

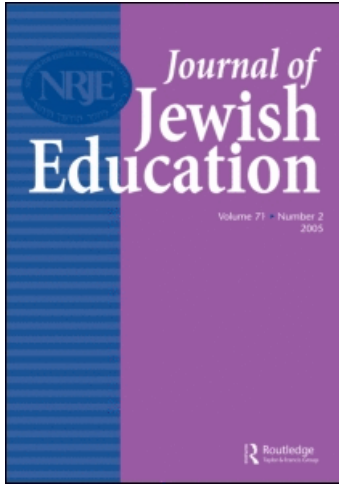
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JEWISH EDUCATIONAL TRENDS IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY

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INTRODUCTION

The Jewish community in South Africa has undergone a great many changes in the last 20 years, and will continue to undergo additional changes as a result of the fall of Apartheid and the election of a democratic government in 1994. These changes are already visible: they affect Jewish education in a broad sense as well as Jewish educational structures and institutions specifically.

The study of Jewish education in South Africa is fascinating because it provides a lens for looking at how a minority religious group is dealing with the preservation of its community. This struggle is occurring both in the face of dramatic external pressures, due to social upheaval in the entire country, and tremendous changes from within the Jewish community itself. While the political changes on the national level are, overall, very positive, the destruction of the evil of Apartheid has resulted in many societal problems with which Jews, along with other white and privileged groups, must deal. These include much higher rates of crime, the fear of affirmative action, and the continuing emigration of Jews from the country (balanced by very little immigration). Thus, South Africa offers a unique setting in which to study Jewish education today, because South Africa is the only En-

glish-speaking country currently undergoing anything of this sort.

A further complication is that South Africa Jewry is dominated by Orthodoxy, but there is a great gap between the official positions of the Orthodox rabbinate and the actual attitudes and behaviors of the average Orthodox congregant. This dichotomy is not entirely unknown to American readers, but it is one that has faded away in America in the last generation. Today the phenomenon of non-observant Orthodoxy has become a marginal aspect of American Jewish education and American Jewish sociology, but in South Africa it is quite important.

This article, then, offers an overview of Jewish education in South Africa today. The first half of the history describes Jewish education in South Africa and the social and economic trends currently underway; the second half analyzes the impact of these trends on Jewish education in South Africa today.

EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF JEWISH EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Over the past 150 years South African Jewish education has developed in the context of a racially divided society. Even before the official introduction of Apartheid in 1948, the society had informal but very real racial frameworks. This racial segregation had a dramatic impact on all immigrant groups in South Africa, including the Greeks, Portuguese, and Italians, as well as the Jews. After 1948 the Nationalist government actively promoted the maintenance of separate communal identities through Apartheid, a system of laws that

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decreed separate housing, schools, socializing areas public restrooms, buses, beaches, and the like for the three major racial groups: whites, blacks, and coloreds (which included Malays, people of mixed race, and, in some instances, Indians). This segregation helped to build and maintain a Jewish community that was quite insular and to maintain high levels of Jewish communal cohesiveness while allowing Jews full access to South African English-speaking culture.¹

Jewish education in South Africa has been described by the late Bernard Steinberg as "the composite product of Anglo-Jewish communal organization and Zionist ideology superimposed on East European traditions."² After World War II the community built day schools, which successfully integrated traditional Judaism, Zionism, and a strong ethnic identification. Today the commitment to day school education has become much stronger and continues to attract ever-increasing percentages of school-age children in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

This, however, was not always the case. The earlier attempts at Jewish education go back to the 1840s, when religious classes were first held in Cape Town. In 1878 a Sunday School was established, and in 1895 the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation School became the first day school in South Africa.³ While other day schools were established in Johannesburg, Pretoria, and other cities, the Jewish community did not seem to view these schools as preferable, and only a small percentage of Jewish children enrolled in them. Rather, the early 20th-century pattern was as it was in the United States during the same period, to send Jewish children to public schools and then to Talmud Torah after regular government school hours.

During the first four decades of the 20th century, Talmud Torah after-school education was the dominant South African preference. Jews were a tight social community, and

attendance at government schools allowed Jewish children to be exposed to South African language and culture without threatening Jewish communal loyalties. Of course, some Jews began to assimilate, and even drop out of the Jewish community, but the numbers were small, and the Jewish leadership did not perceive this as a serious threat to organized Jewish life.⁴

HISTORY OF THE DAY SCHOOL SYSTEM

It was only following World War II that the day school system increased dramatically in importance. At the same time, the importance of Talmud Torah tended to decline. This new commitment to day school education was made possible by the development of a traditional-national orientation that became the hallmark of the day schools.

The traditional-national orientation is an approach to Jewish education that stresses that Jews are a distinct national group, bound together by a connection to traditional Judaism. Nevertheless, there is the recognition that different students will take this traditional more or less seriously as something they will actually practice and totally believe in. Despite these differences, the consensus among South African Jews is that traditional Judaism is the cornerstone of their national identity. In practice the schools have taught this tradition not so much to emphasize the religion but as a means of instilling Jewish identity based on the national conception of Jews as a distinct group. This would help maintain the continuity of the Jewish people as an entity, which has been of paramount importance to South African Jews. The late Chief Rabbi Louis I. Rabinowitz wrote in 1964:

Two decades ago, the Jewish day school was virtually unknown here. The sole provision for communal education was the afternoon classes

which held undisputed sway. It was only under the reeling impact of the catastrophe of the European holocaust that a critical, intelligent and honest reevaluation of the educational apparatus was undertaken by a group of inspired people.

It was realized that the system of Jewish education as an appendage uneasily tacked on to general education had not succeeded, and a new method had to be introduced.⁵

The day school system began with the establishment of the King David School in Johannesburg in 1948 and grew to a maximum 17 separate day schools by the late 1960s.⁶ From 1948 to 1994 it became increasingly common for Jewish parents to send their children to a day school, but by the late 1970s and certainly the 1980s it became more and more the rule rather than the exception. As Jews began to emigrate in increasing numbers (the total population decreased from 130,000 in 1976 to an estimated 80,000 or even 70,000 today), many of the government schools, which once boasted considerable numbers of Jewish children contained fewer and fewer of them. This, in turn, increased the Jewish parents' feeling that their children would feel more comfortable in a Jewish day school.

One phenomenon that was very noticeable in the 1970s, but which has seemed to stop almost completely, is the trend of parents living in small communities sending their children to live in hostels in Johannesburg or Cape Town in order to attend King David or Herzlia. For example, over 100 such boarders lived in the King David hostels in 1969,⁷ but the numbers began to decline as more and more Jewish families left small towns for either bigger cities or to emigrate from the country. Today few families with children of school age remain even in medium-sized cities such as Durban, to speak nothing of the dozens of small towns that once had between 30 and 250 families or more.

The growth in the number of day schools stopped as a result of increasing emigration after 1976, to this day the percentage of Jewish students enrolled has continued to increase. Currently at least 85 percent of all Jewish students attend a day school, and the percentage continues to rise. The vast majority of these students attend school in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

This shift has had a catastrophic impact on the Reform (or Progressive, as it is called in South Africa) movement, because most parents who send their children to a day school do not see the need to also bring the child to an afternoon Hebrew School two or three days a week. Whereas in the Orthodox system the day school simply replaces the cheder, for the Reform Movement the move to day school education has severely weakened those parents' ability to commit to the Reform temples and Progressive Judaism.

As Rabbi David Sherman, the rabbi emeritus of the Cape Town Jewish Progressive Congregation, has pointed out, his cheder numbers have dropped from 400 or 500 as late as the early 1970s to about 50 today, including both the Green Point and Wynberg temples. He attributes this to emigration, which took a disproportionate number of Reform families, as well as to social pressure applied in the day schools to join and attend Orthodox synagogues. There are also Reform children in the day schools whose families do not attend temple. Rabbi Sherman explains, "But many are actually lost to us as members completely. To keep the adults interested in Temple Israel, you have to keep the children interested. With much smaller cheders, it is much much harder to maintain momentum."⁸

CURRENT CHALLENGES TO THE DAY SCHOOL SYSTEM

Since the 1970s smaller Jewish communities, such as those in Pretoria and Durban,

have seen drastic declines in their Jewish population. For example, Durban has dropped from 6,000 to 3,000 and continues to fall. Because these communities have had difficulty maintaining their day schools, they recently entered into agreement with Crawford College to privatize the schools. Crawford College, originally set up in Johannesburg by a former non-Jewish teacher from King David School, offers a high-quality, private school education with Jewish and Hebrew studies. It is therefore very similar to a Jewish day school, but is run by a non-Jewish teacher/businessman as a private enterprise—and for profit. Crawford has gone to great efforts to assure the Orthodox authorities that the schools will maintain religious standards similar to what are practiced in the day schools. Whether the standards will be enforced is unknown, but there is little reason for Crawford to jeopardize his school system by failing to follow through on his promises.

The development of the Crawford College system is the most dramatic change in the Jewish educational system in the 1990s. There are likely to be additional Crawford College openings, including perhaps in Cape Town.

Despite the high levels of emigration, the Jewish day schools in Johannesburg and Cape Town have only declined moderately in numbers, due largely to a higher percentage of Jewish students attending day schools as well as many Jewish families from smaller communities moving in. There is, therefore, no feeling of impending crisis in South African Jewish education in those cities. Nevertheless, there are those who believe that serious problems lie beneath the surface, unaddressed and causing great harm to the development of committed Jewish graduates.

The Orthodox Chief Rabbi, Cyril Harris, is one of those concerned for the future. He writes that on the surface all appears well. The schools are happy and bustling, the teachers skilled and effective, and the facili-

ties highly satisfactory. Most of the pupils do well at matric (the achievement tests in the final year of school), at sports, and at getting along with each other. However, just below the surface, he says, exist a variety of vexatious problems.

Our mainstream schools proudly boast a national-transitional ethos. This means the entire system ought to be geared to producing—to use the definition of the late Rabbi Isaac Goss of blessed memory—“a completely integrated Jewish personality,” someone whose Jewish consciousness is rooted in the spiritual heritage and historical experience of the Jewish people, someone to whom Israelism is a viable component of Jewish identity—and someone who feels comfortable with both.⁹

According to Rabbi Harris, the answer lies within the motives of Jewish parents. He feels that it cannot be assumed that Jewish parents send their children to Jewish schools to obtain a sound Jewish education. Their true reasons may have more to do with fear of falling scholastic standards combined with secular ambition: Parents want their children to get a good education so they can obtain good jobs. These parents may also be more concerned that their offspring to develop a Jewish identity than obtain a sound Jewish education. The introduction of Jewish Studies in matric, for example, has enjoyed little success despite the fact that there is supposed to be a matric requirement for Jewish scholars.

This has led, claims Rabbi Harris, to a disconcerting situation where the study of Jewish issues and traditions left virtually entirely in the hands of a small group who are the most participatory, or in the hands of those who have no immediate link to the Jewish faith but who are simply fulfilling a role required by them by their choice of career. Jewish education is thus simply a part of the job description of teachers in a school system.

The vast majority of Jewish parents and other members of the community are uninvolved.

In this scenario, Jewish education is reduced to something taught by rote by people who do not have an emotional understanding of what they are teaching. The content of Jewish studies is thus separated from the vibrant context in which it needs to thrive. Further, these teachers typically are not well versed in the academic aspects of Jewish education. Harris suggests that teachers in Jewish schools need both: "Harmonizing Jewish tradition with modern thought," he says, "is an essential exercise for the enlightened Jew, not only because of the multiple tensions which require resolution, but because claims for the validity of Torah wisdom can only be substantiated by informed comparison with secular wisdom."¹⁰

Fortunately, some conscientious teachers have managed to convey a sense of Jewish history without falling into the trap of dwelling solely on the tragedy of the Holocaust, as is so often the case. Further, they have instilled a sense of social responsibility to the world in which their students live every day, which is particularly important in the emerging democracy of a desegregated South Africa. It is only in ways such as these that Jewish children can understand and practice sound Jewish ethics and principles within their local communities.

To ensure the success of these program, however, many observers believe in the need to reinforce traditional Jewish values despite the norms that govern the current social context. These norms are, briefly stated, that most South African Jews, some 80 percent of whom are nominally Orthodox, do not really practice Orthodoxy; it is a civil religion rather than something they practice fully. There is a gap between what the South African Orthodox Jews says and believes in and what he or she practices. School can play an important role in trying to bridge that gap, whether it is just to

help students grapple with the tension between theory and the reality or whether it is to actually bring students closer to Orthodox belief and practice. It is vital, then, that the school become "the forum for healthy debate on the relative merits of ancient and modern value systems."¹¹

Rabbi Harris brings further evidence: the relative absence of university students studying Judaism. He writes that the paucity of university students engaged in the whole range of Jewish studies is a further example of the demotion of Jewish learning. He believes that the post-Emancipation era did not bring about any weakening of primary education in Jewish circles. In fact, on the surface, the Jewish educational system appears to be a success. In reality, however, the system lacks substance, because there is not a solid core of students with an advanced and ongoing commitment to the study of Judaism. Harris believes that the post-Apartheid era "with most regrettable consequences" changed the emphasis from Jewish education to secular education.

Because it now competes with powerful alternatives, the informed Jewish view becomes more, not less, important. Thus a priority of our community is to reinstate a culture of Jewish learning, to endeavor to recapture that sense of esteem in which the learned Jew as invariably held. While a significant number of Orthodox students have been attracted to study in *yeshivot*, precious few of the total student body have been attracted to Jewish studies at university.¹²

Harris suggests that the Jews throughout the world, and especially in South Africa, should place more emphasis on the role of the rabbi as spiritual "teacher" in both the temple and the school, and that parents, and the family in general, should re-emerge as facilitators of education at home. "Similarly," says Rabbi Harris, "Shabbatonim should be for the whole family, not only for a specific teenage

group. The excellent educational work of the Casper Jewish Educational Development Centre, through which many hundreds of Kind David High School pupils have been fired with enthusiasm by the informal Jewish programs of the Encounter project, is testimony to the Jewish potential of the pupils and the reality of beginning to fulfil it." According to Harris, only when all those individuals who may influence the future of Judaism—parents, spiritual and community leaders, teachers, and scholars—join forces in a united goal, will "the tide turn for the better."¹³

Rabbi Harris is, of course, speaking from an Orthodox point of view, and one can respect him for his consistency and commitment to a consistent form of religion. But the South African Jewish society is not based on rational thought, so it is unlikely that the inconsistencies that Harris finds so disturbing will soon disappear.

ORIGINS OF THE JEWISH NATIONAL-ETHNIC IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Numerous observers have commented that the educational legacy of Apartheid has trained South African society not to engage in critical thinking processes.¹⁴ Avoiding asking too many questions was essential for survival in the Apartheid state, and the creation of an open democratic order has not changed the mentality of those raised under the old order. But at the same time, it is not at all clear that those raised in the new South Africa will be more assertive about questioning assumptions and challenging the established order. Rather, the trend among many white groups of has been to withdraw from general society and form tighter and closer knit subunits.

In the Jewish community this trend has been manifested in increasing social "ghettoization" and a strong move towards Orthodoxy, reflected in a phenomenal rise in

interest in Jewish education of a traditional nature. Programs offered by the Ohr Sameach group in Johannesburg, for example, are reported to draw as many as 1000 people every week, but programs stressing liberal values or scholarly programs, for example, those sponsored by the Progressive Movement or Jewish academic organizations such as the Kaplan Centre, have drawn extremely limited audiences.¹⁵

Writing in 1989, Bernard Steinberg stated, "Jewish identity is expressed in a national-ethnic rather than a religious-cultural form. It is based on spontaneous sentiment rather than a deep involvement in religious practice or culture and learning."¹⁶ This makes it difficult for intellectual or religious leaders to have a major impact on the community solely through intellectual argumentation.

Charisma is an essential element for all those who desire to have an impact on the community, and this holds true as well for those working in Jewish education. While this may be true for all diaspora communities, it is especially important for South Africa, a society that is still trained to respond to a totalitarian authority structure.

Rabbi Isadore Rubenstein, a Johannesburg Jewish educator, writes that one of the major characteristics of Apartheid society was the absence of an overarching South African identity. Rather, there was a sharp focus on the specific subgroup to which an individual belonged.¹⁷

Rubenstein argues that the broadly national-traditional Jewish educational philosophy is uniquely suited to the values and perspectives of South African Jewry. In order to understand the educational approach taken by the day schools in particular, it is necessary to take into account the South African background.

Rubenstein writes that South African Jews have tended to see themselves as part of the "white caste," yet this segregated society has

also allowed Jews to establish an individual identity precisely because there has been, in fact, no “melting pot syndrome.” Quoting Allie Dubb and other academics such as Jocelyn Hellig, Rubenstein suggests that the definition of South African Jewry as “whites” was simply a legal denotation with no real authentication by either society or culture.

This stance, however, was in direct contrast to the Afrikaner minority, which developed a very real sense of social and cultural distinctions—as opposed to the English-speaking communities, which formed no definite group. The meaning behind being a “true South African” is thus blurred and inconsistent with what is generally accepted as united nation. All citizens are part of separate subgroups that tend to define personal identity and, indeed, culture. Naturally, this seemingly disparate definition was enhanced by the legal adoption of segregationist policies that tended to define particular ethnic and racial delineations.

It is for this reason, then, claims Rubenstein, that South African Jews typically congregate around religious activity and that the temples have become “the core of community identification.” However, although this would imply that the local community would be a devoutly religious society, other academics have argued to the contrary. They suggest that Jewish identity has become dependent on a sense of community which, although it may stem from some affiliation with religion, is largely as a result of group identification rather than religious observation.

One might think—considering how much of a Jewish community there is in Johannesburg and the country as a whole and how much the social and religious lives of South African Jews revolve around the synagogue, and Orthodox synagogues at that—that there is an intensely religious ethos involved. Some scholars have argued that this focus on the synagogue is largely a result of the need to identify

with other Jews as an ethnic group as opposed to an interest in religion in general and Orthodoxy in particular. Orthodoxy is chosen most often as the form of Jewish religious identification because this has been the pattern for other groups in South Africa, where Protestant immigrants were drawn to the denominations they viewed as mainstream and of high status: the Afrikaners, for example, gravitated toward the Dutch Reform Church, and the English-speaking Christians gravitated toward the Anglican and Methodist churches.

Nevertheless, there have been in South Africa alternative means of Jewish identity, most notably Zionist youth movements. These have included Betar, a politically right-wing group; Habonim, a group slightly to the left of center; Bnei Akiva, an Orthodox Zionist youth group and Netzer, a Reform Zionist youth group. However, in recent years membership in all of the youth movements, with the possible exception of Bnei Akiva, has declined dramatically, so that in South Africa in the late 1990s youth movement political identification is no longer a serious competitor for the primary loyalty for South African Jews of any age.¹⁸

This explains why South African Jewry is seemingly entirely comfortable with the contradiction that members who attend an Orthodox shul observe few of the rites and customs required by Orthodoxy. It seems, then, that pure religious issues, such as *halachah*, tend to play a significantly lesser role than simple secular and traditional issues. These latter issues include, to name a few, the governance of Jewish communal organizations, securing funding for those organizations, Jewish school issues, controversies related to how the Jewish community presents itself to the government, relations with other ethnic groups, fighting anti-Semitism, loyalty to Israel, how Jews are portrayed in the media, and the impact of affirmative action and how it might affect Jewish children growing up.

Further, it is safe to say, then, that the strength of South African Jewry lies in structure and consensus rather than ideology. This attitude reflects an ideological concern to ensure the survival of the community rather than the survival of the faith. This attitude has been reinforced by similar attitudes of the Calvinist Dutch Reform culture, which has exerted much influence over much of the white population of South Africa. Religious affiliation has hence been affected more by family traditions than ideological conviction.

Rubenstein seems to confirm Jocelyn Hellig's sentiment that South African Jews know relatively little about modern Judaism as it is practiced throughout the world and are reluctant to be creative in their spirituality.¹⁹ that is, they adhere to traditional forms of Orthodox prayer and worship, uninterested in any sort of liturgical reforms or changes. They are generally unmoved by creative readings in English and other such attempts at being innovative within the Judaic context. They are totally disinterested in unusual spiritual practices, such as healing services, nature services, and meditative techniques, or in incorporating any aspects of other religious traditions and/or New Age concepts into their spiritual lives.

In quoting Peter Berger, an American scholar of religion, Rubenstein underlines the fact that there is an almost passive resignation—and, as a result, a loss of individual identity—rather than a determination to break from what is essentially a neutral society, that is, a society in which you can assume any identity you want as long as it does not interfere with the civic authorities. South African Jews seem to be locked into the identity assigned to them by a previous government, and they submit to preconceived membership in a specific ethnic, cultural, and religious group defined by others than themselves.

For these scholars, then, the question remains whether Jews in South Africa will be

able to learn to take their fate in their own hands so that they can build an exciting new identity in the emerging democracy, or whether they will continue to live out the national and traditional Judaism thrust upon them. Another way to state the question is will South African Jews learn to encourage creativity within their faith in order to facilitate a new and vibrant Jewish consciousness?²⁰

Utilizing Emile Durkheim's thesis that schools are clear agents of their societies, Rubenstein then places the Jewish school at the nexus of the cultural and social values of South Africa today. He writes:

In terms of the above description of being Jewish in South Africa, it would appear that the 'broadly national-traditional' Jewish educational philosophy is uniquely suited to the values and perspective of South African Jewry....

In summary, the main thrust of the Jewish education in the King David Schools is to socialize the students into the strong but intellectually shallow Jewish identification characteristic of South African Jewish society. Issues of the content of this Jewish education therefore take a less crucial role, and the clear success of the schools in their primary aim removes the impetus for serious curriculum evaluation and development. It remains to be seen whether this balance between the form and content of Jewish education will be successful in meeting the challenges of the future.²¹

Rubenstein believes that changes in the nature of Jewish identity form a challenge to Jewish education in the new South Africa, changes that parallel the attempt to move away from a segmented society where identity has been almost entirely dependent on group membership. Today there seems to be a newfound pride in what is a more open and unified society, where people are determined

to be called South Africans rather than Jews or Zulus or the like. This sort of outspoken nationalism, particularly among Jews, would have been unheard of before.

Perhaps this is a sign of the times, and may lend some hope to the future of a dynamic new Judaism within the country. It certainly seems to have had a positive effect on what Rubenstein calls "marginal" Jews who are rediscovering a Jewish affiliation. If this is indeed true, then South African Jews should try to make a concerted effort to contribute to the development and reconstruction of the country and to embrace the new democracy. To fail to do so would be a betrayal of the very fundamental elements of Judaism.

There is no question, either, that Jews will lose their identity in this new society. In fact, Rubenstein believes that it will prove quite the contrary: this reaffirmation of their faith within a broader context of community will serve only to reinforce Jewish continuity. In emphasizing this sentiment, Rubenstein confirms the statement made by the country's Chief Rabbi, Harris when he says that, in investing in the future of the country, Jews need not surrender their Jewishness or lose sight of a mutual interdependence: Jews are not required to give up anything—rather, they are required to give towards the general good.²²

However, these trends will require a re-evaluation of the current curriculum followed by Jewish educational institutions. It is simply not enough to assign the responsibilities of Jewish education to the back burner in the hope that the system's current problems will be remedied solely by positive social developments within both the school systems and the country itself as the country heals from the ruptures caused by Apartheid. Such an approach would almost certainly spell trouble within the ranks of Judaism, and indeed threaten the continuity of Judaism and all it may offer. Jews will have to find a more constructive means to rejuvenate Jewish studies.²³

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY TO THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

Finally, Rubenstein believes that the Jewish community must develop an orientation to a changing South Africa. The country cannot survive on good will alone, so it is important that South African Jews, as important contributors to the new society, be compelled to take a positive, proactive approach to the somewhat uncertain future within the country. Jews need to look beyond their own communities and personal religious values, so that the spirituality inherent in Judaism is conveyed—and practiced—within the broader society. Rubenstein writes,

In 1989 Steinberg questioned the degree to which "Jewish education prepared children and youth to adapt specifically Jewish attitudes to South Africa's daunting problems and controversies." In a "new" South Africa, with people increasingly judged in terms of their contribution to the welfare and development of a new sense of "South Africa collectivity," and with students increasingly internalizing an unhyphenated, proud South African identity, Jewish schools—and indeed the community as a whole—can no longer afford the luxury of isolation from the broader issues.²⁴

He argues, for example, that Jews need to not only continue to contribute economically to the country but to engage in social action projects to help the poorest of society.

He further argues that the dawning of a new era demands that Jews help to lead their communities into a new consciousness. On the one hand, South African Jews must recognize that their Jewish religious identity must remain the binding force for group cohesion. On the other hand, their commitment to Jewish identity is, in the words of Bernard Steinberg, "largely without the foreboding

overt expressions of religious belief and of ritual observance."²⁵

The Jewish community in South Africa remains one of the tightest and least assimilated communities in the entire diaspora. That group cohesion is partially explained by the unique social circumstances that existed under Apartheid. With the dismantling of Apartheid from 1990–1994 and the creation in 1994 of a democratic society with strong liberal values, it might have been expected that the assimilation rate would soar. That this did not happen is due in part to the South African Jewish socialization that is reinforced by the day school system. South African Jewish education encourages endogamic behavior because the extensive day school system—recall that 85 percent of Jewish children attend Orthodox Jewish day schools—helps reinforce that the community stays within itself. In addition, social networks within synagogues are very tight. These two systems mutually reinforce each other.

However, the inconsistencies of the existing ethos make it vulnerable to collapse as new forces gain momentum in a very radically changing environment. As early as 1987 the Herzlia headmaster, Solly Kaplinsky, spoke of the potential difficulties ahead, and stated that Jews—and, indeed, all South Africans—cannot rely on tradition to run the country. He emphasized that the national/traditional trends of the past must be unlocked and that Jews must expose themselves, their communities, and their schools to a new Zionist identification.

The question of definition and application is thrown into sharper focus when we consider that the bulk of our community are neither National—witness the exodus of most emigres to diaspora countries rather than to Israel—neither are they Traditional—our empty synagogues testify to that—and, viewed against the perspective of radical turbulent changes on the

macro level in South Africa, it is clear that the senior leadership of the Day School Movement have to seriously re-evaluate their educational objectives.²⁶

Kaplinsky went on to argue that one of the most important of all the challenges facing the South African Jewish community today is invigorating young people so that they will be enthused by the social and moral values that they must have to address the issues with which the country currently grapples.

Judaism must be seen by our graduate students in the words of Herschel as “an answer to the ultimate problems of human existence and not merely a way of handling observance.” Our schools must become role models for all things decent, civil and honorable. If we are able to provide our students with a handle to make an informed Jewish choice, and if they appreciate that there is a Jewish response to the situation, we will have equipped them with a formula for Jewish living wherever they find themselves. I sometimes feel that we are too concerned about where we should live rather than how we should live.²⁷

ENDNOTES

¹Bernard Steinberg, “South Africa: Jewish Education in a Divided Society,” in Harold S. Himmelfarb and Sergio Della Pergola, eds., *Jewish Education Worldwide Cross-cultural Perspectives*. Lanham (New York and London: University Press of America, 1989). The article appears on pp. 357–393.

²Steinberg, p. 382.

³M. E. Katz, *The History of Jewish Education in South Africa, 1841–1980*. University of Cape Town. Ph.D. dissertation, 1980.

⁴Katz.

⁵Louis I. Rabinowitz, “Jewish Day Schools Are Glory of South African Jewry: A Reply to Arthur Saul Super,” *Jewish Affairs*, February 1964, pp. 14–15. The article appears on pp. 13–16.

⁶Bernard Steinberg, "Jewish Education in South Africa," *Jewish Education*, Vol. 39, No. 4, December 1969, p. 19. The article appears on pp. 14–22. Steinberg counts as separate schools buildings that are today branches of the same school system. For example, he counts three day schools in Cape Town, which today are all part of the Herzlia School System.

⁷Steinberg, "Jewish Education in South Africa," p. 19.

⁸Interview with Rabbi David Sherman, 1 May 1997.

⁹Cyril K. Harris, "The Elusive Balance: The Day School Predicament," *Jewish Affairs*, Spring 1995, p. 51. The article appears on pp. 51–52.

¹⁰Harris, p. 51.

¹¹Harris, p. 51.

¹²Harris, p. 52.

¹³Harris, p. 52.

¹⁴See, for example, John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds., *Apartheid is a Heresy*. Cape Town; David Philip, 1983.

¹⁵Interview, Rabbi Hillel Avidan, Chairman, South African Association of Progressive Rabbis, January 1998.

¹⁶Steinberg, "South Africa: Jewish Education in a Divided Society," pp. 361–362.

¹⁷Isadore Rubenstein, "Jewish Education in a Changing South Africa: Preliminary Questions," *Jewish Affairs*, Spring 1995, p. 53. The article appears on pp. 53–59.

¹⁸Interview, Greg Flash, leader of Netzer, May 1997.

¹⁹Rubenstein, pp. 53–54.

²⁰Rubenstein, pp. 54–55.

²¹Rubenstein, pp. 55–56.

²²Harris, p. 52.

²³Rubenstein, pp. 56–58.

²⁴Rubenstein, p. 58.

²⁵Bernard Steinberg, "Education as Ethnic Response: The Case of South African Jewry," in Moshe Sharon, ed., *Judaism in the Context of Diverse Civilizations* (Johannesburg: Maksim Publishers, 1993), p. 248. The article appears on pp. 239–251.

²⁶Solly Kaplinsky, "Looking at South Africa Jewish Education in the Future," *Jewish Affairs*, June 1987, p. 11. The article appears on pp. 11–14.

²⁷Kaplinsky, p. 13.