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Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies, Volume 24, Number 3, Spring 2006, pp. 136-140 (Article)

Published by Purdue University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2006.0049

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I am indebted to Zev Garber and the editors of *Shofar* for inviting me to respond to Hal Lewis' powerful vision of "The Jewish Studies Professor as Communal Leader." I had the privilege of spending several days with Dr. Lewis and his colleagues at Spertus College last year, and I was immediately struck not only by his personal warmth and quick intelligence but also by his obvious practical administrative abilities and the broad range of his experience in both communal and educational work. His plea to "restore the crown of scholarship to the Jewish people" makes many important points that deserve fuller treatment than is possible in this limited context. I will therefore not so much respond as I will try to raise a few "debating points," hoping that others will take over where Dr. Lewis and I have left off.

I

Let me begin with a story. Some years ago, two of my friends offered to serve on the educational committee of the day school where their children were being educated. Both could have made significant contributions not only through their considerable Jewish knowledge but also through professional expertise that could have helped evaluate and improve the school's curriculum: one was an experienced teacher in a sophisticated and specialized (non-Jewish) school in the area, and the other was a prominent professor of developmental psychology and a world-famous authority on child development. Neither was turned down out of hand. Rather, they were first subjected to a humiliating "interview" by existing board members with no credentials or expertise. Only then were they politely but firmly rejected for membership on the committee. It should come as no surprise that no Jewish Studies professors were members of that committee, even though several were parents in the school.

I do not believe that this story is exceptional or that it reflects any peculiar weakness of Jewish institutional organization. Quite to the contrary, I believe it represents the "best practice" of all well-run institutions, whether

Jewish or not. No competent institutional leader should allow loose canons into positions of prominence and authority—especially if those loose canons have credentials with which to challenge the administrator's control. Anyone who has followed American federal administrations over the past few years will recognize the effectiveness of tight control in getting one's agenda accomplished. Temporary consultants can be brought in—but that is because they are temporary: they are easy to fire, their reports can be shelved, and their advice is soon forgotten. Putting a credentialed academic on an institutional board is to invite disaster since she can continually criticize from the sidelines always making the reasonable claim of "knowing better" than the other volunteers and the professional staff without having to take responsibility for carrying out her own advice.

We should remember that leaders and intellectuals are by definition different types. Leaders seek to build while intellectuals examine and offer critiques. Leaders act and motivate others to act while intellectuals stand on the sidelines offering advice. Of course, there are well-informed leaders who are also subtle thinkers, and there are engaged intellectuals who enter the fray and, whether with pen or sword, choose to act. But before we bemoan too loudly the absence of intellectuals in our communal leadership, we should remember that typologically they wouldn't necessarily fit the mold.

II

Dr. Lewis began his paper by highlighting one of the lesser mentioned findings of the 2001 National Jewish Population Survey: that 41% of Jews currently enrolled in college and graduate school have taken at least one "Jewish studies class as part of their coursework." What are the implications of this fact? Dr. Lewis suggests that this is debated: Jewish professionals eagerly celebrate this evidence of group "continuity," but Jewish academics are (and have always been) ambivalent or even hostile towards any linking of their endeavors with the community. According to Lewis, Jewish Studies professors prefer to identify themselves with the universal values of academe rather than with the parochial concerns of Jews. I think this is a little unfair to Jewish Studies academics who, in my experience at least, tend to come from the more affiliated sections of our community. But let us grant Dr. Lewis' point for the moment.

Read properly, the NJPS statistics highlight an astonishing fact. Jewish Studies programs at universities now are the major source of post-bar mitzvah Jewish education (at least outside the Yeshiva world). Our community may well be the first in history to entrust the bulk of the Jewish education of its young adults to non-Jewish institutions. At the University of Maryland where I teach, close to a thousand students enroll each year in courses on the Bible

and Talmud, history and literature, Hebrew and Yiddish, religious philosophy, film, Israeli politics, the Holocaust, and many other aspects of the Jewish experience. Many of these students take only one or two Jewish Studies courses; but some—including those who intend to become professional Jewish educators or rabbis—take a dozen courses or more at our quite secular institution.

Locating Jewish education in large general universities yields many benefits. For one thing, it is significantly cheaper. (The Jewish community doesn't have to pay for the buildings, janitorial services, gymnasium, etc., etc.) Second, it is efficient: it puts Jewish studies where the kids are already. Third, I am convinced that the net result is higher quality Jewish education. Very very few Jewish institutions can afford the range and quality of faculty or the size of library that a Maryland or UCLA, much less a Harvard or Yale, can provide. And perhaps most important, by placing Jewish Studies in secular institutions we are putting forward the bold claim that Jewish knowledge, Jewish languages, Jewish literature, and Jewish culture can and must take their place within the broader, universalizing discourse of human civilization. By doing this I believe we raise the standards for Jewish knowledge.

But by competing in universal academe, we also inevitably redefine our goals and change our criteria for excellence. Instead of reinforcing identity and encouraging endogamy, our goal in Jewish academe has become to promote sophistication of thought, flexibility of mind, (self-)critical analysis, and expansive creativity. These qualities will not always be seen as desirable to a community that encourages group cohesion in the face of perceived external and internal threats.

Here is the real crux of the problem to which Dr. Lewis points. I do not believe that intellectuals, members of the broader academic community, are ashamed of being Jewish or hesitant to identify with the Jewish community. But the standards of contemporary intellectual discourse and its stress on freedom of thought are often at variance with the shared values of the established community. The Jewish community, whether religious or secular, whether standing to the political right or left, regularly (and rightly) protests academics who question the particular sacred cow of the moment. The university world has, on the whole, resisted attempts by the community to dictate intellectual content, even when these have come with large sums of money attached. But it works both ways. Intellectuals cannot then object if the community rejects their insistence on absolute freedom of thought and speech, no matter where such freedoms lead.

III

Dr. Lewis bemoans the end of a glorious past age when intellectuals were an integral part of our community's leadership. In Lewis' view, biblical prophets, talmudic sages, medieval *gedolim*, and post-Enlightenment scholars formed a continuous chain of thinkers who were once granted a role in leading the "authentic" Jewish community, sharing that power with religious and political authorities. This is not the place to question the historical reality of this utopian vision. But is Lewis correct that those times are gone? Aren't there still lots of people in positions of leadership in the Jewish community who can claim to be intellectuals? Rabbis certainly perceive of themselves this way, and are regarded as such by their congregants. Teachers and principals in Jewish schools hold advanced degrees and, if the current enormous salaries being offered to day-school headmasters are any indication, the community highly values their professional qualifications. So why should we feel that intellectuals are excluded and that the present community rejects their participation? Is it because rabbis and day-school principals are not the type of intellectuals that Lewis has in mind?

We must remember that ours is a polarized community in which what it means to be Jewish (and hence to be an expert in Jewish learning) is vigorously and loudly contested. An ongoing, fierce cultural war is evidenced by the increasing institutionalization of Jewish life, for instance in the formal "credentialization" of our intellectuals (rabbis, Ed.D.s, and Ph.D.s), the rigid denominationalism of religious life in the diaspora, and the aggressive politicization of religious affiliation in Israel. These are all formalizing responses to the cultural wars. Those who regret the factionalism of Jewish life should remember that (*pace* the famous joke about academe) the fighting is so incredibly intense because the stakes are so incredibly high.

It is not at all clear who will win the cultural turf battle facing our community. At present, I do not see the secular intellectualism of disengaged academe in the lead. In the realm of education, traditional institutions of Jewish learning are flourishing as never before. Even non-Orthodox schools both in Israel and America are often dependent on traditionally trained teachers for man- (and woman-)power, with a consequent blurring of the broadly humanistic message these schools were established to promote. In the realm of publishing, I can think of no book of academic Jewish studies that has achieved the circulation of the Art Scroll Talmud. When I was a young man, the passing of traditional Judaism was a much lamented given. Today, the demographic and cultural expansion of Orthodox segments in the community has left less traditionalist groups in real panic.

The turf battle in schools is not limited to the elementary levels. Years ago, Jewish Studies programs in universities could be started and staffed by a local rabbi. Today, university departments jealously guard their prerogative to hire only Ph.D.s from accredited universities, even to teach "Introduction to Judaism." For their part, rabbinical seminaries are just as defensive of their status: *smikha* or ordination requires full participation in multi-year programs, no matter what the previous training of the candidate. The age of the non-professional, broad ranging, Jewish intellectual would seem to be over.

In this environment, we are not discussing the absence of Jewish intellectuals from the community. Rather we are bemoaning the fact that "our" preferred type of intellectualism is not as authoritative as we would wish. In this, Jews of course reflect the sense of cultural malaise that affects many areas of modern society.

IV

Let me end on a personal note.

When I began my career as a university teacher over thirty years ago, I believed that the future of Jewish education lay in the secular university. Relying on the authority and prestige of that institution, I thought, Jewish Studies professors would train a generation of young Jews (and non-Jews) thoroughly competent in Jewish cultural skills, well versed in the broad issues of Jewish history and thought, and able to participate confidently and creatively in the sophisticated discourse of the modern world. Though some of my own teachers told me that they did not believe in my vision, and that it was not possible to achieve Jewish intellectual sophistication in a secular university, I have devoted the bulk of my adult life to proving them wrong.

I confess that it is not clear to me that I have succeeded. Dr. Lewis cites Professor Steve Zipperstein's complaints that academic Jewish Studies have had little or no impact on how Jews think and what they read. I myself recently admitted to a friend and former student who has gone on to a distinguished rabbinical career that I envied him his direct role in the Jewish community. But for better or worse, it is in academe that I have chosen to live my life, and it is in these groves that I will leave my mark if any. Even though (or perhaps, because) I work in a secular state institution, I remain convinced that the Jewish community is well served by putting its education "eggs" in the public "basket." If I can convince private philanthropists and communal organizations to support me and my colleagues in building a Jewish library, in funding Jewish professorships, and in endowing Jewish Studies scholarships, all in a "non-Jewish" institution, then I too will have been a leader of the Jewish community.