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RABBINICAL COUNSELING'

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON HOW THE  
RABBI ATTEMPTS TO COUNSEL CONGREGANTS

ALAN D. BREGMAN

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILL-  
MENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
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## DIGEST

This thesis is an attempt to explore the ways in which rabbis attempt to help congregants in the counseling situation. The counseling situation is defined as one in which a congregant calls upon the religious leader, usually in his study, when he finds that he needs help with a problem in daily living.

Literature written on the subject of religious counseling points up the symbolic role that the religious leader plays. This symbolic role manifests itself by the religious leader being a representative of a religiously based moral code. It is out of this context that the religious leader counsels his people.

The attempt to explore the ways in which rabbis offer help to congregants by counseling was accomplished by interviewing rabbis in the field. Case material was gathered from these rabbis out of which came an analysis of how the rabbi attempted to help his congregant. Such methods as suggestion, ventilation, reassurance, confrontation and advice were offered by the rabbis.

In the conclusion, it is suggested that what is distinctive about religious counseling is not the technique used by the counselor, but the nature of the institution in which he counsels his people.

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DEDICATED TO

MY WIFE

WHO HAS THE PATIENCE  
NEEDED BY A GOOD COUNSELOR

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I am deeply indebted to the rabbis in the field who consented to be interviewed for this thesis. It was their time, their thought, and their experience which made this thesis possible.

## INTRODUCTION

In an age of science and technological change, the role of the rabbi has undergone a transition. Where once the rabbi's primary function was to be a scholar and a judge, the role of the rabbi, today, has taken on new aspects.

One of the changes in the rabbi's role makes him a counselor to individuals in his congregation. Whereas in the traditional role of the rabbi, congregants came to the rabbi for decisions on law, congregants now come to the rabbi for counseling in relation to problems in daily living.

The goal of this thesis is to explore the ways in which rabbis attempt to help congregants by counseling. There are two areas of counseling which will be explored. The first area is the counseling done by the rabbi. The second area deals with the rabbi as a referral agent and his relationship to other counseling professions.

## RESEARCH METHOD

There are two methods of research in this thesis. The first method is an exploration of some of the key issues involved in religious counseling as derived from literature written on the subject.

The second method of research, which is the bulk of the thesis, is interviews with rabbis in the field. In this method, an

attempt is made to gather case material from which will be derived the way in which the rabbi attempts to help the congregant.

### INTERVIEWING THE RABBIS

Fourteen rabbis were interviewed for this thesis. The interviews took place in three major mid-western cities as well as the local city of the interviewer. Usually, the time of the interview ranged from one hour to one hour and a half. Most of the interviews took place in the study of the rabbi.

An interview schedule was prepared by the interviewer (see Appendix 1). The use of the interview schedule was not rigid. The idea was to make the interview as informal as possible so as to allow the rabbi to offer as much of his experience as possible. The informality of the interview served to lessen any factors which might make the interview threatening to the rabbi.\*

The rabbis were prepared for the interview only by an introductory letter which was followed by a phone call to set a definite time for the interview. Letters of thanks were sent to the rabbis participating in the research for this thesis.

\*The recordings of the interviews may be seen by permission of Rabbi Robert L. Katz, Professor of Human Relations, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio

## CONCLUSIONS

The nature of this thesis is exploratory and is in no way an attempt at a scientific analysis of religious counseling. The conclusions reached in this thesis are analyses of how rabbis attempted to help congregants as found in the case material.



## CHAPTER I

### ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS COUNSELING

"People in trouble throughout the ages have sought the help of the religious leader. Today, however, in a world dominated by science, the role of the religious leader as a counselor has become blurred in some respects and greatly augmented and complicated in others."<sup>1</sup>

### AMBIGUITY IN THE ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS COUNSELOR

The very terminology used to describe the activity in which a congregant seeks the religious leader for help with situational and emotional problems creates ambiguity in his role. "Under labels like 'pastoral psychiatry', 'spiritual psychiatry', and 'religio-psychiatry', psychotherapy is being substituted for religious counseling."<sup>2</sup> In this age of science, the question most asked of the clergyman is..... has the clergyman abdicated his role to become a psychotherapist. "Once primarily theological and humanistic, the role of the religious leader, in the conditions of the modern world and under the impact of the social sciences, has come to be thought of in psychotherapeutic terms."<sup>3</sup>

Ambiguity in the role of the religious counselor arises not only out of the terminology used, but emerges when religious counseling

is compared to other counseling professions in terms of a scientific approach.

The age of science has called for a scientific approach to the counseling role. While other counseling professions, such as psychiatry and social casework, have made efforts to explore their methods from a scientific point of view, religious counseling has fallen behind in this effort. For example, social casework has made efforts to study and to use the phenomenon of transference and counter-transference in the casework relationship, while little in the way of this kind of research has been attempted in religious counseling.

There is still a third area in which ambiguity arises in the role of the religious counselor. In comparison with other counseling professions, little effort has been made to define religious counseling. Specifically as pertains to rabbis, Katz writes, "The ambiguity in the rabbi's counseling role arises from the fact that there is no consensus among rabbis or among rabbis and laymen regarding the standards and practices of the profession."<sup>4</sup>

#### INTEREST IN THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO COUNSELING AMONG RABBIS VS. CHRISTIAN CLERGY

While in the whole realm of religious counseling, little has been offered in terms of standards/<sup>and/</sup>practices, Christian clergymen

have struggled with examining the role more so than have rabbis. There are journals available which deal directly with the clergyman in his pastoral role. These would include Pastoral Psychology and The Journal of Pastoral Care. Both of these are under the auspices of Christian groups.

Little in the way of literature has been written by rabbis. Few books have been written on the subject of the counseling role in the rabbinate.<sup>5</sup> This has led Professor Seward Hiltner, a leader in the Protestant movement in pastoral counseling, to lament over the fact that there are so few Jewish books devoted to the scientific understanding of interpersonal relations. In his book, Grollman states, "Many Jewish seminaries teach psychology and counseling but in contrast to the Protestant theological schools, the courses are just footnotes."<sup>6</sup>

#### THE INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF THE RABBI'S ROLE ON THE MODERN RABBI'S ROLE AS COUNSELOR

That there is a moderate effort to come to grips with the rabbi's role as counselor, has its roots in the traditional and historical view of the rabbi's role. "Despite this practice of counseling, the modern synagogue member has not been conditioned by Jewish tradition

and history to view the rabbi as essentially a counselor of individuals. The rabbi has more often been accepted as a group leader, scholar and teacher of Judaism, and symbol of religious authority without an equally clear recognition of his pastoral role."<sup>7</sup>

Rabbi Feibleman has provided us with a good summary of what tradition has considered to be the role of the rabbi. "The role of the rabbi has never been one of disinterestedness nor indifference to his people. Yet, his classic function has been different. It was not he who necessarily cared for his individuals follower or congregant, but rather the synagogue itself, or more properly, the people cared for one another.....The synagogue took as its responsibility to collect alms, provide hospitality on the Sabbath as well as other holidays and to provide for one another in an interdependent way..... The rabbi was protracted to study, render decisions, and in general to assume the role of learned authority."<sup>8</sup>

To be sure, the role of the Chasidic rebbe came closer to the counseling role. He was called upon to help individuals by exercising dybbuks or performing great wonders. He assumed some unusual responsibilities which the general rabbinate did not.

Unlike the Chasidic rebbe, the general rabbi "did not hear everyone's troubles, nor strive to solve their difficulties, especially

when they were outside of the law. Perhaps he had enough troubles of his own."<sup>9</sup>

### A TRANSITION IN THE ROLE OF THE RABBI

There came a transition in the traditional role of the rabbi. "This transition in professional functioning came with, first, the change of community mores and was undoubtedly abetted by the influence of Christian practices, as the communicants began more and more freely to observe and know one another in more congenial society. Rabbis, especially Reform rabbis, took on more of the acculturation of their surroundings. With the shift from traditional practices to spiritual emphasis, the rabbi became a community figure and representative. He was less exclusive, more approachable, and consequently more intimate with his congregants. He came to know their lives, their difficulties, and their problems. Naturally, he sought to help them."<sup>10</sup>


The role of the rabbi to render legal decisions became increasingly unnecessary, especially in Reform Judaism. Once the break had been made that observance of Jewish law was no longer required, the role of the Reform rabbi had to be redefined. The Reform rabbi now had the time, the desire, and the responsibility to minister to individuals.



### THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIAN CONCEPTS ON THE RABBI'S ROLE AS COUNSELOR

The Christian concept of the minister as a "pastor" has had an influence on the rabbi's role as counselor. Within Christian circles, there has always been a relationship between the image of the shepherd and the church dignitary. In fact, the King James version of the Bible translates verses in Jeremiah 3:15 and 23:1 as "I will give you pastors which shall feed you with knowledge." The role of the pastor was to minister to individuals, that is to say, those individuals who have gone astray from the flock.

The image that the pastor or minister serves individuals who find themselves in trouble has influenced the expectation demanded of the rabbi, that he counsel congregants who find themselves in trouble.



### TOWARD A DEFINITION OF RELIGIOUS COUNSELING

Religious counseling has been defined in many ways. Most of the definitions concentrate on the way in which the total role of the religious leader is defined. For instance, religious counseling may be defined as a process of help given by one who represents a religious based moral code. There are others who define religious counseling

as psychotherapy done by a religious leader.

A definition of religious counseling will include numerous elements. A broad definition might be a process in which a congregant usually calls upon the religious leader in his study when he finds that he needs help with a problem in daily living.

This definition describes the elements of religious counseling. It, in no way, tells us what the religious counselor offers the congregant who comes to him. The religious counselor will offer the congregant a variety of ways in which he will attempt to help his congregant. These ways would include suggestion, ventilation, advice, reassurance, emotional support, and other techniques in which he will attempt to help his congregant with the problem presented. ✓

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF RELIGIOUS COUNSELING

One of the characteristics of religious counseling is that the religious leader is associated with some type of religious institution. His association with that institution requires him to be a representative of a religiously based moral code. "The nature of religion and the needs of human beings dictate the role of the religious leader. As we see it, his first and most important task is the inculcation of a religiously based moral code."<sup>11</sup> Thus, Linn and Schwarz conclude that religious



counseling derive "their special nature from the fact that the religious counselor operates within a moral and spiritual framework." Explained further, this means that the religious counselor defines his role as one in which "he teaches a moral code as well as administers sacramental rituals to his congregants.....he stands as father to the lonely and physician to the wounded in spirit."<sup>12</sup>

Rabbi Katz suggests that there must be compatibility between the rabbi's counseling activities and the teachings of Judaism. "The fact that a rabbi is a representative of Judaism and a leader of an institution sets limits to the depth and the range of his counseling."<sup>13</sup>

Rabbi Hollander would seem to agree that the rabbi is a representative of a moral code or tradition. He says that it is within this context that the rabbi derives his effectiveness. In his Yeshiva project, Hollander's thesis assumed that the rabbi represented a fundamental conviction: God cares and watches over the destinies of all. Its implication for the rabbi is that whatever form of help that the religious leader offers his congregant, be it advice, reassurance or referral, what he has to give becomes more meaningful to the congregant because of this conviction. "The conviction manifests itself in the form of a system of religious values pertaining to all aspects of daily living. These values, viewed as expressions of

ultimate truths rather than as culturally acceptable norms of transient importance, can help the individual achieve a sense of security, of belonging, and other positive emotional states."<sup>14</sup>

Another characteristic of religious counseling is that the religious leader ministers to his people within a religious context. The religious context involves three principles to which all major Western religions adhere. The first principle "is the belief that it is primarily in group life (family, community, national and international) that human beings achieve those things which are of lasting value. Secondly, religion enshrines the belief that if one obeys the code, certain important satisfactions ensue, the chief of which is immortality. Religion stands also for the belief that the universe has purpose and that it is a purpose favorable to man. This belief, in turn, presupposes the existence of an organizing principle of some kind, which is commonly called God."<sup>15</sup> It is within this religious context that the religious leader counsels his people.

All are not in agreement with Linn and Schwarz as regards their formulation of the symbolic role of the religious leader. The most outstanding example of one who disagrees is Carrol Wise. His formulation would structure the role of the religious leader into a psychotherapist. In his book, Pastoral Counseling, he describes the

minister's role as that of an analytically oriented or non-directive psychotherapist. There is an emphasis in his formulation on the permissive character of the role, thus, allowing the minister to dispense with a moral code. "No consistent effort is made to distinguish between emotional disturbances that are realistically related to the circumstances of life such as illness, death, or natural catastrophe, and those that are irrational and unrelated to reality, such as the various mental illnesses. In effect, it is denied that the one is the peculiar business of the religious leader, while the other is the business of the psychiatrist or the social worker."<sup>16</sup>

Wise puts little emphasis on the symbolic role of the religious leader. His view holds that whatever the leader has to offer his congregants, it is based on the inner quality of his own life rather than external forms or activities, "by which he means Scriptures, prayers, religious rites and religious writings of various kinds."<sup>17</sup> Wise writes, "This is not to minimize the values of prayer or Scripture but rather to indicate that their value depends greatly upon the kind of relationship which has been previously established, and upon the attitude of the pastor."<sup>18</sup> It is clear that the person of the religious leader is more significant to Wise than the symbolic role which he might represent.

It would seem that most writers in the field would tend toward the view that the religious leader plays a symbolic role with his congregants. Hence, conflict would seem to arise between the non-judgmental religious leader and the symbolic role which the religious leader represents. Whether the religious leader should make judgmental conclusions in the counseling interview is open to question. Kagan points out the dilemma when he says, "The rabbi does represent moral value judgments, and yet he cannot be condemnatory if he is to succeed as a counselor."<sup>19</sup>

#### THE INFLUENCE OF CONGREGANT EXPECTATIONS ON THE RABBI'S ROLE AS COUNSELOR

The role of the religious leader as a counselor is determined, in part, by the expectations of the congregants. Folkman has written, "almost all of us are counseling. Our people have come to expect it of us. It is no longer a question of whether or not rabbis should counsel. It is merely a question of how can we learn to counsel effectively."<sup>20</sup>

Do congregants expect the rabbi to counsel in a particular way? Rabbi Katz writes that "the modern congregant, particularly if he belongs to the urban middle class, <sup>is/</sup> prepared for a more enlightened type of counseling. The minister should be skilled to meet that need."<sup>21</sup>

Consensus would seem to say that congregants have expectations of what they don't want the rabbi to be. Rabbi Katz most clearly points this out when he says that the congregant wants the rabbi to be there as a rabbi. "The congregant normally views the rabbi as a teacher and guide and not as a psychiatrist or social worker."<sup>22</sup>

There are certain minimum expectations that congregants have of the religious leader. They expect the religious leader to be fully acquainted with the community resources. This has established the fact that one of his roles as a counselor is to be a referral agent with community resources at his fingertips.

Another expectation of the laity is that the religious leader will listen and be a co-sufferer. "It is often understood by those who come to us that they do not expect definite solution. Frequently, they come purely and solely for sympathetic understanding; they come to share their burden, not to release themselves from its responsibility; they come to put themselves on record with the rabbi, so that if untoward happenings eventuate, they feel some strength in having shared a confidence..... They know that nothing primary can be done and they want their rabbi to tell them, the co-sufferer, how to face the gruelingly impossible situation that they have."<sup>23</sup> It would seem that what Feibleman is suggesting is that the rabbi can do great service in



helping his congregant to ventilate a problem.

The rabbi is expected to be accepting of an individual regardless of the deed committed or situation a congregant may be in. It is to this point that Kagan cautions, "No matter what be the state of his morals, or the attitude of others toward him, the person must feel that in the presence of the rabbi, he is an individual of worth."<sup>24</sup>

Still other congregants expect the rabbi to offer absolution for what the congregant may consider to be a sin. It is expected that within the power of the rabbi is the ability to communicate in some way with the deity.

#### PRESENT DAY INTEREST IN RABBINICAL COUNSELING

Rabbinical counseling as a professional movement is just beginning to be taken with any seriousness. In 1954 Katz wrote, "Although some of the insights and techniques of modern psychotherapy have been introduced into the programs of various institutions of the Jewish community, rabbis have, until recently, neglected to train themselves as counselors or to re-examine Jewish belief and practices from the viewpoint of personal dynamics. The systematic integration of insights from the fields of religion and psychology and the development of a theory and a practice of individualized pastoral counseling have largely

been the achievements of Protestant ministers."<sup>25</sup>

Since 1954, interest has increased among rabbis in the study and research of rabbinical counseling. Professor Katz has written a comprehensive book on the use of empathy.<sup>26</sup> Rabbi Earl Grollman has edited a book entitled Rabbinical Counseling.<sup>27</sup> Evidence to the fact that there is an increasing interest and concern with rabbinical counseling can be seen in the training of rabbinical students. A number of rabbinical students receive training in a pastoral program at Bellevue Hospital in New York. At the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, largely through the efforts of Rabbi Robert L. Katz, Professor of Human Relations, a course has been developed in conjunction with the Jewish Family Service Bureau of Cincinnati where a student has an opportunity to observe the casework technique as well as an opportunity for intense discussion on psychology, counseling and group dynamics.

The study and exploration of rabbinical counseling is still in its infancy. Many questions still await answers.

### SUMMARY

At present, there is ambiguity in the role of the religious counselor. Ambiguity arises from the terminology used, definition of



religious counseling, and the attempt of the religious counselor to find a place on the team of other professional counselors.

The role of counseling is a recent one for the rabbi. As the practice of Judaism changed, so had the rabbi's role. Where once his primary function was that of a scholar and judge, today he is a community representative and minister to individuals.


The Christian concept of the minister as a pastor has had influence on the role of the rabbi as a counselor. The image of the pastor as one who brings back those who have strayed from the flock has had influence on the rabbi's role in which he helps individual congregants who find themselves in trouble.

There are characteristics associated with religious counseling. The religious leader is associated with a religious institution and counsels within a religious context. To some, the religious context means that the religious leader carries a symbolic role in which he is a representative of a religiously based moral code. This limits the extent to which the religious leader may counsel.

There are others who define the role of the religious counselor as one in which he is a psychotherapist. It is not the symbolic role that the religious leader offers but the skill and technique of the man.

Congregant expectations have helped to define the role of the religious counselor. Congregants have come to expect an enlightened form of counseling while expecting the religious leader to maintain his identity as a religious leader.

As evidenced by books written and programs to train rabbinical students in the counseling role, there is an increase in the interest and exploration of the counseling role.



## CHAPTER II

### HOW THE RABBI ATTEMPTS TO HELP CONGREGANTS AS REFLECTED IN CASE EXAMPLES

In this chapter, we shall analyze examples of rabbinical counseling. These examples are case situations offered by the rabbis interviewed for this thesis. Through an analysis of these examples, we want to arrive at how the rabbi attempted to help his congregants who came to him for counseling.

#### EXAMPLE ONE: Hillel rabbi; study block; sexual ethics.

A student came to the rabbi of a Hillel Foundation. He wanted to talk over a personal problem. He stated that recently he had not been able to pay attention to his studies. His grades had begun to drop. The lowering of his grades was what frightened him and motivated him to seek help. The student complained that every time he sat down to study, his mind began to think about other things. The rabbi inquired of the student as to some of the things that occupied his mind while he studied. Before answering the question, the student told the rabbi that there was something that he wanted to talk about

first. He then told the rabbi that some weeks back, he had rented a motel room and had had a sexual experience with a girl. It was the first such experience for the student. Afterwards, the student felt disappointed in the experience. Previous to that night, he had expected some kind of an exciting experience. He told the rabbi that one of the main things that he thinks about when he tries to study is ways in which he could have made the experience more exciting for himself.

At the end of the interview, the rabbi asked him back for a second interview. The rabbi suggested that he bring a list of other things that he thought about when he tried to study.

The following week, the student returned with a completed list. The rabbi drew a diagram for him. In every box of the diagram the rabbi wrote one thing that the student had listed on his list. The suggestion made by the rabbi was for the student to concentrate on accomplishing one thing at a time. For example, "take one page of a book and learn it well. When you have accomplished this, go on to another page or to something else." A few weeks later, the student came and told the rabbi that he was now doing better in school.

### HOW DID THE RABBI ATTEMPT TO HELP THE STUDENT? LISTENING

One of the ways in which the rabbi attempted to help the student was by listening to the total problem. He let the student ventilate the entire set of circumstances without interrupting him. Even though the nature of the problem involved sexual ethics, the rabbi made no attempt at moralizing. While listening to the problem, the rabbi made no attempt at solutions.

### INTEREST AND CONCERN

The rabbi showed interest and concern both for the student and his problem by inviting him back for a second interview. The rabbi did not end his interest in the situation after listening to the problem. The problem could not be solved in one interview, so the rabbi invited him back for a second interview.

### DIRECT AND SUGGESTIVE COUNSELING

Twice in this situation did the rabbi use direct and suggestive counseling. In the first instance, he asked the student to write out a list of those things which he thinks about when he studies. The rabbi asked him to do something concrete in relation to his problem.

The second time that the rabbi used direct and suggestive counseling was in the second interview. The rabbi drew a diagram for the student and suggested that the student try to accomplish one thing at a time. The suggestion made by the rabbi was intended to help the student work through his problem.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF THE RABBI'S PERSONALITY

Much of what the rabbi offered the student came from his personality. There was warmth about him. He was a man who exhibited patience. He was accepting. He was not aloof and detached. There is a quality about him which makes him approachable. When he listened, it is only the counselee that he was concerned about at that moment.

EXAMPLE TWO: Parents request to break up a marriage; unmarried mother; referral.

This example involved a girl of 24. She was described by the rabbi as not very pretty and very obese. She met a man of 65 and announced to her parents that she had married the man. The initial contact with the rabbi was made by the girl's parents. Their request of the rabbi was for him to help break up the marriage. They came to

his study and poured out their hearts as to the great hurt that their daughter was causing them.

The rabbi felt that he could not comply with their request to break up the marriage. Rather, he saw as a much more realistic goal to try to help the parents face and accept the reality that their daughter was married to the man.

A number of months after this contact, the man to whom the daughter was married passed away. During this period of turmoil, the daughter revealed that she was never married to the man but rather living with him. She also found out that she was pregnant.

While arrangements were being made for the funeral, the parents came to see the rabbi again and ventilated their hurt and shame. In this interview, he asked to see the daughter.

Some days later, the daughter came to see the rabbi. She showed no feelings of loss concerning the death of who is presumed to be the father of her child. On this basis and the fact of the pregnancy, the rabbi made a referral to the Jewish Family Service Bureau.

#### HOW THE RABBI ATTEMPTED TO HELP THESE CONGREGANTS. REALITY TESTING

The rabbi tested the request of the parents with reality. He found that their request was not realistic. He redirected the



counseling goals to fit in with reality. The reality was that the daughter, at the time the parents came in, was allegedly married to the man. The rabbi attempted to help by directing the parents to face and accept reality.

#### LETTING THE COUNSELEE VENTILATE

When the parents came to the rabbi with feelings of hurt and shame, he attempted to help them by letting them ventilate their feelings. The rabbi acted as a second party to whom the counselee could express their inner feelings of hurt.

#### BRINGING OTHER MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY INTO THE COUNSELING SITUATION

Initially, the counseling problem focused on the parents and their inability to accept the alleged marriage of their daughter. After the death of the man, the problem focused on help for the daughter. The rabbi attempted to help by bringing the daughter into the counseling situation. He did not suggest to the parents that they refer her to Jewish Family Service. The rabbi offered help to the daughter as he had been helping the parents.

### REFERRAL

When the rabbi detected behavior in the daughter that to/ seemed not/be appropriate, he attempted help by means of a referral. Because the girl was unmarried and pregnant, he decided that the appropriate means of helping her with her problem was a referral to the Jewish Family Service in his city.

EXAMPLE THREE: An unhappy marriage ending in divorce.

A congregant came to the rabbi and complained about her unhappy marriage. She had earned her Masters Degree in Education and had considerably more education than her husband. She complained that she and her husband no longer had anything to talk about. There were several children involved in the marriage. In the interview, the rabbi helped her to examine all of the alternatives available to her and the consequences of each. Finally, the congregant arrived at a decision for divorce. She is now teaching at a local university and, according to the rabbi, is quite happy.

### HOW DID THE RABBI ATTEMPT TO HELP THIS CONGREGANT? NON-DIRECTIVE COUNSELING

The rabbi attempted to help this congregant by letting her explore all of the alternatives and the consequences of each alternative.

At no time did the rabbi attempt to evaluate an alternative from his point of view. In the counseling interview, he did not offer her his opinion as to what might be the best alternative for her situation. He did not direct her in any particular alternative. He remained detached from the problem and acted only as a mirror in which the congregant explored the alternatives.

Once the congregant reached a decision for divorce, the rabbi neither agreed nor disagreed with the decision. His mode of help was to make sure that the decision was made only by the congregant.

**EXAMPLE FOUR:** Asking the rabbi advice about an extramarital affair. How could I help her?

A congregant came to the rabbi to ask advice about an affair that she was having with a man. She told him of the unhappy marriage in which she was involved. The advice that she wanted from the rabbi was whether the affair would have an affect on her children. The rabbi described this woman as being highly sentimental, beautiful, and "having a deep need for physical love." She was not satisfied with the sexual life in the marriage. The rabbi described

her husband in opposite terms. He felt that the husband could not give her what she wanted out of the marriage. The rabbi's conclusion was .....I told her that the affair would not be good for the children, but a woman with these needs, how could I tell her to stop? What could I have said to her?

#### HOW THE RABBI ATTEMPTED TO HELP THIS CONGREGANT..... THE USE OF SYMPATHY

The rabbi attempted to help in this situation by showing sympathy. In this case, sympathy took the form of a non-verbal response to the situation. The rabbi's response in the thesis interview is indicative that he was preoccupied with his own feelings about the total situation that the congregant was in. He assumed that his feelings about the extramarital affair were the same as the congregant's. He did not confront her with her behavior.

EXAMPLE FIVE: A doctor commits suicide. What could I have done?

The wife of a doctor came to the rabbi because she suspected that her husband had been taking drugs again. Previous to this, the doctor had been hospitalized and had received psychiatric care. He was

later released. The wife of the doctor asked the rabbi to pay a visit to the doctor and to help him if her husband found himself in trouble again with drugs. The rabbi visited the doctor and the doctor assured him that he was not taking drugs. The rabbi intuitively thought that the doctor was lying. When he returned to his study, he phoned the hospital and the psychiatrist. They refused to help because they had thought they did everything that was possible for him. A few weeks later, the doctor was found dead after his car had crashed into a telephone pole. The rabbi was emotionally upset as he asked himself what he could have done or said to prevent what he and the doctor's wife knew was a suicide.

#### HOW DID THE RABBI ATTEMPT TO HELP? ENLISTING THE HELP OF OTHER RESOURCES.

The rabbi attempted to help the doctor by calling on other resources, namely, the hospital and the psychiatrist. The decision to help in this way was made by the rabbi with the request coming neither from the doctor nor the doctor's wife.

#### PERSONAL VISITATION AND SUGGESTION

The rabbi attempted to help the doctor's wife and the doctor

by virtue of his symbolic role as a rabbi. The request was made for the rabbi to visit a congregant. The visitation itself was thought to be of help to the congregant. The technique used by the rabbi is much like the technique of suggestion. When the rabbi visited the doctor, he attempted to help by using the authority which his symbolic role of rabbi represents. His attempt was for the congregant to admit to taking drugs, whereby the rabbi would help him to other sources for cure.

EXAMPLE SIX: Behavior problem in the religious school and the rabbi as a source of identification

A teacher in the religious school sent a young boy to the rabbi because the boy was a behavior problem in class. Upon some investigation, the rabbi found that the boy was having problems in regular school as well. In a phone call to the parents, the rabbi received the impression that the boy was being rejected from all points. The rabbi called the boy into his office. He made it clear to him that the religious school was one place where he would be permitted to remain and not be rejected.



### HOW DID THE RABBI ATTEMPT TO HELP THIS BOY? INVESTIGATING THE TOTAL PROBLEM

In order to help this boy, the rabbi felt it necessary to know more about the boy. Therefore, he made a phone call to the school as well as a phone call to the boy's parents. In this way, he was able to ascertain a total picture of the boy's situation.

### THE USE OF REASSURANCE

The rabbi thought that it would be helpful to the boy if he reassured him that religious school was one place where he would not be rejected. He also reassured the boy by talking to him in his study that he, the rabbi, cared about him.

### THE RABBI AS A FATHER TO THE CHILD

When the rabbi spoke with the boy in his study, he spoke to him as a father would speak to a child. He attempted to give the boy a sense of security, making it known to him that the rabbi cared and was concerned about him. The rabbi involved in this situation projects the image of a father. His personality is a quiet and reserved one. He speaks of wanting to offer love and compassion to his congregants. It is this type of love, that father has for child, which he wanted to offer the boy.



EXAMPLE SEVEN: Problems in a second marriage.

A couple came to the rabbi complaining bitterly about each other. They complained that each was not treating the other's children as they should. There were conflicts over money. They argued over living habits. After listening for a while to their complaints, the rabbi responded.....if you love each other, why don't you go home and stop acting like children.

HOW THE RABBI ATTEMPTED TO HELP THIS COUPLE.  
THE SCOLDING BY AN AUTHORITY FIGURE

The approach taken by the rabbi in this situation was to deny the problems that the couple were presenting to him. The way in which he attempted to help them was to scold them for behavior which he thought was childish. The rabbi used his role of an authority figure to scold the behavior of his congregants who came to him for counseling.

EXAMPLE EIGHT: Daughter living with a negro.

Parents came to the rabbi to talk about their daughter. Their daughter had graduated college and was living in New York.

At the time the parents came to the rabbi, the daughter was living with a Negro boy. They wanted to know what to do. From the information that the rabbi derived from the parents, he was able to ascertain that the educational level of the Negro boy was far below that of their daughter. The rabbi explained to the parents that this was an infatuation on the part of their daughter. The rabbi further explained that because of the educational difference between their daughter and the boy, their daughter would grow out of this experience.

#### HOW THE RABBI ATTEMPTED TO HELP THE PARENTS

In an attempt to help the parents handle the situation, the rabbi rationalized the situation. Within the rationalization, he attempted to make them feel better by offering hope that their daughter would grow out of the situation that she was in.

#### EXAMPLE NINE: Friendship to a lonely woman

An elderly woman came to the rabbi after her husband had passed away. The rabbi recognized that she was suffering from her loss and experiencing intense feelings of loneliness. He offered help to her by seeing her on a regular basis. The time that he would spend

with her was not focused on any particular problems or situations. Sometimes she would come to his study. Other times, he would pay a visit to her home. When this was not possible, he would call her on the phone to see how she was getting along. The woman came to depend on the rabbi in such a way as she would call him every time she had to make a decision about something. The woman went so far as to make the rabbi executor of her estate.

HOW THE RABBI ATTEMPTED TO HELP THIS WOMAN.  
BECOMING A "FRIEND" TO THE CONGREGANT

The rabbi attempted to help by becoming a friend to this lonely woman. This form of counseling did not focus on any particular problem that the counselee might have. Rather, the rabbi helped her by becoming a friend when there were no other relationships available to the woman. The friendship that he offered her became a supportive relationship where she depended on the rabbi. He helped her to use the relationship of friendship as a source of security. His attempt to help her developed into a severe dependency relationship.

EXAMPLE TEN: Wife leaves husband... Suggestion and referral by rabbi.

On the morning of erev Rosh Hashanah, the rabbi received

a frantic call from a congregant. The congregant insisted upon seeing the rabbi immediately. The rabbi met him at his study. The night before, the wife of the congregant was to pick her husband up at the airport when he returned from a business trip. She did not show up, and, indeed, had left home.

The congregant who called the rabbi was an immigrant whom the rabbi had helped to settle in the city. In the counseling interview, the first question that the rabbi asked was what had happened between ~~him~~ and his wife. He said that his wife had been keeping the finances but had not kept them to his satisfaction. They got into an argument and the husband struck her with his strap. The rabbi responded by recalling a phone call that the congregant had made to him a year ago. At that time, the congregant and his wife got into an argument and the man put his hands around the wife's neck and squeezed although not with any force. At that time, the rabbi went to their home and patched up the marriage.

The rabbi explained to the congregant that his wife was living in fear, that the next time he might go a step further. As the congregant was concerned about getting his wife back, the rabbi suggested that he see a psychiatrist who would be able to help him to control his impulses. The rabbi made the referral.

HOW THE RABBI ATTEMPTED TO HELP THIS CONGREGANT.  
THE USE OF CONFRONTATION

In an effort to help the congregant understand why his wife had left the home, the rabbi attempted to confront the congregant with the nature of the problem. He interpreted to the congregant some of the reasons why his wife had left the home.

REFERRAL

The rabbi, having recognized that this congregant could not control his impulses at times, thought that it was both appropriate and would be helpful to refer this congregant to a psychiatrist. ✓

EXAMPLE ELEVEN: Advice for divorce

A congregant came to the rabbi who was also a personal friend. The congregant ventilated his problem which concerned his wife. He complained bitterly that his wife was cruel, angry and literally driving him insane. The rabbi responded quite directly and said-----if you are going to remain sane, you had better divorce her.

### HOW THE RABBI ATTEMPTED TO HELP THIS CONGREGANT. LETTING THE CONGREGANT VENTILATE

The rabbi attempted to help the congregant by letting him do what he came to the rabbi for, that is, to ventilate all of his feelings about his wife and his marriage. The rabbi helped by being a willing listener to the troubles of his congregant.

### GIVING OF ADVICE

The rabbi attempted to help his congregant by more than just listening. Because of the nature of the situation whereby his congregant seemed to be emotionally falling apart, he offered advice to his congregant. He advised that the congregant divorce his wife. The kind of help offered in this situation is directive and suggestive. The nature of the help was not that of an authoritative demand, but rather advice from a friend.

### EXAMPLE TWELVE: Resentful of mother being around

A young man, recently married, came to the rabbi. He complained of tension in his marriage. He stated that the tension arose out of the fact that whenever he went away on a business trip,



his mother would come to his house and spend time with his wife. What he resented was that his mother would constantly ask his wife questions about him and the marriage. His problem was that he could not tell his mother not to come to his home when he was away. The rabbi suggested that he approach his mother and tell her directly that when he was away, she was not to come to his home.

HOW DID THE RABBI ATTEMPT TO HELP THIS MAN?  
SUGGESTION BY AN AUTHORITARIAN FIGURE

The rabbi attempted to help by encouraging the young man to accomplish a task. The encouragement offered is from an authority figure. The relationship between the young man and the rabbi is that of father to son. The encouragement that the rabbi offers is as a father would encourage his child to accomplish a task.

EXAMPLE THIRTEEN: Shall we let the doctors do a post-mortem?

A family came to the hospital chaplain and wanted to know whether they ought to let the doctors do a post-mortem on a relative who had died. The hospital chaplain advised that they let the doctors do a partial post-mortem. This satisfied the family.



HOW DID THE RABBI ATTEMPT TO HELP THIS FAMILY?  
GIVING APPROVAL TO A DECISION

The rabbi attempted to help this family by giving his approval to a decision by virtue of his authority as a rabbi. The family was concerned about the religious implications of a post-mortem. They were ambivalent in their decision. The rabbi's approval as the authority helped them to overcome their ambivalence.

EXAMPLE FOURTEEN: A rejected teenager.....the rabbi confronts the parents

This counseling situation came about when the rabbi met individually with each of his confirmands. The teenager felt rejected by her parents. She complained to the rabbi that her parents never show her affection or love. She felt as though they did not care for her.

After the meeting with the teenager, the rabbi asked the parents to come into see him. In this interview, the rabbi explained in full detail what their daughter was feeling. He made an attempt to make them aware of a problem that their daughter was having.

HOW DID THE RABBI ATTEMPT TO HELP?  
AN OPPORTUNITY TO VENTILATE FEELINGS

The rabbi gave the teenage girl an opportunity to vent all of her feelings toward her parents. The rabbi made no attempt to deny those feelings but accepted them as being real. Whether the teenager's perceptions were reality oriented or not, the rabbi accepted her feelings as being real.

CONFRONTATION OF A PROBLEM

The rabbi attempted to help in the situation by confronting the parents with the feelings of their daughter. He made no attempt to take sides in the situation. His approach was to make the parents aware of a problem. He did not wish to help by accusing or condemning the parents.

EXAMPLE FIFTEEN: To help an unmarried mother make plans

A student came to a Hillel rabbi. She told him that she was pregnant. The rabbi wanted to know if she had told her parents that she was pregnant. She had assured him that they knew. The rabbi

helped her to figure out a plan for herself. Since she would begin to show around the end of the semester, she decided to stay in school until the end of the semester. The rabbi helped her to make arrangements to go to a home after the semester ended. There, she would have her baby and put it up for adoption.

HOW THE RABBI HELPED THIS STUDENT....  
THE RABBI AS A HELPER IN MAKING PLANS

The rabbi attempted to help this girl by examining the total situation and then making plans based on this examination. In this situation, he helped the girl to decide to finish out the semester. He further helped her by making arrangements for her to go to a home in order to have her baby and put it up for adoption. He made no attempt to moralize the problem. He was not interested in who the father was. He was interested only in helping this student to map out a feasible plan for herself.

SUMMARY

There are many ways in which the rabbi attempts to help congregants who come for counseling. He may use the technique of suggestion, ventilation, referral, advice, sympathy, reality testing,

scolding, friendship, approval, reassurance, confrontation, helping to make plans, and by being a source of identification. All of these techniques are derived from an analysis of the case situations offered by rabbis interviewed for this thesis.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE RABBI - COUNSELOR, SOCIAL WORKERS AND THE JEWISH FAMILY SOCIAL WORK AGENCY

All of the rabbis interviewed for this thesis who engaged in counseling made referrals to other counseling professions. Some rabbis preferred one profession over another.

#### THE RABBI'S LIMITATIONS AND HIS USE OF REFERRAL

One of the primary reasons that rabbis refer to other counseling professions is the recognition of his own limitations and lack of training. Referral was made when a rabbi thought that the situation was one which he could not handle.

To make this more concrete, a woman came to the rabbi when she found out that her husband was running around with other women. The rabbi listened but wanted to hear the other side of the story. He wanted to see the husband. When the husband came in, he confirmed the fact that he was seeing other women. As he told the rabbi of his experiences, he vividly described his genital organs when having intercourse with other women.

When this kind of material came from the congregant, the

rabbi realized that this was a situation which he could not handle. He diagnosed the situation as one in which there were homo-sexual tendencies in the man.

Clearly, the rabbi recognized his own limitations and thought that a referral was appropriate.

### REFERRAL AND THE RABBI'S TIME

Counseling individuals is a time-consuming function. More time is spent on a situation than the hour or so that the congregant is in the study. There may be phone calls that have to be made. Time is needed to think and evaluate the situation. If the situation takes the rabbi out of his study, time is taken up in traveling. Rabbis will make referrals to other counseling professions on the basis that they do not have the time to work with an individual.

Time is a consideration when the rabbi perceives that working with a situation will entail more than one interview. A case in point is a widow who came to the rabbi to talk about one of her children. The son was having behavior problems. The rabbi felt that this situation could not be solved in one interview. On this basis, a referral was made to the local family social work agency.

THE RABBI'S EXPECTATIONS OF THE  
JEWISH FAMILY SOCIAL WORK AGENCY

In all of the cities in which interviews for this thesis took place, a Jewish family social work agency was located. The name of the agency differed from Jewish Family Service to Jewish Family and Childrens Services. The extend to which the rabbis interviewed had a working relationship with this agency differed widely. The attitudes maintained by the rabbis toward social workers in these agencies also varied.

Those rabbis who had formal training in counseling had the least criticism of the agency and its workers. These rabbis also had the greater knowledge of the casework method. They were more aware of the work done by the agency and, for the most part, satisfied with the quality of that work.

The expectations that these rabbis had of the agency and the workers differed from those that other rabbis held. The opposite is true as well. Those rabbis who were least comfortable in the counseling role and devoted the least amount of time to it were more critical of the agency and the workers. The expectations of these rabbis differed from those who were formally trained.

The expectations held by those rabbis least comfortable in the counseling role focused on the relationship between the synagogue



and the agency.

Several of these rabbis expected the agency to be related to the synagogue. One rabbi expressed his displeasure in these terms. He described the social workers as secularists and he described those affiliated with the synagogue as the religionists. In his view, the two did not see eye-to-eye. There is competition between the two institutions rather than each complementing the other. ✓

The competition between the secularists and the religionists is described by another rabbi. In his city, the director of the Jewish Federation was said to be anti-religious. That is to say, he did not relate to nor participate in synagogal life. The rabbi thought this not to be the proper image of a professional working in the Jewish community. Among these rabbis there is institutional competition.

Among those rabbis who had formal training in counseling, the expectations of the social worker and the Jewish family social work agency were different. These rabbis showed much more concern with knowing about the skills of the social worker. They tended not to be concerned with whether there was a relationship with the synagogue and the social work agency. Their focus of concern was whether the agency could be of help to congregants who need counseling.

That the rabbi with formal training in counseling is more concerned with the profession of counseling in contrast to the relationship between two institutions is evidenced by the fact that one rabbi is president of the Family Service (secular) social work agency in his community. He has no religious expectation of this agency. He is not preoccupied with the question of whether the sectarian agency has identified with the synagogue.

The rabbi who holds a Masters in Social Work did his field placement at the Jewish Family agency in his city. Thus, he knows the workers in the agency and feels to be part of them in some way. Like the rabbi mentioned above, he has no expectations that the agency should identify with and have a special relationship to the synagogue. The expectations that he holds are clear from his attitude toward non-Jewish social workers working in the Jewish agency. He was convinced that it made no difference as to whether a congregant or client received a non-Jewish worker or a Jewish worker. He was of the opinion that the casework method was the same. The methods, goals and accomplishments would be no different among non-Jewish workers as compared to Jewish workers. However, he did think that it would be a good idea if the non-Jewish workers had a knowledge of and understanding of the Jewish community and Jewish culture.

He explained that within the agency in his city, the director would give lectures on the structure and activity of the Jewish community.

Were we to put the rabbinical expectations of social workers and Jewish Family social work agencies on a continuum, the rabbis least comfortable in the counseling role would be at one end and the rabbis who had received formal training in counseling would be at the other. Many of the rabbis interviewed would fit somewhere in the middle. Many of these rabbis were neither concerned with the relationship of the Jewish social work agency to the synagogue nor the lack of relationship. They were concerned as to whether they could refer to the agency because they, themselves, did not wish to offer counseling. They were not concerned about the skills of the social worker. They knew nothing about the training of the caseworker nor did they have a conception of the casework method. Their relationship to the agency was based strictly on whether it was a source where they could send congregants.

Many of these rabbis had no relationship with the agency except to know that it did exist and that they could recommend it to their congregants. They had no personal contacts with either the director or the workers. In a situation where a rabbi thought that a congregant needed depth counseling, he would recommend that the

congregant should contact the Jewish Family agency but would not make the referral himself.

#### SOME STEREOTYPES OF SOCIAL CASE WORKERS HELD BY RABBIS

One of the things that stand in the way of using the social work agency as a referral source is stereotypes held of the social caseworkers. A rabbi called the Jewish Family social work agency in his city when he had an amputee that he wanted seen by a caseworker. The rabbi felt that the caseworker to whom he spoke made it sound as if he would be doing the rabbi "the biggest favor in the world." The rabbi's reaction was that this characterized social workers. The stereotype was that the social worker sits behind his desk and waits for people to come to him.

There are other stereotypes held by rabbis interviewed for this thesis. One rabbi sees the social worker as the poor man's psychologist. Another rabbi discounts the training of the social worker. He claims there are two kinds of social workers. There are those who have the empathic ability and those who do not. The good social worker has the empathic ability while the social worker who does not, he stereotypes as boorish. Still another rabbi stereotypes social workers as rigid people.

EXAMPLES OF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS  
BETWEEN THE RABBIS AND SOCIAL WORKERS

In those situations where there is a working relationship between the rabbi and the social worker at the Jewish Family social work agency, there is one element in common. In all of the instances, the rabbi had a relationship with either the director and/or the intake worker. The relationship was one in which the rabbi could call the director and/or intake worker on an informal basis.

One rabbi described his relationship in this way. A couple would come to him for marriage counseling. The rabbi thought that the couple could benefit from casework. While the couple is sitting in his study, he would call the director and explain the problem to him. He would ask the director if the agency was the appropriate referral resource. If it was, he would instruct the couple to call the agency when they arrived home or on the next day.

Another rabbi said that there is one worker at the agency whom he calls whenever he thinks that he has a situation which is appropriate for casework services.

In the thesis interview, one rabbi told me about some reports that he had gotten about congregants whom he had referred to the social work agency. This is usual practice for him. He has



made it known to the agency that when he makes a referral, he expects the social worker to consult with him on a regular basis so that he can maintain interest in the congregant and his problem. He expressed caution that he is very careful never to interfere in the counseling done by the social worker. Yet, he feels that contact with the social worker can help the social worker, himself and the congregant.

### SUMMARY

Primarily, there are two reasons that the rabbis interviewed refer congregants to the Jewish Family social work agency. The first reason is when the rabbi recognizes that a situation is beyond his competence. The second reason that the rabbis refer is when a situation demands too much time for them to do the counseling.

The relationship that the rabbis had with the Jewish Family social work agency varied. Much of the relationship depended upon the expectations that the rabbis had of the agency. Those rabbis who were the least comfortable in the counseling role were the most critical of the agency. They also expected the agency to identify with the synagogue. Among these rabbis, the institutional competition was the most intense. Those rabbis who had received formal training in counseling were

concerned, for the most part, with the skills and results of the agency. They tended not to be concerned with the relationship between the agency and the synagogue. There was little or no institutional competition among these rabbis. Many of the rabbis interviewed tended to hold a position somewhere in the middle. Several of the rabbis were only concerned with the fact that the agency acted as a resource for counseling. Many of these rabbis suggested the agency to their congregants although they did not make the referral themselves.

Several rabbis held stereotypes of social workers which prevented them from using the social work agency maximally as a referral source. These stereotypes included the social worker who sits behind a desk and waits for clients to come, the poor man's psychologist, disregard for training and the social worker as a rigid person.

In those situations where there was a working relationship between the rabbi and the agency, the rabbi was able to relate either to the director and/or the intake worker. The common element to all of the situations where there was a working relationship was that there was at least one person whom the rabbi knew and could call at any time.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

#### CONCLUSIONS ABOUT RELIGIOUS COUNSELING

Much of the literature written on religious counseling emphasizes the ambiguity in the religious counselor's role. In effect, the question is being raised, what distinguishes religious counseling from any other form of counseling.

Why is there ambiguity? There is ambiguity because of an unrealistic expectation of the religious counselor. The expectation is that the technique used by the religious counselor will evolve out of the way in which the role of the religious counselor is defined. To make this concrete, Hollander suggested that the central conviction out of which a religious leader operates is that God cares and watches over the destinies of all. Other writers and authorities suggest that the religious counselor is a representative of a religiously based moral code. From this type of a definition of the role of the religious leader, expectations are aroused about the way in which the religious leader will conduct a counseling interview. For instance, one might expect that if the rabbi is symbolic of God's care, he might use the

technique of prayer to help a congregant. If the religious leader is a representative of a religiously based moral code, one might expect him to be judgmental and use a technique of condemnation to help his congregant.

In contrast to the expectations that may be evoked because of the role definition of the religious leader, what are the techniques that are actually used in the counseling interview. As concluded by an analysis of the case situations offered by the rabbis interviewed for this thesis, they use such techniques as suggestion, ventilation, reassurance, sympathy, confrontation, and others. Important here is the fact that these techniques are no different than the techniques that might be used by a counselor who is not a religious counselor.

When we contrast the expectations of religious counseling and the actual techniques used, the question asked is what is religious about what the religious leader is offering the congregant. There does not seem to be any difference in what he is offering and what any other counselor may offer. Hence, ambiguity arises as concerns his role as counselor.

Much of the ambiguity in the religious counselor's role can be cleared up if the difference between the religious counselor and other counselors does not focus on technique but focus on the

nature of the institution where the counseling is being offered. There lies the difference between religious counseling and the counseling offered by other professions. In order to distinguish religious counseling from other forms of counseling, we will have to examine the effect that the synagogue has on the congregant who enters it for counseling. Why does the congregant choose to come to the synagogue rather than go to another institution for counseling?

When a congregant comes to the religious institution for counseling, he comes to a familiar place. More specifically, the congregant comes to his temple and to his rabbi for counseling. Because the synagogue is familiar to the congregant, it serves as a resource which tends to be less threatening than other institutions.

The physical sight of the synagogue makes it less threatening. The congregant knows where he is going. He is not going to a strange building nor will the counselor be strange to him. He will know the rabbi. Even the congregant who has had no contact with the rabbi on a personal basis will, at least, be familiar with his face.

The synagogue is a place where many activities are going on. There is the religious school, the social hall, the sanctuary and the library. All of these rooms give the congregant reassurance that he is not entering surroundings where only people with problems go.

The people whom the counselee meets are familiar to him. By and large, the office staff is made up of people who are members of the congregation. The counselee does not feel that he is among strangers. While waiting for the rabbi, he may wish to talk with people whom he knows. Talking may have a calming effect on the counselee.

There are those congregants who have a special feeling for the sanctuary in the temple. Being near it in time of trouble may be helpful to the counselee. Associations formed with the service such as warmth, fellowship and prayer may carry over in the form of support as the congregant enters the synagogue with a problem.

The synagogue is a place where the whole family may be involved. It serves as an extension of the home. Children may be in religious school. The husband may be active in the brotherhood. The family may attend services together. That the synagogue is an extension of the home makes it less threatening to come with a problem.

In addition to the synagogue being a less threatening place to bring a problem, the rabbi's study gives comfort to the counselee. His study may be decorated in a way which gives the counselee

emotional support. Book shelves may be lined with books. There may be religious objects on display. The pictures on the wall of his study may be of a religious nature. The congregant who sees evidence of a religious atmosphere feels the strength and support that religion tries to convey. The message of religion as a source of hope and comfort is symbolized in what the counselee sees in the rabbi's study.

What is distinct about religious counseling is the institution in which it takes place. Not even the counselor feels himself to counsel in a way which the definition of his role might convey. Not one of the rabbis interviewed saw themselves as a judge by virtue of the religiously based moral code which they represented. Therefore, when these rabbis attempted to offer help, especially in those situations which involved morality, the nature of the help offered was not judgmental. Rather, they attempted to offer help through the techniques of advice, suggestion, reassurance, support, and any other technique that a counselor may use, but within the context of the religious institution described above.

### KEY ISSUES AND PROBLEMS IN RELIGIOUS COUNSELING. IS RELIGIOUS COUNSELING HELPFUL?

One of the primary frustrations that the rabbis expressed was not knowing what happened to the congregant after the counseling interview. Most of the rabbis had no way of following up the situation once it left the study other than perhaps to see the counselee informally at a service or at a social gathering.

Not following up on the situation led many of the rabbis to question themselves as to how helpful they really were to their congregants. Much of this particular problem lies in the fact that almost universally, the rabbis saw the congregant for one interview.

### IS THERE A TECHNIQUE TO RELIGIOUS COUNSELING?

Among the rabbis interviewed, there was one clear difference between the approaches to counseling. The difference was in the ability and desire to make a diagnostic formulation about the problem brought to him by the counselee. A diagnostic formulation means an assessment of the underlying conflict of the problem presented and an approach to the counseling interview based on that assessment.

Those rabbis who had received formal training in counseling were the most concerned with a diagnostic evaluation. Those rabbis



least comfortable with the counseling role were the least concerned with diagnostic formulation.

Those rabbis who used a diagnostic evaluation had the most flexibility in what they could offer a congregant. By diagnosing a problem, they could then determine whether reassurance, confrontation, suggestion or advice was the most appropriate form of help. In contrast to these rabbis was the rabbi who did not make a diagnostic evaluation and whose approach to counseling was more rigid. For instance, there is the rabbi who considers himself to be an ear to his congregants no matter what the nature of the problem might be.

There are two dangers with those rabbis who did not attempt any kind of a diagnostic formulation. The first danger is that the rabbi tends to accept the presented problem as the real problem. The second danger is that the rabbi may not respond appropriately to the needs of the congregant because the rabbi has not evaluated the nature of those needs.

### DOES THE RABBI HAVE TIME TO COUNSEL?

The rabbi's time is a key problem in his role as counselor. Unlike other counseling professions, the rabbi does not set aside a

certain segment of time in which he does his counseling. Usually, he has to fit counseling interviews in between other activities in which he engages.

This can present a problem to the rabbi. One rabbi told of how he had to rush from a funeral to the temple because of a counseling interview. He was late for the counseling interview. Seemingly having to rush from one activity to the next, he could not pay full attention to the congregant who came to him for counseling. Feeling rushed, he did not even desire to listen to the problem.

Another aspect of religious counseling can be annoying to the counselor. This type of counseling is the informal counseling done by the rabbi. Congregants will stop in to talk when picking up their children at religious school. Perhaps a congregant will stop to see the rabbi when attending a meeting. Frequently, the rabbi will have something else on his mind and the congregant's problems will be of little concern to him. Rabbis interviewed expressed annoyance at these kinds of situations. How helpful can the rabbi be when he is annoyed by the congregant?

#### THE LONELINESS OF THE COUNSELING ROLE

Several of the rabbis expressed their frustration that the counseling role is a lonely one. They bear many secrets and can

speaking of them to no one. It is because of this burden felt by these rabbis that they wished that congregants would not come to them and make them aware of the intimate details of their lives.

APPENDIX I

1. Do congregants seek out the rabbi to talk about their personal lives?
2. When congregants come to the rabbi for help with problems, what is it that they want from the rabbi? Advice, support, etc.
3. Could you give me some recent examples of congregants who have come to you?
4. What do you feel are your strengths in this role?
5. What are some of the frustrations in this role?
6. Do you feel that you are successful at helping congregants in this way?
7. Approximately, how much time during the week do you devote to this role?
8. Are there any sources available to you when you feel that you need help with a situation?
9. Do any of your congregants go to the Jewish Family Service?
10. How do they attempt to help people who come to them?
11. What have been some of your recent contacts with social workers?
12. What is casework?
13. What kind of training do social workers receive?
14. Do you think that the students at the College need any kind of specialized training for this role?

FOOTNOTES

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