

FORUM III

On Being a Role Model for Professional Behavior Within the Jewish Community

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For much of my life I have respected the argument of the very Orthodox who have argued that even the slightest deviation from or bending of the rules may begin a process, perhaps inexorable, of breaking or ignoring even more practices until there may be no more rules left to break. Of course, there is merit to this view.

Also for much of my life I have respected the argument of those who have argued with equal persuasiveness that practice, policy, or principle must be examined and evaluated in relation to a specific context and where actual behavior takes place. Without this flexibility, they argue, Jewish individuals and Judaism may not survive. And, of course, there is also merit to this view.

In order to reconcile these two views, one must not only understand the consequences of behavior but also the manner through which rules evolve; that is, the process. Knowing when to be flexible and when to question the rules is an ongoing matter. It is the purpose of this article to explore this process.

Why do we revere Moses who was an order taker of the first magnitude? Why do we revile Adolf Eichmann, also an order taker of the first magnitude? Why do we personify Moses, the order taker or servant to God, in our tradition as "good"? Why do we personify Eichmann, the order taker or servant to Adolph Hitler and to the Nazi government, as evil? And how does Aaron fit into this schema of good or evil? These questions have been of increasing personal interest to me as I consider my own evolution as a human being, as a Jew, and as a professional whose discipline has been to deliver service through being human.

DEFINITIONS

Because the phrases "role model," "evil," "victim mentality," and "professional" are essential to this discussion, they are defined below.

A *role model* is not seen as an exemplar but as an example. He or she may not necessarily be someone whose behavior ought to be emulated but someone to know in order either to emulate totally, emulate partially, or reject.

Evil is behavior that has the potential of bringing harm to another. It may be the consequence of either action or inaction. It is not necessary for the intent to be harmful. Rather, *the potential consequences of the behavior* determine whether a person has, intentionally or unintentionally, perpetrated an evil act.

Consider the *victim mentality*: "The devil made me do it" was a response that Flip Wilson, a noted comedian of the 1960s, used weekly while playing one of his characters, Geraldine. Guaranteed to get a laugh when he tried to explain away something that he knew he should not have done, it obviously struck a familiar and personal response in the viewer. It parodied a normal human response to deny ownership for doing something unpleasant. It speaks to the victim mentality in each of us. Other, often-heard victim mentality phrases include "I'm sorry, it's policy," ". . . but, I'm only doing my job," "I'm only following orders," "it's not in the budget," "why me," or "since I knew that this is what they would want me to do, I went ahead and implemented it," often followed by, or at least inferred, "without even being told or asked."

Persons who experience true calamities

(i.e., catastrophic illness or accidents clearly not within their immediate control) may respond as a "why me" victim or in a more affirmative manner. Sometimes, this process leads from victimization to affirmation and at other times from affirmation to feeling victimized.

Jerry Harvey, (1988), professor of management science at the George Washington University, has suggested that often victims may participate as partners with perceived oppressors in helping a tragedy to happen. In referring to Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann In Jerusalem* (1963), he suggests that certain aspects of the Holocaust might not have happened had the Jews in some European communities, through their Councils, been outspoken and resistant, rather than cooperative and compliant.

Catastrophes can befall anyone. How we position ourselves in relation to the circumstance determines whether we own the circumstance or whether it continues to own us. How we respond determines whether we are acting as victims or as professionals.

In 1988 the Association of Jewish Center Workers chose to substitute the term "professionals" for the word "workers"; it is now called the "Association of Jewish Center Professionals." This was no small decision. Being merely workers at least provided us with an excuse. A mere worker may, with some understanding, use excuses for doing unpleasant or unethical things. A professional can use no such excuses.

Being a professional involves the following shared commitments:

- To serve humanity and, through that service, to improve society
- To transcend personal, monetary, or other tangible gain; service to a clearly defined and mutually agreed-upon clientele is *the* priority
- To understand that a handshake or one's word is as morally binding as a written contract is legally binding and indeed that they are solemnly interchangeable
- To be supportive of and helpful to colleagues in the pursuit of common, mu-

tually agreed-upon purposes and goals

- To heed seriously Hillel's rhetorical questions: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?"
- To share a common view of the world through a commitment to a common code of ethics that articulates shared values *and to act within those behavioral guidelines*
- To have a shared knowledge base
- To know that service delivery is *through the profession*, that the primary identity as a professional is *to the profession*, as well as to other professionals, rather than to any one place, any specific group of clients, or certainly to one's self; "over-identification" with the client is considered *bad professional practice*
- To understand that one's professional behavior is equally appropriate at any place or with any group of clients and reflects upon the profession, as well as upon colleagues, wherever they practice
- To appreciate that the behavior of colleagues who are long gone affects us today just as our behavior will affect colleagues in the future
- To truly understand and accept as a commitment that responsibility to the profession transcends responsibility to a board of directors or committees; in fact, because the profession is expected to stand behind the practitioner, support at least in theory ought not to be far away; at no professional level and among professional levels is the relationship ever intended to become adversarial
- To emphasize cooperation between agencies and among colleagues in order to maximize service delivery to a mutually agreed-upon clientele
- To understand that any professional is expected to practice that profession in any city, in any part of the world, at any time in history, as a calling no less sacred than the calling of any recent seminary graduate; the phrase "caring professional" can never be allowed to be perceived as an oxymoron

Considering this conceptualization, have we deviated from these professional principles?

ON MOSES, AARON, AND EICHMANN

Moses

It would appear that God made a wise choice in selecting Moses as servant. God must have sensed potential in Moses that is not readily apparent to the reader of the biblical text. Consider that by the time Moses and our Deity have their first face-to-burning bush encounter Moses has settled into a rather ignominious life. He has already killed one human being, albeit for beating a Hebrew, and buried the evidence. Rather than face the consequences of a trial, he runs away (Exodus 2:11-15). He is extraordinarily reluctant to accept the role God has selected for him and has become quite insecure. He questions his ability to follow through and admits to being inarticulate (Exodus 4:10-13). Yet, God appears certain that Moses can be relied upon to follow his instructions, which he receives by the hundreds. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are filled with them. And they are followed meticulously and faithfully.

Without God's intervention Moses could not have emerged, certainly not have been remembered. In fact three of the four episodes found in Exodus where Moses appears to make his own decisions on behalf of his kinsmen—without our Deity's apparent intervention—could be interpreted as portraying Moses as either wicked or as a buffoon. (Exodus 2:11-15, 17:8-13, 32:26-28). Consider the episode in Exodus 17:8-13.

Amelek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim . . . (When) Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand Amelek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew very heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands; thus his hands remained steady until the sun set. And Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amelek.

At only one moment, totally on his own and confronting an angry God on Mt. Sinai, does he emerge as a true leader, alone and, as God would have it, without witnesses (Exodus 32:7-14).

Aaron

If God chose well in selecting Moses, I am reminded of myself and some other administrators I know when Aaron is also selected by our Deity. Aaron is articulate, apparently presents himself well, and is given the role of speaking for Moses who is speaking for God (Exodus 4:14-16). Although God has correctly sensed substance in Moses, our Deity's choice of Aaron brings the Hebrews, all 600,000 of them, perilously close to a Holocaust more complete and everlasting than that which even Adolf Hitler may have felt could be accomplished. "Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them" (Exodus 32:10).

Aaron, in Exodus, is what today's jargon refers to as a 'go-fer' and also appears to function well only when he follows orders given by another person. At Sinai, at least, he has a victim mentality and never understands the potential consequences of fashioning the Golden Calf.

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us." Aaron said to them, "Take off (your) gold rings . . . and bring them to me." This he took from them and *cast in a mold and made it into a Golden Calf . . .* (and) he built an altar before it (Exodus 32:1-5).

Even after he tells Moses an untruth about his role in preparing the Golden Calf in a much earlier version of Flip Wilson's "Geraldine," he is not only not punished but has already been promoted and is allowed to retain his position as our first Priest. Upon Moses' return to the foot of Mount Sinai after receiving the Ten Com-

mandments, Aaron explains the existence of the Golden Calf in this way:

Moses came near the camp and saw the Calf and the dancing . . . (and) said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them?" Aaron said, "Let not my lord be enraged. You know this people is bent on evil. They said to me, Make us a god to lead us . . . So I said to them, Whoever has gold, take it off! They gave it to me and I hurled it into the fire and out came this golden calf!" (Exodus 32:19-25).

Perhaps it continues to be a strength of we Jews neither to expect nor value perfection but to strive to make the world safe for fallibility.

Eichmann

How does Eichmann fit into this triad? There are more than superficial similarities between Moses, Aaron, and Eichmann. Eichmann's early life was undistinguished. He did not do well in school and never graduated from high school. His career was singularly unimpressive before he joined the Nazi Party. He had to leave his native environs to pursue a livelihood. He even enrolled in the wrong branch of the German military. "As far as he was concerned, it was all a misunderstanding and at first a great disappointment . . . 'In short, I had mistaken the Security Service of the Reichsfuhrer S.S. for the Reich Security Service . . . and nobody set me right and no one told me anything'" (Arendt, 1963, p. 36).

It was not until he was assigned to his bureaucratic niche and only had to follow, transmit, and implement orders that Eichmann came into his own. There is no evidence that he hated or bore animosity toward Jews. There is strong evidence that he had an above-average fondness for his family and community. He in no way saw himself as an "evil" person, nor probably did he see those around him as evil (Arendt, 1963).

Eichmann fit into his bureaucratic role

extraordinarily well. He followed orders, but did not take responsibility for their consequences. He viewed the following of orders as his moral responsibility (duty) rather than what the consequences of unquestioning order following would be. In short, Eichmann refused either to think or to take ownership for his actions. And because thinking, ownership for one's own behavior and ethical behavior are intertwined in our Jewish value system Eichmann became one of the legendary symbols of the Holocaust, a symbol that by far transcends the role he actually played.

Moses, Aaron, and Eichmann

Where do Moses, Aaron, and Eichmann differ? God in our tradition is not a dictator. God not only tells but listens. Personal disagreements with God occur, and God sometimes reconsiders. Ironically, through this model of interaction humans can help God become a better God, and, as a result, become even better and more faithful servants. With Abraham a transforming argument occurred at Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20-33). With Moses it was the glorious moment during his solitude at Sinai (Exodus 32:7-14). Here, in only ten sentences we experience the most pivotal point in Jewish history and the behavior that separates Moses from Aaron and Eichmann.

When God learns that Aaron and some large portion of the Hebrews are cavorting with the Golden Calf, apparently forgetting the wonders that God had performed for them within only the 3 preceding months, God is angered enough to propose annihilating all of the Hebrews. In addition, God offers Moses an opportunity to become the new Abraham: ". . . and (I will) make of you a great nation" (Exodus 32:10). God will fulfill the covenant with a new lineage emanating from Moses. What an opportunity for Moses!

To be in God's presence must be awesome enough. Consider being alone with a wrathful, vengeful, vindictive, angry,

spurned God who is in the process of transmitting such a gift as The Law, following so many miraculous deeds. In contrast to Abraham's pleas to save some individuals at Sodom and Gomorrah, at Mt. Sinai Moses is faced with the potential destruction of God's own chosen people. Not only does the whole future of the Jewish people revolve around this moment but this uncertain, self-questioning Moses who earlier hesitated to speak for God, let alone for himself, now has an opportunity to become the new Abraham simply by doing nothing, by going along, by behaving as a bystander. And there are no witnesses to know otherwise.

What would Aaron have done at that time and place? What would Eichmann have done?

What courage it must have taken for Moses to speak! What a risk for his own safety to disagree with this wrathful Deity. What a sense of responsibility to these former slaves, to try and calm down this God. Yet, what might God have thought of Moses after this potential Holocaust had Moses not intervened? Did God appreciate Moses' intervention? It seems to me that Moses not only helped the Israelites but helped God as well by preventing our Deity from destroying the Israelites.

This episode is but only one of four in which Moses acted on his own. The other three did not bring much credit to him. Moses as a role model demonstrates that appropriate intervention does not need to occur at each opportunity. However, it does need to occur *at least occasionally*. For us, it is a reminder that at least occasionally we have an obligation to risk and to rise above the mundane. A study of Aaron's behavior in Exodus shows his strong tendency to follow orders, to give in to the masses, and to be reluctant or unable to adhere to a modest standard of moral leadership. This tendency brought the Israelites perilously close to absolute extinction. Because in the end it was averted, this near tragedy is not only forgotten, but

Aaron continued in his role as our very first priest. The biblical text does not even list him as an accomplice to the destruction of 3,000 Israelites ordered by Moses when he descends from Sinai (Exodus 32:25-29). Aaron, in this story, is separated from Eichmann by results, not by behavior.

Similarly, there is no evidence that Eichmann chose to intervene. He too went along. He took, gave, and implemented orders. Yet, because his actions contributed to a clear-cut and measurable tragedy on a heretofore unprecedented scale, he is considered a direct participant in the Holocaust and one of its symbols.

BEHAVIOR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In this brief description of Moses, Aaron, and Eichmann we can see some examples of behavior and potential or actual consequences. Without some frame of reference (values), without a general awareness of when to intervene, without an occasional ability to risk and without an occasional willingness to separate oneself from the majority, any one (or all) of us, without meaning to, can become like Aaron or Eichmann and, perhaps, participate in creating small tragedies. Persons who become like them can fit into a bureaucratic niche very nicely and succeed without regard to the effect they may have upon their clientele. Indeed, they may not even be aware of the effect of their behavior.

In choosing a role model it is important to look at behavior and its consequences and then to decide which pattern of behavior is right or wrong for each of us. Doing so involves being aware of how our actions are perceived and consciously avoiding being or behaving as a victim. To avoid doing evil, we can also study the effects of behavior and foresee options that may develop as a result of intervention or absence of intervention.

The terms "victim" and "professional" may well be antonyms. The phrase "victimized professional" is a paradox. A com-

mitment to behave in a manner befitting a professional as described earlier and as based on Jewish values creates guidelines that are helpful in avoiding a victim mentality. These guidelines also help us avoid a more subtle spin-off of victim mentality, which is to identify with the captor (our clientele) and to become like Aaron or Eichmann.

Eichmanns are not made. They become. And they become so a tiny little bit at a time in a gradual step-by-small step process. Each succeeding step appears to be a little easier and, with the human ability to rationalize, increasingly more correct—or less wrong. It was well said by the late, great French film director, Jean Renoir, “On this earth, there is one thing which is terrible, and that is that everyone has his own good reasons.”

In our practice some examples of these small steps may be:

- Raising fees and thereby causing the needy to go through the embarrassment of asking for help, being turned away, or not even bothering to ask for the help they need
- Chipping away at scholarship dollars or making it more difficult for needy recipients to receive those dollars
- Adding gradually to job loads as staff numbers are reduced
- Shifting dollars from basic mission-oriented services that have an annoying tendency to need increasing subsidy to more glitzy and more popular services or perhaps putting even more dollars into those services or programs that already produce dollars even if these programs are not mission related
- Gradually weakening kosher and Shabbat observance policies
- Polarizing staff into “we” and “they” through a management and staff attitude that supersedes a collegial attitude

The process of “Eichmannization” may begin with an articulated directive or mu-

tually agreed-upon modest expectation. Having made the first step, the next is easier. Then the process develops its own momentum and may be continued without directives because the professional feels it is expected or part of normal operating procedure. “When the Evil Urge tries to tempt man to sin, it tempts him to become all too righteous” (Buber, 1947, p. 153).

The ability to easily do harm unto another is not difficult to document. Consider the well-known experiments conducted by the psychologist Stanley Milgram in the 1950s involving nice, normal persons who upon orders or suggestions were, with little hesitation, able and willing to inflict pain through the control of electrical impulses and to do potential harm to others (Harvey, 1988, p. 818). Very easy to do if thinking and caring are not consciously and consistently integrated into motivation for behavior.

This depersonalization and institutionalization of doing potential harm to others are “Eichmannization.” It matters not that we do not actually kill persons in one fell swoop. We can also destroy by chipping away at a person’s life a little step or a few seconds or minutes at a time. We are more fortunate than Eichmann because we work in a different time, place, and culture. But, remember, as with Aaron it is the basic personality that determines the potential, not the situation or the results.

RIGIDITY AND FLEXIBILITY

Our work demands flexibility most of the time. On the one hand, professional practice requires that the questioning of “how far to go” can never cease. On the other hand, professionalism and our Jewish tradition also set limits and parameters on the appropriateness of behavior.

In terms of conflicts with the board or directives from colleagues, it is likely that no one specific item may create significant professional discomfort. Rather, the broader issue, and the danger, is a *pattern of com-*

pliance—unquestioning compliance that continually erodes the behavior norm.

- Does professional responsibility suggest making efforts to educate a board or supervisors even where education is resisted?
- Is it professionally correct to implement potentially hurtful policies or orders? Always? Sometimes? Never?
- Is it professionally correct to take stands on principle? Always? Sometimes? Never?
- When to draw the line?

Most readers of this article are leaders functioning in a professional role. Everyday, each of us individually and as members of a profession collectively is a role model. We are being evaluated and affecting others more often than we would care to think. How we individually and collectively choose to deal with ourselves defines who and what we are, as well as the degree of victim we are. Further, in our roles, by victimizing ourselves we victimize others. And how our behavior is perceived today will affect how others who have been in contact with us may behave in the future. In the same manner we have been affected by others in the past and are being affected by others today. Also, since I continue to believe that as professionals in a Jewish setting we operate within the parameters of and are bearers of that Jewish tradition, we owe it to each other as well as to ourselves and to our clientele to mold our behavior within that tradition and none other.

On occasion, issues relating to substantial ethical or value conflicts must be treated within the parameters of professional and, in this field, Jewish integrity in the same manner that an Orthodox rabbi would be expected to respond to a directive from his board of directors to eat unkosher food. Although board responsibility should indicate that it is not only Jewishly insensitive but Jewishly intolerable to direct the rabbi to perform an act of such personal repugnance, it is equally intolerable under nor-

mal circumstances for the rabbi to accept the directive to eat the unkosher food.

- As behavior, it would set a bad example (*role model*).
- It would be an act that could have a potentially harmful effect on the rabbi and, by example, on others (*evil*).
- It would be difficult for the rabbi to justify his behavior (*victim*).
- It would be grossly, grossly *unprofessional* behavior.

If the rabbi did eat that food, the behavior would be at least as unkosher as the food itself. Using acceptable behavior as a standard, the institution itself would become unkosher. In this spirit the consequences of unprofessional behavior for any Jewish communal professional are no less significant. For a professional to implement policies that place us beyond a Jewishly acceptable professional norm is equally unkosher behavior.

CONCLUSION

This article is intended to be a reminder that, first and foremost, we practice a calling. It is also a reminder that any administrative or business responsibilities that may be included in our functions are secondary unless they enhance the provision of maximum Jewish service to a defined clientele regardless of where that clientele is located since our behavior in one community affects our colleagues in others.

Professional behavior flows from a frame of mind and a personal philosophy. Although a common knowledge base is essential, the context of values and commitment to a profession serving a clientele separates a professional from a technician.

To emphasize this theme I chose four words or phrases. The first three—role model, evil, and victim mentality—place the fourth, professional, in context. That we are role models is a fact. That we affect the behavior of others is a fact. That being

