Rethinking Power:
Collaborative and Coercive Power in the Jewish Community

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis, entitled, "Rethinking Power: Collaborative and Coercive Power in the Jewish Community," is to explore the nature and exercise of power in the Jewish community. It surveys three models of power: community organizing, Jewish feminism, and the State of Israel in order to uncover how power manifests in Judaism and how different forms of power operate. Power is a controversial and debated concept within political discourse as well as within Jewish sources. This thesis examines the relationship of Jews to power over time and the intersection of power and ethics. It seeks to elucidate how collaborative models of power can act as creative, relational sources and offer alternatives to more hierarchical or coercive systems.

This thesis can be broken down into three major components: an introduction, body, and conclusion. The introduction presents the paradigms of *power-with* and *power-over* and explores various Jewish sources that address notions of authority. The body consists of three chapters. Each chapter investigates one of the models of power. While there are numerous examples of power in the Jewish community, I chose these particular models because they offer either an alternative perspective, such as community organizing, or because they represent a core aspect of Judaism. The chapter on Jewish feminism, for instance, investigates the role of halakhah, Jewish law, as a source of authority, and the chapter on Israel addresses the role of power and ethics in governing a Jewish state.

This thesis primarily employs secondary sources and a few primary sources. It focuses on philosophy and examines a range of sources including the work of political and social theorists, Jewish historians and philosophers, and traditional Jewish texts. This thesis offers a broad survey of some of the definitions and issues regarding power in Judaism. Hopefully, the bibliography will provide a resource guide for readers to continue to look more deeply into the notion of power and more specifically into one of the models of power presented.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Typically, when Jews discuss power they mean one of three things: omnipotence of God, power of community, or actual forms of power that groups of Jews exert in society (academia, media, politics, business, etc.). This thesis investigates other forms of *power-with* in Judaism and among groups of Jews. It will focus on three models of power in Judaism: community organizing, feminism, and Israel, and will explore how power is manifested in each system. It will examine alternative constructions of power such as feminism where the power of the personal can become political. Additionally, this thesis will explore community organizing which represents a model of shared power in which individuals or groups must relinquish some of their own individual power in order to create greater collective influence through relationships. Finally, this work will consider the most controversial and referenced form of Jewish power today, the state of Israel, as a modern political nation embedded in the Judaic tradition.

This thesis will examine several definitions of power in Judaism and will analyze specifically the models of community organizing, feminism, and Israel through the lens of two different notions of power—*power-over* and *power-with*. It will attempt to prove that *power-with,* relational and shared power, acts as a more potent and effective long term model of power than *power-over,* where one party exerts control over another. This thesis will not focus solely on power as brute or military force. It will also consider how power has functioned over time in Judaism, and how narratives about power influence its exercise. This work will focus on power in terms of belief and action through the theoretical lens of coercive *power-over* and the more relational model of *power-with.*

In order to explore various models of power, one must first establish a definition or identify the key concepts underpinning a notion of "power." Power represents an abstract and elusive term that political and social theorists have debated for centuries. The idea of power itself is highly contested and even controversial because of the "power" and authority inherent in the ability to define such a significant concept and practice. Feminist perspectives on power categorize power in three different ways: power as a resource, power as domination, and power in terms of empowerment.[1] These three categories offer a useful paradigm for understanding the different ways in which the definition of power is constructed.

First, as a resource, power can provide a social good when it is equally distributed among various groups in society. Within each of the models that will be addressed, power acts as a potential resource to further certain values, ideals, or stories, yet each model struggles with the question of who is left out (impoverished individuals or minority groups, women, Palestinians) when the resource of power is only possessed by some. Second, power as domination represents the extreme form of *power-over* in which the relationship of one individual or group subjugates another and becomes fundamentally unjust or oppressive.[2] Master-slave relationships, the feminist critique of patriarchy, or the Marxist theory of class exploitation are some examples of this expression of power. Not all *power-over* relationships are inherently threatening or materialize into this radical form of oppression. Some *power-over* relationships, in fact, are necessary in certain situations such as a parent and child or the government and citizens when safety is at risk. Finally, power as a form of empowerment, or as some scholars call "transformative power," illustrates a model of *power-with* or *power-to*

[1] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Feminist Perspectives on Power," accessed December 9, 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-power/.
[2] Ibid.

relations that enhances, rather than diminishes, the power of others. This kind of power is relational, not hierarchical and brings together individuals or groups to partner together to create systemic change.

Political theorist Steven Lukes suggests that the nature of power is so disputed because our conceptions of power are themselves inherently shaped by power relations. He explains:

> "How we think about power may serve to reproduce and reinforce power structures and relations, or alternatively it may challenge and subvert them. It may contribute to their continued functioning, or it may unmask their principles of operation, whose effectiveness is increased by their being hidden from view. To the extent that this is so, conceptual and methodological questions are inescapably political and so what 'power' means is 'essentially contested'…"[3]

Lukes argues that the nature of defining power is a political endeavor in and of itself. This assertion only furthers the importance of exploring how various Jewish movements understand and employ power. It also forces us to consider why *power-over* remains the dominant understanding of this term and urges us to uncover the political ramifications of a society where hierarchical power based on control and domination continues to be so pervasive.

Social and political theorists provide a wide array of definitions for the concept of power. This thesis will address only a few of the multitude of theories concerning the nature and exercise of power. These conceptions of power vary, in one way, based on the differentiation between exercising *power-over* another person by "getting them to do what you want" verses the *power to* act or do something *with* others. Max Weber offers one traditional formulation of *power-over*. He defines power as "the probability that one actor

[3] Steven Lukes, *Power: a Radical View*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 63.

within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance…"[4] Weber is interested in social action and change theory and identifies power through the lens of domination.[5] For political scientist Robert Dahl, power represents an intuitive notion where "A has *power-over* B to the extent that A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do"[6]

Political theorists Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz challenged Dahl's definition of power and established a two-dimensional view where power is the "participation in decision-making" and can be analyzed only after "careful examination of a series of concrete decisions."[7] Unlike Dahl, Bachrach and Baratz differentiate between the ability to make and enforce key political decisions as the exercise of actual power versus the ability to make and carry out routine ones. In these models, scholars identify power as an exercise where one body exerts *power-over* another; getting someone to do what might be contrary to that person's own interests. Social theorist, Michel Foucault also interprets power based on this paradigm*:* "if we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise *power-over* others"[8] In the Bible, God acts as the greatest model of *power-over* where God exerts God's will upon the people. However, God also seeks a *power-with* relationship with humans as God's partners through the covenantal bond. Similarly, during the era of kingship, the kings wielded great *power-over* the people in their rule.

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[4] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Feminist Perspectives on Power," accessed December 9, 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-power/.
[5] Pip Jones, *Introducing Social Theory* (Malden, MA USA: Polity, 2003), 84.
[6] Robert Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science* 2, no. 3 (1957): 202-203.
[7] Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, "The Two Faces of Power," *The American Political Science Review* 56, no. 4 (1962): pp. 947-952.
[8] Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 217.

Still today, this concept of *power-over* represents the dominant construction of power where one person imposes his or her will upon another. The model of *power-over* might establish a more expeditious process because it does not require the cultivation of relationships or the brokering of shared interests. This form of power results in short terms wins, but this articulation of power can fail to provide sustainable, long-term success and can undermine individual autonomy in the process. Despite its abundant use in politics and other areas of society, the potential effectiveness of the *power-over* model is mitigated by other long term consequences.

The less known model of *power-with* offers an alternative to the exercise of *power-over*. Political theorist Hannah Arendt describes power as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert[9] Arendt defines power as a capacity in which "power springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse."[10] *Power-with* assumes that power derives from the collective and from the shared relationships among people. One group does not exert its will over another. Rather, both groups act together out of a sense of shared interests and values. Ideological movements like feminism and community organizing have been operating through the exercise of this kind of power in which storytelling and relationships exist at the center. Yet, *power-over* still remains the most widely accepted definition and use of power.

Stories of *power-with* also abound within biblical tradition. The daughters of Zelophechad[11] provide a model for the earliest community organizers. They are able to inherit their father's land through strategic thinking, understanding others' interests, storytelling, and collective action. They bring together the entire community to present their

[9] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence.* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1970), 44.
[10] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958),200.
[11] Numbers 27:1-7

case, speak in a language that those in power could relate to and share a story about their family. The daughters illustrate *power-with* through relationship and shared power. Similarly, Moses demonstrates *power-with* and listens to his father-in-law Jethro and shares his power through a system of judges.[12] Moses does not fear a loss of his power by giving up some it to the judges. Rather, he understands that this system of delegation actually enhances Moses' ability to exert power by sharing it with others.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks explores another biblical account of power. He distinguishes between power and influence through the story of Moses. When Korach rebels against Moses' leadership, Moses wipes out his opposition.[13] Yet, when Moses learns from Joshua about Eldad and Meldad prophesying in the camp[14], he does not consider it a threat. Sachs unpacks these two contrasting reactions from Moses as a model for two types of leadership: power and influence. For Sacks, power diminishes the more one shares it. Whereas with influence, the more one shares it, the more one possesses it. "Power operates by division, influence by multiplication."[15] He assigns kings and prophets as examples of this distinction. A king holds power and can create taxes, wage war, and make laws. Prophets, on the other hand, do not possess the power to command an army, but they do possess the power to influence decisions and fight against injustice. They inspire the people and their influence does not end with their death. Sacks argues that Eldad and Meldad did not seek out power, but instead sought to share the prophetic spirit or influence, whereas Korach threatened Moses' authority as a leader.

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[12] Exodus 18:17-27.
[13] Numbers 16:31-35.
[14] Numbers 11:26-30.
[15] Jonathan Sacks, "Parshat Korach: Power Versus Influence," accessed January 13, 2014,http://www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha/covenant_and_conversation_influence/.

Like Sacks suggests, there are many nuances to a definition of power and several words that are used interchangeably—influence, access, control, authority. Feminist theorist Marilyn Frye explores different aspects of power, one of which is "access." According to Frye, "total power is unconditional access; total powerlessness is being unconditionally accessible. The creation and manipulation of power is constituted of the manipulation and control of access."[16] For her, access is one of the "faces of power" and differences in power exist because both parties don't possess equal access. Similarly, Frye identifies "definition" as another face of power. In this *power-over* paradigm, those in power are the ones who determine what is said and possess the ability to label a situation. In this fashion *power-over* becomes oppression as "a system of interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize, and mold people who belong to a certain ground, and effect their subordination to another group."[17] For Frye, control of access and definition are claims to power.

Discussing *power-with* in the Jewish context remains loaded because of our experience of powerlessness in Jewish history and the Jewish narrative which identifies Jews foremost as powerless. Power in Judaism remains a contested topic, fraught with all kinds of implications. Some Jewish writers and scholars revel in the power of contemporary American Jewry who is deeply connected and influential in various spheres of society such as economic and political life. They sit on the Supreme Court and run the top financial firms. These authors marvel at Israel's power as a "start-up nation" and as the only successful democracy in the Middle East. Others, like Peter Beinart and Marc Ellis, express shame and embarrassment over the state of Jewish power today. The exercise of power in Israel, for example, represents a failure for these writers in Jewish morality. The story of redemption

[16] Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983), 103.
[17] Ibid, 33.

that has become so intertwined with the creation of the State and the narrative that understands Jewish history as a shift from powerlessness to power creates a complex and sometimes self-denigrating or self-aggrandizing picture of how Jews interact with power. This thesis will not represent a triumphant or nostalgic understanding of Jewish power. Rather, it will focus on various paradigms and measures of power that exist within the Jewish community, and perhaps even unravel the deep seeded connection between contemporary Jewish identity and the narrative of powerlessness and survivalism.

This complicated relationship with power dates back to the rabbinic period. The rabbis completed our ancient texts, the Mishnah and the Talmud, in their current form post exile, while they lacked the political power to enforce any of their ideas. Individuals with minimal power were writing about power—how to use it and enforce it. Therefore, Jewish ideas of power began as purely theoretical since the rabbis' vision of it did not actually play out in real society. For the rabbis, true power, perhaps, was not political, but existed in the ability to interpret the word of God for the people. Their power was theocratic, even if they did not possess the authority to impose religious laws either. These questions continue to evolve in the modern Jewish state because of Israel's ability to, for the first time, actually exercise power.

The stories presented represent only a few of the biblical accounts that deal with power in its various forms and these definitions offer simply a survey of the field. The Israelites and God struggle with how to relate to and exercise their power and make mistakes along the way. This thesis will consider some of the manifestations of power in the Jewish community today and will explore alternative ways to understand power. As Jewish identity continues to evolve, so too must notions of authority and sovereignty. Perhaps models like

community organizing and Jewish feminism can offer potential roadmaps for change. While the situation of governance and power in Israel can continue to offer an example of the genuine challenge of exerting power, especially when Jewish history and tradition provide minimal experience with sovereignty for leaders to draw upon.

This thesis will unpack three models of power through a Jewish lens. It will explore how the use of *power-with* and *power-over* influences the use of power and how each model defines power differently. The source of authority and the values behind each example of power impact how that authority gets exercised. Perhaps these models can offer a vision for understanding "Jewish" power and for guiding individual action toward a more ethical approach to power.

CHAPTER TWO: COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Over the last several decades, synagogues and other faith based organizations throughout the country have become a part of congregation-based community organization (CBCO). Congregation-based community organizing builds relationships among members within an organization and across organizations, transcending barriers of faith, class, and race. Through these relationships, community organizers build a broad-base of institutions, secular and religious, that yields collective power in order to bring about social change. This work seeks to transform individuals, communities, and cities. This chapter will attempt to offer a window into some of the ideas of community organizing and some ways in which power manifests in congregation-based community organizing today.

The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and the Pacific Institute for Community Organizations (PICO) are examples of two such national organizations that engage in this work. IAF was founded by Saul Alinsky in Chicago in 1940. This broad-based organization enacts the work of community organizing through its affiliates across the U.S., such as the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO) in Boston or One LA in Los Angeles.[18] Similarly, PICO, founded in Oakland, California in 1972 spreads across the U.S. in 25 cities and also works with faith communities to pursue social change.[19] Within the Jewish world, Just Congregations was established several years ago in order to engage Reform synagogues in this process of congregation-based community organizing. Just Congregations seeks to build collective *power-with*in and across synagogues in order to address economic and social

[18] Ann Baird McClenahan, "'Big Boston': The Impact of Community Organizing On Christian and Jewish Congregations in Boston" (diss., Harvard Divinity School, 2010), accessed December 11, 2014, ProQuest Research Library. 3.
[19] Speer Paul W. and Joseph Hughey, "Community Organizing: An Ecological Route to Empowerment and Power", *American Journal of Community Psychology* 23, no. 5 (1995): 730.

justice on a systemic level. Based on a theology of redemption, Just Congregations views its mission as transforming the world as it is into the world as it should be.[20] Through such efforts, Just Congregations has been a part of successful campaigns for health care access, affordable public education, and immigration, transforming the lives of synagogue members and creating more just societies in their communities.

Broadly, community organizing can be defined as: "collective action by community members drawing on the strength of numbers, participatory processes, and indigenous leadership to decrease power disparities and achieve shared goals for social change"[21] There is not a monolithic approach to community organizing, rather, various practitioners and ideologues across generations train leaders and understand power through a range of experiences and beliefs.

Defining Power

Activist and founder of IAF, Saul Alinsky, initiated the discussion of *power-with* in the context of community organizing by defining it as organized money or organized people. The Industrial Areas Foundation model of community organizing operates on the premise that a basic reality of the American political system is that "…power follows money. And political power most often derives from economic power."[22] IAF's work acts as a balancer of power to organized money through organized people. It hopes to empower its members to take responsibility for what happens to them and others in their communities and to gain significant political power to better their own lives and their community as a whole.

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[20] "What Is Just Congregations?," Union for Reform Judaism, accessed March 2, 2014, http://urj.org/socialaction/training/justcongregations/vision/.

[21] Lee Staples, *Roots to Power: A Manual for Grassroots Organizing* 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 1-2.

[22] Mary Beth Rogers, *Cold Anger: a Story of Faith and Power Politics* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1990),193.

Community organizing recognizes these realities of social and political power, while also operating through a more subversive model. IAF organizers articulate a vision of the "world as it should be" while also operating in the "world as it is," in the political reality that currently exists.[23] They understand that in order to be effective without access to organized money, their most important capital is relationships. In her book, *Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics,* Mary Beth Rogers articulates the centrality of relational power, rather than coercive power in IAF and other community organizing groups:

> For them, power had a dimension of being "acted upon" as well as acting, of being influenced, as well as influencing. They viewed power almost as a reciprocal "relationship." In fact, the concept of relationship was central to everything—leadership, power, organizing, learning.[24]

Power manifests through the exchange of relationship, not through hierarchy or domination. By building relationships and partnering with a wide constituency individuals are empowered to act through an exchange of ideas and to build a power base large and diverse enough to demand attention from public officials.

Community organizers recognize that in the "world as it is" most agencies or institutions garner power when individuals at the top make decisions that impact the *broad-base* of people below them. Yet, the model of IAF and other community organizing groups challenge the "world as it is" by offering a vision of *power-with* shared leadership, shared visioning and shared action. This kind of shared power is only made possible by a commitment to putting relationships at the center of this work and shifting the culture of power from transactional to transformational.

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[23] Ibid, 194.
[24] Ibid, 194.

As demonstrated previously, the use of power exists at the center of congregation-based community organizing. In this context, power is defined as the ability to act in one's own behalf and to organize others effectively around one's own interests in order to create long term systemic change.[25] Instead of fearing or denying power, this model teaches about the necessity and strategic use of power, and in turn empowers individuals from all faiths, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds to identify and claim their own passions and abilities in order to enliven their desire to take action as part of a collective. According to this model, leaders must learn about self-interest and power in order to bring about long term change. Yet, community organizing also proposes a counter-cultural understanding of power that redefines its parameters:

> …Power is not something one gathers for personal aggrandizement; it is what you teach others to get for themselves…if absolute power corrupts absolutely (actually, a little will do just as well these days), so does absolute powerlessness. It breeds those twin polluters of the soul, helplessness and hopelessness. And it transforms the processes of democracy from government "of, by, and for the people" into a power grab by lawyers, lobbyists, and legislators.[26]

Community organizers understand that powerlessness can be just as destructive as power. This model tries to combat the lesson of passivity that can be institutionally embedded in our society. Instead, it teaches leaders to act out of their own self-interest and to pursue change—in healthcare, education, housing, immigration—that may seem out of reach or overly mired in red tape and politics. Community organizing seeks to bridge the gap between policy makers and citizens affected by those policies; between "the haves" and "the have-nots." It reminds citizens of their ability to establish collective power that can influence

[25] Ibid, 31.
[26] Ibid, i-ii.

policies that directly impact their own lives and communities. Through this process, citizens can pursue justice by holding their elected officials accountable and by helping to shape the political agenda by acknowledging their own collective power and potential for action.

Power-over

The model of community organizing transforms the conventional understanding of *power-over* by operating through the model of *power-with*. Often, power is manifested when one individual or group controls the actions of another. Community organizers label this kind of power as *power-over,* which relies upon both dominance and dependency.[27] Most exercises of power that exist in the public realm operate when "people act with *power-over* others, relating to them instrumentally, imposing their will upon them."[28] Parents, for example often exert *power-over* their children and on occasion leaders demonstrate *power-over* their constituents for reasons of safety. As the Founding Director of Just Congregations, Rabbi Jonah Pesner, points out, although the work of soup kitchens and other direct service organizations remain vital for helping people, that structure designates those who go for food as receivers of *power-over.* "Even with our good intentions, those feeding have power; those eating do not."[29]

When God created the world, God exerted *power-over* God's creatures throughout much of the Bible. Similarly, the biblical text sets up a paradigm during the creation story for humanity to maintain *power-over* other creatures. "…They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on this

[27] Suzanne Stone, "Community Organizing: A Jewish Call to Action" (rabbinic thesis., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2012),95.
[28] Jonah Dov Pesner and Lila Foldes, "Building the Power for Redemption: An Introduction to and Theology of Congregation-Based Community Organizing", *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Spring 2008):7.
[29] Ibid, 7.

earth."[30] The model of *power-over* infiltrates much of secular and Jewish history, as well as political system today.

This exercise of *power-over* operates on the assumption of scarcity. It assumes that one party, group, or individual wins resources only when another loses. In this paradigm, life is a zero-sum game where some fail in order for others to succeed; an organization or individual's fate becomes negatively linked to another as opposed to being mutually reinforcing. This "winner takes all" approach forces people into stark competition for power because it understands power as a scarce resource that only few can possess.

Power-with

As Pesner demonstrates, our tradition also provides an alternative mode for understanding power and leadership. Community organizers describe this kind of power as *power-with.* In another creation narrative, God performs an act of *tzimtzum,* contraction. "In the mystical model, God creates the world in an act of contraction, withdrawing in order to allow the physical universe to come into being. Based on this conception, Jewish philosopher Eugene Borowitz uncovers "…a mode of leadership that creates space for new leaders to flourish and grow."[31] This understanding of power based on an assumption of abundance provides opportunity for new leaders to emerge in every moment. Congregation-based community organizing groups flourish when more leaders come together and bring together their networks of relationships in order to create an even larger group of people that can increase their collective power. Like God's act of *tzimtzum,* congregation-based community organizing does not train leaders to exert control over its constituents. Rather,

[30] Genesis 1:26.
[31] Pesner and Foldes, 7 from Eugene Borowitz ,"Tzimtzum: A Mystic Model for Contemporary Leadership," *Religious Education* 69, no. 6 (1974).

this model views all members as potential leaders who possess unique skills and passions that can contribute to the process regardless of race, gender, class, or other typical signifiers of power.

One of the most important aspects of power in community organizing is its relationship to empowerment. The first lesson of community organizing is the iron rule: *never do for other people what they can do for themselves*. Often, people want to help others, but they don't understand the needs or motivations of the recipient group. In this paradigm, one group or individual acts *for* others instead of *with* others which, even with the best of intentions, perpetuates a *power-over* mentality. In congregation based community organizing, CBCO, the ideal is to teach and empower a group to act for themselves. Wealthy, white citizens, for example, would not take action *for* their poor peers. Rather, these two groups would partner together to pursue long term change that impacts both constituencies.

In this model, the dichotomy between actors versus those who are acted upon does not exist. Instead of doing for others, CBCO encourages people to understand their self-interests and see themselves as potential leaders who can collectively be a part of the change process.

> Organizations may believe they are promoting citizen empowerment when they are actually doing things *for* their constituency rather than doing the work *with* their constituency. An organization that advocates the rights of immigrants but that is composed only of White citizen professionals with privilege is not necessarily engaged in progressive organizing work. The ability of such a group to be truly accountable to the constituency is virtually impossible without be driven by immigrant voices.[32]

[32] Loretta Pyles, *Progressive Community Organizing: Reflective Practice in a Globalizing World*, 2 ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 14.

This model understands that in order to garner real communal power, constituents who are directly impacted must be a part of the process.

Self-Interest

In order to act on one's own behalf, leaders in CBCO must acknowledge and understand their own self-interest. Self-interest is tied to what matters to someone and who they want to be in the world. Community organizing philosophy links transforming the world to transforming ourselves, uncovering our power in the world by uncovering our *power-with*in ourselves. This requires self-reflection and recognition of what motivates us to act in certain ways.

The concept of self-interest can make many people uncomfortable. In the world of philanthropy and social activism, most people are taught that their work is about giving to *other* people and improving the lives of *those people over there.* "In the world of social change, people often believe that one needs to sublimate his or her self-interest for the sake of the common good. On the contrary, organizing promotes the discovery of one's self interest as a tool for social change."[33] Our desire to help others and to work on specific causes stems from something within us; it is linked to a story or experience in our lives. Community organizers encourage leaders to express these stories and to name their motivations and commitments—their self-interests.

CBCO strays from typical social action because it demands that leaders take action on issues that arise from their own self-interest—issues that impact them and their broad-base partners. Leaders in community organizing don't help kids in inner-city schools get new text books. This is important work, but organizing encourages leaders to uncover what impacts

[33] Stone, 72.

their own lives, and to then take action based on this self-interest. This tactic enables long-term change because leaders are invested and committed to seeing this change take place over time.

Self-interest, however, does not mean selfishness. Renowned IAF organizer, Edward Chambers clarifies the definition: "Self-interest is the natural concern of a creature for its survival and well-being. It's the fundamental priority underlying the choices we make."[34] Chambers asserts that self-interest consists of self-preservation, self-recognition, self-determination, and self-respect.[35] When individuals engage in relational conversations with another, they gage someone else's self-interest, what drives them to act, and they learn ways in which their interests might overlap so that these two parties can find an opportunity to partner to create change together.

Rachel, a public school parent, was enraged about her son's school. He was being overlooked because he wasn't the top student or a struggling student, and he was receiving busywork homework that made him apathetic about his learning. After speaking with teachers and the administration, nothing had changed. Rachel felt powerless to help her son. Out of this self-interest, Rachel began speaking with other public school parents at her synagogue to find out more about their experiences with public school. She started to learn that other parents were experiencing similar issues with their various public schools, and they decided they wanted to take action together.

Self-interest is not simply about ensuring one's own survival; it is about viewing individual self-interest in connection to the interests of others. Even though a person might have a kid in a private day school, she might realize that it is in the long term interest of the

[34] Edward T. Chambers, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action, and Justice* (New York: Continuum Press, 2003), 25.
[35] Ibid, 25.

community to improve their public schools because the more powerful the community, the more power each individual in the community carries. Self-interest is not simply about being transactional; it is about knowing oneself in order to create communal change. The discovery of one's self-interest takes place through relationships with others, and in community organizing one's self-interest is inherently tied to others.

The Process of Organizing

This kind of empowerment requires a deliberate, meticulous process. Community organizing networks like IAF undergo a number of private sessions of research and preparation for any public event that will take place with a specific purpose and planned outcome. Organizers leave room for the spontaneity and emotion that takes place when people are inspired, but they also plan as much of the event as possible. For example, a rally to lobby the mayor to create a public transportation system with stops in particular strategic areas or to move the location of a municipal airport requires months of training and research to learn and analyze the potential outcomes and to understand how these outcomes affect those who participate politically and personally. Political consequences are analyzed based on shared values, personal growth and broad social change.[36] Before such a public event, members of the group would complete a power analysis to evaluate the major players who could influence this issue and to identify the people they need to meet with in order to understand the issue more deeply and strategically. A series of research meetings would follow to explore the issue further and to narrow and clarify exactly what the most strategic question would be to ask of the mayor and his or her staff.

[36] Rogers, 50.

Additionally, these research meeting help group members become experts on the issue in order to minimize the gap between the public officials and themselves and to empower the group to become more engaged in the political process. This process teaches constituents to become actors in the political process, not merely victims or those who are acted upon. By gaining more knowledge about the issue and learning to value themselves as citizens worthy of the time and energy of their political leaders, individuals begin to establish more reciprocal relationships with public officials by actively holding them accountable. Simultaneously, through this process, group members develop trust and accountability among themselves and therefore strengthen the relationships within their own group.

Before and after each of these research meetings, the members participating in them hold meetings to prepare what they want to learn from the specific person with whom they are meeting, what are their interests, how to engage with them relationally. After the research meeting the group holds another gathering to evaluate how it went and to reflect on how the group acted together and how different members of the group could grow their skillsets. This type of preparation and reflection takes place before and after any public meeting. This process also helps leaders confront and know themselves better in order to engage publically with influential political leaders. This kind of training can be uncomfortable. However, the pedagogical approach of community organizing embraces moments of discomfort or tension as an opportunity for growth. Organizers, like Alinksy, thrive on moments of conflict in order generate creativity and change. "Change means movement. Movement means friction. Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict."[37]

[37] Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*, Vintage ed. (New York: Vintage, 1989), 21.

Community organizing philosophy suggests that in order for individuals to understand and enact their own power, they must first understand and know themselves.

By modeling *tzimtzum,* by creating space for new leaders, and by adhering to the iron rule, the collective power of community also empowers individuals to see themselves as agents who can in fact make change in the system. The model of shared, relational power allows people to see how they can exercise control and responsibility in their own lives and within their community. It removes what may seem an insurmountable barrier, and instead enables individuals to uncover their own unique gifts and to understand their own agency within any political system.

For example, after a *house meeting*[38] campaign, members of a synagogue realized they were all impacted by issues of healthcare. At first, they were discouraged to join their broad-base's healthcare campaign because of their barrier of knowledge. The healthcare jargon and system seemed too difficult and too politicized to tackle and understand. Yet, by joining the campaign and developing relationships with other members in their broad-base coalition and with public officials through research meetings, these members not only became a part of an important campaign that sought to bring healthcare to undocumented immigrants, they also realized their own power. These leaders were empowered to engage in an issue that earlier seemed insurmountable by defeating the barriers to the system and by overcoming the information gap. A reciprocal relationship exists between the development of power for community organizations and personal empowerment for members of the

[38] A house meeting is a small gathering of people in someone's home to discuss issues and share stories. This relational meeting seeks to build deeper relationships among a specific group in hopes of them moving toward internal or external action. These meetings are also sometimes used to test an issue or uncover what issues matter to these constituents.

organization.[39] By holding other holders of power accountable, the organization builds power, and in turn empowers its individual members.

Aspects of *Power-with*

Shared Power

The *power-with* paradigm includes three major tenants of power in the community organizing model: shared power, power in numbers, and power through relationships. First, this model of *power-with* operates based on the idea of shared power countering a perspective of scarcity. It understands the world more from a viewpoint of abundance where organizations and individuals succeed when they work together rather than at the expense of one another. The model of *power-with* assumes that "the power only exists because people are *with* each other."[40] The collective becomes the source of power. For instance, IAF community organizer Michael Gecan distinguishes between the conventional form of *power-over* and the more relational based form of *power-with:*

> Not the power to abuse others back. Not the power to dominate. Not the power to replace the last bully with a new bully. Not the power to keep others from entering. But the power to demand recognition and reciprocity and respect, the power to create and sustain meaningful public relationships.[41]

For him and for other community organizers, power is not based on galvanizing issues and it is not focused on charismatic leadership. On the contrary, power stems from creating an organized and diverse group of people who are invested in lasting relationships and change.

Community organizers acknowledge that individuals must relinquish a small amount of their own unilateral power in order to maintain greater collective power. As Alinsky

[39] Speer and Hughey, 729.
[40] Pesner and Foldes, 8.
[41] Michael Gecan, *Going Public* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002) 6-7.

purports, **"**People cannot be free unless they are willing to sacrifice some of their interests to guarantee the freedom of others. The price of democracy is the ongoing pursuit of the common good by *all* of the people."[42] Through this understanding, individuals' fates become tied together.

For example, members of Leo Baeck Temple brought together the four LA mayoral candidates to pressure them to build a train through the Sepulveda Pass. Leo Baeck Temple brought 300 of their members into the room. This showing was powerful, but what made the difference was that they reached out to their coalition partners and invited representatives from churches and synagogues across Los Angeles All sorts of Angelenos stood up and told the candidates how many lives their institutions represented—together over half a million people. If these disparate groups had thought in terms of scarcity—if St. Agnes Church only cared about affordable housing and Immanuel Presbyterian only cared about the bus riders union and Temple Isaiah fought only for education—each institution would have competed against one another for support. One institution's campaign would have limited another's. But the group acted through a paradigm of abundance. They collaborated and became more than individual institutions—they used the power of numbers, over half a million people, to impact all the issues that affected each individual group. Through this process, the participants came to realize how their interests overlapped. When the time came for the candidates to commit to work with Leo Baeck Temple on building a train, each of them looked out at the room full of people and the tens of thousands more represented, and said "yes."

The synagogue understood that their vision for rapid transit in Los Angeles had to move beyond only their narrow interests. In order to transform their city, they needed to

[42] Alinksy, xxv.

consider the interests of their coalition partners in South Los Angeles and Downtown who were concerned about issues like bus access and creating a stop for public transit in their neighborhoods. The institutions within the coalition were able to uncover their shared interests and build power in numbers through that overlap, but each institution also had to give up some of their interests, some of their power, in order to be a part of this larger vision and be a part of a *broad-base* organization who was bigger than any of its individual institutions. If that synagogue had only focused on their self-interest to build rapid transit in the 405 corridor and failed to support the related issues of affordable housing or fair busing, then the synagogue would not have seated 1000 people of different faiths and backgrounds in their sanctuary for a public action, and would not have garnered the interest of the mayor to be in a room with a wide constituency of potential voters.

Everyone has a stake in this model because each individual is considered valuable and a potential leader unlike a traditional system of hierarchy where those at the top becomes the holders of power. *"Power-with* assumes almost every person, rich or poor, has the capacity to be part of the process of social change. Indeed, in order to make change—as at the shores of the sea—many people must come together to take collective action"[43] Traditional indicators of power—money, access, charisma—are not the only measures of power in this system. Instead, power derives from the sharing of stories and the overlap of interests among members of the collective who act together and use the power of numbers to achieve systematic change. Just as God created space in order for the physical world to emerge, so too must leaders constantly make space for new leaders to emerge. In doing so, this model constantly brings new people together and grows its base, therefore creating more opportunities to establish the power to hold elected officials accountable.

[43] Pesner and Foldes, 6.

Power in Numbers

Second, power derives from numbers. Congregation-based community organizing seeks to develop relationships across neighborhoods, socioeconomic status, race, and religion. It works to create a *broad-base* of individuals and organizations that represent the spectrum of a city and demonstrate power because it represents a wide collective. The mission of GBIO illustrates this value:

> Our primary goal is to develop local leadership. This will enable us to develop the power of organized numbers to hold other holders of power accountable to their public responsibilities, as well as initiate action and programs of our own to solve community and economic problems.[44]

Based on Alinsky's definition of power as organized money or organized people, CBCO focuses on large numbers (specifically of people from a range of districts, backgrounds, races, classes, faiths, etc.) as one of the major sources of power. Through power in numbers, members of the *broad-base* are able to hold their public officials accountable to their political responsibilities.

In a small, private meeting behind closed doors, a public official can choose not to show up, or to send a lower ranking member of their staff, or not to take the group meeting with them seriously. On the other hand, when a public official, such as the mayor, for example, sits in front of a room with 1000 people from across the city, these numbers demand his or her attention. Power in numbers puts pressure on a public official to prioritize an issue and to take a group seriously because the group represents an array of voters and constituents from whom the mayor needs support. The ability to mobilize a large number of people and turn them out for a particular event represents a great deal of power.

[44] McClenahan, 5.

Power through Relationships

Finally, in congregation-based community organizing power rests within relationships, not within issues. For example, one of the platforms of the PICO model is: "relationships based on shared and emotional ties between individuals produce bonds that are more meaningful and sustainable than relationships based on rational or emotional reactions to community issues alone."[45] Similarly, the GBIO mission expresses the significance of people over issues:

> We are multi-issue. The issues we work on come from within our institutions, from the concerns of the people. We cross neighborhood, city, racial, religious, and class lines to find common ground and act on our faith and democratic values. We support each other's work in local neighborhoods and communities; we practice the Golden Rule. We also practice the Iron Rule of "never doing for people what they can do for themselves." We develop the combined power to solve larger problems that cannot be solved by one neighborhood or one racial or ethnic group alone.[46]

Broad-base organizations like PICO and IAF focus on relationship development among members of the group, rather than on consensus of issues. In community organizing, the collective seeks long term, systemic change. Therefore, a *broad-base* cannot rally only behind issues because then when one campaign would be over the group would disband.

After Reform California[47] won their campaign to pass the TRUST Act,[48] an immigration reform bill, the group did not simply dissolve because they had won one issue. The group was built on relationships, and therefore moved to the next phase of community

[45] Speer and Hughley, 733.
[46] McClenahan, 5.
[47] A group of Reform rabbis and lay leaders across California who are organizing around issues such as immigration reform. For more information see: http://www.jewishjournal.com/cover_story/article/jewish_values_at_heart_of_immigration_reform
[48] The Trust Act prohibits local law enforcement officials from detaining immigrants longer than necessary for minor crimes so that federal immigration authorities can take them into custody.

organizing, evaluation, in order to reflect on how their campaign went and to decide on a new campaign. IAF organizer Ernie Cortes explains, "That's why we organize people around their values—not just issues. The issues fade and they lose interest. But what they really care about remains—family, dignity, justice, and hope. And we need power to protect what we value."[49] Congregation-based community organizing roots *power-with*in deep relationships. It then builds political capital through the power of numbers the organization can turnout because people in relationship show up for one another.

Leaders in community organizing build relationships with public officials. IAF, for example, values relationships even with political adversaries with the hope that their interests might overlap in the future. They work with those who run the system because it is strategic and effective, despite the divergence of this tactic from Saul Alinsky's original philosophy decades ago. Yet, more important, the goal is to develop relationships within the organization—the synagogue, the church, the broad-base—based on shared vision and accountability. CBCO groups thrive when relationships are built not only on affinity for one another, but on mutual understanding and vision, and on a commitment to accountability.

This kind of collaborative power begins with relational meetings, or *one-to-ones*. Unlike an interview or casual conversation, these relational meetings focus on the exchange of stories and rely on a real curiosity about who the other person is at their core. *One-to-ones* are not simply meetings. They are moments of genuine encounter with another human being where one seeks to understand what motivates and what matters to the other person. Through these encounters, individuals can also explore how they might be able to partner with each other at some point in the future. Individuals share their stories, their concerns and fears, and their visions for what the world could look like.

[49] Rogers, 31.

Through this process, members of the group build relationships and trust among one another because they begin to understand how different individuals act. The group can then learn how to leverage each individual's strengths and also can trust each other in public meetings that might hold tension or be uncomfortable because all members of the group know that they have each other's backs. Similarly, in relationship, individuals can hold one another accountable because of the foundation of trust. After several *one-to-ones* within a community, issues emerge that deeply and widely affect members of the community. These issues can lead a community into action—to use their stories, their self-interest, and their collective power to work toward creating a more just community, city, and world. Campaigns about healthcare or education, for example, began out of conversations that took place in coffee shops or homes about "what keeps you up at night?"

The foundation for the organization is based on the connections among its members and their commitment to social change, not on the commitment to a particular issue. This mentality also allows the *broad-base* organization to act strategically by choosing issues that are winnable and that speak to the values that tie the members of the organization together. This emphasis on relationships instead of issues allows organizations to work on a variety of issues that impact different individuals at different times. Additionally, based on the notion of relationships and power in numbers, individual institutions within the broad-base might work on an issue that is not directly in their own self-interest in order to support another institution within the broad-base.

Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the primary source of power in congregation-based community organizing is relationships. The building of relationships

within an institution, across various institutions, and with elected officials allows leaders to garner political and social influence through shared power and power in numbers. These groups seek to establish *power-with* others, not *over* others, which enables a model of long-lasting change because of the foundation of trust and shared vision within the broad-base of constituents. The community organizing process requires a longer process of building power because of its relational basis. Yet, the result not only transforms a district, a city, a state, or a country, it also transforms the lives of the normal, everyday people who do the work and who realize that they have something unique to contribute to the world. Community organizing reminds individuals across all differences that they can indeed impact the political process and that it is not only those at the top who can exercise power.

This model of power could be applied to various institutions and processes. Community organizers can effectively use *power-with* to empower individuals to create systemic change within the political realm and within other religious and secular institutions as well. Synagogues or churches, for instance, could transform their religious schools, create an anti-bullying campaign that impacts their institution and the county, or simply build a more relational culture using this model. Teaching individuals the skillsets and processes of community organizing can instill a sense of civility, activism, and empowerment that has remained dormant in much of society for too long.

CHAPTER THREE: JEWISH FEMINISM

Similar to community organizing, power exists at the center of feminism. Since the nineteenth century, the term "feminism" has been used in various capacities as a political and social movement that seeks justice and equality for women, while also critiquing other forms of oppression such as racism and heterosexism.[50] Therefore, the construction of power as domination which often takes the form of oppression is an area of particular interest in feminism. Alternatively, like the community organizing model, feminism identifies sharing stories and building relationships as major sources of power. In the U.S., Jewish feminism emerged in the 1970s around issues of power in halakhah, Jewish law, such as the exclusion of women in all-male prayer services and women's exemption from positive time-bound commandments, mitzvot that are fulfilled only within certain periods of time such as wearing tefillin or tzitzit or sitting in the sukkah. As feminist theologian Rachel Adler argues in her 1973 article, "The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman":

> Ultimately our problem stems from the fact that we are viewed in Jewish law and practice as peripheral Jews. The category in which we are generally placed includes women, children, and Canaanite slaves. Members of this category are exempt from all positive commandments which occur within time limits. These commandments would include hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, eating in the Sukkah, praying with the lulav, praying the three daily services, wearing tallit and t'fillin, and saying Sh'ma. In other words, members of this category have been "excused" from most of the positive symbols which, for the male Jew, hallow time, hallow his physical being, and inform both his myth and his philosophy.[51]

[50] *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Topics in Feminism," accessed December 18, 2014, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-power/.
[51] Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman" *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A* Reader (New York: Schocken, 1983), 13.

The exclusion of women from these rituals discounts them in the broader narrative of the tradition. It leaves women out of the symbolic moments that solidify one's Jewish identity.

Halakhah acts as the authoritative system and arbiter for participation in Judaism and establishes the boundaries and regulations that help form identity. Women, for example, cannot serve as witnesses in a Jewish court[52] and do not count as part of the necessary ten people required for prayer. These exclusions not only leave women out of essential Jewish practices, they also define normative Judaism as male and identify women as outsiders.

Underlying the debate of the role of women in Judaism is the question of power—who possesses power and how is this power exercised in the halakhic system. Within halakhah and other Jewish theological institutions, knowledge is shaped to support certain holders of power. The nature and position of this power determines who claims authority for shaping society. More specifically, power controls who will establish the cultural norms of a society and who will act as the executors of the law. Jewish scholar, Susannah Heschel understands the reality of the *power-over* paradigm within the Jewish context: "Jewish feminism is not about equality with men. . . . Feminism is about women's refusal to submit to male authority. The real issue is not equality, but power. Who's in charge? Who defines Judaism, and who determines whether or not we get to dance with the Torah?"[53] Heschel articulates the question of power in terms of authority and whether women can access and participate in the corpus of Jewish tradition and ritual.

This chapter will address Jewish feminism as another model of power. It will concentrate on halakhah as the primary system of power in Judaism and will explore how three different Jewish feminists, Rachel Adler, Judith Plaskow, and Tamar Ross negotiate the

[52] Sh'vuot 30a.
[53] Susannah Heschel, "It's Not about Equality—It's about Who's in Charge," *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism,* ed. Danya Ruttenberg (Seattle: Seal Press, 2001), xvi.

halakhic system of power. It will investigate how these particular Jewish feminists establish parameters for who should be the arbiters of power in Judaism and will analyze how these scholars interact with halakhah as a power structure that can in turn exclude and disempower women. It will also examine how these feminist theologians converse with one another regarding their approaches to how they address feminist thinking within or outside the halakhic system. This chapter will provide a brief overview of a more complex and expansive field that has wrestled with the issue of halakhah and women's inclusion in Jewish practice for decades.

Judith Plaskow

Jewish feminist theologian, Judith Plaskow articulates the kind of relational power found in community organizing through her own personal story. While attending Yale, Plaskow joined the Yale Women's Alliance, a group that defined itself as a sisterhood of women. Within this group, Plaskow came to recognize the power of what the group called the "yeah, yeah experience." This term explains the moment when one person shares something about themselves or their experience and another responds, "Yeah, yeah!" "…this triggers a double recognition. We saw ourselves in the experience to which we responded, and we also recognized ourselves as women coming together, recognizing our common experience with other women."[54] This moment recognizes, "yes, I agree with you" and "yes, that is my experience too."

These experiences unite women and transform their individual encounters of oppression into something empowering because it has been felt and shared by a whole group

[54] Judith Plaskow, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, (*Beacon Press, 2005), 25.

of women. Plaskow defines the "yeah, yeah experience" as "many individual moments of recognition and illumination through which I come to a new awareness of my situation and myself."[55] One person's individual oppression becomes everyone's oppression. This process of joining women both acknowledges and affirms someone's suffering, and also raises consciousness about women's isolation and the injustices they experience.

Like *one-to-ones* or *house meetings* in the world of congregation-based community organizing, this model of feminism draws on relationships and shared experiences as major sources of power. Through storytelling, individuals draw on their own experiences and realize their individual strength as well as the strength of their community to take action and advocate for change. This communal commitment to consciousness-raising inspires self-transformation and moves toward outward action. Plaskow's experience models this kind of inner and relational power. Her interaction with the "yeah, yeah" and the Yale Women's Alliance introduced her to the world of feminist academia. Yet, after her immersion in this community, she soon began to question her experience as a feminist Jew. By uncovering the oppression of women in society, she began to look deeper into the oppression and exclusion of women within Judaism.[56]

The first to write about feminist issues from a Jewish theological perspective, Plaskow addresses the system of power in Judaism, halakhah, in a radical way. She asks an essential question for evaluating halkhah as a system of power:

[55] Ibid, 25.
[56] Ibid, 25.

> What if the Otherness of women is not simply a matter of Jewish incorporation of surrounding social attitudes but is in part created and sustained by Torah itself? What if the subordination of women in Judaism is rooted in theology, in the very foundations of the Jewish tradition?[57]

Plaskow concerns herself not only with the status of women within the system of halakhah and the need for other institutional changes, but also with the roots and sources of women's oppression in Judaism and a vision for a new theological model of Judaism. For Plaskow, altering the halakhic system is not enough to transform the Otherness of women. "Our legal disabilities are a *symptom* of a pattern of projection that lies deep in Jewish thinking." [58]

She analyzes halakhah as a patriarchal construction, which inherently designates women as "other." Unlike the other feminist theologians that follow, Plaskow in her work "The Right Question is Theological," argues that instead of revising a broken system, women should shift their focus to theology for innovation. Women have been left out of the content, process and form of halakhah. While Jewish feminism might engage in the project of halakhic restructuring, they must also move beyond halakhah and create new understandings of Torah, God, and Israel that provide a new definition of Jewish identity and humanity.[59] She acknowledges that observing the law versus following theological principles defines a religious Jew and understands that action based on the law often takes precedence over belief in Judaism.[60]

Plaskow, however, also recognizes the integral relationship between the law and theology. She therefore takes the radical position that halakhah is so deeply rooted in

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[57] Judith Plaskow, "The Right Question Is Theological," *On Being A Jewish Feminist: A Reader,* ed Susannah Heschel, (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 223.
[58] Ibid, 226.
[59] Ibid, 231.
[60] Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (New York, NY: Harper& Row, 1991), 22.

patriarchal principles that it must undergo theological changes before it can be accepted as possible system for Jewish feminists:

> Indeed, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between Jewish theology and Jewish religious practice and institutions. Patriarchal theology, while it cannot of itself give rise to patriarchal structures, supports patriarchy as a religious and legal system. When Torah is thought of as divinely revealed in its present form, the subordination of women is granted the deal of divine approval. When God is conceived of as male, as king ruling over the universe, male rule in society seems appropriate and right.[61]

Gender exclusion becomes embedded in Judaism through the authority and power of male authors and arbiters of the halakhic system over women, and through the definitions of basic Jewish symbols that identify Judaism as masculine.

Although still suspicious of halakhah, in *Standing Again at Sinai,* Plaskow reevaluates her dismissal of halakhah completely and instead offers potential options for renewal. She explores the relationship between Jewish feminism and halakhah through the case study of feminist rituals. She identifies fluidity as an essential value for ritual as part of a commitment to undermining hierarchy and to promoting relationship.[62] Like in her consciousness-raising groups mentioned earlier, open and nonhierarchical structures are paramount in order to establish *power-with* relationships of mutual sharing as opposed to a *power-over* system in which a person or even a ritual structure dominates the group. Plaskow demands that women and men act as co-lawmakers for any future legal process.

Plaskow critiques halakhah for limiting the potential for relationship. Any legal system must negotiate between individual justice and reliability. If the law adjusts to every individual situation, it becomes too variable. Yet, when the law creates generalized rules, it

[61] Ibid, 22.
[62] Ibid, 67-68.

cannot address each individual situation and can in turn, neglect certain instances of injustice. In the end, Plaskow lands at an impasse with halakhah and its ability to block or enable relationship and connection in community.[63] Furthermore, Plaskow discusses the new norms of Jewish feminism in which women being counted in a minyan or women participating in study and reading Torah is just as central to feminist law, if not more, than other halakhic tenants. Plaskow questions whether these new innovations can be considered halakhah. She concludes that "Perhaps what distinguishes feminist Judaism from traditional rabbinic Judaism is not so much the absence of law in the former as a conception of rule-making as a shared communal process."[64]

Unlike other Jewish feminists such as Tamar Ross, who will be discussed later in the chapter, Plaskow understands halakhah as a human invention, not divine, that can and should be changed to represent changing visions of humanity. She operates on the assumption that halakhah "envisions and supports a patriarchal order."[65] Therefore, creating revisions and new interpretations of the law is not heretical for Plaskow as it may be for other Jewish feminists. Plaskow recognizes the tension between the commitments for fluidity and relationship inherent to feminism and the "rigidity and abstractness" of the traditional halakhic system.[66] She remains unclear as to whether a new iteration of halakhah could meet the needs of Jewish feminists and whether the inclusion of feminist ideals into Jewish law would support the halakhic system. This enduring question and her openness to possible answers create room for other feminists, such as Rachel Adler, to enter the conversation.

[63] Ibid, 70.
[64] Ibid, 71.
[65] Ibid, 71.
[66] Ibid, 73.

Rachel Adler

In *Engendering Judaism,* feminist theologian Rachel Adler considers how to reimagine a system of power that is inclusive of women. Adler asserts that the issue of equality and access to halakhah affects all of us, not only women, because the power structures that limit women actually limit everyone. Adler calls not only for the inclusion of women in Judaism, like in liberal Judaism, where women simply do what men do. Rather, she calls for a transformation of Judaism itself that shifts the paradigm from a "women's problem" to a "Jewish problem."[67] Like Plaskow's "yeah, yeah" experience and the process of sharing stories in community organizing, Adler similarly begins with storytelling as a mechanism for forming collective memory and shaping identity and future action.[68] Stories demonstrate commitment and belonging, and the importance of these stories or myths begins Adler's case for a new iteration of Judaism.

Adler incorporates the studies of religious anthropologist Riv-Ellen Prell to critique the method employed by the classical Reformers to include women. By applying a Universalist approach, the Reformers categorized women as "honorary men."[69] In an effort to practice the Enlightenment ideal "all men are created equal," this method ignores the differences of women and instead and delineates them to the classification of "deviant men." Furthermore, by failing to acknowledge differences among men and women, this method also glosses over differences among women themselves and limits them to a single voice. Instead, Adler calls for a cooperative approach that includes both men and women to address the problematic power dynamic within the halachic system.

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[67] Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: an Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1998), 24.
[68] Ibid, 22.
[69] Ibid, 24.

In order to consider what an alternative relationship to halakhah could look like, one must first address the inherent questions of power—who or what holds ultimate authority? What are the sources for this authority? As Adler notes, Orthodoxy locates authority in the Written Law of the Bible and the Oral Law produced by the rabbis, both of which, according to them, originate with God and are therefore infallible.[70] More modern halakhists acknowledge that societies change over time and that laws must consider the current cultural and historical contexts. The debate over the origins of the law calls into question the law's authority, and in turn, the power it manifests over a modern practice of Judaism.

Adler seeks a resolution to the conflict between the importance of the law and its exclusionary authority. She applies the work of Robert Cover, an American legal theorist, to negotiate this dilemma. Cover explains that law flows out of a *nomos,* a world of meaning and values communicated through stories. He offers an illustration of the law as a bridge: "Cover's image of the bridge built of committed praxis grounded in story reinforces the necessity of halakhah, for only by means of halakhah can Judaism embody its sacred stories and values in communal praxis."[71] Cover's bridge metaphor offers a more expansive and dynamic halakhic system that progressive Jews can buy into and access.

> "…Cover's bridge image makes it possible to think freshly about halakhah, because it counters precisely those features that progressive Jews, and progressive feminists in particular, find repressive in halakhah's traditional formulations. It is dynamic rather than static, visionary rather than conservative, open to the outside rather than closed, arising communally, cooperatively, covenantally, rather than being externally imposed and passively obeyed.[72]

[70] Ibid, 27.
[71] Ibid, 36.
[72] Ibid, 36.

By recreating the Jewish narrative, where a variety of interpretations can take shape, a new *nomos* or normative world that embraces a spirit of feminist values can form. Adler does not offer a specific picture for what this new *nomos* could look like, nor does she remain bound to historical halakhic definitions. She acknowledges women's powerlessness within the halakhic system as outsiders, alienated from the sources and unable to access authority. Yet, Adler does not assign this project to women alone. Rather, this must be a joint task of women and men to re-interpret our Jewish sources and stories because of a communal moral imperative.

Adler argues that feminists can bring a unique set of perspectives and tools for building the necessary bridge to halakhah. She believes that one such contribution that feminists can provide is their use of narrative in order to present a vision and a legal and philosophical critique.

> "As a method of vision, feminist narratives draw upon fantasies and desires, prophecies and prayers to imagine possible worlds in which both women and men could flourish. As a tool of critique, narrative can expose within abstract theories assumptions about the nature and experience of being human, what people know, how they live, what they want, and what they fear."[73]

Story is essential for overturning faulty theory by exposing narratives and perspectives that were previously left out, and by poking holes in commonly accepted assumptions about humanity that may no longer have contextual relevance.

She adds that feminists can also bring the tool of context to the bridge building paradigm. Women's roles, for example, are inherently a social construction, one that constantly changes over time. Therefore, when applied to halakhah, one understands that

[73] Ibid, 38.

humans can access the ability to restructure the social constructs that determine so much of their thinking and boundaries. Alongside the skillset of understanding narrative, feminists can use storytelling to expose the limitations of context which sometimes leads to the pitfall of assuming that certain theories (e.g. halakhah) remain stagnant across time and space, as opposed to responding to their current context.[74] Naming the relationship of context to a theory or system allows for possible renewal and transformation.

"Engendering Judaism, like other kinds of human engendering, is a project that women and men must undertake together. We must converse, tell stories, play, and know one another if we are finally to inhabit a single *nomos* as partners and friends."[75] Men and women must join together in this project because the halakhic structures that limit women, also limit men. The task of creating access and equality within the system of Jewish power must be a joint project where the community expands the definition of halakhah, rather than replacing one definition with another, or by merely including women under the premise that they are functioning as men. The conversation surrounding Jewish law must involve all of the players at the table.

Adler concludes her discussion of halakhah with the Talmudic story of Yalta, the wife of Rabbi Nahman, who clandestinely challenges narratives dealing with women and halakhah. [76] Adler uses Yalta to demonstrate that while one might not be able to claim the power to shape the law, one can uncover the law's hidden meanings. One can work within the system to destabilize the law and not merely accept one's exclusion.[77] Adler returns to the discussion of power: "Yalta reminds us that what grounds authority is power, and power

[74] Ibid, 38.
[75] Ibid, 59.
[76] Berachot 51b.
[77] Adler, 56.

has social investments. Power can use authority to include and empower broadly. But power can also exercise authority to stigmatize, to subordinate, and to exclude. Yalta as legal guerilla strips away the mask of justice, revealing the cruel face beneath."[78] Unlike the *power-with* model of community organizing which seeks to empower others in the process, Adler points out the problematic nature of *power-over* with regards to the halakhic process because, as she suggests, it excludes and diminishes anyone who is considered outside the normative halakhic parameters. In place of this model, Adler advocates for a "metadiscourse" in order to democratize the process without neglecting its particular features which might enable a conversation about who is included in the legal definitions of community and what structural elements might be reassessed.[79] Unlike Plaskow, Adler does not give up halakhah completely, because she believes it is a necessary component for Jewish practice. Yet, for her, Judaism must create a broader framework for legal definitions that embraces modern secular values, and includes women in this newfound *nomos*.

Tamar Ross

Modern Orthodox Jewish feminist, Tamar Ross, addresses the issue of power in halakhah from a different perspective. She seeks to reconcile divine law with feminist challenges in the law, such as biases toward men. She draws upon the ideas of Abraham Isaac Kook through the metaphor of "expanding the palace of Torah" to develop an approach to halakhah that addresses the modern concerns of our time through widening Jewish tradition rather than limiting or undermining it:

> And in general, this is an important rule in the struggle of ideas: we should not immediately feel obliged to refute any idea that comes to contradict something in the Torah, but rather we

[78] Adler, 58.
[79] Adler, 43.

> should build the palace of Torah above it. In so doing we reach a more exalted level, and through this exaltation the ideas are clarified. And thereafter, when we are not pressured by anything, we can confidently also fight on the Torah's behalf.[80]

On the one hand, she contradicts Rachel Adler in that she finds the tools for addressing feminist issues in halakhah within the halakhah itself and argues that the practice of halakhah is not negotiable. For Ross, the divinity of Jewish texts is not negotiable. She critiques Adler for not providing precise enough tools for the determination of halakhah. On the other hand, Ross acknowledges that the authority to renew halakhah does not rest solely with the poskim.[81] She confronts issues of gender injustice through halahkic mechanisms, while also pointing to a theological framework that must be re-imagined. Ross understands feminism as a new divine revelation which offers it legitimacy and in turn opens the door for halakhic change.[82] While she critiques Adler's process of halakhic deliberation as too amorphous, she affirms Adler's work for relying on the community as a source for interpretive authority and halakhic innovation. However, Ross also questions the use of community as the sole arbiter of legal understanding.[83]

> What can be concluded from their insights, however, is that those in the best position to negotiate the encounter between Judaism and modernity are those who are most intensely affected by the conflict of loyalties that it has engendered. Deeply immersed in the rabbinic tradition and maintaining a high degree of allegiance to its standards and practices, Orthodox women with feminist sensibilities are the very personification of the qualifications required for Adler's project…Able to approach *halakhah* critically without rejecting it and to

[80] A.I. Kook, *Iggerot Hareayah* I, 163-164.
[81] Ronit Irshai, "Toward a Gender Critical Approach to the Philosophy of Jewish Law (Halakhah)," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, No. 2 (Fall 2010), 57.
[82] Ibid, 60.
[83] Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism* (Hanover: Brandeis, 2004), 155.

> manipulate a viable position for themselves within it without abandoning its internal vocabulary, they are the ideal formulators of new legal meaning.[84]

Ross assigns Orthodox women as those responsible and capable of engaging in the halakhic project to articulate a modern feminist approach to Judaism.

Ross describes her early writings on women's issues in halakhah as a more conservative approach where she did not want to actively advocate for reform. She based her thinking on halakhic change on two models that emerged from the writings of Rav Kook. The first understands the need for halakhic change developing from new societal pressures from outside forces that the community must address. This situation is not ideal because as Ross explains, it "intrudes upon normative halakhic practice, it is not one that should initially be introduced by the community of the halakhically observant."[85] However, if some in the community adopt these changes and they spread throughout the community, then the community can rest and accept them.

The second model addresses voluntary higher standards of religious observance where behavior exceeds the letter of the law. This model does not violate any halahkic standards but is cautioned against because of the fear of a small minority establishing new norms for the larger community without undergoing the necessary institutional process.[86] Ross applied these halakhic models to the role of women in the Orthodox community, but expressed that despite her frustration, women's issues had to be solved by ad hoc solutions as the rabbinic judgment demands in order to maintain the boundaries of halakhah.

Ross suggests, for example, that there is "a certain inner logic to tradition" that makes a devout Jew wary of altering any form of the law without extreme sensitivity for the values

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[84] Ibid, 172.
[85] Tamar Ross, "Modern Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Feminism", *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, (New York: Institute of Contemporary Jewry and Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.
[86] Ibid, 4.

it purports. When an aspect of the tradition, like the status of women, seems antiquated or unjust, Ross advocates that the woman involved should use her imagination to "discover some unconventional method of *modus vivendi* with the tradition."[87] Through this imaginative process, Ross believes that this innovation can eventually become institutionalized in the halakhic deliberation. While one cannot doubt the eternal nature of the Torah, the practical implications can be altered based on modern realities. Individuals can push avenues of self-expression as far as possible within the law, even when it causes dissonance for challenging the image of women previously accepted. If women cannot serve as shliach tzibur in public prayer, for instance, they should form their own prayer groups. If the testimony of a woman is not accepted in rabbinical courts, the testimony should be defined alternatively and still heard as non-testimony, like in the case of *agunot.* Women who cannot issue a *get,* a divorce document, should establish prenuptial agreement which would invalidate the marriage under mutually agreed upon conditions.[88] Ross also employs other means of negotiating women's status within the system of law. If a woman is not allowed to serve as a judge, for example, one should look to the arguments of the *Rishonim* who deal with this dilemma in regards to Dvora as judge. Ross applauds halakhic imagination as long as it offers deference to the governance and divinity of the text.

Yet, over time, Ross expanded her perspective on the "women's movement." She argued against the "arbitrary exclusion of women from traditionally male-based centered of power."[89] While still devoted and respectful to the authors of halakhah, Ross became increasingly aware of male bias in Jewish tradition and began considering the gray area

[87] Tamar Ross, "Can the Demand for Change in the Status of Women be Halakhically Legitimated?,"*Judaism* 42, no.4 (1993): 489.
[88] Ibid, 488.
[89] Ross, "Modern Orthodoxy and the Challenge of Feminism," 4.

between what is permitted and what is prohibited in regards to women's issues and further explored areas of flexibility within the law.

Ross explains the hierarchal structure of Jewish tradition that orders men above women and grants greater responsibility, rights, and privileges to men in all matters of leadership and authority.[90] Women's status is tied to the achievements of her husband and sons; women are acquired in marriage and not counted as part of the minyan; and men are usually the only inheritors of property. As Ross suggests, "Not only are women not the intended audience of halakhic stipulations, being generally excluded from the public or communal arena; in practice, they have also had no official part to play in the legislative and interpretive process."[91] Women's role in this kind of Jewish community conflicts with Western democratic ideals about the nature and role of women where a more egalitarian culture is being constructed which creates pressure in Orthodox communities for change. Ross considers how these two realities can be negotiated.

She identifies the decentralization of Jewish communal authority as a factor for the "halakhic freezing in the modern period."[92] She explains how the realities of the halakhic decision making process today impact the outcomes of the law. While matters like marriage and divorce are addressed in the rabbinic courts in Israel, they are dealt with in the diaspora in a more limited way. Rabbis, she asserts in the Diaspora mostly offer information about halakhic practice, but actual decision making regarding application and changes to halahkah is restricted because of the lack of centralized institutions and the broad access to education. This diminishes a widely accepted rabbinic authority, according to Ross, which has been

[90] Ibid, 6.
[91] Ibid, 6.
[92] Ibid, 7.

replaced by a system of halakhic deliberation where a particular case is measured against the codes and where the authority often defaults to the status quo.

More complicated halakhic cases are still decided by a *posek,* which can be simply a learned man with popular consensus. Ross sets up this paradigm to explain that the limited authority and modest position of a *posek* in contemporary Jewish life creates a situation where *poskin* simply try to execute existing halakhah, instead of trying to reinterpret it or reimagine its purpose today.[93] *Poskim* to do view themselves as ideological, yet Ross argues that the process is still more fluid than it might appear. When two halakhic principles are in tension, for example, sometimes the arbiters use ideological and subjective means to come to a conclusion. Similarly, while precedent is always the main factor, Ross asserts that this precedent sometimes emerges from customary popular practice rather than from the canon itself. This understanding of halakhah as value laden instead of being limited to absolute constraints, influences the desire for a more modern ethic that includes new moral realities.

Ross outlines a variety of methods for how halakhic authorities respond to a changing social landscape and acknowledges the debate throughout history regarding how to instill change into the law.

> The tug of war between conservatism, on the one hand, and the pressure for halakhic solutions that seem to run counter to the intention or spirit of the law, on the other, is a well-known phenomenon in the history of halakhah. Sometimes adjustments to new demands have been incorporated fairly painlessly and have become so well entrenched in tradition that any traces of the battle leading up to their acceptance are totally forgotten; while at other times, the struggle and resistance to change have extended over centuries, providing powerful testimony to the fact that anachronism is the natural condition of legal systems in general.[94]

[93] Ibid, 8.
[94] Ibid, 16

Yet, the debate over the status of women presents a unique situation where tensions run particularly high. Perhaps, because these issues question the very nature of human of such protected institutions as the Jewish family or human sexuality, and calls into question the very vision of the community. Although she displays compassion for this tension, Ross asserts that halakhah has addressed other issues in the past that held such deep seeded ideological shifts involving moral transformations like the attitude of Jews to non-Jews.[95]

This realization creates space for new societal beliefs in existing halakhah. Yet, one must recognize that the process of changing women's status in halakhah will not simply impact women, but will shift the entire halakhahic system, which can create a great sense of fear for the community. Ross, however, explains the feminist movement in the orthodox community represents something even broader than rights for women, "it purports to represent a spiritual revolution offering an alternative reading of the world, God, and history."[96] Feminism threatens this hierarchal authority and the widely accepted societal structures that have been in place for centuries. Ross does not attribute this dilemma to only halakhic issues because of the parallel situations of women in other religions and concludes that the patriarchal system must have served the interests of men and women in the past. While assessing the implications of the feminist movement on Orthodoxy as a whole, Ross considers that learning among men and women could shift the origins of authority. The existence of women Torah scholars alongside men could establish a system of authority based on merit, excellence in scholarship and piety, rather than on official appointment, which would democratize the process.[97]

[95] Ibid, 17.
[96] Ibid, 18.
[97] Ibid, 24.

Adler acknowledges the need for halakhah for a functional and rich communal praxis, but holds the flexibility to address feminist issues outside the halkhahic system because of her role in a liberal Jewish community. Ross, on the other hand, writes about Jewish feminism from a different interest. Halakahah is a divine given in her life and in the life of her community and therefore she must uncover ways to create space for women's issues within the system. Ross acknowledges that the feminist movement must address issues of power among men and women and takes notice of a Judaism that can act as vehicle for patriarchy. Ross seeks innovation within constraints and uses her knowledge of halakhah to explore the fluidity and flexibility of the law to speak to women's voices and concerns. Ross does not work to overturn the system of power, but to look for ways within the system to offer up more power to women.

Conclusion

Each of these feminist scholars operates on a different assumption about the nature of halakhah and its ability for transformation. They also address the tension between Western feminist ideals and more traditional Jewish principles in various ways, both within and outside the law system itself. A central question these scholars and other Jewish feminists must consider in their theologies is whether patriarchy in Judaism represents a sociological or theological dilemma. "That is, is patriarchy merely optional excess baggage that was imposed on Judaism by external sources, something in no way intrinsic to Judaism, or is it something more profound, warranting even a critique of monotheism and its associated worldview?"[98] While some, like Plaskow claim a theological foundation, others, like Ross, seem to argue for sociological roots and believe that the lack of gender equality is not

[98] Irshai, 62.

inherent in the halakhah itself. This assumption impacts the means by which these scholars address issues of halakhah and its power dynamics.

While all of these scholars identify the worldview of halakhah as male dominated, they each consider the role of halakhah in Judaism, specifically a vision of an inclusive Judaism, through different tools and ideologies. Plaskow might want to eliminate what she deems the inherent *power-over* relationship of the law over women and replace it with a more relational model of Judaism. While, Ross, on the other side of the spectrum, seeks to use what she understands as the inherent flexibility and creative process of halakhah to address changing norms.

Yet, the most curious aspect of this power model is how the rabbis understood their own authority. They claimed that they derived their power from the kings and priests, and saw themselves as the continuation of the political chain of authority within Judaism. Yet, the rabbis who wrote the halakhah were all men who held no political power while they were writing the law. Ironically, these powerless men wrote about power and attempted to exert authority in the only spheres they could—religious practices in the community and in the home. One must consider the social and political contexts of the texts while unpacking their authority, and as Adler suggests, reimagine a new *nomos* for the application of halakhah today. Jewish feminists, men and women alike, must expand the definition and the ideas within halakhah, rather than replacing one definition with another definition. They must balance the *power-over* tendencies of the law with the *power-with* values of feminism in order to create a new synthesis of Jewish feminist halakhah.

Power is alluring and once an individual or group acquires power, they almost inevitably do not want to give it up. Yet, by maintaining the *power-over* relationship of the

law over women, the interpreters and practitioners of halakhah relegate God into one limited place and understanding and fail to recognize the more expansive nature of God and the laws created to serve God and the community. The conversation surrounding Jewish law has to involve all those who are affected by it and must create various pathways to access it in an evolving social, political, and moral landscape.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE STATE OF ISRAEL

This thesis has examined two alternative models of power that are exercised in the Jewish community. However, there could be no discussion of the role of power in the Jewish community without addressing the question of how power functions in the state of Israel. After centuries of persecution and perceived victimhood, contemporary Jews must grapple with challenging questions of power after the establishment of a sovereign state where Jews also employ their *power-over* other minority groups. In the course of building the State, leaders struggled with various questions of power such as human rights, territorial boundaries, and the role of religion in governance. These questions could not have been envisioned before the founding of the state and will continue to haunt Israel in terms of how it defines itself as a Jewish state. No experience in modern times can help Israel address these kind of church-state issues and questions of power. Rather, as Israel continues to mature and grow, it must come to grips with how to deal with the internal Jewish issues of religious authority and state practice as well as the external challenges of security and ruling over another people.

Journalist Peter Beinart in his controversial book *The Crisis of Zionism* begins to consider some of these questions about power through his depiction of the dramatic shift from "powerlessness to power" that Jews have experienced over the last century:

> The shift from Jewish powerlessness to Jewish power has been so profound, and in historical terms so rapid, that it has outpaced the way many Jews think about themselves. One hundred years ago, Jews in Palestine lived at the mercy of their Ottoman overlords; Jews in Europe

> endured crushing, often state-sponsored, anti-Semitism; Jews in the Muslim world were frequently consigned to second-class status; and Jews in the United States lived at the margins of American life. Even fifty years ago, none of Israel's Arab neighbors recognized its right to exist, and some of those neighbors seemed to enjoy military parity with, if not superiority over, the Jewish state. Most of the Jews still in Europe lived under tyrannical, anti-Semitic Soviet regime, and even in the Unites States, some Ivy League universities still limited the number of Jewish students who could attend.[99]

Today, as Beinart suggests, some American Jews still understand their narrative through the lens of powerlessness and many locate their Jewish identity within the story of victimhood and survival.

Just as the Holocaust represents the quintessential moment of Jewish powerlessness, so too the creation of the State of Israel symbolizes the first real exercise of Jewish power in two thousand years. "That the same generation experiences the extremes of power and powerlessness has had a profound effect on the ways Jews regard political sovereignty."[100] Yet, this understanding of Jewish history from the perspective of powerlessness to power has created a great deal of dissonance, as author David Biale points out, for contemporary Jewish identity. Sovereignty in the state of Israel has become directly linked to persecution during the Holocaust which leads to a challenging and convoluted understanding of Jewish power today. The narrative of Israel as the antidote to the Holocaust, and the image of the "New Jew" in place of the weak, apolitical Jew persecuted in the Diaspora create a tension and discomfort about how Jews should understand sovereignty in Israel. How can a people who have been so connected to a self-understanding of powerlessness now grapple with the

[99] Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2012), 4.
[100] David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 145.

realities of realized power? Biale explains that "Instead of sovereignty bestowing a sense of security, it has led to contradictory feelings of inflated power and exaggerated fear."[101]

The issues related to Jewish power and the state of Israel are broad and complex. This chapter will begin to examine some of the major questions and will explore possible responses. It will consider how the Jewish victimhood narrative impacts issues of sovereignty today and will investigate the relationship between morality and the demands of political power and statehood. American Jews possess an ideal for what the state is supposed to embody, and early Zionist documents similarly articulate a dream of Israel as a "light unto the nations" that carries ethical obligations rooted in Jewish tradition. This chapter will explore the gap between the ideal theory surrounding the state of Israel and the reality that exists on the ground. It will consider how Jewish ethical principles regarding power and how Jew's relationship to power in history play out in the paradigm of Israel.

One of the challenges of a society with two ideological principles—democracy and Judaism—is that the tension between the two spills over into many sub-categories of society including issues like security and the rights of minorities and foreign workers. This dilemma creates a vibrant debate within Israel, the U.S., and elsewhere in the Diaspora. The realities about the decision making and operating of the government can clash with the ideological platforms upon which the country was founded. Often, a compromise between these two polarities remains the outcome of real government. This chapter will explore whether the agreement of the Zionists has been fulfilled, violated or tarnished, or whether there has been some accommodation between dreams and realities of power. It will also examine how Israel reconciles ethics and power, and how understanding Israel as a Jewish state or a state

[101] Ibid, 146.

for the Jews impacts how Jews negotiate the ideal vision of a Jewish state and the reality of governance and statehood.

The first issue that the American Jewish community struggles with is whether or not Jew's actually wield power, more specifically political power. Beinart argues that although anti-Semitism still exists, Jews face a very different world than our ancestors—in the Middle East, in Europe and most significantly, in the United States.

> …in the last two decades Jews have serves as secretary of state, secretary of the treasury, national security adviser, House majority leader, and White House chief of staff, and have held the presidencies of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Of the last six editors of the *New York Times,* four have been Jews. On the Supreme Court, Jews currently outnumber Protestants three to zero.[102]

Beinart goes on to demonstrate Jewish power through the marriage of Chelsea Clinton, the daughter of a former president, to a Jew in a public Jewish ceremony and other political indicators of not only Jewish acceptance, but monumental Jewish influence. Israeli author and journalist, Yossi Klein Halevi suggests that Jewish squeamishness with power in fact demonstrates how successful Jewish power has been. He says that it "frees us from the deformity of powerlessness which we rebelled against 60 years ago."[103] Halevi illustrates that the critique of Jewish power is only possible if Jews actually possess power. This new reality, according to Halevi, creates a bifurcation among world Jewry where Israel's power acts as both a source of pride and a source of shame. Jews simultaneously revel in Israel's political and militaristic power, while also cowering from it and clinging to the "moral high ground" of powerlessness, even if they know that the condition of powerlessness failed.

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[102] Beinart, 4.
[103] Donniel Hartman, "Power and Powerlessness," Unit Four, iEngage Lecture, Shalom Hartman Institute.

Beinart takes world Jewry's response to Israel's power a step further. He argues that the Jewish community often avoids discussing or acknowledging this power for fear of a revival of anti-Semitic myths.[104] Jewish history warrants such a response and anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiments remain alive. Yet, the gap between Jewish power in the U.S. and Israel today and the narrative of Jewish victimhood creates tension and confusion about how Jews should exercise their existing power. Jewish identity for centuries has been tied to this image of innocence and powerlessness causes world Jewry to struggle with their new position:

> Many people are devastated when they see Jewish hands dirtied with the inescapable blood and guilt of operating in the world. The classic Jewish self-image—the innocent, sinned-against sufferer—is being shattered. The traditional Jewish conviction of being morally superior which has sustained our self-respect through centuries of persecution is being tested.[105]

As the Jewish image of innocence has vanished, Jews must acquire a new narrative, one that helps them exercise their power and cope with the new reality of state sovereignty.

Beinart responds to this dilemma by suggesting that "We need a new American Jewish story, built around this basic truth: We are not history's permanent victims. In a dizzying shift of fortune, many of our greatest challenges today stem not from weakness but from power."[106] Jewish survival is still urgent. Hamas and Hezbollah, among others, pose severe threats to Israel's security. But the primary responsibility of the Jewish people is no longer simply survival. In order to grapple with Jewish power in a real, responsible way, Jewish leaders must first, albeit cautiously, accept their power and address the inherent

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[104] Beinart, 5.
[105] Irving Greenberg, "The Ethics of Jewish Power," *Perspectives* (New York: National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, 1988), accessed at http://rabbiirvinggreenberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/The-Ethics-of-Jewish-Powerb.pdf, 1.
[106] Beinart, 8.

consequences that accompany such power. The question remains as to how Jews can develop a narrative of power after 2000 years of viewing power from the outside. As Jews struggle with the moral weight of sovereignty, they also cannot aggrandize powerlessness.

The dilemma that Beinart articulates introduces the second issue that informs the conversation of Jewish sovereignty: the relationship between power and morality. World Jewry may be deeply uncomfortable with powerlessness because of the overwhelming number of Jewish lives lost. Yet, simultaneously there is a desire to romanticize powerlessness because of the perceived morality of not dirtying one's hands with blood. Halevi points out the public relations problem of power, especially for Jews. David, the smaller underdog, triumphs in history over Goliath. The person or nation who chooses death or another perceived form of moral high ground bodes better in public perception rather than one's who uses power to fight and possibly expose oneself to corruption.[107] Israel's sovereignty introduces a whole new set of dilemmas, such as the occupation. King David could not build the Temple in the Bible because his hands were too stained with blood. His use of power secured the Israelites' future, but it also created consequences and more challenges. Sovereignty is not pure, but neither is powerlessness.

Scholar Irving Greenberg, one of the leading voices in the conversation of Jewish power, demonstrates that powerlessness is indeed not morally superior and is susceptible to corruption as well:

> Erstwhile victims should not be romanticized. The moral purity of victims is often a function of the fact that they have no power to inflict evil. They are equally, sometimes more, subject to being corrupted by accession to power. Throughout history, when downtrodden classes would arise, they would often turn a murderous fury against the equally victimized

[107] Yossi Klein Halevi, "Power and Powerlessness," Unit Four, iEngage Lecture, Shalom Hartman Institute.

> neighboring Jews. Many a liberation movement has denied the Jewish right to liberation. It is delusion or self-righteous flattery to believe that Jews can avoid the same tendencies. The historical challenge of power must be taken on with eyes open"[108]

Greenberg offers a realistic picture of power and powerlessness. Those who are powerless can also take part in corruption and can also inflict violence upon their co-victims. The condition of powerlessness is not inherently linked to morality. Although power makes many Jews and even non-Jews uncomfortable because of its potential for corruption, power also introduces the capacity to enact change and to use power ethically.

Marc Ellis in his book *Beyond Innocence and Redemption: Confronting the Holocaust and Israeli Power* elaborates on Greenberg's position: "Jewish powerlessness is immoral, for it is no longer compatible with Jewish survival. Because the power needed for survival in the contemporary world is available only to sovereign states, achieving power in Israel reaches the level of sacred principle."[109] For the first time in two thousand years Jews have a state of their own. According to Greenberg, the existence of the state enables Jewish survival and therefore becomes a moral obligation to protect it. Learning to come to terms with such sovereignty and to exercise it through ethical means requires the Jewish's community acceptance of their political power. Jews do not want to be the eternal victims of history who cannot exert power. Power offers the opportunity for the Jewish community to protect themselves and even improve the world around them. Jews must engage in a conversation about power in order to deal with Israel's use of power for survival, while also constantly recognizing the danger of an unethical use of power.

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[108] Greenberg, 1.
[109] Marc H. Ellis, *Beyond Innocence and Redemption: Confronting the Holocaust and Israeli Power* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 19.

Many Jews maintain the belief that power is inherently corrupt and that morality and power are incompatible. Those with this perspective argue that nations should mitigate their use of power because it can create an even greater evil than the evil the state is seeking to combat.[110] Sovereign states, like Israel for instance, must be cautious with their use of power, even in defending itself. Scholar Donniel Hartman understands the weight of power. He explains that "sovereignty is not only a right; it is a responsibility."[111] Jews must acknowledge the responsibility of exercising power and must develop a contemporary story of Jewish power. They must navigate the relationship between morality and sovereignty and articulate a theology or ethical principles that recognize the gap between the ideal moral values and the reality of state governance. Various scholars have offered approaches to Jewish power. Following are simply a few selections from Donniel Hartman, Yossi Klein Halevi, and Yitz Greenberg on how Jews can engage in the conversation of power through the lens of Israel.

In a lecture on power and powerlessness, Donniel Hartman addressed the way Jews talk about power and whether power is fundamentally unjust or inherently evil. He bases a Jewish narrative of power on two textual traditions—*b'tzelom Elohim* and *tikkun olam.* He reminds us of the moral obligation to preserve human life and to avoid bloodshed through the commandment of Genesis nine—to remember that all people were created *b'tzelom Elohim,* in the image of God. Jews, therefore, must heed the ethical obligation toward others, but they also must preserve their moral obligation to themselves.[112] Through the idea of *b'tzelom Elohim* Hartman articulates the Jewish obligation for self-preservation, the commandment to first protect ourselves and remember that we too are created in the image of God. This idea

[110] Hartman, "Power and Powerlessness."
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

sets up Hartman's first principle of power: use power first and foremost to protect oneself. The Jewish value to safeguard the "infinite value of all humankind serves as the foundation for a conversation of the awareness of self…Your life takes precedent. This doesn't create exclusivism, but rather that you become a lover of people…love of self is the first moral obligation."[113] Hartman demonstrates the use of power for reasons of survival and self-preservation, which speaks directly the case of Israel.

However, power should not simply be used to defend our individual right to life, it should also be used, according to Hartman, to improve the world. Hartman's second principle for the Jewish exercise of power is to use power to fight injustice. Hartman explains that "We are created in the image of God because it is our job to replace God in this world…we use power in order to govern and in order to improve this world."[114] For Hartman, power is the ability to exercise the Jewish responsibility for *tikkun olam,* for repairing the world.

Hartman makes clear that self-protection is not the sole goal of power and acknowledges that power requires limits. For him, the principle of *kiddush HaShem,* the sanctification of the name, helps set those limits. He suggests that *Kiddush HaShem* reminds Jews that human life has value as articulated by his first principle of power, but that there is also a moment when one crosses the line and abuses power, and in turn ceases from being human.[115] In those rare and isolated instances, Jews must prioritize the critical value of human life and consider the consequences of using power in a way that violates that value.

Hartman deals with the reality that the state of Israel has created the need for Jews to use power. He argues that power is essential in the real world of security issues; in a world

[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

which is still incomplete. At the same time, Hartman urges Jews to aspire never to have to use the power they possess and to remember that power is a necessary reality and not a path unto itself. While striving for survival and peace simultaneously, Hartman recognizes the complicated considerations that are part of trying to build a powerful and moral state of Israel.

In a conversation with Hartman on the issue of Jewish power and powerlessness in light of the state of Israel, Yossi Klein Halevi describes the chaotic reality of employing power in the pre-redemptive or non-redemptive world in which humanity currently resides. He argues for a conversation on power not only in practical terms, but in spiritual terms. Powerlessness as the ideal, he suggests, belongs to the messianic era when power will be irrelevant. However, in a non-messianic world where real enemies exist, a nation or people must ensure that they can protect themselves.[116] Halevi cites the well-known commandment not to do unto others what has been done to you: "Remember that you were strangers in the land of Egypt"[117] as a calling not to be brutal. On the other end of the spectrum, Halevi evokes the biblical commandment to remember Amalek[118] as an injunction not to be naïve. Halevi understands Amalek as "the archetypal and mythic symbol of genocidal tendency" where "we live in a world in which genocide is possible and there are enemies that will attack us without provocation."[119] Halevi articulates a Jewish approach to power manifested through the state of Israel as one that balances these two polarities—slavery in Egypt and the attack of Amalek, "don't be brutal" and "don't be naïve." Embracing these Jewish narratives

[116] Halevi, "Power and Powerlessness."
[117] Leviticus 19:34.
[118] Exodus 17: 8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19.
[119] Halevi, "Power and Powerlessness."

in regards to power does not ensure that every response of the state will be handled correctly, but that the state will make choices based on ethical principles.

Halevi designates between two eras of Israel's approach to power. In the beginning of the state, Halevi argues that Israelis outwardly celebrated their military power as an antithesis to the Holocaust and the image of "sheep to the slaughter." May 1973, Israel's twenty five year celebration, Halevi describes as the last military parade right before the Yom Kippur War. He marks this event as the shift to the second era of Israel's approach to power. Today, he argues, Israelis are less celebratory about power and the military culture has diminished, illustrated in part by the lack of military parades.[120] Halevi uses this example to demonstrate that power does not need to become intoxicating or define a nation. He acknowledges the complexity of power, and also the potential redemptive use of power to act as a vehicle for improving the world.

Yitz Greenberg has remained a prominent voice in the conversation on the relationship between ethics and Jewish power. Greenberg offers a pragmatic approach to power. Even though power has the potential to corrupt, Greenberg still believes Jews must acquire it, and that some failures will inevitably occur when navigating how to exercise it. Greenberg explains that "pragmatism rather than the prophetic, compromise rather than perfection, will be the norm in the third era.[121] The use of power requires a compromise between the ideal of Jewish values and the reality on the ground of governing a state. Like Halevi and Hartman, Greenberg believes that power must seek to be in concert with morality and a desire to better the world. Yet, Greenberg also articulates a more results-oriented approach which takes into account that no matter what standard one holds for the exercise of

[120] Ibid.
[121] Ellis, 20.

power, there will always be inescapable moral side effects. Even so, for Greenberg, the more ethical path is not avoiding power because of this reality, but rather seeking to employ it only when necessary and trying to minimize these "immoral side effects" as much as possible.[122]

Zionist thinker, Theodore Herzl argued that Zionism could transform Jews into a "normal" people through the founding of their own state. Greenberg normalizes Israel as a regular state among other nations and depicts the pragmatic reality of state governance that perhaps Herzl left out:

> There is no state in the world that can or does, in an ultimate sense, base its existence on moral right, despite rhetoric to the contrary. The recognition of a state, its basis, lies in its ability to govern a specific territory with enough consent, volunteered or coerced, to allow that governance. Israel, like the United States or the Soviet Union, India or Guatemala, exists as a state for better and for worse because it has the requisite power and consent to govern. To lose that ability to govern is to change political leadership; threats from the outside can be met with moral and political suasion, but ultimately the military guarantees survival. Thus Israel exists because it exists, that is, because it is able to assert enough power and gain enough consent to survive.[123]

Moral aspirations aside, Greenberg articulates the stark reality that Israel survives as a nation because of its ability to defend itself from other nations. Like other nations, it possesses the ability to govern because of its military capabilities. As Henry Kissinger suggested when discussing the European balance of power system during the seventeenth century, "*Raison d'etat* asserted that the well-being of the state justified whatever means were employed to further it; the national interest supplanted the medieval notion of a universal morality."[124] While the platform of security is often employed to legitimize any of Israel's actions, the

[122] Ellis, 23.
[123] Ibid, 158.
[124] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 58.

reality of governance is that security must remain at the forefront in order for Israel to maintain its sovereignty.

The crisis of Israel's relationship to power becomes complicated based on how individuals understand the State's purpose. As Michael Walzer asks, "Does the state actually serve the needs of the hour in the same way that 'normal' states do? Or does it have a larger purpose?"[125] Does the covenant create special standards for Israel? The question remains as to whether Israel is a nation like any other who struggles between the ideals of morality and the realities of governance. As a nation like any other, these questions of morality become less urgent. However, when a larger redemptive or religiously infused ethical imperative is placed upon the state, it confuses the question of power and exacerbates the gap between the ideal and the real.

Greenberg offers a vision for the ideal exercise of power. For him, Jewish power should seek a synthesis between the moral prophetic demands and the realities of state governance and policies:

> Since real policy rarely meets the absolute standard of the ideal, those who exercise power are in constant tension with the prophets who denounce their moral failures. The contrast is not always in favor of the prophets. If those in power are responsible people, they must renounce prophetic stances. Prophets can rely on spiritual power and make absolute demands for righteousness. Governments have obligations to protect people. On the other hand, when governments ignore prophets, they usually end up abusing the people they are supposed to protect.[126]

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[125] Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, Noam J. Zohar, eds., *The Jewish Political Tradition, Volume One: Authority* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 465.
Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism* (Hanover: Brandeis, 2004), 155.
[126] Greenberg, 5.

He acknowledges the challenges of sovereignty and the reality that the practice of state governments often dilutes or redefines the intended goals or moral obligations of the state. The primary concern of a nation is to protect its people. Therefore a responsible nation cannot rely on the idealism of the prophets who have the luxury to demand righteousness above all. Yet, Israel still cannot ignore the ethics of the prophetic tradition or the government will end up misusing its power and threaten its own people. For Greenberg, Israel is the vehicle for Jewish empowerment after the Holocaust, and in a post-Holocaust world Israel does not need to abide by "perfect morality."[127] Greenberg asserts that Israel is the place where Judaism as a religion and as a moral exercise takes place because a Jewish majority decides policy for its own people and for other peoples.[128] Israel is the place of Jewish unity and the playground of Jewish destiny.

Perhaps American Jews hold on to the dream that Israel is supposed to symbolize something unique, a new beginning for Jews, where all policies and actions speak to an ideal "Jewish" behavior. This struggle of purpose and understanding Israel as a state for Jews or a Jewish state complicates the question of how it should exercise power. As a state like any other, Greenberg argues that the Jewish military and other governing institutions are not immune to killing innocent people and misusing power. However, Israel must seek to minimize these occurrences by abiding to Jewish ethical principles.

Greenberg explains that this reality is challenging for most Jews, "But to believe otherwise is to commit a 'genetic fallacy' and assume that Jews are intrinsically more moral than other peoples. Such a belief bespeaks a covert racism. After all, Jews are like other

[127] Ellis 25.
[128] Ibid, 28.

people—only more so."[129] Greenberg uses the Bible to illustrate this reality. The Bible does not portray the Israelites as a morally perfect people. Rather, like all other nations, the Israelites are susceptible to moral corruption and falter just the same as their contemporaries. "Its picture of Jewish sovereignty shows a deeply flawed record…The illusion of ethical perfectionism grows out of the record of millennial powerlessness whose results are projected incorrectly into the new reality."[130] In the biblical tradition, leaders like Moses and David misuse their authority at times, and the Israelites engage in military force and kill innocent people for the sake of sovereignty. This should not provide a model for the exercise of power. However, the biblical model does remind Jews that they are not unique in their struggle with sovereignty and that Jewish tradition acknowledges the mistakes and challenges of wielding power ethically. Greenberg explains that the use of power historically leads to a "weakening of conscience" unless there is continual exposure to prophetic standards. Jewish power exists within the parameters of regular state politics and governance, yet Israel must continue to struggle with how to wield its power its power as ethically as possible.

Other Zionist perspectives on Israel continue to shape the debate on how Israel should exercise power "Jewishly." The founder of religious Zionism, Abraham Isaac Kook, for example, suggested that greater Israel was the desired outcome for the Jewish state and any compromising of territory would act as a violation of God's promise to the Jewish people. His philosophy continues to impact settler movements today which draw on theocratic authority. In this case, Jewish power originates with God's covenantal promise to the Jewish people, and all other issues of morality remain secondary.

[129] Greenberg, 6.
[130] Ibid, 6.

Twentieth century Zionist thinker Ze'ev Jabotinksy provides another viewpoint on how a Jewish state should exercise power. His revisionist ideology suggested that the primary concern of a Jewish state is to defend Jews. Before the founding of Israel he believed that Arabs possessed power through the strength and will to advocate their interests. In his famous speech, "An Iron Wall" he urged Jewish leaders to understand that "Every indigenous people will resist alien settlers as long as they see any hope of ridding themselves of the danger of foreign settlement."[131] Jabotinsky respected the power of the Arabs and their desire for autonomy. Yet, he also understood them as a threat to the Jewish state and therefore believed that it was necessary to subjugate Arab interests in order to ensure Jewish sovereignty. Through his metaphor of the iron wall, he implored Jews to demonstrate that same kind of authority—martial power—in order to secure their interests. Jabotinsky's ideology represents the most basic form of *power-over,* in which issues of security trump other concerns. This perspective recognizes the hard reality that sovereignty requires first and foremost military strength.

On the other end of the spectrum, contemporary author Marc Ellis provides a radical left view by arguing that the mythos of the Holocaust is used to justify Israel and overlook its unjust policies. He condemns Israel's use of power as a violation of universal principles of justice, especially the treatment of the Palestinian population. For Ellis, moral authority is essential for the survival of Israel and the Jewish people are at risk of becoming just like the Jews' own oppressors in history. Unlike the other scholars, Ellis argues that the desire for self-determination in which Jews decide their own fate in their own country like other nations

[131] Ze'ev Jabotinsky, "An Iron Wall (We and the Arabs)," *Zionism: Background Papers for an Evaluation, vol. 4 – Zionism and the Arab Movement: Our Reflections with Our Neighbors* (Jerusalem, Israel: n.d.), 319-322.

is more complex and is not enough to justify a moral abuse of power.[132] Ellis suggests that Jews are connected as a people not only because of the existence of a Jewish state. The issue of survival and establishing Jewishness, as the other scholars have expressed, are secondary for Ellis. For him, "Jewish witness," being in relationship with others throughout history and understanding Jewish particularity among others is most significant**.**

The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948 echoes the narrative shift from powerlessness to power. Citing the exile of Jews from their own lands and the massacre of Jews in Europe, this Declaration echoes the theme of redemption and the creation of the state as a mark of Jewish survival and empowerment. It recognizes Jews as strong warriors, not as victims, who employed their will to survive through atrocities like the Holocaust in order to reach this moment of self-determination:

> Survivors of the Nazi holocaust in Europe, as well as Jews from other parts of the world, continued to migrate to Eretz-Israel, undaunted by difficulties, restrictions and dangers, and never ceased to assert their right to a life of dignity, freedom and honest toil in their national homeland.[133]

The creation of the state represented the redemption of Israel and the actualization of the Jewish will to survive. This document illustrates the ideal vision of the state:

> It will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions…"

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[132] Ellis, 159.

[133]The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, Israel Foreign Ministry, http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20state%20of%20israel.aspx.

Israel was created with the values of justice and peace invoked by the spirit of the prophets to ensure equality for all peoples and religions residing there. Like other state declarations, Israel's founding document established a nation based on liberty and freedom in which the early Zionists believed.

Similarly, the Israeli military, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) established codes that could regulate this spirit of respect and human dignity among soldiers and influence their training and behavior as representatives of the state. Every Israeli soldier is supposed to keep the IDF Code of Conduct in their pocket at all times as a constant reminder of the values of its soldiers. One of the values of the Code states: **"**Human Dignity – The IDF and its soldiers are obligated to preserve human dignity. All human beings are of inherent values regardless of race, creed, nationality, gender, status or role."[134] The IDF and other institutions of the state created a framework for ideas and actions that regard all people, even the enemy, with dignity and equality. These documents offer a vision and ideology for the state, but like other nations, the gap between this ideal and the real decision making process is wide. Compromise becomes an outcome of real government and these ideologies become diluted in instances on the ground. Israel's use of power becomes even more complicated when such a large number of Jews live outside of Israel and confront questions of Israeli power outside the lived political framework. Like the early Zionists, many Jews in the Diaspora hold on to the belief that the state is supposed to be something different than other states and must uphold the ideals and policies like the Declaration of the State and the "Spirit of the IDF."

[134] The IDF Code of Conduct: Human Values in Every Soldier's Pocket, Israeli Defense Forces, http://www.idfblog.com/2011/12/10/human-values-in-every-idf-soldiers-pocket-the-idf-spirit/.

Conclusion

Each of these Zionist thinkers offers different insights into how the State should interact with power. They acknowledge some of the challenges raised as a result of the unique situation of Israel within the Jewish narrative. Like the founding documents of the state of Israel, these scholars offer an ideal for the exercise of Jewish power, while similarly recognizing the realities on the ground. When the primary function of a state is to provide for the security of its people, the use of power becomes complicated and the gap between the ideal and real can increase when the nation's security is at risk. Greenberg, for example, understands that "what appears to be moral in the abstract may work poorly in actual practice."[135]

Hartman, Halevi and Greenberg all articulate the tension between morality and power, and explain the ethical reality that "…in an unredeemed world, one must be able and willing to exercise power to protect or advance the good."[136] They speak within the context of innocence and redemption and understand Israel's role primarily as self-protection and then as a calling to *tikkun olam* in a world not yet redeemed. They also recognize that power cannot be an end unto itself; it cannot become something Jews worship. Instead, it must always be for the purpose of perfecting the world. Other thinkers like Rav Kook located authority within God's will, while early Zionist thinker Jabotinksy understood sovereignty through martial power.

Whether the narrative of redemption allows for moral ambiguity remains a contested issue and whether Israel can be both a Jewish state that adheres to Jewish ethical standards and a political nation that must maintain its sovereignty is unclear. However, like these

[135] Greenberg, 5.
[136] Ibid, 5.

scholars, Jews must first come to terms with their power. Only by acknowledging it can they struggle with the relationship between sovereignty and morality so that they never become idolaters of power. Jewish sources can act as a guide for employing power as some of these writers suggest. However, like the nature of power, Jewish texts can also be interpreted to further a particular perspective. Jews' limited experience with power in history, specifically in terms of state sovereignty, forces Israel to face questions that have never been addressed before and to establish a model of power that will instruct Jews in future generations. *Power-over* might be the reality for governing a state. However Israel must continue to seek out more opportunities for *power-with* relationships with minority groups and other peoples in order to live out its calling to embody a moral Jewish nation.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely. ~Lord Acton

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities. ~Hannah Arendt

For centuries, societies have struggled with the nature and exercise of power. Often, when the term "power" is invoked, the most immediate association is usually corruption. Alongside this assumed relationship between corruption and power comes the supposition that power inherently undermines morality. Several of the Jewish thinkers discussed in this thesis articulate a vision of power as a creative energy, not as a coercive force. For them, power acts as a means, not as an end. Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, for example, suggests that:

> "A great historian has asserted that power is evil. But this is not so. Power is intrinsically guiltless; it is the precondition for the actions of man. The problematic element is the will-to-power, greedy to seize and establish power, and not the effect of a power whose development was internal. A will-to-power, less concerned with being powerful than being 'more powerful than,' becomes destruction. Not power, but 'power hysteria' is evil.[137]

Buber demonstrates that power itself is not evil, but the desire to always acquire more power is when morality is at stake. Power becomes a threat when it is viewed as the end goal, and not the means to achieve some societal good. This kind of potential for corruption rests on a paradigm of scarcity. A common notion of power is that it exists as a zero sum game in

[137] Martin Buber, *A Land of Two Peoples,* Paul Mendes Flohr, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 50.

which the more power someone else has, the less you can have. As Jonathan Sacks stated earlier, this belief of power suggests that the more people with power, the more that power diminishes. This understanding of power is troubling because it pits individuals and groups against each other as opposed to acting *with* one another. Instead of considering the possibility for all parties to exert some manner of power, each group competes for the "most" power, undermining anyone who gets in the way. This kind of *power-over* can lead to corruption in the race for ultimate control and access.

Conversely, some of the scholars presented in this work imagine power as a force for engendering relationship and uncovering shared interests. This kind of resource, which has been defined as *power-with,* generates power through the connections between individuals and groups, and through the ability of people to act together. This capacity only emerges when people seek to understand one another and their interests. In this paradigm of relational power, some individuals might possess more influence than others. It is not a utopian system in which all parties naturally garner the same amount of access. Yet, one party is not exerting their control over another. This model, which has been illustrated through community organizing and Jewish feminism, teaches each individual to be empowered and to unearth their own inner strengths so that one can take action and not be acted upon. When *power-with* is employed, everyone has a stake in the system and power no longer becomes a "winner takes all" approach.

This thesis analyzes three cases of power and explores a new use of power—*power-with* through alternative paradigms such as feminism and community organizing. Traditionally, *power-over* suggests that one body has authority over another. However, the interpretation of *power-with* debunks the perceived necessity for exercising control over

another entity. Instead this model of power suggests that power can be collaborative and presents new opportunities for women, for congregational work, and for Jewish political concerns. This alternative form of *power-with* is not inherently tied with corruption. It does not thwart the autonomy or imagination of one person or group in order to achieve an outcome. Many scholars and citizens believe that power corrupts, but perhaps only *power-over* corrupts. It seems that a new definition of power, one that embraces power as a capacity for good and an opportunity to advocate for shared interests is necessary.

In order to exercise power in this way, one must first acknowledge his or her own power. Perhaps because power has become linked with corruption and greed, many are afraid to talk about power or self-interest; they have become taboo topics. Yet, it is essential for individuals to name their own power and to discuss self-interest. This allows for the possibility of shared power because all parties are able to understand each other's influence and are able to negotiate together how they can leverage these strengths to achieve greater power for both of them. Similarly, individuals and groups cannot elevate powerlessness. As Yitz Greenberg illustrated in his discussion of Israel, powerlessness is not morally superior. If one lacks power, one lacks the capacity for change.

However, despite the potential for collaborative power, there are some situations when *power-over* remains necessary. In all political systems, someone or some group is left out. The realities of governing imply that it is impossible to establish an equal playing field for all people, as evidenced in the situation of Israel. *Power-with* is a subversive, counter-cultural model that is still not the dominant practice of power. Therefore, states must still play with the currency of *power-over* in order to secure their sovereignty, especially in the precarious situation of Israel. In these situations, morality is inevitably compromised and

corruption becomes possible when there is a perceived race to achieve ultimate power. Yet, it remains challenging to act based on *power-with* when surrounding nations do not abide by this premise. Still, Israel, and other nations must seek out more opportunities to act through relational power and to practice externally, and even more so, internally, the values of shared influence in order to ensure a more ethical exercise of power.

The Jewish community is currently experiencing a huge shift in its understanding of Jewish identity and the notion of membership. Twentieth and twenty first century Jews relate to power in a different way than their counterparts decades ago. Contemporary Jewry has inherited from every civilization the *power-over* model. The generational and ideological transformation of identity and membership offers an opportunity to introduce a new paradigm of power, both inside and outside the Jewish community.

In order to remain relevant to millennial generations and others, engagement and transparency must be seen as one of the defining and essential characteristics of Jewish institutions today. The application of *power-with* provides for this kind of thinking because it demands mutuality and clarity in an effort to build consensus and develop leadership. In a twenty first century framework, *power-with* offers a model of leadership that welcomes those still sitting on the outside of Jewish institutional life who might have been disheartened by the hierarchy of another time. Instead, individuals can be empowered to take ownership of institutional Judaism and perhaps even be transformed themselves in the process. This model could only take place in our organizations in an era in which Jews possess a political base in their own state and movements like feminism and community organizing have infiltrated synagogue culture. Israel's use of power acts as a centerpiece of the debate during a period

in which millennial Jews in the U.S. have only experienced Jewish power and do not relate as closely to a narrative of powerlessness.

Over time, some critics of the Jewish community have characterized it as authoritarian or hierarchical: lay people who make large donations gain greater access to institutional Jewish life, rabbis exert authority over their congregants, the Israeli rabbinate establishes religious laws over a secular majority, and the Israeli government wields power over the Palestinians. The issue of the use of power has permeated the boundaries of Judaism and spread throughout various conversations. Yet, the legacy of leaders and "organizers" like Rachel Adler, Tamar Ross, and Judith Plaskow, and Donniel Hartman and Yitz Greenberg, and Saul Alinsky demonstrate that a new understanding of power is possible. These scholars articulated an ethical vision of power within the Jewish heritage that breaks down barriers of wealth, gender, and access. These visions of power replace those barriers with opportunities for coming together and for deepening relationships within the context of community. The work of these thinkers does not apply only to the notion of power in broad terms, but also to how power can operate internally for institutional transformation and externally for how Jews interact with other faiths.

Power-with empowers individuals and communities to seek systemic change within the civic realm, and also within their own institutions. The processes of relational meetings in community organizing and conscious raising groups in feminism rely on building power by sharing stories and inspiring people to believe that they possess the inner power to create change. Engaging in conversations that name the tensions inherent in power and teaching about alternative models of power can transform the way we act in community. Families can take ownership of their religious schools and make them places of genuine encounter and

inspiration. Board meetings can become more than discussions on strategy and budget. Jewish institutions in general can act as spaces where individuals uncover their gifts and are empowered to help create a Judaism they believe in. When power is seen in terms of abundance and relationships exist at the center, everyone has the opportunity to be a part of the work and the vision.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that power is central to the work we do in the Jewish community. After centuries of trying to exert power in subtle ways as strangers in other people's lands, Jews now face a new relationship to power. The existence of an economically, politically, and militarily powerful Jewish state and the influence American Jews wield in all aspects of society create a new circumstance of power. Instead of hiding from this situation, the Jewish community has the opportunity to explore new ways of employing this influence. They can examine how the existence of Jewish power impacts Jewish identity. The narrative of survivalism cannot be the language of contemporary Jewish leaders. Rather, the exercise of power in relational, collaborative terms can help lead to a transformative vision of Judaism which grounds us in values of justice, human dignity, and creativity. The application of *power-with* in our communities can lead not only to self-preservation, but to moving us closer to our calling to ensure a more perfect world.

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