

LEADERSHIP FOR THE SEVENTIES

In the early days of the French Revolution, the Marquis de Lafayette was having a drink in a Parisian café when someone burst in, shouting, “Where is that mob going?” Lafayette polished off his drink, pulled on his jacket, and said as he headed for the door, “I don’t know, but wherever it is, I have to get there first, because I’m their leader!” That, of course, *is* one form of “leadership,” following from the front, as it were, capitalizing on the views of the moment and using them for one’s own ends.

Another type of leadership is that of the monarch who “reigns but does not rule,” or his counterpart in everyday life who delights in the perquisites of office, but shirks the responsibilities and whose goal is not to rock the boat, to alienate as few people as possible, and to leave his office much as he found it.

A third form of leadership is that of the dictatorial “knock-their-heads-together” approach that can work in some situations but that is clearly out of phase in this age of participatory democracy.

There *is* one other style of leadership, however, that is not only in keeping with the times, but gives hope of being the most effective, especially for the Jewish community.

It is the theory of leadership that presupposes a thoughtful, aware, and concerned constituency serviced by “spokesmen-guides” who see their role in several lights: to delineate and clarify significant issues; to present for consideration feasible alternatives; to articulate the views of the group; and to formulate and implement programs of effective action that reflect a rational consensus.

Leadership is a process of communication and change that cannot be conducted in isolation; it requires interaction *with* the group as well as *for* the group, where the leader, in Erik Erikson's words, "tries to solve for all what he cannot solve for himself alone." If, as many believe, lack of effective analysis of our problems is our most pressing concern, then the leadership task is clear.

In this age of over-simplification, when complex subjects are discussed in banner headlines with all the loss of subtlety implied; when, in all areas, we are encouraged in unrealistically high expectations of performance that in our more mature moments we know cannot be met; when novelty is the order of the day and the "new and plausible" is automatically preferred to the "former and probable" – the role of responsible leadership is more difficult, more thankless, and, sadly, more necessary.

These are the problems of leadership in our *time* rather than of any given organization or particular field. For this is the day when some of the nation's very best mayors, such as Lee of New Haven or Cavanaugh of Detroit, and many first-class university presidents, such as James Perkins of Cornell, have walked away from their jobs in despair; they could not face the impossibility of providing responsible leadership to a constituency that prefers the expedient placebo to the more-difficult, more-expensive, and longer-range solution which has a higher degree of eventual success.

Constituencies of today tend toward impatience, but also toward the extreme position; today's leader, would-be or actual, is under pressure to declare himself Pollyanna or militant, with any intermediate stance considered a "cop-out".

But the problems will not evaporate because they are ignored or mistreated; they will be dealt with successfully or not, and the constituency will benefit or not. It has been said that in science there are neither rewards nor punishments, only consequences. It will be the thankless role of contemporary leadership to bear the blame.

What are the major problems that the American Jewish community faces and how can its leadership be most helpful? On the one

hand, there are the problems of American society with whose well-being the American Jewish community is inextricably bound; on the other hand, there are those of the world Jewish community, with whom segments of the American Jewish community identify in various ways and degrees.

In either case, leadership may be most effective, not by taking stands on specific issues, but by helping to formulate attitudes and clarifying underlying concepts. Whether through the general press or the Jewish-oriented press; through conferences, debates or forums; through existing organizations or new ones; through the synagogue or the community center; or, most likely, by the use of all of these, the American Jewish community must be helped to understand the nature of the pressures and influences being brought to bear on them which affect their value systems, their lifestyles, their physical surroundings, even the very nature of their existence.

All progress involves change, but not all change leads to progress. The time has come to review the basic assumptions underlying a number of specific issues.

For example, one's thoughts on the real but ignored conflict between the current interpretation of "equality" and the traditional interpretation of "justice" on the other will determine one's attitude on many inter-group questions such as "benign quotas," professional standards, educational testing procedures, etc. No one can doubt that objective standards and objective testing are under fierce attack today. Ironically, it used to be the *conservative* who opposed objective tests for college admission, etc., on the grounds that there were factors more important than intelligence, and the result was the "quota system"; today, it is the *radical* who is on the attack, but that does not make the argument any more logical. If specific tests have a recognizable bias that does not screen for a meaningful characteristic, that specific test should be discarded, but *objective testing* should not be. Let us rethink the concepts of equality and justice.

Another key issue is the virtually undiscussed question of socio-economic class; it is pressing because of its confusion with the question

of color. In the Forest Hills, New York, subsidized housing controversy, for example, politicians insisted on discussing the difficulty in terms of race, whereas local residents insisted on discussing the problem in terms of schools and safety.

Socioeconomic class differences *do* exist in our society and are reflected in differences in lifestyle, motivation, time-sense, and many other ways. Lowest-class, working-class, and middle-class groups have different ideas of what they demand from a school system, and it is not a sign of bigotry for a middle-class group to fight hard for maintenance of high standards.

Sociologists are just beginning to realize that Jews consider the quality of a school system a key factor in their choice of residence; faced with declining quality in schools, they just pick up and leave.

Before the Berlin Wall went up, it used to be said that the East Germans “voted with their feet.” Well, the mobility of Jews in fleeing our troubled central cities has been greater than that of Italians, Irish, and other groups; it was due to changes in the school system; in retrospect it would have been in everybody’s best interest to fight the school question through and to have them all remain in the city.

Another question whose implications are starting to plague us is the one put by Shaw in the mouth of Eliza Doolittle’s father in *Pygmalion* when he discussed the “deserving” versus the “undeserving” poor. Should access to public housing be a right or a privilege, should welfare payments be in cash or in kind, and how do we treat the “crisis ghetto” syndrome (what is best for the resident dysfunctional family and what is best for the city as a whole.)

A careful and sophisticated analysis of the question of poverty must be made; we must differentiate specifically between the aged or the handicapped or the tragedy-struck and those who are not only dysfunctional themselves but destructive to others. Remedial programs helpful for the one are almost useless for the other; and the failure of many well-intended programs threatens to destroy those that have worked or that could work in a different context.

The determination of “national priorities” is a lively issue; one’s

judgments will be influenced by one's attitude on the proper balance between what Galbraith calls public and private goods. We must think about cost/benefit ratios and "lesser of two evils" situations. It isn't enough to discuss Consolidated Edison supplying electricity to New York City only in terms of the Storm King Generator's harm to the Hudson River; or only in terms of the thermal pollution of a nuclear plant in Jamaica Bay; or only in terms of polluting smokestacks along the East River; or only in terms of high tension wires bringing power from faraway areas; or only in terms of a power shortage which will black out the city, cut off summer air-conditioning, stall subways underground on stifling days, etc.

Political leaders whose attention span seems to extend only from election to election can beg such questions, but leadership must help the public to face the problem of such trade-offs realistically.

The question of community control and local home rule is a variant of the same problem. Airports, museums, hospitals, bridges, community centers, and similar facilities concern all of us and their placement must be thought through by all of us. Each of us knows where they shouldn't go, namely on his own street corner, but none of us knows where they *should* go, except usually some place involving cost to be borne by higher taxes which we refuse to pay.

We are in danger of becoming a society in which "veto power" is so widespread that any vocal group can stop an action while almost no coalition of groups can *start* one. We risk a creeping paralysis of public will, another alternative to effective action.

The deterioration of our central cities continues apace. Jews have traditionally been the country's most enthusiastic city-dwellers; they have more to lose from urban decay and the most to gain from urban resurgence. Jews have not so much willingly gone to the suburbs as been driven from their preferred city. Even in suburbia, the Jew seeks the urban virtues of convenience, comfort, and cultural and social opportunities. In a survey of housing preferences taken among suburbanites near Philadelphia several years ago, it was found that after the children were grown, almost all of the non-Jewish parents wished to

remain in their single-family homes while the majority of Jews intended to return to urban apartments.

Recent city problems may have changed the pattern somewhat, but there is little doubt that safe, clean, vital cities would re-attract vast numbers of suburban Jews.

Some think that urban problems can be solved by better public relations and more cheerful publicity, King Canute and Dr. Coué to the contrary. In all likelihood we will wait until some major city like Newark or St. Louis actually goes bankrupt before we realize that a Gordian Knot problem requires a Gordian Knot solution. There are those, I among them, who believe that central cities can regain health by shifting financing of local education from the municipal property tax to the state income tax (with the burden falling on those best able to pay), by the federalization of welfare costs and benefits, by zoning and land use changes that re-distribute the poor from dense concentration in central cities to dispersion throughout the region and, finally, by regional solutions to regional problems.

Whatever the solutions they will come about only when an informed citizenry demands them; and Jews have a vested interest in taking the lead.

Another area for rethinking is the controversy between separatism and integration, whether rich and poor, black and white, Jew and non-Jew; the subject of ethnicity and the melting pot must be reexamined.

In today's fluid, yet pluralistic society, sensitivity and common sense should focus on differentiating the significant from the trivial.

Leadership must be positive and guide its constituency in these days of troubled inter-group relations. We must try to achieve a "color-blind" society that recognizes the legitimate concerns of the Black as much as it does that of the Jew. Failing that, we may see our society destroyed.

Housing must be integrated, schooling must be integrated, employment must be integrated. And we must strive to see these goals achieved without lowering standards.

All these are problems that concern all of America's 200 million people, but we Jews are among those 200 million and we cannot be like the fellow in the leaky rowboat who refused to help bail out because the leak wasn't under his seat. John Donne has answered that for all time and we cannot ignore the tolling of his bell.

Of specifically Jewish concern, however, is what the thrust of Jewish philanthropic efforts should be in the future. New York's Federation of Jewish Philanthropies empaneled a special commission to discuss it, and its recommendations, if implemented, would require a budget far greater than can realistically be raised; selectivity is needed.

In the early days of the 20th century, Jewish hospitals were necessary not only to treat the Jewish sick but to permit Jewish doctors to enter the field of medicine. Jewish social welfare programs were financed largely by successful members of an earlier German Jewish migration and were aimed at what was frequently the physical conditions and destitution of later Eastern European immigrant groups. Jewish education was considered the province of the cheder and the synagogue, while Jewish cultural survival seemed assured and was manifest in a thriving theatre, press, social clubs, burial societies, political organizations, and so forth.

Today, the outpatient departments of most Jewish-sponsored hospitals serve many more indigent non-Jews than Jews; downtown Jewish community centers are faced with constituencies fleeing to suburban havens; Jews themselves have access to virtually all the social institutions of our society; and the role of government has expanded to embrace areas that were once the preserve of private philanthropy.

In considering the future we must face the question of how we relate to our own needs and to the needs of the larger community of which we are a part.

One school of thought holds that there is no such thing as a Jewish swimming pool, gymnasium or surgical operating room, and that these should be sponsored by general public funds for general public use. Another school holds that, just as Yale and Harvard were Con-

gregationalist contributions to American life, and Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore were Quaker-sponsored, but available to all, so the Jewish community should support its share of first-rate institutions benefiting the general public. This is essentially the outlook of Brandeis University.

A third view holds that so long as there are Jewish poor, aged, and handicapped who are not adequately cared for by other means, the Jewish community should remedy the deficiency.

But virtually all would agree that Jewish cultural survival, as opposed to physical or theological survival is in grave danger through ignorance; and that creative leadership is called for to meet the challenge.

The community center is the logical vehicle for this purpose, and its support justifies a handsome share of all the talent, energy, and money we can find.

In a time when alienation and despair seem widespread, when family bonds have become tenuous, when so many lack motivation and goals, when life appears aimless and even our physical surroundings seem to lack human scale, the inculcation of Jewish cultural values in congenial settings justifies anything we can do to add meaning and grace to the lives of those who share it.

These are not problems unique to contemporary Judaism; Thoreau's observation about the lives of quiet desperation led by those around him is echoed in André Malraux's comment that "other people are much more unhappy than one thinks," and neither statement would seem novel to the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes.

If ever the Jewish community center field had meaning and value, it is today; and in the reevaluation of philanthropic priorities, advocates of the community center must speak loudly and clearly of their concerns.

Also, the continuing relationship of the American Jewish community to Israeli and foreign communities must be thought through in constructive ways.

In the case of Israel, one can say that rallying around a nation

under military attack and in danger of physical obliteration is one thing; creating a long-term, mutually productive relationship between two stable, separate entities is another.

Our relationship with non-Israeli Jewish communities abroad deserves imaginative thought; Jews in Russia, but also in Europe and Latin America, will look increasingly to American Jewry for guidance and assistance on a scale and of a nature much different from the past. The recent European interest in the American Jewish community center movement and local efforts to replicate it are indicative; and we must be prepared to take full advantage of this opportunity to forge new bonds with co-religionists abroad.

In all these concerns, whether national or international, whether on specifically Jewish or more general questions, our leadership must be bolder, more thoughtful, more willing to stand and be counted than ever before. We have passed the point where raising money for worthwhile causes is sufficient to discharge our obligations. Our leadership must be willing to ask difficult questions and to encourage informed and searching debate.

Solutions to the problems call for a lowering of hysterical voices and an increase in the level of sophistication we bring to these complex questions.

Our leadership, our spokesmen-guides, must encourage us all not to be satisfied with superficial responses, but to dig deep into the problems, to demand more of ourselves and others.

In the final analysis, it all gets back to Hillel, who laid it on the line, "If I am not for myself, who is for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?"

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