who was weak and therefore a drain on the family's finances could be taken up to a mountain and left to die. This was accepted as normal and legitimate practice by parents. Not so in Judaism, where a source of authority does not imply *absolute* authority. Only God is absolute authority. Parental direction had to be benevolent, and even loving, giving the family its reference point and its structure.

This description of the exercise of benevolent authority and discipline in the traditional Jewish family is, of course, idealized. It was not always so effective. There was apparently always present in Jewish life the phenomenon of Jewish overindulgence of children. Let me illustrate this with two interesting examples from Jewish literature and history. The universality of this proclivity for excessive

forbearance by Jewish parents is given fascinating testimony in the following passage:

There is yet one other evil disease regarding raising children that is not practiced by other people. A child sits at the table with his father and mother and he is the first to stretch forth his hand to partake of the food. He thus grows up arrogant, without fear or culture or refinement, acting as if his father and mother were friends or siblings. By the time he is 8 or 9 years old and his parents wish to correct their earlier mistakes, they no longer are able to, for his childish habits have already become second nature . . .

Another bad and bitter practice: Parents take a child to school, and in front of the child, warn the teacher not to punish him. When the child hears this, he no longer pays attention to his school work and his disobedience grows worse. This was not the practice of our ancestors. In their days, if a child came crying to his father or mother and told of being punished by a teacher, they would send along with the child a gift to the teacher and congratulate the teacher . . .

Modern though it sounds, this complaint comes from *Tzeror Hachayyim* by Rabbi Moshe Hagiz, over 220 years ago. Two centuries ago, in the pre-modern period, Jewish parents were already indulgent, so this Jewish syndrome is older than the modern period.

Let us cite one more passage, this time advice by a German Jew on the desirable method of raising children.

A man should begin to train his children in the service of God and in good character when they are yet very young. He must be careful not to permit his love for them to indulge them and permit them to do whatever they wish . . . However, he must be very careful not to frighten them unnecessarily, lest the child be driven to harm himself. . . Every parent must judge his child's individual personality and treat him accordingly. Also, if a parent is always angry, the child will come to despise him and pay no more attention to his approach than to a barking dog.

This frank and intelligent advice comes from *Yosef Ometz* of 350 years ago. It is worth listening to him closely. It summarizes, in a way, 3,000 years of cumulative Jewish experience. It is the frequent absence of this combined love and authority, which equals intelligent discipline, that bedevils so many families today.

COMMITMENT

After love and authority, our third and final element for discussion is: commitment. The father in this idealized Jewish traditional family is not only the visible and present focus of authority for the children, but he is also a symbol, the re-

presentative and refractor of a Higher Authority. Freud taught that conscience has its genesis in the child who, at about the age of 3, begins to internalize the parents' commands, so that even in the absence of the parents he is aware of their do's and don't's. This is how a rudimentary conscience builds up in the child. Of course, Freud went further, and said that all religion is merely a projection of the child's feelings towards his human father; God is a kind of substitute father.

In a measure that is true enough; in Hebrew and in the Jewish tradition we refer to God as *avinu she'ba'shamayim*, "Our Father in heaven," as if we had made the leap from our father on earth to our Father in Heaven. But, of course, Freud overstepped the bounds of logic when he concluded that the belief in God is *nothing but* a projection and thereby committed the error of reductionism. Furthermore, I think Freud may be guilty here of what has been called, in logic, the "fallacy of origin." For example: Plato taught that the world is round because, in Platonic philosophy, the most perfect of all figures in geometry is the sphere, and since this world is presumably perfect in its structure, it must be round. Obviously, the reasoning sounds nonsensical to a modern's ears; but while the origin of his argument may be wrong, the conclusion is basically correct. The same "fallacy of origin" is operative in the Freudian assumption that because faith in God begins with a child's internalization of paternal authority, that that is all there is to both God and religious belief. Whatever may be the merits or demerits of this Freudian view, it remains true that the father effectively acts as the psychological focus for the child of an authority greater than the father himself. He is a surrogate, a broker, of a kind of authority that is beyond the family itself. The father as authority is not self-contained and, in traditional Judaism, he is not self-authenticating. There is a higher authority which legitimates the role of the father. The father is only the broker of this higher authority of God, Torah, Judaism, tradition. The father grounds his authority in the sanction of the Transcendent to which father and son and mother and daughter are all mutually committed. This sanction of the father's authority (or, if you will, the authority of his authority) is the cement of commitment that helped bind the family and make of it a cohesive, well-structured unit. The child knows: if I am angry at my father and I want to rebel, I may hate him; I may even have a death wish for him. But I know all along that there is something beyond father; he is not the ultimate ground of authority, and some day I will be the continuation of my own family because all of us are bound to something much higher.

The focus of the commitment must be beyond the father or whoever happens to be the authority in that family, in order for the family to be united by this commitment.

Thus, this religious commitment is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the reconstitution of family life. Most Jewish homes today are fundamentally non-

Jewish. ("Ethnic Jewishness" is totally irrelevant in this respect.) Those Jewish values which do survive, however you want to describe them, are the fortuitous results of a cultural lag. When the fundamental commitment has spent itself, the accompanying phenomena tend to continue for a while; but you can't draw endlessly on that spent capital. Take a minor example: education. Most of us have or had parents whose formal education was less than the one that we possess. Why? The answer is: the Jewish drive for education. A Jewish boy and a Jewish girl must get an education. We, in turn, give this value to our children. But I don't know how much longer this is going to continue, not only because the counterculture makes a virtue of nonachievement rather than achievement, but because our whole impulse for education — to take this one Jewish value — derives from a religious commitment. It is not primarily a sociological phenomenon — the way for the immigrants to get out of the sweatshops. The original inclination comes from the *Mitzvah* of *Talmud Torah*, the religious commandment to study the Torah. This purely religious norm later became secularized, turning from "Torah" to "education," and that meant how to be a doctor or a lawyer or a professor. But when you cut off the major commitment — the religious commitment — all its derivative Jewish values can continue only by virtue of a cultural lag. Alone, these values have only limited endurance and must soon vanish.

PRESCRIPTION

So much for analysis. Let us now turn to prescription. Unfortunately, I believe I have a much better grasp of what's wrong than I have any ability to prescribe for it. But since the theme assigned to me requires prescription as well, I shall try my hand and hope the medicine I offer you is at least somewhat effective. I feel that the best approach is the indirect one. Let me follow my outline with a slight change, and discuss authority first.

For a family to be cohesive, to be healthy, there has to be a source — a focus of authority. A totally shared authority is inadequate because it is unfocused; it means that no one really knows what's going on. Children under such conditions become confused, not knowing whom to turn to. The attempt to establish authority in a family requires effort and forethought. Prenuptial marriage counseling can certainly help in clarifying the way a family ought to be structured, and the role of discipline that has to be decided mutually by husband and wife. The problem becomes difficult not only to solve, but even to discuss rationally and coolly nowadays, in light of Women's Lib, which unquestionably has had a profound, transforming effect on the lives of all of us — in many ways good, and perhaps in many ways not so good. More than ever before, women feel that they must assert themselves, even within the structure of the family. Not always is this new self-assertion an autonomous decision by the woman herself. I have had experience with cases where

women felt dreadfully unhappy because their own intuition told them that they are much happier in a traditional role, in which structure they may have been subordinate to the husband as the authority but yet in full control of their own particular arenas of action; yet they felt that, because of all they read and hear and discuss, they were not doing right by themselves. The inner confusion of such women makes their particular roles worse than their counterparts in either the traditional or the completely "liberated" family. This internal conflict means that they really do not know where they stand, they do not know what they want. All they do know is that they are dreadfully unhappy. Perhaps the time has come for all of us to stand up and be counted amongst the moderates on liberationism, and to pay primary attention to the health of the family as a whole and not only to individual members at the expense of others.

There should be, then, a source of authority. When I say authority, I hope I will not be misunderstood. I am not speaking of the petty tyrant who pulls at his suspenders and says "I'm boss because I wear the pants in the family." I refer, rather, to an intelligent, enlightened attitude where there is, within rational psychological limits, a division of labor, a division of responsibility, and a division of authority, but where at least there is some kind of grouping around a center.

Permit me an illustration, though a trivial one, of how this division and focusing of authority operates in a traditional Jewish family. I take mine — both the family in which I grew up and the one I am now raising — as example. We eat in the dining room, at least on *Shabbat*. There are two big armchairs; Daddy sits in one on one side, and Mommy in one on the other side. No child sits in my chair, or his mother's chair, without asking permission first. We don't overdo it. We do not make the children jump up, bow down, and scrape and say "Sir" and "Ma'am." If they did, we'd all have a good laugh. We try to be as friendly as possible, but there are certain rules. You do not sit in your father's or mother's chair. Nor do we begin eating until your parents do. As the father, I am served first and their mother too comes before them. Of course, I won't eat the portions that the children like; I will leave it for them. There are times the children will ask me a question, and I will say, "ask Mommy." But on major discussions if they go to their mother first (and they know she may be more easily persuaded in certain areas), she will say — "Well, if Daddy wants to, I'll say yes too." There has to be some kind of focus. Unless the father is a boor, in which case we face more complex problems, that is, I believe, the way a traditional family operates.

Of course, there are special problems with fatherless families. What does one do in a family made fatherless through death or divorce or separation or abandonment? Here I believe one ought to begin to search out a surrogate father. Either mother must learn how to assert authority or, if she is constitutionally unable to do so, there has to be some way for her children to find a father-model, whether it be a

teacher or someone else who can firmly assert moral responsibility and moral authority. Granted, this is easier said than done.

Love. If it doesn't exist, the family situation seems almost hopeless, because of personal, psychological, and sociocultural reasons. Even the minimum effort that would be necessary to support it under such conditions appears to me to be heroic. The problem is complicated nowadays by the fact that the nuclear family in contemporary Jewish life is largely divorced from the extended family, and it is the extended family which tends to retain Judaism's social and moral norms longer than the solitary nuclear family. When a unit consisting of father and mother and children are pulled out of the context of the larger Jewish group, it will tend to lose any traditional values much more quickly than a continuing Jewish neighborhood will lose those same values even if they are already suffering the attrition of assimilation. The Jewish community as a whole has, of course, undergone assimilatory erosion, but I think that the great move to suburbia which came about during the '50s was the beginning of a precipitate abandonment of the whole Jewish nexus, which was a core of the residue of Jewish values. In other words, upper social mobility spelled for us a very sudden downward trend in psychological stability and religious continuity.

Take the highrise dwellers in urban areas. I live in one of them. When Jewish families moved to suburbia in the 1950s, they pulled themselves out of this Jewish context of the extended family which, as I said, was really the source of some Jewish continuity of family values. What did they do? They formed their own communities. These are the new communities, which many of you in the audience service through your various agencies. All of this is new. These communities start almost *de novo*. You have someone coming from the Bronx, someone else from Brooklyn, a third party coming from the lower East Side, and suddenly they find themselves in Flushing or in Westchester or in some other "new" area, and they have to reform, regroup. The very fact that they pulled out of their previous neighborhoods means that a great deal of the continuity was lost. But when you get an urban high-rise person, he doesn't even have the advantage of this new community that was formed, weak as it is, as an instrument of continuity. Hence, the high-rise dweller is really in the worst possible position. He has no extended family. He has no ethnic or, without being pejorative, no tribal associations, and therefore he lacks a historic ethic. The little bit he picks up in Sunday school or in "going to Temple" once or twice or five times a year is, to be frank, utterly meaningless.

Let me make my prejudice clear: I do not believe in mental ghettos. I want my children to be exposed to every important and worthwhile trend in human thought — even the unworthwhile ones that are then rejected. But I am a believer in geographical ghettos — voluntary ones. I do prefer to live in a Jewish neighbor-

hood because of religious and cultural reasons, because the neighborhood is what allows my children to have an environment which my family alone cannot provide them with. And whereas I want no one in the world to say that this neighborhood must be all white, just as I want no one to say that another must be *Judenrein*, for I do believe in integrated neighborhoods, yet I do want to have a Jewish neighborhood for my children where their Jewish school will function within a living and supportive cultural context. A ghetto, if it's a voluntary one, and a geographical-social ghetto and not an intellectual-ideational one, is a good thing. Of course, the whole liberal tendency to fight against the segregation of Jews in our time led us to overdo a good thing. We went too far in the right direction; we broke up our Jewish neighborhoods. Breaking up Jewish neighborhoods meant that the family and the individual began to suffer. Therefore I think that the minimum we can do is to foster Jewish neighborhoods and neighborhood associations and the Jewish institutions, such as Centers, which really are surrogate Jewish neighborhoods, thereby providing extended Jewish family feeling and the opportunity for learning Jewish values and living them.

Finally, let us turn to the theme of commitment. In the absence of any genuine inner religious commitment in a Jewish family, we must seek some external idea or cause which can attract and centralize the commitment of the individual members of the family. I am a great believer in the fact that the focus of family cohesiveness must be transcendent and not immanent. It cannot be the family for the family's sake. It just doesn't work in the kind of society in which we live, with all its centrifugal pulls. It has got to be something beyond the family to which all members, or most members of the family, are mutually committed. Ideally, it ought to be a religious commitment, a Jewish commitment. But where it isn't, I believe that Jewish social workers are obligated to try, insofar as it is possible (and for all I know it may not be possible), to locate substitute or surrogate commitments. For example: Israel is a surrogate value, and Soviet Jewry too is such a value. It can be social work in a nonprofessional way, such as anti-poverty work, or, art, or anything else, not necessarily Jewish but something that the whole family feels binds them together. It can be mutual study, or teaching the child some sort of skill or some branch of knowledge.

I have a suspicion that families really began to founder with the advent of printing. It is a crazy theory, and I am not committed to it; I propose it only for argument's sake. As I look through Jewish history, which is the field that I am most acquainted with, I find that the parent, before the advent of printing and the high literacy which came very early in Jewish history, was largely a teacher. This is true especially of *Torah she'be'al peh*, the oral tradition. The father was the instrumentality through whom the child became acquainted with his heritage, which after all was the whole pattern of his life. You learned your functions, you learned the Torah, you learned everything of real importance, through your father.

With the advent of printing, and the professionalization of teachers, what happened was that the father sustained a loss of his teaching role, hence a loss of what bound him to his child. As time went on and learning became more universally available, the father became less and less important in this respect. What is needed, then, is a return to the *status quo ante*. (I am, of course, not advocating the banning of printing!) The father must again become the teacher of his child. About 15-16 years ago, I went to a resort hotel in the Catskills and spent some time with my family. At the same time there was present a man who today is a very, very important teacher of Talmud – one of the true great Talmudists of our country. His children were about ten years older than mine. I can still experience my sympathy with the poor youngsters badgered by their father to concentrate on a page of Talmud while the whole of our civilization's contribution to leisure and entertainment lay tantalizingly before them – and my sympathy as well for the poor father's impossible task, which he approached so patiently and heroically. About 3 years ago I met one of those boys – and he was introduced to me, in his own right, as a looming genius of Jewish scholarship, fiercely devoted to his eminent father. An intellectual relationship, whether that of teacher-student or of fellows in acquiring skill or knowledge, is the kind of commitment that can hold a family together.

CONCLUSIONS

I must be honest. I do not think that you as social workers, or I as a rabbi or a teacher, are going to succeed in any appreciable way to find substitutes for the religious commitment. The effort to do so results in self-delusions. All the ersatz values will not really do, because what is needed is a transcendental focus which can and must come from a spiritual commitment. Without that, we are at best providing first-aid and at worst bluffing ourselves. You say: what can we do? My answer is: we are facing a terribly messy situation. It is the universal condition of man today – of man without God, of man without faith, without an awareness of transcendence, man who feels terribly endangered by the gaping existential void within him, by the threat of meaninglessness which is aggravated by the ubiquitous awareness of death. You just cannot fill the transcendental void by values which we sit down and artificially create. There is no way out. To be honest, either we choose the real thing, or we are in despair. We cannot in one hour or in one lifetime ever hope to devise an adequate substitute for religious faith; in any event, according to my own commitments, substitutes are called – idols.

The Jewish family was strong not when it discussed values but when it lived them. It began to disintegrate when it substituted cocktails for *kiddush* and tuxedo for *tallit*. Traditional Jewish wholesomeness was grounded in a spiritual commitment, in a sublime web of ritual acts invested with both metaphysical significance and nostalgic and historic recollection, so that individuals were both synchronically

and diachronically part of a people – a people called a *mishpachah* (family) at its very founding by Abraham. These are not just disembodied “values” or artificial “rituals,” but part of a living organism, which gave life and vitality to the family and a sense of validity to its members, despite the ubiquitous domestic problems to which Jews, like all humans, are heir.

Social workers have immediate, critical, emergency problems. They must give first-aid and salvage what they can. But the bigger, more fundamental, and more ominous problem is the spiritual one, in which social workers, as interested and experienced members of the Jewish community, must join with rabbis, leaders and thinkers. Together we must heroically strive to overcome the great spiritual crisis of our times, which rabbis and thinkers and Jewish leaders failed to avert in the first place.