

### **Abstract**

**This thesis contains four chapters. Chapter one is the introduction. Chapter 2 covers day schools and the families that attend day schools. Chapter 3 is on the synagogues and their role in the day school family's life. Lastly chapter 4 will cover conclusions and insights.**

**The day school serves the Jewish family for Jewish culture and Jewish engagement in a way that can make synagogue involvement seem redundant for the lay Jew. The Jewish staples provided by the synagogue (as well as some that are not) are also provided by the day school. From the day school environment the congregant can potentially access worship, community, holiday celebration and even learning. Therefore, the question arises, what does or can the synagogue provide for these families if so much is provided for them by the Day school? Could this be why they leave? What is the synagogue doing to engage day school families? What can the synagogue understand about engagement by listening to day school families stories?**

**The goal of this study is three-fold: 1) To discover who are these families that belong to day schools and what is going on in their daily lives and why did they choose this option over a secular private school? 2) To what extent does their Jewish life take place in the day school versus the synagogue and how do they experience and compare the two? 3.) To do research that yields patterns of behavior of these families that can help illuminate the nature of Jewish engagement in the 21st century.**

**The nature of this research is not quantitative data analysis. Rather the research employs a qualitative grounded theory analysis of the commonalities and the outliers in the responses to assess which formative experiences helped to shape and define our participants' experiences over their time in the day school. The research centers on 28 interviews conducted with parents, students, rabbis and administrative staff at the day schools. The interviewees were selected from three Los Angeles based day schools, as well as, congregations throughout the Los Angeles area.**

Day School dynamics: The Role of Synagogue with Day School  
Families

Micah Ellenson

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Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion School of Rabbinic  
Studies Los Angeles, California

Date: 4/1/2014 Adviser: Dr. Bruce Phillips

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## Introduction:

The notion of Conservative, Reform, and Community Jewish day schools has only existed in the United States in any real sustainable way for the last 50-60 years. In the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was much debate in Jewish professional circles as to the shape and form that Jewish education should take. The central question floating around Jewish education was: should Jewish education be supplementary to American Jewish life, separate, or integrated into the fabric of what a young Jew learns? In the end the majority decision was to make religious Jewish education supplemental to American public education. However, there were streams in both the Conservative and Reform movement who continued to advocate for full time Jewish day schools. The advocates for Jewish day school saw day school as the best way to ensure that Jewish continuity and literacy would continue in the United States. These day school advocates saw Jewish supplemental education as woefully lacking. They pointed out decreased Jewish literacy and increased levels of assimilation and apathy. In order to combat these trends they strongly advocated for the creation and support of liberal Jewish day schools in the United States. The opponents of Jewish Day school saw the creation of such an institution as a betrayal of the American public school system and detrimental to Jewish integration into the larger society. However, after much debate the Conservative movement and then the Reform movement decided to embrace the idea of Jewish day school education. While Day schools in the United States have been incredibly successful one of the unintended consequences of Jewish day schools is that a gap has formed between the school and the synagogue for the Jewish family that attends a day school. This paper will explore the relationship between these day school families and the synagogue, as well as, the

functions, limitations and unexplored opportunities of both the synagogue and day school in Jewish family's lives.

Most studies have addressed one of five questions: 1.) Making a case for day school, 2.) making a case against day school, 3.) the history of day schools in the United States, 4.) quantitative studies of the day school population, and 5.) ethnographic studies of the day school population. None of the literature has tried to examine the actual quality of the relationship between the families in the day school and the synagogue.

The earliest articles presenting arguments for and against day schools in the Reform movement are presented in four articles from "The Jewish Teacher". The first two are from a 1951 symposium on Jewish day schools. One article entitled "Liberal Judaism and the day school" by Emanuel Gamoran, makes an argument in favor of Reform Jewish day schools, and the other "The Jewish day school: Its fallacy and dangers" by Victor E. Reichert in which he offers an argument highlighting the detrimental effects of day school for the Reform Jewish community. The other two articles from "The Jewish Teacher" appear in the 1962 edition and contain two articles entitled "The day school and Reform Jewish education – The case for a Reform Jewish Day School" by Samuel Glasner and "The day school and Reform Jewish education – The case against a Reform Jewish Day School" by Sam Rosenkranz in which each offers an argument in favor of and against day school education in the Reform movement. In 1983 in the periodical "Religious Education", Daniel B. Syme writes about the dilemma of day school education for the Reform movement in an article entitled "Reform Judaism and Day Schools: The great Historical Dilemma". In the same volume there is an article by Michael Zeldin entitled "Jewish schools and American Society:

Patterns of Action and Reaction” in which he takes to task the reactionary nature of Jewish education and the goals and purposes of Jewish education.

In 1988 a shift in the literature on day schools occurred from whether or not American Jews should have day school to what a day school should be and how it should run. This shift is reflected in an article by Michael Zeldin “The promise of historical inquiry: Nineteenth century Jewish day schools and Twentieth century policy”. In the periodical “Religious Education”, this shift is further reflected in the 2008 article by David Ellenson in “Journal of Jewish education” entitled “An ideology for Liberal Jewish Day School: A philosophical-sociological investigation”. In these articles no mention is even made for the relevance of day school, the only argument that is made is for the nature of the education within the day school.

In the book “Jewish Day Schools Jewish Communities” edited by Alex Pomson and Howard Deitcher in Ellen B Goldring’s article on “Building community within and around schools” she critiques a report by the Commission on Jewish Education in North America which stated that the Jewish community must support the schools. Rather she argues, the school must support the community. In her work she explores how the Jewish day school can better serve the Jewish community. “Curriculum, Community, commitment: Views on the American Jewish Day School in memory of Bennett I. Solomon” edited by Daniel J. Margolis and Elliot Salo Shoenberg is an exploration of the challenges, goals and vision of Jewish day school.

Two very good books on the History and early years of day schools are Alvin Schiff’s “The Jewish Day School in America” and “To The Golden Cities” by Deborah Dash Moore. In Schiff’s book he crafts an arguments for the need and function of day schools as well as

the formation of the institutions. He also has an article published in the periodical “Jewish Education” some 20 years late in 1982 entitled “from Sunday school to Day school” where he tracks the success of day school education in the 20th century. In Moore’s book she describes the beginnings of the Reform movements day school movement in Miami and Los Angeles. Also on the history of Jewish education there is “The Benderly boys and American Jewish education” by Jonathan B. Krasner which highlights the early history and formation of the Jewish educational system, including attitudes towards Jewish day school education versus after school education.

Micahel Zeldin has an article in “The Prager handbook of Faith based school in the United States, K-12 volume 1” entitled “Reform Jewish Day schools” in which he covers the history, mission and added benefit of Reform Jewish day school. Similarly, David Sanford Cohen in his thesis “American Reform Judaism and the Jewish Day School” writes about the history of day school education and the attitudes of the Reform movement to day school education prior to 1974. In the Journal of Jewish education Jonathan Krasner has a three part article on the history of Jewish education in the United States entitled “Jewish education and American Jewish education”.

On the quantitative level there is Marvin Schick and the Avi Chai foundations “A census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States 2010-2011” which covers the statistics of Jewish day schools in terms of who is sending their children to day and in what percentage.

In “Down the up stair case: Tales of teaching in Jewish Day Schools” Carol K. Ingall uses ethnographic research to explore the experiences of Jewish day school teachers by interviewing them and analyzing the results of those interviews. The closest any book has come to addressing the issue of the role synagogues can play in day school families lives is



Alex Pomson and Randall F. Schnoor's "Back to school: Jewish Day School in the lives of Jewish adults". In that book they address how the school becomes a synagogue for its families, not the dynamic between the two institutions. Where Pomson and Schnoor meld the two worlds this research is interested in disseminating them.

While this literature review is far from exhaustive one trend has become abundantly clear: Most of the literature surrounding day schools either explores day schools history, centers around the issue of how to bring people towards Jewish day school education or why the American Jewish community should distance itself from day schools and the goal and scope of Jewish day school education. None of the literature uncovered examines the relationship between the families in the day school and the synagogue. The majority of literature focuses on the people who say no to day school and tries to figure out ways to get them to say yes. This Thesis is concerned with the people who say yes and how can the day school and synagogue enhance their Jewish experience.

Nowhere is the gap between expectation of the synagogue and Jewish lay person more pronounced than in a Jewish Liberal day school. Liberal Jewish day schools number very few in the United States. As of 2011 Avi Chai reported that of the 297 day schools in the United States, 15 were Reform and 43 were conservative Solomon Schechter schools . Reform synagogues with day schools attached are even fewer and outside of one in New York and one in Houston the rest are located in Los Angeles or South Florida .

The day school serves the Jewish family for Jewish culture and Jewish engagement in a way that can make synagogue involvement seem redundant for the lay Jew. The Jewish staples provided by the synagogue (as well as some that are not) are also provided by the day school. From the day school environment the lay Jew can potentially access worship,

community, holiday celebration and even learning. Therefore, the question arises, what does or can the synagogue provide for these families if so much is provided for them by the Day school? Could this be why they leave? What is the synagogue doing to engage day school families? What can the synagogue understand about engagement by listening to day school families stories?

The goal of this study is three-fold: 1) To discover who these families are that belong to day schools and what is going on in their daily lives and why did they choose this option over a secular private school? 2) To what extent does their Jewish life take place in the day school versus the synagogue and how do they experience and compare the two? 3.) To do research that yields patterns of behavior of these families that can help illuminate the nature of Jewish engagement in the 21st century.

Little research has been done on liberal synagogues that have day schools, much less the congregants who are members of both the day school and the synagogue. Day school parents where the school is a part of the synagogue have a unique relationship with the synagogue that is unparalleled in United States Jewry. These families present unique opportunities and challenges for synagogues to engage and serve them. Understanding this group better and looking at who they are, how they construct their Jewish identity and affinity to the Temple can potentially help give Jewish professionals insights on how to better engage congregants. The nature of the engagement is what is being looked at in this study. Is the synagogue the center of their Jewish lives, or is it, in fact, the school? What does that mean for their Jewish identity formation and is this model of synagogue day schools a viable one, or is it in fact, more detrimental to true engagement and Jewish identity formation?

The research centers on 28 interviews conducted with parents, students, rabbis and administrative staff at the day schools. The interviewees were selected from three Los Angeles based day schools, as well as, congregations throughout the Los Angeles area. Two of the schools are part of a synagogue and one is an independent community school. These schools also run the gambit of liberal Judaism from Reform to Conservative to Community. In order to assess the quality of their Jewish experience in the day school, I interviewed a variety of parents with a range of experiences in the day school. The nature of this research is not quantitative data analysis. Rather the research employs a qualitative grounded theory analysis of the commonalities and the outliers in the responses to assess which formative experiences helped to shape and define our participants' experiences over their time in the day school.

## Chapter 1 Day schools

In order to understand the role Synagogue might play in a Day School family's life we will first look at what types of parents choose day schools and their reasons for choosing formal Jewish education. By doing this we will get a picture of all the Jewish functions a day school plays for a family and then be able to juxtapose those roles against the roles of the synagogue for a day school family and as a result will be able to see the functions that a synagogue might serve in a day school family's life.

The day school parents fell into one of three categories: those raised in Orthodox or more traditional Conservative communities, immigrants, and converts. There are most likely other types who choose day school for their children, however, of the people interviewed they all fell into one of these three categories.

From the parents who grew up with more traditional backgrounds one parent from the Community Day School described the influence his Orthodox upbringing had on him making his choice to send his children to day school in the following way:

My Orthodox day school background gave me huge amounts of knowledge. It was an opportunity for me to really learn about all the nuts and bolts of Judaism. I'm an attorney and while my father was an attorney, the manner in which I was taught... learning Mishnah, Gemara, Rashi, Rambam, I now realize I was being taught in a Socratic type method and that type of analysis allowed me to mentally wrestle with the Jewish content I was learning. Having Judaism be part of your everyday life it just becomes a part of you... not something outside of what you do every day, it just is what you do every day.

What ultimately motivated this father to send his child to a Jewish day school was a sense that what he learned in Day School was completely integrated and

consistent with the person he became and he wanted his children to have that same sense about Judaism.

Another reason the families interviewed who were raised in Orthodox families chose day school was a sense of obligation for Jewish continuity. They saw themselves as, while not identically replicating their childhood experience, still reflecting the larger goal of continuity that was instilled in them by their parents, community, and schooling at a young age. By providing some form of formal day school Jewish education for their child, even if it is not the specific teaching they were exposed to growing up, they ensured that they were upholding the value of continuing the chain of Jewish tradition.

The second type of family that chose day schools were immigrants. Many of the families at the day school were Russian, Israeli, Persian or South African. The Israeli adults interviewed had many preconceived notions and ideas about Judaism upon entering the day school based on where they were raised. They viewed their Judaism ethnically and rejected the religious side of being Jewish. Often times this rejection was not a response to actual facts but a rejection of the feelings associated with the religious right in Israel. However, they also saw their culture and ethnic identity as being intrinsic and integral to their lives in America. Therefore many Israelis will engage in one Jewish activity to express this ethnic identity, be it camp, day school, or Israeli scouts. The real joy and success of Jewish day school for them comes when through the day school they are exposed to an area or perspective on Judaism they knew nothing about before their child started learning

about it. Israelis, who perhaps grew up taking the Jewish calendar for granted, suddenly have a chance to engage in the Jewish calendar with fresh eyes.

For many of the immigrant families interviewed Jewish identity had little to do with Jewish ritual practice. For example, Russian Jew, who were labeled a Jew as a matter of distinction in their birth country saw here Judaism as cultural. In Communist Russia there was a legal designation placed on peoples identity cards labeling the nationality of the individual. Here is one mother's account of coming to America from Russia for her and her husband:

I grew up going to Orthodox Jewish school from middle school and on. We emigrated from Russia when I was seven. I started in public school until 7th grade when my parents put me in an Orthodox day school and that has shaped my Judaism ever since. And my husband immigrated when he was 17 and had no Jewish education but Jewish identity, His grandmother was a holocaust survivor, but he had no practical, formal, education. What he acquired he got from me.

It was not until these two came to the United States that their formal Jewish education began. Once that formal education was implanted it became important to both of them to implant that in their children through day school.

Converts were the opposite of Israelis and Russians. While the former viewed there Judaism ethnically the latter viewed it religiously. The interesting perspective that a convert brings into the Jewish community is that they do not see religion through a cultural or ethnic lens the way many Israeli, Russian or American Jews view their Jewish identity. Instead, because of how they were raised, they see religion as an expression of spirituality and not of culture. For them Judaism becomes a different way of engaging spiritually. This vignette is from one of those mothers:

To join a synagogue was more a priority for my husband than it was for me. But over the years we have switched roles. I was born Catholic and converted in 1984 after I met my future husband. It was important for me that the kids had a religious grounding. My husband tends towards the cultural aspects of Judaism and I tend towards the ritual aspects the ceremony more, probably because of my Catholic background.

For the convert their child's Jewish education is not merely teaching a history it is also teaching a way of being in the world.

There are several reasons that came out of discussions with these families, as well as admissions directors from various Jewish Day Schools, about the reasons why day school families choose to send their child to a Jewish day school. By understanding the reasons why a family chooses a day school one can begin to understand the role the day school plays in building and structuring these families Jewish identities. Once that is understood it will better help to understand the day school families connection or lack thereof to the synagogue.

When a Jewish family is choosing a school for their child they have one of three choices: Public, private non-Jewish, or private Jewish. This study is only interested in examining those families that chose between a private non-Jewish school and a private Jewish school. Those families that chose public school and their reasons for doing so, are not the focus of this research. In Los Angeles there are many choices for private school and since they all cost about the same a family must use other criteria besides cost to determine their choice of where to send their child. One theme that emerged throughout the interviews in terms of what drew parents to choose a Jewish day school was warmth. For many of the parents interviewed the warmth that they felt at the Jewish day school was something that

they did not feel at the other non-Jewish private schools. One Reform Day School parent described her experience visiting a non-Jewish private school while she and her husband were school shopping for their children: “We looked at a local k-12 college preparatory school and thought it was snooty and it was not warm, it was a cold, cold place. Cold, very status conscious and you look at the parents and go, we’re not going to fit in there. It was just a cold unfriendly place where you would not want to be.”

By contrast, these and other parents, were attracted to the warmth they perceived at day school. The warmth that people felt at the Jewish day schools that were observed was a key factor reported in the added value of Jewish day schools by everyone from the staff to the students. One mother who moved her children from a non-Jewish private day school to the Reform Jewish Day School describes the warmth in terms of her children's transformation as people at the Reform Day School the following way:

The difference has been on all levels. I think they are happier with their friends. I am going to use my daughter as an example, who was very happy there (at the non-Jewish private school), and very well liked. All of them were very popular and well liked at the other school. She says the kids here have personalities, and they'll have fun and they'll play. They have more choices here and more options and the kids have bigger personalities.”

Therefore, one factor that pulls day school families to choose day school education is the sense of warmth they experience at the Jewish Day School.

Another reason parents chose day schools was because of the emphasis on community. A father at the community school said:

We went to Community Day School initially because of our understanding of the curriculum at the kindergarten level and its emphasis on community. Our



general philosophy on learning was intense, hands on, experiential learning. Community Day School as a Jewish day school offered that in the secular as well as Judaic aspects of their curriculum...My wife and I met when we were 18 at summer camp. It was really important for us to have a combination of formal and informal as well, and the community aspect of Community Day School was very important to us.

A third consideration was whether or not the school was a good fit for the child. The day school parents interviewed were highly attuned to the concept of making sure wherever their child went it was going to be the right fit for their child. They did not attempt to make their child fit a system; rather they wanted a system that fits their child. One case in point comes from a father at the Community Day School:

Our oldest daughter went to the Jewish Community high school. Our middle daughter had a choice between the two liberal Jewish high schools and the public school magnet and she chose the public school magnet because it was the best fit for her. She told us she wanted to get outside of her comfort zone and the public school magnet has an excellent magnet and our daughter is something of an athlete and will be playing Varsity basketball for them as a freshman.

Another example of finding the right fit for the child comes from a day school family of three that transferred into the Reform Jewish day school, when their oldest was in fifth grade at a local non-Jewish private school, because their son complained about the school he was attending. It was only when their son voiced his displeasure that they took that as an opportunity to move the whole family. This is also an example of the hierarchy of decision making day school families employ in making academic decisions for their children. In this hierarchy parental happiness is perhaps third, logistics second, but most important is whether or not this place is a good fit for the child. "My husband and I were unhappy for about two or three years.

Then when our oldest said he does not like the social environment, he's not happy there, we were like great! Initially we were going to still keep our middle daughter there but then she said she wanted to keep the family together so with that we brought our youngest over as well because he was not going to be the only child at the other school. So now we are all here.”

Day school choice is not just about the child or the school but is also about larger familial patterns that exist outside the student school dynamic. The interviews showed that in terms of home life parent’s structure their lives around their kids needs not their own. In the interviews it became clear that a parent’s needs and wants are subservient to what their kids need and want. Where parents spend their time, where they choose to volunteer is all for the purpose of their children. For day school families an inordinate amount of their home time is taken up with prioritizing their children’s agendas. The same mother, who transferred her children from the non-Jewish private school to the Reform Day School, moved from the Religious School at the temple to the day school at the same temple, put the fact that kids are the priority this way: “There is less opportunity to be involved in the Religious School because it is not your priority. Your priority is where your kids are in school all day.” Therefore we can see that one thing that motivated these families to choose the schools they did was not the Jewish aspect at all but rather that a particular school environment was the best fit for their child.

Another reason that presented itself for parents choosing a liberal Jewish day school was that it reconciled some of the Jewish dissonance they felt growing up. In other words the Jewish home practice for many of these parents growing up was at

odds with what they learned in their Jewish school. None the less, Judaism and formal Jewish schooling was still very important to them. One family grew up in a modern Orthodox community and was now sending their children to the Reform Day school:

My wife and I both had extensive Jewish education and we wanted our kids to basically, not have the same education, but wanted them to be educated about their Judaism... Growing up in the modern Orthodox community I think at the time in the schools we were growing up in we felt we had positive experiences. However I think there was some dissonance between what we would get at school and what we were doing in the home. And that dissonance primarily related to practice of ritual in level of observance. I think in the bigger picture looking back it created an unnecessary tension and dissonance in the home. That has something to do with the fact that despite our upbringing we chose to send our children not through the orthodox day school system.

Logistics is another reason parents choose whether to send their children to Jewish or non-Jewish schools. It seems that for these day school families even personal happiness took a back seat to logistical consideration. For example, the admissions director at the Conservative Day School described how convenience factors into the way she recruits families: “I meet some families in the womb sometimes. I am touring some families that have not even given birth yet. So I will literally tour someone who is eight months pregnant who wants to pick a place starting with mommy and me, going to pre-school heading to Day School, they don’t want to change. We are that package.” Another family that chose Reform Day School stressed the role of logistics in their choice to stop sending their children to the school: “My brother’s family was here. We looked at a lot of places and fell in love with the school here. We fell in love with the location, the mommy and me programs. My husband really wanted a Jewish influence. We loved the preschool

but when my older ones went to private school at a non-Jewish school we moved my youngest to a different, non-jewish, preschool.”

Parents also cited as their reason for choosing a Jewish day school that learning about the traditions, history and values was important to them. One mom that I interviewed enjoys when her children are able to teach her something about her tradition that she did not know. “Some friends would ask, “Why would you send your kids to a Jewish school?” My husband and I said we have Shabbat at home and keep kosher at home but the real traditions were what they were going to get at a day school. There are some holidays that I had to learn from my kids. The school teaches them every detail from the beginning. Those details weren’t in my house and that was what we wanted them to get from a Jewish day school.”

Another reason day school parents cited in choosing day school was support in living a Jewish life. One mother had been a member of the Reform Day school community for twenty years reflected back on her choice to send her children through the day school system: “I don’t know why I sent them to a Jewish preschool. It was just something inherent in me. I think bringing the kids here insured we would have some sort of compass for how to raise our kids in a traditional way.”

Values might be expected to be an almost universal reason for choosing any parochial school, day school included. Surprisingly, only some of the families mentioned values as a reason they chose day school. One mother I spoke to sent her oldest to public school and her two younger sons to Jewish Day School. On the role of Jewish studies in her younger children’s development she said the following:

Values. I look at my oldest kid who did not have a day school education, Religious School is just a dip in the water. He can mumble his way through a

prayer but that is about it. And he has some identification... but he doesn't have the attachment the identity. That's what day school gives these kids it gives them values and a structure to hold on to. And I think it will give them something to hang onto when the going gets rough. And I'm sorry that my oldest did not have that because the going did get rough and he did not have anything to hang onto.

Conversely, another mother saw the son she has at school as a direct product of the life they live at home not of the values education of the school:

My son gets paired a lot with kids who struggle and he really likes it. The honest truth is there are a lot of his friends and classmates that would not behave that way. I believe a lot of what my kids are has to do with what we've instilled in them in the home from when they were very little. I feel his menchlikite has to do with more our parenting than the school and the type of people we want them to be and they are developing to become.

Her son, however, disagreed with the mother and saw the values he and his peers possess as a direct result of the school environment. This 6<sup>th</sup> grade student describes an example of the character of the kids at his day school by explaining what it was like to make the A team at his school in basketball:

I made the A team and in previous years I was on the B team. And the kids on the team helped me learn different skills and enhance my range of skills. They would even help me during recess. I think that aspect is unique to this school because at other schools there is too much competition or the kids don't really care. I think at this school people want everyone to be better as a team. People in the school have the perspective that if you get better they will get better. I think it comes from a growing bond between the students. The teachers don't tell us to do it, but they guide us towards making ethical decisions and working collaboratively. We're individual but we collaborate on everything.

One disincentive for otherwise positively oriented parents that might cause them to opt out of day school is if they perceive that they are being made to practice a certain type of Judaism. This notion is so strong it made one family choose not to send their child initially to Day School:

We had come to look at the Community Day School when our oldest daughter who is now in 12th grade was getting ready to go to kindergarten. When we came to look at the campus we were mainly turned off by the boys wearing kippas that was the one thing that really threw us off and we said no way was she ever going to that school. We kept looking and she ended up at another school which ended up going belly up after her second year. So I applied to one other school and the community Day School and she got wait listed at the other school and got into the Community Day School. And my husband and I laugh that it was the best mistake that ever could have happened to us, because it is the greatest gift we ever have given our family.

For many of the parents I interviewed Judaism and sending their child to Jewish day school was not a religious expression it was a social expression. This is how one mother from the Community Day School saw her Judaism as a social expression:

I grew up in Mexico city where we were a tiny, tiny minority. It is a very close nit Jewish community and most Jewish kids go to Jewish day school there. My home was very reform. We never kept kosher, never lit Shabbat candles and I did not go to a Jewish day school, so that was unusual. It was less important for my parents to have a Jewish education or training, but they wanted us to have a Jewish social life. So me and my brothers are a part of Maccabi Tzair, which is like a Jewish scouts group, and that was the center of my Jewish life. I was very influenced by that. You had to make an effort to be Jewish in a place where there were so few Jews.

Day school participation is an expression of the type of Judaism that was modeled for most parents. The reason a parent raised Orthodox chooses a liberal day school is because they are reproducing their own Jewish upbringing by sending their kids to day school. For the parents raised modern Orthodox the Jewish practice that was modeled for them at home was not Jewish activity but Jewish education. Therefore, when parents send their kids for a Jewish education it is an expression of the Judaism that was modeled for them growing up. However, the

reason they choose the liberal option over the more traditional option is to reconcile the dissonance they felt growing up.

Parents tend to choose the type of school they attended. For instance a family that went to public school, if the experience was positive, will be more likely to send their children to public school. Similarly a family that grew up in more traditional day schools will be more likely to send their children to day schools. However, what happened for some of the families interviewed that grew up in a more traditional day school was that their families during their childhood assimilated and a dissonance began to be created between what they learned in school and what they did in their home life. Therefore, a family might choose a liberal Jewish day school because there is less dissonance between school teaching and home life.

A large number of the parents interviewed were either immigrants or converts. Perhaps one of the appealing aspects of Day School for immigrants is that in a world that is so foreign to them they go to the one thing that is familiar to them and that is Judaism. It is possible that the worship and worldview are different from their home country, but it is still Jewish and therefore provides a sense of security and stability in a new world they are still trying to navigate.

The admissions director at the Reform day school said the following about the first generation Jews who apply to the school: "A lot of first generation families don't apply anywhere else . . . I think a lot of people choose this school because it is safe, not just proximity safe, but who their children is going to interact with safe. There is a percentage of our people who are hiding out here. It is safe here, it is what they

know. They are here for the Jewish feeling and they want their kids to know some prayers and some history.”

Converts make a special contribution to day school as they can provide an opportunity for a day school community to reconnect with the religious aspects of Jewish identity instead of just the cultural ones. Of the parents interviewed two converted to Judaism. Both were converts from Catholicism and it seemed that engaging in Judaism was a way for them to maintain some of the values the Church taught them while simultaneously embracing their new religion.

The second generation Jewish parents who sent their children to day school mostly grew up in more traditional homes or went to Jewish summer camp. Therefore the big question becomes: once a family has adapted and Judaism no longer is the only place they feel safe, what would compel them to lead Jewish lives or embrace Judaism? When identity choice is left entirely up to the individual and no one is forcing you to identify as a Jew the chances of maintaining affiliation diminishes dramatically, Unless there is a strong sense of pride or shame in one's Jewishness the family will more likely than not drop their Jewish affiliation after a few generations unless they are given some compelling reason not to do so.

While immigrants, for whom day school represents a site of cultural safety, the few families that spoke with me about community who were not immigrants were also Jewish summer camp alumni. It seems that what Jewish summer camp provided for them is a model for Judaism that is all about community. Therefore, these parents whose camp experience influenced their Jewish identities try to seek out a school that emphasizes community and interaction. Community fed their souls



and now they want community to feed their children's souls as well. The community that is built for a day school family almost becomes a one stop shop for Jewish living and integration. The community that is created for many of these day school families begins to feel like a synagogue.

The admission director at The Community Day School observed how over the years the day school has come to resemble, even without intending to emulate one, a synagogue:

On the Monday or Thursday before the kids Bar or Bat Mitzvah we do a service for the kids. We bring out the Torah and invite the family. It's just with the grade of their piers they get to read some lines of Torah. And the children say wonderful things about that kid. Like what they bring to the community, what they brought to the classroom what they bring as a human being. It is very emotional and special. We get a lot of calls from families asking if we will do the B'nai Mitzvah training or to use our facilities. And that is something we are starting to look into now. 15 or 20 years ago we tried to be so supportive of the other temples, not wanting to take members always, we want our families to belong and affiliate. But now these synagogues have all become competing day schools for us and we get nothing out of it, the relationship is totally one way. And its not that we would not encourage our families to belong, but we have a magnificent beit midrash and if we are the spiritual Jewish world for a lot of our families because they do not belong why can't they have a little ceremony here on a Saturday morning and celebrate their bar mitzvah and then the school can use that revenue.

The day school experience can influence Jewish life in the home by expanding the students repertoire of Jewish knowledge and practice [skills]. However, there are limits to the impact of a Jewish Day School education in the life of a family. Jewish literacy is not the same thing as Jewish practice. Schools can teach what a word means or what a song is talking about but they cannot by themselves show the students how to enact that learning outside the classroom. Due to the fact that religion by its very nature is abstract it takes living in the world

with the Jewish tools given in the day school to understand how to apply what the student has learned. A 6th grader lamented the disconnect he felt between his education and the practical application of that education:

I've learned the alphabet, and learned how to read and write well, but as far as taking test to what the teachers teach us, when I ask a question, they said I should have known that, I should have listened, but the thing is every single student said they didn't understand it. I think they need a different system. Like we sing a song and then they expect us to know different vocabulary and content based on the song that we studied, but we don't really get the connection between it and we can't apply it, we don't know how to apply different concepts to different situations.

Jewish education in the Day school is not just about the foundational materials of Jewish literacy such as Jewish history and bible. Day school education is also focused on the type of person that is being molded. Day Schools do not just mold smart kids like other private schools, they as a matter of intentionality, attempt to mold character. They seek to create students who are kind, thoughtful and most of all, accountable for their actions.

Jewish day school also enriches a family's Jewish literacy and home life. When a child comes home with some new learning or custom it enables the parents to learn and grow Jewishly as well as their children. However, Jewish education in the day school seemed to be almost exclusively concerned with the child's Jewish literacy not the parents. This is a glaring hole and a missed opportunity by the day school.

As was suggested earlier the hierarchy of needs for a day school family is fit, logistics and happiness. The story about the family that changed schools after their child complained illustrates the interaction between fit, logistics and happiness. Even though the parents were unhappy they were willing to suffer through the non-

Jewish day school if it was the right fit for their children. When it became apparent that it was not the right fit they felt better about pulling their children out, however, they would still be at the other school if their daughter had not said that not being together as a family was not the right fit for her. In other words for this mother and all the parents I interviewed, their priority was going to be their children's lives and where those kids spent most of their time was going to take precedence over anything else.

Whatever the importance of other considerations the decision a parents makes regarding their Jewish affiliation almost always come down to logistical considerations. Take the case of the family that was happy at the day school but pulled their youngest out when it became logistically inconvenient. Even though the family was happy with the Jewish school as soon as it became inconvenient they pulled their family out of the school. Modern families are too on the move and too busy to do anything that they perceive as inconvenient. How a family chooses to structure their time is a reflection of the values they wish to instill in their children. Sometimes these choices are consciously made other times they are made unconsciously. A mother from the Reform Day School described her family's daily routine:

Our days are very regimented. We get up at 5 am walk the dogs, get the kids up, leave at 6:45 am, school starts at 7:30 am. Most days sports or orchestra to 5 pm or the nanny picks them up at 3:30 pm. They get home at 5 pm and tutor comes three times a week and cello a couple times a week. We have people coming and going all the time from 5 pm-8pm. I get home at six and prepare dinner while they work. This is a week when I'm home. By 9 pm or 9:30 m we collapse in heap and then do it all over again. It is a pretty jam packed schedule. Friday night we are usually too tired to go anywhere, but we try to do dinner. Saturdays are usually our sleep in do nothing day. And they could have baseball from anywhere from 9 am to 5 pm. I think our schedule is probably too jam packed. But honestly if I had the opportunity

to make my schedule less jam packed I do not think I would, because otherwise I would have already. I could complain all I want to about it, but I'm still doing it. But it's a choice I've made and I'm pretty happy with it.

The biggest concerns for day school parents are: are we doing this (raising our kids) right? As one parent explained, are we as the parents on the same page? This uncertainty is what parents are struggling with at home. One natural instinct would be to provide programming to help with these areas, however, I might suggest more important than programs is to be sensitive to the fact that this is what parents struggle with in raising their kids. By being sensitive to this fact it will have the added impact of affecting the way Jewish educators and professionals interact with parents and the way they judge parental decision making and prioritization.

When a family chooses a Jewish day school there is a perception that they will have support in raising their child. For the Jewish day school parent sending their child to a Jewish private school is not just about academics or Jewish knowledge, it is about providing the family guidance for how to raise good people. For the mother who was looking for a Jewish compass for herself and her children she knew that by herself her family would default to non-observance. The act of sending her child to a day school ensures that their Jewish consciousness would not falter.

Lastly, parents want to be free to choose how they express their Jewish identities. When a family walks in and sees kids being made to wear kippot, for example, if that action bumps up against their perception for the way they think Judaism should be practiced they will not choose Jewish day school education.

Therefore the Day School provides the following areas for day school families:  
Warmth, community, fit for their child, reconciles Jewish dissonance, logistically  
convenient, peer group, Jewish literacy, support, values, and social as well as  
personal expression. Given that all of these areas are covered for the day school  
family by the school what if anything is left for the synagogue?

## Chapter 2 Synagogue

One of the central questions of this research is to explore what the function of the synagogue is for a day school family. Central to uncovering the roles and functions of the synagogue for day school families is the questions of whether Temple life is complimentary to day school life or whether it is actually redundant. Most of the Rabbis I interviewed, save for one, thought that there was a role for Synagogue in day school families lives beyond education. However, day school families by and large see their Jewish life as being complete through the day school. What then does the synagogue offer a day school family?

One Rabbi at a congregation without a day school spoke on the limits of day schools and what a synagogue could offer a day school family in the following way:

The act of sending you kid to the Jewish Day School does not in and of itself speak of Jewish values to your kids. The true goal of Jewish day school education is to create literate Jews who develop a passion to become life-long learners. The day school is the Beit Midrash of the Jewish community. However, it is not the Beit Kenneset or the Beit Tfillah. One learns the skills of Judaism in the day school, however, that knowledge needs to be put into concert with other Jewish institutions in order to take that Jewish learning and turn it into Jewish practice.

Another Rabbi on the subject of teaching day school students in the Religious School said his goal is to create conversations for day school students that they would not have in school. Conversations that deal with how to live in the world and what the tradition has to say about the lives they lead. For this Rabbi day school education is subject based while religious school education is focused on the individual:

When I have kids that are day school kids they all participate in the confirmation program. The foundation for Jewish text when I am teaching is something my day school students don't need, however, it is incumbent on

the synagogue school to bring Jewish texts that my day school kids would not interact with over at the school. I try to pick themes and a wide range of disciplines that the day school is not teaching. I am looking for texts that will enable me to enter into the kind of conversations a Rabbi wants to have with his students about their teen life and the choices they will make the rest of their life and the changes they will be going through both chemically, emotionally, and psycho spiritually. I get to look at the texts uniquely through a teen lens that talks about their lives.

Conversely, however, another Rabbi believes that there is no role for synagogue beyond life cycle and social for a day school student. She uses the example of a day school student in the confirmation program. Her feeling is that what they would really get out of attending is merely social and that is only important if it is something the student desires:

There is not a place for the day school student in the teen program because they would only attend it for social reasons not because they are really going to learn anything. I think reaching out to those kids would only be important socially. The role of the Synagogue is if a kid gets sick or a parent dies. Then I am fully present in their kids life. So the role is illness, social, social justice, holydays.

Most of the Rabbis interviewed argue that the synagogue provides a gateway to allow a person to continue their Jewish journey. The day school family has learned about Israel, now they can come on an Israel trip with the Temple. Then, the Rabbis continue, when they get back the Temple is in a unique position to help process and follow up on that trip. Then, after that, the day school family and student can engage in a discussion on Israel based on their experience that they could not have had before. It allows, as one Rabbi put it, for a Day School family to:

...continue what they have been doing on a higher level. You want a family to feel they belong to an ongoing family community. Some of that happens in the school but it happens in an integrated way in the shul through things like Mitzvah day. We want people to feel that they are part of the larger Jewish community.

One Rabbi, at a large Reform Temple in Los Angeles, described the increase in Israel education and Shabbat attendance as a result of building a day school at her Temple:

The school has brought many good things to the temple like a greater association with Israel because now in grade six the kids have an exchange. Our kids go there and their kids come here. We were able to bring in Israel bonds in a way that we were not able to before. Also, there has been an increase in family Shabbat participation. More families have come, not regularly, but there are more informal Shabbat opportunities. Before the day school Shabbat was B'nai Mitzvah families and a few serious adults. But the day school really expanded it. Seeing the difference between before the day school and after is really significant.

One Rabbi's perspective on the synagogue is that it should be a Beit Kenneset, a house of gathering, for a day school family:

perspective on the role the synagogue potentially could play in their lives.

According to one parent the only way she could imagine the Temple offering something to her child is if the experience was complementary to the experience her son was having in the day school:

The added value for my son for being involved in the synagogues would be if the Synagogue were doing interesting things that my son perceived to be interesting and fun and not part of the school. Things like trips, camping, working with kids.

A parent who belonged to both the community day school and a synagogue reported that her daughter liked making new friends at synagogue but the mother could not handle the logistics of adding another outlet for her child. She said:

We belong and are active in Temple. The only drawback in going to a day school is that my kids don't have a connection to the Temple. They have no reason to be at Temple for youth group or Religious School because they have it on a daily basis. My 6th grader is studying for her bat mitzvah and has had to go for the last six weeks to the Temple for their prayer class and she has really enjoyed it. Yesterday was her last class and when I picked her



up she said she was going to miss it. She said she was bummed she doesn't get to see those kids anymore. So that is the one drawback of day school but it would be overkill.

That is, it would be overkill for the mother, not necessarily the child.

Day school students who learn in a synagogue as well as day school encounter a different and sometimes off putting culture of learning. For the day school student learning in the synagogue must be conducive to engagement and enjoyable. The same mother who sent her child to the pre-B'nai mitzvah program had an older child who participated in the confirmation program at the Temple. However, her daughter had a miserable experience during the process because she was operating with a different set of operating instructions from the rest of her classmates. She was there with a completely different approach to Jewish learning. Due to the fact that she grew up at day school, she had developed the habit of disciplined, consequence based<sup>1</sup> Jewish learning. However for her Religious school classmates, who had no such associations with Jewish learning, it was an extra and it was treated accordingly.

Our oldest daughter because she left the day school in 6th grade did end up going to confirmation and got confirmed. At first we imposed it and then we told her she did not have to go back. She did it for three years and every time it was time to re-enroll we told her it was up to her and she chose to go back and complained every time. Really what she complained about was that the other kids did not want to be there. She would have liked to have sat there and had the conversation and the discussion but the other kids were not interested. The teachers spent most of their time disciplining and she would come home very frustrated but she would go back each time. So did she get a lot out of it? I don't know, probably not, probably just self-fulfillment that she accomplished the task.

Day school families view the synagogue as a place for life cycle events. A mother of a 5th grader at the Reform Jewish day school described the role of

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<sup>1</sup> In other words she was graded on the quality of her Jewish learning

synagogue as being limited to life cycle events because day school families have only limited relationships with the Rabbis:

Being a day school with a Temple, we hardly feel the presence of the Temple at all outside of dues and high holyday tickets and you do your bar or bat mitzvah stuff there. It is hard to be connected to the rabbi unless you somehow found some personal connection. I was at a community organizing meeting full of very involved elementary school moms and they all said they feel no connection to the synagogue. One mom who is beyond involved came to me and said I don't know which Rabbi to choose for my son's bar-mitzvah because I don't know any of them. We have awesome Rabbis across the way just nobody knows them.

The Community Day School admissions director explained that most of her day school parents do not look to join a synagogue until it comes time for the B'nai Mitzvah:

A lot of our families may belong to different temples, but a lot of them have no desire in their early years because they feel we are meeting that spiritual need. But when they creep closer to the bar mitzvah year, they join Temples because they need their kids to be bat mitzvahed. They are immersed in it every day here.

The admissions director agrees that day school families only use the synagogue because they perceive a need to have a b'nai mitzvah at the Temple. However, even the draw of b'nai mitzvah celebration does not always work. As one mother put it at the Reform Day School she had no connection to the Rabbi or the Temple because she had her children's B'nai Mitzvah in Israel. Therefore, a family has alternatives for life cycle events beyond the Temple.

In contrast to the mother who saw religious school as superfluous for her daughter, one Rabbi makes the opposing argument that the more the better. This Rabbi actually sends his child to both the local day school and the religious school. While it is true that he is a Rabbi and therefore it is not quite the same as a lay family

that would choose this same option, even among Rabbis this type of decision is extremely rare. Ultimately, this Rabbis argument is that the synagogue builds muscle memory for Jewish practice and life. It is the gym where one gets to live out and exercise all their religious muscles in unique supervised ways. By sending his child to the Religious school his son is strengthening and getting to exercise Jewish muscles that he cannot in his day school. He says:

My six year old loves it and he has friends that are in both places. He loves them all and hangs out with them all. I think it is of vital importance for him to be at the synagogue because it is his home, because the synagogue is the center of the Jewish universe so of course my kid has to be at religious school at the synagogue. He learns different things. I think day schools are incredible to build Jewish identity but I also think that because we put so many eggs in that one basket, because it seems like day school is going to cover it all, that we forget that religious school covers a lot of stuff. I think religious school does a very good job of mechanics of Hebrew, and really celebrating the chagim because you come to your shul to celebrate the chagim. I think we provide a different mechanics system at the religious school level and synagogue and I think they are partners for how the day school works. For me it's a given.

Another disincentive that discourages day school families from engaging with the synagogue is a feeling of being an outsider. Engagement in the synagogue is potentially uncomfortable for a Day School family because the adults either do not know anyone outside the school or because they are not knowledgeable enough about how to put into practice the meaning behind the customs and rituals their children are learning in school. One family at the Reform day school made Synagogue participation a priority after several years in the day school without participating in Synagogue life. They decided that if they were really serious about Jewish living for their children they had to be serious about it for themselves. Therefore they decided to start attending services every Friday night:

When we started coming to Friday night services the Temple stopped being a day school and started being a Temple. We didn't know the rabbis back then. We would look at the cantor then and we were so scared of him. And today my husband is one of his boys. We were afraid of the cantor. We were intimidated by being with the big people. . . The first time I went I felt so out of place I didn't know anyone not even him. So I pushed myself. Being uncomfortable. Until we got to know people and then the rabbis and cantor knew me by my name and it made me feel more comfortable.

One parent said that for her the added value of the synagogue is the relationship she has with the Rabbis. She described how great it is that the Rabbis know her children and that her children feel very at home at the synagogue:

And I think that's what the synagogue brings is the fact that the kids have such an incredible relationship with the rabbis. They know each and every one of them. And each of the rabbis knows our kids by first name... For example the fact that when our daughter goes to the youth lounge she's at home, she knows everybody my name. The same thing with our son. It's part of their world.

Day school families, by and large however, merely see the Rabbi as the master of ceremonies for their child's bar or bat mitzvah. The same is true for other life cycle events as well. They see the Rabbi, not as the person to help guide them spiritually through life, but a master of ceremonies who comes out and runs the important events of their family's life.

As one mother at the Reform day school put her lack of relationship to the Rabbis: "I am not that connected to the Rabbis... I am not that connected to the Rabbis here because I did not do the kids B'nai mitzvah here, I did them at the kotel."

Therefore the question for the Rabbi is do they want to be seen as more than officiators of life cycle events? If they do, an effort needs to be made by the Rabbis. Unfortunately one day school mother reported that when she asked the Rabbis to be more present they turned her down:

It is what I used to tell the Rabbis, come and do carpool once a month. The Temple is very separated. It is like they are up high and we are down low. For three years we talked about the Rabbis coming and doing coffee talk and the carpool once a month for fifteen minutes. And they said it's not a good use of my time. They said they would not know everyone's name so they would not do it. If the Rabbi is only on the pulpit coming in and out it's not going to work, you're not going to build community that way.

One Rabbi saw his role with religious school families as a model for the role of the Rabbi with day school families:

I do a pre-consecration meeting with every parent that is new to our school. The parents get a chance to study with me, and we talk about who is doing the consecrating. We look at the Talmudic text about the parent's obligation to their kids, one of which is to teach Torah. I say well what does that mean? Why did you send them to us to teach them Torah? And then I say if you are counting on us to teach your kid how to love being Jewish then I have bad news for you because at the end of the day we can't do it without your partnership. Anything we teach your child and send them home to you and you feel awkward about the fact that you don't have the same knowledge that they do, or it's not of interest to you, your kids will quickly pick up on that, or the parent tried and was unable to engage in it in a meaningful way. No model is more important to them than you are.

There is an institutional assumption that day school families are part of a separate community by both the synagogue and the day school. One mother had been a member of the day school and Temple for twenty years. She had two older sons in college and a younger one in fourth grade. Her older sons went through the day school and her younger son was now in a local public school. Towards the end of the year last year she was thinking of dropping her Temple membership and joining another synagogue with a family from her son's public school. She told the religious school director and the director immediately called one of the Rabbis who had done this mother's older sons bar mitzvah's. After a lengthy conversation between the Rabbi and her she decided to stay at the Temple. In her 20 years at

the synagogue, this was only her third conversation with any Rabbi. She had one conversation each for her older two sons Bar Mitzvah's and this one as she was thinking about leaving. Whether intentional or unintentional the message that was sent to this congregant is that she was peripheral to the Rabbis and to the synagogue, therefore, the synagogue became peripheral to her life.

One entry point for a Day School family at a synagogue is programs. At the reform community day school's Temple the women's group is floundering. One day school family talked about showing up to the women's group but everyone there was over seventy. Perhaps a reason the women's group failed is because the younger women from the day school who showed up did not see the program as reflective of who they were or how they saw themselves. When this happens a day school family will stop showing up to the synagogue because they are not around people they think are like them. Juxtapose this to the fact that at the day school when a family shows up they see and interact with people that they see as very much like themselves. In the end day school parents feel synagogue programming is not programmed for them.

### Chapter 3 Conclusions

This research has painted a picture of day school families and their reasons for choosing day schools and the roles that synagogues can serve in their lives. Perhaps, the way a synagogue engages and relates to a day school and day school families can serve as a model for how synagogues can engage all families in synagogue life. What day school families need for the synagogue to do is educate them and compel them to think that life in the synagogue is a worthwhile venture for them and their family.

The greatest hurdle facing synagogues in terms of engaging day school families is that the day school provides so much for a Jewish family that the synagogue, by its nature, cannot provide. At a synagogue one has to wait for a break in the academic year or summer to plan a Temple Israel trip, or hope that a family will show up for a special Shabbat program. Yet, in the day school Israel and Shabbat can be built in as natural components of the school year. By making Israel and Shabbat a part of the school year it allows for increased participation and exposure to both. While this will not necessarily lead to a deeper practice of Shabbat or connection to Israel by the family, it does increase the likelihood of both participation and practice of these two Jewish identity builders. As a result day school families see their Israel and Shabbat needs as being met by the school and not the synagogue.

Conversely, however, the synagogue can benefit from this increased Shabbat and Israel awareness. The reality that day schools can make a theoretical conversation about Israel or Shabbat a reality is incredibly profound. Day schools

can help synagogues by providing high levels of Jewish literacy to help turn concepts into reality. The synagogue can build on the learning and passion that a day school family starts with in the school. Thereby the day school becomes a feeder to deeper and larger Jewish living. As a result, the day school is not an ends but rather a means for deeper Jewish expression and engagement.

While there is unarguably added value to sending ones child to a Jewish day school in terms of Jewish literacy and identity formation it also needs to be kept in mind that day school education has limitations. Jewish literacy is not the same thing as Jewish practice. One can learn about all the facets of Shabbat but still not practice or integrate the Sabbath into their lives. The idea that literacy and practice are the same is the great mistaken notion of Jewish day schools by both parents and the day schools themselves. Day schools can teach the academics of Judaism but they are not necessarily effective at creating Jewish practice in terms of both ritual and ethics. The reason for this is that there is a certain coercive nature to Jewish practice in a day school due to the fact that it is easier to mandate practice because of the academic overlay of the school.

Jewish day schools are schools; they are not the real world. Jewish education in a day school cannot be an end in and of itself because the learning is always academic and not practical. The nature of school is that it is practice and preparation for the real world, not the real world itself. The reality is that the school does not truly have the ability to translate that academic learning into actual practice or a Jewish ethic. As was pointed out earlier, there is a coercive element to day



school living in that the students and families are being required to participate, rather than choosing it on their own.

One area in which the day schools excel is in setting expectations on the day school families. When the members of a day school and synagogue are bought into the mission of community it creates a very powerful dynamic. The difference between engaged and disengaged community is in the expectation placed on its members. What is the expectation that the institution places on its family members? What does it mean to be a part of this place? Day school families will meet the expectation of the day school because they are bought into its mission and want their children to succeed academically. The synagogue has a tougher time because the mission of the synagogue and the mission of the congregant may be at odds. However, when the synagogue is able to communicate that message effectively and get parental buy in parents tend to step up because that is what is expected of them. Involvement goes along with expectation; however, involvement has the added implication that without the individual being involved this institution cannot function. It sends a very powerful message to parents that without them the school cannot function. Without parent involvement the school will fail. This sentiment to creating community cannot just be a platitude it must be true. Take for instance this one community building program done at the Community day school:

Every year around May we (the PTA) start calling the new families who are starting in September to welcome them to the Community day school, so it starts really early on. Then during the summer the buddy family calls the new family and they invite them to get together and can do anything as little as a 45 minute yogurt to coming over for dinner. Of course sometimes the families click and sometimes not, but this way when the new kid comes in they already know a face. It is a really big thing for us as a board to really

make people feel included and a part of the community. They really push community.

There is no reason for the synagogue not to adopt similar models of expectation and community building. The day school has the advantage of coercion that the synagogue does not. However, the synagogue has the opportunity for building community through empowerment rather than coercion.

One Rabbi at a Temple with a day school summarized the mission of Jewish Day school education as follows:

The Mission of Day School is to develop kids who are comfortable with their Jewish identity who are literate who have enough skills to navigate their lives as Jews to feel they have a responsibility to the Jewish past and Jewish future and Tikun Olam and that they want to continue their study as life-long Jews and life-long learners.

Therefore it is incumbent upon the rest of the Jewish community to support the graduates of Jewish Day Schools to provide them with opportunities to express their Jewish learning in authentic and real ways in the world.

Even though there are those who definitely say that synagogue is not necessary for a day school family as a result of these interviews it does seem that the synagogue can serve functions for the day school family beyond life cycle events. Day School families by and large do not see the value of synagogue attendance. Day school attendance is seen as sufficient to the family and synagogue attendance is redundant for them. However, the synagogue can provide areas of Jewish connection and growth the day school cannot provide. First it can provide an elevated Jewish experience that is not the role of the day school. The synagogue has the potential to take the practical material learned in the school and bring it to

life. However, the synagogue and day school families both have to see the synagogue as able to serve a broader scope of needs in their lives than just worship, learning, and life cycle. Rather the synagogue needs to be seen as a *beit Kenneset*, a place where Jews gather to experience the wide range of Jewish spiritual and cultural moments on their spiritual journey through life.

Day school families can be engaged with the synagogue through complementary experiences to school. In this case a complementary experience would take the form of certain trips such as a teen youth trip to Israel, or camping or working with religious school kids. While it is true that the day school offers all of these activities an argument could be made that the overlay of the academics for these activities in the school diminishes the family and student's ability to build a true passion for Jewish life. Also, if a child or family from the day school is out with the Temple making Jewish choices the motivation for the Jewish choice is being made of that Jews own volition as opposed to because it is being forced upon them by a school standard.

If a day school child is going to get anything out of synagogue learning and life, the learning they do at the synagogue must be qualitatively different from what they do in their school. It is hard for day school families to see the added value of synagogue because one of the primary modes of engaging congregants at a synagogue is learning, which is what their kids do at the day school. However, synagogues provide a unique space for a unique type of learning. Learning in a synagogue needs to be complementary and enhance the learning that takes place in day schools by studying issues about the student's soul and spirit and not just

teaching literacy of a text. The learning that goes on in a synagogue can be academic however it should speak more to how people live their lives and what Judaism says about how to help them live as fulfilling a life as possible. By contrast the overarching goal of day school should be building Jewish literacy. The ability to talk about their lives as individuals is what day school students find compelling about synagogue. At the school they receive the foundational skills but it is through the synagogue that they can deepen their connection to the texts they have studied while also expanding and exploring their own social emotional toolbox. The synagogue also provides an opportunity to teach parents Judaism which the day school does not provide.

However, overcoming the school standard or presenting a different type of learning is not what prevents day school families from engaging. It is the logistics of making time for synagogue and the parental perception that synagogue attendance is of diminishing value for their children that prevents Day school families from engaging in synagogue life.

It is very hard for the mother who said synagogue would be overkill for her day school daughter to imagine that the Temple has anything to truly offer her day school child. Although they are active members of both the day school and the Temple she laments the fact her kids have no connection to the Temple. However, she also acknowledges that engagement would be overkill for her because it is seen by her to be redundant and logistically inconvenient. One added bonus of synagogue life for a day school student becomes clear as she continues to talk about her daughters experience and that is her child has the opportunity to meet

other kids through Temple. Therefore, one tangible bonus a Temple offers to a day school family is a chance to meet Jews outside their immediate school community. However, it must also be asked why a family would want to meet more people? Given the busy lives of American Jews and the interviews conducted it seems these families do not have time for the friends they have much less the time to make and keep new friendships. However, as was the case here, it was not the idea that these other students in the Bnai Mitzvah class would become her new best friends. What her daughter got out of the B'nai Mitzvah class was that she enjoyed the time she spent with the other students in the activity they were engaged in while at Temple. Therefore, perhaps it is not the ability to meet people but the ability to create sacred time with people in a Jewish activity that a Temple truly offers the day school family.

Both this mom and the admissions director at the community Day School say that the day school families get “it” at day school without specifying what “it” actually means. Is it learning? Is it Jewish living? Is it worship? Is it life cycles? Is it all of them? Is there something that “it” does not cover for the day school family in terms of developing a well-rounded Jewish family that is passionate and living Jewish values?

One “it” that the day school family does not get in the day School is the ability to live a Jewish life that they choose. Schools have requirements while synagogues have choices. So long as the overlay of requirement is present, which it is in a day school, a family is never actually ever choosing to live Jewish, they are to a certain degree, living Judaism by default. Therefore, the true value of synagogue for a day school family is the opportunity to experience Judaism. It is one thing to talk about

ritual, practice, belief, and philosophy. It is quite another to put those conversations into practice in a non-coercive environment. When a family comes to synagogue to engage in ritual or a youth group event they are putting themselves in the position to experience Judaism and feel all the things one would want them to feel about being Jews but they are doing it because they choose to not because of a school requirement. Once they have made the choice of day school every choice after that ceases to be a choice and becomes a requirement.

One area where day school families choose synagogue is life cycle events. Day school families do want life cycle events from their Temple. While this may not be the case in 10-20 years from now, as of now the primary place Jews go to practice life cycle is the Temple. However, interviews have shown that the less Jews feel a connection to the Rabbis, synagogue and larger Jewish community, the less they will want to use the synagogue for life cycle events. There is a true opportunity in the synagogue to create community around life cycle events so that it is not just a family celebrating the simcha but a celebration by the whole community.

What does it mean that one of the Rabbis did not see the added value of synagogue involvement for a day school student beyond life cycle? Is this a marginalization of the synagogue? Does her line of reasoning reinforce the thought that for day school families that Judaism is by its nature supplementary to life? By making the synagogue only about life cycle and social considerations it has the potential to drain Judaism of its rich nutritional value to feed and energize every aspect of a person's life. When the message is sent that Judaism is only about life cycle and literacy it has the potential to communicate to day school families that

Judaism is a dusty book we take off the shelf only when it is needed. Synagogue should be the place to model a daily Jewish practice that goes beyond the walls of the day schools.

Some families do see an added value in synagogue attendance beyond just worship and life cycle. Consider the powerful message the family that chose to overcome their discomfort and be active in the synagogue sent to their children about Jewish life by engaging in the larger Jewish community. They said to their children that Day School learning was not enough for them. They modeled that in order to live Jewish one has to take their Judaism into the world and it must be of one's own choice. They also showed their children that Jewish engagement can be initially uncomfortable and that discomfort must be pushed through. The modeling of the importance of Judaism that Day School parents would do by showing up and participating in synagogue life is invaluable. What they model is that Judaism is not just something a person learns, it is something a person lives.

However, once the initial social discomfort of feeling out of place in the synagogue is pushed through by the day school family synagogues must create conducive environments for learning and engagement. Consider the daughter who attended confirmation and was miserable. If perhaps the confirmation teacher had been more intentional about setting the ground rules and expectations of learning then the daughter and her classmates learning would not have been such a painful experience. Conversation is only engaging and meaningful when people understand the rules and buy into wanting to play the game by those same rule. In the confirmation class what foundation were they working from? The fact that this girl

had a day school foundation meant she was working from a different foundation which put her at odds with her classmates because there were different behavioral expectations.

The day school can teach a person the skill of reading Rashi but it is the Temple that allows that student or family to talk about what the text means to them. That is not to say that a day school teacher would not have the personal meaning conversation with their students. However, because the personal connection is not really relevant to the skill being acquired in the day school curriculum the synagogue is in a unique position in their learning environments to have conversations about the personal meaning of the text.

Where a day school cannot compete with a synagogue is that a day school by its nature is a time limited experience for the family. Synagogue on the other hand has the potential to be a lifetime anchor for a family and is not limited to a certain period of time. As a result of the Rabbis knowing the one day school family's children and them feeling at home in the synagogue, these children and parents have an anchor that can last their whole life. Even if the Rabbis leave, the family will still have a relationship with the place that is not limited to the years of enrollment as it is in a day school.

Another unique aspect of a synagogue community as opposed to a day school or camp community is time. The synagogue community is uninterrupted in the cycle of the year and is available throughout a family's lifetime. However, in my interviews day school families did not see this aspect of synagogue as important or compelling for them. They see their lives as too busy and the community piece



being taken care of in their other Jewish worlds of day school and/or camp.

Therefore they do not want the community that the Temple is offering.

The current model in Jewish life is that day school and synagogue are parallel. An alternative model is for Synagogue and Day School to serve complimentary purposes. What the Rabbi who sends his child to both Religious school and day school means by the idea that synagogue is the center of the Jewish universe is that synagogue has the potential to provide a place for day school families to plug in the Jewish identity they have built in the day school. As a result, for this Rabbi day school families need to realize that their day school education is not going to cover every aspect of Jewish living. Day school teaches the meaning behind Jewish living, but cannot, in and of itself, create passionate Jewish living. The synagogue must provide an experience the day school cannot because a day school family feels their Jewish life is fulfilled by the day school when perhaps there are areas of Jewish life that could be enhanced for these families by the synagogue.

The greatest challenge to Synagogue engagement for day school families is that people choose, at a maximum, three or four areas to be engaged in during their day-to-day lives. Home and work are the first two for a Jewish day school family and school and, perhaps, synagogue are the third and fourth. As a result of this synagogue involvement is seen as an extra-curricular activity. It is enjoyable but not something people are inclined to devote their free time to if it is placed after their third choice. As one mom who used to be in the Religious school at the Reform Day School described her feeling about synagogue involvement "Your priority is where your kids are in school all day... I think synagogue is almost like an extra-curricular

activity so it is hard to plan on investing part of your time also there.” As a result of this seeing synagogue as an extra-curricular activity the question should be raised, how does the synagogue elevate itself in the lives of the day school family?

All the people interviewed seemed to have a need and desire for community. However, for whatever reason, be it time, desire, convenience or something else community was defined by belonging to three or four institutions at the most. Be they day school and synagogue, day school and camp or day school and something else, the limit seems to be about two extra after family, and work. After a family is involved in two communities there seems to come a point of diminishing returns for them and redundancy to be affiliated and associated with more than that many. Therefore, the synagogue must figure out ways to elevate their level of importance for day school families.

For day school families the Rabbi and synagogue are seen as almost synonymous. In order to increase the visibility of the synagogue in day school families lives the Rabbis must be more present within the Day school. As one student put it to me he enjoyed the Rabbis story-telling and his perspective on the parasha. However, he also acknowledged not really knowing any of the rabbis at the Temple. When the role of the Rabbi becomes narrowed down to one or two functions and there is no real relationship between the Rabbi and the student, then the Rabbi becomes a caricature of him or herself. Unintentionally the Rabbi has distanced himself from the student’s everyday experience. As a result the student feels distanced from the Rabbi. Therefore when the Rabbi comes in to tell a story to the student it is like watching an actor on TV. They know the actor, or at least they

perceive they do, on some level. However, in reality they only tune in to be entertained for a short while.

The Rabbi has the choice of having a static or dynamic relationship with the families and students of day schools. If the Rabbi chooses static they will be defined by that one role and feel the distance between themselves and the students. If they choose a dynamic relationship, where they serve multiple roles and know the students and families as people instead of merely by name and role, then that distance between the two will shrink.

If the Rabbi acts as a guide and partner in helping to raise the parents and child and to help instill a Jewish ethic then perhaps day school families would be more likely to see the value of synagogue membership.

Therefore, in order to understand how to change the day school synagogue relationship and how to elevate the synagogue for the day school family it is beneficial to look at what role the Rabbi might play in a day school family's life. The Rabbi must be seen as an agent of engagement. Engagement does not just mean coming in and running a praying with parents, or telling a story. Engagement here means creating intimacy. A Rabbi's primary function for a day school family is presence. It is not that the day school families feel they need a Rabbi; however, they seem to be open to having a relationship. What ends up happening for these day school families is that because they have no relationship with the Rabbi or the synagogue they do not realize it is missing until they start to think about their child's bar or bat mitzvah. Then they realize they have been at a school with a Temple for ten years and they do not really know any of the clergy they would call "their Rabbis".

For many day school families the Rabbi is seen as a person who pops in and out of their lives. The Rabbi comes in and does a little song and dance and then leaves. In order to be the agent of engagement and to build the kind of warmth day school families desire the Rabbi needs to cease to play this role. One example of this was a 6th grade praying with parents at the Reform Day School. There was a room full of 6th graders with their parents. There was coffee set up and tables for the parents to socialize and chat before the 8:10 am event. However, there was no Rabbi or staff mixing with the parents or the families. The Rabbi comes in as the families sit down and the show begins. The message that is sent is that the Rabbi pops in tells a story and then pops out. A parallel message is being transmitted to the parents that Judaism can pop in and out of their lives as well. As the Rabbi tells a story of what the tallit means he has the parents bless their children. The message that becomes abundantly clear is that this is a siloed journey for each family sitting there. Take your tallit, bless your child and then leave by yourself.

When the Rabbi pops in and pops out of day school families lives he or she is modeling three things for the families. The first is that Judaism can and does pop in and out of one's life and is not a constant. The second is that the synagogue and Rabbi are not a consistent part of the families' lives and should not be counted on as such. The third is that by creating this type of dynamic it creates an unintended distance between the day school family and the Rabbi.

Even if the Rabbi does not like it they are the face of the synagogue and are consequently seen as the symbol of the synagogue. Therefore if a day school family has no real relationship with the Rabbi they will have no relationship with the

synagogue. The Rabbi must be the bridge for day school families to build vertical and horizontal relationships within the synagogue. Vertical relationships are those between the individual and the institution and horizontal relationships are those between people. Day school parents reported that they do not want to go to synagogue events because the people are old, it is uncool and quite frankly, they have no relationship with the institution (Vertical) or the people there (Horizontal). Therefore the Rabbi needs to serve as a bridge between these two domains. There is a social phobia that day school families have when they enter the synagogue that can only be spelled with exposure to the Rabbis and other families.

One way to accomplish this goal is for the Rabbi to see their role as being like that of a Mezuzah. By Mezuzah it is suggesting that one role of the Rabbi is not to actually do anything, rather it is merely to be present. Day school families more than anything else want to have that presence.

If the Rabbis expect day school families to step outside their comfort zone then the Rabbis need to model the same behavior on their end. Perhaps day school families do not see their Rabbi as their spiritual guide; however, it is the best role for the Rabbi to fill with day school families. As opposed to just being the person who pops in and pops out of their lives, the Rabbi could be the person who is their companion throughout their life journey, guiding them spiritually through all of life's transitions and moments, big and small.

One area that Jewish day schools can help synagogue education is helping to define the true purpose and breadth of Jewish education and how that purpose perhaps stands in contrast or complimentary to American life and education. All

parents, whether day school, private school or public school, prioritize the aspects of education that are important to them for their children. For some the priority is academics, for some it is status, for some it is about setting their children up for the future, some it is community and for some it is values. Day school families, that choose day school and do not just default to day school, mainly prioritize values over other considerations. They are less concerned with what their child will do then with the type of person they will become. As the admissions director at the Community day school said, “Most of our Families are looking for the values based education. The parents of four and five year olds want their kids to be menches, that is what they are looking for... they are really looking for that sense of community, to be menchy and to know right from wrong and be spiritually connected to their Judaism.” It is probably no surprise that for many people Judaism is the source from which they identify their values. Therefore, it is the pedagogy of Jewish education that day schools can help to illuminate. That pedagogy is that education is about the process of helping develop a whole and well-rounded individual.

Besides character development Jewish education by its nature provides critical thinking skills. The Talmud is one large document on the ethic of critical thinking. It is definitely true that one reason for parents choosing a day school is that their child will obtain critical thinking skills. Judaism plays many roles in a person's life. One of the primary roles is learning. However, Judaism does not teach what to think as much as it teaches how to think. Judaism challenges its adherents to wrestle with issues and examine and explore them. Judaism requires its learners to take an issue and learn it and look at it from all sides. As one 8<sup>th</sup> grader put it: “To

me Judaism means questioning, there is always room to question". After eight plus years at a day school this student's take away from his learning was questioning which reflects critical thinking. Isidor I. Rabi, the Nobel laureate in physics was once asked, "Why did you become a scientist, rather than a doctor or lawyer or businessman, like the other immigrant kids in your neighborhood?" "My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: 'So? Did you learn anything today?' But not my mother. She always asked me a different question. 'Izzy,' she would say, 'did you ask a good question today?' That difference - asking good questions -made me become a scientist!"<sup>2</sup> Similarly a day school can help illuminate that the value of critical thinking is the purpose for giving a child and family a Jewish education.

Another theme that came up over and over again was a sense of responsibility and continuity. The question is does the day school student whose parent feel this value so acutely look at the responsibility for continuity as a burden or as a source of pride? If it is a burden then it does not seem that Jewish engagement will endure. If, however, continuity is a point of pride it has the potential to strengthen the child's sense of Jewish identity.

Another area that was addressed in terms of the day school family and synagogue relationship was community. Is the community at a day school redundant to the community at a synagogue or supplementary to that Jewish community? Community is a major consideration for a day school family. Jewish day schools have a certain atmosphere. To the families that choose the day school

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/01/19/opinion/l-izzy-did-you-ask-a-good-question-today-712388.html>

they feel differently when they are there. They feel embraced and welcomed and they feel that for their kids. It is almost impossible to artificially create an affect, however, Jewish day schools at their best will make the people who enter feel differently and feel positively. The day school has an advantage over the synagogue in that because the people are there every day it is easier, to a certain degree, to create that atmosphere. Therefore, it is incumbent on the Synagogue to be more intentional about creating a community atmosphere that is supplementary to the community atmosphere at the day school. When a day school family enters the synagogue campus it needs to show that family that the community there is qualitatively different from the day school community.

Community is where one feels as comfortable at the place they are as they do at home. Day schools create this sense of home because the students and the parents feel a sense of ownership and empowerment about the place. The same could be said to be true of summer camps. However, synagogues have a much tougher battle to create that home feeling because the sense of ownership is mainly thrust upon the clergy and not necessarily shared by the congregant.

One reason that a parent feels a part of the day school community in a shul with a school is that they seem themselves reflected in that community. They say, probably subconsciously, I am a parent, this is a place for parents, and therefore, this is a place for me. If a mom who sees herself as a young parent goes to a women's event and see older parents and empty nesters there, she does not see herself reflected in the gathering and thereby feels uncomfortable and does not return.



The issue that a synagogue with a day school has is that the synagogue cannot send that message that without the family's involvement the synagogue will fail. Instead the message that is sent to day school families is that all the Temple wants is their dues. There are unintended consequences that are sent with membership dues. While the desire is to create community the message that is sent by requiring dues in addition to tuition is that it is not your engagement in community that we desire it is your money. Granted places have operating expenses, however, great care needs to be taken in analyzing the message that is sent with due requirements if community building is an important criteria.

Another reason families choose day schools is because of a sense of warmth. Perhaps it is a mere by product of Jewish community and Jewish schools but the parents all point to the warmth of the community as the greatest positive to day school involvement. In order to get people to not take the warmth of an institution for granted they must feel it acutely when they are not at the day school or synagogue. This is done with phone calls, greeting families as they come and go, talking to parents about their children's successes, knowing what is going on in a family's home life and making sure the family knows they are missed when they are gone.

One factor has become abundantly clear in terms of the ability of a synagogue to play a role in a day school family's life: For the synagogue to engage these families the synagogue needs to be involved in the life of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah long before the ceremony. In order to get Jews to be lifelong Jews Rabbis and the synagogue need to establish lifelong relationships. The best way to fix post B'nai mitzvah drop out is with pre b'nei mitzvah engagement.

The best way for both day schools and synagogues to fix the post b'nai mitzvah dropout rates is for Jewish institutions to see each other as resources not competition. As institutions in the Jewish world grow and become more independent they seem to become more isolationist in their nature. Synagogues provide an invaluable resource for day schools that they cannot provide for themselves and that is year round Jewish living. The ideal of a Jewish Day school education would be to take the concept of tikkun olam and learn about it and then put it into practice in the synagogue. The reason tikkun olam in a synagogue is different than community service opportunities in the day school is that the child and family are making it their choice with no ulterior motive for reward. The only thing motivating their Jewish choice is the desire to engage in a Jewish activity. Conversely the synagogue can utilize the day school for learning opportunities and academic engagement for its families. If it is true that we are entering a post-denominational era it would behoove both day schools and synagogues to partner up and see each other as resources to better impact their Jewish clientele's quality of Jewish life and engagement.

There are two implications for day schools and synagogues to be drawn from the fact that some observe that Judaism is entering a post-denominational era. The idea that we are entering a post denominational era seems to be indicative of the fact that people do not want to be told what to do or how to practice their Judaism. The sovereign self<sup>3</sup> means that not only do people want to make up their own minds about how to practice their Judaism they see it as their right. People want to search but want to come to their own conclusions about how to practice. As a result of this

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<sup>3</sup> THE SOVEREIGN SELF: JEWISH IDENTITY IN POST-MODERN AMERICA by Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen

post-denominational phenomena synagogues will have to become more about a thing than a movement. Therefore, rather than synagogue being a catchall for Jewish life one synagogue might be about social justice and another be about community. The people interviewed seem to not want to subscribe to a philosophy anymore but rather are gravitating towards being able to choose a synagogue that reflects their interests and a day school that lets them choose.

Therefore day schools and synagogue need to ask themselves not just what is their individual institutions goals but what is the super goal of what they are trying to accomplish? What is the goal of all this Jewish learning? Each institution needs to ask themselves not only what they hope to accomplish with their curriculum but what true success looks like for the Jewish people. For some of the Rabbis interviewed true success is when a congregant or day school graduate goes out into the world and makes Jewish choices. For one day school I observed they developed a portrait of a graduate which described what a child leaving their school could do and what they would do Jewishly once out in the world.

Whatever the ultimate goal is it behooves all Jewish institutions to examine the question of what does the finished product look like out there in the world. Being Jewish is a process of which we are never finished, however, it should be incumbent upon Jewish institutions to also be concrete in their desired outcomes. By doing this one can not only measure success but take something which is very abstract and concretize it for the Jewish community. Many of the people interviewed did not think about the abstracts of God and spirituality, they thought in terms of practice and observance. This reflects the fact that people, by and large, measure their

experience in concrete not abstract terms. When the synagogue and day school says this is what we want to turn out it gives the congregant and day school family something real and concrete to aspire to achieve. How wonderful would it be if both institutions could figure out how working together could accomplish these goals? Education and choice of attending day school for families is about the type of person that is produced. All the parents interviewed wanted to see their kids be good, responsible, happy citizens of the world. Synagogues and day schools each accomplish this in their own way with some redundancy and overlap. However, there is also a complimentary nature to what these two institutions provide families. If they were to come together they could produce Jews who were both incredibly literate and whose expression of Jewish living was passionate and life-long.

It should be noted that families did see some value in being part of a synagogue beyond life cycle events. However, there is a value to synagogue for a day school family beyond life cycle. In addition there is value for the synagogue for day having engaged day school families. Due to the religious nature of Judaism synagogue is able to focus on the soul of a day school family. Peter Benson<sup>4</sup> in his work on human thriving identified three components to helping human beings thrive. He said everyone needs a spark champion; someone who champions for that individuals success. He identified that there are three types of spark champions: Parents, teachers and the community. The synagogue serves as the community area of spark champions allowing a child to truly thrive while the day school provides the teacher. By being able to take special notice of the day school families the synagogue together with the day school increases the families chance to thrive.

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<sup>4</sup> "Sparks: How Parents Can Ignite the Hidden Strengths of Teenagers" by Peter L. Benson,

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