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Barry Chazan,
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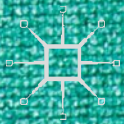

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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-51585-4 ISBN 978-3-319-51586-1 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-51586-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017935409

Cover illustration: Agata Gładykowska / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

To Marissa and Ari Jacobs
And to the Chazan children and grandchildren

Acknowledgments

Each of us has spent a lifetime immersed in the world of Jewish education and Jewish civilization. Our first and most powerful teachers were in our homes (two of us in the same home), and our later educators included passionate classroom instructors, energetic camp counselors, inspired university professors, and bright and curious students, along with Jewish texts, scholarship, books, films, music, television, radio, magazines, websites, historical places, holy sites, museums, synagogues, organizations, institutions, workplaces, colleagues, mentors, friends, social groups, neighbors, and, to come full circle, our own families. The perspectives we share in this book were shaped by all these influences.

This volume also emerged out of many years of collaboration and close relationships among the authors. The original impetus for this project was the impulse of two siblings—senior scholars in their respective fields of education and Jewish studies—to work together for the first time on a book that would somehow meld their shared backgrounds and mutual interests while also reflecting their differing approaches to matters regarding Jewish life and learning. The inclusion of the third author soon thereafter was both strategic and instinctive, as the three colleagues had once constituted the faculty of the doctoral program in Education and Jewish Studies at New York University (in its early years, we sometimes had more instructors than students in the seminar we co-led, which of course made all of us students of each other). The dialogues that generated the ideas and claims we have advanced in this book began long before then and have continued ever since.

We are grateful to our partners on this project who helped bring it to fruition: Susan P. Fendrick, whose careful copyediting and insightful critiques of earlier drafts significantly enhanced our work; Sarah Nathan, who cleaned up our footnotes; Lisa Rivero, who compiled our index; and Erika Vogel, who adroitly managed the production of this book from start to finish. Thanks as well to the editorial and publishing staff at Palgrave Macmillan. Finally, our sincerest appreciation to the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture for a grant that supported our efforts. In the end, the views expressed and the choices made in this book are of course the responsibility of the authors alone.

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Prologue

In the religious polemics of medieval and early modern life, Jews often contrasted the literacy and learning in their own community with what they perceived to be the decidedly inferior educational accomplishments of their non-Jewish neighbors. While Jews knew that they constituted a small minority demographically, politically, and militarily, they were convinced nonetheless that they were unmatched in the realms of the spirit, knowledge, and ideas. Some modern Jews and their observers have asserted that the traditional Jewish emphasis on learning lies at the core of the remarkable scientific and literary achievements of modern Jews: for example, the stunning number of Jewish Nobel laureates in the widest possible range of intellectual endeavors. On every level and in every way, Jews over the ages customarily have taken great pride in Jewish educational achievement.

As modern Jews have confronted a new set of issues in radically altered circumstances, the sense of education as a critical element in Jewish life has been both reinforced and challenged. The importance of education has been proclaimed prominently in modern Jewish life, and Jews over the past few centuries have talked considerably about investment in Jewish education. At the same time, Jews have been widely attracted to and engaged in ideas, contents, and texts of other cultures in modernity.

Nowhere has the interaction of the age-old tradition of Jewish education with modern society been more apparent than in the contemporary American Jewish community. This community emerged suddenly and unexpectedly during the twentieth century as the world's largest and most powerful Jewry. A negligible element on the world Jewish scene until the late nineteenth century, the American Jewish community grew by leaps

and bounds as a result of the massive migration from Eastern Europe that began during the 1880s. While for some people in the "old country," America was perceived as a land of license and licentiousness, for most eastern European immigrants—Jewish and non-Jewish alike—America was regarded as a land of equality and opportunity. Individual integration into the radically new American setting was complicated, but most Jewish immigrants—joining the prior and smaller set of American Jews—succeeded rather quickly in making a place for themselves in the land of equality and opportunity, and in fashioning a potent new force in world Jewry. The role of this new Jewish community was augmented markedly and painfully by the tragedy of the Holocaust, which destroyed the older centers of Jewish life and power, thus thrusting American Jewry more prominently into a central role in world Jewish life.

The dynamic of a mostly immigrant population with a long and rich educational tradition confronted by a dramatically new society, worldview, and emergent public schooling structure constitutes a fascinating chapter in Jewish life. It is the story of the interaction of two significantly different educational *paideia* and social visions. This interaction is the subject of our book.

Students of American Jewish education have not sufficiently appreciated the chasm that separates the modern and contemporary Jewish world from the environments that supported and challenged pre-modern Jewry. The differences between pre-modern and modern Jewish life are enormous, and their implications for American Jewish education are profound. Only when these differences are carefully clarified can the challenges and opportunities of contemporary American Jewish education be fully grasped. This book comes to clarify essential features of pre-modern Jewish education, describe the disruptions and achievements occasioned by the interaction with modernity and American culture, and reflect on the potential of contemporary American Jewish education in a twenty-first-century world.

* * *

In the pre-modern Jewish world, Jews by and large lived segregated from majority society, whether it was predominantly Islamic or predominantly Christian. This segregation was imposed by the non-Jewish majority for its purposes but was generally welcomed by the Jewish minority. Separation from the majority was by no means total; for example, economic needs required extensive majority-minority contact. Education, however, was rigorously segregated. All Jewish educational activities—in

schools and outside of schools, for young and old alike—were organized, funded, and directed by the Jewish community.

This core reality of pre-modern Jewish life was radically altered as a result of the restructuring of Western states that began toward the end of the eighteenth century. In the new states created in the wake of the American and French revolutions, semi-autonomous communities and other bodies were stripped of their powers. One such body was the Jewish community, which had long had its own independent administrative structure, court system, social welfare agencies, and schools. In the modern nation-state, Jews enjoyed the new rights of citizenship and legal equality, while giving up many of the benefits associated with their essentially autonomous institutions—including, prominently, the Jewish educational system.

For pre-modern Jews, education was *ipso facto* Jewish education, but with the restructuring of modern Western states Jewish communal institutions were transformed from governmentally enforced and mandatory to entirely voluntary. In addition, Western states demanded of their newly enfranchised Jewish citizens that they become full participants in the new state culture, and secular education was key to this full participation. Those Jewish schools that did continue to operate had to alter their curricula to ensure that their students became full-blown French, English, or German citizens; in addition, considerable pressure was exerted to bring Jewish children into the emergent state schools.

Thus, for modern Jews, educational experiences (though not Jewish ones) have in the main been structured and often provided largely by the non-Jewish environment. With respect specifically to schooling of the young, standards have been dictated by the larger environment, and schooling has been provided primarily by the general educational system. The bulk of the modern Jewish schooling experience, then, has taken place in a non-Jewish context and is oriented in directions other than Jewish life and its enhancement. By definition, modern education is far more deeply influenced by the surrounding ambience than was the case in the pre-modern world. In sum, with integration into the modern nation-state has come a decisive change in the ways in which Jews of all ages are educated. This change and its implications have been of overwhelming significance to Jewish education in terms of its organization, authority, opportunities, and limitations.

The same set of changes has had major repercussions for the authority brought to bear on Jewish education. In the pre-modern world, where church and state were intimately linked, Jews did not have state authority of their own. Pre-modern Jews lived under the control of Islamic or

Christian rulers, who allowed Jews to administer their own internal affairs, including religion and education. In effect, this meant the backing of the non-Jewish political authorities for the religious hierarchy within the Jewish community. In medieval and early-modern western Christendom, for example, the ruling authorities ceded control of all aspects of Christian education to the Church and likewise control of all aspects of Jewish education to the rabbis. The rabbis exercised enormous power over Jewish life in general and the autonomous Jewish educational system in particular. The uniformity produced by this rabbinic control was impressive and in many ways served these Jewish communities well.

With modernity came the separation of church and state, which had a remarkable impact on Jewish life. Gone was the dominance of the religious elite in Jewish life in general and in Jewish religious and educational activities in particular. Jews were able to part ways with the former established religious authorities, and many enthusiastically did so. Alternative religious groupings emerged within the Jewish world, with each evolving version of Judaism developing its own set of educational views and commitments, and Jewish groupings not oriented toward religious identity made their appearance as well. Arguably the most powerful of these latter groupings were grounded in a vision of Jewish nationality and the drive to establish a nation-state that would express Jewish identity as it developed there. Here, too, the new vision of core Jewish identity carried with it an innovative set of Jewish educational goals and techniques.

The disintegration of the previously semi-autonomous and united Jewish community had enormous implications for the Jewish educational enterprise. Jewish education—heretofore dominated and controlled by the religious elite—now became Jewish educations (in the plural), a set of separate and independent educational undertakings, each guided by its own vision of the essential nature of Jewishness. No Jewish authorities were empowered any longer to declare illegitimate one or another of these visions or educational systems.

Traditional Jewish education had been steeped in the general authoritarianism of pre-modern life and thinking. A set of leaders within the Jewish fold was assumed to have mastered knowledge of Jewish tradition and thinking and was charged with the responsibility of transmitting their knowledge to the communities they led. While they used diverse methodologies—some quite text- and student-centered—their ultimate task and practice aimed at the transmission and inculcation of their understanding of Jewish tradition and its obligations. But with modernity came new

understandings of societal organization and knowledge. No longer was any group within society (or any subgroup of society) venerated as the sole repository of wisdom—and indeed, the transmission of wisdom was no longer alone at the center of any educational vision. Modern Jewish education has had to consider the inclinations and predispositions of the learner and the needs imposed by his or her environment, along with the demands of the tradition being taught and the accumulated knowledge of the teacher.

Perhaps the most significant change flowing from modernity has involved changes in fundamental assumptions about the world in general and the Jewish world in particular. For pre-modern Jews, the basic mechanism of reality and history was control by the one and only God who had created the universe and continued to direct it. Historical developments were thought to result from fulfillment or non-fulfillment of the demands of the divine-human covenant. Jews perceived themselves as suffering in exile as punishment for the sins of their ancestors, with the sure faith that the same God who had exiled them would one day redeem them and lead them back to the land that had long been promised them.

Modernity changed these fundamental convictions for most Westerners, including most Jews. The deity was removed from the human scene in one of numerous ways; for example, the existence of God was denied outright; God was assumed to exist, but had long ago allowed the created world to function in accord with the laws (established by God) that govern it; God was understood as existing and affecting reality, but in ways that cannot be fathomed. Whatever the perspective adopted by individual Jews or Jewish movements, the result was to largely remove the workings of the divine-human covenant from an operative role in understanding historical processes.

Given this radical shift in the basic stance toward reality and history, Jews who have been attracted to the new views—and they have constituted the majority of modern Jewry—have had to construct innovative and naturalistically grounded (and widely varying) foundations for Jewish education. No longer perceived as a divine command, the imperative to Jewish education came to be rooted for many in the conviction that, over the ages, Jews have created a repository of wisdom that demands attention, admiration, and engagement. This wisdom resides both in core Jewish texts that must be carefully studied and in the history of the Jewish people as a dynamic and creative collective entity. Jewish education as a key to Jewish survival no longer revolves around fulfillment or non-fulfillment of the demands of the covenant, but study of the Jewish past provides invaluable insight into the successes and failures of diverse Jewish approaches to survival and human creativity.

While Jews can no longer claim the distinction of being the sole bearers of the divine-human covenant, careful study of the Jewish past alerts Jews to the many distinctive qualities of that past and confers a powerful sense of the dignity of Jewish identity. Precisely the lessons to be extracted from the Jewish legacy vary widely, focusing, for example, on Judaism's moral teachings, on its concern for all of humanity, on its commitment to maintaining the world's ecology, on the Hebrew language and the culture it has fostered, or on the centrality in Jewish history of the Land of Israel. No matter what the precise focus, the overall sense of modern educational approaches is the richness of the Jewish past and the need to grasp that richness and derive maximal benefit from it.

The obliteration of the semi-autonomous Jewish community, the demand that Jews integrate themselves into the Western states that granted them citizenship, and the redefining of Jewishness as either religious or ethnic/national identity constituted common developments all across the modern Western world. Nonetheless, salient differences between Westernized modern Jewish communities are identifiable and significant. Especially important for our purposes are the uniqueness of America and the special circumstances of the American Jewish community.

The European nation-states that emerged in the nineteenth century—pre-eminently France, England, and Germany—were heirs to millennia of national culture. Thus, the demands for Jewish absorption of and conformance to the national culture were intense. Jewish difference was legitimate only in the sphere of religion. Beyond the walls of the synagogue and the home, Jews were to comport themselves precisely like their non-Jewish neighbors.

In this respect, America was different. America could lay claim to nothing like the lengthy history of European national cultures; America was a newcomer on the nation-state scene. Moreover, Americans were deeply conscious of their society as grounded in immigration, and they largely embraced the immigrant experience and immigrants themselves. Thus, the pressures for conformity to a well-defined national culture in the United States were far weaker than in the European nation-states. As in the western sectors of Europe, Jews were defined fundamentally as a religious community, but there was space in America for a range of alternative Jewish cultural expressions as well.

In America, Jews could choose to identify themselves Jewishly in broader ways than in Europe. The American commitment to the division between church and state, as well as receptivity to diverse ethnic backgrounds and

cultural histories, opened two portals—one religious, the other ethnic—for the shaping of new Jewish educational programs and institutions. Jewish education could be religious education, or it could be grounded in a cultural approach emphasizing the centrality of Jewish languages, Jewish cultures, and Jewish history. These dual portals enabled the creation of a much more diversified set of educational institutions and programs than was perceived as legitimate on the European scene. In our effort to understand American Jewish education, we have to be sensitive to the extent that American Jewry has enjoyed a special set of identity options and possible educational directions.

In the wake of World War II and subsequent technological, social, and political dynamics, world civilizations in general and American society in particular have undergone major changes. Globalization has enriched the economies and the social settings of most of the world and has been strongly felt in America. In addition, the technological revolution has been worldwide, with special impact in America. As a result, late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Americans—Jews included—have become habituated to the stunning diversity of options available to them in all avenues of human life: economic opportunities, social mores, cultural standards, and identity typologies. The American openness to diversity, already felt by America's Jews prior to World War II, has become yet more prominent. The availability of multiple options for identifying Jewishly, which we have already cited as a unique feature of American Jewish life, has very much intensified in recent decades, and the tendency shows no sign of abating. This too has major implications for our understanding of American Jewish education.

* * *

Contemporary American Jewish education is deeply affected by the legacies bequeathed by the pre-modern period, by the revolution of modernity, and by the opportunities for diversity uniquely offered by America. Chapters 1 and 2 of this book focus on pre-modern and modern worldviews that were to affect the ideals and structures of American Jewish education. Chapter 3 focuses on the contexts and culture of twentieth-century America, as well as on expressions of Jewishness in the general culture of American film, literature, media, and public knowledge, all of which constitute educational means. Chapters 4 and 5 focus in a detailed fashion on the emergent culture and counterculture of Jewish education—formal (schooling) and informal (multiple venues)—that was to emerge in twentieth-century America in response to the particulars of American