

The Reconstructionist

Volume 69, Number 2, Spring 2005

Table of Contents

- 2 **From the Editor**
- Jewish Ethics: Theory and Practice**
- 4 *David A. Teutsch*, Reinvigorating the Practice of Contemporary
Jewish Ethics: A Justification for Values-Based Decision Making
- 16 *Brant Rosen*, Forging Connections:
Report from Natandome Village, Uganda
- 24 *Anne Underwood*, Clergy Sexual Misconduct:
An Issue of Ethics and Justice
- 31 *Mordechai Liebling*, The Jewish Basis for Shareholder Activism
- 35 *Christina Ager*, Every Day Ethics: God is in the Details
- 41 *Moti Rieber*, Simplicity as a Jewish Value: Reclaiming and
Reconstructing Sumptuary Legislation
- 49 *Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus*, What Is Religious about Ethics?
- Viewpoint**
- 58 *Deborah Waxman*, The Emergence of an Icon: *Yahrtzeit* Plaques
in 20th-Century American Judaism
- Book Reviews**
- 76 *Natan Fenner*, A Guide for the End of Life
Review of *Behoref Hayamim/In the Winter of Life: A Values-Based
Jewish Guide for Decision Making at the End of Life*,
edited by David Teutsch and Deborah Waxman
- 86 *Nina Mandel*, Responding to Interfaith
Review of *Introducing My Faith and My Community: The Jewish
Outreach Guide for the Christian in a Jewish Interfaith Relationship*,
by Kerry M. Olitzky and *Interfaith Families: Personal Stories of
Jewish-Christian Interfaith*, by Jane Kaplan
- 91 *Sheila Peltz Weinberg*, Eternal Questions, Prayerful Responses
Review of *Filling Words with Light: Hasidic and Mystical Reflections
on Jewish Prayer*, by Lawrence Kushner and Nehemiah Polen

FROM THE EDITOR

The relationship between religion and ethics is venerable, if complex. It is difficult to find a religious tradition that does not, in some way, embody an ethical perspective as well as specific ethical prescriptions and proscriptions.

Jewish tradition is no different. The ancient rabbinic authorities differed as to whether the 613 commandments of the Torah tradition could be parsed into those *bayn adam l'makom* (“ritual”) and those *bayn adam l'havero* (“ethical”), but the fact that they evolved such categories at least tells us that the ethical could be expected to be found within the larger context of the religious.

When the Reform movement in Judaism developed in the 19th century, it attempted to remake Judaism into a religious creed in place of the civilization of a national group. “Ethical monotheism” became the banner under which the new Reform ideology organized. The ritual regulations were reduced in significance, or even in some cases eliminated, while the ethical imperatives of the Prophets (if not always the ethical “laws” of the Torah) were elevated.

As Mordecai Kaplan noted in *The Future of the American Jew* (1948), the traditional Jewish perspective on ethics presumed a supernatural God and a divinely-revealed Torah. As Creator, God was the measure of right and wrong; as a reliable record of revelation, the Torah embodied God’s expectations (and a Jew’s obligations) with regard to proper behavior. Under the impact of modernity, both of those presumptions were challenged.

The difference between our fathers’ attitude to the Torah and that which we today must take is this: They assumed that the Torah was perfect and its value realized through obedience and conformity with its standards; we should see in it the beginning of an eternal quest which we must continue. *We can discover value in the Torah by utilizing it as a living tradition, a sort of collective memory of valuable experience.* [M]odern Jews can use the Torah for inspiration and guidance, even though they cannot commit themselves blindly to an acceptance of all its teachings (p. 346; italics in original).

The liberal religious project of trying to discover and agree upon ethical principles in the absence of certainty about Scripture and the nature of God is related to that aspect of philosophy that strives to establish moral postulates and ethical imperatives on the basis of reason rather than revelation. Contemporary religion shares the concern of classical religion that standards of right behavior be established and maintained. But in the absence of orthodox faith, a degree of the relative and the tentative is introduced into moral discourse.

It is this absence of ultimate authority that agitates religious as well as cultural fundamentalists — those for whom there can only be one right way of being, of doing and of living. For those adhering to this type of creed, pluralism necessar-

ily implies relativism, and relativism is portrayed as an invitation to immorality.

Reconstructionist Judaism has tried to ground ethical imperatives in places other than a belief in revelation. In *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*, Rabbis Rebecca Alpert and Jacob Staub write:

But if Reconstructionists don't view texts and traditions as authoritative, how can we be guided by them? Through the workings of community. Reconstructionist communities seek to counter the cultural bias in North America that places a supreme value on individualism, personal autonomy, and privacy. It is not the case that a person's ethical behavior is nobody else's business. If Judaism is a civilization, then how you conduct your business, how you treat or mistreat people, and how much or little you contribute your time and money to community building and social action *matter as much* as how you pray . . . People do the right thing not because they are commanded to do so, but rather because they are influenced by and feel responsible to other members of the community (2d edition, pp. 98-99; italics in original).

The challenge of formulating a contemporary Jewish ethics continues to be both provocative and stimulating.

In This Issue

In this issue we present a series of perspectives on ethics, dealing with both theory and practice, which pick up various aspects of the modern and post-modern discussion about the relationship between ethics and religion.

We also are pleased to offer in the "Viewpoint" section a thoughtful historical analysis of one of the common symbols of synagogue architecture, the memorial plaque. The evolution of this symbol is shown to reflect the historical development of the American Jewish community.

In the "Book Reviews" section, we have, appropriately for this issue, included a review of a recent publication on end-of-life decision making published by the Center for Jewish Ethics at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. We also feature reviews of new books on issues of intermarriage and on hasidic and mystical insights on prayer.

Our 70th Anniversary

Our next issue (Fall 2005) will celebrate the 70th anniversary of *The Reconstructionist*, with a series of articles, analyses and reflections on the past, present and future of Reconstructionist Judaism.

—Richard Hirsh

Reinvigorating the Practice of Contemporary Jewish Ethics: A Justification For Values-Based Decision Making

BY DAVID A. TEUTSCH

Often described as a way of life, Judaism must shape the everyday conduct of Jews to deserve that description. But in our time Jewish approaches to moral thought and action do not usually shape the lives of American Jews. This essay discusses how we reached this situation, the nature of moral action, and what we can do to reinvigorate Jewish moral engagement.

Historians and philosophers agree that it is a mistake to equate law and ethics. The Jewish concept of *lifnim meshurat hadin* implies that one must often go beyond the letter of the law to achieve fully moral conduct. Nonetheless law in a society generally embodies at least minimal moral standards.

In pre-modern Jewish communities *halakha*, Jewish law, was an integral part of Jewish culture, and *minhag* (custom) that supported it shaped much of daily living. For Jews in that pre-modern world, *halakha* defined the way

that Jews did many things, so a theological justification was not that important. Living together reinforced Jewish conduct and values. Self-governance and the institutions of the *kehilla* (organized community) strengthened the coherence of that culture and its capacity to sustain itself.

With modernity came secular citizenship, and with it the end of the pre-modern, self-governing Jewish community. *Halakha* and *minhag* had been evolving to meet the changing needs of the community because of the natural social regulation characteristic of communities. Secular citizenship disrupted that evolution, immersed Jews in modern society, and shattered the community that had provided the context for absorbing Jewish precepts and living by Jewish ethics.

Loss of Organic Community

The loss of that organic community

Dr. David A. Teutsch is the Director of the Center for Jewish Ethics and Myra and Louis Wiener Professor of Contemporary Jewish Civilization at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

radically altered the course of Jewish life. Suddenly *minhag* and *halakha* were optional, not obligatory. Whether to follow them became a question, the response to which gave rise to the modern Jewish religious movements, each with a different ideology describing the relationships between God, the Jewish people and Torah. Neither modern Orthodoxy nor any of the liberal movements, however, arrested Jewish assimilation. Jewish acculturation to America involved education, clothing, language, cultural and recreational activities — all the elements of daily life. As connection to Jewish community and culture eroded in people's lives, so did the presence of Jewish practice and ethics.

Reinvigorating Jewish ethics is critical to the future of Jewish culture, to the relevance of Judaism to contemporary Jews, and to the positive influence of Judaism in the world. But how can that be accomplished? What is the ground of moral life, and given the current nature of American Jewish life, what is a plausible moral decision-making process?

Legitimation and Truth Claims

One major strand of Jewish tradition holds, paradoxically, that the Jewish people heard only the *alef* of *Anokhi*¹ at Mt. Sinai. They waited to hear the rest of Torah from their leader Moses and his successors. The ineffable experience Jewish tradition connects to Sinai is the claimed origin and legitimation for Jewish tradition. Such experience, regardless of its origin, is always experienced as powerful and life-changing. The powerful experience that

anchors our sense of truth and reality is perhaps beyond culture, beyond intellectualization, and beyond language to express accurately, even though it profoundly shapes each of these. Such experience in our own lives extends and reinvigorates both the Sinai metaphor and our confidence in our own moral legitimation.

While many of us anchor ourselves in what we believe to be a transcendent ground of truth, we cannot escape our own human experience, which is limited by our physical finitude, limited by the constraints of our senses and minds and by the complicated interaction between thoughts, feelings and the culture in which we are located. Philosophers in previous generations assumed they were working to describe objective reality.

More recently, we have come to face that we cannot legitimately claim to know objective reality. Located as we are solely within the human experience, we necessarily settle for something less. We now recognize that people base their claims about objectivity on their capacity to reach agreements about what they believe is true that include the largest possible number of people and cultures. The broadest possible inter-subjective agreement is as close to objectivity as we can come.

The idea of objectivity emerged from the development of culture in general and from philosophy in particular. As with many ideas, the limitations of the idea of objectivity emerged only after the idea had been in use for centuries. Many people feel secure in their belief that they can know objec-

tive truth. For them the loss of that belief can be profoundly disturbing. People often prefer to believe in the effortless clarity of black-and-white truth. The lack of certainty is a source of insecurity. Efforts to increase certainty consume considerable energy and absorb a great deal of attention. However, in order to think clearly we must recognize the limits of our knowledge. Recognizing our intellectual limits brings us closer to truth.

Search for Objective Truth

Classical moral philosophy sought to arrive at statements about the right and the good that are objectively true for all times, places and people. That concern has continued into our own day, represented by such contemporary work as John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*.² Rawls is concerned with developing principles for creating a just society. Those principles, he asserts, ought to work in any society in any time and place.

Moral philosophers like Rawls talk about how a rational person would act. They can perhaps give parameters for governments, but this does not work in the same way for the decisions of individuals and small groups, with their particular tastes, histories and concerns. Rawls' work is strikingly devoid of particular small-scale applications. Furthermore, science has gradually forced us to recognize that the "purely rational person" does not exist. Our biochemistry, emotions, intellects, spirit, brains, sensory experience, minds, societal inputs and intuition can be talked

about as if they were separate, but they are actually always highly interactive.³ Each is shaped by the others in ways that are extraordinarily complicated and far from fully understood. We do not yet even have good explanations for why one of these factors seems to dominate the others at different moments in our lives.⁴ We do know that this does not happen in the manner that the affected individuals regard as optimal, and we often have less control over these shifts than most of us would like.

Scientists and social scientists share awareness of the complexities of the brain and limitations of rationality. That awareness requires us to think afresh about what we are trying to accomplish through moral discourse. Simply put, it is not enough for us to achieve a high level of moral reasoning. We engage in moral discourse to discover moral action in order to act morally. From my outcome-driven perspective, our moral dialogue needs to lead us to actually doing good and doing right, or it is a failure.

Moral Reasoning

The work of Lawrence Kohlberg portrays six levels of moral reasoning.⁵ His theory was that if moral reasoning could be improved, conduct would follow. It was quite shocking when his critics laid out hard research that showed there is little correlation between the level of reasoning achieved and the kind of action taken.⁶ Simply put, knowing what is right doesn't necessarily lead to doing it.⁷ People can be selfish in the pursuit of their narrow

self-interest. They can be self-indulgent, cruel or self-serving, often without a qualm. Moral reasoning by itself clearly does not sufficiently motivate an individual to act on its conclusions. Fortunately, human beings do not make most of their decisions in social isolation. We depend not as much on moral reasoning as on moral examples, social pressure and social convention to shape our conduct.

This recognition is embedded in the Jewish critique of Kierkegaard's portrayal of the Abraham of the *Akeda* as a "lonely knight of faith." Jews have traditionally seen Abraham not as a lonely knight — an isolated individual in relationship exclusively with God — but rather as a human being with relationships with family, clan and tribe. Indeed, other people — for most of us, our parents — taught us to walk and talk through example and interaction. Without relationships we would never have learned to talk; we would never have become acculturated. And of course each culture is composed of the accretions of generations that children unselfconsciously absorb through their families and peers. Relationships and cultural absorption are profoundly intertwined.

Our moral decisions and actions never happen outside the context of relationship and culture.⁸ Quite the contrary! Everything that we understand about ourselves we understand *because* of our relationships and culture. We are not objective *because* we are rooted in these aspects of the human experience.

As far back as anthropologists can trace, human beings existed in clans

and tribes. In order to get along, they took cues from each other as to language, thought and action. From infancy people learn to act the way they do from others, and they are constantly receiving feedback from each other. The human species has been successful because people are capable of harmonizing with each other and coordinating their efforts to accomplish the tasks required to create culture and do work. The ability to adapt and interact is part of the human evolutionary advantage. It is also why we cannot legitimately deal with human behavior without looking at its interpersonal setting.

Role of Society and Culture

Society and culture play a major role in shaping our wants and desires. People are too complex to be totally predictable, and sometimes they innovate or rebel in ways that bring sweeping changes. Nevertheless, society and culture generally shape our expectations of our own actions and those of others, providing the context for our moral decisions. It is our culture, refracted through family and other groups, that shapes the moral universe within which we live. Of course in contemporary culture, most people are part of several groups and multiple cultures. This multiplies their identity choices and behavioral options, creating significant internal tensions, a challenge to which I return later in this essay.

During much of its history, moral philosophy attempted to ask what an individual ought to do without con-

sidering the individual's cultural context. From the perspective that I have described above, answering that question is not terribly useful, which is fortunate because for the most part it is a question that is impossible to answer. The critical question is what a particular individual embedded in a particular social setting at a particular moment should do. The complex social setting with its particularities of economics, family structure, rituals, customs and relationships provides the setting within which we function and shapes the choices we make.

Evolution of Morals

Let me give an example. One current theory about cultural evolution is that patriarchy developed along with the emergence of elaborate agriculture that required the use of implements so heavy that only men could effectively wield them. Patriarchy in this reading is historically located. It is not an accident that in post-industrial societies, where virtually all jobs can be done interchangeably by either men or women, patriarchy has begun to give way to gender equality.

In our post-modern cultural setting, liberal Jews agree that sexism and support for patriarchy are moral errors, but to accuse the families living in those early agricultural settlements of moral error because they were patriarchal does not make very much sense. On the other hand, retaining patriarchal structures when they are no longer economically or socially justifiable is immoral because it violates the principle of equal

opportunity (and as a Jew, I would add the principle of *b'tselem elohim*, that human beings are all equally in the divine image). Thus, our morals evolve because the conditions in which they function evolve. There are those who live in parts of the world where economic conditions have not yet made patriarchy antiquated, and there are others who cling to it out of tradition. But moral evolution is occurring in their lives as well.

The conditions causing this evolution can be classified as political, economic, social, and technoscientific. These can be summarized by the acronym PEST.⁹ The PEST conditions are the result of complex interactions beyond most individuals' ability to control. When the PEST situation changes, we adapt to the new realities they create in order to thrive. Our moral life must adapt just as surely as other parts of culture do. Thus we should understand morality as contextual.

Culture carries forward moral understandings that individuals absorb without necessarily being conscious of it. Every culture has its own norms, values, obligations, rights, responsibilities, ideals and customs. This moral cluster is what Alasdair MacIntyre calls a "moral thicket." He describes it that way because of the tangle these moral elements create. Most of the time we can navigate our culture's moral thicket without thought because of our capacity to repeat unselfconsciously behaviors that are effective and socially acceptable.

However, the elements of the moral thicket do not interact neatly and pre-

dictably but rather in complex ways. These interactions are shaped by culture, shifting circumstances and presenting issues. Our moral life takes place within that complexity. The task of ethics is to help us navigate in a manner appropriate to each new set of circumstances we face.

Reaffirming Universal Positions

Despite the fact that morality is culturally conditioned, there are some statements about human moral life that rise above context. While we might debate what they are, one that is very broadly held is, “You shall not murder.” Moral relativists would say this is not an absolute rule, but most people would disagree, as would philosophers from Socrates to Rawls. We might disagree somewhat about how to define “murder,” but we would agree about most cases. There is strong intersubjective agreement here, if not objectivity!

Loyalty to family is another universal, perhaps because it confers an evolutionary advantage. Morality generally furthers the interests of our species. Of course the existence of moral precepts does not guarantee individual compliance. The fact that we can find only a small number of universal precepts, and that even these are understood slightly differently in different cultures, underlines the degree to which many of our moral decisions can only be understood in context. Even how we understand murder differs, as the actions of contemporary terrorists demonstrate. Moral argument against terrorism rests

in part on definitions of terms, in part on authority claims and in part on historical analysis. Too complex to explore here, it hinges in part on what constitutes an acceptable level of collateral damage in a just war — and what constitutes a just war. A rich literature explores that issue.¹⁰

As discussed above, the adaptation of Jewish ethics to changing circumstances occurred naturally through *halakha* and *minhag* in the organic Jewish communities of earlier generations. While rabbis were often the decisors during this period, the needs and concerns of the community members and their willingness to accept some leaders’ decisions and reject others created a dynamic tension that permitted such evolution. In our time, with the organic community a distant memory, the challenge is to create communities with the power to shape substantially the moral life of the community and its members. This can only happen through voluntary consent that grows out of moral dialogue. Creating the kind of dialogue that can alter the commitments of community members and create broadly shared agreement — or at least influence — is particularly critical in voluntary communities, where there is a minimal ability to enforce compliance.

Problems of Adapting Culture

One of the marks of a strong culture is its capacity to acculturate children and other new members to its way of doing things. Among the tools for doing that are language, practices that can be duplicated, customs, rituals, and

other forces of socialization. One of the problems with living in a rapidly changing world is that groups have a hard time adapting their cultures to the changes. People who need to adjust the elements of morality to these changes often have difficulty in keeping up. Practices that embody ways of doing things effectively and that train others to do them are embodied in professions, customs, manners and a broad variety of other behaviors. All these practices contain a moral component. Change disrupts these practices.¹¹ When that occurs, the social settings that carry moral life weaken, and morality becomes thinner. More people act immorally, both intentionally and inadvertently, when the social mechanisms that reinforce moral life are weaker.

Whereas in earlier times, each person lived primarily in a single culture, today people in industrialized nations have multiple cultural identities. One person might be an American, a Jew, a lawyer and a mother. With each of these identities come different values and practices. That is particularly challenging for people interested in passing on a way of life like Jewish culture, which is a secondary culture¹² for all but a tiny minority of Jews. This makes it very difficult to pass on Jewish ethics because Jewish culture has become so thin in most places, including much of Israel.

Most Jews are not employed in the Jewish community. Their primary language is not Hebrew. They do not dress in a distinctively Jewish way. Their primary forms of entertainment — tele-

vision, movies, books, magazines, games, sports — are not Jewish. Their Jewish acculturation is therefore highly limited. When culture becomes thin, it is enormously challenging to pass on ethical frameworks because our practices and customs — our ways of doing things — embody and reinforce our ethics.

How Pass on Jewish Ethics?

What can we do to increase our capacity to pass on Jewish ethics? We can strengthen culture by creating vigorous communities. We can attempt to create shared moral vocabulary in our communities. We can foster strong relationships among people in our communities. We can reinforce ritual behaviors whose values our communities support, and we can advocate for the ethical outlook they embody. We can provide feedback to each other (*tokheha* — see Lev. 19:17) when we believe that a person or organization is engaged in practices are not in keeping with our shared values. We can also provide feedback when we believe someone is doing something that is in moral error. The moral dialogue that results will provide an opportunity for examining definitions and traditions, reinforcing vocabulary and norms, and expanding moral vigor. When leaders fail to speak directly and frequently to these issues, the result is an increasing incursion of values and norms from the primary culture.

Creating intensive group experiences is a powerful tool for imprinting culture. One of the reasons that Jewish

summer camps are so important in Jewish identity formation is that they create a community context for full-immersion Jewish living. Strong relationships and powerful experiences occur naturally. In that context, values, vocabulary and shared practice are mastered with little conscious effort, a situation not easily achieved even in day schools, because they are not 24-hour environments. Of course, each camp inculcates values and practices reflective of its own ideology. Jewish moral life is primarily rooted in particular Jewish communities, not the diverse global Jewish community.

Values-based Decision Making

Congregation-based communities can only have substantial influence on the moral lives of their members if they develop a shared ethos and intensive relationships. Values-based decision making (VBDM) is designed to create a moral dialogue that reinforces values, creates consensus, and builds community.¹³ VBDM is a multi-step process that requires fact-finding, exploration of Jewish tradition, determination of actions excluded by norms, and discovery of relevant values and ideals. Consideration of alternative courses of action can then take place in light of consequences, values, and ideals. This process is one of self-education and not just decision making. It can work both for individuals and for groups when they are facing decisions with sufficiently important impact and a substantial moral component.

Over the last 15 years, VBDM has

become common in Reconstructionist congregations. The need for moral discussion and a community consensus around ethical practice provides a powerful rationale for VBDM. It is designed to help raise consciousness about vocabulary, and to help establish communal norms and practices that add depth and meaning to Jewish culture. By empowering people to engage in this process as a community, we also help them to discover the means to carry their set Jewish values and norms into application in their own lives.

Jewish Decision Making

Of course, if the study stage of VBDM is not done with care, people will simply bring with them their American individualist perspectives, patiently wait until the study step of VBDM is over, and assert their American values. That can derail the educational phase and empty the process of its Jewish content. When that occurs, the purpose of VBDM is circumvented. VBDM only works as effective Jewish guidance if there is genuine and substantial engagement with Jewish culture — texts, traditions and values. Otherwise VBDM may still result in effective decision making — it's just not Jewish. A Jewish community committed to Jewish culture ought to be true to its identity.

This is not to say that Jewish values are unchanging — Reconstructionists in recent decades have expanded Jewish tradition to include values like democracy and inclusion.¹⁴ Cultures evolve. But values held by individual

Jews are not necessarily Jewish values; that is an issue with which each Jewish community must wrestle. When a claimed value is in tension with inherited beliefs, practices or norms, careful Jewish study and exploration of the issues are warranted.

The decision to make a significant change should be accompanied by soul-searching and trepidation, with careful thought about implications for social justice and the future of the Jewish people. The response to “giving Jewish tradition a vote” ought not to be “it doesn’t speak to me.” Tradition votes only when we listen carefully. Only listening and agonizing can validate a veto. Some communities may not start by examining Jewish tradition. This invalidates their decision-making process. However, if a community avoids engaging Jewish tradition, that flaw would carry over to other decision-making processes, unless it turns over decisions to a rabbi who takes Judaism seriously, or to another leader with similar knowledge and commitment. This would involve the betrayal of other values.

Controlling Group Dynamics

Another objection some have raised to VBDM is that as a method of group governance, it is subject to the politics of groups. Decisions are affected by how effectively people argue, by the dynamics of bullying and by personal pleading. But shared decision making is always subject to group dynamics. A fair-minded chairperson makes a critical difference in assuring that all voices

are heard. In a synagogue setting the rabbi, too, can act as a guarantor of a well-crafted process.

At least as important as what the rabbi and chairperson do on the spot are the norms established in the group for meticulously following the stages of the VBDM process, for assuring that every voice is encouraged, and for taking Jewish approaches seriously. The critics of VBDM are correct that it does not work well if it is not done with care. However, the same is true of all group processes. It is important that VBDM is defined at every stage as an educational process, not just one for decision making.

As with all processes, if it goes astray or if the results are shown to be inadequate, the community has the right, and indeed the obligation, to start a new process. If each process includes substantial education, the individuals involved will be enriched, and the community will be strengthened. The first and most important task of the chairperson and rabbi is to guarantee a sufficient educational process. This involves text and context, the place of practice in the community and exploration of all the aspects of the moral thicket. The infusion of Jewish values vocabulary and a sense of Jewish history strengthen Jewish culture and moral life.

Competing Forces

One of the challenges of creating Jewish moral influence in the contemporary North American setting is the enormous power of marketing. Mar-

keting is designed to appeal to our needs and wants in order to persuade us to spend money to purchase goods and services. Marketing necessarily leads to an emphasis on extrinsic goods — products and services that can be bought and sold. The consequence in America has been a reduction of awareness of the importance of intrinsic goods. Intrinsic goods are such things as personal moral virtue, the satisfaction that comes from performance of deeds of altruism and the meaning that flows from efforts made to sustain long-term relationships.

One of the tensions between American and Jewish culture is the growing emphasis on extrinsic goods in contemporary American culture. Jewish culture appreciates extrinsic goods while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of intrinsic ones. Part of what VBDM ought to accomplish is to help people become much more fully aware of the importance of the kinds of intrinsic goods that Judaism emphasizes.

Examples abound: the attitude of gratitude that is central in Jewish prayer, the virtue of humility, the value of community connection, and the obligation to be engaged with Torah are but a few. Only when people are conscious of the way in which they have been manipulated by marketing can they consider the alternative. Jewish moral dialogue can help to build that awareness.

(Of course, it is true that VBDM utilized by Southern Baptists in Mississippi or Buddhists in Dharmasala will reach very different conclusions than Reconstructionist Jews' conclusions

because each group starts with very different inputs — different norms, definitions, values and beliefs.)

VBDM can also provide the basis for a dialogue. On some issues a consensus can emerge. On others, such as the differences between Jews and Catholics about abortion, the nature of the conflict can be clarified. VBDM works first to clarify moral thought. Once the issues are clear, we can then struggle to discern what we ought to believe and do. Becoming conscious about these moral matters helps to increase our resistance to manipulation.

Therapy and Happiness

A second major part of American culture that has challenged the Jewish moral outlook in recent years has been the emphasis on psychotherapy. Of course, interventions in order to deal with mental illness and to help people recover from trauma are important, and it is wonderful that we have advanced both in our use of pharmaceutical interventions and in our capacity to provide individual and group therapy. Achieving greater personal insight is also a worthwhile goal. For many reasons, including shifts in insurance reimbursements and the rapidly growing array of psychotropic medicals available, drug therapy is a much more common intervention today.

Judaism places a high value on healing, and that includes mental health. However, there are several aspects of some forms of therapy that are not so salutary from a Jewish perspective. One

of these stems from the fact that the various forms of therapy all have values of their own. Often people are unaware that they are absorbing values from therapeutic culture.¹⁵ One value is the paramount importance of individual happiness, a central idea in some approaches to therapy found in the U.S. While not all therapists or all therapies have this in common, enough do so that they reinforce the emphasis on individuals seeking happiness that stems also from capitalism and marketing.¹⁶

This by itself is not necessarily a bad thing; Aristotle, for example, placed a high value on happiness. But emphasizing personal happiness reinforces American individualism in ways that can lead to isolation, loneliness and insecurity. Of course, not all therapeutic methods take this approach; Mary Pipher, for example, eschews it.¹⁷ Therapy is a wonderful tool — and Jews who utilize it should be conscious of its limits.

Invigorating Jewish Moral Life

VBDM is not a panacea. It can fully invigorate the moral life of a Jewish community only when it includes a substantial educational process, when the leaders of the community create currency for Jewish moral terminology, and the study of Jewish texts and maintenance of Jewish traditions are ongoing parts of the life of the community.

The central importance of community in a Jewish ethical system suggests that we ought to make major personal investments in the creation and main-

tenance of community. Without community there will be no vehicle to preserve and convey Jewish culture. Because of the cultural setting in which we live, democratic, inclusive community is the model that makes the most sense. While developing the technologies to create and reinforce such community is a challenging and ongoing task, the rewards of community involvement have intrinsic benefits that more than justify that challenge.

1. *Anokhi*, translated as “I,” is the first word of the Ten Commandments. Its first letter is *aleph*, which is a silent letter.

2. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971).

3. The huge literature that explores these issues includes, for example, Janet Radcliffe Richards, *Human Nature after Darwin: A Philosophical Introduction* (The Open University, 2000) and Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal*, as well as works by V.S. Ramachandran, Francis Fukuyama, Robert Pollack, David S. Wilson, and many others.

4. See, for example, Paul Maclean, “A Mind of Three Minds: Educating the Triune Brain,” *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, 1978, 308-341; *The Triune Brain in Evolution: Role in Paleocerebral Functions* (Plenum 1990); *The Evolutionary Neuroethology of Paul MacLean* (Praeger, 2002).

5. Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (Harper and Row, 1981).

6. A significant amount of this research is summarized in Augusto Blasi, “Bridging Moral Cognition and Moral Action: A Critical Review of the Literature,” *Psychological Bulletin*, 88.1, July 1980, 1-45.

7. This is made yet more complex by problem of typology, as Kohlberg studied Western males. A gendered critique is offered by Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*. Cultural and class issues exist as well. For the purpose of this article, however, it is enough to recognize that in all individuals a large gap exists between moral reasoning and moral action.
8. Human beings exist as we know them only in the context of culture, which allowed their evolution into creatures with long childhoods, a dependence on language, and the capability to utilize tools. This critical understanding is central to cultural anthropology. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (Basic Books, 1973).
9. I first encountered this idea through the teaching of Hasan Ozbekhan, then a professor at the Wharton School.
10. See, for example, Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* (Basic Books, 1992) and works by Paul Ramsey, James Childress, Douglas Lackey, S. Hauerwas, and J.B. Elshtain.
11. Alasdair MacIntyre discusses this issue in *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, 1984), and Jeffrey Stout responds more optimistically in *Ethics after Babel* (Beacon, 1988).
12. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann were the first in my experience to use the term "secondary culture." See *The Social Construction of Reality* (Anchor, 1966). Mordecai Kaplan talks about "primary" and "secondary" civilizations in *Judaism as a Civilization* (Macmillan, 1934).
13. For a fuller methodological discussion of values-based decision making, see my article by that name in *The Reconstructionist* 65.2, Spring 2001; reprinted in the second edition of volume one of *The Guide to Jewish Practice* (RRC Press, 2000).
14. See David Teutsch, "Attitudes, Values and Beliefs", *Guide to Jewish Practice* (RRC Press, 2000), pp. 15-25.
15. See Don Browning, *Religious Thought and Modern Psychologies: A Critical Conversation in the Theology of Culture* for an analysis of the diverse ideologies embedded in various therapies.
16. Robert Bellah explores this theme at length in *Habits of the Heart*.
17. See Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* and *The Sheltering of Each Other*.

Forging Connections: Report from Natandome Village, Uganda

BY BRANT ROSEN

In April 2005, I accompanied ten members of my congregation, the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation (JRC) and four other participants on a delegation to Natandome Village, Uganda. This effort was sponsored by American Jewish World Service (AJWS) and was hosted by the Foundation for the Development of Needy Communities (FDNC) a non-governmental organization working to promote grassroots sustainable development in communities throughout Uganda.

As is the case of so many communities throughout Africa, Uganda has been ravaged by the HIV/AIDS pandemic over the past decade. Though HIV/AIDS in Africa has been characterized as the most devastating global crisis of our time, Uganda has arguably been considered one of the success stories, due in no small way to the inspired efforts of local non-governmental organizations (NGO) like the FDNC.

Members of the JRC Global AIDS Task Force felt strongly that education and advocacy was not enough; the time

had come to bear witness to the realities confronting one African country as it tries to respond to HIV/AIDS. What follows are excerpts from my travel journal.

Monday, April 4

We head for Natandome, accompanied on our bus ride by a number of FDNC staff and lay leaders, including their visionary CEO Samuel Watalatsu. Natandome is located in the Mbale District, four hours north of the Ugandan capital city Kampala. The road is largely unpaved and the traffic conditions are occasionally treacherous. To pass the time, Samuel and the others sing an African folk song for us — we reciprocate with a Hebrew peace song *Od Yavo Shalom*. We go back and forth this way for the better part of an hour, sharing our respective songs with increasing enthusiasm. I can't help but think how perfectly natural — and yet how unprecedented — it all feels.

After we arrive in Natandome, we sit under a large, open-sided canopy,

Brant Rosen is rabbi of the Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation in Evanston, Illinois, and president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.

which will serve as our central meeting place/dining area. As we receive our initial debriefing from our group leaders, small children from the village gather and stand tentatively at a distance, not quite sure what to make of their new guests. They talk to each other quietly; we occasionally wave at them, and they shyly wave back.

After settling in, we are invited to one of the FDNC's vocational school classrooms for a special welcome presentation. We sit together on wooden benches along with many others from the village, who gather inside and outside of the classroom. Teenage students enter the room and perform for us, singing songs in a combination of English and their local language of Lugisu. Though the melodies are upbeat and joyous, the subject of their songs is HIV/AIDS, how it has affected their community, and how they intend to "chase it away."

Then things get really interesting. The teenagers reenact a celebration/dance typically performed at a circumcision — a tribal rite of passage into manhood for eighteen year-old boys. Though unexpected (to say the least) this dance, just like their singing performance, is impossible to resist. It is heartfelt, joyful, and filled with deep pride. As they perform, the initial shyness melts away. The younger children of the village have flocked to us, happily sitting on our laps, holding our hands.

Afterwards, I stand and offer words of thanks from our delegation. The members of our delegation then stand and spontaneously sing *Oseh Shalom*. The village cheers us on. The fatigue

of our long journey is magically and immediately replaced by excitement in anticipation of the week to come. We have finally arrived in Natandome.

Tuesday, April 5

After working several hours on a construction project (bricking and plastering an FDNC classroom) our group splits into two. One group visits a slum neighborhood in nearby Mbale Town, and my group takes a walk further into the village. We are led by Omai (Mama) Jessica, Samuel's mother and a strong matriarchal figure at the FDNC. Like too many women of Natandome, Omai Jessica is a widow. Her husband died when her youngest was one year old. Jessica was a schoolteacher for many years, and now works as a health care volunteer for the FDNC. She also helps to organize local church and women's groups.

We visit Oma (Papa) Henry, a former pupil of Omai Jessica, who now works in the village providing support to a large number of AIDS patients and orphans. He speaks to us about his work in a manner similar to Jessica and the other Ugandans we have met: with a real passion for his work and a gentle inner nature, expressing himself with an almost constant smile and ready laugh.

Henry takes us to visit a man from his community who is dying from AIDS. It is a short walk to his house, a mud hut. The man's mother, sister and cousin sit on the ground in front of their home. The mother and sister are disabled and unable to walk — his mother's legs are as thin as matchsticks. We are invited to visit inside the hut

and some of us enter, going one at a time. The man lies on a mat on the floor, clearly in the final stages of the disease. I take his hand and he thanks me for coming to visit him. I tell him it is my honor to be with him and I say a *mishe-beirach* — a Hebrew prayer for healing.

Oma Henry then takes us further into the village for another visit. We walk past small farms and the path narrows. We see subsistence farmers working their small fields. Everywhere there are household animals, goats and pigs tethered to trees, chickens, roosters and ducks foraging on the ground and thin, gaunt cows grazing in the brush. We arrive at our destination and meet with another one of Henry's clients, a fourteen-year old girl, recently orphaned, who is raising her six younger siblings on her own. She approaches every member of our group, takes our hands in her own and kneels to the ground.

As we speak, from out of the grove of trees more and more young children materialize, and they gradually stand before us. Most of them are half naked and some are malnourished, with clearly distended bellies. They seem delighted to see us, mischievous smiles appearing on their faces. In the days to come, I will often see young children carrying infants on their backs. It will always take me a moment to remind myself that they are not giving piggy-back rides. They are caregivers.

Wednesday, April 6

After lunch we drive into Mbale for a visit to TASO (The AIDS Support Organization), an important Ugandan

NGO that offers HIV/AIDS treatment, counseling, education and support. TASO is the very model of a grassroots organization. Born as the informal effort of a few AIDS activists, there are now TASO facilities located throughout Uganda, extending service to roughly two-thirds of the country.

Their Mbale facility is state of the art — it is clearly one of the crown jewels in the Ugandan campaign against HIV/AIDS. We tour the facility and meet with the staff. The highlight of our visit is an astonishing presentation by TASO clients who have been organized into a chorus/drama group. Their performances serve to educate others throughout their community about the importance of AIDS prevention and of “living positively” — TASO's double entendre for how clients live with the HIV virus.

Their performance for us is proud, frank and unabashedly honest. They sing joyous songs about condoms, about ARVs (anti-retroviral drugs) safe sex and living positively. It is a profoundly healing message, standing up defiantly to shame and stigma. It is doubly profound knowing that they are spreading this message throughout a country that so desperately needs to hear it.

That night before dinner, Omai Jessica reminds us to say *motzi* before we eat. She has become very taken by our blessings and by Judaism in general. She asks me to translate the Hebrew for her and I teach her the pronunciation. In the future we will begin every meal with a Ugandan prayer sung by Jessica, followed by our group *motzi*. Cultural exchange is quickly becoming second nature for all concerned.

Thursday, April 7

We wake up early and are on the road by 6:00 for a visit to the Abayudaya, the Ugandan Jewish community. Numbering over six hundred members throughout Uganda, the Abayudaya have been practicing traditional Judaism here since converting en masse in the early 20th century. Because so much of Uganda is marked by a pronounced and devoutly Christian culture, we are all very curious to experience our first taste of Ugandan Judaism.

As we approach, it becomes apparent to us that the Abayudaya live in a village just like the other Ugandan communities we have visited: one of dense farmland, dirt paths, and mud huts. Upon closer examination, however, we notice Hebrew writing and Jewish stars on several of the buildings.

We arrive at their central congregation, the Moses Synagogue, in time for the morning service. The building is African in style, but filled with comfortable Jewish sights. The walls are lined with familiar books — in addition to American Jewish prayer books there is an array of English language books on a variety of Jewish subjects. A handful of men welcome us as we walk into the synagogue and invite us to sit in the first few rows. I am handed *tefillin* and wrap the strap around my arm as the morning blessings begin.

The style of the service is immediately familiar to us. The prayer leader gives instructions in English and we *davven* a traditional service in Hebrew. When we get to the *Pesukei D'zimra* (the

introductory psalms of praise) we are handed song sheets with the psalms in transliterated Lugandan. They are set to lovely, joyful African melodies — we are able to join in almost immediately.

The rest of the service continues in familiar fashion. During the Torah service, they offer me the honor of the second *aliyah*. (Perhaps I have been joining in a bit too enthusiastically!) To my slight shock, after finish the opening *aliyah* blessing, they invite me to chant from the Torah itself. Though I have not prepared the portion, I sight-read and improvise as best I can. I am genuinely moved by the honor.

The service concludes with the singing of *Shomer Yisrael* and *Hatikvah*. Afterwards, the prayer leader welcomes us. His name is Aaron Kiutu Moses and he serves as one of the rabbis of their community. Another member of the community steps forward and makes a few announcements. He mentions that amidst the joy of our meeting there is also sad news to report. One member of their community has died just that morning and they will need volunteers to come and help collect the body.

Afterwards Aaron takes our delegation on a brief tour of their village. We visit their private Jewish schools as well as the public schools they administer for the subdistrict. Not surprisingly, we end up staying longer than we had planned, lingering in particular with the younger children at the Hadassah Hebrew school. We are all struck by the sight of these children studying the *aleph-bet* in the manner of Jewish children everywhere.

Before we leave, we give Rabbi Aa-

ron some *tzedakah* in memory of their community member who has recently died (of AIDS, as it turns out). He thanks us and tells us that our communities are now forever linked, for we have experienced both joy and sorrow together. Aaron is sorry, as are we, that we must leave so soon. He would love for us to spend Shabbat with them. It is truly a tempting offer.

Friday, April 8

After our final day of work we are invited to a dance performance by the teenage students of Natandome's vocational school. We are seated in a row outside a classroom as literally hundreds of adults and children from the village gather around us. The teenagers perform a series of dances to the beat from a wooden xylophone. The dancing goes on for an extended period of time, the boys and girls pairing off and gyrating with abandon.

After several dances, they stop and gesture to our group, inviting us to join them. We look at each other, gulp, and nervously join them. They tie colorful sashes around our waists and the drums start up again. Each of us gets a teenage dance partner, and off we go. Hundreds of villagers cheer and whoop with delight and laughter. We're pretty stiff at first, but we quickly loosen up as the dancing goes on and on and on. At one point the group forms a semi-circle and they invite us to dance solo in the middle. We each take a turn, the crowd going especially wild when one of our AJWS group leaders Nina Kaufman and I do the bump.

When it is all over, we stagger back to our rooms looking at each other with incredulous, silly grins on our faces. We get ready for Shabbat, then gather under our canopy for dinner and a Shabbat service. Omani Jessica lights the candles, together with Emma Bernsohn and Naima Cohen, the two high school student members of our delegation. Shabbat has begun.

Saturday, April 9

Night has fallen and we gather under our canopy for *havdalah*, joined by a large number of FDNC staff and lay leadership. It has been a wonderful Shabbat, tinged with the sadness of knowing it would be our last full day in Natandome.

Before *havdalah*, I explain the ritual to our guests and I add that this particular ritual of separation does not only mark the separation between Shabbat and the week — for us it also marks the separation between our sojourn in Natandome and our departure tomorrow. We then begin to sing the *havdalah* blessings, and our Ugandan hosts sing the melody with us. As our voices build, my mind and heart are filled with sacred lessons of a week soon to be past.

Lesson 1

“You Can't Develop People — You Can Only Help People Develop Themselves.”

The true heroes of this trip were the NGO workers we met along the way: Samuel Watalutsu and the men and women of the FDNC, the doctors, counselors and clients of TASO. These individuals are deeply connected to

their home communities, and their work is rooted in the shared, sacrosanct value of grassroots sustainable development. They know that any successful answer to the myriad of crises and challenges they face cannot be imposed upon them from the outside — it must be nurtured from within.

In speaking to these activists, we were consistently taken by their passionate adherence to this principle. At its core it is driven by a vision and conviction that real development is human development — it is rooted in the inherent integrity of human beings and their relationship to their communities, their cultures and their environment.

When Moses Maimonides taught that the highest level of *tzedakah* was helping others to become self-sufficient, he was, in his way, promoting the very same vision. The greatest gestures we can offer those in need are not our pity nor our handouts, but the ability to develop themselves in such a way that honors their worth as human beings.

Lesson 2

“Jews Are Global Citizens.”

Jews do not typically participate in these kinds of service projects, which invariably tend to be in the domain of organizations like the Peace Corps, or Christian service groups or missionaries. In the months and days leading up to my trip, I heard my share of comments from people questioning why my congregation was participating in this delegation. Too often, it seems, “Jewish service” is invariably understood as “service to Jews in need.”

I am profoundly grateful to AJWS

for seeking to change this paradigm. AJWS believes, as do I, that to be a Jew in the 21st century means to be a global citizen — to define our sacred imperative of *tikkun olam* as repair of the entire world. By living with rural Ugandans, by bearing witness to their stories, by supporting their work for sustainable development while studying texts from my own spiritual tradition for guidance, I have experienced Jewish fulfillment as never before. Every moment of this trip, no matter what I happened to be doing, I felt I was exactly where I should be as a Jew. Even as a rabbi, I have rarely been so sure of this.

A passage from our AJWS program handbook puts it perfectly:

In the past, we have asked . . . what about service/justice work is Jewish? At the beginning of the 21st century, this is not the most challenging, provocative or productive question we could be asking ourselves. Instead, the question (we should be asking) is:

The divide between the developing world and developed world is staggering. The amount of poverty, hunger and disease in developing countries is greater now than ever before. In light of this imbalance and the wealth of resources to which many of us have access, how should we Jews respond?

Lesson 3

“The Quality of Hope”

The villagers of Natandome and Uganda live amidst one of the most dev-

astating crises of our time: widespread pandemic, extreme poverty, familial dislocation, political instability. However, despite it all, I never sensed for a moment that their hopes or spirits had been beaten down. On the contrary, I witnessed people invested to the core with a deep love for one another and their community — a palpable sense of what delegation member Elaine Waxman termed “emotional sustainability.”

I do not know that I can say precisely where emotional sustainability comes from, but I do believe it is nourished by relationship. It is clear that the people of Natandome and the workers of FDNC are energized by their love for each and their community — and by their hope for a better future.

I cannot help but think how notably lacking this quality is in my home country. On the contrary, those working for social equity and justice in the United States often testify to a widespread sense of disillusionment, burn-out and futility. The paradigmatic feeling seems to be, “I’ve worked so long and so hard and nothing ever seems to change.” In Natandome, the paradigm is the polar opposite. Though the villagers face personal and collective challenges the like of which we Americans will never know, I sense no disillusionment or despair. Their unique quality of hope, their emotional sustainability, their love, truly has much to teach us.

Lesson 4

“And God Created Humanity in God’s image . . . ”

We use the term “global village” so much that it is fast devolving into a

cliché. We may be connected by our cell phones, the Internet and global finance markets in unprecedented ways, but in the ways that matter most it often feels as if the citizens of the world are more isolated from one another than ever before. This is especially true of post- 9/11 America, which regards the rest of the world with increasing suspicion and fear.

My experience on this delegation has convinced me more than ever before that we need to redouble our efforts to make the concept of a global village a reality and not simply a tired catch phrase. The truth is that most of us Americans know precious little about the world beyond our borders — and even less about the developing world. We see pictures in magazines of poor children with distended bellies and flies on their faces, and we regard them as alien — beings from another world who have little to do with us and our comfortable homes.

Despite our illusions, however, the truth remains that a significant percentage of the world lives in some form of definable poverty. And they are not nearly as far away from us as we might think. They do not live at the ends of the earth. They are *yoshvei tevel* — dwellers of our shared world. They, like us, are created in the image of God.

The only way we will ever fully understand this truth is to make the conscious effort to leave the confines of our homes and forge real human connection. Though the people of Nantandome are significantly different from us in many ways, during this past week our delegation has grown to under-

stand just how much we have in common. Their children laugh and play and get into mischief just like our own. Families love their children just as deeply as we do, and harbor the same kinds of hope and dreams for them to grow up happy, healthy and in safety. This knowledge has been a gift to me. In discovering their humanity, I have rediscovered my own.

The trip was transformative for our

delegation in a myriad of unexpected ways. We returned changed — in obvious ways and in ways we have yet to fully understand. We have been inspired, and devastated; spiritually deepened, and politically motivated. We share a sacred bond with one another and with the people of Natandome Village. Though our journey is now over, we are united in the conviction that a new one is only just beginning.

Clergy Sexual Misconduct: An Issue of Ethics and Justice

BY ANNE UNDERWOOD

Regardless of denomination or tradition, most congregants assume that their place of worship and religious study is a safe space for children, adults in crisis and all who enter. Most would aver that their faith community promotes justice and is administered ethically. Yet religious institutions are human enterprises led by clergy and laity subject to missing the mark the same as leaders of any institution. The pursuit of the Holy does not itself make everyone holy.

All religious leaders have power¹ within their community. A few misuse it. Acknowledging the misuse of power by some religious leaders is painful but necessary. This is as true for Jewish denominations as for Boston Catholics, even though it is the sins of the latter's clergy leaders that have received the broadest publicity.

Misuse of power by religious leaders — in this article, specifically, rabbis and cantors — may be financial, emotional, spiritual, physical or sexual. None is simply a personal harm done privately between the rabbi/cantor and another. Each misuse violates the trust of an individual, the families of both,

the congregation, the professional association and the ordaining/investing body.

Power Abuse

Any form of power abuse by clergy tears the fabric of the community. Property crimes, like embezzlement (abusing access to synagogue funds to steal), can be criminally prosecuted, but usually are not. Congregational leaders are often loath to shame their clergy publicly or to be the object of negative publicity.

Transgressions against persons are often beyond the scope of civil or criminal law, unless the physical abuse of minors is involved. Accusations of personal harm are often cases of “he says, she says,” and frequently involve people marginalized from community power.

The primary example of personal harm is sexual misconduct, which encompasses all forms of misuse of power sexually: abuse of minors, sexual malfeasance with adults and sexual harassment. This is the example used throughout this article to discuss abuse-of-power issues.

Justice and ethics are inseparable. *Pirke Avot* 1.10 admonishes, “love la-

Anne Underwood is an attorney and consultant who serves as an advisor to the ethics committee of several clergy associations, including the National Association of Jewish Chaplains and the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

bor and hate [the abuse of power]. . .” (The Hebrew word translated as [abuse of power], *rabbanut*, is the modern Hebrew word for the rabbinate.² How one uses power demonstrates one’s commitment to the ethical life. How one holds others accountable for their use of power demonstrates one’s commitment to justice. For most religious people, the second mandate concerning others is more difficult to confront than the first.

Sex, Power and Religious Leaders

Historically, sex and power often intertwine. The potential for misusing power always has been present in relationships between religious leaders and laity. American religious history, for example, is replete with stories of Protestant clergy-congregant sexual liaisons. Three thousand years ago, the prophet Nathan rebuked King David for fulfilling his lust with the wife of a soldier and then using his royal power to order the man killed in battle (Samuel II: 11-12).

Until recently, the term “sexual indiscretion” described and often excused such behavior. Sexual indiscretions were tolerated because male religious and political leaders were viewed as “entitled” to sexual prerogatives, or were pitied as victims of female temptresses within their communities.

In the 1980s, a new perspective emerged. Leadership entitlement (the “King David Syndrome”) and male vulnerability (the “Potiphar’s Wife Trap”) were reconceptualized. “Sexual indiscretion” received a different name:

sexual misconduct. Faith communities urged clergy to accept responsibility for faithfulness to partnered commitments — their own and those of others. Recognition spread that sexual relations were inappropriate with congregants, counselees and employees.

Societal Changes

The change in religious communities corresponded to changes in the larger society. Both acknowledged the fresh perspectives on human relationships articulated in the 1986 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Meritor v. Vinson*.³ There, for the first time, sexual harassment (in the workplace) was acknowledged as a legal theory on which a claim for harm could be made.

The Court gave three guidelines for determining if a sexual liaison in the work place constituted harassment. First, a voluntary liaison (no gun held to one’s head, no threat of economic loss or loss of status) does not automatically create a “welcome” liaison. It must be shown that the relationship was welcomed by both parties. If it was not, it might constitute harassment.

Second, when determining if the liaison was welcome, the fact-finder must look to the impact of the alleged behavior on the alleged victim, not the intent of the accused. This turns upside down the traditional analysis in criminal and tort law where the *mens rea* (mind-set) of the accused is the focus, usually to the exclusion of a victim’s perception or experience.

Third, the Court said that when

there is an imbalance of power, consent to a voluntary liaison cannot be assumed. Consent is a matter of fact to be determined at trial. Each guideline confirms the prophetic call to heed the voice of the most vulnerable — to honor the view of those with lesser power.

The Court in the Meritor case held that employers (and, in a later decision, schools) are responsible for the actions of those whom they employ in positions of authority. Further, there must be written and publicized policies regarding appropriate conduct and procedures for addressing complaints. The 1990s saw the creation of sexual-misconduct policies, and modifications to existing professional ethics codes, specifically to address sexual behavior.

Leaders' Fiduciary Duty

As codes were refined, so too was the understanding of "sexual misconduct." Applying concepts from the legal and financial world to human relationships, ethicists in the mid 1990s spoke of religious leaders' fiduciary duty to those served. Fiduciary means holding something of value in trust. The holding creates the responsibility to act in the other's best interest. The relationship of a cantor and bar mitzvah student, for example, exists for the sole purpose of addressing and protecting the needs of the student.

Because of the rabbi's position as a trusted leader of the community, s/he often has access to the details and dreams of congregants' lives. The community's selection of a rabbi con-

fers on that person honor and power. Individuals trust the rabbi to be a person of integrity as well as a religious leader. When the rabbi breaks the confidentiality of a couple in marital counseling, or uses private insights about someone's health to keep that person off of the board of directors, or returns the flirtations of a conversion candidate, fiduciary duty is breached. The rabbi has not held sacred something in her or his care.

This breach of duty is also a betrayal of trust. When trust is broken by a religious leader, the result for the person betrayed is often alienation from the Holy and bitter departure from the faith tradition. The ramifications of each cascade throughout the entire community — either as direct knowledge is shared, or as rumors are spread.

Imbalance of Power

In pastoral counseling, it is always the duty of the rabbi to monitor transference.⁴ The rabbi is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the relationship because the rabbi holds greater power in the context of the religious community.⁵ A congregant may be a powerful financial broker, an influential attorney, or esteemed surgeon. (In such congregants' professional lives, they have their own fiduciary duty to clients and patients.) But within the synagogue, it is the rabbi who holds the "professional" power within individual relationships.

Professional power comes from the special knowledge and expertise of the position. The professional, whether

doctor, lawyer or rabbi, knows the patient, client or congregant in ways the patient, client or congregant does not know the professional. There is mutuality of consent to the relationship, but no mutuality of access to information about each other within the relationship.

If “knowledge is power,” it is clear that one person holds more of both. In addition to this real power differential, most people ascribe power to the professional, whether or not the professional has actual power in a given encounter. This applies particularly to clergy of all faith traditions. “Numinosity” is the special name for the kind of “transcendent,” “connected-to-the-Holy” power ascribed by laity to those who are ordained or invested. Theology and ecclesiology aside, numinosity is as real for the religious Jewish lay person as for the Irish Catholic or Sunni Muslim.

No matter how much power a person has outside the religious setting, within it, the expectations and realities of the rabbinical status create an imbalance of power in favor of the rabbi vis-à-vis individual congregants in counseling, crisis or life-cycle ceremonies.

Are Peer Relationships Possible?

Can there ever be occasions when a rabbi sheds his or her rabbinic power for an authentic peer relationship with a congregant? Until very recently, the conventional wisdom has been “no.” Once a rabbi ascends to the *bimah* as liturgist and teacher of Torah, the rabbi

is set apart — elevated in both function and person within the congregation.

A few voices, mine included, are now proposing rare and limited situations where the power imbalance can be acknowledged, the difference it creates negotiated, and a friendship of peers formed. However, this will never be true if there has been a counseling relationship between the rabbi and the congregant or the congregant’s family. And, there can never be an assumption of meaningful consent to a sexual relationship.

Boundaries: What and Why?

For the rabbi/cantor, two ethical questions emerge: How does one recognize, own, value and use wisely one’s power while remaining fully human and non-arrogant in a professional relationship? How does one use one’s own needs and abilities to benefit and complement the needs and abilities of the others with whom one stands in a “power” relationship?

These questions align with the concept of “boundaries.” Webster’s dictionary defines a boundary as something that sets a limit. Ethicist Marie Fortune says that “boundaries are a means to attend to our relative power and vulnerability in any relationship without doing harm.”⁶ Boundaries (limits) can be viewed as boarders or barriers to separate the rabbi from the congregant. Or, they can be seen as safe points of contact, points where both can meet but that allow the rabbi to maintain the separation necessary to focus solely

on the best interests and needs of the congregant, rather than on the rabbi's own issues and desires.

Observing boundaries does not mean showing no warmth or engagement with those served. One psychologist says, "Boundaries do not mean 'detached neutrality.' Boundaries are about passionate but trustworthy engagement."⁷ Boundaries mark a path along which two people, rabbi and congregant, can travel safely and with ethical integrity in spiritual and intellectual intimacy.

Policies and Professional Codes

Understanding power differentials and respecting professional boundaries are personal steps that rabbis, cantors and congregants can take to contribute to the ethical environment of a congregation. The congregational body needs also to study the issues of use and abuse of professional power and to formulate its own policies and procedures for responding to allegations of injustice, whether financial or personal. Policies should cover not only the ordained/invested, but all employees and lay members as well. Since the focus of this article is sexual misconduct, it is policies particular to those charges that are discussed.

Most denominational sexual-conduct policies follow the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's definition of sexual harassment which includes: unwanted touching, unwelcome attentions, assault and rape.⁸

The First Amendment removes ministerial conduct in religious forums

from the purview of secular law.⁹ Therefore, faith communities have an ethical obligation to create and enforce their own policies in order to provide the same level of safety in their communities as that required at the supermarket or the department store. Rabbinical and cantorial codes and policies generally prohibit any sexualized contact between rabbis or cantors and congregants, students, counselees and employees. Synagogue policies should include religious school teachers, vendors and volunteers.

Holding Clergy Accountable

Having a policy is not enough; it must be publicized. More importantly, people must be willing to use it when necessary. Acknowledging that religious leaders sometimes miss the mark and engage in inappropriate sexualized conduct is painful. Communities can be split apart by allegations and findings, and holding religious leaders accountable is emotionally wrenching. Perceptions of clergy can become conflicted and contradictory. The rabbi who is charged with having molested three congregants is the same rabbi who has supported thirty others through the final days of loved ones. The cantor who makes some bat mitzvah students uncomfortable with his jokes and hugs possesses the voice that so many find emotionally moving at High Holy Day services.

The most difficult lesson from the secular world for religious communities to comprehend is that numerous great and good deeds for many cannot

outweigh the damage of inappropriate sexualized behavior to a few. No group of professionals likes to hear of a colleague's misdeeds. No group of professionals is comfortable disciplining peers. For clergy, it is especially disconcerting, since it is uncomfortable and difficult to presume to sit in judgment of another person. In my experience, congregants understand more readily than do colleagues the importance of acting on allegations of clergy misconduct. Sometimes, the congregation must take the lead in seeking justice from the offender's professional association.

When *Teshuvah* Is Not Possible

Clergy and lay people of all faith traditions believe in the power of remorse to produce reconciliation and reform (*teshuvah*). The unfortunate reality is that for many religious leaders who offend, true *teshuvah* does not happen. They are incapable of fundamental change. Psychological evaluations of sex offenders often show people with a pervasive character disorder. They cannot control their impulses, or comprehend the impact of their actions. The only just response for them and for congregants (current as well as potential) is removal from opportunities for leadership or further rabbinic/cantorial work. Their own denial, coupled with the natural resistance to "congregational messes," makes covering up the situation or blaming the complainants the easiest response. Neither is just or ethical.

Clear guidelines for acceptable be-

havior, coupled with a straightforward and fair process for investigating and adjudicating allegations of misconduct, are the only antidote.¹⁰ Communities are accountable to their members for an ethical environment in which justice is upheld with compassion. However painful, *tikkun olam* requires the ethical community to hold accountable a leader who has missed the mark of justice in community relationships.

1. Power here means the ability to influence or control one's environment and the people in it.

2. *Pirke Avot: A Modern Commentary on Jewish Ethics*, edited and translated by Leonard Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky, UAHC Press, 1993. The observation on *rabbanut* and its modern counterpart is noted by the editors.

3. *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*, 477 U.S. 57 (1986). A bank teller terminated a lengthy sexual relationship with her supervisor. After being fired, she sued the bank, claiming that the relationship was not consensual and that she had felt harassed by the supervisor's attentions. The court ruled that harassment constitutes discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and that an employer could be found liable for the conduct of its supervisory employees.

4. Transference and counter transference (often involving erotic feelings or emotional fantasies) frequently occur in counseling. Professionals who counsel should be trained to recognize, use and diffuse these feelings to address the issues of the person with whom they are working.

5. Two works containing excellent discussions of power differentials in professional relationships and giving specific note to the

kinds of power inherent within clerical relationships are: *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry* (Paulist Press, 1996) by Richard Gula, SS, and *At Personal Risk: Boundary Violations in Professional-Client Relationships* (Norton, 1992) by Marilyn Peterson.

6. Marie Fortune, "The Joy of Boundaries," in *Boundary Wars, Intimacy and Distance in Healing Relationships*, Katherine Hancock Ragsdale (The Pilgrim Press, 1996), 80.
7. Miriam Greenspan, "Out of Bounds," in *Boundary Wars, Intimacy and Distance in Healing Relationships* Katherine Hancock Ragsdale (The Pilgrim Press, 1996), 134.
8. EEOC definition: "Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made

either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such an individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment," 29CFR 1604.11. Educational institutions add "educational" to employment situations.

9. Courts interpret the First Amendment's religious freedom and separation clauses to prohibit their interference with the training, hiring, retention or firing of people with "ministerial" functions within a religious institution.
10. The author has written elsewhere about the contents of such policies and procedures.

The Jewish Basis for Shareholder Activism

BY MORDECHAI LIEBLING

The Kossover rebbe taught that we always need to be conscious of the Divine. He was asked, “Can we think of God when we are engaged in buying and selling?” “Surely you can,” the rebbe answered, “If we are able to think of business when we are praying, we should be able to think of praying when we are doing business.”

Multinational corporations are considered by many to be the most powerful institutions on the globe today. Of the world’s 100 largest economies, fifty-one belong to corporations with revenues larger than many nation states. Governments are frequently powerless to change corporate behavior or, worse, are compelled to do their bidding. More than sixty years ago, Franklin Delano Roosevelt said that modern corporations “had become a kind of private government which is a power unto itself.”¹

Private Property of Shareholders

What is often overlooked is that these corporations are the private property of shareholders. Publicly held corporations are technically democracies — the shareholders are the voters.

Shareholder involvement has thus emerged as one of the most effective ways of holding corporations accountable.

Recently, an inside-the-Beltway lobbyist for a national environmental organization said to me, “Getting a multinational corporation to change its policies is many times more important than getting the Senate to pass a bill.” As large corporations have assumed significant power in shaping the lives of people and in affecting the health of our eco-systems, working to change corporate policies is an essential component of any effort to bring about a healthier and more just world.

Most shareholders think of themselves as investors. In fact, and in law, they are owners. They own a portion of the corporation in which they hold shares. Being an owner bestows the power of the proxy vote, the power to vote on shareholder resolutions. In Jewish tradition, being an owner has significant ramifications. There is a strong basis to support shareholder activism, derived both from basic principles about wealth and economic resources and from specific *halakhot*. The following is a brief summary of the relevant principles.

Rabbi Mordechai Liebling is Director of the Torah of Money program at the Shefa Fund.

Basic Principles

- The earth belongs to God, and all wealth derives from God.
- Human beings are the stewards of creation, and are responsible for taking care of each other.
- Judaism is a covenantal religion: We are partners with God for the well-being of all creation.
- Owning private property is a legitimate human need; along with ownership come rights and responsibilities.

A fundamental tenet of Judaism is *brit* (covenant) — the belief that God and humans are partners in the world's daily recreation and in striving toward justice. Our partnership with God is the basis for recognizing that economic interdependence and community responsibility limit and balance the creation and accumulation of wealth. Being true to the *brit* requires conscious ethical behavior in work, consumption, buying, selling, lending and giving. The miracle of Sinai was of human beings coming together to form a society based on ethics and justice, and not on personal gain. This was reaffirmed within the reward and punishment paradigm of rabbinic Judaism. As the Talmud says, "The first question you will be asked in heaven will be, 'How did you conduct your business affairs?'"²

Responsibilities of Ownership

Judaism understands the ownership of private property as a legitimate human need. Ownership of property implies both rights and responsibilities. Property owners do not have absolute

rights over their property; rights are circumscribed by the needs of the community, such as in the laws of *peah* (reserving the corners of the field for the poor) and of *leket* (gleaning — leaving the rest for the poor once a field has been harvested). These laws require the owner to share the means of production with the poor. Furthermore, property owners must act to prevent injury to others on their property, as seen, for example, in the biblical injunction to put a fence around a roof.³

In Judaism, an owner cannot escape responsibility for the social and communal effects of wealth. The modern corporation, however, separates the shareholder from the corporation. The principle of limited liability, that the corporation and not the person is liable for damages, is fundamental to the corporation. In fact, it is its *raison d'être*: Liability laws were a restraint on risky ventures, and the corporation was created specifically for the purpose of limiting liability. This allows a transfer of moral, as well as legal, responsibility, with the result that shareholders often feel that they have no responsibility for illegal or unethical actions committed by the corporation in which they are shareholders. Jewish tradition, however, does not accept the separation of ownership and liability so easily, affirming that a shareholder remains an owner of the corporation.

Jewish Perspectives

What does Jewish tradition say are the responsibilities of the owner? There are direct principles that affect the own-

ing of shares in a company:

- One is not allowed to earn a profit from forbidden activities, such as, for example: theft; not paying workers fair salaries, using false weights and measures, creating pollution or endangering someone's health.

- One should not allow one's assets to cause damage, and one is liable if damages occur. The classical example from the Talmud is about oxen. If ten people hold shares in an ox and that ox causes damage, each shareholder is liable, proportionate to his/her holding — no matter how small and regardless of whether s/he was actively involved in handling the ox. One cannot transfer responsibility for the action caused by one's assets.

- One may not assist or be a partner to someone who assists another to do an act that is forbidden, even when there is no judicial fine or punishment. Just the opposite: one must try to prevent another from committing a transgression. This is based on Leviticus 19:14, "One should not put a stumbling block before the blind" (*lifnei iver lo titen mikhschol*). As examples: one may not sell weapons to a known criminal, or to someone who is likely to commit a crime; one may not create a market for goods that are harmful, such as tobacco. Neither an individual nor a representative can do these types of things.

Following these teachings, we see, for example, that a corporation that supplies arms to rogue political leaders or despots, or to nations that use weapons against their own citizens to stay in power, would be in violation of these principles. We currently have several

cities trying to sue gun manufacturers for producing Saturday-night-specials. We have the responsibility to make sure that our property (assets) does no harm.

Halakhic Viewpoints

There is a long history of discussions in the halakhic literature about the responsibility of shareholders.⁴ Given all of the responsibilities of ownership, halakhists have had to come to terms with the duties of shareholders. Rabbi D. B. Bressler, in his survey of the relevant literature concludes that

. . . while a diversity of views exists concerning corporate shareholder responsibility, the consensus is that only corporate directors and executives bear ownership accountability. This would mean that according to Jewish law, only such shareholders would, because of their own ownership status, have the legal obligation to examine ethical questions before investing.⁵

This consensus is based on the premise that individual shareholders do not have the power to change company policy while directors and executives do have that power.

The advent of shareholder activism challenges this premise. A group of shareholders, acting together, has the power to change company policy. There is now a thirty-year track record of shareholder resolutions successfully changing company policy. Some recent examples: Home Depot agreed not to buy old-growth lumber; Staples agreed

to sell more recycled paper; pharmaceutical companies have provided HIV/AIDS medicines to African countries free of charge or at significantly reduced rates; and numerous companies have agreed to end discrimination against gay and lesbian employees.

The possibility of collective action having cumulative power leads to the principle that Jewish shareholders have the responsibility to act. Rabbi Bressler concludes,

. . . if there is a shareholder movement attempting to pass resolutions at the annual company meeting that would prevent management from implementing some business impropriety or harmful practice, it would be incumbent upon shareholders to support such proposals.⁶

Collective Wealth

Estimates of the collective wealth of Jewish institutions in endowments and communal funds vary from 25 to 50 billion dollars. That is a significant amount of assets, much of which is invested in stock. Yet very few shareholders vote their proxies. Over the last two years, through my work at the Shefa Fund, I have organized the Jewish Shareholder Engagement Network, to educate and organize Jewish institutions about the importance of voting their proxies. To date, the Network has a dozen members, representing more than \$1.5 billion in equity.⁷

It should be noted that in mainline Protestant denominations and Catholic orders, proxy voting is taken very seriously. The Interfaith Center for

Corporate Responsibility, the source of most social-justice shareholder resolutions, has 275 member institutions, only three of which are Jewish.

One final teaching: A good deed cannot be performed through assets gained by not fulfilling other responsibilities of property ownership. In other words, one cannot fulfill one commandment by means of a transgression of another (*mitzvah haba-ah ba'aveirah*).⁸ Saying "If I earn more money I will give more *tzedakah*" does not work, if in the process of making the money one is causing, contributing to or benefiting from injustice.

Jewish values about the responsibilities of ownership are clear and unambiguous — we need to take every reasonable step to make sure that the things we own do no harm. A first step in being a responsible shareholder would be to vote proxies to fulfill those obligations.

1. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, *Commonwealth Club Address*, September 23, 1932.

2. Talmud, *Shabbat* 31A.

3. Deuteronomy 22:8.

4. For an excellent review of the material see D. B. Bressler, "Ethical Investment: The Responsibility of Ownership in Jewish Law" in *Jewish Business Ethics: The Firm and Its Stakeholders* edited by Aaron Levine and Moses Pava, Jason Aronson, 1999.

5. *Ibid.* 185.

6. *Ibid.*, 193.

7. The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College is a member, along with many of the institutions of the Reform movement; the Nathan Cummings Foundation is also a member and has been the principal supporter of this project.

8. Talmud, *Sukkah* 30A.

Every Day Ethics: God is in the Details

BY CHRISTINA AGER

I am an eco-behaviorist, which for the purposes of this article means two things. First, I see behavior as the primary vehicle for connection between living beings. Second, I see behaviors as being created in the space between the environment and the individual. So while each person is responsible for his or her actions, the environment also contributes to the context in which those actions occur. The context (or ecology) of any situation contributes to the behaviors exhibited in that context. Some situations help us be our best selves, while other situations contribute to our being less than our best.

Responsible leaders, be they supervisors, teachers, principals or parents help create contexts in which people are most likely to interact positively. Eco-behaviorism is an extension of the philosophy of Martin Buber, and can be summed up as follows: what happens happens *between* one person and the environment. Each person's actions within the interaction contribute to the creation of the space in which we live our lives.

I am also a mystic of sorts, believing that the worlds of action (*asayah*) and of words or formation (*yetzirah*) do, in fact, create the world we inhabit (*beriah*). These physical manifestations of life not only mirror the sphere of emanation (*atzilut*) they create this sphere, which in turn affects the worlds of *asayah* and *yetzirah*.

Action and Speech

Action and speech are our tools of creation. A cosmic circle is begun each time we act, and each time we speak. Consequently, ethical living is grounded in each behavior — verbal or nonverbal — in which we engage. In this article, I will lay out some lessons learned from my work that contribute to embracing the ethical construction of everyday life.

Behavior is the primary vehicle for connection. Each action we take is an opportunity to heal or harm, to build a bridge or to build a barrier. Those are among the choices we face each time we interact with another person. We have the opportunity to choose dozens, per-

Dr. Christina Ager is an associate professor of special education and executive director of the B²EST (Building Behavioral and Educational Support Teams) program at Arcadia University. B²EST provides research-based programming to support students with emotional and behavioral challenges and to implement positive behavioral support in schools and organizations nationally.

haps hundreds, of times a day between being kind or being hurtful, between smiling and frowning, between truly seeing someone else or being consumed in our own life. Being conscious of those choices helps us to act wisely.

Behaviors are the details of life, and life is all about details. How we behave conveys our ethics, our principles and our beliefs about the world. Living an ethical life means behaving ethically. When asked, many people will report they “believe” in kindness or they “value” caring. Our behaviors are the translation of our beliefs into action. Without this, ethics or values are meaningless.

Believing and Behaving

In addition to being an eco-behaviorist and a mystic, I am also a professor, consultant and trainer in the field of positive behavior support. This field used to be called “behavior disorders,” but has since evolved. No longer do we view life through the lenses of deficits. Rather, our goal is to help organizations, schools, families and individuals find ways to support themselves and each other in behaviors that are consistent with the ethics of the person(s) or the organization. We seek to promote behavior that is caring, compassionate, kind, true and meaningful.

We find that if there is a disconnect between what we say we believe and how we behave then a sense of unease gets created inside us and at some level, we suffer. We are not as satisfied with our work or as happy in our homes. Positive behavior support tries to transform situations of harm — such as people yelling

at each other, teachers embarrassing or berating children, or organizations using silence to promote fear — into situations of healing. The concept of everyday ethics developed through my grappling with the intersection of my Judaism and this work of helping myself and others shape the world in which we live, one behavior at a time.

Five to One

One of the central foci of this work is the “five to one,” a research-based ratio of the number of positive/supportive statements to the number of corrective or critical statements. Research has demonstrated that use of this ratio transforms relationships and, consequently, situations.

This is the way it works: for every one corrective or critical statement we make, we need to make five positive or supportive statements. In this way we create situations or contexts that honor the good or successful in others, and acknowledge their strengths and contributions. This also insures that we cultivate and express gratitude for the abundance present in our lives, rather than focusing on discontent for what is lacking.

When this concept is introduced to people they are often skeptical. It takes practice to make the positive statements as genuine as our criticisms often are. It takes commitment and practice to learn to live this way. Principals, supervisors and parents often assert that it is impossible to fulfill, or try to negotiate for something less — three to two, or three to one, for instance. But five to one works. This ratio has been shown to improve student

performance in schools,¹ employee satisfaction at work,² and can predict with over ninety percent accuracy the likelihood of couples staying together.³ This ratio can be used both as a metric (to measure the health of a relationship or organization) and as an intervention. Using the five to one changes a person's orientation toward others and subsequently toward life; it is a powerful tool.

Applying Jewish Values

Five to one is also a spiritual practice. Practicing the five to one makes it easier to see that each of us is made *b'tselem elohim*, in the image of God. I have been blessed with many great teachers, many of them appearing in a form I would not have chosen if given a choice. These teachers are people who “push my buttons.” Over time I have come to accept “button pushing” as God's way of reminding me to grow and change. In other words, people who push my buttons are equally in the image of God.

Obviously, this is not always easy to remember. Nor am I always able to see God in the faces of someone who is ranting at me about why I am wrong or totally misinformed. Still, when I can remember that each face I encounter is a face of God, it is easier to take the step forward toward growth, rather than backward toward fear or anger.

An extension of *b'tselem elohim* is the Jewish value of welcoming the stranger. I have found this most helpful when I recognize the stranger as someone who thinks, believes or lives very differently from myself. For a long time, I thought of the stranger as some person who would

wonder through the desert of life and end up outside my tent, as the three angels appeared outside Abraham's tent. It was a lovely image and a convenient one. Since I do not live in a tent in the desert I did not have to face this possibility as a real task in my life. Yes, I felt guilty sometimes that I did not go into the streets and invite people who are homeless to my Seder, but then the feeling would pass as conveniently as the holiday.

Welcoming the stranger is a more real and more difficult task when the stranger is someone with a different political opinion; or a smoker ahead of me in line at the movies; or any of the thousands of other people who rub up against me in the daily lived interactions of everyday existence.

Levels of Power

Louise Hay⁴ talks about three levels of power: individual, tribal and spiritual. People who operate out of either an individual or tribal orientation believe that different rules apply to them and their group than apply to others. Many of the ills in the world come from privileging individual and tribal power. But if we recognize the unity and connectedness of all creation then ultimately there are no “strangers.” *Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Ehad*: God is One.

Making choices that welcome the stranger, and that reinforce the idea that we all matter, is not always easy. Engaging in behaviors and interactions that say clearly, for example, “your children or your feelings or your thoughts matter no less than mine,” can be a challenge. Welcoming everyone — those strange to us,

as well as those familiar to us — means our hearts and minds are as open as Abraham’s tent. We can exercise a hospitality of the heart that is willing to provide others with the sustenance they need, even if that nurturance is very different from what we think they need, or what we ourselves need. Welcoming the stranger means I extend the same kindness, patience and understanding to people whose values, beliefs or lives seem foreign to me as I do to those whose values, beliefs, and lives are similar to mine.

Understanding that all behaviors have a function can help us welcome the stranger. Actions communicate; they can result in our getting something we want, or avoiding something we do not want. Knowing the function of a person’s behavior can help us act in a more compassionate, understanding and supportive way toward him or her.

Functions of Behavior

The functions of behavior are universal. We want to get the attention of people we like or respect, we want access to tasks or activities we enjoy, we want status, control over our own lives and a sense of belongingness and safety. Conversely, we want to avoid the attention of people we do not like and tasks or activities we find distasteful or difficult. We also want to avoid frustration along with failure and fear, fear of embarrassment or failure or of another person’s anger or disapproval.

These functions are neither right nor wrong. Wanting status or attention, or wanting to avoid failure are neither good nor bad. Some people are more socially skilled and interpersonally wise; they are

able to get what they want without annoying others. When we view others as “having a behavior problem,” it is not that they want something different than the rest of us. Rather it is that they go about getting it in ways that we find disruptive or hard to take. The student who garners attention by acting out in class, and the congregant who wants twenty minutes of the rabbi’s time at every *oneg*, are both trying to gain attention or status. The colleague who runs every idea by you before acting, or a supervisee who puts off a major task, may both be trying to avoid failure.

Seeing beneath the behavior, and hearing what people are saying to us by means of their behaviors, enables us to approach people in a different, more supportive and productive way. If a rabbi can see that a congregant needs the status of talking with her, then she can find other ways to provide that status; not by allowing herself to be cornered at the *oneg*, but in a way that feels better to her and does not monopolize her time after services. In time, that person may also learn how to get status in ways that are more socially acceptable, and more organizationally compatible.

Rewarding the Good

In most schools and organizations the easiest way to get attention is to act out, while behaving appropriately and being a good citizen often leads to being ignored. Teachers, for example, can make sure the majority of their attention is going to students who are behaving appropriately, rather than to students who are not following the rules. Teachers often

use what I call the sniper method of behavior control, ignoring, for example, the twenty students who are walking to lunch quietly, and shooting a disapproving comment at the one or two students who are talking in the hall.

Reversing this accomplishes three things. First, students learn that to get the teacher's attention they must be doing what is right; second, a more positive atmosphere is created in the school (especially if the teacher is using the five to one); and third, students who are not following the rules begin to do so in order to gain the praise and recognition available to their fellow students who are doing as asked.

Fear of Failure

Understanding that a congregant or supervisee wants to avoid failure allows us to meet them with compassion, since we too want to avoid failure. Then we can assure them, ask what they need to get started, and let them know they should check in with us a third of the way through their task. Setting up this system often allows people to move forward, and provides an opportunity to intervene before a project is completed, so that it can be kept on track instead of being criticized after the fact. We do not feel so put upon, and can be more generous with our reassurance. Taken together, these strategies constitute a system of positive behavioral support that establishes a different framework in which to live, one that stands in contrast to the systems currently operating in most schools, synagogues and work places.

By recognizing that the functions of

behavior are universal, and by seeing what a person is saying with his or her behavior, we can respond in ways that preserve other people's dignity and support them in getting what they need. Then we can develop ways to help people learn more positive or appropriate ways to behave, strategies that result in a positive climate that makes manifest the values of our families or organizations. We can create places where compassion, consideration and collaboration are espoused, not just in mission statements but in everyday interactions. We can develop organizations that proactively meet the needs of their constituents and self-consciously reinforce desired behaviors. The goal of positive behavior support is to find personal and organizational ways to support behaviors that contribute to actualizing the goals that we set for ourselves.

Giving and Getting Support

All people deserve support, and all of us need support from time to time. When we are being intra- or interpersonally intelligent we can often figure out how to support ourselves, or how to get support from our partners or closest colleagues. We talk over a situation that we know will challenge us behaviorally before it occurs, and strategize how to remain kind and calm while knowing our buttons may get pushed. Or, we decide not to make the phone call to discuss a difficult topic with a colleague because we are tired and feeling vulnerable. So we wait and make the call tomorrow, when we are more capable of being our better selves. And there are times when we are not so intrapersonally intelligent, when we too

need the support of environments or co-workers that help us do what is right, kind or judicious.

Providing support for each other is not over and above the responsibilities of life, it is a primary responsibility of life. Doing so with kindness, compassion and generosity conveys our acceptance of this responsibility, and creates in the spaces between us an atmosphere conducive to acceptance and growth.

We create the world through action and speech. Practicing the five to one, remembering *b'tselem elohim*, and welcoming the stranger can help us create a kinder more expansive world. Pausing to see what people are saying to us through their behaviors, and looking at our own annoyances as opportunities for growth and transformation, can enable us to respond in ways that create positive sup-

portive spaces between us and other people. In these ways ethics become the words and actions of every day living.

1. *Best Practices, Prioritizing as a Group*, Office of Quality Improvement and Office of Human Resource Development (online), University of Wisconsin Madison, <http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/meetings/prioritize.htm#criteria>

2. Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D., *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (Princeton, NJ: Gallup, 2004)

3. Gottman and Swanson, "Math and Marriage: Five-to-One Ratio Predicts Who Will Stay Married," *University Week* University of Washington, Vol. 21, 2004 (16).

4 Louise L. Hay is a lecturer on and teacher of metaphysics and the bestselling author of 27 books, including *You Can Heal Your Life* and *Empowering Women*.

Simplicity as a Jewish Value: Reclaiming and Reconstructing Sumptuary Legislation

BY MOTI RIEBER

I have a parlor game I sometimes like to play with friends. We list everyday seemingly indispensable items that did not even exist ten or fifteen years ago. It's a long list: cell phones (now with text messaging and picture-taking capacity); personal digital assistants (PDAs, now including mobile e-mail); e-mail and the Internet itself; high-speed computers (now with broad-band connection); iPods (which have more storage space than the highest-tech home computer did ten years ago); digital cable television; and on and on. And this does not even take into account the things that did exist years ago but are now bigger and better than they ever were: television sets the size of walls, huge new houses and, of course, the SUV (or as progressive columnist Jim Hightower calls it, the "Chevy Subdivision.")

Consumer Religion

Consumerism is more than ever the civil religion of American life. Since the

"greed is good" 1980s, we have seen the triumph of globalization and the free-market system, coupled with the collapse of meaningful alternative philosophies to our contemporary obsession with getting and spending. The shopping mall has become the most important "public" space in society; shopping has become the most important activity; and the one-day sale has become the most recognizable way we celebrate our civic holidays. The incessant and insistent message to "buy, buy, buy" is forced upon us 24/7, from televisions, radios, billboards, newspapers and Internet pop-up ads.

American Jews are far from impervious to this sort of societal pressure. An old joke captures the materialism that many associate with organized Jewish life: "What did the mink say to the fox? 'See you at Rosh Hashanah!'" That this tendency toward materialism still exists and, in fact, has expanded along with the size of houses and cars, can be seen in elaborate and expensive *semahot*; it is not unusual for a bar

Moti Rieber is the rabbi of Congregation Beth Shalom in Naperville, Illinois.

mitzvah to cost as much as a wedding did a generation ago, and for a wedding to cost twice as much as a new car.

The Reconstructionist movement and, before it, the Havurah movement, reacted against this tendency by downplaying the prominence of financial supporters in synagogue life — a reaction that has its own complicating legacy. Yet even if this is taken as a positive, we can wonder whether a value that we profess in the synagogue (in this case, modesty in financial matters) has been transferred to our home life. A look at our bank statements and at the SUVs lining our parking lots would seem to answer that question.

The focus in our lives on the purchase of “stuff” has a deep and lasting impact. It limits our available time, since we need to work longer hours to be able to afford to buy the “stuff,” insure it, find a place to store it and dispose of it when it wears out. It may mean cutting back on hours devoted to civic engagement (including the synagogue), friendship or even time with one’s family. As a result, we may find ourselves socially isolated, with no resources of communal or spiritual connection to fall back on. We may find ourselves lonely and isolated, despite our large homes and deluxe standards of living. There is the environmental impact as well.

Cultivating Contentment

In contrast, Judaism has a long history of encouraging modesty in consumption and of cultivating content-

ment with one’s standard of living, as evidenced for example in *Pirkei Avot* 4:1: “Who is rich? Those who are satisfied with what they have.”

The best-developed expression in Jewish tradition of this ethical insight is found in the sumptuary laws, which were established beginning in the 15th century, and are found in both Sepharad and Ashkenaz, from Spain and Italy to Poland and Lithuania to France. Few areas of ethical instruction get as much attention by so many varied communities over such distances and long periods of time as do the instructions regarding limiting ostentation in matters of personal consumption. I will examine a few brief examples of this material, and then suggest ways in which this perspective can be effectively brought into our contemporary Jewish communities.

Law and Lessons

Sumptuary literature tends to fall into two categories: legislation promulgated by community leaders (not necessarily, or even primarily, its rabbis) in an attempt to regulate the costs of dress and/or celebration; and homiletical material, in which the community’s rabbis remind people of the spiritual dangers of the pursuit of too much wealth. The homiletical material sets out the values, and the legislation attempts to put those values into everyday practice.

The earliest sumptuary materials come from 15th-century Italy and Spain, and show the influence of Sepharad’s greatest thinkers: Rambam

(Maimonides), and the ethicist Bahya Ibn-Pekuda. In the *Guide for the Perplexed*, Rambam points out that in nature, what is necessary for life (for instance, air and water) comes cheaply, while what is less necessary (such as rubies and emeralds) comes quite dearly. “When one endeavors to seek what is unnecessary, it becomes difficult to find even what is necessary ... forces and revenues are spent for what is unnecessary and that which is necessary is not found.”¹

Bahya devotes the ninth treatise of *Hovot ha-Levavot* (Duties of the Heart) to abstinence (*prishut*), by which he means the ability to temper the bodily appetites for the sake of disciplining the soul. Bahya puts the consumption of food, dress, “habitation and other requirements” into three categories: that which is necessary to live; that which is consumed for enjoyment, “but not to excess or reckless overindulgence,” such as good bread or well-prepared food; and that which consists of “much indulgence,” and he proscribes this last. Why? Because “one who [indulges] so to excess is induced to indulge also in enjoyments that are unlawful. Moreover, his absorption [in these pleasures] prevents him from fulfilling the duties to God incumbent upon him.”² As we will see, this scale remains useful to us today.

Both leaders promote an ethos of moderation throughout their writing, whether homiletic or legislative. In particular, Rambam’s idea of the “Golden Mean” had a significant influence on the way Jewish life developed, especially in its aversion to asceticism. Rambam’s

work is probably the clearest answer to those who would suggest that sumptuary literature is an attempt to impose an ascetic standard on the Jews.

Benefits of Modesty

From these examples, we learn that a key motivation behind admonitions to pursue modesty in consumption is the conviction that pursuing luxury distracts one from the service to God, which for these writers is at the core of Jewish life. Yet just as clearly, the essential value underlying sumptuary legislation is moderation, not severity.

Sumptuary legislation itself suggests additional motivations: primary among these was to enable the community to collect enough money to support itself and its causes. In 1418 in Forli, Italy, for instance, sumptuary legislation was promulgated with the expressed purpose of raising funds necessary to bribe the pope to look kindly upon the Jewish community.

The Forli declaration limited both extravagant dressing and lavish banqueting:

In order that we may carry ourselves modestly and humbly before the Lord, our God, and to avoid arousing the envy of the gentiles, we decree that until the end of the above-mentioned term [ten years, 1416-1426] no Jew or Jewess shall be permitted to wear a [fur-lined jacket], unless it be black, and that the sleeves shall be open and that the sleeves shall have no silk lining whatever on

them. Those who already possess such cloaks of any color other than black may continue to wear them, provided the sleeves are not open, and the cloaks are closed both in the front and back [so that no one can see the fur lining]. Neither shall any man or woman wear any cloak of sable or ermine or mixed fur . . . The fine for the transgression of any of these provisions regarding the use of clothes and ornaments shall be ten Bolognini of silver . . . for each offense. Men shall be held responsible for the infractions of these rules by their wives. If anyone will refuse to obey these ordinances, the community shall refuse to admit him to minyan or to read the Torah or to perform the *gelilah*.

. . . [N]o Jew shall be permitted to invite to a banquet more than twenty men and ten women and five girls. This number shall include both the people of the city and those without, but shall not include relatives as close as second cousins . . . ³

In the Forli material we find another reason for such legislation: to avoid antagonizing the gentiles. This became a more central rationale in Amsterdam, where the Calvinist Christians (or Jews influenced by Calvinism) were scandalized by the more flamboyant recent immigrants from Spain.

Restraining Excess

This is not to say that the religious

leadership of the Sephardic community accepted or was happy with the level of ostentation among its affluent (or not-so-affluent) members. In a sermon dated c. 1622, Rabbi Saul ha-Levi Morteira (1596-1660), a leading Sephardic rabbi who wrote more than 1400 sermons between 1616 and 1645, deals with ostentation among the Sephardic population. The body of the sermon centers on three words in Exodus 1:7: “The Israelites were fertile *va-yishbretzu va-yirbu va-ya’atzmu* very greatly, so that the land was full of them.” The three untranslated words, rendered in the Jewish Publication Society translation as “and [were] prolific; they multiplied and increased,” are explicated throughout the sermon — negatively, as it turns out, as an accounting of the Jews in Egypt forgetting who they were and whence they came, becoming accustomed to living in exile, and growing wasteful and extravagant. In this, they are compared to the extravagant Jews of Amsterdam.

Morteira cites legislation, perhaps from an earlier synod in Castile, drawing a distinction between religious and “optional” banquets and pointing out that the latter are prohibited, and that even the former should not be excessive, lest one waste one’s well-being on frivolities:

There is no foolishness greater than that of a person who has fields and vineyards for the support of his household but sells them to buy expensive clothing for himself and ornaments for his house, so that when the time of

harvest comes, he is hungry, with no field to reap. So it is with those of us who spend money on jewels and expensive clothing. We have no fields except our money, and we must use it to serve God and provide food for our household. Is it not utter foolishness to diminish it for no good purpose, so that when the time of harvest comes, there will be no source of food?⁴

Similar legislation was promulgated in Palermo, Venice, Salonica, Mantua and Rome throughout the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries.

Wealth and Divine Favor

Unlike the ethical literature of Sepharad, early Ashkenazic ethical literature, such as that of Hasidei Ashkenaz and the legal commentaries of Isserles, tended to look approvingly at wealth as being evidence of God's favor. This may be due to the relatively impoverished state of early Ashkenazic Jewry: there is little or no sumptuary legislation or literature where there are few or no affluent Jews. Yet communities in Eastern and Central Europe throughout the period continued to draw up sumptuary guidelines, and their rabbis continued to exhort from the pulpit, showing just how universal and widespread the community's concerns were on these matters, despite the lack of indigenous intellectual or ideological underpinnings.

The first ordinances of this sort were developed by the community in Cracow in 1595:

One is permitted to wear only two rings on weekdays, four on the Sabbath, and six on the holidays. Both men and women are absolutely forbidden to wear precious stones. An exception is made in the case of a pregnant woman, who is permitted to wear a ring with a diamond because of its curative powers. Otherwise, no exception will be made, under penalty of three ducats.⁵

Limiting the ostentation of richer members was clearly of great importance in Poland and Lithuania, as we see most clearly in the homiletics of R. Ephraim Luntshitz. Luntshitz (1550-1619) was a student of Solomon Luria and an itinerant preacher until becoming head of the yeshiva at Lemberg and then president of the rabbinical court in Prague in his fifties.

The main theme of Luntshitz's sermons was, as he put it, "to retort to those misguided ones among our people who enjoy all the good and passing successes"⁶; that is, criticism of the wealthy members of his community, whom Isserles and the *Sefer Hasidim* had considered blessed. To the contrary, Luntshitz claimed that the passion for money and luxury of this group caused them to focus on the ephemeral rather than the eternal:

... [T]here is hopeless confusion as to the value of life itself. Most men live as though they believed that life existed for things. Thus, life is lived on a low plane. Those of our members who constitute

the backbone of our congregations are mostly merchants who are deeply engrossed in the business of gathering profits, and whose standard of value, even in matters pertaining to holy things, is none other than the coin of the realm.⁷

Luntshitz criticized the association of commercial success with spiritual attainment, saying that wealth corrupts and destroys the character of men when they do not appreciate its purpose. “For the proud in spirit normally wish for riches, whereby they can display . . . the splendor of their greatness. But all wealth leads to arrogance.”⁸

Consequences of Excess

Worse, the pursuit of profit causes the wealthy to ignore their obligation to their needy brethren. Luntshitz compared the rich to the gentiles and the poor to Israel, exiled and oppressed. Worse still was the power of the bad example that the rich provided:

Those in moderate circumstances, hankering after the luxuries of life, are perpetually scrambling for ever-increasing riches, an enterprise deservedly reputed to be the most fertile single source of evil in the world.⁹

This gives us an important additional motivation for such legislation: Over-consumption encourages less-well-off Jews to attempt to match it; this “keeping up with the Goldbergs” hurts most those who can least afford it.

As in other sumptuary materials,

Luntshitz does not propose asceticism for Jews, realizing that money is necessary and useful. But one must learn to hold it at a safe distance. It is comparable, in this respect, to fire: one can barely do without it, yet one does well not to get too close to it. And surely there is no rational justification for this mad pursuit after the material things of the world, a pursuit that absorbs the interest and energy of multitudes of our people.¹⁰

The values underlying Luntshitz’s seemingly harsh words are thus the same as those that stand behind all such material: too much wealth arouses envy from the gentile community and from one’s fellow Jews; it leads one to live beyond one’s means, as well as to diminish one’s obligation to *tzedakah* and the maintenance of the poor; it encourages other Jews to live beyond their means; and, of course, there are the spiritual costs: the pursuit of wealth distracts from those activities that are of real — eternal — importance.

Lessons for Today

If it is true that sumptuary regulations tend to arise when Jews are in a period of relative prosperity, then clearly there is as great a need for such guidelines today as there has ever been. After all, the wealth and position of many of the Jews of contemporary America and Europe (and even Israel) make the Jews even of the Golden Age of Spain seem like the denizens of a mud-covered *shtetl*.

All the rationales behind the promulgation of sumptuary literature ob-

tain today. Remember Rambam's claim that the search for what is unnecessary (and therefore rare in nature) causes us to lose what is vital (and common). Today, as well, we can see that the pursuit of extravagance interferes with the ability to provide everyday necessities. Examples include industrial farming that pollutes drinking water through runoff; a highway system that encourages sprawl and global warming; and diamond mining, which inhibits the very ability of societies to govern themselves peaceably, among all too many others.

A focus on consumption still causes us to live beyond our means, as evidenced by today's record levels of consumer credit, bankruptcy and low rates of savings. It still takes money from our *tzedakah* and civic responsibilities. Some people prefer to purchase plasma televisions rather than synagogue membership with their so-called "discretionary" money. The focus on consumption still encourages those who are less wealthy to live beyond their means. And although avoiding the envy of non-Jews has faded as a consideration, our forebears understood much better than we that rampant consumerism disconnects us from matters of the spirit, from our connection with God.

So we can certainly justify a contemporary reconstruction of sumptuary regulations. We are faced, of course, with the antinomian tendencies of contemporary Jewry and the individualistic ethos of Americans, not to mention, as scholars point out, that sumptuary legislation was probably most often honored in the breach. In other words, if it did not work then, why would it

work now? But efficacy is not the only or even the main means by which we decide which Jewish values to teach. If it were, then we might well have stopped teaching the ethics of speech long ago.

A Place to Start

Perhaps a place to start would be with Bahya's three-step needs assessment: that which is necessary to live; that which is consumed for enjoyment, "but not to excess or reckless overindulgence"; and that which consists of "much indulgence." It would be valuable to have a community-wide process of the study of this material (or even such a process within a small group of like-thinkers), plus values clarification around what is "necessary" and what is "reckless." This might then lead to the establishment of guidelines that could be binding in the communal context and suggested for one's home life. It might, for instance, lead to such initiatives as *gemahs* (an acronym of the initial letters of *gemilut hasadim*, acts of loving-kindness), an organization for the sharing of goods such as tools, books or fancy clothes.

Further such specific recommendations are beyond the scope of this paper. But it is worth keeping in mind that for nearly 500 years Jewish thought has responded to affluent circumstances and material ostentation with repeated reminders that the values that make life truly worthwhile are found not in one's wallet — or in one's house, or in one's driveway, or on one's wall, or on one's back — but in family, community and

connection to the Divine Source. A study of the sumptuary laws, and a reconstruction of them in our day, can help bring that reminder to today's Jewish community.

-
1. *Guide for the Perplexed* III:12.
 2. R. Bahya Ibn Pekuda, *Duties of the Heart (Hovot Ha-Levavot)*, tr. Moses Hyamson (New York: Feldheim, 1970), 315.
 3. Louis Finkelstein, *Jewish Self-Government in the Middle Ages* (New York: JTS, 1924), 292-294.
 4. Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching, 1200-*

1800: An Anthology (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 285.

5. Jacob R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 195.
6. H.H. Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 711.
7. Israel Bettan, *Studies in Jewish Preaching* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 1939), 290. The material quoted here is paraphrased by Bettan.
8. Ben-Sasson, *op.cit.*, 711.
9. Bettan, *op.cit.*, 290.
10. *Ibid.*, 292.

What Is Religious about Ethics?

BY JONATHAN BRUMBERG-KRAUS

Ninian Smart, the great scholar of comparative religion, classified ethics as one of the six basic dimensions of any religious system or worldview, along with the mythic, ritual, doctrinal, social, and experiential dimensions.¹ Yet the connection assumed in our popular culture between ethics and religion is not entirely without problems. Does religion in fact offer compelling incentives for a modern person to be moral? I believe that religion, as it is understood in the academic study of comparative religion, has the potential to provide non-fundamentalists with compelling incentives to behave ethically — indeed, to make ethical behavior a spiritual experience.

Louis Newman, in his recent book *An Introduction to Jewish Ethics*, cites the noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who writes:

[R]eligions must be understood as “cultural systems,” which create meaning through the synthesis of “worldview” and “ethos.” . . . [S]acred symbols (and by implication, all religions) function to synthesize a people’s ethos — the tone, character and quality of their

life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; and their worldview — the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order. This means that, in the context of religious systems, beliefs about ultimate reality are intimately connected with the values about how one ought to live. Each religious symbol, practice, or ritual fuses some aspect(s) of the believer’s worldview with some aspect of the believer’s way of life.²

In other words, religious worldviews in general, and Judaism in particular, fuse ethical practices with specific experiences, stories, rituals and social institutions, so that each reinforces the other; each evokes a rich set of associations; and each, in a sense, implies the others.

Worldviews and Ethics

I can think of at least four strategies by which the Jewish religious worldview intimately connects or fuses our beliefs about ultimate reality with some aspect of our way of life — that is, with our ethos. Jewish religious strategies for

Dr. Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion at Wheaton College in Massachusetts.

getting people to behave ethically include:

It feels good: One gets a heightened experiential reward for acting ethically.

It is all part of the story: One reenacts primordial or foundation myths when acting ethically. For example: “[Y]our male and female slave may rest as you do . . . Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord freed you” (Deuteronomy 5:14-15).

Shared style, shared identity: One wants to belong. There is a social incentive for ethical actions.

Indirect attitude adjustment: The repetition of ritual reinforces ethical dispositions.

Jewish religious tradition synthesizes [our] ethos, especially our moral and aesthetic style and mood, with our worldview by evoking in us experiences of these four strategies. All are interconnected and interdependent. That is the characteristically comprehensive, unifying power of a worldview; therein lies the religious dimension of ethics. For the purposes of exposition, I will discuss each one of these strategies individually.

The Reward for Ethical Behavior

Liberal Judaism values the experience of ethical decision making as much as (if not more than) the experience of actually performing the good deed upon which one has decided. In other words, it is as much the subjective experience of performing a mitzvah with *kavanah* (intention) as it is the objective, intrinsic rightness or goodness of the action (if indeed there is such a thing) that specifically gives it meaning as a mitzvah. To put it bluntly, es-

pecially for liberals who value autonomy so highly, it feels better to use our brains to explore options and make a thoughtful, intentional choice to follow an ethical course of action than to do mindlessly what we have to do because some authority said so. Many of us have been acutely aware of being tempted to do something we knew to be wrong, and then, in fact, choosing to do the right thing, despite our initial inclination.

From a Jewish perspective, the moment of moral decision is a valued spiritual (“religious”) experience. Thus, the Torah’s story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden does not just teach the abstract doctrine that human beings have free will (otherwise how could they go against God’s will and eat the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?). It also sacralizes every subsequent experience of moral decision making by enshrining the first such opportunity as a crucial element of our myth of origins.

Study as Moral Deliberation

An important way we encourage these “feel-good” experiences of spiritual/ethical insight is through study, especially the ritual liturgically-directed engagement in the morally problematic stories of the book of Genesis. For example, consider the Torah readings for the first and second days of Rosh Hashanah. Our listening to and study of Sarah’s instruction to Abraham to banish Hagar and their son Ishmael, or God’s command to Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, cultivate the

experience of moral deliberation as a dynamic process, to be imitated and re-enacted when we are confronted with analogous moments of moral choice in our lives.

This is more or less what Alan Dershowitz argues in his thought-provoking book *The Genesis of Justice: Ten Stories of Biblical Injustice That Led to the Ten Commandments and Modern Law*.³ Dershowitz suggests not only that Sarah and Abraham's behavior is patently opposed to the categorical prohibitions of the tenth and sixth of the Ten Commandments ("Do not covet" [Exodus 20:15]; "Do not murder" [Exodus 20:13]), but also that those contradictions are intended to provoke us to think and struggle with the tension between laws and the actual messy situations to which we must apply them.

Jewish morality is not blind obedience to moral absolutes. It rather combines deliberative thought and action in a unifying experience, so that behaving ethically — performing a mitzvah — has a crucial subjective, experiential component. It makes us experience our human dignity as choosing, thinking, efficacious beings — in the very image of the God who thought and said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Here is a built-in experiential incentive to perform good actions: They make us feel good, smart and noble.

Mythic Enhancement

The very fact that we have these stories as parables of moral deliberation leads directly to the second religious strategy Jewish tradition uses to moti-

vate us to behave ethically: the mythic enhancement of our ethical experience and obligations through understanding our roles as part of an ancient and ongoing story. Indeed, a rabbinic answer prompted by the morally problematic stories of Genesis exemplifies this rationale for behaving morally. Our engagement in the stories of Abraham and Sarah should prompt us to ask: Should we be bound by moral commandments that the heroes of the Torah do not themselves follow? We could easily object that Abraham and Sarah were not obligated to follow the Ten Commandments because they had not yet been revealed. If they were so important, then why had they not yet been revealed?

This is exactly the question the rabbis ask in a midrash on the Ten Commandments found in *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*; rabbinic tradition is quite sensitive here to our needs as human beings for an incentive to be good:

[The Torah states:] "I am the Lord your God." [Exodus 20:2] Why were the Ten Commandments not said at the beginning of the Torah? They told a parable: To what is this matter like? Like a king who entered a province and said to the people, "May I be your king?" But the people said to him, "Have you done anything good for us that you should rule over us?" What did he do then? He built the city wall for them, he brought in the water supply for them, and he fought their battles. Then when he said to them, "May I be your king" they

said to him, "Yes, yes."

So it is with God. He brought the Israelites out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, sent down the manna for them, brought up the well for them, brought the quails for them. He fought for them the battle against Amalek. Then He said to them, "I am to be your king." And they said to Him, "Yes, Yes."

What ultimately is the motivation for the ancient Israelites to follow the rules of their king? It is not blind obedience, but gratitude, and the experience of being in a relationship with the One who has acted on their behalf. The motivation to be ethical derives not from conformity to some abstract principle of the good, but rather from the context of an ongoing story, a drama in which we are cast in the main roles.

To be sure, biblical scholarship teaches us that historical prologues were a staple of ancient Near Eastern treaties between suzerains and their vassals. However, that fact only underscores the insight both of the redactors of the Torah and of the author(s) of this midrash, namely, that human beings need some sort of compelling, subjective motivation to act ethically. Thus, this story evokes a particular subjective feeling, the experience of gratitude, as a built-in impetus to do the right thing. This background story provides a sort of mythic enhancement of the ethical experience.

Shared Style, Shared Identity

One of the most important things

that gives Jews a sense of a common group identity is a shared moral and aesthetic style. There can be compelling social incentives to behave morally. This became clear to me as a result of a discussion on the story of the spies and their sin in the book of Numbers (chapters 13-14) that Rabbi Jeffrey Summit, an ethnomusicologist as well as a Hillel rabbi in the Boston area, led at a retreat for local New England Hillel faculty advisors and staff that I attended last year. Rabbi Summit focused our Torah study on the interpretations of the verse, "We were like grasshoppers in our eyes and so we were in their eyes" (Numbers 13:33). He contrasted a negative interpretation of the idea of measuring ourselves by how others see us with a more positive one informed by contemporary ethnomusicological and anthropological theory on style and group identity.

On the one hand, Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, a Hasidic rabbi in the early 19th century known for his sharp, edgy and often ironic perspective, says that the main sin of the spies was that they meant, "We feel like grasshoppers, so the giants [for so the mighty inhabitants of the promised land appeared to the spies] must see us as little grasshoppers too!" How did the spies know what the giants thought? For the Kotzker rebbe, there is nothing really wrong with the spies seeing themselves as "grasshoppers." It is only natural to have occasional doubts about oneself. But why should they worry about what other people were saying about them? They could not possibly know how the "giants" felt about them.

Their fear of what other people thought of them poisoned their attitude, and thus they, in turn, poisoned the attitude of their fellow Israelites with their negative report.

Self and Other

On the other hand, Rabbi Summit suggested, if one takes the two parts of the phrase as complementing rather than opposing one another, “We were like grasshoppers in our eyes and so we were in their eyes,” it is quite consistent with certain definitions of ethnic identity in modern anthropological theory. As one anthropologist, George de Vos, puts it:

Ethnic identity, like any form of identity, is not only a question of knowing who one is subjectively (“in our eyes”), but also of how one is seen from the outside (“in their eyes”). Ethnic identity requires the maintenance of sufficiently consistent behavior to enable others to place an individual or a group in some given social category, thus permitting appropriate interactive behavior.⁴

Moreover, Anya Peterson Royce, an ethnomusicologist whose theory is based on her study of dance and style in the Zapotec Indians of Mexico (as well as in other groups), says that in ethnic identity:

probably [the] most important contrast is between “us” and “them.” Without this contrast,

ethnic identity does not exist. The hypothetical group on an island with no knowledge of others is not an ethnic group; it does not have an ethnic identity; it does not have strategies based on ethnicity. We define ourselves in large measure in terms of what we are not, and that derives from our experience of what others are and how we differ.⁵

The Function of “Style”

For Royce, one of the most important of these “strategies based on ethnicity” can be found in her understanding of the term “style.” Clothing, language, food preferences, customs, ceremonies, myths, ethics and values are all strategies used by groups in interacting with one another and in differentiating one’s own group from others. Thus, to have a Jewish ethnic identity would mean, in Royce’s view, to adopt a distinctively Jewish ethnic style. Studying Jewish texts and history, praying in Hebrew, eating Jewish food, celebrating Jewish holidays, observing Jewish folkways, are all elements of a Jewish style. Moreover, there is even a distinctive Jewish moral style. Jewish ethics tend to be more self-consciously deliberative than authoritarian. Jewish ethics encourage us to study our moral options before we act.

There are other characteristic features of a Jewish moral style. We express our remorse for what we have done wrong collectively, as in the Yom Kippur prayers *Al Het and Ashamnu*. We do not do so individually, in a pri-

vate booth, as in the Catholic sacrament of confession. And we do so characteristically with an attitude of “holy *hutzpah*,” quoting divine promises back to God, or in the upbeat melody in which we sing *Ashamnu*, sounding more proud than contrite.

Style or Tradition?

The most important aspect of Royce’s theory of ethnic identity as the performance of a certain “style,” and the one most relevant to us, is her emphasis on ethnic identity, or better, the adoption of ethnic identity as something variable and as a choice. She deliberately describes ethnic identity as a “style” rather than as an inherited “tradition, because in her words,

“Tradition,” the descriptive term most frequently applied to ethnic groups and identity, has too often implied something conservative and unchanging, something that is passed on from generation to generation in its original form. But that does not account for the facts of most situations. “Style,” though a venerable term, does not have the conservative implications. On the contrary, it often implies the opposite, as in the phrase “changing styles.” ... “Style” also implies that individuals have a choice in selecting appropriate styles...” [T]here must be alternative choices, thought they may never actually be elected. Where compulsion or physiological necessity reign, there is no room for style.”⁶

Especially, though not exclusively, for those who are Jews by choice, or who are non-Jewish members of Jewish households who may have adopted elements of a “Jewish ethnic style” without having undergone a formal conversion to Judaism, this is a helpful and more realistic way of looking at Jewish identity. For all of us it provides a fresh way of looking at our original question — why act ethically? — as well as at some interesting possible answers. If we find that identifying with the Jewish ethnic community is a source of emotional satisfaction and a fulfilling and meaningful strategy for interacting with those closest to us, as well as with the broader, different cultures around us, then we are likely to experience those feelings when we perform actions characteristic of a Jewish moral style.

So if we visit the sick, give charity to a person in need, host people in our homes, avoid being cruel to an animal or condemn injustice because we define these as *mitzvot*, then the resulting sense of belonging and identity is an added incentive to maintain those ethical practices. Moreover, as an expression of our Jewish ethnic style, it preserves our sense of autonomy and choice, and encourages a sense that we are equal contributors to a dynamic, evolving process — rather than the passive inheritors of a static tradition in which we have no say.

Indirect Attitude Adjustment

The final strategy to motivate ethical behavior, indirect attitude adjust-

ment, uses a complex system of interconnecting ritual behaviors to cultivate ethical dispositions. In this strategy, Judaism connects natural activities ostensibly not related to morals, like what and when to eat, and what and when not to, so as to encourage certain inclinations or habits conducive to moral behavior.

As an example, consider the medieval Spanish biblical commentator, ethicist and kabbalist, Rabbenu Bahya ben Asher's interpretation of the requirement to fast on Yom Kippur. He presents this in his chapter on fasting in his ethical treatise *Kad Ha-Kemah* ("The Jar of Flour").⁷

In a midrash, Bahya interprets the passage from Isaiah read on Yom Kippur (about fasts that are not pleasing to God) to explain the ethical import of a verse from Proverbs (12:1): "The righteous one knows the soul of his beast, but the mercies of the wicked are cruel." Bahya interprets the phrase "soul of his beast" to refer to the medieval concept of the animal soul, the one of three (beside the lower vegetative and higher intellectual souls) that makes us desire to eat, sleep, fight or have sex. Fasting is a way to "subdue" this "beast."

It is well known that affliction of the soul (*nefesh*) is the main point, not affliction of the body; for if a person afflicts his body by fasting on a fast day, and doesn't afflict his soul (*nefesh*) from thinking evil thoughts — this is a sin, and one gains no merit by this fast. This is what Isaiah refers to when he says, "Because you fast in strife

and contention, and you strike with a wicked fist. Your fasting today is not such as to make your voice heard on high," and he says, "Is such the fast I desire? A day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush, or lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, a day when the Holy One is favorable?"⁸ (Isaiah 58:5)

He explains by this that affliction of the body without affliction of the soul is by no means the point of "the day pleasing to the Holy One." The point is the affliction of the soul. And of whoever afflicts his soul to keep it from bad thoughts and acts of evil, this is why he says, "Is this not the fast I desire?" and it is written, "Is it not the sharing of your bread with those who starve?" (Isaiah 58:6) He means that it is not [God's] intention that you starve your body, but rather that you feed the starving. It is not that you should afflict your body by fasting on a fast day — that is why he says, "Do not ignore your own flesh" [literally, "not hiding from your kin"] (Isaiah 58:7), for it is forbidden to you to "ignore your own flesh" and to constantly afflict it, because that's not what God intended; it is to afflict your soul!

And know in yourself that this is so, for accordingly we find that the Torah is lenient regarding the commandment to afflict the body for a sick person who is in danger. Thus our rabbis said, "One may feed him something forbidden, or

one may feed him on Yom Kippur,” for “It is better to profane one Shabbat in order to be able to observe many *Shabbatot*.” But it is not lenient about afflicting the soul (*nefesh*).

For example, if one’s soul is so fixated on the desire to engage in forbidden sexual relations so that his very health is endangered, it is not permitted to engage in them at all, even if he would die because of this. There was a case when a man in danger of dying sent for the doctors, and they told [the woman he loved], “There is no chance of recovery unless you have sex with him.” The Sages said, “Let him die and do not do it with him; you will get dragged with him across the boundary [of what is permitted]. Let him die and do not get dragged down with him.”⁹

. . . And thus the whole point of the Torah, and of prayers, and fast days, and of acts of *tzedakah* — everything — is to subdue the animal soul (*nefesh behemit*) and to draw the intellectual soul (*nefesh sekhilit*) to the service of the Holy One, Blessed Be He. About this, the verse from Proverbs 12:1 is written — “the righteous one knows the soul of his beast” (i.e., his animal soul) — for it is characteristic of the righteous man to subdue his animal soul in order to raise his intellectual soul.¹⁰

Acts and Lessons

All this is a very complicated way of

turning the simple ritual act of fasting into a moral lesson and discipline. (One can make a similar case, as I have done elsewhere, for the taboo against eating meat with the blood still in it.¹¹) Through these and many other Jewish rituals, we create a web of associations, so that nearly every activity — from buying in stores, to plowing fields, to having sex, to observing the Sabbath, to traveling and so forth — becomes an occasion to make a moral decision or provoke a moral reflection. In this way “each religious symbol, practice, or ritual fuses some aspect(s) of [our] worldview with some aspect of [our] way of life,” reinforcing the day-to-day “sheer actuality” of our moral way of life.¹²

Ethics as a Religious Phenomenon

I have tried to make a case for looking at ethics in general, and Jewish ethics in particular, as a religious phenomenon for three reasons. First, I want to challenge the attempt of religious fundamentalists to monopolize the language of morality for their particular religious perspective and social agenda. I fear religious liberals have ceded the terms “religion” and “morality” to those with a populist, anti-intellectual perspective of religious authoritarianism and a self-righteous moral certitude. Perhaps “spirituality” has become preferable to “religion” because of the negative institutional and authoritarian connotations of the latter term, but “spirituality” seems shakier ground in which to root our moral convictions. I want to reclaim religious language for a pro-

gressive religious and moral agenda.

Secondly, in a post-Holocaust world, any ethics that assumes people are consistently capable of basing their moral decisions only on rational, abstract principles is doomed to disappoint. But when we understand that ethical systems are integral parts of worldviews, we are better able to understand what motivates us to do not only what we think is “right,” but also what we feel, and what our socially constructed experiences of the world confirm to us is “right.” Finally, when we think of the four ways Judaism motivates us to behave morally as four strategies, we preserve, encourage and value the experience of moral autonomy that is so important in understanding our “moral style,” and that distinguishes us as liberal Jews.

1. Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*; third edition; (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000). This article began as a series of four sermons I gave for the High Holidays when I was serving as the interim rabbi of Reconstructionist Congregation Shirat Hayam in Marshfield, Massachusetts, in 2004-2005, and I wish to express my gratitude to the congregation for giving me the opportunity to reflect on morality, religious experience, and Jewish identity with them.

2. Louis E. Newman, *An Introduction to Jewish Ethics* (Upper Saddle River, New

Jersey: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005), 18.

3. Alan Dershowitz, *The Genesis of Justice: Ten Stories of Biblical Injustice That Led to the Ten Commandments and Modern Law* (New York, New York: Warner Books, 2000).

4. George De Vos, “Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation,” *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change*, eds. George De Vos and L. Romanucci-Ross (Palo Alto, California: Mayfield, 1975), 374, cited by Anya Peterson Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, 1982), 33.

5. Royce, *Ethnic Identity*, 12.

6. *Ibid.*, 28, citing Alfred L. Kroeber, *Style and Civilization* (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1963), 150.

7. The title *Kad Ha-Kemah* alludes to the miraculous jar of flour with which the widow fed Elijah in I Kings 17:14: “The jar of flour shall not give out . . . until the day the Lord sends rain upon the ground.”

8. New Jewish Publication Society translation slightly modified.

9. Bahya ben Asher ben Hlava, *Kad Ha-Kemah in Kitve Rabenu Bahya*, ed. Charles B. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1969), 442 (my translation).

10. *Ibid.*, 443 (my translation).

11. Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, “Does God Care What We Eat? Jewish Theologies of Food and Reverence for Life,” in *Food and Judaism: Studies in Jewish Civilization 15*, ed. by Leonard Greenspoon et al.; (Omaha, Nebraska: Creighton University Press, 2005).

12. Newman, *op. cit.*, 18.

The Emergence of an Icon: *Yahrtzeit* Plaques in 20th- Century American Judaism

BY DEBORAH WAXMAN

Like many rituals, the observance of *yahrtzeit* (literally “year’s time” in German and Yiddish) changed when it was transplanted was transplanted (along with massive numbers of Eastern European Jews) to America beginning in from the 1880s onward. This transformation was notably shaped both by an aesthetic of general memorials that came to the fore following World War I and by widespread electrification of private buildings that coincided with the 1920s synagogue building boom. By the next intensive synagogue-building phase — following the Second World War — the electrified model was widely available and widely adopted, if occasionally criticized.

Beyond revealing insights about synagogue architecture and rituals related to the commemoration of those who died, the emergence of this aesthetic model points towards the growth and transformation of the American Jewish community in the 20th century. Key factors include American Jews’ need to remember their past; their desire for permanence; their confidence

in America as a place that would let them set down roots; and their responsiveness to marketing efforts.

A Representative Example

An example of the type of *yahrtzeit* plaque and memorial board under discussion can be found in Reconstructionist Congregation Beth Israel in Media, Pennsylvania. At the rear of the sanctuary, on each side of the entranceway, are four friezes of memorial plaques. The individual plaques are of a style widely found in North American synagogues. They are bronze rectangles, three inches high by eight inches wide. The lettering is raised, and most plaques feature the names of the deceased in Hebrew and English, along with the date of death according to both the Jewish and secular calendars. In many instances, plaques bearing names of family members are placed together, although in other cases they are scattered.

To the left of each plaque is a socket into which a small white light bulb is fitted. The lights are illuminated on the

Rabbi Deborah Waxman is Vice-President for Governance at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

anniversary of the death of the person memorialized. The plaques are fitted into the four friezes. The top of each frieze is scrolled and includes a Jewish star and the names of donors. Jewish stars decorate the corners and the bottom of the frame features the name of the congregation.

At Beth Israel, the rabbi oversees the plaque orders and proofreads the Hebrew. Lay people are responsible for maintaining the *yahrtzeit* lists, notifying members of upcoming anniversaries and turning on the appropriate lights each week.¹ The memorial plaques record the *yahrtzeit* date, and the electric bulbs call attention to individual *yahrtzeit* observances as they occur.

History of *Yahrtzeit*

The roots of the rituals surrounding *yahrtzeit* seem to be in medieval Europe. Some traditional Jewish sources try to search out precedents in the Bible (e.g., Judges 11:40, citing the annual mourning for Jephthah's daughter, and the marking of the date of Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34) as well as in the Talmud (see Rashi on BT Yevamot 122a).² The practice of marking the death anniversary of a parent or teacher seems to have become popularized following the destruction of the German Jewish communities during the Crusades.

However the term "*yahrtzeit*," which was used by the Christian church to commemorate death anniversaries, did not emerge in the Jewish community until around the 15th century.³ It is not treated directly in the Shulhan Arukh,

though various commentators on this work do use the name and address the practices.⁴ These commentaries suggest there were several practices associated with maximal observance of *yahrtzeit*: reciting the Kaddish (mourner's meditation) at services in the synagogue on the anniversary date; taking honors and responsibilities at the synagogue during the week of *yahrtzeit*, such as leading services, taking an *aliyah* (Torah honor) or providing a light repast following services; voluntary fasting; visiting the grave of the individual being remembered; burning a candle for the twenty-four hours of the anniversary;⁵ studying passages from the Mishnah; and contributing *tzedakah* (charity) in memory of the deceased.⁶

The centrality of Kaddish as part of mourning practice emerged following the Crusades.⁷ The recitation of this doxology, which is primarily composed of verses of praise and declarations of acceptance of God's will, was seen from a mystical perspective as a way to facilitate the movement of the departed's soul from Gehenna (purgatory) to paradise in the year following death.⁸

Candles and Light

The lighting of a twenty-four hour candle was most likely adopted later than Kaddish, possibly as late as the 17th century, in part because of objections that it mirrored an explicitly Catholic practice of lighting candles to saints and in memory of the dead.⁹ The most common Judaizing explanation for the use of a light draws on Proverbs 20:27: "The human spirit is the candle

of *Adonai*.¹⁰ Some authorities report that on *yahrtzeit*, candles were lit both at home and in synagogues.

Lighting a candle in the synagogue satisfied both spiritual and pragmatic concerns. Regarding spiritual considerations,

those of a mystical bent believe that each year on the anniversary of death the soul is given permission to soar above the world, and when it approaches the synagogue where it had spent much time of its earthly existence, it is pleased to see a candle burning in its memory and thus to know that it has not been forgotten.¹¹

Pragmatically, if one forgot to light the candle at home on the occasion of *yizkor* (the memorial service held on *Pesah*, *Shavuot*, *Yom Kippur* and *Shemini Atzeret*) or on a *yahrtzeit* that coincided with a festival, it could be lit at the synagogue from a flame that was already burning. This public ritual may also have satisfied the needs of women, since according to traditional practice most of the other public practices associated with *yahrtzeit* were restricted to men.

In his book, *Contemporary Synagogue Art*, Avram Kampf reports that some medieval synagogues made provisions for these memorial candles, creating room for simple wax candles to be placed on parapets surrounding the wall of the synagogue, fastened at intervals on the side near the door, in the middle of a long wall or in a wrought iron stand made to hold many candles

that would be placed to the left of the ark.¹²

Thus the traditional prescription for *yahrtzeit* combined recollection of personal loss exemplified through personal actions (candle lighting, fasting), actions that both affected the community and reflected well upon the soul of the departed (giving *tzedakah*, leading services, providing an *oneg* at synagogue), and communal commemoration (reciting Kaddish with a *minyan*). The emphasis on penitential acts — evocative of the rites of *Yom Kippur* — is designed to achieve spiritual improvement for the soul of the departed and also for the survivor. All of these practices represent an intersection of horizontal community — the real-life community surrounding the survivor — and vertical community, comprising the generations preceding the survivor and those that will presumably follow her as she is memorialized in a similar fashion.¹³

The Imperative to Remember

Even as significant portions of the *yahrtzeit* ritual have long been synagogue-based, academic and pastoral sources on *yahrtzeit* make no mention of commissioning plaques or other markers to be hung in the synagogue. While signage to honor founders and donors is an ancient practice,¹⁴ whatever memorial markers that existed in the late medieval or early modern eras seem to have been portable. *Memorbukhen* — communal prayer-books listing the names, death anniversaries and accounts of martyrdom of mem-

bers of the local community—emerged (similarly to *yahrtzeit*) as a memorial phenomenon following the Crusades.¹⁵ Many European Jewish communities of both the Ashkenazi and Sephardi rites maintained *memorbukhen*, and these books were exported to the Americas. (The Touro Synagogue in Rhode Island prominently displays a *memorbukh* near the *bimah*.)

Paper and paper-like plaques were also adopted. The United States Library of Congress has in its possession seven vellum memorial plaques from the northern Italian city of Mantua. These 19th-century plaques, some of them shaped like candle stubs, commemorated the dead of the wealthiest and most prominent families of the community and were placed on a memorial wall near a permanent *ner neshamah* (light of the soul).¹⁶ Rabbi Michael Strassfeld, a collector of antique signage, reports that he has in his collection two handwritten *yahrtzeit* plaques on paper from congregation Hevra Mishnayot in Chelsea, Massachusetts; they were framed and hung under glass.¹⁷ This type of portability is consistent with Stephen Kayser's observation in *Jewish Ceremonial Art* that few Jewish ceremonial objects exist from before the year 1500 because of widespread European persecution, and because of the exclusion of Jews from artisan guilds.¹⁸

New World Opportunities

The New World, however, offered new opportunities for creating more permanent memorials, and mandated

new modes of reminding survivors of the obligation of saying Kaddish and announcing their losses to the larger community. Hanging on the walls of Congregation Ansche Chesed's Harlem New York building, which the congregation occupied from 1911 to 1928, were three large family "memorial tablets" composed of bronze letters applied to large marble slabs. When the congregation moved to its then-new 100th Street building in 1928, members moved these family tablets with them but switched to a more egalitarian model.¹⁹ (They currently hang in the synagogue's West End Avenue entrance foyer.)

Hanging in the rear of the 100th Street sanctuary are two large friezes onto which are mounted bronze plaques, similar in design and motif to the ones on display at Beth Israel in Media, although slightly longer. While Ansche Chesed's plaques are not electrified, at nearby Congregation Rodeph Sholom, which was built just before Ansche Chesed's 100th Street building, the sanctuary boasts similar bronze plaques that are complemented by beveled amber-colored lights.

From Home to Synagogue

As discussed above, *yahrtzeit* emerged in the Middle Ages as a ritual to mark personal loss. It was distinct from such communal bereavements as Tisha B'Av (the Ninth of Av, commemorating the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem) or more localized dates of mourning. The onus for observance of this ritual rested

with the individual, who had to keep track of the death anniversary on the Jewish calendar and attend synagogue to fulfill the obligation of reciting Kaddish. For Jews who lived in organic Jewish communities (*kehillot*) such as those in medieval Europe that lived by the Jewish calendar and mandated synagogue attendance, regular *yahrtzeit* observance was likely to be relatively easy.

Massive Jewish immigration to America led to a transformation in traditional Jewish practice. Historian Jonathan Sarna traces the shift of ceremonial practice in the 19th century from the home to the synagogue, including such traditional home ceremonies as candle lighting, recitation of Kiddush (the blessing over wine before Sabbath and festival meals) and building a *sukkah* (a temporary booth built at home to celebrate the fall harvest festival of Sukkot).²⁰ While the East European Jews who immigrated in massive waves from 1881 to 1924 initially created *landsmanshaft* synagogues that reproduced their Old World *kehillot*, these synagogues ultimately became Americanized, and consequently also saw the transfer of home ritual to the synagogue.²¹ The emergence of bronze *yahrtzeit* plaques such as those hanging in the rear of the Anshe Chesed and Rodeph Sholom synagogues represent an example of this transfer.

Marking Jewish Time

Immigrants and first-generation American Jews fulfilled several goals by transferring the *yahrtzeit* commemora-

tion to the synagogue. First, they guaranteed that the individual Jew in America, perhaps largely disconnected from the rhythms of the Jewish calendar, would observe this personally important anniversary. The synagogue thus became the keeper of Jewish time.

Second, a primarily individual ritual was transformed into one that was communally based. Illuminating an individual plaque and announcing the *yahrtzeit*, often including information regarding the relationship of the deceased to the member of the congregation, informed the entire community the nature of a member's loss and presumably mobilized whatever support was necessary. The community could replace or augment the member's family of origin, which would likely have needed no notification of an event of such personal and familial magnitude. In this way, the *yahrtzeit* plaque in the synagogue located the surviving family member in a different context. This would have been an extremely important function for immigrants to America, far removed from their families, home communities and the cemeteries where loved ones were buried.²² It would have been equally important with the migration of Jews a generation or two later away from the eastern seaboard points of entry of their ancestors.²³

Yahrtzeit and Donations

By the 1950s,²⁴ the transition of *yahrtzeit* commemoration to the synagogue had developed in several ways. The notification to remind congregants

of the approach of a *yahrtzeit* date frequently included a return envelope for an additional *tzedakah* contribution to commemorate the occasion. An individual — on his/her own initiation, in response to promotions in synagogue bulletins, High Holiday mailings or funeral brochures or at the solicitation of the synagogue — could make a contribution to the congregation for the purchase of a memorial plaque that would be hung in the building. In return for this donation, several services would be provided, as summarized in a promotional brochure from Congregation Rodeph Sholom, reproduced in a 1960 pamphlet published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations:

Congregation Rodeph Sholom maintains in its Synagogue at 7 West 83rd Street, New York City, Memorial Tablets on which the names of departed may be inscribed as a permanent remembrance. Alongside each name is a *Yahrtzeit* light that is lit on the anniversary of the passing of the deceased and Kaddish is recited and the name mentioned at the Sabbath Services and is recorded in the Temple Chronicle. (sic) Such Tablets afford a permanent means of memorializing the departed. Inquiry as to these Memorial Tablets may be made at the Temple Office.²⁵

Bronze: Legacy of the Great War?

How did this predominant aesthetic form of memorial emerge? Evidence

suggests that the electrified bronze plaque emerged as a model for commemorating *yahrtzeit* in the years immediately following World War I. An examination of the catalog of a prominent bronze manufacturing company points toward its emergence. Gorham Manufacturing Company, based in New York, regularly published substantial catalogs of memorial tablets that included an extensive articulation of the history of bronze as an artistic medium and its suitability as a medium for memorializing individuals. Here is a description from a 1905 catalog:

Bronze as a material for the tablet form of memorials²⁶ is beyond all others permanent. No more fitting form of memorial has yet been devised than the decorative tablet of bronze. It is artistic, unostentatious and equally appropriate, whether placed in church, hospital, library or public building. While unlike the mortuary monuments, its erection is fitting at any time, no matter how many years have elapsed since the death of the person or the performance of the deed it is designed to commemorate. The lettered memorial in tablet form has always held an important place in the world's history. The hieroglyph-incised "stile" of the Egyptian, the half-worn brass in the quaint English country church, and the more enduring bronze tablet that adorns the modern buildings are all linked together in one common lineage. Inspired by the same

spirit of reverence for those who have departed, and by the same desire to permanently record their praiseworthy deeds or their moral excellences, these tablets have had for the living the double value of a memorial and an incentive, so their erection assumes the respect of a duty towards the community at large, as well as an act of loving regard to those commemorated.²⁷

As the copy suggests, these catalogs and those of other manufacturers featured, among other items, prominent individual memorial plaques, often bearing a poem or description of the deceased. No item particularly resembles a frieze of individual tablets that can be augmented; all are one-time commissions that are static reflections of an individual or a community at a certain moment in time.

The Jewish Frieze

Gorham's 1918 catalog, however, does feature two items that anticipate the emergence of the Jewish memorial frieze. The top of Plate 13 shows a small frieze with five available slots; the sample includes two filled slots, one simply showing a name, the second showing a name and the dates of birth and death. The names are not recognizably Jewish, but the motif anticipates the model widely adopted by Jews. Indeed, the same page contains an individual plaque with Jewish stars in each corner and text in both Hebrew and English.²⁸ It is unclear if this plaque was intended to stand alone or be in-

serted into a frieze. Whatever the intention at the time of production, this plaque (and others illustrated on the same page) contains the same composite bronze parts of the friezes that later appeared at congregations *Ansche Chesed* and *Rodeph Shalom*.

Influence of War Memorials

A 1946 catalog from the General Bronze Corporation indirectly hints at why the frieze might have emerged around 1918. The copy editors at General Bronze had a similar perspective as their colleagues at Gorham Manufacturing Company on the glory of bronze and its suitability for memorialization:

Bronze — the metal of the ages . . . Since the dawn of civilization, bronze has been the metal of enduring beauty. In the ruins of ancient Rome, Greece, Egypt and among the strange structures of the vanished Mayans, many bronze implements, tablets and statues have been found in a practically perfect state of preservation. The gold at Montezuma and the vast treasure of the kingdoms of antiquity are lost in the shadowy past but the age-old bronzes live on for all to admire. Centuries hence there will undoubtedly be many fine works of bronze that will bear eloquent testimony to the craftsmanship of our own day. What would be better than enduring bronze to keep alive the memories of those who fought and sacrificed for our

country? Such memorials will last through the centuries — keeping great deeds aglow in the hearts of Americans; preserving the names of heroes in the far reaches of the future.²⁹

The first part of this catalog features new war memorial designs by a celebrated sculptor. The second part of the catalog features “The General Bronze Classic Group.” Included among them are

a distinguished group of memorials that were used to commemorate the heroes of World War I. These are the finest of the many honor roll tablets that General Bronze executed after the last war. They are conventional in design and are always dignified and in good taste. We are, therefore, including them in this brochure so that you will have the widest possible range of designs from which to make your selection.³⁰

Within this group is one that is evocative of *yahrtzeit* friezes that, perhaps coincidentally, commemorate the service of “the men of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society who served in the World War.” A listing of more than 100 names, including three in memoriam, follows.

Adopting an American Motif

I speculate that the preponderance of war memorial plaques commissioned after World War I, many of them in bronze, contributed to the

emerging aesthetic of *yahrtzeit* memorials. Bronze was already used in synagogue art and architecture (see the heavy bronze appointments at New York’s Temple Emanu-El)³¹ and was widely used to memorialize soldiers after World War I. Adopting this motif in American synagogues would perhaps have lent to them some of the patriotism and unimpeachable respectability of the soldiers.

War memorial plaques, however, are one-time commissions, with a static list of names. A display for *yahrtzeits* must necessarily be more dynamic, allowing for augmentation and rearrangement. The frieze model provided decorous emulation, but also met pragmatic considerations. Electrification addressed the need for dynamism.

Arrival of Electricity

David Nye’s masterful social history *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology* provides evidence that enables speculation as to how the individualized bronze plaque came to be electrified. Nye traces the penetration of electricity into the daily life of Americans, beginning with Edison’s invention of a stable light source in 1885. The electrical light bulb represented a paradox, marking the first time in human history that light and fire were separated.³² Electricity was immediately embraced as superior to candlelight, gas, kerosene or other sources of illumination because of its relative safety and predictability, and because of its quality of generating neither heat nor grime.³³

In its earliest years, from 1885-1910, electricity was used primarily to support the emerging marketplace economy. Manufacturers converted their factories to electricity to increase productivity and safety,³⁴ and department stores adopted electrical lighting to enhance the experience of shopping during store hours and to feature their goods in brightly lit window displays during evening hours.³⁵ Public street lighting³⁶ and the introduction of thousands of miles of electrical trolley tracks³⁷ consumed another significant percentage of available energy in electricity's first decades. For private individual use, electricity was a prerogative of the upper class.³⁸ In 1910, only 10 percent of private homes in America were outfitted with electricity.³⁹

Impact of Electrification

By 1910, an electrical grid had been established in most urban and suburban areas. Electrical suppliers, peddling newly affordable power⁴⁰ and interested in balancing their load and increasing evening consumption (hours when many factories stood idle) turned their attention to providing electricity to the homes of individual consumers. Nye concentrates primarily on the drive to provide electricity to private homes,⁴¹ noting that this effort accelerated after World War I, when industrial energies were redirected from the war effort to domestic concerns.⁴² In 1920, General Electric, one of the largest suppliers of electricity as well as a producer of appliances that would consume ever greater amounts of electricity, began a

massive advertising campaign to create a "positive electrical consciousness" that would foster a "want" for electricity in consumers.⁴³ The campaign was clearly effective: by 1930 the number of private homes wired for electricity had increased to seventy percent.⁴⁴ (The percentage was significantly higher in urban and suburban venues, given that most rural communities were not wired until after a post-World War II intervention by the federal government.)⁴⁵

It is reasonable to speculate that as the many synagogues built in the 1920s building-boom were wired for electricity, the electrification of memorial plaques became highly feasible. Even as the *yahrtzeit* frieze may have followed war memorials with their sober and orderly listing of names, the electrical bulbs, whatever their forms, guaranteed that the plaques were more dynamic. The bulb emulated (rather than replaced) the personalized candle, which presumably continued to be lit at home by the mourner. The electric bulb also highlighted the individual plaque on the anniversary of a death, presumably satisfying the desire of family members to commemorate their deceased in the context of the synagogue community.⁴⁶

Emergence of an Icon?

The plaques at congregations Anshe Chesed and Rodeph Sholom seem to suggest that, by the 1920s, the model adopted by Beth Israel in Media was emerging, if not yet institutionalized: the decorous appropriateness of bronze and the appeal of electrification combined to establish a convincing aes-

thetic. The booming economy of the 1920s spurred a significant synagogue building and refurbishment boom, largely on the model of the synagogue-center.⁴⁷ While I have not been able to discover documentation, it seems likely that the electrified bronze model was adopted during this boom: the 1948 General Bronze catalog shows a memorial board in the form we know today, replete with electrical sockets. Indeed, by the post-World War II synagogue building boom, spurred on by the move of many Jews to the emerging suburbs, this form had become ubiquitous; memorial boards were barely mentioned as anything other than a fundraising strategy, or were occasionally and quietly (and ineffectively) criticized.

Percival Goodman, one of the foremost synagogue architects of the post-World War II period, speculated in a 1949 *Commentary* article that no fewer than 1,800 new congregations were being planned in the years following the conclusion of the Second World War.⁴⁸ Many of these congregations were located far away from the urban centers in which the immigrants first settled. Deborah Dash Moore summarizes this migration:

After the war American Jews began a journey that would rival the mass migration of their immigrant parents. Their decision to abandon the big cities for a new frontier charted a course for the rest of the century. While many Jews chose to settle in suburbia, a significant minority opted for the open society of the emerging Sun-belt.⁴⁹

The Movements Respond

In response to the massive relocation of Jews in the years following World War II, both the Conservative and the Reform movements fostered building efforts, providing support and guidance to their affiliates. Historian Jack Wertheimer documents the efforts of the Conservative movement, noting that the United Synagogue employed an extensive bureaucracy in an effort to create uniform practice among affiliates:

Although it is not possible to measure the extent of influence these national bodies exerted over local congregations, it is evident that they managed, through regional and national conventions, publications, and direct advisory programs, to bring a degree of uniformity to affiliated congregations.⁵⁰

Nonetheless, there is very little treatment of memorial plaques in any movement publications, which gives some evidence through silence as to how ubiquitous the model had already become.

The Conservative Rabbinical Assembly did, however, address the issue of electrified memorial plaques at a 1953 meeting of its Committee on Jewish Law and Standards:⁵¹

Is it proper to use an electric bulb for a *Yahrtzeit* lamp? . . . The Committee ruled that an electric bulb is permissible, since Jewish Law does not require any kind of lamp for *Yahrtzeit* and there are no serious objections to us-

ing an electric light for this purpose. It was suggested that the manufacturer of such a bulb might communicate with Dr. Kayser of the Jewish Museum for an appropriate design.⁵²

The 1946 General Bronze catalog mentioned earlier indicates that the rabbis may have been issuing a ruling based on a fairly widespread folk practice.

Aesthetic Concerns

Two United Synagogue documents (from among the many to which Wertheimer alludes) reveal how lightly treated, if at all, was the subject of electrified bronze *yahrtzeit* plaques. The 1956 United Synagogue pamphlet, *So You Want to Build: A Guide for Your Synagogue Architecture Committee*, does have a section titled “Memorial Plaques.” It is unclear if it is speaking about *yahrtzeit* plaques or about plaques to acknowledge large-scale building-campaign donations in memory of loved ones.⁵³ The concerns are largely about aesthetics:

Although memorial gifts should not be solicited until the general fundraising campaign is over, this committee should decide policies early. To avoid conflicts in taste and design, establish the principle that nothing will be placed in the building unless accepted by a responsible body.⁵⁴

Another pamphlet from the following year, *Reference Forms and Procedures for Synagogue Administration* includes a section on “Memorial and *Yahrtzeit*

Notices” that features several examples of forms that describe the conventional model as well as the services provided with purchase. This sample card is from Temple Israel Center in White Plains:

Dear Member:

May we call your attention at this time of your *Yahrtzeit* observance to our TEMPLE MEMORIAL PLAQUES. This is a traditional and dignified way of honoring your dear departed. Each bronze Memorial Tablet bears the name and *Yahrtzeit* date of a loved one. The Memorial Lamp adjoining the tablet is illuminated on every *Yahrtzeit* and for every Yizkor Service of the year. The plaque in our Temple is truly a perpetual Memorial... If you are interested in a Memorial Tablet, please mail the attached card to us. . . .⁵⁵

Taken for Granted?

In roughly contemporaneous documents, the Reform movement treats *yahrtzeit* plaques in similar fashion. *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guidebook to Synagogue Design and Construction*, published by the Union for American Hebrew Congregations in 1954, is a comprehensive collection that treats everything from how to create a social hall that can accommodate a removable basketball court and movie screenings to the careful organization of the administrative unit. *Yahrtzeit* plaques are not addressed in the chapters on the sanctu-

ary or the social center, or in an article on art in the synagogue, nor in the lighting or maintenance sections. The one mention of the *yahrtzeit* plaque appears on page 292, number 32 in a checklist on the synagogue proper: “Memorial tablets, if placed in the Sanctuary, should be harmonized with interior.”

The only direct treatment of *yahrtzeit* plaques that I was able to locate in Conservative and Reform movement publications is in their potential as a fundraising strategy. In the 1963 UAHC publication *Successful Synagogue Administration: A Practical Guide for Synagogue Leaders*, *yahrtzeit* plaques are addressed in the “Financial Management” chapter, under “Supplementary Sources of Income:”

Many congregations derive considerable income from the privilege⁵⁶ granted to their members to inscribe the name of a departed one on a *Yahrtzeit* Memorial Tablet, displayed prominently in the synagogue. Names of the deceased are read from the pulpit on the anniversary date and at the Memorial services on Yom Kippur and festivals. The contribution for the establishment of this time of memorial varies from \$150 to \$500. Individuals frequently purchase name plates not only for their departed relatives but make a reservation for themselves.⁵⁷

Ambivalence Emerges

Even as rabbis and lay leaders signed

off on what seems to be an already established lay practice, there was some ambivalence among intellectuals. Electrification presented part of the challenge. Architect Percival Goodman is on record critiquing the use of electricity for the *ner tamid*: “What can be the meaning of such a light if it requires no care other than the payment to the local utility company for the electric current and an occasional rebulbing?”⁵⁸ A photo of the lobby of Congregation Beth El in Springfield, Massachusetts, which Goodman designed in the 1950s, includes a low shelf with the first line of the Kaddish mounted on the wall above it. The caption explains that the shelf is a “trough for Kaddish lights.”⁵⁹ While I have not uncovered any writing by Goodman explicitly on the topic of how to memorialize the deceased, it is likely that he was trying to develop a different aesthetic, quite possibly derived from the medieval parapet mentioned earlier.

In his 1966 book, Kampf takes on the topic more directly, if no less critically:

Attempts to find new, aesthetically satisfying ways to honor the deceased have been few. Placing the memorial tablets outside the prayer hall has been a practice that deprives the interior of an adequate sense of the communal unity of the living and the dead. Very often one finds unattractive commercially produced bronze tablets, with sockets for electric bulbs besides each name.⁶⁰

Bronze *yahrtzeit* plaques are one response to the question of how to make

memory concrete. Transplanted from European shtetls, American Jews sought to find a way to commemorate permanently their dead. Their relative affluence, and their confidence that they and their children would not be subject to persecution and displacement in America, combined to spur American Jews to create a tangible form of memorial, one that was mounted on the walls of the synagogue, a central institution of American Jewish religious life.

Ironically, the plaques' implicit assertion of permanence is revealed to be illusory in light of the extensive mobility of Americans and demographic changes in the American Jewish community. Just as Congregation Anshe Chesed moved from Harlem to the Upper West Side in the 1920s, many synagogues, especially ones founded in urban settings, moved, merged or closed.

When Plaques Outlast Congregations

An example of this phenomenon can be found in suburban Philadelphia. Prior to renovations in the late 1990s, the social hall of congregation Beth Tikvah-B'nai Jeshurun (whose name reveals it to be the result of a merger), featured plaques from older congregations that themselves were previously merged into the originally independent congregations Beth Tikvah and B'nai Jeshurun. It is unlikely that the descendants of the individuals memorialized thereon had any idea where the plaques bearing the names of their ancestors

would eventually end up.

When Beth Tikvah-B'nai Jeshurun renovated its social hall, the congregants struggled with the problem of how to confront this challenge of "unclaimed" plaques from congregations that had long since closed. They ultimately decided to take down the large friezes, remove the individual plaques, sell the friezes for scrap metal, and installing on their permanent friezes any plaques that commemorated individuals who were connected to current members of the synagogue. The other plaques are now hung on a small, specially designed frieze during the month of the *yahrtzeit* noted on the plaque.⁶¹

Conversations about Memory

Many synagogues are engaged in a conversation about memory. Beth Israel, an older Reconstructionist synagogue that has owned its own building for much of its history, maintained the aesthetic model that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century and that it adopted long ago. Newer congregations are seeking to create aesthetic models that evoke the earlier model but are also more contemporary. The memorial wall at West End Synagogue, a Reconstructionist congregation in New York City, is an example: the wall is free-standing, slightly curved, and placed in one corner of the sanctuary; the slightly raised bimah stands in the opposite corner. The wall features bronze plaques, but these are much smaller (2" x 4") than the model that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century. Rather than an electrical

socket or light bulb at the side of each plaque, there is a little ledge on which may be placed a stone, echoing the traditional Jewish practice of laying a stone on a grave marker to commemorate a visit to a cemetery. The stones are stored at the left side of the wall on a curved shelf, which is mounted beneath a poem for Kaddish composed by a late member of the congregation that is etched in glass.

Others are changing languages entirely, creating virtual memorials on the internet. The website “Jewishgen” features virtual “memorial plaques” that visually approximate the real bronze plaques; they are displayed on the website for various periods of time, depending on the amount contributed.⁶² Other websites, such as *www.legacy.com*, with the motto “where life stories live on,” create virtual memorials that can be accessed from anywhere and by anyone.

Patterns of Development

The bronze electrically-illuminated *yahrtzeit* plaque seems to have emerged in the 1920s synagogue building boom and to have then been widely reproduced in the synagogue building-boom that followed World War II. This occurred with little attention from the liberal denominations that fostered the design and building of synagogues, and it eventually received retroactive consent from rabbis. It seems likely that the bronze manufacturers, zealous believers in the merits of their products, nurtured a need felt by Jewish immigrants from Europe and developed a

product with which to respond to that need. Lay people had the financial means and the aesthetic confidence to embrace this model. The opposition of such intellectuals as Percival Goodman was not forceful enough to engender a successful alternative.

The lack of opposition on ideological or religious grounds (as opposed to aesthetic ones) suggests that the bronze plaques and the services connected with them emerged out of fertile and authentic Jewish soil. They were sufficiently continuous with existing *yahrtzeit* practices so that the innovation generated little or no controversy. Indeed, the plaques produced significant benefits. They generated income for congregations while providing an important connection to the Jewish calendar and to the Jewish community for rapidly assimilating American Jews. Thus, industry marketing and synagogue fundraising imperatives converged and were mutually beneficial. The centrality of the synagogue as the place where the memorial plaques were installed reflects the transition of rituals that were previously home-based to observances now carried out in the synagogue — a trend evident in other American-Jewish rituals in the 20th century.

Equality in Memory

The plaques also point to the democratization of the American Jewish community. Whereas the vellum plaques from Mantua or the marble family tablets from Ansche Chesed’s Harlem building commemorated the

deceased members of wealthy families, the bronze plaques were readily affordable, both in production costs and in the required contribution to the synagogue, even for members of modest means.⁶³

This is not to say that indications of class structure disappeared from the synagogue. Major gifts in memory of loved ones could still be made to building campaigns. In the sanctuary at Anshe Chesed, for example, all of the windows, from the small ones on the lower level to the tall ones in the balcony, bear inscriptions commemorating various individuals; these ornate stained glass installations certainly cost much more than the bronze plaques. But the plaques — the primary and dominant means of commemoration within the congregation — are uniform in size and, when looking at the typical memorial frieze as a whole, it is impossible to distinguish between those who were wealthy and those of more modest means.⁶⁴

Finally, the plaques also indicate an embrace of the prospect of permanence. Unlike the portable models made necessary by the conditions of Jewish living in earlier eras, bronze plaques installed on the walls of the synagogue represented a sense of stability — to the congregation inhabiting the building and to the family members comprising the congregation and donating the plaques. However innocently, they represent the optimism of American Jews in the first half of the twentieth century about the possibility of their being permanently at home in the New World.

1. Interview with Rabbi Linda Potemken, March 20, 2001.

2. s.v. “Yahrtzeit,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1996), 16:702.

3. I found alternate attributions of the origin of the name from as early as the 14th century (*The Jewish Mourner's Book of Why*, which is fairly scholarly despite its popularist title and question-and-answer format), the 15th century (*A Guide to Life*, one of the primary informers of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* article on *yahrtzeit*), and 16th century (*Jewish Encyclopedia*). The omission of the term “*yahrtzeit*” from the 16th-century *Shulḥan Arukh*, which did not incorporate contemporary Ashkenazi practice, is not helpful in dating its emergence.

4. s.v. “Jahrtzeit,” *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnall's, 1907), 7:64.

5. *Ibid.*

6. H. Rabinowicz, *A Guide to Life: Jewish Laws and Customs of Mourning* (London: Jewish Chronicle Publications, 1964), 108.

7. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, *op. cit.*, 16:704.

8. When Kaddish became part of the year's mourning practice, rabbinic scholars disputed whether a full year of spiritual support for the soul would be necessary to raise even the most righteous soul to paradise; the practice of reciting Kaddish for eleven months arose so as not to impugn the piety on the soul of the departed. There was resistance to Kaddish as part of the *yahrtzeit* practice for the same reason, but some authorities, including Isaac Luria, counseled that even the souls of the righteous could be elevated to a higher level of paradise. See Alfred J. Kolatch, *Jewish Mourner's Book of Why* (Middle Village, NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1993), 250.

9. *Ibid.*, 256.

10. *Jewish Encyclopedia*, *op. cit.*, 64.
11. Kolatch, *op. cit.*, 258.
12. Avram Kampf, *Contemporary Synagogue Art: Developments in the United States, 1945-1965* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1966), 146.
13. I am grateful to David Teutsch for this insight about vertical and horizontal community.
14. See, for example, Carl H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue: Excavations at Dura-Europos Final Report* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House), 335.
15. s.v. "Memorbuchen," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1996), 11:1300-01.
16. It is unclear from the description whether these plaques were permanently displayed or were hung only as *jahrzeit* dates approached. Abraham J. Karp, *From the Ends of the Earth: Judaic Treasures of the Library of Congress* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications and Library of Congress, 1991), 147-49.
17. March 11, 2001 interview. The plaques bear no dates or other indications of their origins and Rabbi Strassfeld is unfamiliar with the provenance of the synagogue (August 26, 2001 email).
18. Stephen Kayser, ed., *Jewish Ceremonial Art* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 9, 13.
19. Interview with Rabbi Michael Strassfeld, March 11, 2001.
20. Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Evolution of the American Synagogue" in Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen, ed., *The Americanization of the Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 222.
21. *Ibid*, 223. Synagogue architects in the 1940s were well aware of this trend. Percival Goodman, one of the foremost architects in the post-World War II period, wrote in 1954:

Among second-generation Jews

ritual observances in the synagogue tend to become secondary, but there is a greater dependence on the synagogue for those observances which formerly belonged to the home. Social and philanthropic activity becomes important. Jewish education, now almost completely divorced from the home, becomes a paramount function of the synagogue. Stylistically, the result is that the building takes on a secular appearance. It is a community center, a club, a school, set out in ample grounds. Yet in its essence it must be a house of prayer, for all realize that without the Holy Sabbath Judaism will die (emphasis original).

- See "The Character of the Modern Synagogue" in Peter Blake, ed., *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guidebook to Synagogue Design and Construction* (New York: Union for American Hebrew Congregation, 1954), 91.
22. March 18, 2001 email correspondence with Jonathan Sarna. Sarna suggests that immigrant Jews were deeply preoccupied with death.
 23. Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 2.
 24. See below for a discussion of why I am certain the form was fixed by this date.
 25. Max Feder, *Cemetery Operations and Procedures* (New York: Commission on Synagogue Activities, National Association of Temple Administrators of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1960), unnumbered page.
 26. The marble family tablets from Anshe Chesed's Harlem building give some idea of Gorham's competition.
 27. Gorham Manufacturing Corporation, *Gorham Memorial Tablets Made in Bronze, Brass, Marble, Mosaic and Other Materials*

- (New York: The Department of Stationery, Gorham Co., 1905), unnumbered page. This particular catalog, in spite of its mention of other media in the title, featured bronze by attaching a small bronze plaque to its cover.
28. Gorham Manufacturing Company, Catalogue T: *Bronze Tablets, Directory Boards and Letters* (New York, Gorham Co., 1918), unnumbered page.
29. General Bronze Corporation, *Bronze Memorials and Honor Roll Tablets* (New York: General Bronze Corp, 1946), unnumbered page.
30. *Ibid*, 4C.
31. Oscar Israelowitz, *Synagogues of the United States: A Photographic and Architectural Survey* (Brooklyn, NY: Israelowitz Publications, 1992), 38.
32. David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 2.
33. *Ibid*, 13-14.
34. *Ibid*, 186.
35. *Ibid*, 114.
36. *Ibid*, 30.
37. *Ibid*, 89.
38. *Ibid*, 32.
39. *Ibid*, 18.
40. *Ibid*, 260.
41. He does include a fascinating discussion of how urban churches, left dark as “the great white way” began to emerge on the streets of America’s cities, adopted electrical crosses to emulate and harmonize with the electric advertising aesthetic adopted by surrounding commercial establishments (*Ibid.*, 51-52).
42. *Ibid*, 262.
43. *Ibid*, 265.
44. *Ibid*, 18.
45. *Ibid*, 321.
46. The public announcements described above serve the same purpose.
47. Jack Wertheimer, “The Conservative Synagogue” in Jack Wertheimer, ed., *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 121-22.
48. Reprinted in Kimberly J. Elman and Angela Giral, eds., *Percival Goodman: Architect, Planner, Teacher, Painter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001), 67.
49. Moore, *op. cit.*, 2.
50. Wertheimer, *op. cit.*, 127.
51. Rabbinical Assembly, *Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards*, February 25, 1953. I am grateful to Dr. Jenna W. Joselit for locating this source.
52. There was a minority opinion preserved that stated only wax candles or oil lamps should be used as memorial lights. Kolatch suggests an explanation for this view:
 Many authorities are of the opinion that memorial lights used for *Yahrtzeit* must conform to the definition of the Hebrew word *ner*. *Ner*, which is translated as “candle” or “lamp,” implies the presence of a flame produced by a wick and fuel (wax or oil). The flickering flame is a reminder of the lights that burned on the menorah in the ancient Temples of Jerusalem. The light from an electric bulb would not fit the definition of *ner*. Some authorities, however, do permit the use of electric memorial lamps. (*op. cit.*, 257)
53. I am frustrated by the lack of Yiddish or Hebrew words to indicate precisely about what was under discussion. In my review of materials, the Conservative movement did not usually hesitate to use Hebrew or Yiddish.
54. *So You Want to Build: A Guide for Your Synagogue Architecture Committee* (New York: The United Synagogue of America, 1956), 4.
55. *Reference Forms and Procedures for Synagogue Administration* (New York: The

- United Synagogue of America, 1957), 45.
56. As the scope of this research indicates, the hanging of *yahrtzeit* plaques in the synagogue is extremely powerful and widely practiced: it serves to link individual to community both vertically and horizontally and was adapted to meet the needs of the American environment. Nonetheless, as this passage indicates, the synagogue also gains benefits, including income and attendance. The relationship appears more mutually beneficial than the use of the word “privilege” implies. It is unclear if this word choice implies an indication of discomfort with death, an overdeveloped understanding of the synagogue as an elite bastion, an inappropriate emphasis on the financial opportunities that obscured the significance of the ritual to the writer and editors, or is a marketing word that means an additional benefit for which one can pay.
57. Irving Isaac Katz and Myron E. Schoen, *Successful Synagogue Administration: A Practical Guide for Synagogue Leaders* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1963), 63.
58. Percival Goodman, “Congregation B’nai Israel” in Peter Blake, ed., *An American Synagogue for Today and Tomorrow: A Guidebook for Synagogue Design and Construction* (New York: Union for American Hebrew Congregations, 1954), 103-104.
59. Rachel Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States: History and Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955), 159.
60. Kampf, *op. cit.*, 170.
61. Interview with synagogue administrator Valerie Hurwitz, August 31, 2001.
62. www.jewishgen.org/jewishgenerosity
63. All of the rabbis I interviewed noted that, while the tablets comprise an important source of income, they would never deny a plaque to a congregant with limited means.
64. This egalitarianism in death is deeply authentic to Jewish practice. See the translation of *Moed Katan* 27a-b:
 People used to bring food to a house of mourning: the wealthy brought it in baskets of silver and gold, the poor in baskets of willow twigs. And the poor felt ashamed. Therefore our sages taught that everyone should use baskets of willow twigs.
 People used to serve drinks in a house of mourning: the wealthy served them in white glasses, the poor served them in less expensive colored glasses. And the poor felt ashamed. Therefore our sages taught that everyone should serve drinks in colored glasses.
 People used to bring out the deceased for burial: the rich on a tall state bed, ornamented and covered with rich coverlets, the poor on a plain bier. And the poor felt ashamed. Therefore a law was established that all should be brought out on a plain bier.
 Quoted in Anita Diamant, *Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead and Mourn as a Jew* (New York: Schocken Books, 1998), 63.

A Guide for the End of Life

A Review of

Behoref Hayamim/In the Winter of Life:

A Values-Based Jewish Guide for Decision Making at the End of Life.

edited by David Teutsch and Deborah Waxman

(Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Center for Jewish Ethics, 2002)

BY NATAN FENNER

The Center for Jewish Ethics at the RRC has produced a useful, thoughtful, accessible and topical guide for decision-making at the end of life. It provides conceptual frameworks, reasoning and guidance for making Jewishly informed, ethical decisions around end-of-life issues. The point of departure is a medically up-to-date, academically grounded and liberal Jewish perspective.

Behoref Hayamim contains a series of chapters drawing on each author's experience in the fields of medicine, medical ethics, congregational and Reconstructionist movement leadership, chaplaincy and Jewish healing. The chapters address decisions and concerns commonly faced in end-of-life care, including: advance directives, life support and resuscitation, information-sharing and communication between patient and caregivers, pain management, bedside advice for those offering emotional and spiritual support, assisted suicide and Jewish burial and mourning practices. Some authors reach conclusions or make arguments

reminiscent of Reform responsa or Conservative interpretations/conclusions of *halakha*; however, the book is much more a guide and conversation-starter than a compendium of definitive pronouncements and formulae.

Values-Based Decision Making

The opening chapter, "Jewish Values and Decision Making," by David Teutsch, provides an orientation to and an explanation of values-based decision-making, and of the key Jewish values and terms that inform much of the discussion of end-of-life care in the succeeding chapters. One finds a clear resonance with the Reconstructionist approach to communal decision making in Teutsch's summary of the process of values-based decision making: determine facts, alternative actions and their outcomes, and relevant beliefs and values; examine relevant scientific and social-scientific approaches to understanding these; consider the historical and contemporary context, including the history and rationales of Jewish

Rabbi Natan Fenner serves at the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center in San Francisco, and on the board of the National Association of Jewish Chaplains.

practice; look for norms that might exclude some actions; weigh the relevant attitudes, beliefs, and values; formulate decision alternatives; seek consensus . . . ; [and] make the decision (5-6).

Among the Jewish values and concepts identified in this chapter as relevant to the end-of-life conversation: *pikuah nefesh* (saving a life); *eyt lamut* (there is a time to die—accepting death’s inevitability); *kevod habriyot* (human dignity); *b’tselem elohim* (each human being’s infinite worth derived from being created in the image of God); and *rahmanut* (compassion/mercy). It also addresses terms more specific to and commonly used in Jewish bioethics discourse on end-of-life issues: *terefa* (a person certain not to recover from a terminal illness) and *goses* (in talmudic literature, one whose medical condition has so irreversibly deteriorated as to be expected to survive no more than three days). This introduction addresses both lay and professional readers, laying out a method for study and a foundation for a Jewish moral perspective on the questions raised by the other authors.

Advice for Caregivers

“Taking Control of Difficult Decisions,” by William Kavesh, contains information and advice about advance directives that are helpful, particularly for individuals who are or may be designated as caregivers, proxies, surrogate decision-makers or as having healthcare power of attorney. In fact, this chapter provides useful questions and direction

for individuals who are or should be considering or drawing up or revisiting their own advance directive, a category that arguably includes anyone over forty. Pages 22 to 24 include a concise explanation of the content, approaches, common complications and strategies of advance directives. The chapter also brings a helpful discussion of some of the inducements and impediments — both from common experience and from those particular to the Jewish milieu — to completing advance directives.

In “End-of-Life Technologies,” Kavesh explains some of the medical procedures most commonly addressed in advanced directives relating to life-support, together with rationales for using or declining them. Particular attention is given to cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), ventilators (artificial respirators) and feeding tubes.

In addition to outlining a medical perspective on these technologies, Kavesh makes frequent reference to *halakhic* and ethical sources (mostly from Conservative and Orthodox literature — the one citation of a Reform responsum in *Behoref Hayamim* occurs in a footnote to Chapter 9), and to generally held Jewish values.

Feeding Tubes

The section on the “effectiveness of feeding tubes” is more accurately a depiction not of their utility and conditions for likely success, but rather of their ineffectiveness and risks, and rationales for forgoing them. For readers not current with the medical literature and

“best practices,” it reads like a critical re-examination or reframing of an over-used technology. In Kavesh’s view, tube feeding shifts from a medical intervention that is widely used and seen as an aid to life to an “impediment to the departure of the soul from the body.” (59-60)

Without including a rationale for when in a patient’s life this reclassification of tube feeding becomes appropriate, the logic behind this view could be seen by some as unduly biased or overly broad in its application. The chapter could benefit from Kavesh’s perspective on why or when, and for what kinds of underlying conditions, a feeding tube — still commonly offered or prescribed by physicians in many settings — might be an appropriate treatment option. This perspective would lend the reader a greater sense of balance or context for discerning how to respond, or what questions to ask or consider, when making such a decision. On the side of *refuat hanefesh* (healing of the spirit), Kavesh notes that it can be very reassuring for family members to try feeding their loved one orally after the removal of a feeding tube (61).

The Role of Relationships

“Forming New Relationships,” by Paul Root Wolpe, examines the role and impact of relationships in *refuat hanefesh*. The quality and intensity of our primary familial, communal and professional caregiving relationships may significantly distress us, comfort us or otherwise shape our experience.

The dying person and his or her familial and professional caregivers have different roles, obligations and challenges in this regard. Wolpe cites a number of midrashic sources containing vignettes on healing in the context of peer and caregiving relationships.

This chapter includes a sensitively written section on appropriate roles for caregivers in helping someone in their meaning-making efforts as they confront illness or death. As many professional caregivers who work with people in hospice or with terminal illness know, healing is possible — and the hope for healing can be a powerful motivator — even in the last days and hours of life. Wolpe enumerates some areas where dying persons and those supporting them might seek healing (*refuat hanefesh v’refuat haguf*), including study, prayer and communal and familial ritual.

Among his more *takhlis* (practical) suggestions, Wolpe highlights the importance of having or arranging companionship and emotional support when “bad news” (i.e., a grave or potentially shocking diagnosis) is to be delivered to someone, particularly if the physician or other bearer of such news is not prepared or in a position to remain with the receiver of the news and offer that support. Wolpe also explains that in the often chaotic and emotionally stressful setting of such conversations, designating a member of the personal or professional care team to record or remember important information can be invaluable, as details are easily forgotten, conflated or recalled out of context or out of proportion.

Acknowledging that some families prefer to keep significant medical (or ancillary) information hidden from a loved one whom they feel to be in a precarious condition, Wolpe advocates for truth-telling as a general rule. In a discussion that is essentially directed to physicians and family members of the affected person, Wolpe notes the tension placed on the entire caregiving system when it is asked to maintain a conspiracy of silence or outright deception. In his view, truth-telling may in fact support greater trust and hope (read also: healing) on the part of the patient.

Surrogate Decision-Makers and Pastoral Support

In the chapter “Families and Treatment Decisions,” Wolpe articulates some of the challenges and stresses of caregiving and caregiver decision-making, including an all-too-common lack of clear guidance and support for those engaged in this sacred and potentially all-consuming endeavor. Wolpe delineates the roles that several of the primary constituents (family/loved ones, physician, rabbi) can play in support of good decision making about end-of-life care. It bears emphasizing (more than was done throughout the book) that when her/his decision-making capacity is acknowledged, the patient’s voice is, in the normative medical and legal view, the first and last to determine preferences and treatment choices from among the given options. A surrogate decision-maker takes over, and a different level of responsibility devolves upon the family or significant

others, only when the patient is not able to convey his/her wishes directly. Included in this section is a helpful clarification of the distinction between and appropriate places for substitute judgment and best-interest decision making.

Much of the discussion in this and other chapters focuses on the domain within which terminally ill or dying persons are no longer able to make or consent to medical decisions on their behalf. Wolpe notes some of the common ways that families run into conflicts over end-of-life treatment and care decisions. Sometimes these conflicts are inescapable, but Wolpe gives suggestions that may lend helpful perspective in some cases, both to smooth the decision-making process and to support *shelom bayit*, peace in the family.

Wolpe notes that “rabbis well-trained in hospital chaplaincy may be better able to serve the role of interpreter of complex medical ideas, but any rabbi can also serve in a pastoral role. . . . How the health-care team deals with the rabbi’s role may depend on the physician’s religion . . . as well as the type of hospital or facility” (74).

In fact, professional chaplains, whose ranks include many rabbis and cantors, have special training not only to serve in an interpretive role among patient, family members and the health-care team, but also in helping people address other issues that may impinge significantly on both decision making and spiritual care/well-being, i.e. suffering, theological questions and religious and cultural perspectives on illness and death. Professional chaplains often enjoy a degree of standing and

collegial rapport within a health-care institution that allows them to support or advocate effectively for religious, values-based decisions. Hence, when a hospital or other facility has a professional chaplain on staff or available through a community chaplain program, that individual should be considered as a potential resource to the dying person and the caregivers, which may or, as is often the case, may not include a congregational rabbi.

Coping with Suffering

Issues of pain and suffering, their personal and theological impact, and modes of coping and decision making related to these issues are addressed in the chapter “Pain and Suffering” by Sheila Segal. This chapter includes anecdotes that lay out in concrete terms different modes of companionship, *bikur ḥolim* (visiting the sick), *gemilut ḥasadim* (acts of kindness), and prayer on behalf of the person facing terminal illness or imminent death, with the particular focus on addressing, relieving or forbearing physical and emotional pain.

Noting the blurred boundary in contemporary experience between the traditional categories or stages of *goses* and *terefa*, Segal considers a “person to be at the ‘end of life’ if he or she is suffering from a disease or condition for which there is no cure and no reasonable hope of improvement” (87). Segal then delineates, for the person at the end of life who is also in pain, ethical guidelines surrounding the “duty to relieve pain:” “any intervention that

prolongs the dying process... [or] causes or prolongs pain may be rejected or discontinued; there are situations in which acceptance of death is in the best interest of the individual; . . . pain must be treated as aggressively as necessary” (88).

The scenarios articulating and honoring the pain experienced by care-givers, and acknowledging the impact of intense or sustained pain and suffering on decision making, may make for helpful, affirming reading for individuals in that position.

Given the room for decision-making autonomy and permissiveness granted in this and other chapters of *Behoref Hayamim*, Segal also includes an important caveat that each individual experiences pain, and may find comfort, in unique ways. Therefore, we must always hearken and be sensitive not only to the broader field of options and to our own stance with regard to end-of-life care, but to the particular person before us, with his/her inclinations and experience, in his/her particular condition and moment.

Spiritual Accompaniment

“End-of-Life Care,” by Myriam Klotz, concentrates on the opportunities and demands inherent in spiritually accompanying the dying person. This chapter provides guidance for the simple yet sometimes quite challenging act of being with someone who is dying. Encouraging approaches to prayer and to shared silence are offered in support of meaningful and spiritually supportive visits. Klotz also pro-

vides a succinct guide for conducting a personalized healing service, which can be a resource for the professional officiant or for those inclined to convene such a service without the guidance of a clergy member.

The intended audience for this chapter seems to be professional caregivers (medical or spiritual) with interest—but perhaps without extensive training—in what Klotz refers to as *hitlavut ruhanit*/spiritual accompaniment, or in working with patients who are not so versed in prayer or in articulating their own spiritual needs.

In describing some of the profound personal, spiritual and relational transformations that can take place when someone is dying, Klotz notes that caregivers can encourage healing and spiritual development during this process. While honoring the transformative potential of being present for and with someone at the end of life, there is perhaps an unintended sense not only of opportunity, but also of expectation or responsibility for fostering some kind of healing or growth that the caregiving reader might assume. Such a sense of responsibility would for many seem unduly heavy and — given that not all deaths appear graceful — unreasonable.

Healing Rituals

Klotz's presentation of healing services or healing rituals pictures the identified recipient at the center of a circle of caring. For some people nearing the end of their lives who may not have the interest or energy to participate in this kind of choreography, the

offer to pray on their behalf, or the knowledge that they are remembered during moments of communal prayer, such as a congregational *mi shebeirakh* prayer for healing, may be comforting. The ill or dying person need not be present to derive a sense of spiritual support from others' attentions; and a community or a group of caregivers may also find strength and comfort in linking together in this way. Furthermore, the team-like bonds of connection and support that are established or deepened among friends, family and a caring community may come to serve as an important, affirming bridge when that same group of people is mourning together after the death.

Klotz also mentions the *Vidui*/death-bed confessional prayer and who might recite it as the end of life draws near [118]. For those who are encouraged to make use of this prayer or explore this liturgy further (there are a number of versions revolving around the central themes Klotz outlined), texts of and explanations for the prayer can be found in various rabbi's manuals, and in some daily prayerbooks (including various Orthodox versions and the Reform movement's *Gates of the House*); and online in English (translation by Amy Eilberg at www.myjewishlearning.com/lifecycle/Death/Dying/Text_of_Vidui) and in Hebrew (a scanned version can be found at www.ira.kaufman.com/atneed/), among other sites. The Web site of the National Center for Jewish Healing (www.ncjh.org) is another source for readings, study texts and prayers for those facing grave illness and death.

Hospice Care

“A Time to Die: Reflections on Care for the Dying” by Amy Eilberg describes what hospice is, and how a hospice approach is consonant with both Jewish tradition and a holistic world view. The chapter enumerates commonly expressed needs of dying people, including the need to feel heard and to grieve. Eilberg advocates for a recognition of the preciousness of our finite lives informed by a clear awareness of our mortality, the cultivation of which can have profound and positive effects on our consciousness.

This chapter includes material that would be helpful both to lay people and health-care professionals who have mixed feelings about hospice or who labor under the conception that hospice, with its inherent acknowledgment of and concession to death’s inevitability, goes against values Judaism holds dear. Eilberg addresses directly Jewish concerns about and perceived obstacles to hospice care. She balances a historical orientation for “life at all cost” and “death as enemy” with an equally grounded Jewish concern for choosing treatment that addresses the ill person’s most important concerns, and offers the greatest hope for relieving one’s most deeply felt pain and fears. Eilberg highlights the traditional Jewish teachings around the meaning of *refuah sheleymah* (complete healing of body and spirit), death as a part of life, *eyt lamut* (there is [a time to be born and] a time to die), and death as a motivator for focusing our efforts for good while we are alive.¹

Acceptable Actions at the End Of Life

Wolpe’s chapter on “Ending Life” explores the issues of hastening death, including suicide and assisted suicide, and the nuances of active and passive euthanasia — which are among the more wrenching questions that are increasingly confronting ethicists and lay people alike when considering the condition and the desires of people suffering with debilitating, terminal illness and intractable pain.

Wolpe refers to talmudic passages describing the deaths of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and Rabbi Hanina ben Teradion, and commentaries on the suicide of King Saul. In Wolpe’s understanding, these passages show not encouragement but certainly some latitude for understanding and acceptance — *bediavad*/after the fact — of actions that hastened death in circumstances that were dire, torturous to the point where there was a risk of desecration of the Divine, and offering no possibility of physical recovery or escape. Regardless of the path chosen by individuals confronting such dire and intractable suffering when death is already imminent, Wolpe argues that “decisions made within the spirit of human caring and Jewish ethics that have the medical and spiritual welfare of the dying patient firmly as the top priority are all touched ultimately by the presence of God” (147).

Goses or Terefa?

Wolpe notes that “the model of *goses*

suggests that we can remove impediments (including, in the view of the majority of scholars quoted in this volume, respirators and feeding tubes that keep the *goses* from dying naturally), but not actively cause the death of another” (139). He then notes that “some scholars suggest that modern dying fits more into the category of the *terefa*, one who is clearly and severely terminally ill” (and is expected to die within a year)(139).

While both considerations emphasize the “underlying intention . . . to maintain the dignity of the dying, and not to unduly hasten their deaths” (139), the ramifications of this change in classification are significant, as Wolpe deduces in the latter case the permissibility not only of removing life supports but also of administering pain medications even in a way that may shorten life.

This section would have benefited from greater detail and more reference to sources in the ethical literature that spell out the criteria for determining when to use the *terefa* framework rather than that of the *goses*; the logical steps that proceed from the *terefa* designation; and the import Wolpe derives from the statement that “one who kills the *terefa* is exempt from (earthly) punishment” (139).

Mourning Practices

“Death and Mourning” by Richard Hirsh appears, with only minor changes, as it was published previously by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association as *The Journey of Mourning: A*

Reconstructionist Guide. It provides sensitive and comprehensive guidance for undertaking the decisions and the *mitzvot* associated with *avelut*/mourning, *k'vod hamet*/honoring the deceased and *nihum avelim*/comforting mourners.

This chapter is a thoughtful, useful, liberal Jewish substitute for, or complement to, such classic, encyclopedic and more (Conservative/Orthodox) legally framed works as Rabbi Maurice Lamm’s *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* and Rabbi Alfred J. Kolatch’s *The Jewish Mourner’s Book of Why*. Among the topics addressed are a Reconstructionist approach (using a historically informed, humanistic/naturalistic lens) to questions about life after death. It is well suited for lay readers (mourners, individuals or communities preparing or wishing to offer comfort and support) seeking step-by-step guidance and explanation regarding the important elements and arrangements for funerals, *shiva* and related topics. It may also serve as a resource of helpful perspectives for clergy working with liberal Jews and addressing questions that arise in the contemporary context, such as non-Jews mourning for Jews and vice-versa.

The chapter also provides practical guidance and thoughtful suggestions from a Reconstructionist perspective regarding infant death, the confluence of *shiva* and Jewish holidays, increasingly common liberal practices and concerns around cremation, and the recitation of Kaddish by other than first-degree mourners or in the absence of a *minyan*.²

A Need to Speak

In the section addressing the comforting of mourners during the first year following their loss, the point is made that “widows and widowers often report that...they experienced the loss of friendship with couples who may not have known how to adjust” (170). Indeed, in my experience working with bereaved individuals and with grief support groups, many mourners express a need to speak occasionally or repeatedly of their loved ones or of their feelings in the months after their loss, as part of their healing process. While counseling can be helpful, particularly, as Hirsh notes, when there is a long-term lack of adjustment to the loss, friends or relations with the patience to do so should indicate their interest, willingness and availability to listen.

I had a minor quibble with the statement that Reconstructionist Judaism “no longer affirm[s] many of the traditional ideas about life beyond death” (172). While I agree that the movement does not endorse many of these views, I am among many Reconstructionist rabbis who, in practice, frequently explore, work with and at least indirectly affirm individual mourners’ sometimes traditional, other-worldly, and even admittedly irrational views about life after death.³

To Hirsh’s advocacy for the traditional practice of having only mourners (rather than the entire congregation) recite *Kaddish Yetom* (the Mourner’s Kaddish) (175), I would add that communal support is expressed, in part, through the collective responses (*amen, yehei sh’mei*

rabbah, brikh hu) that are part of the recitation.

Traditional and Progressive Perspectives

One element I found lacking in the book was guidance for liberal Jews who are caring and making decisions for loved ones who are more traditionally or halakhically observant. As a chaplain who encounters a wide range of Jewish practice and knowledge, I feel that this helpful collection would have been strengthened by the inclusion of advice or additional bibliographic resources for this constituency.

Behoref Hayamim is a very readable, useful, and current volume that provides good resource material for a realm of decision making and care that is increasingly common and increasingly important in many of our lives. The book contains helpful anecdotes, a familiar Reconstructionist lens and citations for many of the rabbinic sources that inform discussions of Jewish end-of-life-care ethics, without trying to arrive at or present a particular halakhic stance for its liberal readers. The chapters would make excellent stand-alone study texts in adult or continuing professional education settings, as well as for individuals or families wanting to clarify their values or formulate advance directives in a Jewishly informed way. The book is recommended reading for congregational clergy, and other lay and professional caregivers who seek a liberal Jewish perspective on end-of-life issues.

1. Another polemic addressing Jewish concerns about “giving up” and shifting into a palliative mode is found in the concise volume by Rabbi Daniel S. Brenner, et al., *Embracing Life and Facing Death: A Jewish Guide to Palliative Care* (CLAL, 2002). This guide also outlines some of the primary tasks — as understood by longtime proponents of the hospice movement and Jewish spiritual care providers—associated with, for example, responding to a diagnosis, formulating advance directives and an ethical will, living with illness, addressing suffering, seeking forgiveness and making peace in one's relationships and reciting the vidui/deathbed prayer.

2. Regarding the customary graveside recitation, *HaMakom yinahem!* “May God

comfort you along with all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem,” while many have understood this phrase as embodying messianic hopes, as Hirsh notes (160), another widely recognized meaning given to these words has to do with the recognition and comfort of being part of and somehow connected to a larger community of mourners across the continents and the generations.

3. Hirsh does note that irrespective of what a movement's ideology or theology may suggest, “individual Jews will choose what they believe about life beyond death — regardless of their denominational affiliation. In such a highly personal area of spiritual conviction, that is entirely appropriate” (160).

Responding to Inter-marriage

A Review of

Introducing My Faith and My Community: The Jewish Outreach Institute Guide for the Christian in a Jewish Interfaith Relationship,

by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky

(Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004)

and *Interfaith Families: Personal Stories of Jewish-Christian Inter-marriage,*

by Jane Kaplan

(Praeger, 2004)

BY NINA MANDEL

My grandmother, *zihrona livraha*, was not stingy with her opinions. She was vehemently and articulately opposed to the concept of inter-marriage and she let us know it. She was, in fact, typical of generations of grandmothers, grandfathers, parents, siblings, rabbis and community leaders who felt (and in some cases still do feel) a sense of peril for the continuity of the Jewish people posed by inter-marriage.

In fairness, my grandmother spoke just as eloquently and memorably about the importance of *klal Yisrael*—the entirety of the Jewish people. She would invoke the message of unity inherent in the *Shema* prayer to explain the ineffable connection between Jewish people that had allowed for their survival. And she applied that message to her family, presiding fiercely, if somewhat ineffectively, over us as the unquestionable matriarch, protecting her kin from the temptations of the outside world. She firmly believed that

inter-marriage would lead to the abandonment not just of Judaism, but an abandonment of the Jewish people. In theory, she supported conversion to Judaism by the non-Jewish spouse to be the lesser of two evils. However, the *shonde*, the shame, came from even dating “out” in the first place. Inevitably, her diligence and that of Jewish grandmothers everywhere failed to keep inter-marriages from happening.

A Growing Challenge

The most recent National Jewish Population Survey, 2000-01, reports that since 1996, the inter-marriage rate for newly-married Jews is 47 percent. This is a slight increase since 1985, but a much lower rate than that of the 1970s and early 1980s. These are not shockingly new statistics, nor are the ones that indicate that inter-married families are less likely to engage in Jewish life or raise Jewish children than “in-marrieds.” For the last several decades,

Nina Mandel is rabbi of Congregation Beth El in Sunbury, Pennsylvania.

Jewish communal life across the denominational spectrum has been addressing the implications of intermarriage programmatically, institutionally and theoretically.

What has shifted in recent years is the approach to the “intermarriage question.” Up until recently, the two predominant Jewish “antidotes” to intermarriage were to invest time, effort and resources in keeping Jewish adults from marrying non-Jews; and to encourage non-Jewish partners to convert to Judaism. Increasingly, we now find Jewish institutions turning their attention to making intermarried families feel more welcome as a means of keeping Jews, and the people who love them, involved in Jewish life (see, for example, the 1998 Reconstructionist report *Boundaries and Opportunities: The Role of Non-Jews in Reconstructionist Congregations*). Instead of believing, like my grandmother, that the most effective course was to keep Jews from marrying “out,” we now find the inclusivity approach entering the mainstream. In October 2003, Paul Golin wrote in *Moment* magazine that: “For the first time in U.S. history, the number of Jews is declining. Welcoming intermarried couples can reverse the trend.”

Giving Voice to Intermarried People

This viewpoint is explored in complementary ways by the two books under review. Neither is a how-to for conversion, nor do they even try to make the case for it, or for the abandonment of an interreligious relationship. What the authors do, in very dif-

ferent ways, is to give a voice to many of the different players in these relationships. One book effectively explains why “marrying Jewish” might matter so much to the Jewish partner’s family, even in cases where they are seemingly without any other connection to Jewish life. The other exposes the impact on families when aversions to, and stereotypes about, intermarriage are aired insensitively and explores how couples work to develop strategies for their interfaith relationships.

Introducing My Faith and Community is directed to a specific audience. Though the title suggests a guidebook for the Jewish partner, “. . . this book is primarily designed for people whose quest to learn more about Judaism emerges mainly from a special relationship with someone who is Jewish” (xi). It is written primarily for the Christian reader, with the history and rituals of Judaism often being explained in contrast to a Christian experience.

Using four broad chapters titled “Faith,” “Foundational Values,” “Culture,” and “Community,” Kerry Olitzky gives a comprehensive and accessible rundown on Jewish history, practice, ritual and communal life. He frames his discussions in both traditional Jewish teachings, like Maimonides’ Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith, and more contemporary vocabulary and values, using subheadings such as “welcoming environments” and “spiritual practice.” Each chapter ends with a section entitled “Next Steps,” encouraging the reader to engage further in an aspect of Jewish thought or practice as a way of deepening his or her understanding.

If the book were to be judged solely by its cover, it would be described accurately as welcoming, with a picture of an open door with a *mezuzah* on the doorpost and a “Shalom” mat on the landing. One would not expect to find a disapproving grandmother in this house, and this is the success of the book. The underlying message in the teaching about Judaism is to explain why it means so much to Grandma.

Contradiction and Confusion

Olitzky admits to the non-Jewish reader that the Jewish family that may be giving him or her such a hard time often seems contradictory, or even hypocritical. “How could being Jewish be so important to you if you never celebrate the holidays?” “Why should I convert if you don’t even keep a kosher home?” “Why is Judaism so important to my partner, who has not set foot in a synagogue since age thirteen?”

Rather than invoking tragic history, fear of extinction or religious prescriptions, Olitzky focuses on the values that make Jewish peoplehood so important. He explains that, unlike examples from Christianity, Jewish faith does not require ritual practice, and that synagogue membership is not a requirement for Jewish identity. He also explains how Jewish identity is maintained through everything from food to art to ritual practice.

He also tackles head-on, if not sometimes apologetically, stereotypes about Jews that might arise. Using the values frame of *tzedakah*, mixed with some medieval history, he addresses the roots

of stereotypes about Jews and money. “If Jews appear to be overrepresented in the sphere of philanthropic giving, this may be viewed as a desire to sublimate the urge toward conspicuous consumption. But it’s important to recognize that giving money and donating time have an ancient basis in Jewish values” (44).

Plus and Minus

Where the author is less successful is in taking on the task of describing the distinctions among the different movements within Judaism. While it is helpful to have a chapter entitled, “The Four Major Movements in American Judaism,” it is less helpful to try to offer, as Olitzky does, a guideline of what individual rabbis may require for things like conversion or synagogue participation. For instance, his assertion that “Not all Reconstructionist and Reform rabbis require circumcision for adult males” does not adequately prepare the reader to expect a range of opinions in these matters.

Introducing My Faith and My Community is successful because of its candor. The book does not hesitate to present the ways in which coming into a Jewish family can be unsettling to a non-Jewish partner. Olitzky tries to shift the discomfort to understanding, by explaining how and why many Jews have come to be invested in the concept of “Jewishness” beyond the realm of religious practice. This approach allows the non-Jewish reader to feel understood and the Jewish reader to feel well represented.

Personal Narratives

Interfaith Families: Personal Stories of Jewish-Christian Intermarriage is a collection of personal stories that are as revelatory as Olitzky's book is informative. The author offers an intimate look into the "back-stories" of interfaith marriages in an effort to share the many ways couples successfully, and unsuccessfully, deal with the kinds of challenges Olitzky presents. The stories were gathered by author Jane Kaplan through a systematic interview process. They are meant to offer a cross-section of experiences, using couples from across the country, of all different ages and at different points in their marriages, including several divorced couples.

The stories are grouped into five chapters, each representing an approach to intermarriage taken by the family: "Choosing a Jewish Family Life"; "Choosing a Christian Family Life"; "Finding a Way to Have Both"; "Looking for Alternatives"; and "Deciding to Convert." Although Kaplan has chosen not to present any analysis of the interviews, she does start each chapter with a brief comment on her findings and each interview, told in the first person, begins with a summary about the circumstances of the subject.

What Kaplan's choice of narratives reveals is an overall frustration among the partners, Jewish and non-Jewish, about how issues of religion are dealt with in the relationship between the partners. In many of the cases, one partner reports feeling unsupported in following her or his own religious path, or pressured into conversion. Even in

the cases where the couple considered the impact of religious differences carefully before marriage, it is instructive to read how unexpected challenges arose over time.

It is provocative, and also sometimes difficult, to read how many of the non-Jewish partners report being treated critically by Jewish families. In most of the cases Kaplan offers, the Christian family and partner have a much easier time accepting the relationship, marriage, conversion or decision about raising the children, than the Jewish side. The issue arises repeatedly that the non-Jewish partner does not understand the visceral attachment to Judaism, and I found myself at times wishing that these couples had read Olitzky's book.

Identity of Children

The question of what to do about raising children seems to be the most challenging, and the stories present some interesting and thought-provoking ideas for addressing this issue. Kaplan offers examples of how families have managed by choosing either Judaism or Christianity as the religion in which the children will be raised, regardless of whether the parents share a faith tradition.

Kaplan also offers stories of ways in which families have blended traditions. In some cases, they found or created similar communities in which to teach and celebrate both faith traditions; in others, no firm decision was made, and the children were encouraged to find their own way. These stories often read more joyfully than do the ones in which

a decision was made and the partners struggled to support one another. (An interesting addendum to the book would be stories from the children in all these families, to see how these choices played out for them.)

Ultimately, it is the candor of the stories that make this an important resource for discussing intermarriage and conversion issues. This is not a book put together to show us how well things worked out once a decision was made to convert to Judaism or to create a Jewish household. It is obvious that conflicts often arise in interfaith marriages, even when one or both partners define themselves as “non-religious.” It is also obvious that the pressure put on couples in these situations by their own families and clergy can be hurtful. Though in most cases the extended families came to accept the choices made by the couples involved, harm was done. This book makes us consider exactly what it is we mean when we talk about creating welcoming

communities for interfaith families.

Changing Attitudes

Taken together, these books show a changing attitude about intermarriage in liberal Jewish communities. The focus is no longer so much on prevention as on respect and understanding. My grandmother may not have been happy when some of her grandchildren married outside of their faith, but in the end she did her best to accept everyone. Had she had insight into the impact her stance had on those couples before they married, or had those non-Jewish partners of her grandchildren had more insight into why the investment for her was so high, perhaps feelings could have been spared all around.

Olitzky and Kaplan have helped us to see alternative, and, it is hoped, more effective and more welcoming, ways of responding to the challenges of intermarriage.

Eternal Questions, Prayerful Responses

A Review of
*Filling Words with Light:
Hasidic and Mystical Reflections on Jewish Prayer*
by Lawrence Kushner and Nehemiah Polen
(Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, VT, 2005), xiii + 154 pages

BY SHEILA PELTZ WEINBERG

I am one of many who has had the privilege and pleasure of studying with rabbis Larry Kushner and Nehemiah Polen. They are master teachers, contemporary hasidim/rebbes and lovers of God who express their love through teaching Torah in the deepest sense.

Their collaboration produced the mystic and hasidic commentary for the *My People's Prayer Book* series from Jewish Lights Publishing, and now these contributions have been collected in the delightful, slim volume, *Filling Words with Light: Hasidic and Mystical Reflections on Jewish Prayer*.

In the authors' words, the book is a

[B]ouquet of interpretations, comments, stories, and reflections on how to put more of oneself into the words of one's prayer; how to give them new life; how to en-spirit them; how to fit them with their own individual skylights, or, if you will, in the imagery of the

title of this volume, how one might begin filling words with light (xiii).

The commentaries are conveniently arranged according to the daily and Shabbat liturgy, making it an excellent companion for a class on *siddur* (prayerbook) for beginners or beyond. Many of the sections, usually a page or two in length, can be read as is, or adapted as inspirational introductions to different parts of a service. Some of the texts might be transformed into *kavannot*, or into instructions for meditation, or used as the basis for personal reflection or journaling. (For rabbis and Jewish text teachers, this volume would be made more valuable with a companion of all the sources in Hebrew.)

The Inner Life

When we are in the territory of hasidic tradition (what scholar Miles Krassen calls the "Science of Love") the invitation is extended to plumb the

Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg is Outreach Director and Senior Faculty Member at the Institute for Jewish Spirituality.

inner life. This can only be done one person at a time. The safer and more secure we feel, the more we are able to allow the inner voice to be heard. These texts provide a pathway. They link us to a community of our ancestors. Studying these texts together, we bond with communities in the present to support each other in the work of inner exploration.

Some of the texts point toward specific practices that can be embraced to help us make this inner journey. For instance, in his morning prayers the Skulener Rebbe would focus on each individual phrase, one at a time. “He would not permit himself to move on to the next phrase in the prayer until he felt he had found some personal message of hope and redemption” (30). This might have taken longer than we could imagine, but time was not an issue for the Skulener, since he was imprisoned in solitary confinement by the Romanian authorities for the “crime” of teaching Jewish children.

Hasidic Insights

Despite the brevity of the commentaries, some of the key chords in the hasidic symphony are tucked into this volume. We find references to such ideas as the constant renewal of creation — ourselves included. The cultivation of this awareness is a key to spiritual revival. It is also a theme embedded in our liturgy and in many hasidic texts. Abraham Joshua Heschel called it wonder, or “radical amazement.” It is the process of waking up in this moment to the absolute uniqueness of this very

moment. It is breaking though habits of boredom, fixed views and assumptions that cloud the organs of perception.

One of the longest commentaries deals with preparation for reciting the *Shema*, and deals with another pivotal hasidic concept: *deveikut*, or cleaving to God. Kushner and Polen quote a beautiful text by Zev Wolf of Zhitomir, as amplified by Martin Buber, in which *deveikut* is revealed as an inner unification of one’s own scattered consciousness, or dispersal of one’s soul’s energy. This, our teachers tell us, is a perfect introduction to the declaration of God’s unity in the *Shema*.

Deveikut is discussed further in the section on the Torah service in relation to the verse from Deuteronomy 4:4, “and you cleave to Adonai your God.” Kushner and Polen draw on Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk who offers an approach to this term in his work *Pri Ha’aretz*. He suggests that *deveikut* entails the preparation of the soul in such a way that there is no barrier of personality or self-seeking that might be in the way. In the language of parable, no trace of rust must be found when we glue together two pieces of silver.

This text integrates the process of one’s inner work with identifying and releasing the barriers of connection to God. It is a typical hasidic transformation of the psychological realm into the transpersonal. We might just pass by the word “cleave.” This reflection helps open that word into a practice and concept of immeasurable subtlety. Perhaps this will then entice us to further exploration.

The Language of Prayer

Some of the sections are direct commentaries on the language of prayer. Why, for instance, in the *hashkivenu* prayer does it say “Remove the adversary from before and after us”? The Biala Rebbe suggests that before we fulfill a mitzvah we tend to be plagued with doubt. But after we fulfill a mitzvah we are tempted by arrogance. Hence we need to ask for protection from the inner voices that keep us separate and trick us with their power and logic before and after we perform a mitzvah.

This is a classic hasidic approach to text and to prayer: to become alert to moments of insight into the machinations of our minds and hearts. The religious life is seen as a constant practice of refining the heart or training the mind to see more clearly. And what will we see? We will see the truth, which is the absence of separation between ourselves and each other, between the finite and the infinite, between the human and the divine.

This hasidic approach is also expressed in a commentary on the verse we recite before the *Amida*, “Adonai, Open my lips that my mouth may declare your praise.” Whose lips are they? Whose praise? Whose mouth? A hasidic or mystical interpretation of this verse emphasizes the non-dual nature of reality, and the *Amida* as the moment when this is most fully realized.

The verse deals with the interdependence of human and divine. Polen and Kushner see this as an approach to

prayer, which represents another spiritual paradigm. They write:

Prayer may ultimately be an exercise for helping us let go of our egos, hopelessly anchored to this world where one person is discrete from another and from God and soar to the heavens where we realize there is a holy One to all being and that we have been an expression of it all along (68).

Daily Mindfulness

One of the shortest and most beautiful commentaries is on the special blessing for holiness on the Sabbath when we recite: “They will be satisfied and take pleasure from your goodness.” Our authors cite Aaron of Karlin who notes the apparent redundancy of “satisfied” and “take pleasure” and teaches: [This] reminds us that all desire and appetites, once sated, no longer provide much pleasure. But the pleasure of being close to God, he adds, is inexhaustible. Even though we will be satisfied, we will still draw pleasure from proximity to you” (80).

This sounds to me like an instruction for mindfulness in our daily lives. It calls us to reflect closely on our experience of wanting and of being satisfied. What is satisfying and what is not? How are we controlled by desire for the fleeting, which creates further desire in its wake? Do we even know, acknowledge and celebrate when we have enough? How do we connect to the satisfaction of knowing Divine goodness? The hasidic teachings come from

a time and place in Jewish history of material scarcity. In our culture of overload, speed and excess, this is an even more powerful call from our tradition.

There is much more. In fact, this book keeps revealing its secrets. It is not meant to be read through and placed on the shelf to gather dust. But it is hard for me to judge how one might respond to these teachings if one was new to these ideas. My hunch is that this book will be an excellent resource, but better utilized with a teacher and in community. This will increase the likelihood that the words will have resonance and provide illumination that can lead to spiritual openness.

Reconstructionism and Hasidism

I recall the days when I was a student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and had a course on Reconstructionism back to back with a course in hasidic text. I felt an amazing synergy between the two approaches. The Reconstructionism course taught me about actualizing the potential for a life of righteousness and lovingkindness by connecting to the power called Godliness. The class on hasidic text taught me the importance of getting beyond the barriers of selfishness, destructive emotions and pride in order to recognize the Divine in all things and in all moments. The Divine was the healing, loving, sustaining and renewing power within us and within all things in the universe. The vitality of the creation is found within the creation. I connected with the humanism of both approaches, with the emphasis

on transforming the heart in order to be a channel of the goodness that is waiting to flow more freely in this realm.

The Hasidim are a resource to us because they cared about many of the same things we care about. They also wanted the tradition to speak to them, to come alive. They wanted their words filled with light as much as we do.

Prayer was the central mitzvah for Hasidim. In many ways, prayer is the most challenging part of a religious life for us. The life of the mind and the construction of community are more within our grasp. How do we reinvent and renew prayer that will truly be a force for connection, love and transformation? How do the words of the past take wing? How do they expand our energy and give us strength to face the challenges of our lives and our times? How do they lead us to see the world in new ways? How do our prayers help us work with our hearts, peeling of the layers of rust that are always accumulating to cover the hurts and fears of being human?

This little volume is a wonderful contribution to the search for answers to these questions. It ends in a beautiful way with, not surprisingly, an observation about Elijah. It is based on reading Elijah the Tishbi as Elijah the *toshav*, the “resident.” Because Elijah did not die, he is, according to Abraham Isaac Sperling of Lemberg, the only true resident. The rest of us are just “passing through.” The question then becomes for all of us: how can my brief passing be as pure and life-giving as possible? How can I live in a way

that my passing through creates more goodness than harm? These are the eternal religious questions, whether you are a Hasid or a Reconstructionist. I think I am both.

TRANSNATURE'S GOD

Studies in Mordecai M. Kaplan's Theology

by Professor Meir Ben-Horin

Edited by Ethan M. Merlin

Transnature's God, a monumental study by Professor Meir Ben-Horin (1918-1988), is largely an intellectual history of the central ideas of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, widely known as the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism. In the words of editor Ethan Merlin, "Kaplan stood at the crossroads of ancient and modern traditions. His novel ideas about God and Judaism reflect his particular historical and cultural moment. In this book, Ben-Horin explains those ideas while documenting their relation to larger intellectual currents."

Dr. Ben-Horin devoted the 1970s through 1987 to researching, analyzing, writing and enhancing this work. Just as he was editing his final manuscript, he died, in January, 1988. The culmination of decades of Jewish scholarship, Dr. Ben-Horin's manuscript has been rediscovered, re-edited and is now published.

This is a significant scholarly work that has been researched and painstakingly footnoted by the author. It is "must reading" for students and scholars of Judaism.

407 pages. Heavy paperback. 8 x 11.5 inches. ISBN 0-9761208-0-1.

Order online at www.bookstream.biz

Then click on "Religion" and then "More info" and "Add to Cart"

Or send a check for \$26.⁹⁵ and \$6.⁹⁵ shipping and handling (total \$33.⁹⁰)
(outside North America, \$19.⁹⁵ air shipping, total \$46.⁹⁰)

Adar-Nisan Books, LLC

PO Box 7223

Wilton, CT 06897

Phone: 203-761-0500

E-mail: ANBooks@AdarAdvisors.com