

REVIEW ARTICLE:

Victor B. Geller

The movement of many Jewish families, along with other Americans, from the hearts of our great cities to the surrounding suburbs, is a fact that is by now well-known and carefully documented. How this trend has affected Jewish religious life thus far, and what it portends for the future, is a question on which serious students of Suburbia have differed. Reacting to a recent book on this subject that has attained a degree of popularity, especially in New York, Mr. Victor B. Geller here records his own observations and evaluations based upon extensive experience in the servicing of traditional congregations throughout the country and with special emphasis upon new suburban synagogues. Mr. Geller, who holds both a bachelor's degree and master's degree from Yeshiva University, was formerly associated with the National Council of Young Israel and then the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations. For the last six years he has traveled throughout the country visiting established communities, and helping establish new ones, in his capacity as field director of Yeshiva University's Community Service Division.

HOW JEWISH IS JEWISH SUBURBIA?

Jewish Suburbia is a sensitive topic of conversation in traditional Jewish circles. It represents the the greatest challenge now facing us. It is the fashionable crucible in which tomorrow's Jewry is being fashioned. Yet, despite it crucial character, Suburbia is the area of Jewish life in which we have done less than the deviationist groups. They are able to cite impressive statistics of growth in new commu-

nities from coast to coast, while we confine ourselves to a modest effort centered around New York and a few major Eastern cities.

It is important, therefore, to pay attention to a new book by a leading Conservative rabbi who has had thirty years of experience in synagogue and communal work plus secular training in sociology and anthropology.

*The Jews in Suburbia** by Rabbi

* Boston: Beacon Press, 1959.

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Albert Gordon, was even accorded the unique distinction of having been serialized in a major New York City newspaper—the *New York Post*, in November and December, 1959.

This reviewer was curious to know how an important Conservative leader looks at Suburbia. I wanted to see his estimate of this new phenomenon in American Jewish life, in which he and his associates are playing so prominent a role. I half anticipated that a book on Suburbia by a Conservative rabbi would be subtitled, "We Came, We Saw, We Conquered." The striking fact is that the author has very little to say about Orthodoxy. It is clear from his writing that there was no contest; hence no victory. While I shall later take issue with this estimate, it is important to note this indication of our standing in the eyes of the non-traditional community on the subject of Suburbia.

While Rabbi Gordon pays homage to the vitality of Orthodox Jewish life of the past, he obviously shares the current thinking of most Jews that its demands are too great for the casual sport-shirt mentality of today. He concedes that Jewish young people work less at the task of being Jews, but he denies that we are the less Jewish for it. He is of the opinion that Jews are gaining in spiritual and moral strength despite the deemphasis of practice and observance.

Jews in Suburbia is a well presented book that is easy to read. The author has clearly invested much effort in its preparation. By using questionnaires and interviews, he has tried to make of his book more than a collection of per-

sonal-opinion essays. Briefly, *Jews in Suburbia* graphically describes Jewish Suburbia as part of the broader post-war development in American life. The author offers a series of profiles of suburban Jewish communities across the country in order to give us a flavor of American Jewry in the mid-twentieth century. We read of family life in Newton, Massachusetts; commuting fathers and dominant mothers in Levittown, Long Island; parent-child relations in Skokie, Illinois; ritual life and observance in the San Gabriel Valley of California; attitudes towards rabbis, synagogues, and Jewish theology in Euclid, Ohio; and feelings about God in Montgomery County, Maryland. Rabbi Gordon's pen moves like a silent camera across the panorama of middle-class homes, synagogues, centers, and schools, giving us an intimate glimpse of our people. After discussing the strengths and weaknesses of Jewish Suburbia, Rabbi Gordon gives us his judgment of this emerging pattern of Jewish life.

Our author is optimistic about Jewish Suburbia. He says, "The Jews of suburbia have, to date, achieved a high degree of integration into the total life of their communities. They have also succeeded in attaining a high measure of identification with the Jewish people and its way of life. Weaknesses, imperfections, and even decay and dissolution are readily apparent to the observer of the Jewish way of life, to be sure. However, as has been noted throughout this study, there is much about which we may be highly pleased. Today, there are more Jews—young enthusiastic Jews

—who have the will to be Jews than I have noted in over three decades of careful observance. There is ample reason to speak hopefully concerning their future” (p. 247).

The factual impressions presented in *Jews in Suburbia* are basically correct. The picture Rabbi Gordon draws of the attitudes, opinions, and behavior of suburban Jews is sound even if it is not entirely to scale. I have no quarrel with what is presented. The fault with *Jews in Suburbia* lies in what has been omitted and, in the author's conclusions.

Rabbi Gordon is an optimist about Jewish life in the suburbs. I am not. I feel that there are problems of such great magnitude in Suburbia, that, if the current trend continues there is grave doubt that it will produce a religious community that will meet even the reduced Jewish standards of the non-Orthodox.

At this point, a word of caution is in order. Critics of Suburbia have a tendency to talk about its ills as if they were unknown in the rural or urban communities. This, of course, is not so. We must understand that the suburb—particularly the Jewish suburb—is what the cities have made it. If the suburb is bereft of Jewish values, the theft occurred in the city. The shortcomings of the suburb are ever present in the older centers of Jewish life. The reason for our special attention to the weaknesses of the new community is their unrelieved intensity. The old deformities stand out in bolder contrast when viewed in the freshness of Suburbia and all the promise that inheres in newness

The urban community in post-

war America is losing its young families. The blight of spreading slums has outdistanced the most ambitious redevelopment programs. The high cost of new housing, the tensions growing out of racial and minority friction, and the growth in the size of the young family are but a few of the reasons why young people feel that their future lies outside the constricted limits of the older urban locale.

A home in the suburbs is the dream of the vast majority of young American Jewish families. Their aspirations, particularly as regards family life, are common knowledge today. The ancient Jewish heritage of strong family life still remains a desired goal for most of them, regardless of their level of religious observance. The suburbs are intended for family living. The emergence of the family or activity room as the architectural feature of the suburban ranch home points up the desire to have the family work, talk, and play together.

It is now some thirteen years that young Jewish families have been pursuing this dream. How well have they done? How close have they come to the realization of their dreams? To the best of my knowledge, culled from twelve years experience in Jewish Suburbia, the record is mixed.

From the material point of view, the achievements have been tremendous. No one can doubt the fact that they are living with more luxury and convenience than ever before. Not only are homes beautifully appointed and clothes stylish, but suburban schools, while faced with severe problems of overpopulation, are very well equipped and

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staffed. The synagogues and centers are big, bright, and bursting with all sorts of programs.

The search for family "togetherness" has been less successful. There is a widespread disillusionment with the effect of Suburbia on the Jewish family. Despite the anxious search and nervous striving for "togetherness," it has not been forthcoming; at least, its awaited blessings have not proved satisfying. There is no need to present the picture of the suburban family in all details in order to illustrate this point. A mere outline will suffice.

The father of the suburban family rises earlier than he ever did in the city—he must in order to get to work on time. He works harder than ever because the needs and standards of his family are greater than ever. Afterwards he must spend generally from an hour to an hour and three-quarters returning home. The commuting father thus often eats supper late—sometimes as late as eight o'clock. If his children are young, they will have eaten before he returns home. He must give some attention to the endless round of things that have to be done about the house. He has little time or inclination for more than perfunctory attention to his children's homework, his wife's recitation of the days activities, or a meeting at the Center. As Rabbi Gordon mentions, the father has abdicated much of his authority and influence in the suburb. This has been less because of conscious desire than by default.

Mother is best characterized as the executive director of the suburban Jewish family: early rising, hard working homemaker, chauff-

fuer, social secretary, ambassadress to the community, and tone setter for her family. Among her most prized possessions is something she never had in the urban area from which she came—a driver's license. This alone makes her life radically different from the life of her counterpart in the city. Having attended to the needs of her home and family, she is free to move about both within and outside the community in which she lives. Her evenings (especially after babysitters become unnecessary) are a busy whirl of PTA, Sisterhood, Hadassah, etc. Rabbi Gordon describes her as the modern "Woman of Valor," because of the way she is involved in worthwhile activities. From the point of view of family "togetherness," however, this lady is usually overinvolved.

Children are busy the world over, but in the suburbs child activity has been developed to a new high. In addition to the usual program of school, Talmud Torah, homework, and television, the suburban youngster has scouting, little league, dancing classes, music lessons, and center youth groups to occupy his time. The boom in private kindergartens and nurseries is to be attributed in part to the growing practice of keeping children busy all day. (Another factor, of course, is the desire of the suburban mother to be free of her charge).

The teenagers share the child's privilege of being sheltered, protected, and provided for by their parents, while enjoying the adult advantages of vast sums of spending money, great freedom, and, usually, the family car. If children are busy in the suburbs, then teen-

agers are frantic for they must cope, in addition to all else, with fraternities, sororities, dances, sports activities, etc. The strong competitive character of social life keeps them continually on the go, and many of them dare not stop for fear of being left behind. The teenager is an amiable, polite guest in his own home. Were it not for the fact that his parents are equally occupied with their own activities, they could not help but notice how little time their sons and daughters spend in their company. This was pointed out to this reviewer some time ago by a young suburbanite who told of the radio conducting one of its periodic campaigns against juvenile delinquency. As part of this campaign, spot announcements were made asking: "Where are your children tonight?"—implying that children should be in in the bosoms of their families. Said the young citizen of Suburbia, "One day I was home and heard that broadcast, and you know—a funny thing happened. I realized that I was home but my parents weren't. They were at a meeting." Such is the un-together home of today's suburbs.

In all fairness, we must again point out that the cohesiveness of the American family has suffered in all settings: urban, suburban, and rural. The suburb, however, with its preponderance of people in the same age bracket, income level, and background, has heightened the effect of these centrifugal forces on the young family.

There is still another force acting on the communally responsive suburbanite, and that is community pressure. As our author points out,

the relocation to a new community often creates insecurities about acceptance. Suburban newcomers are as reluctant to go "too high" as they are to go "too low." This seeking of status (meaning reasonable position, rather than social climbing) makes them unusually vulnerable to pressure to conform to community patterns. Most of us are not prepared to risk disapproval by resisting this pressure. The pressure to join, participate, and identify with a whole host of local programs has further fragmented Jewish family life.

The urban community, at least, offers a cloak of anonymity which can easily be donned when one wishes to avoid outside persuasion or influence. In contrast, the big picture window of the pretty suburban Cape Cod invites the scrutiny of neighbors and it is hard to pull the window-shade down.

Traditional Jewish family life was vastly different from the pattern just described. The author's eloquent description of it is more than adequate.

"According to Jewish tradition, the father was the head of the family. It was he who had the responsibility of rearing his children in the fear of God and the knowledge of His law. He was the towering personality who protected and disciplined the members of his household. In biblical days, he was spoken of as the patriarch, or father of the extended family. His wife, as his help-mate, was the teacher and moral guide of the family. Her duties and responsibilities were directly associated with the home. In biblical times, she counseled and guided her husband and instructed

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her children. She was the matriarch, the mother whose influence and authority were obviously great. The husband was the king, his wife the queen. The two were intended to complement each other. She was more than a self-effacing mother. She conducted herself so as to leave no doubt that, though she could attend well to her household, she was indeed a strong personality in her own right. Her activities, although confined in the main to the home and the rearing of her children, assured her of the right to be regarded as an equal with her husband. The accepted division of responsibilities and duties between husband and wife cast no shadow upon the importance of the woman's role within the family. Her influence, with respect to her children and her husband, was extraordinary. She took an active part in training her sons up to the age of five, at which time the father assumed the instructor's role. She guided and prepared the daughters for their wifely role all through their maturing years" (p. 57).

After these words, it is astonishing to read Rabbi Gordon's conclusions about contemporary Jewish life. "I believe that the suburb has strengthened Jewish family life. Even though the parental roles are somewhat different from what they were a generation ago, the home remains the central institution of Jewish life. . . . Whatever the present weakness and defects of suburban life, it is my belief that they may be more than counter-balanced by a more closely-knit Jewish family life in the suburban home" (p. 84). The only comment that Rabbi Gordon sees fit to make on

the contrast between the classic pattern of Jewish family life and the contemporary one is that they are *somewhat* different. I must confess that I view the contrast less charitably.

The Jewish family of today is not a development but a distortion of what once was. What we now see is a vector resultant of the complex forces at work on the American scene, instead of a strong core group motivated by deeply rooted inner values. If the shallow quality of suburban Jewish life is regrettable, the equanimity with which a responsible spiritual leader accepts this is even sadder to behold.

The evidence which Rabbi Gordon offers to justify his favorable prognosis is not convincing. "Jewish families like to assemble on religious festivals and holy days in order to enjoy the occasion as a family unit. . . . Parents and children, grandparents . . . the entire family frequently assemble on the Sabbath Eve because they like to be together" (p. 74). At first glance we might agree that such a practice helps retain some of the qualities of *Shabbat* for our suburban family. My observation, however, has been that convening the family for a Friday evening meal reduces the *Shabbat* to a level of a social tool. The *Shabbat* becomes the means; the gathering, the end. As a meeting device, the Sabbath meal loses its religious significance. The feeling that people take away from such an evening is the pleasantness of fellowship, not the warmth of the Sabbath spirit.

Before the "something is better than nothing" school of thought leaps to the defense of this afore-

mentioned Friday meal, let me explain that the very basis of my doubts about this sort of activity lies in the fact that to the participants the "something" becomes the "everything." They are permitted to convince themselves that their family dinner is the satisfactory and sufficient equivalent of the totality of the Sabbath experience that Jewish tradition prescribes. The part becomes the shrunken whole.

In a similar vein Rabbi Gordon writes: "Young married people speak with satisfaction of visiting their parents' home with their young children . . . so they may note the rich symbolism and ceremonial of the Sabbath and Festivals" (p. 74). This pilgrimage back to the city almost sounds like a Japanese procession to a family shrine. Going home to "Grandpa" to show the children what *Yom Tov* is, resembles a visit to a private museum. It demonstrates the pathetic inability of these young people to engender, by themselves, a positive and vigorous Jewish experience for themselves and their children. Even at its very best, this return to the atmosphere of the parental home must decline as the older generation passes on. The sight of spiritually impoverished young Jews returning to a well that is running dry is hardly cause for rejoicing.

In the same context, Rabbi Gordon makes a seemingly innocuous statement which is also very revealing. In mentioning the fact that 61% of the people he questioned return to the homes of their parents for the holidays, he says: "As long as Jewish emphasis on family life continues, Jewish Suburbia will

manifest the same positive values that have characterized them in the the past" (p. 75). Here Rabbi Gordon makes the common error of confusing *Jewish family life* with *family life among Jews*.

It is time that we understood that *family life among Jews* is of sociological significance, whereas *Jewish family life* is of religious significance. We did not invent family life. Love of family is not a uniquely Jewish virtue. The quality of family life among the Chinese, for example, has been truly superior for thousands of years. Many people have taught the value of family solidarity and cohesion. While it is true that the Jewish family, having been buffeted by centuries of persecution, has forged unusually strong bonds, its real quality and strength came from the fact that its family life was truly Jewish, rooted in Torah teaching and practices. The significant factor in our family association has been that it was motivated by an intense inner religious spirit.

Historically, the relationship of Jewish children to their parents was formed in consonance with the religious principle of *kibbud av va'em*—the fifth commandment. Domestic relations between husband and wife were based upon and deeply influenced by the all-pervading concept of family purity—*taharat ha-mishpachah*. These two factors gave *Jewish family life* richness, dignity, and resilience. In the suburbs we have *family life of Jews*. It is as decent, as honorable, and as pleasant as the family life of the broader community. With the exception of two residual characteristics, more sobriety and less intermarriage (and

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these too are disappearing), there is little *Jewish family life*. One would be hard put to distinguish the actual family life of the suburban Jew from that of his non-Jewish neighbor.

There is one more observation that needs to be made on the subject of the "rich symbolism and ceremonial" to be found at the grandparents' home.

Much is made, both in the book under discussion and in other recent literature, about the beauty of rituals and ceremonials and of their value in bringing Jewish culture to our children. My experience tells me, however, that the young, uninformed, and non-observant Jewish family derives very little from these rituals.

Esthetically, the beauty of *kiddush*, *havdalah*, the *motzi*, etc., has been vastly overrated. There is little drama in these practices. I cannot understand how rabbis and Jewish educators have been able to convince themselves that a paragraph in a foreign language chanted by an old man with questionable vocal or musical ability over a cup of wine constitutes in and of itself a religious experience. To a youngster whose day-to-day life has little Jewish practice, *kiddush* is not necessarily beautiful at all. Up to a certain age, it can have a hocus-pocus effect because it is strange or mysterious. For the teen-ager, neither *kiddush* nor any other such practice can be important if his father, who is his primary guide in life, does not demonstrate genuine acceptance of it.

The pity is that the sincere parents think the *kiddush* has an impact on their children. The child-

ren, in turn, think that the little ceremony has some meaning for adults. The fact is that in most families neither is true. The value of *kiddush* in such situations *could* be that of a stimulus to awaken a sense of inquiry in youngsters—an equivalent of the Four Questions at the Seder. This requires, however, a home which is Jewishly informed and mature enough to accept and handle questions. Only in a home where *kiddush* is part of a complete *Shabbat* pattern does it carry much meaning. The transformation of *kiddush* into a child-focused symbol is basically a performance or a show. It is an admission, in effect, that the child is outside the realm of Jewish experience, that he is merely a visitor to Judaism. Unless the parents accept *Kiddush* for what it was meant to be—a *mitzvah* or divine *commandment*, not a sociological suggestion, for the purpose of pronouncing the *holiness* of the entire Sabbath day—it must fail to win over the children. We must, after all, distinguish between *dinim* and *mitzvot* on the one hand, and "customs and ceremonies" on the other, and certainly *kiddush*, if accepted merely as a pretty ceremonial device, is incapable of the magical winning of young souls for Judaism.

It is no secret that children are central actors on the suburban scene. They are the primary reason for the departure of the young post-war family for the myriad of new developments that ring the metropolitan centers of our land. As we remarked before, the material abundance with which we surrounded our children is without equal. In no less measure, do we

see love and affection being lavished on our young people. Their parents are aware of the emotional and psychological problems that beset children and they work hard at trying to prevent them from arising. These parents have a right to be proud of what they are doing.

Yet even at this early date in the development of Suburbia there are growing expressions of concern over the extent to which it has become a child-centered world. Educators and child psychologists who a few years ago were extolling the progressive character of these communities, are now having grave second thoughts about what we have wrought.

Rabbi Gordon quotes a suburban father on this subject. "I moved out here for the sake of my kids. I want them to have the best that I can afford. . . . Nothing is too good for my kids" (p. 65). It requires no great insight to see this indulgent parent as a pitiful caricature of a father. If this man were the real culprit, it would not take much to see the matter in its proper light and to correct it. The problem is more complex than the father who has made himself into a human piggy bank. We can find a clue to the problem in a statement which the author himself proudly makes. "Jewish parents, whose concern for the child has been a source of general admiration throughout the ages, are today in the forefront of the child-centered world" (*ibid.*) Rabbi Gordon thus seriously advances the thesis that the child-centered family is a Jewish tradition and a Jewish ideal.

This is a gross mis-reading of

Jewish teaching. Indeed, if a label must be affixed, then we must say that the Jewish family is a parent-centered one.

Perhaps the best way of demonstrating this fact of Jewish family life is by briefly examining the sources of the Jewish tradition which was the determining force in molding Jewish family life, and which not only shaped but also reflected the norms of parent-child relationships.

The Bible does, indeed, place a number of obligations on parents with regard to their children. Circumcision, redemption of first-born males, the retelling of the Exodus story, and teaching of Torah are the four responsibilities of father to child. The Talmud adds several other obligations, such as teaching the child a trade and marrying off his children. Yet these rules of conduct governing parental behavior are few and rather prosaic when compared to what is expected of a child in regard to his parents. The law requiring a child to honor his parents is one of the Ten Commandments. In Leviticus (19:3) is added the commandment to fear parents, and the striking or even cursing of a parent is considered a capital crime. The Oral Tradition, as recorded in the talmudic literature, expands on these considerably. *Kibbud av va'em* is understood not only as the emotion or feeling of giving honor, but also as support in a material sense. If necessary, teaches the Jerusalem Talmud (*Peah* 1:1), a child must go begging from door to door in order to support a needy parent. *Yirah* or fear is given the broadest interpretation, the most extensive

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kind of reverence is due to parents. A child may not sit in his parent's seat, stand in his place, contradict him, or show anger and resentment if father or mother humiliates in public unjustly.

The above is, very briefly, the essence of what Jewish Law has to say about parent-child relationships. True, it represents law—the norm, the ideal—and is not meant to be taken as sociological data. Yet it does serve as an indication of what *authentic* Jewish family is like, and what in fact family life amongst Jews tended to be. Jewish parents certainly were considerate of their children's welfare. But authority was vested in father and mother. Consideration, respect, honor, a sense of importance were the natural rights of parents.

The pattern just described is quite different from that which prevails in modern life and especially in Suburbia. Every reader knows, from all that has been written if not from immediate personal experience, that the situation today—the “palmsmanship” between father and son and mother and daughter which is a corollary of the much-touted “family togetherness”—is utterly devoid of the concepts of *kavod* and *yirah* as the Jewish Tradition has understood them and legislated them. Rabbi Gordon errs, then, in placing the current relationship between parents and children squarely within the Jewish tradition.

Furthermore, Rabbi Gordon's sin of commission with regard to parents is compounded by that of omission with regard to grandparents. The author requires a little more than one paragraph to sum

up the status of older folks. “Communities in which few old folk or grandparents reside are, in a sense, abnormal. The knowledge, experience, wisdom and the very presence of this older generation could surely mellow and deepen the lives of the young suburbanites. For this reason, it seems to me, the synagogue and the Jewish Center in Suburbia must provide greater opportunities for fellowship, recreation, cultural exchange and worship for these golden agers whose lives may, in turn, enrich the total Jewish community” (p. 75).

It is understandable that Rabbi Gordon has so little to say about grandparents. There are very few grandparents in the suburbs. The homogeneity of Suburbia is nowhere more obvious than in the absence of senior citizens. This fact has deep implications for American Jewish life. If, in his reportorial role, Rabbi Gordon is justified in confining himself to a few lines on this subject, as a critical commentator he cannot be excused for having failed to examine the true significance of this problem.

During our school years, we learned that the founding of America was a pioneering experience of the first magnitude. Our history books give prominence to the opening of the Western Hemisphere as the New World. America and the New World were synonymous terms in our formative period. This image of newness was tangibly demonstrated to us by the mass of immigrants about us who came to these shores in the years between 1870 and the First World War. Our parents and grandparents were part of this torrent of young, hopeful peo-

ple looking for a bright tomorrow. America, we all came to believe, was the land of the free and the home of the brave and the young and the energetic. This pioneering picture of our nation was a precious contrast to the tired, exhausted Europe where even the children's faces showed the weariness of generations. The greatness that is America today is, in large measure, the fruit of the labors of these young newcomers who lent their minds and bodies to produce the wealth and abundance that we now enjoy.

Some of us have forgotten that nations, like individuals, grow old. America is no longer pioneer country, the land of the young. It has become a land with many old people. In 1880, less than 4% of the American population was 65 years of age or older. By 1950 this proportion was doubled—there were 12,270,000 old folks in our country. The projected estimate for 1960 is 15,701,000; for 1970—18,885,000, and for 1980—22,660,000 (U.S. Census of Population, 1950, Vol. II, Part I, p. 93).

Modern medicine, better food and superior living conditions have raised the life expectancy of the American. "Progress in medicine and public health has now reached the point where two out of every three persons who survive infancy will attain the age of 65 and many will live well beyond" (Steiner and Dorfman, *The Economic Status of the Aged*, p. 1).

In order to understand properly the status of the aged in the Jewish community, it would be helpful for us to gain some picture of the

role of the aged in the overall American milieu.

Aging is one fact of life that most Americans are not prepared to face. We try to hide from it. As one writer put it, "The fear of old age and death has been present throughout human history, but modern Western Culture is almost unique in suppressing it as much as possible" (Geo-Soule, *Longer Life* [New York: Viking Press, 1958] p. 117). Our newly acquired awareness of the aging has taken the form of worry about a problem rather than the recognition of a social fact. There is a great deal of self-consciousness in dealing with older people. The words of some Protestant ministers recently echoed this: "There are, unfortunately, many churches where we make great points of our efforts to 'make our elders comfortable' and what we are really doing is making ourselves comfortable about them."

Our national humor—a good clue to our feelings about every day affairs—also touches on this point. One of Jack Benny's standard comedy lines has been his 39th birthday. Mr. Benny is not dwelling on an idle joke. Like all great wits, he has put his finger on a vital factor in the American personality. When Jack Benny says he is 39 years old, we all laugh with him. We do so because we identify ourselves with his effort to stay young. We also do not want to cross the threshold of our 40th year because we consider this to be the final irrevocable step into dreaded aging.

Not much different is the general attitude in our current Jewish world. In striking contrast to the

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traditional Jewish reverence for the old and the hoary head," we have even stronger feelings of awkwardness and embarrassment in dealing with the aged than does the general community. To understand this attitude we must trace our origin as an immigrant group. While it is true that the large majority of Jews in the United States are now native born, we still have a significant number (20-25%) of foreign born among us. This group is, of course, composed predominantly of our older citizens. The members of this group are familiar figures to us. As a rule, they speak English with an accent. They cling to many of the cultural patterns of the "old country." With all their love for and loyalty to their adopted land (indeed, their appreciation is often deeper than that of their native born children), they are bi-cultural Jewish immigrants who, like the Irish, Italian, Slav, Scandinavian, and others, retain the old with the new. The American Jewish community that developed around the immigrants found itself in a new world of freedom, challenge, and struggle. The friction that arose between the immigrants and their children was a familiar theme in our literature of two decades ago. One result of this strife was the downgrading by youth of seniority as a prestige state. In their zeal to complete the acculturation process, the second generation made modernity their motto. "Old" in their minds meant "old-fashioned." In the gap that developed between father and son, the process of aging lost value. Instead of being a step towards greater importance, it meant becoming obsolete.

"I sometimes wish," a young suburban parent is quoted by Rabbi Gordon, "that my children could really understand my parents. My folks are quite old-fashioned. They live over in Dorchester. They speak Yiddish mostly and only a little English. They talk to the children in English. The children like them, I know, but I'm sure that they don't really understand them. They don't know what they went through, how hard they worked to give my sisters, my brother and me a chance to get ahead. But I guess there's always a division between generations, and maybe we have no right to expect it to be different" (p. 75).

The severance of the links between young and old in Jewish suburbia is a tragic loss both for the youngsters and his grandparents. The absence of the older generation from the context of his daily life means a sense of discontinuity with the past. A grandparent is a living symbol of history, of past, of tradition. When there is no grandparent with whom to communicate meaningfully, the child is deprived of a past and must lose all feeling for tradition as such. And the grandparent is denied, at the same time, the priceless opportunity of conveying to his grandchild the richness of a heritage which has been his for a lifetime. The Talmud equates the importance of the transmitting of Torah from grandfather to grandson to that of personally perceiving the Torah at Sinai—there is a sense of personal fulfillment (*Kiddushin* 30a). There is a deep sense of purpose and usefulness that a grandfather feels when his children's

children ask him to tell them how things used to be when "grandpa was a boy." There is much to be said for the "buba maases" that the old tell the young.

It is not without significance that Harry Golden's recent books have been national best sellers. Through his writings, Harry Golden has become a sort of literary grandfather to many young American Jews. His stories of how the family went to buy Sammy a suit, and similar tales of a nostalgia-laden era, leave a warm glow not only in the minds of those who can recollect those days, but also in the hearts of grandchildren to whom these are stories out of an unknown past. Suburbia has sharply eclipsed the opportunity for this rich transfer in a meaningful way.

There is one final comment that should be made concerning the prevailing attitude towards the aged. What will happen when the young suburban parents of today, who are living and training their children in an environment which values youth above age, themselves become old? What will happen when these people find that they have crossed over these boundaries created by our society into obsolete old age? One cannot help but feel that such young parents will be confronted with terrible and perhaps insurmountable prob-

lems of personal adjustment to an old age that has come to mean boredom and uselessness.

Rabbi Gordon's book is, to summarize, provocative both in what it does and what it does not say. His facts are indisputable. But his interpretation of those facts is certainly debatable. Perhaps the dissident groups can afford this benevolent posture. Orthodoxy can find little solace in the assimilation into which we are being ushered by the kind of conformism peculiar to Suburbia.

This does not mean that traditional Jews ought to throw up their hands in despair. But it does mean that we must judge the situation realistically and accept the challenge fearlessly. The Jewish Tradition has been faced with harder tests in the past. It is hard to believe that Suburbia, with both its geographic and spiritual dislocations, will undo Judaism. Torah can be made to flourish in the neat little ranch houses of Suburbia just as it once did in the steaming tenements of the metropolis. All that is required is vision, foresight, hard work, and an incorrigible optimism as to the future of Torah Judaism. This is a tall order—but it can be filled. Already in some suburbs it is being done. God willing, it will be accomplished successfully in many more.