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**Nurturing Coexistence in Divided Societies:
A Model from Jewish Education of a Common Language for a Pluralistic
Religious Education**

Abstract

This article presents a study of the efforts of the Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE), later known as the Jewish Education Committee (JEC) in the early twentieth century to centralize Jewish religious education. It explores how from 1944 to 1950 Dr. Alexander M. Dushkin, President of the JEC, sought to create a common language for a pluralistic Jewish religious education that could unify multiple denominational groups within Judaism. The article also explores how Dr. Israel S. Chipkin and Dushkin proposed a common language for the Religious Education Association (REA) in order to build interfaith dialogue and thus resolve ideological conflicts between Protestants and Catholics. In the final section, the article proposes a common language for nurturing coexistence in divided societies today.

Introduction

New ideas about society, politics, and religion emerged throughout the Western world during the post-Enlightenment period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the United States at that time, ideals of tolerance, pluralism, and freedom of religion developed and had a significant influence on everyday family, work, and community life. Additionally, American Judaism birthed new denominations and religious ideologies. In particular, the

American Union of Reform Judaism was founded in 1873 and promised to be a utopia for religious freedom.¹ Then, in 1883 a group of traditional rabbis, vowed to "conserve" Judaism by creating a middle ground between Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism. They forged a moderate platform for a new movement under the motto "Tradition and Change." The platform required fidelity to Jewish law and practices while acknowledging that Judaism has always been influenced by the societies in which Jews lived. This "Conservative Movement" was officially launched in 1886 with the opening of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS) in New York City.² Finally, in the early twentieth century Rabbi Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan (1881-1983) called for the reconstructing of American Judaism and founded the Reconstructionist Movement.³

Among the American Christian communities there was a multiplying of denominations that reached its peak during the early twentieth century.⁴ Some of the religious leaders of this time who were concerned about the future of Christianity, sparked an ecumenical movement to bring the various Christian denominations and groups together to dialogue about the core and unifying beliefs of the church. The Religious Education Association (REA) was established in 1903 to seek to improve religious instruction in religious communities and explore how people could bring their religious convictions to bear more fully in society. In accord with the religious

¹ <https://reformjudaism.org/rise-reform-rabbinate-rabbinic-road-out-wilderness>, visited Sep. 4, 2019.

² <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/judaism-conservative-judaism>, visited Sep.4, 2019.

³ <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/reconstructionist-judaism-in-united-states>, visited Sep. 4, 2019.

⁴ See S. E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, New Heaven, CT: Yale University Press, (2004), see also H. Mcleod, *The Cambridge History of Christianity*. Volume 9: World Christianities c. 1914-2000, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2006).

currents of the time, the REA sought to be a Christian ecumenical and interreligious organization.⁵ In 1910, when the REA was in its early stage of development, U.S. Jewish leaders founded in New York City the Bureau of Jewish Education (BJE) to serve as the unifying agency for Jewish religious education.⁶ The organization was also known at the time as Kehillah, which means “Community Association” in Hebrew. It later became known later as the Jewish Education Committee (JEC). This article presents a brief look at three outstanding Jewish community leaders who contributed to the twentieth century effort to unify or centralize Jewish religious education. They are Dr. Samson Benderly, (1876-1944), and two of his devoted disciples, Dr. Israel S. Chipkin (1891–1955) and Dr. Alexander M. Dushkin (1890-1976), both active members of the REA.

The Centralization of Religious Education at the Bureau of Jewish Education

The rapid growth of diverse Jewish educational institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led many Jews to become concerned that Judaism was fragmenting and could come to the point when the various Jewish groups lacked a sense of unified vision and ethnicity. This prompted the founding of the Bureau of Jewish Education in New York City in 1910 to serve as the unifying agency for Jewish religious education.⁷ Dr. Benderly, a Palestine-born physician, who abandoned medicine for Jewish education during his internship at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Baltimore, was the first head of the Kehillah.⁸ Hospital

⁵ See S. A. Schmidt, *A History of the Religious Education Association*, Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, (1983).

⁶ A. M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City*, New York: The Bureau of Jewish Education, (1918), p100-128.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 18.

records from meetings of the board of directors state that when the medical advisory committee gave Benderly the ultimatum to forsake his involvement in teaching religion or to give up medicine, Benderly proudly replied, “You know, healers of the body there are many, but there are very few healers of the soul, and I want to try my end at that.”⁹

After his relocation to New York, Benderly reached out to many young Jewish man and woman, inviting them to become innovative educators for the American Jewry. He created a successful teacher training program which later became part of the Teacher’s Institute where he succeeded in attracting many young men and women to career in Jewish education. Samuel Dinim, one of Benderly’s disciples writes, “No single man . . . has done as much as Samson Benderly did in attracting young men to careers in Jewish Education.”¹⁰

Benderly’s team of workers at the Bureau in the 1910s included close to a hundred full and part time educators.¹¹ Jonathan Krasner in his masterpiece on Benderly, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*, notes that, “Although, Benderly’s earliest disciples included women as well as men, he called them his ‘boys’ . . . and he liked to think of himself as ‘Abba,’ or father.”¹² The Benderly Boys (they also referred to themselves by the more gender-friendly term “Bureau Bunch”) devoted themselves to what they considered to be the holy mission of bringing about a Jewish national and cultural renaissance within the Jewish community in the

⁹ Handwritten board minutes of the meeting of the Hebrew Hospital and Asylum Association of Baltimore, August 6, 1900, Vol. 7. See N. H. Winter, *Jewish education in a pluralistic Society: Samson Benderly and Jewish Education in the United States*, New York: New York University Press, (1966), p37.

¹⁰ S. Dunim, “Samson Benderly—Educator,” *Jewish Education* 20, no. 3 (1949): 33-34.

¹¹ J. Krasner, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*, Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, (2011), 5.

¹² N. H. Winter, *ibid*, p41.

United States, and especially in New York. It is no surprise that the inner circle of the Benderly Boys adopted the name *Chayil*, an acronym for the Hebrew phrase “education is our national foundation.” In Hebrew, *Chayil* means army in the plural or soldier in the singular. The Benderly boys proudly used the name to express their loyalty to fight to carry on Jewish education for American Jewry. Their mission was to create a new model of religious education whereby, as historian Jonathan Sarna notes, “United States Jews can learn how to live in two world at once, how to be both American and Jewish, part of the larger American society and apart from it.”¹³

Benderly clearly articulated his mission for a “revolutionary reorganization” of tradition and innovation for the future of American Judaism in a questionnaire he gave to prospective educators. It contained the following questions:

1. Do you believe in the future of American Judaism?
2. Do you recognize that Judaism is not carried in the bloodstream, and that it is, therefore, not transmitted automatically from generation to generation, but only through the instrumentally of education?
3. Do you agree that what is being done today in our Jewish schools is not of a quality calculated to inspire our youth to devote themselves to their people and its ideals, and therefore lacks the power to ensure the glorious future for American Jewry for which we have the potentiality?
4. If you believe in the need for a revolutionary reorganization of program and methods, do you have sufficient faith in yourself and your abilities to feel confident about the thought of your coming to work and making Jewish education your vocation, will you be able to bring this needed revolution into being—and if so, are you ready to devote yourself?¹⁴

Krasner observes that “[the enterprise of the Benderly Boys] was far more than an educational program, it was a *paideia*, a full-fledged educational initiative designed to realize a conscious cultural ideal, or what Isaac B. Berkson (himself a devoted student of Benderly) called “a vision

¹³ J. Sarna, “American Jewish Education in Historical Perspective,” *Jewish Education* 64, (Winter-Spring 1998), p9-10.

¹⁴ Leo Honor, “Our Professional Debt to Dr. Benderly,” *Jewish Education* 20, no. 3 (1949): 29.

of the rebirth of Jewish life.”¹⁵ Dushkin in an autobiographical essay presents a more mystical and messianic view of the Benderly boys, claiming that, “There was the quality of the Hasidic *rebbe* in Benderly, and he molded us into [his *Hassidim*] a camaraderie of believers. We considered ourselves a band of pioneers who were ‘hasting the footsteps of the Messiah.’”¹⁶

Benderly’s strong traditional Jewish background, coupled with his training in the field of science, equipped him to undertake the noble mission he defined for himself as a Jewish educator.¹⁷ Like a medical doctor who first examines his patients to discover the cause of their symptoms before formulating a diagnosis, Benderly first examined the needs of the Jewish community, which he outlined to the BJE board in his detailed reports. Only after rigorous investigation and analysis did he formulate his aims for a new Jewish education. Nathan H. Winter concludes his bibliography of Benderly with the following statement, “Samson Benderly was the great educational architect and experimenter of Jewish education” and the Bureau of Jewish education in New York City was the laboratory where he experimented with many new ideas about experiential education in an effort to develop a blueprint for a coherent and comprehensive system of elementary and secondary Jewish education in the United States.¹⁸

The JEC Under the Leadership of Dr. Alexander M. Dushkin

In 1939, the BJE has merged with the Jewish Education Association and became the Jewish Education Committee (JEC) and served as the centralized agency for Jewish religious

¹⁵ Krauser, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education*, 10.

¹⁶ A. Dushkin, “Antaeus — Autobiographical Reflections”, in *American Jewish Archives*, Vol. XXI, Nov. (1969), No 2, p123.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, see footnote 4.

¹⁸ N. H. Winter, *ibid*, p65.

education in New York until 1967.¹⁹ The JEC was also called in Hebrew *Vad Ha'chinuch*, meaning “The Education Committee,” and in Yiddish it was known as *Der Yiddisher Dertziung*. Although the merger was primarily for financial and practical benefits, it was also an opportunity for a new vision and leadership for Jewish education. As its first director, Dr. Dushkin, followed the vision of his teacher, Dr. Benderly, of revamping Jewish education in the United States He also sought to lead the JEC to new heights.

The JEC was comprised of many professional staff and consultants. Drs. Chipkin and Dushkin were the two major figures whose leadership and mentorship helped shape Jewish religious education in New York in the later part of the early twentieth century. Chipkin, like Dushkin, was a disciple of Benderly. Dushkin, with Chipkin’s assistance focused his efforts on centralizing Jewish religious education among the diverse Jewish communities. Dushkin’s loyalty to Benderly’s mission is best expressed in his own words as follows: “He [Benderly] recognized the pluralistic character of American Jewry and created the first exemplary community Bureau of Jewish Education as a ‘roof organization,’ aiming to bring some unity into their variety.”²⁰ Like Benderly, Dushkin devoted much time and effort to examining the current trends of Jewish religious education and the needs of the Jewish community in New York at that time. He published his results in a large volume of almost six hundred pages titled *Jewish Education in New York City* (1918) and he dedicated this book to “My teacher and friend Dr. Samson Benderly, A dauntless pioneer in American Jewish education.”²¹

¹⁹ After 1967, the JEC went through many transitions under the leadership of the Unite Jewish Associations (UJA). They first evolved into the Board of Jewish Education (BJE) and then as the Jewish Education Project (JEP).

²⁰ A. Dushkin, “Antaeus — Autobiographical Reflections”, *ibid*, 129.

²¹ A. M. Dushkin, *Jewish Education in New York City*, New York: The Bureau of Jewish Education, (1918).

Dushkin emphasized that the Bureau's effort to establish a nonpartisan Jewish education was its top priority by placing it first on his outlined list of the eleven accomplishments of the Bureau: He wrote: "It [the Bureau] is the first agency created by the Jews of America to deal with the problem of Jewish education in a comprehensive, nonpartisan way."²² Dushkin adopted Benderly's principle that "the future of Judaism in America belongs to no one party, and the problem of Jewish education will not be solved along party lines."²³ Dushkin asserted that religious education, and Jewish education in particular, should be non-ecclesiastical, "not confined to the synagogue, but that it is as broad as the life of the people itself."²⁴ In discussing Jewish education he states: "It makes clear the conception of the *Congregation of Israel* (*Kenesseth Israel*) in its largest sense, is synonymous with the *Community [or Catholic] of Israel* (*Zibbur, or Kahal*),. Jewish education is, therefore, not denominational education but communal education."²⁵ Dushkin's main agenda for the JEC was to foster a unified Jewish education by shifting the educational focus from denominational to communal identity. He articulated his vision for a new JEC clearly in his fourteen-page memorandum to the JEC board on September 18, 1939, focusing on the motto, "Unity within diversity."²⁶

²² Ibid., 127.

²³ S. Benderly, *Jewish Teachers*, Vol. 1, 1-1:27; Jan. (1917).

²⁴ Ibid., 139.

²⁵ Ibid., 139.

²⁶ A. M. Dushkin, "Next Decade of Jewish education in New York City," *Jewish Education* 12 (September 1940): 68-71. See also A. M. Dushkin, "Memorandum on Implementing the Program of the New York Committee for Jewish Education," September 18, 1939, 7, box 3, folder 1, BJENYP, AJA.

Finding a Common Denominator

As a seasoned religious educator, Dushkin formulated a pluralistic agenda for Jewish religious education. He created the slogan “unity within diversity” as the motto of the JEC. Dushkin thought that the key to fostering unity was to find a common denominator that everyone can agree on. He accepted the fact that Jewish schools and organizations were very diverse, with each school and organization having its own ideology, methods, textbooks, curricula, and teachers. At the same time, he drew attention to the one thing they had in common. They were all committed to preserving Jewish tradition and culture. Additionally, the members of the JEC board were comprised of a variety of educational supervisors and consultants, each one representing one of the diverse groups within the Jewish community. Dushkin embraced the complicated task of getting this diverse group to work together.²⁷

The functions of the JEC’s board included organizing teacher training, school curricula, and teacher conferences. They held their meetings bi-weekly and sometimes weekly. In 1944, in addition to their regular “consulting meetings,” Dushkin established a special committee to address the urgent need for pluralistic Jewish education. The committee included at least one representative from each group. Dushkin arranged for a series of meetings of the special committee at which the conversation would be focused on creating a centralized mission for Jewish education by outlining a list of “Common Elements of Jewish Education.” In his address to Jewish educators, Dushkin observed that while the goal of the Kehillah since its formation in

²⁷ The assorted minutes of the Consulting meetings from 1944 included the following names of participants: Mr. Bortniker, Dr. Chipkin (past Executive Director of JEC), Dr. Dushkin, Mr. Edelman, Dr. Edidin, Mr. Pilch, Mr. Gingold, Dr. Goulub, Mr. Horden, Miss Kelper, Mr. Kusselowitz, Mr. Mark (supervisor of the Yiddish Shules/schools), Dr. Nardi, Dr. Rudavsky, Mr. Ruffman, and Mr. Whitman (Supervisor of the Talmud Torah Association and Secretary of the Hebrew Principals Association).

1910 was to create a unifying organization for Jewish education, there were several phases in its development. He characterized them into two general phases: phase 1–1910-1930, with an agenda of strengthening the Zionist and Orthodox schools, and phase 2–1930-1944, with a pluralistic agenda of reaching out to all groups within Judaism.²⁸ In another public address “*Pirud un Achdut in der Yiddisher Derzieung—Unity and Diversity within Jewish Upbringing*” Dushkin laid out his agenda for a third phase for the JEC and designated “unity in diversity” as the guiding theme for the phase. He asked the members of the JEC to concentrate on building bridges among the diverse groups within the Jewish community. Dushkin also presented a first draft proposal of the seven common elements for Jewish education in the United States.²⁹

The Journey in Search of Common Goals for Jewish Religious Education

Intensive analysis of numerous documents from the archives of the YIVO Institute, at the Center for Jewish History in New York, reveals a new understanding on the JEC’s mission to formulate a unifying language that expressed the “Common Elements of Jewish Education.”³⁰ This mission was launched on April 24th, 1944, when Dr. Chipkin, then secretary of the JEC, sent out a memo to the “Pedagogic Consultants” of the JEC outlining the agenda for the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “*Pirud un Achdut in der Yiddisher Derzieung*,” “Unity and Diversity within Jewish Upbringing.” This document contains a speech written in Yiddish by Dr. Alexander Dushkin, (seemingly delivered on November 11, 1945), Records of the Jewish Education Committee; RG 592; folder # 50; YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY.

³⁰These documents are part of *Record RG, #592, Title: Jewish Education Committee 1939-1967 Creator: Jewish Education Committee of New York*, at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, at the Center for Jewish History, New York, NY. Future biographical and historical description of these notes could be found on the online archive for The Center for Jewish History, http://search.cjh.org/primo_library/libweb/action/display. (Last visited 05/17/18). This archive was collected by Dr. Yudel Mark, who also served as a board member of the JEC for many years and at some point as its secretary (1945-). Dr. Yudel was very influential in the Yiddish Schools movement and served as their supervisor and consultant. Special thanks to Mr. Marik Web, former chief archivist of the Yivo Institute, for his assistance in discovering these documents.

remaining several meetings of that school year. He articulated the core agenda of these meetings as follows:

In this discussion, our attention would be concentrated on the elements which unite us rather than those which divide us. This does not underestimate the importance of the elements in Jewish education which divide the groups. This discussion is intended to focus our attention on the common elements that unite us as Jews, with a mindset to formulate a program which could be presented for further discussion to other groups besides our own, among them to the gathering of Judaic scholars from the various parties in Jewish life.

Clearly, the main focus of their conversations was to be on uncovering the elements they could all agree on in order to formulate a unified common language for Jewish education. The group intended eventually to expand their conversation to include others, especially Judaic scholars and local journalists. Given their theological differences, strong commitments to conversation, intense collaboration, and maintaining unity were crucial in working to formulate a unified educational vision. The minutes of the meetings show that Dushkin, the facilitator of the group, worked to maintain a balanced and unified atmosphere.³¹

It took several sessions of interactive conversation to formulate the first draft of the Common Elements. Multiple versions were presented before they finally narrowed the ideas being considered down to seven core elements: 1) Torah, 2) Jewish life, 3) Hebrew, 4) Jewish cultural identity, 5) The land of Israel, 6) Our role in American Jewry and 7) Faith in a better world and the divine purpose for it. The minutes show that five meetings were held on the following days in 1944: Thursday, September 28; Thursday, November 2; Thursday, November

³¹Ibid.

9; Wednesday, November 15; and Wednesday, November 22. All the meetings were led by Dushkin and their sole agenda was to create a list of common elements for JRE.³²

In order to reach neutral, common ground, Dushkin proposed a two steps strategy: first, to define the two most extreme opposite views for each element, and then second, to avoid any extreme approaches. For example, for the first element of Torah, the two extreme views on the subject were: 1) the extreme Orthodox view that every letter of the Torah is sacred and part of divine revelation, and 2) the opposite extreme view of the Reform and cultural Jews who consider the Torah to be a cultural development of the Jewish people, subject to the same laws of social change and expressions as other cultures. Dushkin proclaimed that only after eliminating the extreme views on the subject could the group endeavor to create a common language.

The process of developing the seven Common Elements was a very complex journey. The conversation became intense at times, especially when dealing with such theological topics as Torah, Hebrew, and Jewish identity, about which there were many differing and controversial points of view. However, the greatest challenge was how to get all involved to agree on a common language. Dushkin was able to attain common ground while creating a safe space by assuring the members of the committee that each Jewish group would have the freedom to determine the measures and manner for how to implement each of the common elements based on their own theological and religious inclinations. It is not surprising that Dushkin, repeatedly, had to remind the board to focus the discussion towards finding a middle ground by avoiding any extremes. Ironically, at first, Dushkin, himself (as a devoted Zionist) struggled to maintain a middle ground when dealing with the element of Hebrew. He expressed his Zionist position

³²Minutes of Discussion on Common elements in Jewish Education, (Fall 1944); Records of the Jewish Education Committee; RG 592; Folder # 50; YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, NY.

stating, “that schools that reject the teaching of Hebrew in any form should not be included as part of the JEC.” It was Dr. Chipkin who expressed a more neutral position and who advocated for the inclusion of all Jewish schools that could agree with the general concept of the importance of Hebrew within Judaism and who were open to introducing more Hebrew.³³

Overall, Dushkin skillfully created a safe space for each member of the group to express his views freely, while at the same time keeping diversity in balance by having the group focus on the end goal of developing a common language. He also stated that he wanted the conversation to be open and ongoing. He firmly believed that the discussion about defining a common language for the seven elements should extend beyond the walls of the JEC. He wanted each group of Jewish educators in the United States to have the freedom to express their own point of view about each of the elements and how to implement them. Therefore, Dushkin suggested the following two strategies be considered by each group regarding all the elements: 1) internally — collect feedback by inquiring how each group is actually teaching and implementing each element, and 2) externally — encourage each group to further expand their discussion of common elements beyond the walls of their community by inviting journalists, scholars, etc. into the conversation. Dushkin also affirmed that the seven elements should be open ended and that each group should have the freedom to incorporate the common elements in a way that was in accordance with their own core beliefs. Both Chipkin and Dushkin urged the members of the board not to exclude anyone as long as they could agree on maintaining a positive attitude towards these elements even if they did not fully participate in their practice.

³³ These meetings took place before the establishment of the modern state of Israel. Modern Hebrew became more popular in the following years, as the Zionist movement was emerging.

There is an old saying, “When you have five Jews, you have ten opinions.” The fact that the board was able to reach a general agreement and produce a first draft on such controversial and complicated elements as Torah, Hebrew, Jewish identity, and Zionism in just five sessions was a miraculous accomplishment.³⁴ Hence, Dushkin succeeded after much wrangling in creating a tentative formulation of common elements, which he presented at the Nineteenth Annual Conference of the National Council for Jewish Education, on June 4, 1945. He then published his committee’s statement in the November 1945 issue of *Jewish Education* magazine.³⁵ The following February, a symposium was held on Dushkin’s “organic conception of the American Jewish curriculum.”³⁶

Dushkin, in his address on the seven Common Elements, summarized his leadership of the JEC as follows: “The goal of the JEC is to continue the golden chain of Judaism and to preserve the old heritage of our prophets in creating a better world for ourselves and others.” He likened the JEC to the human body as being composed of various limbs. While each limb is uniquely different in its shape and purpose, all of the limbs share in creating a wholesome body, and only by attending to all of them can a person be healthy and whole. Similarly, he concluded, the JEC represents the diverse groups within the Jewish community and it must be sure to

³⁴ While these meetings took place before the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, the Zionist movement was on the rise and very popular within Jewish circles. For a better overview on the history of the development of the early Zionist movement see W. Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel*, New York: Schocken Books, (2003), see also <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zionism>.

³⁵ A. M. Dushkin, *JE*, 17, (November 1945). See editor's note “earnestly” inviting the readers to send in their “reactions and suggestions.” See also A. Dushkin, *Living Bridges: Memories of an Educator*, Jerusalem: Keter, (1975), p147-148.

³⁶ Jonathan Krasner, *Ibid.*, 342. See also J. Hartstein, “Traditionalist View: Symposium on ‘Common Elements in Jewish Education’,” *JE*, 17, (February 1946), 40-41, on the Orthodox reaction to the common elements.

include everyone in order to present a full and integrated understanding of the meaning of Judaism and Jewish religious education.

Dushkin's resigned from the JEC in 1948 and took on the leadership of the John Dewey School of Education at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel. Chipkin then assumed the head leadership of the JEC. He reissued a final version of the core elements in a pamphlet titled *Jewish Life in America: A Discussion of Some Contemporary Problems*.³⁷ It was published by the National Council of Jewish Women—Committee on Education and Social Action of New York (a sub-committee of the JEC).

The pamphlet was designed to be presented in several local schools as part of an evaluation report of Jewish education. The first part of the pamphlet was on educational theory. It provided a historical overview of Jewish education in the United States focusing on New York City, and discussed the different types of schools, their curricula, and their common elements. In addition, it was intended to be a helpful tool to spark conversation regarding the needs of Jewish religious education at that time and to foster greater awareness among lay leaders and educators of the ongoing progressive development of Jewish religious education. The second part was on educational practice. It was included in order to collect feedback from its four-page questionnaire, which each school was to complete and return to the national JEC office. The instructions in the report contained the following:

Part One

- a) Participants must review the report about Jewish education in the United States.
- b) They must provide a report about the educational resources in their community.

³⁷ "Jewish Life in America: A Discussion of Some Contemporary Problems" (1950); Records of the Jewish Education Committee; RG 592; Folder #173; YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, at the Center for Jewish History, New York, NY.

- c) Participants must visit a school, participate in teaching sessions, and present a report during the second session.

Part Two

For presentation of the brief reports on the subjects taught in the Jewish schools, the following questions might be discussed:

1. How do these subjects help prepare children to face the problems of living as Jews in a modern American community?
2. How do they help them in their relationships with other children in public school?
3. In view of the discussion of the above questions, would you add or subtract anything from the school curriculum and why?
4. In what ways can the school system in your community be improved?
 - a. Should more funds be provided?
 - b. Should there be improved teacher training?
 - c. Should there be improved teacher materials?
5. Is there a need for adult Jewish education in your community? How is it being met?

It is significant to note that in their discussions of the seven core elements of Judaism both Dushkin and Chipkin highlighted the historical outline of the changes and progress of Jewish education in the United States focusing on New York. They both thought that every participant in discussions about the core elements should be aware of the changes in Jewish education that occurred in the early twentieth century so that they could draw insight from the collective wisdom of the Jewish community in the past as they helped to chart the future of Jewish education.

Final Version of the Common Elements

Chipkin presented a final version of the seven common elements in a pamphlet. He wrote:

1. **Torah**—Torah represents the accumulated literary and spiritual heritage of the Jewish people through the centuries. Beginning with the Pentateuch and continuing through many languages, especially Hebrew, Torah gives expression to the way of life and to the social ideals of the Jewish people.

2. **Personal Jewish Living**—This involves applying Torah as a way of life. It requires obedience to the moral law as well as observance of Jewish customs and laws.
3. **Hebrew**—Hebrew is the historical, classical, and modern language of the Jewish people.³⁸ It has served as the repository of literary treasures and the vehicle for rich cultural expression. It is still needed today for the recital of prayer in the synagogue, for the study of the classics, and for reading the modern book or newspaper in Israel.
4. **The Jewish People**—This involves cultivating a Jewish identity that includes both the individual Jew and corporate Israel and acceptance of national responsibility between himself and other Jews. Knowledge of the past and present of the Jewish people allows for a more informed development of personal and group responsibility and preservation of spiritual heritage.
5. **The land of Israel**—like the Hebrew element has been identified with the Jewish people, its past and present.
6. **The American Jewish Environment**—Every Jew living in the United States must acknowledge and embrace both American and Jewish cultures. This includes knowing the history and development of the Jewish community in the United States, participating in institutional and communal activities, contributing to the cultural and spiritual welfare of the American commonwealth, and preserving the equality of the American Jew.
7. **Faith**—The seventh element deals with faith in a living God and in the Divine purpose making for the improvement of world and man, involving the human obligation to strive toward a better, more informed democratic world order.³⁹

Chipkin asserted that the order of these elements is not immutable, that is, that they are not necessarily related and may appear in any of the subjects studied. He emphasizes that the treatment and interpretation for each element will vary with each school. He also offered two assumptions underlying the teaching of these common elements in all the Jewish schools. They are:

1. The desire to help preserve the Jewish people and Jewish spiritual assets regardless of ideological differences, and
2. The readiness to make adjustments to the environment regardless of the method of interpretation by the group.⁴⁰

This final version of the seven elements, while based on Dushkin's works on the Common

³⁸ This final version was published in 1950 after the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11-12.

Elements of Jewish Education, presents a more crystallized, theological, and pluralistic understanding of the elements of a contemporary Jewish education in the United States. Like Dushkin, Chipkin emphasized the crucial role of conversation in shaping and transforming Jewish religious education. He included a survey in his pamphlet on the common elements in order to open the conversation about the elements to all school personnel and parents. In doing so, Chipkin reached beyond the walls of the JEC and expanded the number and range of people involved in shaping and re-shaping Jewish religious education.

The Influence of John Dewey in Creating Common Elements

Dushkin was greatly influenced by the teachings of John Dewey (1859-1952), renowned American philosopher and educator. In fact, Dushkin was the first person to write his doctoral dissertation on the subject of Jewish education under the direction of Dewey at Teachers College Columbia.⁴¹ His writings are saturated with Dewey's ideas about education being a process of democratic socialization. He writes how "the tendencies in Jewish education can be best understood in the light of the two universal ideas which have profoundly affected all of modern life, mainly, Science as a Method, and Democracy as an aim."⁴² Dushkin was concerned about Jewish survivorship in particularity in preserving its traditions and identity in the United States, and in considering the issue he concluded that U.S. Jews needed to embrace democratic values and principles while at the same time adhering to their ancient culture and tradition. In discussing the benefits of democratic freedoms Dushkin wrote that they permit "each of its individual

⁴¹ A. Dushkin, "Antaeus — Autobiographical Reflections", *ibid*, 127. See also *ibid*, 126, for a detailed description of Dewey's role on American Jewish education. He writes: "He spoke fondly and proudly of our group as his 'Jewish boys.'"

⁴² A. M Dushkin, *Ibid.*, 140.

citizens to share his interests and experiences with other citizens, outside of his particular group or class, so as to make possible broad and free choices of individual development.”⁴³

The process Dushkin crafted for forging the common elements of Judaism was a democratically inclusive process. All of the diverse Jewish groups were invited to be part of the process, and Dushkin sought to expand the conversation about the common elements to as many people as possible within and beyond the Jewish community. Moreover, the goal of the process was to forge by democratic means (namely, conversation and the free expression of ideas based on mutual respect) a sense of unity within the Jewish community. Dushkin, like his mentor Dr. Benderly, believed that if Judaism in the United States was to become truly reflective of the principles of an American democracy, it must be guided to develop following a democratic patterns, that of “diversity within unity.”

Dushkin presented the following Deweyan outlook for Jewish education:

No single definition of Jewish education will cover the whole field. It may be best, therefore, to define it objectively from various aspects:

1. Psychologically, Jewish education is the process of enriching the personality of American Jewish children, by transmitting to them the cultural heritage of the Jews, and by tracing them to share in the experiences of the Jewish people, both past and present.
2. Sociologically, Jewish education has two meanings:
 - a. It is the transmission of group consciousness by Jewish fathers [and community] to their children, so as to preserve Jewish life.
 - a. It is the mental and social adjustment of the American Jewish children, so that by preserving the values of their people, they may be able to live the completest, and, at the same time, the most cooperating lives.
1. Religiously, Jewish education may be defined as the training of Jewish children to understand and obey the will of God as it expressed itself in the history, literature, and laws of their people.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26-27.

Dushkin and Chipkin both strongly believed that “the communalization of Jewish educational endeavor means the reorganization of Jewish schools on a democratic basis.”⁴⁵ They were committed to the centralization of Jewish education and formulated the seven elements around the key question of the time: “How can Jews live a Jewish life in the United States?”

Taking The Model Beyond Jewish Religious Education

Looking beyond Jewish education, I contend that the pioneering work of Dushkin and Chipkin in creating a common language for a pluralistic Jewish religious education presents a viable model of how to educate for coexistence in divided societies. An analysis of their journey shows how to create an educational framework based on democratic values and principles for creating common elements and fostering “Unity within diversity” in a religiously pluralistic social context.

Specifically, I present the following guidelines based on Dushkin’s and Chipkin’s work for creating a common language for fruitful dialogue and nurturing coexistence in divided societies:

- a) **agenda** — set the focus on finding a common denominator,
- b) **openness** — make room for differences,
- c) **examine** — define the two extreme positions on each side of the conversation,
- d) **middle ground** — avoid any extremism,
- e) **centralize** — focus the conversation on formulating a centralized viewpoint,
- f) **common core** — create a common language that all can agree on, and

⁴⁵ Ibid.

g) **dialogue** — expend the conversation within the community and beyond the walls of the community.

A Common Language for Interfaith Dialogue

Stephen A. Schmidt, in his history of the REA, notes how on several occasions both Dushkin and Chipkin were involved in easing tensions between the Protestants and the Catholics within the REA. For example, Schmidt reports how, during a REA board meeting in the 1940s, one board major suggested that the often used metaphor “democracy of God” placed “faith in man” rather than God. Alexander Dushkin, founder of the College of Jewish Studies, Chicago, weighed in to modify the “sentiment indicating that in rabbinic thought the emphasis was upon a ‘partnership of man with God.’” When Steward G. Cole countered him, it was board member Rabbi Israel Chipkin, director of the American Association of Jewish Education who attempted to moderate the resulting dispute.⁴⁶ Schmidt writes that “Throughout that entire report there is indication that the Jewish view seemed to negotiate between the religious position of God’s transcendence and the other liberal Protestant ideal of God’s imminence. But in such a way as not to threaten the traditional religious education alliance between Reform Jews and mainline liberal Protestant educators.”⁴⁷

Schmidt also references another incident that directly correlates with the common elements. Schmidt reports how earlier that same year in another meeting, Herbert Seamans raised the issue of whether or not Catholics could participate in the REA. Schmidt writes that “His question was straightforward. ‘How can you possibly reconcile the difference to bring about

⁴⁶ Schmidt, *Ibid.*, 118. Interestingly, this is the first time where reference is made to Chicken as rabbi. Perhaps it was merely the personal impression of the secretary of the Board who took the notes.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

real cooperation when Catholic education inevitably results in attitudes of intolerance?”⁴⁸ Here again, it was Chipkin (the Jew) who served as key negotiator of the group by outlining an agenda for creating dialogue among various groups of religious progressives.⁴⁹ Chipkin encouraged the group to build the conversation around a common denominator in order to be able to continue the interfaith movement. He then proposed a similar strategy to the process used to forge the seven common elements of Jewish religious education. He suggested that the REA build conversation around core elements. He then outlined the following six core elements: “God, Brotherhood of Man, Dignity of the Individual, Democracy, Peace [and] Social Justice.”⁵⁰

Conclusion

The great educational philosopher of the twentieth century, John Dewey, wrote, “Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse. Communication can alone create a great community. Our Babel is not one of tongues, but of signs and symbols without which shared experiences is impossible.”⁵¹ This article is an in-depth study of the creation of a new consciousness among Jews in the United States through their participation in a process aimed at forging via conversation a common language for a pluralistic Jewish religious education. The article suggests how religious educators can today overcome the signs and symbols of Babel that separate us and our religious communities and keep us from finding a common denominator and articulating a new unifying language for the shaping and

⁴⁸ Ibid, 119.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ J. Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, Chicago: Sage Books, The Swallow Press, Inc., (1927), p142.

refashioning of a great community. This author advocates utilizing a conversation about common elements to build bridges among diverse religious groups and forging a new language of interfaith dialogue. Such a process should not aim to produce substantive agreement about religious issues. Rather, it should focus on sharing and respecting diverse views and be focused on how such respect can provide a foundation for uncovering shared, common elements while at the same time honoring the diversity of religious perspectives found in the world today.

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