

Dr. Spock

He's more vehement about issues he was against 25 years ago

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

SPOCK SPOKE and people listened, as they have listened since 1945 when the famed pediatrician first published his "Baby and Child Care," the legendary owner's manual for parents. Dr. Benjamin Spock was guest speaker to a packed house at the 12th annual Alecia Joy Teicher Memorial Parenting Conference in Temple Israel.

Spock is now 87, but if you think advancing age would have tempered some of his views, think again. If anything he's even more vehement on some of the issues with which he became identified in the '60s and '70s, specifically violence, television and war.

On physical punishment for children: "I used to pussyfoot about that in my younger days, in my earlier volumes, but I'm getting bolder in my '80s — I now say NO physical punishment or humiliation. My mother was a humiliatee. I sometimes think in some situations it's better to be whacked than humiliated."

But on permissiveness: "For the first 22 years my book was out, I got no letters. It wasn't until I was indicted by the federal government for opposition to the Vietnam war that the subject came up." It was Norman Vincent Peale, Spock said, who first labeled him as a corruptor of youth because of his permissive child-raising philosophies. People today still stop him in airports to discuss it.

"I am not a permissive. I never was a permissive. I never will be a permissive." His philosophy, he explained, has always been to raise children to respect and in turn to respect those children. "I haven't changed the basics. But to oppress children is something entirely different."

AND ON VIOLENCE and television: "The United States is more violent by far than any other country.

There is more murder, more rape, more wife abuse, more child abuse. Experiments have shown that television violence makes people more brutalized. Some are moved to become murderers, wife abusers, child abusers by what they see on television. Our children are watching television more hours than they are in school — violence and silly stuff. I guess I'm showing my intolerance in old age. . . . What we should be doing is demanding of our television stations (appropriate) programs for school children."

This country and this country's families have never been in a worse sociological condition, Spock said. "The things that used to comfort us are gone." He listed the extended family, satisfaction in work, and the small, tightly knit community as examples.

In losing the small community, Spock said, "We have lost the sense of being well known." Morality existed, he said, because everyone knew who you were and what you were doing. "There are no secrets in a small tightly knit community. That's what makes people behave themselves."

In the past, he said, "Craftsmen took pride in what they were making and the buyer would appreciate the product. There was a double satisfaction. When you work on an assembly line tightening nuts, you never see the whole product. And the assembly line is not just in factories but in offices."

COMPETITIVENESS has contributed to increased tensions, Spock said, starting with teaching children to read at age 2. "It's characteristic of our society — some other person's kid is learning to read so mine should."

Summer camp used to be a time for a child to get away from the academics, to enjoy nature, he said. "Today they learn computers and how to play better tennis."

Overlapping with competitiveness is materialism, he said. All of us need to be materialistic to a degree,

he said, but the balance is missing today. "I'm not trying to bring back the importance of family and religion. I'm pointing out that we lack those balances. Man does not live by bread alone. The older I get the more I am impressed with that truth."

To reverse the trend, Spock said, we must let go of the idea that "get-

ting ahead" is the most important thing. "I think we need to bring up children to serve, to be kind to be loving. Lecturing on it doesn't do much good. They must be so treated at home to bring out the desire to be of service, to be kind and to be loving. Children want to be helpful. If encouraged at all they will be helpful."



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If Spock were king, the schools would drop all grading. "Grades are an abomination," he said. "It distracts the student." Schools emphasize all the wrong things, he said, like memorization and compliance. Instead, he said, responsibility, initiative and creativity should be pushed.

Today's children are being misled in sex education classes, he said, because of the over-emphasis on anatomy and physiology. "It's great to get over mysticism — it's good for children not to be scared, but now it's all anatomy and physiology and they've left out that human sexuality is 50 percent spiritual."

SPOCK VEERED to another favorite topic: politics. It's wonderful to have progress in vaccinations, he said, but what we need for our children is better daycare, better schools and better health care. "It's incredible that here we are the richest country in the world . . . our

ideals are off. We ought to be more demanding of our politicians. To those who say we can't afford it, we need to say stop squandering trillions on nuclear weapons."

"We need to vote and vote discriminately. We can't get these things unless we demand them." Lobbying, letter-writing and demonstrations are all ways Spock suggests of getting the government's attention.

"I learned to enjoy demonstrations, especially when I had a minority viewpoint," Spock said when the government isn't listening, an old man climbing a barbed wire fence always attracts the media and then the government.

"Do any of these do any good? he said. "I'm asking in case no one else asks. 'LBJ said I refuse to be the first president to lose a war.' Was that a good reason to send millions of our children to be killed? Eventually he gave up. He didn't dare run again."

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