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Mourning Call:
Traversing the Wilderness of Grief

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
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Part One: Mourning into Dancing: Loss and its Lessons

Chapter One: Introduction: Mourning Call

If you visit New Orleans, you will certainly be going to the French Quarter, to seek out the well-known open-air coffee stand near the Mississippi River named Café Du Monde. You will partake of the rich culinary indulgences from its spare menu. The first item you will find to enjoy is a cup filled from two large steel kettles simultaneously pouring hot liquids- one black- the other white. The first is thick chicory-laced coffee, and the other an equal amount of hot milk. The second menu item is the beignet, the sweet, hot, fluffy square of fried dough that native New Orleanians simply call a doughnut. Sprinkled with powdered sugar, which will also cover the table and your clothes, and dipped into the coffee, you will taste one of the quintessential delights of a town that pleases all the senses, even when it also breaks your heart.

You will sit there in a motionless moment of delight as you hear the passing hours chimed from the St. Louis Cathedral across Jackson Square and your body will fully understand what your mind in its yearning for constancy will want to deny: things change.

As you sip your coffee and your tongue detects its nuances of flavor, your skin and nose will also sift through the sensory impressions of the air

around you. It will perceive shifting smells, textures and levels of moisture in the atmosphere of this place where the city meets the river. Meanwhile your eyes will discern the fluctuations of the light as the sun glides in and out of the cover of clouds. The solid three dimensions of your moment, as you sit, drink coffee and eat doughnuts at a sidewalk café, slide open and you transcend your concrete place in time. And with the nearby sounds of the hooves of horses drawing carriages, the cars passing to the east and the ships to the west, the boundaries of time dissolve and you are sitting both in Days Gone By and in the World to Come.

What you might not know, as a tourist in the French Quarter of the twenty-first century who is searching for an authentic experience of New Orleans, is that the coffee and doughnuts that you are enjoying are a shadow of another New Orleans. A few blocks up and four decades earlier there was another coffee stand; named Morning Call. New Orleanians drank their coffee and ate their doughnuts there beginning in 1870. Located at the edge of the French Quarter, its clientele sat on the red leather seats of high stools and stared into mahogany-framed mirrors while they drank their coffee at the marble counters to which large silver sugar bowls were chained.

Morning Call was frequented in the dawn's breaking light by people of all ages, those in formal clothes ending a night of celebration, as well as dock

workers dressed to begin a day unloading crates at the port. Its coffee was a little thicker, its doughnuts a little lighter than those served at the cleaner, more tourist-friendly café closer to the Cathedral. And then, in 1971, when the city proposed widening the surrounding streets, limiting street access and parking, Morning Call relocated to a strip mall in suburban Metairie, a part of Jefferson Parish, which more closely resembles Anywhere, U.S.A. Things change.

In 1971, I was outraged at the betrayal of the move. It symbolized to me New Orleans' shift of identity from a multicultural city at the crossroads between the Americas, shaped by the traditions and rituals of its populations of various skin colors, languages, and religion to that of a twentieth century North American City shaped by oil money, greed and the homogenization of culture. I never visited Morning Call again.

But in 2005 I returned to New Orleans a month after Hurricane Katrina to lead Rosh Hashanah services. It was then that I suddenly found my rental car in front of its strip mall location. I decided that thirty-four years and the waters that had broken through the levees had washed away my boycott. Besides, it appeared to be the only cup of coffee in town. Things had changed.

Yearning for something of substance to connect me with the New Orleans that had not washed away, I parked my car and walked past broken branches and piles of debris, through the doors of a commercial establishment in an American strip mall. I crossed the threshold and while the face that looked back at me from the mahogany-framed mirrors was different, the marble counters, red leather-topped stools, chained silver sugar bowls, and the coffee were the same. In the turmoil and transformation that followed Katrina, I was sustained by the continuity in a cup of coffee. Some things don't change.

I am a New Orleans Jew. The values of those identities fuel me like the smooth yet caffeinated drink that is the trademark of my hometown. I embrace their changing communal calendars and their rituals for their observances of joy and tragedy. These have taught me what it means to be human and how to extract eternity from the changing seasons. Through the ritual markers of the calendars of my communities, I have received tools that have instructed me as I have been challenged also to embrace my personal calendar and its flow of heartbreak and delight. It is through an appreciation of the possibility of the sacred eternal that is hidden in every changing moment, like the past and future which hide in a cup of coffee, that I have been able to find peace in the fact of change. It is through ritual that change itself is transformed from destroyer to healer. It is

through ritual that mourning, as we are told in Psalm 30, becomes dancing and that our mourning becomes our call.

Chapter Two:
Mourning into Dancing: *"Il Faut Des Rites"*[1] The Nature of Ritual

הפכת מספדי למחול לי

"You have turned my mourning into dancing." (Ps. 30)

What does it mean to turn mourning into dancing? Embedded in those three words is an entire manual for the process of ritual. It is emblematic of the context that ritual creates to facilitate healing. In mourning the process for confronting loss can be conceived of as a dance, with predictable steps that can be followed.[2] The ancient dance of mourning has been choreographed over the millennia by all of those who have passed through this world.[3] Those who dare to join the dance are given access to the accumulated wisdom of all the generations.

This thesis seeks to explore the purpose of ritual and map the territory that ritual seeks to transform. It takes aim at the understanding of change as a psychological process and posits mourning , a process which encompasses many kinds of loss,[4] as a spiritual journey. It will then create a template that frames grief with Jewish concepts. In charting the

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[1] St. Exupery, Antoine. *The Little Prince.* Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovick, Publishers: London. 1971. p.68.

[2] for a pioneering effort to articulate the steps of mourning for the secular world, see Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth. *On Death and Dying.* Macmillan: New York, 1969.

[3] the early Jewish religious resources which prescribed the unfolding of the mourning experience can be found in: Zlotnick (ed. & trans). *The Tractate: Mourning (Semahot)* Yale University Press, New Haven, 1966. Denburg, C.N. *Code of Hebrew Law, I.* 1964. See also Lamm, M. *Jewish Way in Death and Mourning.* Jonathan David Press: Northvale, N.J. 1969. (interesting to note that Kubler-Ross and Lamm published their books in the same year.

[4] *Semachot.* (see ff. 3 above) as well as elsewhere.

geography of change, I will choose significant Hebrew words to re-name the regions to which Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and others[6] have previously given psychological designations. By explicating this creative spiritual cartography and its Hebrew appellations, I hope to articulate a path to healing with a uniquely Jewish frame. I hope that this Jewish template will also have universal application, as has been the case with my previous work in *Mourning and Mitzvah: Walking the Mourners' Path through Grief to Healing* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1993 & 2001). It is my goal that this endeavor will contribute to the effort of depathologizing the grief process, while helping to shift the paradigm for viewing grief from the therapeutic to the spiritual. Undergirding my work is the assumption that life-cycle challenges and the mourning process that they elicit are normal. I believe that the response to situations that are fundamental to human experience should not be viewed as aberrant behavior but should be held and nurtured in community. I also hope that those who mourn with this map in hand will be guided to a more profound understanding of the human condition and will come to view mourning as a spiritual process and with a deeper sense of Judaism as a spiritual path. I hope they will turn their mourning into dancing.

For help in achieving these goals, I will turn to both ancient and contemporary sources. I will also draw both upon my own professional

[6] Worden, J. William. *Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy. A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner.* Springer Publishing Company: New York. 1991.et. al.

experience with others facing profound change and my personal experience with grief. I will engage Biblical role models. The transformation of Jacob's name to Israel will be especially important, as will the story told in the Book of Job and the words of Psalms and the Song of Songs. I will turn to rabbinic sources, including several Tractates of Talmud and *Deuteronomy Rabba's* Midrash on Chapter 2 from *Parshat Vaethchanan*. Some Chassidic and mystical sources will also shed light on the process of transformation, as will the insights of contemporary ritual theory and the writing of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. My own reflections will also be evident as I strive to articulate a model for transforming mourning into dancing that asserts grief as a spiritual process, through which individuals catalyze a renewed understanding of their relationship with God.

Mourning as a Dance

The phrase from Psalms, "Mourning into Dancing," intimates a vision of transformation that can be misleading. Taken literally, the pledge of "mourning into dancing" promises the substitution of joy for pain. In the agony of grief this may be what is yearned for: an immediate salve for wounds-- fast relief--instant and sudden transformation. However, seeing "mourning" and "dancing" as still photographs- one of contracted grief and the other of expansive celebration- encourages those who suffer to hold

their breath and ask, with great impatience, "How quickly can I replace the first image of myself with the second?"

Not so fast. "Mourning into dancing" is a deceptive phrase, requiring deeper exploration. Seeing mourning or dancing as frozen postures is a one-dimensional reading of both of these words. In this superficial understanding it can promote a cruel and false hope of instant healing. This may deny mourners the opportunity for the deeper self-examination for which mourning calls and deny them access to the meaningful healing and transformation which will allow them to come to peace with the severe decree.

The literal reading of the phrase, "Mourning into Dancing" conceives of mourning in static terms, perhaps because Western Culture is afraid of the dark. Theologian Matthew Fox tells us of the culture's need not for the enlightenment, which so many seek, but for "endarkment."[6] He supports the search for the patinaed[7] wisdom that comes from lingering in the darkness and experiencing what of value might be found there. [8] But in Western culture loss and its terrifying spaces of yearning, depression, anger, and anxiety are often met with the belief that any one of them will

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[6] Mathew Fox as quoted by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Schalomi in a lecture at Elat Chayyim Retreat Center, summer 1996.

[7] Patina- "1. a fine crust or film on bronze or copper, usually green or greenish-blue, formed by natural oxidation and often valued as being ornamental; 2. any thin coating or color change resulting from age, as on old wood or silver" Agnes, Michael, (ed.). *Webster's New World College Dictionary Fourth Edition.* Macmillan USA: Cleveland, 1999. p. 1056.

[8] see note six above.

engulf the mourner, swallowing him or her up forever. Grief is understood as a kind of disease. It is to be avoided.

It's hard not to think of mourning in terms of this horror. As has been frequently discussed,[9] Western culture, frozen in its denial of death and wedded to its rejection of darkness,[10] provides very little that prepares those who confront change to see the universe of loss as having more than one dimension. As Ernest Becker, in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, *The Denial of Death*, [11] tells us,

> ...the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity-activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man.[12]

Or as political commentator Melinda Henneberger said of American culture:

> we Americans are an optimistic bunch -- or like to think of ourselves as such, anyway. But real optimism, real faith, is the opposite of a Hallmark-card denial of death and other inconvenient facts of life. It's the opposite of play dumb, keep moving, and for God's sake keep the body bags off camera.[13]

The attitude of which Henneberger speaks permits human beings the charade of denial and robs them of the opportunity to contemplate the

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[9] Becker, Ernest. *The Denial of Death.* The Free Press: New York. 1973. p. ix.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Henneberger, Melinda. *Elizabeth Edwards' Unflinching Acknowledgment of Mortality.* The Huffington Post. www.huffingtonpost.com/melinda-henneberger/elizabeth-edwards-unflin_b_44452.html. March 29, 2007.

reality of human finitude and its face of "the final [human] destiny."[14] It short-changes them by further denying them the very thing they seek. For while the phrase "mourning into dancing" actually falls short in its promise of fast and superficial relief, it, in fact, makes a much richer promise. It can transform not only the understanding of suffering and loss, but also of the dance of life. In contemplating the phrase, "mourning into dancing," I hope to advance the enriching possibilities that are presented when we linger to explore the dark wilderness, mindful of the words of the morning liturgy, which reminds us that both dark and light were created by God.

יוצר אור ובורא חשך עשה שלום ובורא את-הכל
Creator of light and Creator of darkness
Maker of Peace and Creator of all.[15]

To return to the line of the psalm: Mourning, as a dance itself, is a life affirming process that ironically can end up delivering in the long run what is sought in the short run. For by performing the dance of mourning -- giving full expression to each of the steps-- it is possible to discover a new exuberance for celebrating life.[16] It is possible to come to terms with what it means to be human or, as poetically described by, Adrienne Rich, "to remember your name." [17] (For a fuller treatment of this concept as

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[14] Becker. *op.cit.* p. ix.
[15] This phrase is from the prayer, *Yotzer Or*, in the morning liturgy. This is one of the first three blessings that surround the *Shema* and the *V'ahavta*. It is concerned with the idea that all things, both light and dark, hence good and bad, ultimately come from God.
[16] Kubler-Ross et. al.
[17] Gelpi, B.C. and A. (ed). *Adrienne Rich's Poetry*. W.W. Norton, Inc: New York, 1975. p. 21.

described in the poem, *Prospective Immigrants Please Note* see page 31 below.)

The phrase "mourning into dancing" suggests a process: something in flux- something that changes. In fact, the most important word in the phrase may not be the obvious ones that describe the starting point or the destination. It may be, "into," that little word in the middle, the shortest one- that is seldom capitalized, but holds the key to our understanding of healing. "Into" connects the mourning and the dancing and denotes the path on which transformation takes place. The word "into" is itself a dance- a small dance which leads over time to the big dance: the energetic rearrangement of the mourner's view of the universe, which allows him or her to replace the contracted pain of loss, with energetic and hopeful movement into the future .

But that is the English rendition of the phrase. Let's explore the phrase in its original Hebrew הפכת מספדי למחול לי describes the process with the word, הפך, implying a more revolutionary transformation, a process or ritual for turning things around. This Hebrew word, הפך , rendered in English as "turned into," literally means "to transform" or "to overturn." [18] This short Hebrew phrase describes the mourner's transformative journey from what kabbalists call *Mochin de Katnut* – the contracted mind of narrow vision, to

[18] Brown, Francis, Driver, S.R., and Briggs, C. A. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* . (BDB) Clarendon Press: Oxford 1981. p. 246-248.

Mochin de Gadlut- the expanded mind, which is capable of seeing a much bigger picture.[19] This journey is the journey of healing. When one is in the state of *katnut*, one is likely to view the challenge that is faced from the narrow perspective of his or her own experience. This makes sense. When life appears to kick a person in the stomach, the immediate response would be to put hands on ones belly and wonder, "why me?" But despite the uniqueness of each individual existential confrontation, that challenge is also a face of the human condition. In the state of *gadlut*, the narcissistic world-view of the one who suffers is loosened. He or she may feel a connection with others who have been similarly challenged. He or she may view the experience through a broader lens, one that is tinted with a perspective that takes into account all of humanity. The mourners' dance becomes a shared experience.

As stated above, "Mourning into Dancing" also suggests a pictorial definition of ritual. It describes the way in which ritual provides a process for transforming experience. Perhaps there is proof that this phrase is about ritual in the Hebrew, which uses the word, מחול, for "dance," as opposed to the word, "ריקוד" or any of the many other words that appear in

[19] The Ascent-of-Safed Dictionary of Terms defines these terms as follows: *Mochin d'gadlut Mochin d'katnut*(Aramaic) mature and immature intellect or mindsets, respectively. *Mochin d'gadlut* is a state of expanded intellectual understanding or maturity. *Mochin d'katnut* is state of restricted or immature intellectual understanding – the higher intellectual faculties, *chochma* and *bina*, are immature or inactive. *Mochin d'katnut* is restrictive and pedantic, exhibiting primarily *middat hadin* (austerity tending towards severity)... *Mochin d'gadlut*, on the other hand, is a state of intellect in which the higher intellectual faculties, *chochma* and *bina* are mature and active. *Mochin d'gadlut* is magnanimous and tolerant, exhibiting primarily *middat harachamim* (compassion). Ascent-of-Safed. "Dictionary of Terms," Ascent of Safed, http://www.kabbalaonline.org/staticpages/glossary.asp#.

the Bible and are translated as "dance" in English. רִיקוּד is more of a recreational dance, while מחול is associated with ritual. "מחול */machol*," contrasts with the image conjured by the English rendering of "dance." *Makhol* is specifically used for dances performed in a circle.[20] It is the word used to describe the dance of celebration performed on the dry ground as the Israelites marched through the Sea of Reeds:

> Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went after her in dance with timbrels (Ex. 15:20)

Often associated with praising God, these dances were ritual dances, performed in community, often by groups of women.[21] *Machol's* Hebrew root emphasizes the circularity of the dance by connecting it to words such as "writhing" or "twisting" as in the circular motions made by women giving birth.[22] This window on what in English is simply "dancing" is appropriate to describe the kind, often painful ritual journey toward re-birth that is required when we mourn.

The Meaning of Ritual

As Imber-Black and Roberts say in *Rituals for Our Times: Celebrating, Healing and Changing our Lives and Our Relationships*, rituals frame experiences, showing that a difficult and seemingly solitary experience is really universal. They transmit the accumulated wisdom of the

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[20] *BDB* p. 296-297. Also see Fishbane, Michael. *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology.* Harvard University Press. Cambridge, 1998. *pp.* 175-176.
[21] *Ibid.* See also *BDB* 296-297.
[22] *BDB.* p. 296-297.

generations and enable individuals to feel less alone and unique in the midst of challenging experiences. This is similar to the relationship between *mochin de katnut* and *mochin de gadlut* as mentioned above. Rituals set personal experiences in the midst of community. That community can include representatives from the past, present and future, who are present in the flesh or in the imagination. Rituals provide a safe holding place to focus and to contain the deep feelings that accompany turning points.[23] Rituals provide a map.[24]

It is crucial to secure safe passages at moments of change. Ancient and traditional cultures believe that evil demons lie in wait at moments of change.[26] This notions suggests a concretization of the vulnerability felt when facing turning points. It enables individuals to confront actively the demons of the psyche that plague humans when confronting loss and transition. The rituals designed to placate the demons of change are tools of healing, promoting the awareness that change is part of life.[26] This understanding can empower individuals who feel powerless over the great forces of life and death.

In a society which denies death--both the "little deaths," which Stanley Keleman says await us and mark turning points, large and small,

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[23] Iber-Baker. *op.cit. pp.* 1-8.
[24] *Ibid.. passim.*
[25] Ronald Grimes *Deeply into the Bone. pp.* 5-6.
[26] Bell, Catherine M. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice.* Oxford Press: New York. 1992. *p.* x.

throughout our lives and "Death" that comes at the end--the implication is that change is abnormal.[27] Feeling unique in their suffering, individuals in transition may be unable to cope. They feel alienated from others and from the sources of their own healing.

How Ritual Helps

Healing comes through connection-- connection to the self, to another human being, and to the universals of human experience. This connection can help the individual to transcend the isolation of his or her current anguish (*mochin de'katnut*) and to feel part of something larger than the self (*mochin de'gadlut*). Rituals provide tools for making these connections. They may be millennia-old practices, which address specific life issues, such as the rites of passage for universal experiences such as funerals and weddings. Or they may be rituals created spontaneously to mark a unique experience. Either way, rituals help people in transition to connect with an individual's deepest experiences while creating a context for connecting to others who have participated in these rituals in the past when they faced similar turning points. They "braid continuity and change," in the words of Imber-Black and Roberts.[28]

Through repetition, rituals encode the process of change, creating metaphors which further enrich lives by approaching change with the

[27] Keleman, Stanley. *Living Your Dying.* Random House: Toronto, 1974. p. 25.
[28] Imber-Black & Roberts, *op. cit. p.*12.

creativity (the dance) that comes from simultaneous participation at the symbolic and literal level of experience. This serves as a mechanism for integrating past and present as well as personal and collective experiences.[29]

According to Catherine Bell ritual is "a window on the cultural dynamics by which people make and remake their worlds."[30] Jacob Neusner pronounces ritual acts as the way in which

> religion reaches each of us...through words (I would say through so much more than words) [his words]and of them makes worlds, realms of enchantment, of transcendence.[31]

Spirituality can be seen as a universal experience wherein one has a numinous experience of what Rudolph Otto called the *mysterium tremendum*.[32] Religion is born of the effort to replicate, articulate, share, or transmit that experience. Ritual or rite is the language that religion uses to manifest that effort.

Furthermore as Neusner says:

> Judaism takes everyday and ordinary experiences and transforms them through prayer and rite- and, with them, ourselves as Jews- into metaphors for the sacred: an enchantment through rite, [33]

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[29] Geertz, Clifford as quoted in Bell. p. 164 ff. 63.
[30] Bell. *op.cit. p.* 3.
[31] Neusner, Jacob. *The Enchantments of Judaism: Rites of Transformation from Birth through Death.* Basic Books: New York. 1987. p. 3.
[32] Otto, Rudolph. *The Idea of the Holy.* Trans. John W. Harvey. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1923; 2nd ed., 1950.
[33] Neusner, *op. cit.* p. ix.

Catherine Bell also sees ritual as a tool for integration, which gives substance to conceptualization:

> ...ritual is to the symbols it dramatizes as action is to thought; on a second level, ritual integrates thought and action; and on a third level , a focus on ritual performances integrates our thought and their actions.[34]

Rituals are essential, as Ronald Grimes warns in *Deeply into the Bone* :

> Passages can be negotiated without the benefit of rites, but in their absence, there is a greater risk of speeding through the dangerous intersection of the human life course. Having skipped over a major passage without being devastated by a major upset, we may prematurely congratulate ourselves in passing through unscathed. In the long haul, however, people often regret their failure to contemplate a birth, celebrate a marriage, mark the arrival of maturity, or enter into the throes of death. The primary work of a rite of passage is to ensure that we attend to such events fully, which is to say, spiritually, psychologically and socially. Unattended, a major life passage can become a yawning abyss, draining off psychic energy, engendering social confusion and twisting the course of the life that follows it. Unattended passages become spiritual sinkholes around which hungry ghosts, those greedy personifications of unfinished business, hover.[35]

It is through ritual that turning points are marked and tools are provided for taming the demons that greet us when we face the unknown. In the chapters that follow, I hope to map the liminal space through which ritual guides those who face profound change.

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[34] Bell. *op. cit.* p. 32.

[35] Ronald Grimes *op. cit.* pp. 5-6.

Chapter Three:
Marking Turning Points: Mezuzahs for Liminality

Jewish ritual and practice is concerned with bringing holiness to moments of change. Jews believe in marking turning points. Traditionally, we pray three times a day, at the onset of morning, afternoon and evening. We have rituals for the significant lifecycle events, which mark important moments in individual and communal life. We celebrate each new month with special songs, prayers, and practices.

Every time a Jew passes through a doorway, he or she is instructed to stop, raise a hand, and plant a kiss on the mezuzah that hangs on the doorpost. (Ex. 12:7, Deut. 6:9, Deut. 11:20.) This pious pause is a reminder that every coming and going is a moment of awe. It teaches that a wise person stops to mark such moments, reflecting on the transition and reaching up to connect with what is holy before stepping into the unknown. In Judaism the prayer for reaching up to acknowledge the holiness of transitions is the *Kaddish*, found at the end of sections of the prayer service as well as at the moments of remembering the dead. Jewish mourning rituals provide carefully articulated rites, which facilitate the changing needs of mourners as they pass through the challenges of grief.[36] Jewish legal literature addresses the evolution of the experience of loss as it pertains to the death

[36] see ff. 3 above.

of human beings.[37] It also gives attention to changing categories of experience pertaining to lost objects.[38] In the Talmud there is extensive discussion on the topic of אוש-*ye'ush*, which literally means "despair" and describes the despair an owner might have when realizing that a missing article, that has been lost or stolen, is gone forever. אוש-*ye'ush* is experienced at the moment that the owner gives up hope of recovering that object.[39]

In ritualizing the process of loss, Jewish tradition reverences moments of profound change. This is true whether they are what, as referenced above, Psychotherapist Stanley Keleman calls the "big deaths," which come at the end of ones life or of the lives of those that he or she will need to mourn, or the "little deaths" which are all the other turning points that humans face. As Keleman says in *Living Your Dying*:

> We are always dying a bit, always giving things up, always having things taken away . . .. Life can be described as a migration through many formative loops, many little dyings. Growth, change and maturing occur by deforming the old and forming the new . . .. There are no turning points that are not accompanied by feelings of dying. Each person handles them uniquely. Turning points evoke expressions of anger, pain, excitement, loss, sacrifice, grief and others.[40]

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[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Babylonian Talmud. Baba Metziah.* 21b-23b.

[39] Steinsaltz, Adin. *The Talmud: The Steinsaltz Edition: A Reference Guide.* Random House: New York. 1989. p. 198.

[40] Keleman, Stanley. *Living Your Dying.* p. 25.

Rites of Passage

In his 1909 book, *Rite de Passage*, Arnold van Gennep gave a name to the stage which Jewish ritual honors with each of these practices: Liminality.[41] Van Gennep defined *rites de passage* as "rites, which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age.[42] He made known the three phases, which mark all rites of passage or transitions: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation.[43]

This work seeks to focus on a construction of the process of change as it relates to the significant "big and little deaths" faced by the individual. The present concern is with van Gennep's three phases, which will be elaborated in the chapters to come. The work will also draw upon the amplification of these stages in Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process* and other works.[44] Most influential in this effort will be Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' work with dying patients in *On Death and Dying*[45] and elsewhere. Her efforts, in *On Death and Dying*, to map the process of human change, as individuals faced their own deaths, will provide significant background to the work at hand.

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[41] van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. Translated by Monika B. Vizedom, University of Chicago Press: Chicago. 1960.
[42] Van Geneep, as quoted in Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Aldine de Gruyter: New York.1969. P.94.
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] Turner. *Ibid.*
[45] Kubler-Ross, Elizabeth. *op.cit.*

The technical understandings which categorize the process of change, as defined by van Gennep, Victor Turner, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and others, will under gird this work's understanding of the profound transitions that are essential markers of the life cycle and provide the fertile ground for coming to terms with the human condition and for finding holiness. However familiarity with van Gennep's understanding of the process of change is most useful at this point.

In van Gennep's first phase (separation) an individual or group is detached "from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions, or from both."[46] Here mundane life is left behind, as the affected party (ies) begins the journey into the unknown.[47] The second state is the "liminal" period. During this period "he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state."[48] Here, in "limbo space and time,"[49] the work of transformation takes place. Finally, in phase three, re-aggregation or reincorporation happens and, according to Victor Turner, "the passage is consummated...[and] the ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a

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[46] Turner, *op.cit.* p94.
[47] Turner, Victor in Meyerhof Barbara (editor). "Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox.' *Celebration: Studies in Festivity, 109-135.* Smithsonian: Washington, D.C. 1982. p. 208.
[48] Turner. *The Ritual Process.* p. 94.
[49] Turner, Victor. "Liminality, Kabbalah, and the Media.," (*LKM) Religion.* Academic Press Inc.: London, 1985. p. 208.

relatively stable state once more."[50] The ritual traveler(s) are "moved from liminality back into quotidian reality."[51]

Turner states that all three stages of the ritual process described by van Gennep "can be seen as liminal."[52] He describes liminality as an ambiguous state,[53] clearly "betwixt and between" as it is described in his titular article in an anthology of the same name.[54] Turner says:

> ...liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.[55]

It is exactly this wilderness of liminality that this work seeks to map, to the extent that it is possible to map that which, by definition, must remain without fixed form.

According to Turner:

> ...the liminal moment,...exists when all hangs in the balance, when change might be possible, the perilous moment when social structure momentarily has to loose its grip, in order that change, even within its systematic boundaries *has to be* effected. For liminality...means crossing an abyss.[56]

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[50] Turner. *The Ritual Process.* p. 96.
[51] Turner *LKM* p. 208.
[52] *Ibid.* p. 209.
[53] Turner. *The Ritual Process.* p. 96.
[54] Turner, Victor. "Betwixt & Between" in Mahdi, Louise Carus, Foster, Steven, & Meredith Little. *Betwixt & Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation* (eds.). Open Court: La Salle, Illinois, 1989.
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] Turner. *LKM*. p. 207.

and often can only be exited when accompanied, by some ritual of "purification from the otherwise polluting sacredness and potency of liminality."[57]

As indicated earlier, this work will give Hebrew names to each of these phrases of liminality and will further elaborate on them as they were described in the work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. Of particular concern will be the second or liminal phase. Appropriate to the Jewish practice of kissing the *mezuzah* on the doorpost, the word "limen" is Latin for "threshold," a space that divides two spaces[58] or, as Victor Turner states, two periods of time.[59]

Turner compares the liminal experience of ritual and its creation of "inner space, a period 'in and out of time'"[60] with Rabbi Isaac Luria's Kabbalistic concept of *Tzimtzum*, a word which Turner and others translate as "contraction or concentration."[61] Turner quotes Gershom Sholem as saying that "the existence of the universe is made possible by a process of

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[57] *Ibid.* p. 208.
[58] *Ibid.*
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] *Ibid.* p. 209.
[61] A more precise definition of *tzimtzum* from the Ascent-of-Safed. "Dictionary of Terms," "the self-contraction or self-limitation of the Infinite Light, thereby allowing finite worlds to be created and to exist. Prior to Creation, there was only the infinite revelation of God – the Infinite Light – filling all existence. Within this infinite revelation, finite worlds and beings could not possibly exist. When it arose in God's Will to create the worlds and all their inhabitants, He contracted and concealed the Infinite Light, creating a "void" in which finite existence can endure. Ascent-of-Safed. "Dictionary of Terms," Ascent of Safed, http://www.kabbalaonline.org/staticpages/glossary.asp#T.

shrinkage in God."[62] As understood by Turner, this "movement of recoil"[63] gave rise to an ambiguous state in which God, while "nevertheless containing the whole of creation"[64] created a liminal space,

> a space and time left empty, within which creative activities *may* or *might* take place." [It is for]Luria... not abandoned to chaos or negativity- it is refilled...from the essence of the social.[65]

In my earlier work[66], I have posited three stages of grief, also based on the creation myth of Lurianic Kabbala,[67]which closely relates to all three of Gennep's passages. Corresponding to van Gennep's separation phase is the stage of:

> *Tzimtzum* or Contraction... Recognizing that human creation is overwhelmed and blinded by the brightness of the Divine Light, the Divine Energy withdraws. This creates a darkness in which an as yet unknown creative human process can emerge. Mourning also begins with a contraction. It leaves one in a darkness whose value may seem unfathomable.[68]

Van Geneep's second, or liminal phase would correspond to:

> The second phase of the Lurianic creation process, *Shevirat HaKelim* (The Breaking of Vessels). Here the vessels from which the Divine Energy has withdrawn break apart, shattering the world and hiding its holiness. In this phase [one] confront[s] the broken and uncontained feelings of mourning and face[es] the most intense grief-work.[69]

The re-aggregation stage is similar to the *Tikkun* or healing phase.

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[62] *Ibid.* p. 209. (citing Gershom Sholem).
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.* p. 210.
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] Brener, Anne. *Mourning & Mitzvah: a Guided Journal for Walking the Mourner's Path through Grief to Healing.* Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, Vt. 1993.
[67] *Ibid.* p.12
[68] Ibid.
[69] *Ibid.* p. 107.

> The final phase of the creation process, as seen by the Jewish mystics, is *Tikkun* or healing. Here the holy sparks, which were inaccessible during earlier phases, are redeemed, reorganization takes place, and damage is restored...[vessels] are created to transform..loss into a living memorial and address...ongoing healing process.[70]

Liminality as Stigma

The work of Mary Douglas, particularly her work in *Purity and Danger*[71] is relevant to our exploration of these murky middle passages. She observes that "...ambiguous things can seem very threatening" and that :

> ...that which cannot be clearly defined in terms of traditional criteria of classification, or falls between classificatory boundaries, is almost everywhere regarded as "polluting" and "dangerous."[72]

In her essay, *Those Who Turn Away,* Rachel Adler posits a comparison between *tzara'at* , a scaly skin affliction described in the Bible, and dementia, both of which, she asserts, are feared and stigmatized. Building on Douglas' work, Adler says:

> ... all cultures organize reality into categories. Disorders or anomalies disrupt the way we have systematized reality, the way we have organized the world so it will make sense... Safety is ensured by not crossing any dangerous boundaries and thereby falling out of place and into chaos... People who cross the boundaries or seem to be teetering on their edges remind us of the fragility, the vulnerability of both society and self...[73]

According to Adler, mourners can fit into this category:

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[70] *Ibid.* p.173.
[71] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger.* Routledge: London. 1966.
[72] *Ibid.* p. xi.
[73] Adler, Rachel in Cutter, William (ed.). *Healing and the Jewish Imagination. Spiritual and Practical Perspectives on Judaism and Health.* Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, Vermont. 2007. p. 14.

> People who are [in] liminal or marginal [states] ...also embody this anxiety-provoking place on the edge of the dangerous and the chaotic. This is where "normal" society puts those it stigmatizes as non-normal such as people of color, the poor, and the aged. At times of social stress, those who represent the norm are greatly tempted to relieve their terrors by casting out or punishing these dangerous Others.[74]

This sense of "otherness" and stigma extends to those who struggle with loss, whether through death, illness or the losses brought by other categories of change, who, to reiterate Adler's important words, "seem to be teetering on their edges remind [ing]us of the fragility, the vulnerability of both society and self..." [75] As I have said elsewhere in a reflection influenced by Adler's earlier work:[76]

> In Judaism, those who have come into contact with the most awesome of life's experiences are given rituals, which affirm the sense of strangeness they might feel. These rituals help transform them so that they can once again comfortably walk in the mainstream. Those who have stood at the juncture where life and death almost touch are considered to be *tamai*. Among those is the person who has come into contact with a dead body. A menstruating woman is also in this state and is forbidden physical contact with her husband until she immerses herself in the ritual waters of the *mikvah* (ritual pool), following her menstrual period. Unfortunately, the term *tamai*, has been translated, not by its description of the altered path we take when confronting profound experiences, but as "impure." Given our society's attitude toward profound truths, this pejorative term is not surprising.
>
> While technically mourners are not considered *tamai*, their proximity to death and the response of society to them leaves them feeling "impure" and ashamed of their appropriate response to life's most awesome truths. When we accompany someone to death's gate, we come face-to-face with the very limits of human existence. Death is part

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[74] *Ibid.*

[75] *Ibid.* p.5-7. (this is from the original manuscript of the article and was not found in the published version).

[76] Adler, Rachel in Siegel, Richard, Michael Strassfeld, and Sharon Strassfeld. The Jewish Catalog, Volume I. Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia. 1973. pp. 167-172.

> of being human, but its total mystery invokes awe in us and draws us closer to the unfathomable mystery of being human.
>
> When the Temple stood, those in a state of *tumah* immersed themselves in a *mikvah* and were sprinkled with the "water of lustration," a mixture composed of the ashes of an unblemished red heifer that had been ritually slaughtered and burned on the altar of the Temple mixed with water and the ashes of herbs and branches. Today, upon leaving the cemetery after a burial or upon entering a house of *shiva*, mourners and their comforters ritually wash their hands to cleanse themselves of *tumah*.[77]

Adler sees a similarity in status between the corpse and the mourner. And indeed, both are "*Tameh*."

> The mourner is akin to the corpse as a pollutant because the mourner has corpse-impurity second in intensity only to that of the corpse itself. In rabbinic law, especially in the early stages of mourning, the mourner could be said to mirror the corpse, identifying with it as if loath to relinquish the relationship. The ascetic behaviors practiced by mourners or fasting penitents: not working, not wearing shoes, not bathing or anointing, not having sexual intercourse, may be viewed as imitations of the dead. In this connection, many commentators have pointed to the ascetic practices of Yom Kippur as a mimesis of death. Moreover, like the [male] corpse, the [male] mourner does not pray or study; He is in these respects asocial, isolated, exempt from the activities that distinguish the rabbinic male as a social being.[78]

Certainly this description of the stigma experienced by those on the margins applies to those whose sense of liminality is the result of loss. Ernest Becker describes a culture in which the natural processes of change and transformation are hidden.[79] This invisibility of what is real robs individuals in the society of the necessary tools for navigating the wilderness they must enter when their world is shattered by death. This is

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[77] Brener. *op.cit.* pp.131-132.
[78] Adler, Rachel in Cutter, William (ed.). *op. cit.* p.153.
[79] Becker. *op.cit. passim.*

true whether the challenge of transformation that the individual is facing is the result of Keleman's "big or "little" deaths.[80]

The Mourners' Path

While the experiences that are common in the various encounters with loss observed by Keleman, were also known in the days when the Temple stood in ancient Jerusalem, there is some ambiguity about whether or not the mourners were stigmatized. The Talmud reports that those in the midst of liminal experience entered through a separate gate and walked along a specified path, but their separation granted them a special status in the community, for as they walked the path, they were greeted and blessed by others in the community. As it says in *Semachot*, a minor Tractate of the Talmud:

> a mourner who enters the Temple Mount...may enter and walk around to the left....They would then say to him, "May [the One] who dwells in this House comfort you".... Who are they who circle to the left? A mourner, an excommunicant, one who has someone sick at home, and one concerned about a lost object. (Semakhot 6:11) [81]

The ritualized participation of the mourner in the Temple's procession, both validated his or her "otherness" and prepared him or her for re-entry into the community with a new status, while perhaps protecting the mourner as well as the community from the danger that, according to Douglas, "lies in transitional states

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[80] See Keleman above.

[81] Zlotnick (ed. & trans). *The Tractate: Mourning (Semakhot)* Yale University Press, New Haven, 1966. *Semakhot* 6:11.

> ... simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates a danger to others.[82]

Such acts as "walk [ing]... to the left"[83] also protected the mourner and the community from the danger that, Douglas says:

> ...is controlled by ritual, which precisely separates him [the mourner] from his old status, segregates him for a time and then publicly declares his entry to his new status.[84]

The visibility also provided comfort to those struggling with loss and facing both "big" and "little" deaths, as they were blessed ("May [the One] who dwells in this House comfort you") by those who met them face-to-face. In addition the visibility brought other community members face-to-face with the fact of loss, making it impossible to sustain the denial and thus the stigmatization that plagues contemporary culture, according to Becker, Keleman, and others. As Keleman states, "We are victims of shallow, distorted attitudes toward dying, which we conceive as tragic."[85] Like Becker, Keleman warns that we must transform our attitudes toward death and dying in order to meet life fully. This conforms to Rabbi Zalman Shachter-Shalomi's understanding of the danger of our attitudes toward death. He says:

> we must free the energies bound up in the denial of death. Energies that are tied up in censoring, suppressing, and silencing every and all evidence of our mortality....editing out the signals of our mortality...[and] lead.. to depression.[86]

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[82] Douglas. *op.cit.* pp. 112-120.
[83] Zlotick. *ibid.*
[84] Douglas. *ibid.*
[85] Keleman. *op. cit.* p. 90.
[86] Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman. *Ageing to Sagesing.* Warner Books: New York. 1996. p.82.

Rather, Schachter-Shalomi advises on the necessity of "accept [ing] the reality of our death." He predicts that this acceptance will "paradoxically free us and lighten our burden."[87]

The challenges posed by Schachter-Shalomi's assertion are highlighted by Turner who asks "where is liminality today?"[88] as he observes that "only the observant in churches, sects, cults, and religious movements have well articulated ritual liminality" and that our culture has ceded this experience of the profound to the realm of art and performance.[89] He describes what he calls the "liminoid genres" as being "removed from a *rite de passage* context."[90]

My goal in this work is to lighten some of the burden of those confronting loss by naming and thereby making visible some of the steps through the liminal land of loss. My question is akin to that of Rachel Adler as she asks, "how might we bring ourselves to reject the powerful call of pollution thinking and stretch out a hand to sufferers?"[91] Similarly this work seeks to rise above the attitudes that deny death and render those facing profound change invisible in this culture to create a path which will help to alleviate their suffering. This work seeks to rescue those facing significant

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[87] *Ibid.*
[88] Turner. *LKM.* p. 212.
[89] *Ibid.* p.90.
[90] *Ibid.*
[91] Adler in Cutter. *op.cit.* p. 143.

life changes from the perception that their experience is one of pollution and elevate the essential passages into holy spaces for coming to terms with what it means to be human. In so doing, it calls for a de-pathologization of the understanding of grief, in an effort to shift our cultural predilection for avoiding the deep questions of what it means to be human on a planet where people die.

This work also hopes to posit the liminal experience into the realm of the sacred, where it will be met with the gravitas necessary to transformation. Mary Douglas agues that "Taboo confronts the ambiguous and shunts [it] into the category of the sacred."[92] We are told that, "Religions often sacralize the very unclean things that have been rejected with abhorrence."[93] That the ambiguous state faced by those in profound transition is sacred is the understanding that pervades this work.

My work argues that these passages are holy and deserve to be named as such. This echoes Turner's comparison of the liminal experience of ritual with Rabbi Isaac Luria's kabbalistic concept of *Tzimtzum*, as discussed above.[94] Turner states that the liminal space created by the holy contraction is refilled by the essence of human experience.[95] I believe this implies that this space is refilled from the essence of God (who, as Turner

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[92] Douglas. *op.cit.* p. xi.
[93] *Ibid.*
[94] Turner. See ff. 50 above.
[95] *Ibid.*

time when "the veils between the worlds are the flimsiest."[109] The fragile covering of the *Sukkah*, woven with fronds and branches and decorated with hanging fruits and vegetables has been likened to a wedding canopy, a *chuppah*. It is said that it is under the *chuppah* of the *Sukkah* that the *Shekhinah*, (God's presence that dwells on earth) and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, (The Holy One of Blessing, who dwells in the highest places) meet to celebrate their union.[110]

That this time of ultimate vulnerability, when Jews live in fragile temporary dwellings is also the "*zman simchateinu*" "the time of our joy" and of the greatest potential for the meeting of heaven and earth, is a profound paradox. It underscores the power and value of embracing liminality. The very name chosen for the ancient tribes that made this journey through the desert, Hebrew, עברי, signifies this ambiguous understanding. For the meaning of words with this root, עבר, have to do with passing or crossing over, passing through, and emigrating.[111] Based on this contemporary author, Gershon Winkler and others assert that the meaning of the word , עברי, is "boundary crossers" and that has significance for the status of the Hebrew people[112], suggesting that these tribes were continually in transition i.e. continually dwelling in temporary

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[109] *Ibid.*
[110] *Ibid.*
[111] BDB. *op. cit.* p. 716-720.
[112] Winkler, Gershon. ***The Way of the Boundary Crosser: An Introduction to Jewish Flexidoxy.*** Jason Aronson: Northvale, N.J. 2005.

shelters. This permanent impermanence is a fact of what it means, not just to be a Jew, but to be human.

To return to the Corn Dance: Let us ponder the significance of the Native American community members filing in and reverentially greeting their elders to pay respect before assuming their role in the dance-ritual. Residents of the world described by Becker et. al. as described above, should take note, living, as they do, in a culture that worships youth and devalues age. What does it mean to live in a culture whose festivals begin by acknowledging the elders of the community? What do elders know that is worthy of respect?

The answer lies in the permanent impermanence, described above. The Corn Dance begins with the procession of respectful visitors followed by dancers who enact the ebb and flow of the seasons. Their dance enacts "Mourning into Dancing," as well as the secret of the ancient *Ivrim* and the wisdom of the elders: We live in the Sukkah. Each of the places we dwell, whether it is a physical, emotional or spiritual tent, is a temporary and fragile dwelling.

Things change. And the Festival of Sukkot, with its directives for celebrating impermanence provides powerful images for facilitating change. Subsequent chapters will explore the stages of change as

temporary dwelling places, sukkot, in which those who grieve will encounter opportunities for growth, on the path to becoming a spiritual elder.

Spiritual Elders

What is an elder? "[Elders] are wisdom-keepers who have an ongoing responsibility for maintaining society's well-being ,"[113] says Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi, in his book *Aging into Saging*. According to Schacter-Shalomi:

> Throughout most of history, elders occupied honored roles in society as sages and seers, leaders and judges, guardians of the tradition, and instructors of the young. They were revered as gurus, shamans, wise old men, and women who helped guide the social order and who initiated spiritual seekers into the mysteries of inner space. Beginning with the Industrial Revolution, with its emphasis on technological knowledge that often was beyond their ken; elders lost their esteemed place in society and fell into the disempowered state that we now ascribe to a "normal"old age.[114]

While contemporary Western mores may influence current practice, Jewish values are clear regarding attitudes toward elders. The Torah teaches the mitzvah of *hidur p'nei zakein* (respect for the elders), saying in Leviticus "Rise before the aged and show respect and dignity to the elderly." (Lev. 19:32) Israeli buses post this Biblical phrase as a way of

[113] Schachter. *op.cit.* p.12.
[114] *Ibid.* p. 6.

suggesting that people give up their seat for an elderly person.[115] The Talmud is clear:

> Rabbi Y'hudah says: Be careful to respect an old man who has forgotten his knowledge through no fault of his own, for it was said: both the whole tablets and the fragments of the tablets were placed in the Ark. (*B. T. B'rachot* 8b)

To be an elder is to have been initiated into the understanding of the constancy of change. To be an elder one must come to terms with the nature of life in the *Sukkah:* We say hello. We say good-bye. And in the meantime, we do our best to stay present and to touch what is holy. This is the unconscious understanding which pervades each act of touching a mezuzah and passing across a threshold.

As people age, they become accustomed to the inevitability of change. The *Sukkah* can be viewed as a symbol of this impermanence. Paying respect to elders, as they sit in a *Sukkah* gives homage to the wisdom of experience and makes that value visible. It contributes, like the mourners' path in the Temple, to making mourning (and permanent impermanence) visible. Elevating elders as role models provides images which instruct others in how to be human: how to celebrate, how to hurt, how to heal, and how to die. When this range of human experiences is visible and not hidden by denial, it asserts that the community itself is *HaMakom*, (literally "The

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[115] *10 Minutes of Torah* Union for Reform Judaism - Department of Lifelong Jewish Learning and the URJ Press. ©2007.

Place")the place of healing. *HaMakom* is also the name of God in the blessing given to mourners as they walked the Temple's mourners' path. When comfort is provided in the midst of the community, it helps to remove the sense of pathology from what are known to be normal life experiences- one of the goals of this work. The visibility enables people facing loss to receive support as part of daily life. It is hoped that depathologizing grief will take away some of the shame that drives people who face the challenge of change to question their responses to grief. Instead of asking "when can I return to "normal" as if there were something aberrant in suffering after a great loss, they might take the time to respond to the profound questions that grief raises. Jewish tradition has many names for God. Most of them are descriptive, portraying God through qualities or attributes that describe Divinity. God is called *HaRachaman*, the Compassionate One, *El Emunah*, God, the Faithful One or *Dayan HaEmet*, God, the True Judge. "These are only three of the many on the long list naming God through descriptive epithets."[116] I continue:

> But *HaMakom*, is different. *HaMakom*, is a name for The Holy One which is not descriptive. *HaMakom* embraces without defining the nature of the embrace. It provides a context without a prescription for behavior. It neither describes the face of Holiness whose presence is invoked nor the behavior of the one who is encouraged to find Its presence. By invoking this face of God, the Mourner's Blessing embraces the mourner without intruding. This non-intrusive embrace is exactly the kind of safe attention that mourners need in order to find their voice of healing.
>
> Invoking *HaMakom* reminds us that what mourners most require are Holy Places of Comfort. These Holy Places are caldrons of comfort where individual needs are respected

[116] adapted from Brener, (2001). *op.cit.* pp.238-239.

> and the mourner is given the space to summon the personal resources to evolve a new life.
>
> When we create a place for healing and name that place God, we acknowledge the mysterious nature of healing and the fact that healing comes from some place of soul beyond our understanding or control.[117]

In subsequent chapters, I will label the "places," which mourners visit in their quest for healing with holy Hebrew names. This is indeed an elaboration on the teachings of the ancient Mourner's Blessing: that all turning points call for the blessing of the community and that what is needed for healing is *HaMakom*.

Depathologizing Grief

Today's mourners often feel that the only place they can be honest is inside of professional offices, in a kind of privacy that is created by the "experts" whose help they seek. When facing change, they turn to doctors, psychotherapists, or the clergy. They seek healing professionals, with some sense that they are ill, for help in getting through what are actually normal life crises. But mourning is not a disease. It's healthy to have a broken heart when one has lost what has been valued. After all, a broken heart is a sign that time has been spent wisely-- that one has loved.

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[117] *Ibid.*

The healthy suffering that comes with the broken heart is not an illness. It should not be approached from a medical model that makes people think they are sick, a psychological model, which makes people think they are mentally ill, or a social work model that makes them think that they are needy. While there may be times when help is sought from all of those realms, the primary realm in which the mourner should seek to heal the heart broken by loss is the realm of the community.

Pain, suffering and grief reveal the fact of impermanence and initiate us into life in the *Sukkah*. They are the invitation, the call into a club that no one wants to join. Humans enter the Sukkah in fear and despair. Through the ritual that is Mourning into Dancing they learn the wisdom of life in the Sukkah: the ultimate paradox of merging the time of greatest vulnerability with the time of the greatest joy. No matter the age or the call that catapults one into the dance, when one steps into it, he or she is initiated onto the path of the elder.

Chapter Five: From a Therapeutic to a Spiritual Path

In order to create a New Mourners' path, I will entwine two separate approaches to grief. The first is derived from the five- stage therapeutic path conceived by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, M.D. and the second is an original path derived from my understanding of the Jewish mourning rituals and the specific Jewish mourning practice of saying Kaddish. The original path will also include a structure for grieving that is based on the Kabbalistic conception of the Four Worlds, as depicted in the *Tanya*,[118] as well as my personal and professional experience with grief. These two approaches are proffered as background for the integration of the therapeutic insights and the spiritual processes on the New Mourners' Path.

The Pioneering Work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, M.D.

In the later decades of the twentieth century there have been great strides made in depathologizing the grief process. This is primarily due to the efforts of a psychiatrist named Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. Kubler-Ross began her work in Europe after the Second World War while working with Holocaust survivors. Later she worked with dying patients in the United States. Through years of sensitive listening to her patients she articulated

[118] the first methodical treatise on Chassidic philosophy, published in 1798, written by the first (the Alter) Lubavitcher Rebbe, *R. Shneur Zalman* of *Liadi*, founder of *Chabad Chasidut*, a guide to development of the soul, based on kabbalistic and Chassidic principles. From Ascent-of-Safed. "Dictionary of Terms," Ascent of Safed, http://www.kabbalaonline.org/statiopages/glossary.asp#T.

the common emotional experiences shared by those who face death and grief. She spoke of the progress of feelings through five stages of grief which she named as:

1. Denial
2. Bargaining
3. Depression
4. Anger
5. Acceptance[119]

She described this path as one that is not necessarily linear, reporting that

> Most of my patients have exhibited two or three stages simultaneously and these do not always occur in the same order.[120] [121]

These stages, she reported, were always propelled by Hope.[122]

While the work of subsequent scholars have superceded hers,[123] Kubler-Ross was a pioneer in articulating the grief process and letting mourners and the world know that mourning is a normal and somewhat predictable process. Her model has been widely accepted by those who attend to the emotional turmoil that comes with grief. Many subsequent works on bereavement, including my own, have been built upon her foundation.

Kubler-Ross' compassionate and intelligent work became a Mourners' Path for modernity-- a therapeutic Mourners' Path. She was successful in

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[119] Kubler-Ross, *op.cit. passim.*
[120] *ibid.* pp. 138-156.
[121] Branson, Roy. "Is Acceptance a Denial of Death? Another Look at Kubler-Ross," *The Christian Century*, May 7, 1975, p. 464-468. http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1867.
[122] Kubler-Ross, *op.cit. passim.*
[123] See Worden et al.

getting the medical and psychotherapeutic healing establishment to be more responsive to the needs of those who were dying and those who were bereaved. However, because of the human yearning to find certainty in the great uncertainty that is the emotional chaos of death and bereavement, her stages of grief have come to be calcified in the minds of many, as they approach the grieving process. This may be as true for those who mourn as it is for those who seek to help them. The huge sensitivity and wisdom with which she described each category is often lost by those who have reduced her compassionate work to the five words which she used as headlines for the process of letting go. The grief process she catalogued with such reflective sensitivity became an almost cartoon-like template, which narrowed the understanding of the profundity of each stage- quite the opposite of Kubler-Ross' intention.

The Misuse of Kubler-Ross' Work

Kubler Ross' path provides a recognition of the universal emotional states that appear to accompany grief. It gives external validation for the difficult internal journey that is mourning. However the precision of the five categories has been used to deny the uniqueness of each individual mourner's path. As was described above, this uniqueness was affirmed in the Temple by the use of the formulaic blessing. The fact that it was a non - intrusive, non-prescriptive invocation of *HaMakom*, on the mourner's behalf, granted him or her a *Holy* Place for the unfolding of the unique

individual experience of loss within an understanding of the communal universal experience, as he or she took the healing journey from *katnut* to *gadlut*.

In addition, Kubler-Ross' Five Stages of Grief are too frequently taken as prescriptive, linear, and absolute. This is very different than her intention as Roy Branson said in his examination of the work of Kubler-Ross, to which I have referred above:

> it is not unusual for a person experiencing grief to exhibit more than one stage at a time. They also may not follow Kubler-Ross' sequence of stages. "Most of my patients have exhibited two or three stages simultaneously and these do not always occur in the same order."[124]

Other thanotologists have formulated broader and less pejorative categories for the stages of grief (such as, simply Beginning, Middle and End or Impact, Disintegration, Reorganization[125], but, along with Kubler-Ross' work, they, too, are often used to diagnose rather than to humanize the experience of coping with pain and loss. What was intended to illumine the understanding of the experience of grief has become institutionalized as people look at the stages of grief as if they were scripted experiences. The result is that mourners are in danger of entering each stage of grief looking outward for a description of what they are feeling rather than

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[124] Branson, Roy. *op. cit.*

[125] See Worden et al.

inward to learn what individual growth and wisdom can be found in each difficult step for the grief journey.

Furthermore, the therapeutic path, which was grounded in the medical model, was an appropriate model for the time in which Kubler-Ross did her work. After the Second World War theological questions arose regarding God's role in the vast destruction. For many, faith was shattered. Having seen what humans had done to other humans in a world, which seemed to be emptied of the protection which all religions seek from God, the human soul was in crisis. For many, God's name had become profane. This has become even more pronounced as religion continues to be used as a cloak for those practicing intolerance and even violence in the name of a sectarian and fundamentalist God. With these crises of faith as a backdrop, the existential questions that arise in times of calamity frequently did not feel at home in a synagogue, church, or other traditional institutions. But the questions had to be asked. Psychotherapy provided a home to the soul when it had no place to go. It held the soul until the culture matured philosophically and a more nuanced understanding of God's name emerged in pursuit of the sacred.

Changing the Paradigm for Griefwork

My work is designed to support Kubler-Ross' basic design and her intention to create a compassionate way of framing grief. At the same time,

it seeks to shift the paradigm for viewing grief from the therapeutic to the spiritual. Before doing so, it is appropriate to express gratitude to the therapeutic paradigm as represented by the work of Elizabeth Kubler Ross and others as I explore loss through a different lens. With gratitude to and respect for Kubler-Ross, this work seeks to reframe her model to represent the Mourners' Path as a spiritual path. I contest the misappropriation of the common words associated with Kubler-Ross' model, which have been misconstrued as rigid clinical words, which can connote pathology. I feel that this deprives mourners of their individual experience, and contributes to mourners' believing that there is something wrong with them. In the agony of grief they fear that they are mentally ill. They think they are going crazy.

For example, when someone is said to be "in denial" there is an implication that he or she is not facing the truth. One may have compassion for someone who is not facing a difficult truth, one might understand his or her motivations, however the use of the word "denial" implies that the mourner is engaging in behavior that is not associated with truth. It could imply a delusional state, clearly not a desirable condition.

The same can be said for every stage of the Kubler-Ross schema. "Depression" is associated with illness. "Anger" and "bargaining" also carry negative connotations. The word "acceptance," as well, fails to

describe fully the result of having learned to integrate a loss into our lives and worldview. It describes a kind of resignation that makes a grudging peace with a loss. While this is partially true, it does not represent the personal expansion that is the possible corollary of a more enlightened view of grief. What is most important to remember is that each of these phases through which mourners pass carries important information about being human. Each is a place for the refinement and growth of the human soul as it opens to its mission as a vessel for holiness. **I assert that each of these phases presents a new opportunity for spiritual development.**

In depathologizing the grief process, this work, I a seek to remove the shame from the necessary stages through which those who face loss inevitably pass. This process allows mourners to use these points in time to explore the profound and universal aspects of mourning. It enables those who dare to look their suffering in the face to emerge from it with a deeper apprehension of what it means to be human. This will be achieved by re-labeling Kubler-Ross' stages of grief with significant Hebrew words and conceiving of them as *sukkot*, places where mourners are commanded to dwell temporarily in order to contain, shape, focus and express their grief. It is hoped that this effort will shift the understanding of the mourners' journey and create places of refuge where mourners can learn what they need to know about who or what is lost, about themselves, about being human, and about God. Here the therapeutic gives way to the spiritual.

Re-constructing the Mourners' Path proclaims each of the tents along the way as a holy, temporary dwelling place. Within each there will be tools to turn each of those stops on the path, like the simple *Sukkot* of the children of Jacob as they pitched camp in the wilderness, from a tent to a tabernacle. Each tent will be transformed from a temporary shelter to endure the terrifying unknown of the desert to a holy dwelling place for God's presence, --from an *ohel* to a *mishkan*.

This transformation in understanding grief from a clinical passage into a path for spiritual transformation and growth begins with the faith that grief is a normal and healthy process. Depathologizing the grief process in order to create a safe place and galvanize the pursuit of healing must begin by neutralizing some of the pejorative words that have been used to describe grief. This requires a refusal to label any part of the journey with words that imply judgment. Therefore to name the *sukkot*, I will eschew describing the Mourners' Path in words that have become associated with medical diagnoses or which have other negative associations.

I will also avoid words that define the various stages of grief dualistically. It is my hope that it will become possible to change the conception of the feelings, which Kubler-Ross has identified as stages of grief (anger, depression, etc.), as either negative or positive. Ideally, the stages of grief

can be viewed simply as energetic vortices within which one learns to catalyze the growth process and embrace a different aspect of the sacred human journey. As such, the various stages of grief become mere dwelling places in which one garners the skills to master various essential aspects of coming to terms with being human.

This process will begin with Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' description of the five stages of grief and continues with the sacred Hebrew names, as each of her clinical terms is appropriated to name each of her stages as a holy place—*HaMakom*. In the process grief with come to be understood as a path for learning to treasure each day and for becoming closer to what is sacred.

Some of the choices for these words may be shockingly audacious in light of the words that they subvert in the Kubler-Ross schema, but they are consciously chosen to challenge the sense that grief is anything other than a holy journey. And they are chosen with respect, gratitude, and recognition that if not for the work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, this work, and so much healing, would not be possible.

In short, three assumptions undergird this effort: (1) Mourning is a process. Each place on the Mourners' Path is but one of the *Sukkot* in which we dwell temporarily on this path through the desert. (2) None of the stops on the Mourners' Path is pathological. In fact, each of these *Sukkot* is holy and provides essential and healthful lessons on the nature

of the human condition. And (3) the goal of this work is not to come to terms with death. It is to come to terms with life and to learn to dwell in holiness at peace with the paradoxes of what it means to be human.

To reiterate, I will reconstruct the New Mourners' Path with the holy names given to each of these places on it, with the hope that mourners will remember as they enter each tent, that each of these holy tents is a temporary dwelling. Reframing the Mourners' Path acknowledges these places as awesome cauldrons of growth and learning. It would be cruel and foolish to suggest that mourners might welcome these initiations or should deny the horror and pain that dwells under their frond-covered roofs. But hopefully, it will be possible to say what both Abraham and Moses said when they were called to face God: "*Hineni*, I am here, I will face this challenge. I will do what is asked of me." "*Barukh Dyan Ha'Emet.*"

Chapter Six: Grief as a Spiritual Path

The Paradox of Tearing and Blessing

As the journey begins, it is essential to explore the proposition that grief is about God. This is evident in the fact that Judaism demands that God be invoked upon hearing that a death has occurred. This suggests a validation of the central theme of this work: that grief is a spiritual journey.

According to Jewish Law, when one hears of the death of someone close, one is bidden to tear his or her garment and immediately recite the phrase "*Barukh Dayan Haemet*" in praise of "God the True Judge."[126] In one act, the mourner is challenged to trust God's truth despite the ruptured feelings. The formulaic blessing, in effect, catapults the mourner onto a journey. This begins with the initial moment of brokenness caused by the news of the death, and continues through the emotional work of grieving. It concludes when the mourner comes to a resolution of grief, which is signified by the ability to praise God. This can often take a long time.

What is the purpose of a commandment which calls for such contradictory emotions in one moment: to tear a cloth as a symbol of the rupture caused by death while at the same time reciting in praise of God. Perhaps this

[126] Ganzfried, Solomon. *Code of Jewish Law: Kitzur Shulhan Arukh.* Hebrew Publishing Company, New York. 1991. 194:8&6.

direction is an out-and-out challenge to the mourner, forcing an immediate confrontation between the bereaved person and the force that runs the universe. The outrageously provocative instructions might pierce the initial numbness and re-kindle the mourners' passion, provoking many emotions- among them: anger and wonder. Those passions contain the life giving fire with which one begins the process of healing.

By embracing the struggle to tear and praise in one act, the mourner might recognize grief as a process for reclaiming Holiness at a time when it seems to have contracted from the world. At the same time a kind of human *Tzimtzum* could summon God back into the world, as the mourner observes his or her transformation, as the plaintive solitary cry of "why me?" gives way to the more universal existential questions that grief raises.

"*Barukh Dayan Haemet*" can also leave the mourner speechless. Like Job, in the final chapters of his book, (Job 42:1-6) a mourner can find him or herself silenced in awe at the mystery that is life. "*Barukh Dayan Haemet*" forces the mourner to confront the extent to which humans are not in control. It reminds the mourner that we know very little about the great human questions: Why do people die? How do we find a way to Holiness in a world that includes death? How do we make a place in the heart that can simultaneously hold both life's joy and its pain? The paradox of ripping and

praising in one act may be designed to confront the mourner with the fact that answers to these questions may be unknowable, thus directing him or her to the challenge of coming to peace with paradox. It serves as a reminder that grief is a spiritual process.

Just as Jacob, who will be treated in more detail in a subsequent chapter, eventually came to peace prior to finding his home, coming to peace may be the goal of grief-work. The fact that the Kaddish, the prayer said in memory of the dead ends with the *oseh shalom*, a prayer for peace, validates that that this is so. The formulaic ritual assertion that God is the true judge reframes grief from the individual pain that is surely felt. It suggests that the "why me" that many mourners initially ask may be the wrong question. It directs the mourner to ask the less personal questions, which are more universal, such as the question asked in Psalm 144, "מה אדם (Ps. 144:3)... what does it mean to be human?" This links the search for peace of mind that follows loss with the pursuit of peace on earth.

In raising the question beyond the self, going from *Mochin de Katnut* to *Mochin de Gadlut*, as described above, the mourner is directed to give meaning to his or her pain. If one faced with loss could truly embrace that assumption as he or she undertakes the mourning process, the grief might be met differently. Is it possible to conceive a walk on The Mourners' Path with a non-judgmental assumption of God's justice? Might grief be

approached with curiosity, as Kubler Ross suggests "without judging feelings as bad or shameful but [trying] to understand their true meaning...?"[127] Mourners might enter the tents of mourning with a yearning to understand what it means to be human. They would look to grief as a tool for coming to terms with the human condition.

It is probably too much to ask of a mourner to suggest that grief be approached with curiosity and equanimity. However, the assumption of grief as holy instruction might take away the sense of pathology that often accompanies loss. It might stop mourners from judging their own behavior. It would not take away the pain and the suffering. But it might shift the culture, by changing the way that mourners approach the often-unbearable feelings and their relationship with their pain and suffering. By Praising "God the True Judge," as the first task of mourning, seems like a challenge to one taking the first steps on the mourners' path, when one is likely to confront the void of Holiness that often comes with loss. But it might signal to him or her that a significant part of grief-work will be to find a way back to an experience of Holiness. For those who have held the understanding of God portrayed in Deuteronomy, as the One who rewards good and punishes evil,(Deut. 27:1-26.) this may be especially important. Many who have held to this theology have seen their faith shattered when a tragedy reveals that there may be a flaw in that theological equation.

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[127] Kubler-Ross. *op.cit.* p.4.

Not that this will be easy. To make this journey, the mourner may find it necessary to battle, like Jacob, an unknown and powerful force. And victory will not be a complete triumph, for it will still include signs of loss. As with Jacob, who walked with a limp after his confrontation with the "ish," (Gen. 32:25) signs of the scrimmage will still show. But also like Jacob when he dreamed of angels, the mourner may come to say about the profound journey through this wilderness that is grief, "God is in the Place and I, I knew it not." (Gen. 28:16)

To repeat: life in the *Sukkah* is not easy. Grief can trick mourners into thinking that each of its attendant emotions: fear, anger, tears, anxiety, depression and all of their variations, is an unending trap. This is why I have chosen the *sukkah* to the place for *HaMakom*. Using the *sukkah*, which is prescribed as a temporary dwelling place stresses that each of these emotional experiences is temporary. For if there is any magic at all to the challenge of managing grief, it is in learning to trust that each of these emotions represents a time-limited stop on the Mourners' Path. Accepting this can short-circuit some of the fear and allow the mourner to use the path more effectively as a place of growth and transformation.

A king was approached by advisors with news of a crisis in the kingdom. The grain that had been reserved for the next season had been poisoned. All but a small amount had been treated with some chemical that would cause everyone who

> ate it to become insane. There was no other source of grain. If the people did not eat it they would starve. The advisors felt that the remaining untainted grain should be reserved for the leaders of the kingdom. This would allow them to guide the community through the time of crisis.
>
> The king looked thoughtfully at his advisors and then rejected their solution. "We cannot separate our fate from that of our community," he said. "We must eat the same grain as our subjects." But the king had a solution. "Before we eat the grain," he said, "we will mark our foreheads with ashes. Then we will eat with the others and descend with them into madness. However we will be protected, for each time we look into each other's eyes, we will see the mark of the ashes and we will remember that what we are feeling is the result of this poisoning. We will remember that these feelings will pass as new grain is harvested. This will remind us that our state is temporary. This reminder will get us through the season.

There is another important association to the *sukkah*. Dwelling in the *sukkah* is a commandment:

> You will dwell in the *Sukkah* seven days, all citizens of Israel shall dwell in the *Sukkah*. (Lev. 23:42)

And so it is with grief. While so many try to deny it, loss is a universal human experience. The struggle to come to terms with loss might be viewed as a kind of commandment for those who want to understand what it means to be human. Seeing grief as a *mitzvah* adds another layer to the *sukkah's* association with temporariness and with its spiritual resonances.

Configuring Grief in Spiritual Terms

It seems appropriate to add the spiritual dimension to the understanding of grief. In addition to the practice of tearing the clothing and praising God, as the first act of mourning, other aspects of the Jewish mourning rituals signal that it is expected for mourners to consider God in their responses.

The search for the Holy Presence, central to the project of this work can also be perceived at the core of the practice of saying *Kaddish*, Judaism's primary tool for mourning the death of a close relative. The choice of a doxology (which centers on praising God,) as the principal balm of comfort, is another indication that the intention of the Jewish mourning rituals is to focus the mourner on loss as a spiritual journey. The ritual involved in saying the *Kaddish* holds and guides the mourner's journey through the wilderness of grief.

Kabbalistic Caveat

To describe the spiritual journey of grief, vocabulary and metaphors have been borrowed from Jewish mysticism. These words of *Kabbalah*, such as *Tzimtsum* and *Tikkun Olam*, are chosen with great humility. *Kabbalah* is a profound approach to spirituality. It attempts, through metaphor and spiritual practice, to make accessible that which is ineffable. Kabbalistic concepts are not meant to be taken literally. In recent years attempts have been made to simplify *Kabbalah*, portraying it as if it were a magical way of accessing spiritual energy rather than as the profound system for contemplating the most abstruse universal questions, such as the questions raised by loss. When one employs concepts from *Kabbalah*, just as when one is trying to talk about God, one is potentially susceptible to the possibility of oversimplifying great complexities and thereby distorting their essence. However since the language of *Kabbalah* is suited for

discussion of that which is beyond our understanding, it is an appropriate language with which to describe life's great mystery: how to cope with suffering and death.

Teachings from *Kabbalah* help to clarify the variety of places those in pain must stand for healing. They allude to possibilities for healing that are beyond the known world. They provide a map that delineates the tasks of healing in ways that make healing more accessible and directs one to the higher purpose of grief-work. So with great temerity and with this disclaimer, I will borrow some of these concepts and adapt them in order to to create a spiritual framework for describing the process of grieving.

The *Kaddish* can be examined within the framework of the Kabbalistic concept of the four worlds. This articulates the path of grief as a spiritual journey from the physical pain of a world bereft of one who has gone to the apprehension of that person's spiritual presence and the presence of the Holy. The concept of the four worlds is taken from the *Kabbalah* of Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed (16th C.), who saw the flow of Divinity through four worlds or dimensions of reality. In recent years the concept has been interpreted through a psychological lens. It is from this latter understanding that the following theory regarding grief as a spiritual process is derived.

The Four Worlds[128]

The Four Worlds of Grief Work

Assiyah--the Physical World

Yetzirah --the world of Relationship & Emotions

B'riah --the World of Concepts & Ideas

Atzilut--the Spiritual World[129]

Kabbalah and *Kaddish*

When we mourn, we strain our ears, listening for the voice of the deceased--until we hear that voice coming from our own hearts. Mourners, we yearn to continue the conversation. We search for the unsaid words to resolve the unfinished issues.

The Kaddish can take us there. Kaddish parts the curtains and forces open the space between the worlds, breaking open the crevices where the voices still come through and where all the worlds are one. For the price of our yearning, our anger, and our tears, the Kaddish will carry us beyond the edges of the world we know. It takes us to a place of wholeness- of שלום-of peace-where all the polarities dissolve, where life and death, black and white, male and female, God and not-God merge- become one. *Adonai Ehad.* The words of the Shema become the reality of the world.

Kaddish ends exile. It suffuses the most profane regions with the holiness of God's name and wrests an Amen from the place it has not yet been forthcoming, the Amen we have been listening for for our entire lives. That Amen sustains the world.[130]

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[128] parts of the remainder of this chapter have been adapted from my Jewish Lights pamphlet *Taking the Time you Need to Mourn a Loss.* Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, VT. 2000.

[129] Schneersohn, Yosef Yitchak. *The Four Worlds.* Kehot Publication Society: Brooklyn, 2003. *passim.*

[130] Brener, Anne. (unpublished)

Grief-Work in the Four Worlds- An Excursus

When people grieve it feels as if the world in which they live has been damaged. Holiness seems to have exited from the world and the world feels flat and without its spark. Saying Kaddish allows the mourner to breathe God's Great Name, the *Sh'mei Raba* as it is called in the prayer, back into the world. The Kaddish is a prolonged exercise in purgation, cleaning, and purification understood to be a tool for cleansing the soul of the deceased. It can also be seen as a way to polish the world to make the world once again a fitting vessel for holiness. Saying Kaddish can strip away the details of the stories that bind the mourner to what is past. It can open them up to an as yet uncharted experience of Holiness.

Standing for Kaddish provides the mourner with a means to clear him or herself of the struggles associated with the material aspects of being human. For Kaddish delineates a path for striving to perceive the Holiness, which seems to have exited from the world when a death has occurred. The mourner stands at that precipice between life and death, between matter and spirit. He or she becomes a vessel for aligning the portals of the worlds and creates a conduit through which holiness can enter the world. This effort fulfills the promise made by the words of the Kaddish as those who recite it become channels fit to fill the world with the *Sh'mei Raba*- God's great name.

Said simply, Judaism is about making God a.k.a. Holiness present in the world. When a loss occurs, it feels as though the Divine Spark, God's Great Name has departed. It is the task of being human to keep the channels clear and open so that the flow of holiness can return to the furthest reaches of the created world. This is the goal of spiritual practice. Standing to say Kaddish is such a practice.

Kabbalah charts the created world as four successive worlds that emanate from God or from the etheric *Ein Sof*- (a name for Divinity that means "without end"). Each world manifests with increasingly concrete dimensions. The worlds extend down the ladder of abstraction from the highest world, the World of *Atzilut*, the world of the spirit, to the World of *Assiyah*, the physical world in which action takes place. The world of intellect (*B'riah*) and the world of emotions (*Yetzirah*) are the intermediate steps between the two. Human beings live simultaneously in all four of these worlds and when they mourn, they mourn in each of them. Each of these worlds has tasks, which is part of the process of grieving. The Kaddish can facilitate that work.

Those who stand for Kaddish do so, quite literally in the world of Assiyah, but the Kaddish has the potential of taking him or her all the way back up the ladder of creation, through all the worlds to the highest point in the World of *Atzilut*...almost to the *Ein Sof* itself.

Standing for Kaddish brings all three Kabbalistic dimensions (world עולם, time שנה, and soul נפש) together. Time and place converge to create an opening for soul. The place one stands for Kaddish marks a place in time and space where human bodies can be conduits for bringing the Holy Soul down to earth. Standing for Kaddish creates a nexus of the worlds, a place where time and space intersect and create a target coordinate through which holiness can enter the world.

On the horizontal axis, the Kaddish is a coordinate in space. It connects the one who mourns to all the other earthlings across the face of the planet who join him or her to say Kaddish at any one moment. They stand together to recite the words on behalf of all those who have died recently or for whom a yahrzeit is being observed.

On the vertical axis the Kaddish provides a coordinate in time. Each Kaddish is said not only for the one who is mourned. It is also said for everyone for whom that person said Kaddish. Thus each Kaddish reaches back in time to all who have preceded us. It passes through their Kaddishes to the Kaddish said for the primordial soul of the being called *Adam Kadmon* ("the first earthling") the androgynous being who was the first created human and from whom all humankind is descended. As such, the Kaddish begins with an immediate personal loss (*katnut*) but heralds

standing before the ancient mystery of human finitude that goes all the way back to the beginning (*gadlut*).

When a person stands for Kaddish, this intersection of time and space is unique. The individual soul becomes a lightning rod through which the force of holiness, the *ruach ha kodesh*, can enter the world. Through the work of "doing Kaddish" a person becomes more and more transparent to this Holy Spirit. This enables him or her to give life to the dead (*mehayeh ha metim*) or enliven the material world with the sparks of God's name. Following this practice ultimately fulfills the exhortation of the words of the Kaddish, "to bring the holiness of God's name to the furthermost reaches of creation." It is ironic that this is done at a time when the individual standing for Kaddish may feel furthest from faith in God. Again, a reminder of the first act of mourning: to tear a cloth and praise God at the same time.

This healing task works on many levels. According to the mystical understanding, it cleanses the soul of the deceased. It clears a channel through which the holiness of God's name can reach to the furthest worlds from the source of holiness. It repairs the damage to God's name that occurred with each level of creation and repairs the broken worlds in which humans live. They can work their way back up the ladder of holiness through grieving the loss.

The words of the Kaddish petition for holiness to be returned to each of the worlds. In saying Kaddish from each of the Four Worlds, those who grieve heal themselves. They heal the deceased. They heal the world. And they heal the Name of God. We will walk through each world and then explore the tasks of grief in each of them, as we see how the Kaddish can be used to bring healings and creates a paradigm that extends beyond grief for the dead to mourning life's other losses as well.

The Four Worlds of Creation:

A Meditation for Making God Tangible

> Imagine God, the Unimaginable Great Name, the *Sh'mei Raba* ("Great Name") of the Kaddish or the *Ein Sof* ("Without End") of Kabbalah. Imagine God as a great wind in an inchoate world of holiness. In this world before the worlds, God is a breath that pervades the universe before there is any created thing. That God-Wind (which is all there is), yearns to be manifest. It wants a dwelling place for Holiness- a venue for the enactment of Holiness. From God's yearning God embarks on the experiment of creation. And so unfolds four successive worlds with each world less subtle and more perceptible than those which preceded it.
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> To be palpable Holiness must be caught and formed. It must be condensed into something tangible. Imagine a garment being woven of fibers of wind and as the breath of the Unimaginable Great Name blows through it, a world of spirit is captured in its folds. This first world, the world of *Atzilut*, (derived from the word "*atzel*" which means "near-by" and refers to its proximity to God) emanates directly from the *Ein Sof*, the source. Holiness begins to be manifest in a more tangible, but still very abstract, world: The World of Spirit.
>
> But Spirit also wants to be perceived. It yearns for further manifestation. So the *Sh'mei Raba*, God-Wind blows another

breath. This one is directed into a diaphanous fabric of woven light rays, and what is formed is the World of *B'riah*, (from the Hebrew Word "*Bara*" "to create" as in "In the beginning God created..." (Gen. 1: 1). This is the World of Conception, a world of intellect and ideas in which the blueprints for the construction of the less abstract crystallization of being are conceived.

In the World of *B'riah*, the intention for further creation is asserted. The God-Wind blows again, this time into gossamer strands of interlacing ideas. With that breath emerges the World of *Yetzirah*, (from the Hebrew word "*yatzar*" "to form" as in "God formed man of the dust of the ground"). Ideas, from the World of *B'riah*, give birth to feelings and emotions as the World of *Yetzirah*. These, in turn, interact, and a breath into the translucent cloth born of that interaction creates the World of *Assiyah*. *Assiyah* (for the Hebrew word that means "to do" or "to make"), is a world of tangible substance and action. It is the material, physical world in which human beings and the things that they do are planted.

A twenty-first century corollary of the four worlds points to the emergence of a fifth succeeding world. It derives from the yearning of The World of *Assiyah* to also manifest itself. But there is danger. With each of these successive emanations, as more and more corporeality is achieved, there is damage to the Holy Name, the *Sh'mei Raba*. The initial spark becomes occulted or hidden. It becomes harder and harder to contact the pure name of Holiness. Because of its distance from the source, from the *Ohr Ein Sof* ("Light of the *Ein Sof*"), there is concern that creations in the world which I will call the World of *Rahokiah* (from the word "*rahoke*" which means "far away") are completely devoid of Holiness. The stuff of this world comes from the combination of material strands of this world, which are the manifestations of the World of *Assiyah*. These creatures could be completely lacking sparks of holiness. The fruit of the World of *Assiyah*, in the World of *Rahokiah* may be too distant from the world of pure holiness to retain the essence of *Atzilut* or the intention of *B'riah*. These are the substances that do not biodegrade. They choke the planet and they choke the mourner. In the darkest times of mourning, this distance from God is likely to be experienced. The world feels devoid of holiness. This time it is the human who contracts. And in a reversal of the process of creation, it is human yearning from the depths of loss that summons God to descend. [131]

[131] Brener, Anne. *Personal Journal* September, 1997 (unpublished)

Mourning in The World of *Assiyah*

> My father's humor, control, and patriarchal generosity made the world predictable. With his death, everything was different. I walked with unsure feet. The world reflected this uncertainty. After his burial came a deluge that his city had not seen in 500 years. I mourned my father in a community of people whose living rooms were filled with mud, whose cars were under water. The world became unpredictable. It was dangerous to walk. In that world, I was a solitary mourner. His only remaining next of kin, I was his *Kaddish*. Members of my father's synagogue community came, three times a day, with food and prayer shawls to support me as I began the work of mourning my father. Struggling to learn the words of the *Kaddish*, I leaned on the voices of his community, as they recited the words of the *Kaddish*. These voices, accustomed to joining my father's voice in prayer, surrounded me. Strong at first, they softened as the week wore on and I made the words my own, finding my way once again to the Mourners' Path. [132]

The World of *Assiyah* is the world in which humans spend most of their time. It is the World of Action. The most tangible of the worlds, *Assiyah* is the physical world in which mourners wake up each morning to the fact of loss. Here, they remember that someone or something that has been central to their world is no longer present. This is the palpable and practical "real" world in which people live. It is the world in which they feel the physical pain of our broken hearts.

In *Assiyah* there is action that must be taken-- things to do. This is the world in which the tasks involved in getting through the day can be overwhelming. Funeral arrangements must be made. Possessions must be

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[132] *Ibid.* 1996.

sorted through. Condolences must be acknowledged. Mourners may have to learn new skills- skills that might have been performed by someone who is gone. To learn them, it will be necessary to accept the absence of the dead and so mourners face the challenges in the World of *Assiyah* with great ambivalence.

Assiyah is the world in which mourners miss what is gone. In this world of the physical, they feel the "skin hunger" of longing. They yearn for the touch of those gone. Longing to hold them again, they search for sensual memories. They wrap themselves in their blankets or their sweaters or sniff their coats. Their skin yearns for their touch. They yearn to hear their voices. In the World of *Assiyah*, they must face the memories of what is gone and the stark reality of physical and emotional suffering.

Physical Care: Creating Order in a Time of Chaos

In the stunned, early phases of loss, mourners need physical caretaking. In the world of *Assiyah*, because they are vulnerable to the high stress and confusion of raw grief, they are likely to neglect themselves. The Talmudical injunction that mourners must be fed by the community guarantees that mourning begins under the watchful and caring communal eye. People bring food to the house of mourning in the week following the burial. After the week of *shiva*, the nourishment becomes emotional as the traditional mourner moves to the synagogue to continue the struggle to

inhabit the words of the Kaddish. As the voices of the community surround the mourner, punctuating the prayer with a strong "amen," he or she is held in a communal embrace.

At a time that is so often shattering to self-esteem, the unconditional acceptance of the minyan can be a strong palliative. The meaning of the words at this point is almost incidental as those who recite the prayer claim its sounds as their own. In the World of *Assiyah* mourners can learn to inhabit the Kaddish one letter at a time. The words become a lifeline reeling them in from the anxious vastness of uncertainty in which they are lost. Sometimes just focusing on the ink on the page as they try to get through the prayer word-by-word, letter-by-letter is the salvific work. The words of the Kaddish provide those who suffer with a place to go, people to see and something to do--they create regularity in a world of chaos. Sometimes the simple act of surviving from the beginning of the prayer until its end can be a triumphant sign of hope.

The Kaddish is a vessel in the World of *Assiyah*. It gives a structure to the world and provides a place to stand at a time when mourners are beset by the anguish of struggling to find balance in a world that has lost its moorings. The Kaddish in the World of *Assiyah* is a place to show up each day. Since the Kaddish must be said in a minyan, it surrounds those in pain with the circle of community. This guarantees a consoling embrace at

a time when mourners are most likely to feel alone. The Kaddish guarantees a place to go when one is at loose ends. To say Kaddish the mourner must show up, stand, and recite formulaic words in the midst of a community. In this world of *Assiyah* all the mourner has to do is to show up and stand for Kaddish. Nothing else is required.

In the Physical World of *Assiyah*, the absence of what is gone is most palpable. It is a lonely world of yearning where the mourner must learn to walk again and to trust that there will not be an earthquake. This will have to happen despite the fact that it is often a challenge just to place one foot in front of the other. Saying Kaddish in this world anchors the mourner to the ground.

The World of *Yetzirah*:

Continuing Communication with What Has Been Lost

> The Jewish mystics tell us that the living play a part in the redemption of the dead, by reciting the Kaddish ... they believe [that mourners] can continue to polish the souls of people who have died...this [suggests a continuing]... dynamic contact with those who are gone. It [provides].... the opportunity to say the things that need to be said and signifies that death does not end the relationship. ...[and that] a relationship can still grow and change and issues can still be explored. The *Kaddish* can be the vehicle for continued communication, a line between the living and the dead. Over the years, I have learned to use *Kaddish* as a way to communicate with the people I have lost. When I say *Kaddish*, I focus on the person I am remembering and think about what I would like to tell him or her. Through saying *Kaddish*, I have watched my relationships continue to evolve. I have watched as, over time, what I need to say changes, as I move from the painful efforts to voice what I did not say to the bittersweet comfort of once more basking in the presence of the ones I have lost. [133]

[133] Adapted from Brener. *M&M*. p. 137-138.

In the world of *Assiyah*, so informed by physical activity and material concerns, there is no question that what is lost is gone. In the World of *Yetzirah*, this certainty remains, of course, a painful challenge. However there is a balm in the possibility this world offers for maintaining the connection. The World of *Yetzirah* is a world of feelings and interactions. It provides those who suffer with a place for the emotional work that is so essential to Kaddish. Here the Kaddish is a tool for continuing the conversation with the past and working out unfinished business. This enduring connection is based on Kabbalistic understandings of the dynamic ties between souls. This tie with the deceased is especially strong during the first year of mourning and on days of *yahrzeit* and days of *yizkor* in the subsequent years. At these times, it is believed that souls are affected by the actions of those remaining on the earth. By saying Kaddish on their behalf it is believed that the soul is cleansed of misdeeds and is given the opportunity to rise to become closer to God. The words of Kaddish on the lips of those below, this thinking asserts, can effect the destiny of the soul above.

This mystical understanding of loss provides a powerful metaphor for confronting the past in search of a healing and positive connection with what is lost, no matter what the loss has been. This understanding promotes the effort to remove any lingering negative charge from the past.

As the numbness begins to wear off, those who mourn need emotional caretaking. Here the words of the Kaddish change from being the holding place they provided in the World of *Assiyah*, to being a medium--an invisible line of connection between the living and the dead. The words of the Kaddish enable the emotional work essential to grieving. They can be the vehicle for the next task of mourning: repairing the severed communication with what has been lost, in order to harvest blessing and purify memory.

In the World of *Yetzirah* purgation occurs. It is here that mourners scrub the past from their eyes until it no longer blinds them to the present. The goal is to erase the constrictions of personal history in such a way that memory is a blessing that propels into the future.

On the wings of the Kaddish, those who suffer express their concerns for what is gone. As they struggle to find peace in the relationship with that which is being mourned, they discover the opportunity they need to confront the past and its lingering emotional issues. It is in the world of Yetzirah that the window is opened on previous losses. Mourners may inventory other difficult times to explore their impact on the current situation. They can harvest past learning and apply it to the current challenge. In addition they may face what was not fully confronted at earlier rough places, identifying the growing edge left hanging in the past.

The new experience of pain thus becomes a double-edged sword: it forces the mourner to deal with the unfinished business of past suffering and it provides an opportunity to re-visit an old wound with the gift of healing.

All losses occur in the middle of a conversation. The suffering that comes in their wake forces an effort to recover that conversation with the past in order to work through unfinished business, bring healing with the past, and make peace with the current circumstances. Mourners must find the honest voice for their guilts, regrets, angers, and love. Loss must not silence these voices, for they bring healing to the severed relationships and return those who suffer to their own developmental issues. The World of *Yetzirah* invites those who grieve to come to more nurturing connections with their past, as they resume their individual journeys.

The World of *B'riah*

> Stephanie stood in the room stamping her foot as we said the Kaddish. Her voice was angry and each time she reached a point of punctuation in the prayer, she read it as if it were a question mark. Finally she turned to me and shrieked, "These words are an insult. They were put here to torture me. 'God's Great Name?'" Sarcastically, she asked me, "I should want it Praised beyond all the other praises?" The Kaddish challenges our relationship with Holiness. It inserts a question mark as mourners ask, like Stephanie, "What kind of God would do that to my brother?"[134]

[134] as with all clinical vignettes presented in this work, this is a composite constructed from my work with many clients and does not describe any one individual or situation. All names are changed and stories rendered so as to make identification impossible.

B'riah is the Intellectual World. This is where mourners ask the existential questions about life on a planet where people die, and about the nature of God, justice and the universe. In the world of *B'riah* mourners consider how they want their lives to change in light of these questions.

If, after a loss, a person gets back to his or her regular path immediately—what has he or she learned? A significant loss is likely to call into question each assumption that is held about life. The mourner, who is on the path to becoming an elder, is not likely to retreat to familiar rhetoric, bromides and explanations about the meaning of life. In all of these situations the one who grieves has lost, not only a significant person, situation or object, but also may have lost the foundation of his or her world.

From the depths of grief, the mourner may wonder what the purpose of suffering must be or, to broaden the question, if life itself has any meaning. Often, after a loss, people no longer are satisfied with the answers to these profound questions that may have served in the past. This is especially true for those whose image of God may have been of a benevolent protector who rewards good and punishes evil.

But this existential earthquake of meaning is essential to loss. If a person is not lost following a loss, they may have failed to use that loss as a teacher. With all the anguish and difficulty that come with suffering, what a shame to feel that the experience had no impact on the way in which life is viewed. In the World of *B'riah*, meaning is sought. Mourners must write a new contract with life, God, and the Universe.

Finding Meaning: A New Contract with Life, God, and the Universe.

The cauldron of mourning is a place to question everything. Here the meaning of the words of the Kaddish begins to come into focus. However sometimes they are less of a balm and more of a challenge. The words of the Kaddish praise God's Great Name so highly and express the desire to see the entire universe infused with its Holiness. Rallying behind these words can be an outrageous expectation of an anguished person. Suffering is likely to provoke a profound spiritual crisis. Loss is likely to cause one to question the nature of God, justice, and the universe. It raises suspicion regarding the meaning of life on a planet where people suffer.

According to traditional Jewish mourning practice, the Kaddish is repeated over and over following a loss. This repetition is an opportunity to confront the forces that run the universe with all the questions about a world which metes out pain and justice in what appears to be an arbitrary manner. Here the Kaddish can act as a crowbar, forcing open a belief

system that has suddenly become too small to hold the great paradoxes of Holiness and Horror that dwell together in the universe. By daring, like Job, to perseverate on God's injustice, mourners ask the questions over and over again, hammering at the limits of their understanding until they break a hole in it and crawl through a wormhole into a new universe of meaning. Their world gets larger. They come to embrace the paradoxes of being human, and somehow move to a new plateau on which it is possible to make peace with a God and a universe they cannot totally comprehend.

This theme of hiddenness pervades the book of Job as Job seeks to reveal Justice, Truth, and God, all of which are buried in mystery. Early on Job depicts the non-linear and confused thinking of one who has been stricken by grief. His disjunctive statements reveal the chaotic quality of the thoughts of those who grieve. Lost in their internal ruminations the lines of logic are also lost. The thought processes are disordered. Job is hidden from himself.

Later Job's words become one long question addressed to an unidentifiable force in the universe. In subsequent chapters, he begins to find his voice. This question is particularized and directed to Job's friends and to God. This indirect, rambling and non-linear challenge of the cosmic order is a preparation for the later questions, which will directly accost God. It is the inchoate rumination of the world of *B'riah*, in which those who suffer gain

courage. They rise from stunned grief and premature spiritual acceptance to be energized for the healing journey. With powerful images, the words of Job hammer on the psyche as do the repetitive string of words of interrogation and resistance. This unremitting perseveration is the tool of grief through which it "knocks on heaven's door"[135] in an effort to find an opening which will reveal the secret passage to a wisdom and peace which can shatter the old world and give shape to the new.

The World of *Atzilut*

> Dream: My mother was calling from far, far away, perhaps from another world. The telephone was a model from the time of my birth: black, heavy and with a rotary dial. But its chord was shimmering: translucent, somewhat metallic and pulsating--filled with veins and blood--an umbilical chord, connecting us after her death. It is the silver chord that links the worlds, before and after we take our human breaths. The cycle, like the circular dial, rotates, yet the connection remains. The Kaddish is the silver chord.[136]

Finally there is the Spiritual world in which those who suffer make a new peace with what is holy. Often coming through a crisis of faith demands a completely new experience of Divinity. Here the task is to come to trust in the presence of God, the presence of the deceased, and the presence of the parts that have been surrendered in the wake of our struggles and to know that they are all one.

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[135] Bob Dylan. "Knocking on Heaven's Door." *Pat Garret and Billy the Kid.* (musical album)1974.

[136] Brener, *M&M.*, p.136.

As the old assumptions of faith and/or meaning are shattered and a larger worldview emerges, the mourner enters a spiritual domain, which can slowly bring a new peace with what life has brought. This peace, which Kubler-Ross calls acceptance, recognizes that mourning never entirely comes to an end and that healing does not mean the cessation of grief. Rather healing delivers an ability to integrate pain and find a bounded place for the grief in our lives-- a holy place where it is neither denied nor idolized but can be nourished, attended to, and recognized as one of many parts of an individual's history. The great achievement, experienced in the world of *Atzilut*, is in ceding the physical connection to the person who is gone and coming to a comfortable peace with a spiritual relationship.

Mourners ricochet between the four worlds. They are propelled by their yearning and their heartbreak and also by their hope. A dead end in one world may reveal a gateway to work that must be done in another. As they move back and forth in their explorations, they find unexpected comfort and answers. Over time, with attention to the grief work and the process of healing as framed by the Kaddish and its understanding, those who suffer come to terms with the words of the *Kaddish*. Creating a world filled with God's name now seems a reasonable goal, despite the fact that one may have been cursing God's name just a few minutes earlier. Out of the darkness in which the old concepts of faith have ceased to serve, a new theology emerges. The words of the *Kaddish* match the mourner's

experience as he or she comes through the crisis of faith to articulate a new experience of what is Holy.

Perhaps God's name can no longer be spoken, but paradoxically, the mourner may hold a renewed sense of what is sacred, embracing life and its sanctity all the more tightly.

The difference between the World of *B'riah* and the World of *Atzilut* are clear here. They parallel the differences between belief and faith and between theology and encounter. In the world of *B'riah* the mourner struggles intellectually to come to terms with God. In *Atzilut* he or she simply dwells in Holiness.

Let us return to the Jewish Law which bids the mourner, upon hearing of the death of someone close, to tear his or her garment and immediately recite a phrase in praise of "God the True Judge." This challenges the mourner to trust God's truth despite his or her ruptured feelings. It can be a long journey from the initial moment of brokenness caused by the news of the death through the emotional work of grieving to finally being able to praise God, according to the formula of the blessing: ברוך דיין אמת

So I ask again, what is the purpose of that teaching which bids mourners to tear and praise in one act? It might be seen as an offensive instruction

deliberately designed to challenge the mourner. The words seem to force an immediate confrontation between the bereaved person and the force that runs the universe. Such an outrageously provocative assertion could pierce the initial numbness and re-kindle the mourners' passion. That passion is the life-giving fire with which one begins the process of healing. Such a line can also leave the mourner speechless. It emphasizes that humans are not in control, reminding that very little is known about the larger questions in life: what it means to be human, the journey of the soul, why we are on this planet, and what causes life and death. Like Job, in the final chapters of his book, mourners are silenced in awe at the mystery that is life. Perhaps this practice is simply spiritual guidance, designed to provide an answer to those questions and to direct the mourner to the challenge of coming to peace with that verdict. As Job said, "I relent, knowing that I am dust and ashes."

By attending to the tasks of grief that are present in each of the four worlds, mourners can work their way up the ladder to proximity with what is holy. Their human *Tzimtzum* could summon God back into the world. In the process, it is likely that they will change and that the world in which they live will cease to resemble the world they knew before the events occurred that propelled them on this journey. They may encounter new feelings, new ideas, and new faith. They may make new friends. As was said above, it is likely that they may not be able to call the Divine by the

name they used before. To climb the ladder to the World of *Atzilut*, it will be necessary to battle, like Jacob, some unknown force and to come out victorious. Like Jacob, who walked with a limp after his confrontation with the being, they are likely to continue to show signs of the scrimmage. And like Jacob when he dreamed of angels, they may come to recognize what can be said about the profound journey through this wilderness that is grief, "God is in the Place and I, I knew it not." (Gen. 28:16)

And now we will create the Holy Places in which we can dwell during our journey through the wilderness of grief.

Chapter Seven: Constructing the Sukkah

The Tents of Jacob- The Dwelling Places of Israel

מה טובו אוהלך יקוב משכנותיך ישראל

Ma tovu, ohalecha Ya'kov, mishk'notecha Yisrael
How good are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places Israel!(Num.24:5)

Tents were the temporary homes of the Israelites as they traveled through the wilderness which was to be the cauldron from which they would emerge to enter The Promised Land- the Land of Israel. The above phrase provides my Biblical and liturgical underpinnings as I design the spaces which will be similar holding places for those who grieve- on their way to the promised land of healing. For it will be in *Sukkot*, designed to address the different stages of grief, as outlined by Kubler-Ross, that the grief-work described in the previous chapter will take place. Shortly, I will explore the nature of the *sukkah* as represented in Rabbinic literature. Although I will begin with the above Biblical phrase which is so frequently repeated in Jewish liturgy and song.

From Jacob to Israel and from an "Ohel" to a Mishkan

This phrase, which blesses the dwelling places of Israel, was uttered by Bilaam, a sorcerer who was hired by a Moabite King, *Balak*, to curse the Israelite people as they crossed his land. *Bilaam* wanted to comply with his commission, but time after time, in his effort to curse these foreign intruders, he ended up blessing them. (Num. 24:5) This phrase was his final

statement about the Israelites. He recited it as he looked down from a hilltop at the place where the people were camped. (Num. 24:6) It carries layers of allusions to other biblical tales of transformation and particularly echoes Jacob's own story of what might have been a curse turning into a blessing. (Gen. 32:30) It is my hope that this unexpected reversal will have significance for those who suffer when they emerge from the wilderness of grief, although I know that when loss is first encountered such a transformation is not only impossible to imagine but also may sound like a blasphemous betrayal of who or what has been lost.

Jacob was alone on the night before he was to meet his older brother Esau. He had not seen Esau in close to two decades, having fled Beersheva where his family lived after having stolen Esau's birthright, their father's blessing.(Gen. 32:30) The last time Jacob had seen Esau, Esau was going to kill him. (Gen. 32:23-33.) Jacob must have feared that this night before their reunion would be his last. He sent his family, servants, and all his possessions ahead of him while he remained behind in the camp anticipating a night of solitude and anxiety. (Gen. 32:8.)

Instead Jacob spent that night wrestling with a mysterious creature. (Gen. 32:26.) This "*ish*" (man) is presumed to be God or one of God's messengers. (Gen. 32:29) The struggle continued until daybreak when the being, recognizing that Jacob had prevailed, asked to be released. Jacob refused

saying that he would not let his mysterious adversary go until he had given Jacob a blessing. That blessing came in the form of a name change. The being said to Jacob, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, because you have "struggled with" ("sarit" "שרית") God ("El") and human beings and you have prevailed." (Gen. 32:29) ("Israel" means "one who struggles with God.")[137]

Bilaam's phrase commemorates Jacob's rite of passage as his name came to reflect his spiritual power. It also reflects that transformation as reflected in the places in which he dwelled. The word, "*ohalacha*" in the first half simply means "your tents,"[138] while "*mishkenotecha*" the corresponding word in the next half of the line means "Your tabernacles"[139] or "Your dwelling places." Like the word, "Israel," the new name of Jacob, "*mishkenotecha*" contains a name of God. The reason that "*Mishkan*" (singular of "*mishkenot*") can be understood as either "dwelling place" or "tabernacle"--words that don't seem related, when we read them in the English, is that it has the same root as the word "*Shekhina*."[140] The *Shekhina* is the name commonly associated with the immanent God who dwells in our midst.[141] "Jacob," a name which indicated that he was the second of twins, born clutching the "*ekev*" or heel of his brother Esau) (Gen.

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[137] Solomonick, Abraham and Morrison, David *Maskilon I: Hebrew- English Dictionary of Verb-Roots.* Milah Publications, Jerusalem, 1996. p. 593.
[138] Alcalay. vol. 3 p. 3770 & vol. 2 p. 32. BDB. pps. 13 &14.
[139] BDB p. 1014-1016. Solomonick, and Morrison, *ibid.* 96. p.566.
[140] BDB. *ibid.*
[141] Alcalay. vol. 3. p. 2612.

25:26) became "Israel," one who "struggled with God... and prevailed." (Gen. 32-29). His home changed from the simple tents indicated by "*ohel*" to tabernacles or holy dwelling places for the *Shekhinah* indicated by "*Mishkan*."

What follows is an excursus on the understanding of the difference between an "*ohel*" and a "*mishkan*:" [142] It was in "*ohalim*" that the people of Israel lived in the wilderness after they fled Egypt and before they had reached the land that had been promised to their ancestors. I imagine that these tents were simple structures, which one person could pitch. They were set up outside the camp as temporary homes allotted to individuals and their families. While it was possible for individuals to commune with God in private there, "*ohalim*" were not communal structures. They were not places to offer sacrifices, and God did not reside in them.

The *Mishkan*, on the other hand, was God's dwelling place among Israel. Placed in the center of the camp, this was the place where the tablets of the law were kept. Here sacrifices were offered. The *Mishkan*'s purpose was to create a place for sacred communion with God. The *Mishkan* accompanied Israel during the wilderness period. This portable sanctuary was her companion during the journey from the awesome revelation at Sinai to the establishment of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem.

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[142] Gesenius. Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament. word numbers:166 & 4908. Baker Book Company: Grand Rapids, 1979.

When the two terms, "*ohel*" and "*mishkan*" are used together, the ohel refers to the outer covering while the *Mishkan* is the deepest inner places in which God dwells.[143] This juxtaposition parallels the contrasts between the sacred and the mundane, between the temporary and that which stays with us, and between our personae and our personal depths as we journey through life. It underscores the use of the above phrase as a template for the journey through the temporary, although very difficult, challenges of grief to a more permanent resting place in the presence of the Divine.

With what was Jacob struggling as he prepared to pitch his tent for the solitary night that he likely expected would be the last night of his life? And how does it compare to the lonely nights of the mourner? While the word "*ish*" means simply "man," it has been proposed that Jacob's opponent was an angel, some other messenger of God or that it actually may have been God. Jacob may have been sparring with his own inner "*ish*" and all the guilts and rages that he had carried with him since he left Beersheva many years before. On this dramatic night, he might have been tormented by his fears and misgivings at having tricked his brother into giving up his birthright, or by his sense that he had abandoned his parents, whom he apparently never saw again. Perhaps Jacob agonized over the complicated relationships within the family he created in which he so

[143] *Ibid.*

favored one son, the child of a beloved wife over the many sons of his other wife who he, himself, had been tricked into marrying. Jacob might have struggled with any of these on the night that he thought would be his last. Is this not reminiscent of the late night ruminations of one lost in grief's wilderness, wondering what went wrong?

Perhaps Jacob was struggling not just with the personal problems that were his alone, but with the existential issues, which are the inheritance of all of humanity with which any one of us is likely to struggle at profound moments when we must contemplate death. These challenges of being an "*ish*," a mortal, might have confronted Jacob on the night when he thought that his mortality was in danger.

Whatever the nature of Jacob's antagonist, Jacob prevailed and became Israel. Jacob named the place of this struggle *Peniel*, which means "the face of God." because "I have seen God face to face and my soul has endured." (*Gen.* 32:31)

He then met his brother, who gave him a surprisingly warm greeting. (Gen. 33: 2-16) Jacob left the reunion and lived temporarily in *Sukkot*.(Gen. 33:17) Finally:

ויבא יעקב שלם עיר שכם
Yacov came home in peace to the city of *Shechem* (Gen. 33:18)

where he bought a parcel of land, indicating his intention to settle permanently.(Gen. 33:18-20) These two stops- one temporary and the other fixed are also metaphors for the journey of grief-work as described in this work, representing both the journey and its completion. "*Sukkot*," represents, of course, the transitory dwelling places during the times that unfinished business requires attention. But Jacob's settling "in peace" in "the city of Shekhem," provides a hopeful view of the destination of the mourners' path. "Peace-Shalem" means completeness. It is the same root as "whole," "healing," and "Shalom-peace."[144] It is the consequence of the challenging work, performed on the journey.

The Journey to Shalem

Grief-work is a long and roundabout journey to *Shalem*. It begins with the shattering of the faith structures that have been sufficient until the current crisis. On the way mourners must dwell in *Sukkot*, where they are faced with the challenge of turning mundane tents into holy tabernacles. While camped out in those *Sukkot* they are subjected to enormous battles with the adversaries of human life, like the mysterious *ish* that is a confrontation with things human and Divine. As with Jacob, perseverance yields transformation. It integrates the mystery at the core of human experience, allowing humans to dwell in peace in a home of their own- a home that bears the name of God. Jacob's name became holy, because he

[144] *BDB*. p. 1022-1024.

struggled with God face-to-face and endured. (Gen: 33:31) While hard to imagine, when entering grief's wilderness, such a fate is available further down the mourners' path.

We begin the journey begins by identifying the places along the Mourners' Path as *Sukkot*, temporary dwelling places to give them the holiest of names. These are places that mourners might learn to enter with a sense of reverence or awe. For these crude tents have the potential to become *mishkenot*.

מה טובו אוהלך יקוב משכנותיך ישראל

Ma tovu, ohalecha Ya'kov, mishk'notecha Yisrael

How good are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places Israel! (Num.24:5)

The Rabbis Construct *Sukkot*

Sukkot are appropriate markers or stations on the journey through the wilderness of grief, for they recall the resting places of the Israelites on their demanding journey through the wilderness from slavery to the promised land. Insight into the construction of these shelters can be gleaned from the instructions given by the authors of the Mishnah for building the *sukkot* for the holiday of the same name. Their guidelines are relevant to the challenges of grief and the needs of the mourner.

The *Sukkah* derives its name from the *s'chach*, made up of fronds or other cut leafy material that provides the shade that covers the structure. The

Mishnah says that "for a *Sukkah* to be valid, there must be enough *s'chach* so that it blocks more sunlight than it admits." [145] This provides a useful metaphorical guideline for constructing the *sukkot* in the wilderness of grief. Let us return to the earlier kabbalistic citations, which spoke of *Tzimtum* as a reaction to the fact "that human creation is overwhelmed and blinded by the brightness of the Divine Light."[146] The *sukkot* of grief can be conceived as spaces of shade for those who have been overwhelmed by the glaring light of loss- a light that so often forces a struggle with the mourner's understanding of the Divine.

Just as shelter from the sun was essential protection for those dwelling in the desert, so it is needed for the liminal stages of grief. For me, this resonates with the kabbalistic concept of *tzimtzum*. One of the significant aspects of *Tzimtzum* is that it permits the too bright primeval light of creation that overwhelmed humans to be assimilated.[147] This recalls the intense encounter with the profound nature of life and death than stuns the mourner in the early stages of grief. The *sukkot* of grief will create a safe place in which these hard teachings can be absorbed by creating sheltered spaces for mourners to contemplate their losses in the protective, filtered light of the *sukkot*.

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[145] Schotenstein *B.T. Sukkah* 2a ff 6.
[146] Turner, Victor. *LKM*. p. 208.
[147] *ibid.*

The Mishnah also directs that "You shall make [*s'chach*] and not use that which was already made."[148] Just as a traditional *sukkah* cannot be fashioned from already existing structures, so too the structures created for the incubation of grief will need to be constructed anew for the new realities that grief imposes.

As the mourner loosens hold on what is lost, he or she begins to let go of the past and make room for a more spacious understanding of a universe, one that can accommodate a vision that can hold both loss and healing. So to, the Mishnah gives attention to the need for the sukkah's covering to be an open space.

> A roof that has no plaster on it...*R. Yehuda* says. *Beit Shammai* say one looses the boards and takes one board from between every two boards. And *Beit Hillel* says that one loosens them or takes one board from between every two boards...[while]...*R. Meir* says one takes one from between two boards and he does not loosen them. (B.T. Sukkah: 15a)

Even among the rabbis of the Talmud, who are likely to have differing opinions in many areas, all agree that there must be an opening and that boards must be loosened or removed in order to create the roof of the *sukkah*. So to, we assert that the nature of healing calls for the removal

[148] Shottenstein. *B.T. Sukkah 15a. Note* 33.

and rearrangement of the assumptions which were the structure of the world that existed before the loss was encountered.

Residing in the *sukkah* was not to be an act of half-hearted dedication. That one must commit oneself to the experience of the *sukkah* is stressed in the Mishnah. As it says:

> With respect to one whose head and most of [his body] was in the *sukkah*, but his table was inside the house, *Beit Shammai* invalidates this arrangement (B.T. Sukkah: 28a)

While there is controversy over this with *Beit Hillel*, *Beit Shammai* is adamant:

> If you have always conducted yourself thus, then, in all your days, you have never fulfilled the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*. (B.T. Sukkah: 28a)

So great was the commitment to living in the *sukkah* that:

> It once happened that the daughter-in-law of *Shammai* the Elder gave birth and was bedridden, and [*Shammai*] removed the plasterwork of the roof over her bed and placed *s'chach* above the bed, for the sake of the minor. (B.T. Sukkah: 28a)[149]

Grief work, like a meal eaten in the *sukkah*, requires a complete commitment. It may be likened to the Mishnah's insistence that:

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[149] Ibid. The assumption here is that the minor was obligated to fulfill the mitzvah of dwelling in the *sukkah* however there is controversy about this. See note 39 in the Shotenstein and *Gemara* 28:b.

> All seven days of *Sukkot* a man makes his *sukkah* his fixed residence, and his regular house his temporary residence. [even] if rain was falling into the *sukkah*...(*B.T. Sukkah* 28a)

Just as one must endure discomfort while fulfilling the religious obligation to dwell in the *Sukkah*, one must endure the discomfort of grief in order to receive its blessings. An increasingly familiar practice, the welcoming of imaginal *ushpizin* or guests described is in the *Zohar*.[150] It provides a model for one of the important tasks of grief, described above as the work of "continuing the conversation" with the deceased. According to this ritual, each night of *Sukkot* a different mythic guest is welcomed imaginally into the *sukkah*. Traditionally these guests include the Patriarchs and the other major male Biblical figures, each of whom is associated with one of the *Sephirot*.[151] A contemporary custom is to extend the invitation, first to Biblical women and to broaden the custom to include any person, living or dead, who is not physically present at the time. This practice creates an excellent framework for perhaps one of the most important tasks of grieving, as specified above, to embrace a spiritual connection with the person or the situation that is gone which is not dependant on physical presence. This allows the positive aspects of what is lost to continue into the future.

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[150] References to the custom of inviting the *Ushpizin* or holy guests into the *sukkah* are found in the Zohar Emor 103a, Derech Hashem 3:2:6, Zohar Chadash, Toldot 26c; cf. Zohar 2:256a.

[151] Ascent-of-Safed Dictionary of Terms defines *sefirot*, as ten divine emanations that serve as channels for divine energy or life-force. Ascent-of-Safed. "Dictionary of Terms," Ascent of Safed, http://www.kabbalaonline.org/statiopages/glossary.asp#M.

The focus on creating healing space as the prescription for the challenges of grief was implicit in the Temple's ritual for healing. As the mourners' processional proceeded through the Temple court and their eyes met those of their comforters, the formulaic blessing, mentioned above, was recited. As mentioned above: "They would then say to him, 'May [the One] who dwells in this House comfort you.'"[152] This blessing is the ancestor of the contemporary blessing given to mourners, which evolved, after the destruction of the Temple, to include those who mourned its destruction:

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים
May God [The Place] comfort you, among those who mourn
Zion and Jerusalem.

As discussed above, the name for God in this blessing is *"HaMakom"* which literally means, "The Place." Defining God as "The Place" promotes the understanding that what mourners most need is a space in which they can contemplate the loss and its ramifications. This is the sort of place this work hopes to construct for mourners, as protection from the burning light of loss.

המקום ינחם

[152] *Semahot* 8:11.

Part Two: Reconstructing the Mourners' Path

Chapter Eight: *Shevirat HaKelim:* The Breaking of Vessels: Entering the Wilderness

You must make yourself like a wilderness in order to receive the Torah Bmidbar rabba 19:26

Choosing words to describe and contain the experiences of those making the passage through the wilderness of grief is a humbling task. Using language to shape an empty space has prestigious Biblical antecedents. According to Genesis, the world was created out of chaos through the words of God. (Ber. 1:1-31). Interestingly, there is an etomological connection between the Hebrew words for "wilderness" (מדבר) and "speak" (לדבר). According to Gershon Sholem, in Medieval Jewish philosophy human beings were referred to as "midaber" "מידבר", or "creatures who speak." [163] It was in the wilderness that the ten utterances and the Torah, all words that were to shape behavior, were given. Imagining ourselves in the wilderness is to imagine ourselves at a time of great vulnerability and this is certainly true for those passing through the crucible of liminality.

[163] Addison, Howard. *Jewish Spiritual Direction*, Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock, Vt. 2006. p. 63 quoting Gershom Sholem. *Kabbalah*. Quadrangle: New York, 1974. pps. 23-26.

This vulnerability is acutely felt in the second phase of the Lurianic Kabbalistic version of the creation process is *Shevirat HaKelim*. Here the vessels from which the Divine Energy has withdrawn break apart, shattering the world and hiding its holiness. It is here that the mourner enters the tents in the wilderness of mourning to confront grief's broken and un-contained feelings and face the most intense grief-work. *Avodah*, the Hebrew word for "work," was also the name for the sacrificial service performed by the High Priest in the Ancient Temple in Jerusalem. It is also the name for the Yom Kippur service commemorating those Temple practices. The sacrifices (the *korbanot*- from a word meaning "to draw near") were the vehicles which brought them closer to God and through which they realigned themselves with their intentions of holiness. The process of sacrifice provided the spiritual technology which enabled them to transform the physical (their sacrificial contribution) into the spiritual (their closeness with God). It is in this wilderness that the mourner, too, seeks to transform the connection from what has been prominent in his or her physical world to spiritual connection.[154] Indeed, it is through the sacrifices made, which propel individuals to the Mourners' Path that they too, if they hazard the journey through the wilderness of grief, that it is possible that they will be brought closer to God. The work in the tents will be to find that closeness to the Holy Presence that is hidden in the torment of loss and change- changing it from an *ohel* to a *mishkan*.

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[154] Brener. *M. & M. passim.*

During this time in the wilderness, the fractious emotional states are evident. Within Kubler-Ross' formulation, this period corresponds to the phases highlighted by the emotional experiences of anger, depression, and bargaining. On this non-linear, often chaotic path, the mourner ricochets from one feeling to another. Containing these all under the one heading of *sheverit hakelim*, imposes a higher organization. This designation is descriptive of the broken feelings that make their way into the containment and shelter provided by the *sukkot*. with the hope that this will make them less frightening and more manageable. This is accomplished further by distilling each feeling from the chaos of grief and assigning it to a specific *sukkah*. Each *sukkah* holds an important truth about the human experience. Each *sukkah* reveals another place where the Divine Presence can be encountered and another face of the Divine.

In our wilderness of mourning there are four tents. The first two tents, *Sukkat Kavod* and *Sukkat Kodesh*, have names taken from attributes of God's Holiness. The second pair of tents, Israel and Judah, are modeled after two Biblical characters whose different stories present very different ways of relating with God. Within each tent, the mourner will find very different opportunities for struggle and growth and healing. Each represents another aspect of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' path, although there is not an absolute correspondence to her stages. When the mourner is ready

to leave each of the tents both the mourner and the tent itself will have

been transformed.

מה טובו אוהלך יעקוב משכנותך ישראל

ma tovu, ohalecha Yakov, mishk'notecha Yisrael

How good are your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places Israel!

THE NEW MOURNERS' PATH

The Path of the Psyche:
The Therapeutic Path of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

Denial	**Bargaining**	**Depression**	**Anger**	**Acceptance**
		(Not necessarily in linear order)		

The Path of the Soul: A Holy and Creative Path

Tzimtum	*Sh'verat haKelim*	*Tikkun*
Mochin de'Katnut		*Mochin de'Gadlut*
Lower ***YIRAH***		Higher ***YIRAH***
Awe born of *Pakhad*		Awe born of *Ahava*
shock, fear & horror		*shleimut*, , peace, & healing
Terror		Amazement
	Sukkot b'Midbar	
The Call	***KAVOD--KADOSH--YISRAEL--HODAOT***	The Promised Land

The First Stage of Grief

> When life brings you suffering, hurt.
> When life brings you joy, laugh.
> Cling to nothing
> For all is fleeting. (*Mishna Avot.* 1:7)[155]

The souls' grief-work journey begins at the edge of the wilderness. A loss has taken place, but it has not yet been assimilated. Kubler-Ross calls this early stage of grief: Denial. It represents the way in which the human psyche initially reacts to startling changes by withdrawing to create protective defenses. These defenses allow the one who is confronted with a loss to assimilate slowly a life-shattering truth.[156]

Denial is not about pretending. It describes the natural inability, following a significant loss, to immediately surrender one's most basic assumptions about one's world, life, and the people who have been part of them. Denial is a protective mechanism. According to Kubler-Ross, denial is a healthy resistance that refuses to integrate a new paradigm until a sense of safety can be established.[157]

In the early steps on the Mourners' Path, the mourner contracts, perhaps in disbelief or numbness to find a place of safety in which the changed reality can be assimilated.[158] At this time, when the mourner is blinded by

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[155] Shapiro, Rami. *Mishna Avot.* 1:7.
[156] Kubler-Ross. *op.cit.* p. 38-49.
[157] *Ibid.*
[158] *Ibid.* and Brener. *M&M. passim.*

the horror of loss, the community is instructed by the Jewish laws of mourning to stand by to provide shelter. According to traditional Jewish practice, it is here that the mourner is cared for by the community as he or she struggles to create the defenses needed in order to face the overwhelming feelings that will punctuate the journey through the wilderness of mourning.[159]

When in this vulnerable state, community is essential. The Jewish mourning rituals are constructed so that even in the most isolated and numbed state, the mourner is held in the embrace of the community. Particularly in this early stage, much of the experience of grief is private. However the importance of mourning within the larger context of community is stressed by a tradition that assigns great importance to caring for those at significant turning points. This is born out by the daily recitation of the "obligations without measure"[160] as part of each morning's liturgy in the Reform prayerbook. As it instructs:

> These are the obligations without measure whose reward,
> too, is without measure:
> ...To welcome the stranger
> To rejoice with bride and groom
> To visit the sick
> To comfort the mourner[161]
> And the study of Torah is equal to them all (because it leads
> to them all.)[162]

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[159] Brener. *Ibid.*
[160] Frishman, Elyse D. (ed.) *Mishkan T'Fillah: A Reform Siddur.* CCAR Press. New York, 2006. p. 44.
[161] A more literal translation of this is "to accompany the dead to the grave."
[162] Frishman. *Ibid.*

This commitment to those in liminal status is reminiscent of the broad definition of "mourners" applied to those who walked the mourners' path in the Temple and receives the blessing, "May The One Who Dwells In This Place (*HaMakom)* comfort you," from the community. When the Temple was lost, the Mourners' Blessing was recast to reflect the new circumstances, it became "May *HaMakom* bless you in the midst of the remnants of those who mourn Zion and Jerusalem." The added phrase, offers consolation by expressing the hope that those who struggle will be surrounded by community while traveling the mourners' path. This support of the community, as expressed by such practices as the communal meals during *shiva* and the response of "amen" to the *kaddish* points to another paradox: Mourners need community to do this work and yet they enter each of the tents alone. Within each of those tents the mourner struggles alone to confront some of the most profound mysteries of being human.

The Mourners' Blessing affirms this private work. It wishes the mourner a Holy Place of comfort, while invoking the communal embrace. Ideally the tents, like their Biblical counterparts are situated in the midst of a community. The community stands guard as the mourner enters each tent alone. Sometimes the community is there to tell the mourner to stay in place; sometimes it is there to tell him or her that it is time to move on. The addition of the phrase אבלי ציון וירושלים hints at the fact that those who

support the mourner are also affected by the loss signaling that we share in the human condition. While acknowledging that those who help also wrestle with loss, whether in the past, present or future. The community serves as witness or protector, alert outside the tent. However the community, cannot do the mourner's work. Much of the deep grief-work that will take place in each tent can only be done in the depths of the individual bereaved soul. The community helps the mourner to prepare for this journey and provides a rudder for the mourning vessel. D.H. Lawrence poem, *The Ship of Death*, suggests this imagery:

I Now it is autumn and the falling fruit
and the long journey towards oblivion.
The apples falling like great drops of dew
to bruise themselves an exit from themselves.
And it is time to go, to bid farewell
to one's own self, and find an exit
from the fallen self.

II Have you built your ship of death, O have you?
O build your ship of death, for you will need it.
The grim frost is at hand, when the apples will fall
thick, almost thunderous, on the hardened earth.

And death is on the air like a smell of ashes!
Ah! can't you smell it?

And in the bruised body, the frightened soul
finds itself shrinking, wincing from the cold
that blows upon it through the orifices...
V Build then the ship of death, for you must take
the longest journey, to oblivion.
And die the death, the long and painful death
that lies between the old self and the new.[163]

Not Denial but *Yirah*

[163] Lawrence, D. H. "The Ship of Death." Originally published in Lawrence, D. H. *Last Poems*, ed. Richard Aldington. Martin Secker: London.1933.

This contraction, this "shrinking of the frightened soul,"[164] that takes place in this early stage of grief is not adequately described by the word, "Denial," which sounds like a willful resistance. In contemporary American culture, it sounds unhealthy. A more encompassing description of this stage may be found in the Hebrew word, "*Yirah*," which is variously translated as fear, terror, dread, awe, and reverence.[165]

Yirah describes the shock that is felt when coming toe-to-toe with the great mysteries of life and death before it is possible to absorb them. This word is familiar as the designation of the ten days in the Hebrew month of *Tishre*, which include Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur--the *Yomim Noraim*.There *Yirah* describes the intense period when individuals work to realign their paths, in order to live up to their sacred trust from God and make amends in their relationships.

I choose *Yirah* to communicate the intense, but numbed state of the early mourner, when the reality of the loss is first confronted. He or she is both blinded by the pain and blind-sided by the horror. It is at this stage that mourners contract or retreat. They withdraw into their state of numbness in order to build the defenses that will be needed to filter the blinding light of the unbearable truth of loss. With a mute mouth and a wide-open jaw, the mourner stares, unknowing and afraid, into the mystery.

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[164] *Ibid.*

[165] Alcalay. *Ibid.* Volume 3: p. 981.

The words of Psalm 115, which describe the idols of those who do not know God, as well as those who make and worship them, might describe the experience of early mourning:

> 6 They have ears, but do not hear, noses but do not smell;
> 7 They have hands, but do not touch; feet but do not walk; they do not speak through their throat.
> 8 They that make them are like them; as is every one who puts their faith into them. (Ps. 115: 6-8)

This comparison with those who do not know God may be especially relevant to the early mourner, for, in the depth of early grief, he or she may also not know God. During this time of numbness many experience alienation, not just from the forces of life, but from God as well. Perhaps it is in deference to this that Judaism's period of *aninut*, the time between the death and the burial, in which much of the behavior of mourners is tightly restricted, makes specific laws governing the relationship with the *onen* (the mourner during this period between the death and the burial) and God. Most significant here are prohibitions on prayer and study, as it says in Jewish law:

> Before the interment, the mourner. . . should not utter any benediction, nor respond "Amen"to the benedictions of others. [S]He cannot be included in a [minyan]. (*Kitzer Shulkhan Arukh* 196:1& 2)

Can we presume that those who formulated this ruling understood mourning as a spiritual crisis? It is to contend with this spiritual crisis that the *sukkot* in the wilderness will be designed. As described above those

most vulnerable to this sense of separation from God are likely to be those whose faith was grounded in the Biblical and liturgical portrayals of a God of justice and compassion. This image of God is often shattered by tragedy. I am concerned with healing that separation from God and allowing an understanding of holiness to emerge. This understanding sustains the paradox of faith where horror and beauty can co-exist.

Yirah describes the early stage of loss. It will describe the last stage as well. At first it clothes in safety those trembling in the wake of loss. It holds them protectively until they are able to take in the facts of what has happened. Their contraction conjures images of that paradox of pain and joy, which is the labor contraction of a woman giving birth. This is reminiscent of the definition of מחול *makhol* in the Hebrew phrase translated into "mourning into dancing" described above.[166] Thus *Yirah* calls forth the full continuum of human emotion. This one word encapsulates the paradoxical feelings which come to play in the journey "between the old self and the new."[167] And it does represent a kind of birth. As it says in the first chapter of the Book of Proverbs, "*Yirat YHVH reshit da`at,*" (Fear/Awe of God is the beginning of knowledge." (Prov. 1:7)

Higher and Lower Awe

[166] See ff. 22 above.
[167] D.H. Lawrence, *op.cit.*

Yirah's two-headed meaning acknowledges both the fear and the terror which attend the transformative journey, as well as its potential to generate awe and reverence. According to Eitan Fishbane, "*Yirah* and *ahavah* become the two great categories in devotional literature...[with] *Yirah* as the pathway into *ahava*."[168]In Sefer Pardes Rimonim, Moshe Cordovero aligns two modes of worship with the two sides of *Yirah*, which he refers to as *Yirah* and *Ahavah*.[169] Other kabbalists speak of these two poles of *Yirah*, the first, "Lower awe," grounded in terror and the second , "Higher Awe," based in love.[170] According to Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, a contemporary *Rosh Yeshiva* living in Hevron, there are many levels of *yirah*. The lowest rung in his system is *yirat haonesh* (fear of punishment)."[171] Because initially grief can feel like punishment, it is possible to assert this as the form of *yirah* that shrouds the mourner as he or she teeters at the edge of the wilderness of grief. This sense of grief as a reprimand from the universe torments the mourner in the early days of loss. Cordovero claims that this lower state of *Yirah* brings one to *anavah* or humility.[172] Certainly, this is true in the early days of loss, when the mourner experiences a sense of emotional isolation, and can be humbled by the lack of control that humans have over our ultimate destiny.

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[168] Fishbane, Eitan. lecture at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles. Monday, September 22, 2003.
[169] *Ibid.* in reference to *Cordovero Sefer Rimonim* p. 37.
[170] Ginsburgh, Yitzchak. *The Inner Dimension: A Gateway to the Wisdom of Kabbalah and Chassidut. Gal Einai* Institute, web-based, 5764.
[171] *Ibid.*
[172] Fishbane. *Ibid.*

Ginsburgh's rungs of higher awe "*yirat haromemut*" (awe in the presence of infinite Divine exaltedness) and "*yirat hamalchut*" (awe in the presence of Divine sovereignty) describe the destination of the journey to grief detailed here. They both describe *yirah* based in love. This understanding of *yirah*, which is much closer to the translation as "awe" is, hopefully, the outcome of the journey and will have the quality of *Ahavah* , which is seen as this outcome of the journey through the wilderness. It is the search for these experiences of the Presence of the Divine, described in Ginsburgh's categories, that is at the core of this work. In the *sukkot* in the wilderness of grief the *Yirah* born of fear will transform into *Yirah* that is marked by God's presence. But in the meantime, the mourner must wrestle with the paralyzing mixture of fear and reverence.

Meanwhile under the influence of lower *Yirah*, those who suffer stand in a frozen position. The jaw is dropped; the arms may be stretched to the sides with the palms and eyes lifted to heaven in puzzled horror. It will require the intense feelings, which come from dwelling in the tents in the wilderness to make this transition. These will summon the life force that will be necessary to propel the mourner across the continuum of *yirah* from fear and trembling in the presence of God's terrifying mystery to a renewal of reverence and love for what is Holy- Higher Awe, from experiencing God's punishment to basking in the sense of the presence of the sacred.

It is lower awe that the Israelites must have been feeling, shortly after they crossed the sea and entered the wilderness, moaning and complaining in terror at their new freedom (Ex. 19:16-18). They stood at the foot of Mount Sinai shortly before Moses was to receive the law. They were afraid.

> The third day arrived. There was thunder and lightning in the morning, with a heavy cloud on the mountain, and an extremely loud blast of a ram's horn. The people in the camp trembled. Moses led the people out of the camp toward the Divine Presence. They stood transfixed at the foot of the mountain. (Ex: 19:16-18)

And again after receiving the Ten Commandments:

> All the people saw the sounds, the flames, the blast of the ram's horn, and the mountain smoking. The people trembled when they saw it, keeping their distance. They said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen. But let God not speak with us any more, for we will die if God does. (Ex. 20:15- 16)

Like the children of Israel, those newly touched by loss teeter on the edge of the wilderness, knowing that it is not possible to go back, yet afraid to go forward. Here the fear side of the continuum of *Yirah* is palpable. Like the liberated Hebrew slaves, those who grieve will need to wander until it is time to come out of the wilderness. What is waiting for them is a promised land, which will have been crafted from the hard work of mourning. Resident there is *Yirah's* more beneficent face of *Ahavah*: radiant with the reverence which comes with having been like the burning bush, having stood in the presence of God, singed by the fire of loss and yet not consumed. (Ex. 20:15-16) It is there in this place of Higher Awe, where

Yirah is born of *Ahavah* in which the commandment to tear and to bless in one act is possible. But on this side of the wilderness of grief apprehension of God is still far away.

סוכת כבד

Chapter Nine: *Sukkat Kavod*: Stopping to Pay Honor

> *Tzam'ah l'kha nafshi, kamah l'kha b'sari - k'eretz tziyyah v'ayef mib'li mayim.* My soul thirsts for You my very flesh longs for You, like a parched land - without water. *K'ayyal ta'arog al afiqey mayyim - ken nafshi ta'arog elekha Elokim* - Like a deer panting for the flowing water -- so my souls pants for You.' (Ps: 42: 1-2)[173]

The first *sukkah* to be constructed is, perhaps, the most difficult one to enter: *Sukkat Kavod.* It corresponds, in the Kubler-Ross schema, to the stage of Depression. Here the experience of grief is challenging, both viscerally and emotionally, as the one who mourns longs for who or what is gone. This is a time of sadness, as the mourner hazards the emotional work that will transform the longing for what has been physically lost to a sustaining spiritual connection. The transition into this intuited understanding of a spiritual presence (although it may be presumptuous to call it "God") is often initiated through the yearning for something or someone more concrete: the actual person, status, or object that is lost. i.e., that which is lost. It can often appear as depression. In this chapter I will reframe this stage of grief, and construe it, as a place for transforming the yearning for the physical presence of what is lost to an enduring spiritual connection with it which can be the rudimentary connection with Holiness.

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[173] translation- Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman. personal correspondence.

> To heal after the deaths of my mother and my sister, I intuitively turned to yoga practice, thinking that it would tone my body and soothe my soul. But often I found that the relaxation of the defenses I had built to protect me, actually yielded tears and further anguish. One day, there was a breakthrough, following a challenging new position. I lay on my back and pushed with my hands and my feet, lifting my body into an arch above the floor. I held that position and took in a deep breath and let the air circulate throughout my body. I exhaled and as I lowered my body to the floor, I had the sense that veils were being pulled aside from deep places in my body and soul. They revealed connections I had never before felt to my pain, to my healing, and to those I had lost. I realized that I had not lost them. For a while, I sobbed uncontrollably. Then I spontaneously began chanting the *Shema*, lingering on the final word, "*ekhad.*" I had been saying the prayer since I was a child, but only then did I understand the meaning of "*Adonai Ekhad.*" [174]

Quite understandably, this stage of grief, with its painful and palpable yearning, burdensome sadness, and frequent despair is one of the places on the mourners' path that may be most resisted. Hovering on its periphery, the mourner fearfully anticipates that the weight of its demands will ensnare him or her in a painful morass from which it will be difficult to emerge. "Once I indulge my tears, they will never stop," mourners may agonize. I repeat, it is to confront this apprehension of getting lost in grief's despair that the metaphor of the *sukkah* has been chosen. As I have written elsewhere, each feeling "has a size and a shape, a beginning and an end. That feeling takes over only when not allowed its voice."[175] I hope that by conceiving each of mourning's emotional challenges as temporary dwelling places, they can be approached with less fear and more curiosity so that as one suffering the challenges of growth

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[174] Brener, ***M&M.*** p. 4.
[175] *Ibid.*

and change would ask, "What is to be learned by surrendering to each experience?"

The sense of heaviness and weight that a mourner might feel and which is frequently diagnosed as "depression" is the visceral insistence of the bereaved organism to stop, give honor to what is lost, and surrender to the grieving process. This is a time when mourners often experience a sense of overwhelming fatigue. This physical response to grief generates in them a fear: that there will be no energy to go forward and face the challenges that will be present in this or any of the *sukkot*.

Despite the sadness and sense of physical depletion that is so real in this *Sukkah*, the word "depression" is not appropriate. Depression is a clinical state. It is a psychological diagnosis with an organic base.

> Depression is one of the most common mental health disorders, with patients numbering 19 million and counting. Depression is a catch-all term for many types of what's known as "mood disorders," including the self-explanatory major depression and it's milder but chronic cousin, called dysthymia. Other [related]mood disorders include bipolar disorder, which can fling patients between extreme highs and lows; postpartum depression, which affects new moms; seasonal affective disorder, which happens most often in winter months when there's a decrease in ambient light; and premenstrual dysphoric disorder, a serious form of PMS.[176]

Although the symptoms of depression and those of grief have much in common, the two are not the same. Depression describes an illness. It

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[176] *Prevention Magazine on-line* May 13, 2007.

requires medical treatment. Grief, however, is a healthy, appropriate, though often unbearable response to loss. In the tent of *Kavod*, grief is painful but not pathological. Perhaps this understanding may relieve some of the terror, which mourners bring to this *sukkah*, thinking that there is something wrong with them. Knowing that the anguish of this *sukkah* is not a sign of illness, but an appropriate response, may make it easier to surrender to the necessity of *Kavod's* downward pull. It may make it easier and less terrifying, but it is not likely to assuage all the pain. It hurts to let go.

I reiterate that Kubler-Ross said that there is no particular order for experiencing the various stages .[177] However a visit to this *Sukkah* often starts when the state of *Yirah* has begun to wear off. The one who mourns feels less numb and more in touch with the feelings that are beginning to emerge. The death is no longer news. The fact of the diagnosis, divorce or other change is beginning to sink in. The fires of grief have been banked, and the mourner begins to sift through the ashes. Each labored breath exposes what has been left behind and reveals a glimpse of the obstacles ahead. While at times the mourner may still feel wrapped in gauze and unable to move, the feeling of palpable sadness can be unbearable, as the mourner begins to comprehend the changes that have taken place and

[177] Branson, Roy. "Is Acceptance a Denial of Death? Another Look at Kubler-Ross," *The Christian Century*, May 7, 1978, p. 464-468. http://www.religiononline.org/showarticle.asp?title=1887. as quoted in [220] Goodman, Sara. *The Process of Grief as Defined by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and Reflected by Job and Naomi in the Books of Job and Ruth* unpublished paper.

their consequences for his or her life. At the same time the mourner yearns for what is gone. I have observed this frequently in working with those who grieve. Here is an example:

> A month after receiving a diagnosis of cancer, Sarah came to my office. She sat down on the couch opposite me and sank deep, almost disappearing, into the pillows. She settled shapelessly and sat for a while breathing shallowly. Finally she let out a sigh and began to speak. "I feel depressed," she said. "I feel heavy. I can't move. I cry all the time. I have no desire to go on with my treatment." As she spoke, a trickle of tears ran down her cheek. With that sigh and those tears, Sarah had pulled back the flap to enter one of the difficult places in which mourners reside in the wilderness of grief.[178]

This stage may also come after the intense experience that takes place in *sukkah* to be described later, *Sukkat Kodesh*. This will be the place to be visited after the raging and the fierce resistance to the decree, which that anger represents, has exhausted itself. At this point the mourner might sink into the heaviness and fatigue, which is both an emotional curse and a recuperative blessing in *Sukkat Kavod*.

The above example from my experience as a clinician, suggests that people who suffer often experience that downward pull as a feeling of heaviness. Perhaps this weight can be associated with the gravitas that is necessary when confronting loss, echoing the use of the common use of the word,

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[178] See ff. 133 above.

Kavod, as "heavy."[179] This weighty feeling is their organism asserting the opposite of what the culture is demanding of them. While they are being urged to get over their loss quickly and get on with their lives, their bodies and souls are saying, "Stop. Feel the gravity...the weight, of this situation. Honor what is past. Honor that which is being born within you. Honor your need to broaden the dimensions of your understanding and to come to terms with your new status and new world. Stop. Consider what it means to be human." This is consistent with Leon Wiesletier's assertion that "we do not mourn over death, we mourn over mortality."[180] Wiesletier quotes Nahmanades' *Torat Haadam*, describing mourning as "a primary religious activity [which] enables us to contemplate our true end and to know...our true home."[181] "What death really says," says Wieseltier, "is 'think.' "[182] There are genuine tragedies, sadnesses, and injustices that one cannot deny or rationalize away when taking the measure of a life. They merit the contemplative time of the broken heart, spoken of by Wieseltier, and necessary to healing. Mourners reside in *Sukkot Kavod* like seeds that lie fallow in the earth, absorbing the moisture necessary to bring forth the buds of spring and the harvests that follow. As such, tears are important in *Sukkot Kavod*. They represent the rains and the stillness of winter. Dwelling in this sad, moist, and quiet place, mourners yearn for what is lost and for the strength to move beyond it.

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[179] Alcalay, R. *The Complete English-Hebrew Dictionary*. Chemed Books. Massada. Yedioth Ahronoth: Israel. 1990. Volume 3: p. 981.

[180] Weiseltier, Leon. New York: Knopf: New York. 1998. p.8.

[181] *Ibid.* p. 8-9.

[182] *Ibid.* 59.

As with all of the sukkot to be visited, the choice of the name "*Kavod*" for this *sukkah* is counterintuitive. "*Kavod*" means honor. The name of each *sukkah* is chosen to de-pathologize the stage of grief that it represents. These choices have been made in order to emphasize the fact that the stopover it requires, for those on The Mourners' Path , is both worthy and sacred. Here, I have chosen the holy word "*Kavod*" as its name in order to underscore the fact that grief, unlike depression, is not a disease. As with all of the steps on this New Mourners' Path, *Sukkat Kavod* is a place in which an essential understanding of what is profound and holy can be apprehended. Here, in a tent of tears, the mourner's task is to explore the emotions connected with longing, enabling their transformation from a fixation on the lost object to a concern with a connection to that which is eternal. This is an essential element in the process of surrendering the physical connection with what is lost, on the path to embracing first a spiritual bond with who or what has been lost and second a connection with a more general sense of spirituality. As the wife of a policeman who died at the World Trade Center said, "you get a whole new relationship with God."

Like "*Yirah*" and other of the *sukkot*, the name chosen has several layers of meaning, making these useful terms to encompass the poles in the process of transformation. *Kavod* also means "honor," as in the Biblical

commandment to "honor mother and father." (Ex. 33:18) It also is translated as "weight" and "glory."[183] *Kavod* can also be perceived as the physical precipitate of God's glory that is visible in the world (i.e., "the whole world is filled with God's glory"(Isa. 6:3). Like *Yirah*, *Kavod* has two faces. It is the passage from one to the other, from the experience of *Kavod* as weight to the sense of *Kavod* as God's glory that must take place in this *sukkah* in order to sanctify this stage of the journey, as the mourner yields to the heaviness of sad feelings to explore what else might be learned there.

According to Arthur Green's *These are the Words: A Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Life*:

> *Kavod* or "glory" is the biblical term for God's presence as manifest in the world...however, *kavod* is a presence that is more intuited than seen...[184]

In *Sukkat Kavod*, the yearning for the presence of what is lost gives way to a yearning that calls forth God's presence, and with it, the sense that even in the face of loss, wholeness is possible. This wholeness is achieved as the yearning for the physical connection diminishes. In the process a palpable sense of the positive essence is distilled from the memory of who or what is lost and the mourner establishes a spiritual relationship with that essence. The tie, which seemed to be irrevocably severed and creates such a searing wound in the World of *Assiyah*, is reestablished in the World of

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[183] Alcalay, R. *op. cit.* p. 981.
[184] Green, Art, *op. cit.* p.16.

Atzilut. The mourner experiences the nearness, that is characteristic of the relationship to God in that world, with the person who is lost. "He's always with me," might be the way in which this connection is described.

This is in harmony with the practice from the *Zohar* described above, which engages fantasy in inviting imaginary guests into the *sukkah* [185] and provides a model for using the *sukkah* as a venue in which what is not obtainable in the physical world becomes spiritually accessible. It affirms the possibility of maintaining spiritual connection and continuing to benefit from the values of what is no longer tangibly present.

At the same time, it is very possible that a parallel shift in the relationship with God takes place, particularly for those whose understanding of God has been another casualty of the loss. In *Sukkat Kavod*, it is likely that the image of God shifts from something that is perceived intellectually to one that is experienced viscerally. God as image becomes God as presence.

The *Kedushah*, the central paragraph of the *Amidah*, states that "The whole world is filled with God's glory (*kavodecha*)." (Isa. 6:3) These words, said to be delivered from the perspective of the angels, praise God for the creation of the world. It might be said that there is a fine stardust that falls from God into the universe, which is the source of all of its beauty. This

[185] see ff. 147 above.

physical residue of God, *Kavod*, is the stuff of Holiness that sticks and becomes tangible. The things that we can perceive and touch are God's *Kavod*. This is the essence of God that is present in the material world. But in *Sukkat Kavod*, as the burden of grief weighs heavily on the mourner, it may not be possible to discern that essence.

A Kabbalistic teaching connects the *gematria* or numerical value of the word, *Kavod* with the numerical value of the four-letter name of God: twenty-six. According to the teaching, this shared *gematria* indicates that the impression of the Divine upon the world is communicated through *Kavod*.[186] *Kavod*, then, is God's weight. It is God's tangibility, God's manifestation, and physicality. It is the residue that falls out of spirit. When one suffers, one may forget that the intense and heavy feelings that are being suffered are appropriate and are at all connected to Holiness. In the tent of *Kavod* it is easy to forget. Mourners feel the physicality without a sense of the Holiness. Initially the walls of *Sukkat Kavod* can feel like prison walls until the mourner makes peace with the need to feel the gravitas and give honor to what has been lost.

Even though the world is telling them, "go on, get on with your life and move forward," the mourner's body (which is made of this stardust, by the way) is saying from the depths of its organic self, "I will not move. I have to

[186] Collins, John J. and Fishbane, Michael. *Death, Ecstacy and Other Worldly Journeys*. State University of New York Press: New York. 1995.

stop. I have to give honor to what is gone. I have to pay attention. I have to spend time in this place to understand what it means to have lost this person, this status in my life, whatever it is that is being mourned. I have to spend time to understand what life means. I have to reconnect to holiness. I have to respect (מכבד *m'cabed*- another cognate)[187] the experience."

Grief work is not just letting go, which would be difficult enough. It requires the reconstruction of the mourner's entire world. Grief's call is to see the universe in a completely different way. Suffering forces the mourner to reorient him or herself at a time when it feels that God's presence has been withdrawn from the world. This is all the more excruciating for those whose faith has been shattered by a sense of the betrayal by a God who had been previously perceived as protective and just. Hence, the longing is not just for the deceased or for the previous status.

Moses longed for what he could not have, as well. "*Har'eini na et kevodecha*, Please show me your kavod," (Exodus 33:18) he begged of God. When the seemingly unrelated words: "God's Presence," "glory," "weight," and "heaviness," are conflated into one word, we might understand *Kavod* to refer to the residue of Holiness that drips down to earth and sticks, infusing the world with God's radiance. Moses longed for that palpable

[187] Alcalay. *op. cit.* Volume 3: p. 981.

experience of God. Moses' yearning represents the yearning of all who come to this *Sukkah* both for what they have lost and for an understanding of the power that moves the world and can often leave such suffering in its wake. Rarely would that yearning be articulated as a yearning for God, but, in fact the mourner seeks a connection with something that is not going to be severed by finitude. It is a yearning for something eternal. Is that not as yearning for God?

***Ga'agu'im* / Longing**

The experience of longing is a common emotion in *Sukkat Kavod*. It is an unbearable, but necessary feeling as the mourner's experience is transformed from one of *Mochin de Katnut* to one of *Mochin de Gadlut*. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shlomi's wisdom on longing or "*ga'gau'im*," encourages those who suffer the experience to use it as a path to God. Schachter- Shalomi speaks of *ga'agu'im*, as an essential part of the contemplative life. He reflects on the possibility of engaging longing as a route toward holiness. While his concern in the following passage relates to addiction and less enlightened needs, it is relevant to the experience in *Sukkat Kavod*, when it is so hard to break free of the bondage to what is lost. "There are times," he says, "when we feel connected with God and times when we don't. What is it," he asks, "that propels us... to be more in harmony with God?" He answers,

> We yearn for *d'vequt[270]*. We long to be connected to the Holy One. Something calls us to God. We are theo-tropic beings. Like the sunflowers and the heliotropes, which turn to the sun, we are constantly turning toward God. But we so often fail to understand the nature of our longing. That hunger is an inchoate and free-floating longing, which doesn't have a label on it. And so, we don't know how to direct it... like grief diverted, the feeling of our longing for God has become so buried and hidden that we don't recognize it for what it is. The grand yearning gets directed [elsewhere].[188]

Clothed in the yearning for what has been lost, it is a yearning, like that of Moses, for some irrefutable sensory knowledge of God's presence. The mourner yearns for a renewed faith that can be held onto like a buoy.

Life in *Sukkat Kavod* is accompanied by the weight of unparalleled exhaustion. This fatigue of grief contributes to *Sukkat Kavod's* inertia. As overwhelming as this weight is, its downward pull can provide respite from the shock previously felt as *Yirah*. When confronted with profound loss, the implications of what it means to be human are so stunning that it is as if the mourner has seen God's *Kavod* without any protection from "God's devouring fire." (*T.B. Sotah* 14a) [236]. This sense of *Yirah*, which has been discussed, puts him or her closer than even Moses was allowed to come to the mystery of God. Moses, after all, was protected from the power of this encounter. When Moses asked to see God's *Kavod*, he was only permitted to walk in God's wake, rather than experience the devouring radiance of The Holy One face-to-face. (Ex. 33)

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[188] Schachter-Shalomi. Unpublished manuscript.

As in the discussions of *Yirah*, profound experiences of loss put those who suffer close to the place where the worlds touch. They may have the sense that they have been burned in the encounter. Having touched the mystery- one could say- having almost seen God, they have to take time to recover from the intensity. The vessel is cracked. They must assimilate the heaviness of what they have experienced. In the world of *Kavod*, those who have been exhausted by confronting God's glory are given the recovery time they need, if only they will take it. This time of recuperation masquerades as a time of depression.

There is no vitality in *Sukkat Kavod*. The pulse of life force is barely detectable. So the mourner waits, unable to move. *Sukkat Kavod* takes time. The mourner sits in contemplative meditation and is forced to ponder the loss. In so doing, not only is the specific loss given honor, but also the understanding of loss itself. The mourner feels the weight- the heaviness- the gravitas of what loss itself is about: of what it means to be human on a planet where people die. In the process of contemplation, something lightens. It is as if the little droplets of holiness reappear. The life-force and the tentative sense of first the presence of who or what has lost becomes tangible again. And with this spiritual connection comes a connection to the mystery that it represents. There is a renewed, though

perhaps tentative, connection to that which is holy. This is the beginning of the redemption of the holiness that was lost with the loss.

Prayer in a Time of Tears

On an imaginal altar in *Sukkat Kavod*, there is a salt-water fountain representing a well of tears. This fountain symbolizes the essential expression of the deep work of lament that takes place in this sukkah. At the foot of this fountain is a lacramonium,—a small glass bottle with two openings that fit under the eyes to catch tears as they fall. It is reported that these bottles, relics from Egypt and elsewhere in the Ancient Near East, were used around the year 150 to hold the tears of those who mourned the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. These mourners are the very people, the אבלי ציון וירושלים -"those that mourn Zion and Jerusalem," who are acknowledged in the codicil to the mourners' blessing, as discussed above. According to a legend, it was believed that when the bottle was filled, the Messiah would surely come.[189] Dare mourners believe that their tears can bring redemption?

That the tears of the suffering mattered to God is indicated by Psalm LVI: 9, which says, in what may be a reference to the lacramonium: "You have counted up my tears in a bottle."(Ps. LVI: 9) These tears of mourning, which fall so freely in *Sukkat Kavod*, recall the tears of those early rabbis, who in

[189] Notes attached to an object on display at Temple Israel of Hollywood.

their yearning for Zion and Jerusalem formulated the paradigm of "prayer of the heart," as a way of drawing close to God in the absence of the cultic technology of *korbanot*,

> Rabbi Elazar said: "From the day that the Temple was destroyed the gates of prayer were closed [and God does not directly respond to petitionary prayers]... But even though the gates of prayer have been locked, the gates of tears have not been locked..."–Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzia* 59a

This belief that tears superseded even petitional prayer in reaching God's ears may be comforting to those in *Sukkot Kavod*, as their tears fall, even as it may be difficult to believe. These tears are a token of lamentation for what has been lost and are an expression of that longing at a time when God feels very distant. Certainly the Rabbis, bereft of their geographical compass points of Zion and Jerusalem, must have felt a similar sense of longing as they tried to imagine into reality a new life without the central foci of their worship life. They wondered if their tears, which fell before the open gates of heaven, might be seen as a kind of prayer.

Several passages drawn from Classical Midrash and from Aggaddic material from the Talmud provide insight into the evolution of the new paradigm of prayer. They reveal that prayer may not be so far removed from tears. This insight lends credence to the understanding that a task in this tent is to find the deep voice of prayer, transforming the longing expressed by the tears into an expression directed to The Holy One.

And I [Moses] besought the Lord. (Deut. 3:23)

Rabba's[241] Midrash on Chapter 2 from *Parshat Vaethchanan* scrutinized Deuteronomy 3:23, in which Moses beseeches God to allow him to go into the Promised Land. On the heels of his military victory and having assured Joshua, his successor, that his fight will also be protected by God, Moses returns to his personal concern and again pleads with God to be allowed to "go over, and see the good land." (Deut. 3:25).

The Rabbis were concerned because Moses' prayer was not answered. Perhaps identifying with Moses, from the depths of their communal loss, they sought to know why prayers were not answered. It is likely that asking the existential questions of *Sukkat Kavod* led the Rabbis to attempt to penetrate the true meaning of prayer for some understanding of their own dilemma and that of Moses. Their speculations from this place of tears led, according to Zalman Schachter-Shalomi to the paradigm shift that came with the destruction of the Temple and the need for a new mode of worship.[190] They give us a vocabulary for understanding their view of prayer. This vocabulary articulates much of the experience in *Sukkat Kavod*. It also provides role models for how to pray .

[190] Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman. *Paradigm Shift*. Jason Aronson Publishing. Northvale NJ. 1993.

Biblical Hannah is such a model. Her tears flowed from the depths of grief at being barren (1 Sam 1:7-8).

> Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. (1 Sam 1:13)

This silent personal prayer became the template for prayer, according to R. Hammnuna:

> ...many important rules may be derived from the verses about Hannah at prayer (Sam 1:10) "Now Hannah, she spoke with her heart," hence, he who says the *tefilla* is do it clearly with his lips, "but her voice could not be heard"- hence it is forbidden to raise one's voice in the *tefillah*. (B.T. Ber31a)

In Sukkot Kavod it is difficult to raise one's voice.

But What Should Prayer Look Like?

The Midrash under examination then shifts to a description of the inner experience of prayer and reveals, in the words of Abba Saul, a further understanding of what makes prayer work saying,

> a good omen for prayer is this: if a man directs his heart to his prayer he may be confident that his prayer will be answered.(*B.T.* Ber: 31a)

This is good advice for *Sukkat Kavod* as it is the place of the broken heart. This focus on the heart is at the core of the new understanding of how one comes close to God. Abba Saul based his confidence that God would answer the prayers of the directed heart on the promise in Psalms:

> You will listen to the entreaties of the Lowly, O lord, You will make their hearts firm; You will incline your ear. (Ps.10:17)

Of course the answer that comes to a prayer may not look like the answer that is sought. This disappointing verity is one with which mourners must come to terms.

This Midrash presents a great gift for understanding how this group of Rabbis conceived of this prayer of the heart and will have relevance in each of the *sukkot*. The passage came from R. Johanan, who gives ten synonyms for prayer. All of his words are gleaned from Biblical sources.

> R. Johanan said: Prayer is known by the following ten designations: *Shaw'ah, ze'akeh, ne'akah, rinnah, pegiah, bizur, keria' ah, nippul, pillul and tahanunim.* (*Deut. R. Vaethkhanan* 2:1)

Examining those words reveals an understanding of prayer as an expressive technique. It illustrates, with Biblical portraits, our ancestors at prayer and provides precise images of how to direct the heart in prayer with *kavanah*. Many of them rise from an experience that might look like

depression, and so cast light on expression in *Sukkat Kavod* as well as the *Sukkot* that follow.

We shall examine some of R. Johanan's designations for their guidance in *Sukkat Kavod*. Some of the designations will overlap. Others will be helpful elsewhere.

According to Marcus Jastrow's *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and The Midrashic Literature*, *Shaw'ah*, has three meanings: "to cry, to call for help and [to cry out] in anguish or [with a] sigh...[191] "Rab Huna of Sapporis said it means writhing in the agony of death."[192] In the Bible Job uses this word in describing the cry of the wounded soul and justifying complaint as an act of prayer:

> Men groan in the city; The souls of the dying cry out; yet God does not regard it as a reproach. (Job 26:12)

It is the same sound that rose to God from the slaves in Egypt,

> ...and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage and they cried and their CRY[193] came up unto God from their bondage (Ex. 2:23)

This sound, which God heard and answered, is the sound that rises from *Sukkat Kavod*.

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[191] Jastrow, Marcus. Marcus. *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and The Midrashic Literature*. The Judaica Press: New York. 1992. p.1538.

[192] These Rabbinic discussions of prayer that will be used frequently in the next chapters are taken from Deuteronomy Rabba's commentary on *Parshat Vaethchanan* Chapter 2:1.

[193] when a word is written in all capitals, it indicates that this is the English translation, given in the JPS TANAKH for the word being investigated.

Tzora means "anguish, trouble, distress, persecution as well as straits, and harass."[194] It is the word that Job used to describe the depth of feeling with which he would need to strike out to express "the anguish of my spirit in the BITTERNESS of my soul" (Jb. 7:11). It refers to a narrow place and is the root of the word for Egypt: מצרים. Once again, the emotional experience of slavery is a model for the feelings to accompany prayer and, again, Job is the role model for expressing its passion.

Ze'akeh, has the meaning of lamenting. It is the sound that Jacob caused Esau to utter when he mourned the loss of his blessing. It is a cry of distress, similar to the broken-hearted cry of the exile "My heart CRIES out for Moab." (*Is.*15:5) *Ze'akeh* is the sound of weeping and WAILING that Third Isaiah prophesied in consolation when he said that "never again would the SOUND OF WEEPING be heard in Jerusalem." (Is. 65:19) This utterance of "horror, anxiety, alarm, distress, sorrow"[195] was another sound of the painful lament uttered by the slaves in Egypt, which God heard as prelude to God's choosing to remember the covenant.

The voice of lament is painfully uttered in *Sukkat Kavod*. Lament's quiet and poetic timbre is according to Raymond Sheindlin:

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[194] *Ibid.* p. 1300.
[195] Jastrow, *op.cit.* p. 408.

> ...implicit in poetry [as is] the notion that we are deepened by heartbreaks, that we are not so much diminished as enlarged by grief, by our refusal to vanish...[or]... to let others vanish without leaving a verbal record[196]

Sheindlin's words reflect the value of the time spent in *Sukkat Kavod*, time needed to move the perception of *Kavod* from weight to glory.

The poetry with which Job laments the nature of life provides another Biblical model for the voice for *Sukkat Kavod*. He asks:

> Why did I not die upon leaving the womb, come out from the stomach and perish? Why did knees meet me? Why were there breasts to suckle me ? (Job 3:11-12)

The persevoration on the word "why" in Job's death-wish above shifts his expressive outpouring to the poetic genre of Lament, as his personal death wish becomes a reverie on the fate of humans, moving from *katnut* to *gadlut*.[197]

Poet Robert Frost says that a Lament is a deep grief that cannot be redressed but must be felt. It is, he said, a meditation on the nature of being human on a planet where there is loss.[198] A Lament, therefore, is an expression of a pure form of grief: a grief that recognizes that the die has been cast and one can do nothing to avert the severe decree. The tent of *Kavod*, like the traditional mourning practices enacted on the Ninth of Av,

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[196] Hirsch, Edward *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry* Harcourt Brace and Company, New York. 1999. p. 81.
[197] Job:13-19, with the exception of line 16
[198] Hirsch. *op. cit.* p. 80.

on which no prayers of petition are read, is a place where there is no reversing the severe decree. Here, Job might be seen on his ash heap, rocking back and forth, bemoaning the lot of humans, overwhelmed by erratic powers beyond their control, and yearning for peace.[199] These lamenting ruminations on the nature of Life and of God would find full expression in *Sukkat Kavod*.

Ne'akah, a third word for prayer, is translated by Jastrow as "groaning, the groaning of the wounded, [and]prayer in distress"[200] This word, which Ezekiel graphically uses to describe "the groaning of a deadly wounded man" (Ez. 30:24) is yet another found in the last lines of Exodus, Chapter Two.

> And God heard their GROANING and remembered the covenant... Ex 2: 24

Is not this last quote, similar to God's response to Hannah's tears and Job's lament, as well as the great hope for *Sukkat Kavod*: that God will hear and bring deliverance? The words of Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav affirm that the kinds of expressions common in *Sukkat Kavod* are efficacious to healing when he said:

> The sighing and the groaning of a Jew are very precious. When a person is lacking something, sighing and groaning can bring completeness.[201]

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[199] Job: 13:15 & 17:19.

[200] Jastrow. p. 866.

[201] Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav (translated by) Greenbaum, Avraham. *Advice: Rabbi Nachman*. Breslov Research Institute. Jerusalem/Monsey, New York, 1983. p.18.

But again, the mourner must be reminded that completeness and having a prayer heard and answered is not necessarily the same as having a prayer fulfilled. This completeness can also project an image for the conclusion of the work in *Sukkah Kavod*, bringing those who have suffered the sojourn in this painful place to sit, as it says in the morning liturgy, "At the place of the throne of glory." (Ps. 26:8) This phrase--במקום כסי כבודך--restores the mourner to a place of holiness. The place of heaviness bereft of God has become the Holy Place, *HaMakom*, where God's *Kavod* or presence is enthroned. Unlike Job who had family and wealth restored, the mourner is not likely to receive such recuperative gifts. However, what can be achieved is a sense of the positive aspects of who or what has been lost being once again present in the world. And with that it is possible to have a return of a sense of the sacredness of the world. Just as tangible as *Kavod's* weight of sadness can be the lift experienced by those whose experience of *Kavod* has shifted to a sense of a spiritual presence- whether it is the spiritual presence of what has been lost or by extension, a sense that spiritual presence and a perception of an eternal mystery can be discerned. But this transition takes patience, in Hebrew "*savlanut*," a word which shares the root with the word "*sevel*," which is translated as trouble or burden.[202] For it is in contemplating troubles and feeling the weight of the burdens that the patience necessary for transformation is cultivated. Below are some practices that may help in that effort.

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[202] Alacaly. p. 1721.

Two Spiritual Practices for the Challenges of *Sukkat Kavod*

An Exercise of Longing

Schachter-Shalomi suggests a meditative practice that is "directed toward lifting the misdirected yearning to higher levels and redirecting it toward God."[203] But he says, "In order to get through to my longing for God, I have to excavate through the many levels that have obfuscated and transformed my initial longing." By "installing this yearning into ... spiritual practice," one is able to

> ... redirect [that]longing to God... The frustration-engendered depression of distance from God will give way as you soar on the wings of your longing and connect your longing to God. In making this connection, you will move toward *d'vekut*, the unification of the Divine Will and the individual will which is at the heart of Jewish spiritual practice.[204]

B'col Yom Tamid M'asay B'reshit

The morning liturgy declares that God re-creates the universe every day. Moshe Cordevero, a Medieval Kabbalist living in Safed, believed that creation came forth in the form of Hebrew letters being consistently

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[203] Schachter- Shalomi, Zalman. *Ga'agu'im On Longing -The Energy Of the Contemplative Life.* Unpublished Manuscript.

[204] *Ibid. D'vekut* literally this can mean stuck, cleaving, or connected to God. It is an important kabalistic concept referring to the practice of being in God's presence at all times.

beamed in the direction of the objects they described. As the letters flow, they maintain the object, its form and its life force.[205]

Applying Cordevero's practice to the work in *Sukkat Kavod*, I have asked clients, exhausted from the challenge of loss, to sit still. I instruct them to breathe deeply and to relax into a completely passive mode. I then ask them to repeat the phrase, "*b'col yom tamid m'asay b'reshit*." ("The work of creation is made new every day") over and over imagining that the Hebrew letters are flowing toward them to replenish the worn-out life-force, imagining themselves being nourished by the mysterious presence as it comes to them from a distant place.

By no longer resisting the strong, sad emotions of grief and completely surrendering to the experience of grief in *Sukkat Kavod*, the mystery of healing and refreshment can work their magic. And shouldn't that mystery of healing be given the holiest of names: YHVH- God?

And with these exercises of surrender to the depletion and longing that are the experience of *Sukkat Kavod*, the boundaries between life and death- between having and loosing become more porous. The mourner's

[205] Cordovero, Moshe. *Pardes Rimonim: Sha'ar Haotiot* : Gate 27. Yedid HaSfarim : Jerusalem, 2000. p. 431.

experience of grief, like the description of the Song of Song's little sister, begins to change from a wall to a door.

We return to the altar of *Sukkat Kavod* to acknowledge the blessing of tears and to embrace the element of water, which has brought about the transformation in this place. "ברכא" the Hebrew word for "blessing" shares its root with "בריכא," which means pool and "ברכיים," which means "knees." It is my hope that those who leave this tent with feel as refreshed as our desert ancestors when parched and thirsty from their wilderness journey, gratefully came upon a pool of water and got down on their knees to bless and to drink.[206]

[206] Alcalay. vol. 3. p. 294.

Chapter Ten: Sukkot Kadosh: Re-kindling the Holy Fire

קדושים תהיו אני יהוה
You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy. (Lev. 19:2)

According to Kubler-Ross, one of the first things that people are likely to feel when they are confronted with the reality of loss is anger.[207] This is the label she gives to another of her stages of grief. But the pejorative understanding, which is frequently associated with this emotion, is lacking in her description of this stage. Rather than painting a negative picture of the outbursts of her angry patients, Kubler-Ross describes "anger" as another of the necessary emotions with which those facing loss must grapple.

Reading beyond Kubler-Ross's headline, "anger," there is a compassionate description of anger's intent.[208] She describes her dying patients as purposeful people and emphasizes the need to explore the unexpressed meaning behind the expressed rage. She describes one angry patient after another, not in terms of the unjust or caustic eruption, but in terms of the need to assert integrity and individuality in the midst of profound illness. She portrays her angry patients as people who wanted to make sure that they made a difference before "the light goes out."[209] It is here, in the *sukkah* I have named *Sukkat Kadosh*, that that difference is articulated.

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[207] Kubler-Ross. *op. cit.* p. 50-52.
[208] *Ibid.*
[209] *Ibid.* p. 52

Here, too, in claiming uniqueness, the boundaries, which may have been washed away with the tears of *Sukkat Kavod*, are re-configured. The mourner establishes, with a renewed sense of his or her own integrity, a clarified understanding of his or her uniqueness. Most significantly it is here in *Sukkat Kadosh* that the mourner is empowered by a reignited life-force to find what is holy within.

In the wake of the stunning information of loss, burning passion may be called for in order to be strong enough to penetrate the anesthetized and protected world of early grief. It takes emotion of great intensity to puncture "*Yirah*." However it must be reiterated that the order for visiting and revisiting the various *sukkot* is not fixed. It may take a robust surge of energy to lift the mourner from the weighty feelings in *Sukkat Kavod*, mobilizing him or her following the dissipation of defenses and boundaries that come with the surrender to *Sukkat Kavod's* profound emotions. However the experience in *Sukkat Kavod* may bring respite to those exhausted by the fire in the current *sukkah*, *Sukkat Kadosh*.

When mourners hover on the edge of the wilderness in the state of *yirah*, they may freeze with the terror of their vulnerability. In *Sukkat Kavod*, they begin to relax. The musculature, softened by exhaustion and tears, gives way to surrender. They are ready to enter *Sukkat Kadosh* when they have regained energy and begin to feel called to face the challenges that life

and loss have presented. The eyes narrow. The teeth clench. Palms contract into a tight fist. The mourner is summoning will and is ready to take up the fight. Anger can be the life-affirming emotion that mobilizes the effort.

Anger itself has many faces and in *Sukkat Kadosh* the focus is on the positive, vital emotion intense and passionate enough to puncture that frozen state of *Yirah* or to raise one up from *Succot Kavod.*

Daring to Use the Word Kodesh

If "*Kavod*" seemed like an unlikely word for depression, "*Kadosh*", the Hebrew word for "holy" seems so improbable a word to stand for "anger" as to be outrageous. The term "*Kadosh*" is usually translated as "holy," and it is most frequently used to describe God. Choosing such a sacred word to describe "anger," an emotion with many negative associations is counterintuitive. I make this surprising choice to underscore the importance of affirming what is often dismissed as an unattractive and forbidden feeling and harnessing it in order to find its sacred, transformative passion. Furthermore, I choose such a significant word as a way of honoring the life force, which is behind the anger. I seek with this choice, to make amends on behalf of those who have read only Kubler-Ross' word "anger" without understanding her compassion as she has sought to

de-code her patients' behavior.[210] I offer this holy word, *Kadosh*, as a caveat to those who would judge the behavior of mourners in order to encourage these detractors to help mourners as they seek to assert their life-energy, individuality, and integrity. Finally I portray what can be destructive in a holy manner as a way of cushioning some of the blows that come from the actions of those who suffer, as they lash out into a hurtful universe and injure those who are close.

But first we must explore anger's negative valence. People, especially women, have, according to Kathleen Fischer in her book, *Women at the Well: Feminist Perspectives on Spiritual Direction,*

> been discouraged from awareness of our anger and the direct expression of it...Anger is seen as endangering and perhaps destroying...relationships...[and]will lead to conflict.[211]

Taboos against anger often result in the inhibition of this essential emotion, but anger is unavoidable, as Fischer continues, quoting Fern Felder:

> The only aspect of anger about which we have choices is how we let it move us. We do not have choices about whether or not we will experience it, unless we choose to cut off a very significant dimension of God's life in us. [212]

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[210] Kubler-Ross. *op. cit.* p. 52-81.
[211] Fischer, Kathleen. *Women at the Well: Feminist Perspectives on Spiritual Direction.* Paulist Press: Mahwah, New Jersey.1998. p. 175.
[212] *Ibid.* p. 180.

Anger, insists Fischer, is "an instinct of self- preservation."[213] When anger is repressed, she says, there is a danger of "Muting the moral power of anger as a force against injustice."[214]

To harness that moral power, "Anger" is here re-framed as the holy fire that transforms matter into spirit, catalyzes passion, and delineates a sense of boundaries and of integrity. This seems a more useful (and certainly more compassionate) understanding of the passion of grief than the unpleasant associations usually carried by anger, especially when those who suffer lash out in rage and blame, often for unclear reasons. By conceiving of the energies that are usually associated with anger in a positive way, it is possible to claim them for growth. When anger is affirmed as holy, people focus on their own uniqueness. Their stories are told with the passion they deserve. By refusing to allow even love, compassion, or fear to blunt that necessary passion, a story's meaning can be explored and experienced in its integrity, without succumbing to the natural resistance to anger.

When people suffer, their anger can be, as Kubler-Ross and Fischer indicate, a self-protective vehicle.[215] They express rage at those who have wronged them, at God, and at the workings of the universe. They are angry

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[213] *Ibid.*
[214] *Ibid.* p. 181.
[215] Fischer, *op. cit.* p. 180.

with themselves and with others. They rage at what they might have done differently which could have prevented the crisis or blame others for their role in creating the current catastrophe. They are furious at those who seem to be protected from pain and who do not appear to deserve what mourners perceive as charmed lives. They rant at the powerlessness that humans feel at not being able to control the universe.

Just as the mourner must shed tears after a catastrophe, there is also a need to harden the self, create defenses, and become separate until a new self is formed. That task begins with the anesthetization of "*Yirah.*" Some of those defenses begin to melt with the tears in *Sukkat Kavod.* But in *Sukkat Kodesh*, mourners face the opposite task. Here the passionate life-force, which appears as anger sets those who suffer apart. This helps in creating the new self, with new boundaries and a new identity as mourners begin to redefine their lives. The passion of anger etches a line around the periphery of the wounded soul. It says to an individual, a universe, or a deity that has betrayed faith or hope, "I have drawn a line around me. You cannot hurt me again."

Traditional Understandings of Anger

References to anger in the Torah share the negative understanding expressed above, portraying it as a destructive and dangerous emotion. People are advised against it. The psalms admonish:

> Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; fret not thyself, it tendeth only to evil-doing." (Ps. 37:8).

And Proverbs warns that,

> He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes." (Proverbs 16:33)

As a rule, the rabbinic sages, as well, do not see anger in a positive light. The following seem to me to capture traditional Jewish perspectives on anger:

> One who is angry is as one who worships idolatrously. Whoever is angry, if he is a wise man, his wisdom leaves him". (Bavli, Pesahim 66b)
>
> Whoever reaches a state of anger, comes to err. (Sifri, Parashat Matot, 157)

Despite these unfavorable perceptions of anger, anger was also represented as a characteristic of God. The Bible is replete with examples of God's wrath, sometimes directed at the people Israel and other times at Israel's enemies.

> And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and He gave them over into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the children of Ammon. (Judges 10:7)
>
> Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger And the staff in whose hands is My indignation. (Isaiah 10:5)

The Talmud reveals that God prays to have His/Her anger mitigated by compassion, as it says:

> R. Johanan says in the name of R. Jose: How do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, says prayers? Because it

> says: Even them will I bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer.1 It is not said, 'their prayer', but 'My prayer'; hence [you learn] that the Holy One, blessed be He, says prayers. What does He pray? — R. Zutra b. Tobi said in the name of Rab: 'May it be My will that My mercy may suppress My anger, and that My mercy may prevail over My [other] attributes, so that I may deal with My children in the attribute of mercy and, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice'. (B. T. Brakhot: 7b)

In another Talmudic conversation between R. Johanan and R. Jose it is again clearly asserted that anger is an attribute of God:

> ...it is written: My face will go and I will give thee rest.4 The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Wait till My countenance of wrath shall have passed away and then I shall give thee rest. [the Rabbis then ask] But is anger then a mood of the Holy One, blessed be He? — Yes. [they agreed] For it has been taught:5 A God that hath indignation every day. (B. T. Brakhot: 7b)

If a daily experience of anger is attributed to God, what is the role of anger in human affairs? This same prooftext is used to assert the fact that anger has a place in human expression:

> R. Johanan further said in the name of R. Jose: How do you know that we must not try to placate a man in the time of his anger? For it is written: My face will go and I will give thee rest.4 The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Wait till My countenance of wrath shall have passed away and then I shall give thee rest. (B. T. Brakhot: 7b)

Not "placating one who is angry," in the belief that the "countenance of wrath" will pass away and provide rest, may provide comfort for those who fear being irrevocably swept into the fiery vortex of anger, the way others fear drowning in the sea of tears in *Sukkot Kavod* . But humans are

expected to follow God's example and here we may get another perspective on what it means to follow in God's ways

You Shall be Holy

"You shall be Holy." This commandment was issued in the wilderness as the word of God. If the Torah is seen as the blueprint for human behavior, this order to "be holy" is a significant guideline in determining just what that behavior should look like. For it indicates that the Israelites should model their behavior on that of God. But what exactly does it mean "to be holy?"

According to Michael Rosenberg in his article, *Kedushah* (Holiness) *in Rabbinic Judaism* , the definition of the word, "*Kodesh*" is imprecise:

> The root *k-d-sh*, the source for the Hebrew word kedushah, or holiness, occurs an intimidating 9,324 times in the Babylonian Talmud. Yet despite (or perhaps because of) the frequency with which this root appears, it is an especially difficult task to pin down its meaning. *K-d-sh* rears its head in discussions of sacrifices (where it represents highly regarded offerings reserved generally for those in a state of priestly purity), marriage (as part of the still-used formula by which a marriage is put into effect), prayers, and martyrdom, among other things. It is used to refer to God, the Temple in Jerusalem, and the Hebrew language. For the modern Jew trying to grasp what holiness might have meant for the great rabbinic sages, the diversity of uses for this verbal root can prove to be a frustrating obstacle.[216]

This diversity, however, invites speculation and creativity in discerning the meaning of the directive, which puzzled the Rabbis, as well:

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[216] Rosenberg, Michael. *Kedushah* (Holiness) *in Rabbinic Judaism*. My Jewish Learning.com. 2006.

> R. Hama son of R. Hanina said: What means the text: Ye shall walk after the Lord your God?4 Is it, then, possible for a human being to walk after the Shechinah; for has it not been said: For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire? (Mas. T.B. Sotah 14a)

This query was met with a palliative interpretation:

> But [the meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked, for it is written: And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them,6 so do thou also clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written: And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre,7 so do thou also visit the sick. The Holy One, blessed be He, comforted mourners, for it is written: And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son,8 so do thou also comfort mourners. The Holy one, blessed be He, buried the dead, for it is written: And He buried him in the valley,9 so do thou also bury the dead. (Mas. T.B. Sotah 14a)

You might think that this injunction to perform these obligations in emulation of the Holy One would shift our understanding of the holiness that is modeled by God to the performance of the aforementioned blessed actions and away from our understanding of God as a devouring fire. On the contrary, for purposes of this *sukkah*, we stare directly into the fire to find the attributes of God's behavior to be imitated in order to encounter this terrifying stage of grief.

In emulating God's example, as per the instructions in Leviticus 19:2, further comfort may be found in another instance of God as role model:

> ...God was not angry all these days. And how long does His anger last? One moment. And how long is one moment? R. Abin (some say R. Abina) says: As long as it takes to say Rega'.11 And how do you know that He is angry one moment? For it is said: For His anger is but for a moment [rega'], His favor is for a lifetime. (B.T. Brakhot: 7a)

Anger was valued by the ancients as an important teacher:

> R. Johanan further said in the name of R. Jose: Better is one self-reproach in the heart of a man than many stripes... R. Simon b. Lakish says: It is better than a hundred stripes, for it is said: A rebuke entereth deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred stripes into a fool.(B.T. Brakhot: 7a)

Becoming Kodesh

"*Kodesh*" also means "apartness."[217] Things that are "kodesh" are "separated out." They are "set apart", "*m'kudeshet,*"(separated out or consecrated) to become vehicles for special holy tasks.[218] A bride is *m'kudeshet* or set apart from other women as the unique partner of her husband. Shabbat is *m'kudeshet* from the other days of the week, as a day of holiness.[219] In the temple, animals were designated as הקדש, or as set aside as property of the Temple or consecrated as sacrifices[220] to effect change and bring the donor in a closer relationship to holiness and to God. In a sense when we confront the inevitible sense of aloneness that we feel when we suffer, we are *m'kudeshot* in the tent of *Kadosh*. In this tent through passionate and energetic expression, we establish ourself as separate from others. We create boundaries to make clear who we are and who we are not. As with the procedure of making sacrifice in the Temple, this recovery is facilitated by fire.

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[217] BDB. p. 871.
[218] *Ibid.*
[219] *Ibid.* p. 873.
[220] *Ibid.* p. 872-3.

As human beings each of us walks separately. Each of us is set apart from all others with a different holy task. Upon birth, Jewish tradition tells us, each of us is given that unique face of holiness. We are told that our individual souls are breathed into us by God as we enter the world. With that holy breath each one of us is given a unique destiny. [221]

One of the great challenges to pursuing our uniqueness comes in our bonding with others. Ideally that bonding takes place in such a way that we actualize more fully our uniqueness as a result of the relationship, forming a composite uniqueness that realizes the best of all those involved. But often relationships eclipse, at least part of, the uniqueness of the participants.

In the delight and drama that is human relations, we bond with others and hold tightly. We become magnetized. We are attracted to other souls to such an extent that we often cease to experience ourselves through our own uniqueness. Instead we look for definitions of ourselves through others. We project ourselves outwards, looking into the eyes of the souls to whom we are magnetized as if they were mirrors, invested with the ability to reveal to us who we are.

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[221] *B. T. Sanhedrin* 38a.

This picture of the complaint differs significantly from that of the lament, when the passion of his grief turned back upon himself as in his death wish or his remonstrations from the ash heap, described above, Job ultimately finds his voice as he goes from lamentation to outrage, sarcasm, rage, anger and clarity. These will ultimately raise God in the whirlwind and provide the ambiguous truths that come to replace the world in which simple truth has been shattered.

Job expresses his anger as passion designed to pierce the mystery of both Divine and human behavior in words of complaint directed first to his friends and then to God:

> JOB: You too have turned against me; my wretchedness fills you with fear...[226] *I* refuse to be quiet. I will cry out my bitter despair.[227] [*to God*] what have I done? Why have you made me your target?[228]
> JOB: No man can argue with God... who could oppose God and live? ...How can I prove my innocence? I am guiltless, but his mouth condemns me; I am blameless, but his words convict me...I loathe each day of my life; I will take my complaint to God.[229]
> JOB: How long will you grieve my spirit and crush my heart with your words?[230] You humiliate me and are not ashamed to abuse me. Know that God has wronged me. ..let me speak; whatever happens will happen...God may kill me, but I won't stop. I will speak the truth, to God's face. [*to God*] Grant me one thing only, and I will not hide from your face: Accuse me- I will respond/ or let me speak, and answer me. What crime have I committed? How have I sinned against you? Why do you hide your face?[231]

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[226] Mitchell, Stephen. *The Book of Job.* Harper Perennial: New York. 1992. p. 22.
[227] *Ibid.* p. 23.
[228] *Ibid.* p. 24.
[229] *Ibid.* p. 29.
[230] *Ibid.* p. 48
[231] *Ibid.* p. 36.

> against pain, a lack of feeling...All your "yeses" are based on a "no" that is unspoken. [224]

Kodesh: Separation and Uniqueness: Job as a Model

Looking at Job again, we find a biblical model for yet another emotion. Having already explored his expression of lament, we find a second genre for articulating grief in his complaints. Robert Frost distinguished between lament and complaint.[226] The former is a meditation on the nature of being human on a planet where there is loss, as described in the chapter on *Sukkat Kavod.* The latter expresses a wish and calls for an answer or a remedy. In Job's case, what begins as a set of rhetorical questions evolves into a demand of God for a quasi-legal remedy, as he demands that God give him an audience.

Throughout Job's speeches there is a shifting back and forth between these genres. When he challenges the nature of the universe with his "why questions" or demands an advocate, an audience with God, and/or justice, he appears to be shaking his fist in complaint. This complaint is directed outward, the mind's eye focused, as the fist shakes at an external power, seen or unseen.

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[224] Keleman, Stanley. The Human Ground. Center Press: Berkeley, CA, 1996. p. 242.
[225] Hirsch, *op. cit.* p. 80.

This truth about loss can be infuriating. After a loss, we don't want our obscured piece of the sky. We don't want to assert our uniqueness. We don't want the teaching and the growth that comes with this latest challenge. We want our old life back. Our rage begins with our resistance to this fact of grieving. And in the fire of that resistance is the flame that will ultimately rekindle the passion for living. When we express our anger, we dare to assert that we have boundaries. We risk differentiating ourselves from others. We put our need to blend in and to please aside in service of our willingness to assert our limits and our uniqueness. When we do this we also assert our holiness.

In *Sukkat Kadosh* the mourner explores the holy, life- affirming energy that appears both as passion and the establishment of boundaries. This awakening occurs as the life force reappears and the senses of the mourner are re-awakened. The mourner is once again aware of living within his or her own skin (often with great reluctance and resentment). This anger/passion can be a turning point to energize and stimulate the work of healing.

Saying "No"

> If you can't say "no" you can't say "yes." You cannot affirm something unless you have the ability to deny it. Unless you have the ability to maintain your individuality by saying "no," any "yes": that you may say is not a "yes." It is simply compliance and submission...Giving in to somebody is not saying "yes." You may just be overwhelmed...You see, most of our "no's" are unconscious. They become a defense

Over the course of a lifetime, we come to rely on those mirrors to tell us who we are. In death, divorce, or another loss that shakes our sense of self, we are thrown back on our individuality. As we mourn, we are forced to call back the projections and find ourselves as separate defining ourselves by our own unique destiny and not by the roles that we play in relationship to others. We recognize that on an existential level, we are, in fact alone. Particularly when we suffer, we see that even the most empathic caregiver cannot experience the pain we are feeling and that despite love and support, we suffer alone.

Camus said that no matter how loving, nurturing, healthy and appropriate a relationship is, the mere act of connection obscures a piece of the sky.[222] When we love, this is a sacrifice that we give willingly. As was the case with many of the free-will sacrifices, separated out for the Temple to create more intimacy with God, we make these sacrifices in order to be closer and to relate more intimately to the object of love. When there is loss, that obscured piece of the sky is returned to us and we have the opportunity to see with eyes that are uniquely our own.[223]

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[222] Albert Camus as quoted in Mary Jane Moffet, *In the Midst of Winter* p. 233. Originally found in: Camus, Albert. *Youthful Writings* -Translated from the French By Ellen Conroy Kennedy.Alfred A. Knopf. New York 1976. page number unknown.

[223] *Ibid.*

As Job's assertions grow in passion he, himself, grows in stature ascending to the level of one who confronts God and demands and merits an audience with God.

Finding the Fire

The true measure of Kadosh is God's holiness. We are enjoined to follow God and to become God-like, becoming holy or Kadosh. *Ha Kadosh Baruch'Hu* (the Holy one of Blessing) is among the most common designations for God in classic rabbinic sources. As described above, when the rabbis of old asked how it was possible for human beings to emulate that example because God was a consuming fire, they were concerned that there was danger that humans would be incinerated if we were to closely "follow" God.

Aviva Zornberg quotes Sforno on the function of fire as a precondition to all forms of creative work. She points to the "ambiguity of fire [in its potential to be both] destructive and creative."[232]

In *Sukkat Kadosh* we face being alone. We separate from the life we knew before the incident that caused our suffering. We come to terms with the fact that no one can feel the pain that we are feeling, despite their good

[232] Zornberg, Aviva. *The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis.* Doubleday: New York. 1996. p. 466.

intentions. We are thrown back upon our own resources in search of the holy fire that is uniquely our own. We are enraged. We don't want to be alone.

The tasks of *Sukkat Kadosh* are infuriating. When we have lost someone the last thing we want to do is to make peace with being without him or her. People resist this work. People are afraid of being alone and separate. Certainly this is one of the reasons that people stay in marriages decades after the relationship has ceased to be growth-enhancing. Avoiding the empty spaces, people hold on to the belongings of someone who has died for years after that person's death. In *Sukkat Kadosh* we confront the fear of being alone. We rage against the fear, until we find the courage to stop projecting our fire outward and find the fire within.

In the tent of *Kadosh* the fires are burning, as we attempt, from the depth of our pain, to define, refine, and sanctify the essence of the self that remains. Often we do this awkwardly and without grace. Anger is displaced in all directions and projected onto anyone who shows up on the radar screen. What looks like burning rage often singes those who are close. Frequently resentment is projected outwards. Mourners bicker with relatives, find fault with friends, complain about the behavior of those who were close before the loss, such as doctors, marriage counselors, or ex-

spouses. Those who come close can be burned by the ire. They find it hard to avoid taking it personally.

When we are in pain, we have hot lava inside. We desperately yearn to express the seething of the roiling gut and raging heart. We respond to the peccadillo of an in-law, the insensitivity of an ex-husband, an awkward remark of a friend, the unavailability of a doctor, a universe which has changed its rules, and at an inscrutable Diety. Any of these can be the impetus for a fiery volcanic eruption. The vigor of this explosion may seem out of proportion to that which triggered it. For despite the fact that people often do cruel and inappropriate things that deserve rage, the rage of those who suffer is often not about the incident which has brought it on. It was just the hot lava looking for an opening into which it could flow.

Strange and Dangerous Fire

Certainly this can be dangerous. Mourners must learn to open the furnace of their rage to find the sparks of life energy they will need as they recover their sense of passion without violating others.

The High Priest Aaron's sons, *Nadav* and *Abihu*, came before God to offer sacrifice. Their offering was in the form of "strange fire, (אש זרה)" and they themselves, were incinerated. (Lev.10:1)When working in *Sukkat Kadosh*, we must remember that there are boundaries to holiness. All of us know

people who exude such anger that they cannot make contact without burning others. Learning how to navigate this dangerous fire-walk within the boundaries of *Sukkat Kadosh* is another sign that the mourner has assimilated the wisdom of this *Sukkah*.

Anger as Prayer

Rabbi Johanan's words of prayer have a place in *Sukkat Kavod* as well. Looking again at Rabba's Midrash on Chapter 2 from *Parshat Vaethchanan*, the deep emotions of the earlier words are again present in the word *pegiah* , which Jastrow translates as:

> to strike against, come in contact with, meet (in a hostile sense) to attack strike... intercede or pray...[also] to beseech or. entreat ...to be stricken [or in the *hifil* form] to cause suffering [233]

It describes an encounter, with varying degrees of passion. While elsewhere, this word will describe the voice of a supplicant, in *Sukkat Kadosh* the volume is turned up. This was the word used to signify a hostile encounter or an attack as was anticipated by *Rehav* when she encouraged Joshua's men to;

> make for the hills, so that the pursuers may not COME UPON you. (Joshua 2:16)

The intensity of this word, used in the speech of Elihu to describe the strike of lightning at the will of God (Job. 36:32) is represented earlier in Job's

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[233] Jastrow. *op. cit.* p. 1136.

frustrated cry as he attempts to encounter God with the passion of his sense of injustice. He asks:

> What is Shaddai, that we should serve him? What will we gain by PRAYING to him? (Job. 21:15)

The fact that in this passage, this word is usually translated as "Praying," validates the expression of rage and passion as an appropriate expression of prayer and as the vehicle for the encounter with God.

The Altar of Kadosh

On the altar of Sukkat Kadosh is a fire. It is the passionate life force, which must be rekindled in the process of separation from who or what is lost as mourners move on to confront their unique destinies and the challenges of meeting them. It is the *esh tamid* (the eternal fire) that burned in the Temple to incinerate the sacrifices as an everlasting promise of the possibility of alignment with Holiness. It is the eternal light that burns in each synagogue as a symbol of the undying light of the Divine. In *Sukkat Kadosh* it is the constant affirmation of inner holy spark that burns inside the human soul, which cannot be contaminated, even in the face of death. As the mourner reclaims that spark, tending it with wise boundaries, he or she will have successfully mastered the tasks of *Sukkat Kadosh*.

Caroline

The follow case study reveals the full range of experience that is available in *Sukkat Kadosh*.

Caroline called for an appointment six months after her father died. She said, "I'm really calling on behalf of my mother. It's been six months, and she's barely functioning. She refuses to stay alone in the house, and she won't do anything to help herself. My sister and I alternate spending the night with her, but it's hard. My sister has a new baby, and..." she paused, took a breath and said in a statement that sounded like a question, "I have a life too." Caroline was thoroughly perplexed. "We've tried to get her to join a group. She refuses to go to therapy, but maybe, if the three of us came, she would follow-up. But the truth is I'm not sure she will come."

After some more discussion, I suggested that we make an appointment. She would do her best to get the others to come, but if nothing else, she and I could talk about the best strategy for helping the family. Not surprisingly, Caroline was the only one who showed up for the session. She began the session talking about how her mother was taking the loss, detailing all the things that Caroline had done on her mother's behalf. She spoke of her sister in terms of her callousness to their mother's plight. Caroline rarely mentioned her own experience of her father's death. As we spoke over the course of a few months, Caroline's concern shifted from preoccupation with her mother to concern for herself.

Caroline's father had been controlling. A successful physician, it was his stature in the community, his community activities, and his recreational needs which determined the structuring of family time. The mother was often called "Ms. Doctor." She had repressed her own creative yearnings to such an extent that she had forgotten any individual identity. The Mother had sublimated both her rages at her husband's demands and her rage at her own complicity in squelching her own dreams and passions. These are some of the same feelings that Caroline was feeling now as she felt pressure to replicate her mother's life, in service of her mother's needs.
She showed hints of resentment about the burden that she was carrying. She was chafing at the role in the family. She felt that she was an adventurous person who was trapped into being the good, stay-at-home daughter. She resented never having made a life for herself.

Now in the wake of the death of the father, she was beginning to stake out a place for herself which she did by declaring resentment and claiming boundaries. Caroline was yearning to assert her own integrity. In her grief the developmental issues that had lain dormant until her

> father's death began to assert themselves. This growth, which might not have been possible when the father was alive because of the rigid family structure, has been able to assert itself with the changing make-up of the family.
>
> As Caroline began to focus on herself, she began to mourn her father. She grieved his death, missing him in a hundred ways. But the work she had done in asserting her own individuality allowed her to grieve his life and the ways in which his role their family life had not fostered her growth when we was alive.
>
> The outrage of loss had triggered the smoldering outrages of her past and Caroline was catapulted onto a path of greater individuality. Caroline's anger began to percolate. It began with expressions of concern about her mother. Soon it turned into whiny resentments and then into clearly articulated anger, as she claimed the desire to assert the sanctity of her own life, to explore its uniqueness, worth and meaning. This evolution of feeling resulted in her asserting the need to separate from her family and find her own path, without the burden of putting her mothers' needs before her own.
>
> Caroline's mother's reaction mirrored Caroline's assertion. Angry at first, at the perceived abandonment of her daughters, she was catapulted into taking care of herself and began to reach beyond her children for help.[234]

Caroline's sojourn encapsulates the experiences of *Sukkat Kadosh*. Her process of acknowledging her desire to assert life energy helped her to draw a circle around herself and shore up the boundaries of her own life to embrace her individual destiny and identity in the wake of loss. In the process of mourning her father, in *Sukkat Kadosh*, Caroline was able to identify her own developmental issues that had been obscured first by the family dynamics and then by the emotions of grief.

Like so many of the growth tasks of mourning, the tasks in *Sukkat Kodesh* are not anything that would be chosen with free will. But to resist them is to resist a significant lesson about being human. When one is allowed to

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[234] See ff. 133 above.

contact the furnace, which fuels an individual's uniqueness, another paradox presents itself: Embracing individuality is not a sentence to perpetual solitude. Coming to terms with one's own uniqueness equips a person with self-reliance. It enables him or her to be alone as well as to connect out of strength and not out of need. It prepares one to obtain the wisdom of the elders encountered at the corn dance in Albuquerque.

There is one more result of coming to terms with one's own uniqueness, and it refers back to the previously stated Talmudic conundrum.

> Is it, then, possible for a human being to walk after the Shechinah; for has it not been said: For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire? (B.T. Sotah 14a)

When an individual lives comfortably within boundaries, he or she can more fully embrace individual destiny and walk "after the *Shekhinah*," walking in God's ways. This gives credence to the Talmudic story of God as the minter or unique individuals, created in God's image.

> Adam, the first human being, was created as a single person to show forth the greatness of the Ruler Who is beyond all Rulers, the Blessed Holy One. For if a human ruler [like Caesar, the Roman Emperor who was indeed the ruler in their time and place] mints many coins from one mold, they all carry the same image, they all look the same. But the Blessed Holy One shaped all human beings in the Divine Image, as Adam was shaped in the Divine Image (Gen. 1: 27), "btzelem elohim," "in the Image of God." And yet not one of them resembles another. (B. T. Sanhedrin 38a)

Therefore the effort should be made in this *sukkah*, to find the spark that will ignite the flame that will kindle a sense of the unique image of God that

each person represents. In *Sukkat Kadosh* the effort is to ignite the fuse that sparks the rage and brings the lava forward. But at some point, the outer projection of that anger must be called back, so it can fuel the passion for life.

An Exercise for Sukkat Kadosh

> Lois was a therapy client who would spend part of each session riding an exercise bike, which I kept in my office. As she picked up speed, she would shriek at all the people who had wronged her. And she had, in fact, been the victim of many wrongs. Riding the bike primed her furnace and she became energized by her anger. She went on to start her own business and to become a community leader. She also stood up to the uncle who had abused her as a child. But she did not make demonizing him the focus of the rest of her life. In connecting with her anger, she found the fuel for her own individuation. She was able to take her rightful place in the world.[235]

In *Sukkat Kadosh*, it is important to be like Lois. She was purified by the rage that flamed as she pedaled a stationary bicycle. Physical exercise is an important tool for the work in this tent. It gets the furnace going. It relieves stress and focuses passion as it stimulates the metabolism and helps to purify, cleanse, and energize the self. Use rage to spur physical activity. It will help care for the body, focus feelings, and stimulate the experience of holiness that comes with a well-tuned body. It makes it possible to leave *Sukkat Kadosh* with a sense of boundaries, renewed life energy and a passion for the sacredness of individual destiny.

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[235] See ff. 133 above.

סוכת ישראל

Chapter Eleven: *Sukkat Yisrael*: Struggling with Forces of Heaven and Earth

The next *sukkah* corresponds to the stage which Elizabeth Kubler-Ross called "Bargaining." Here she observed her dying patients making wistful promises in an attempt to "postpone the inevitable happening." [236] These bargains, she said:

> ...include a prize offered [longer life or miraculous healing?] "for good behavior" and...sets a self-imposed deadline....it includes an implicit promise that the patient will not ask for more if [the wish is]...granted.[237]

These agreements, she said, often represent an attempt to atone for some guilt. Usually, according to Kubler-Ross, they are secret and are made with God. Since these bargains are made with God, it is likely that, perhaps unconsciously, they are made, not only to hold on to what is gone, but also to hold on to a belief in a God of justice, who metes out punishment and blessing according to merit. Therefore in this *sukkah* the mourner must again wrestle with God.

In this tent, mourners struggle with their understanding of God as they strive to establish a partnership with something outside of themselves which will enable healing. They strike a deal with an anthropomorphic God, one that they might have felt has abandoned them as they joined Job

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[236] Kubler-Ross. *op. cit.* p. 82.
[237] *Ibid.* p. 83-84.

on the ash heap in *Sukkat Kavod*. Hopefully, they will emerge from *Sukkat Yisrael* with a sense of their own empowerment as well as a new sense of partnership with God. Perhaps they will also have a new understanding of God and or what is Holy.

The name of this tent is derived from the same word that gave Jacob his new name, Yisrael, after having wrestled with the "*ish*" and prevailed. According to Brown, Driver, and Briggs, the root for this word "שׂרה" means "to persist," "exert oneself," or "persevere."[238] It's cognate, "שׂרי" means "survivor." A modern dictionary, *The Maskilon I Hebrew-English Dictionary based on Verb Roots* includes words sharing this root as "לשׂרות" (to strive, fight or contend), "שׂר" (minister or ruler) and "שׂרר" (rule, authority or dominion). [239] Popularly today, the meaning of the word "Yisrael" is often construed as "One who wrestles with God." This, of course, is one of the names of the Jewish people.

Who was the "*ish*" of Jacob's travails? While the word "*ish*" means simply "man," it is often assumed that Jacob's opponent was an angel, some other messenger of God or that it actually may have been God. Jacob may have been sparring with his own inner "*ish*" and all the guilts and rages that he had carried with him since he left Beersheva many years before. On this dramatic night, he might have been tormented by his fears and misgivings

[238] BDB. *op. cit.* p. 975.
[239] Maskilon. *op. cit.* p. 893.

at having tricked his brother into giving up his birthright, or by his sense that he had abandoned his parents, whom he apparently never saw again. Perhaps Jacob agonized over the complicated relationships within the family he created in which he so favored one son, the child of a beloved wife, over the many sons of his other wife who he, himself, had been tricked into marrying. Jacob might have struggled with any of these on the night that he thought would be his last. Is this not reminiscent of the late night ruminations of one lost in grief's wilderness, wondering what went wrong?

If the tone in *Sukkat Kavod* was despair and rage in *Sukkat Kadosh*, the tone here is pleading. It is in *Sukkat Yisrael* that mourners anxiously struggle, strive and confront. The "*ish*" they face may be God, other humans, the self, the person or situation that has been lost and all the other forces with which they wrestle during their difficult time. In *Sukkat Yisrael*, an effort is made to strike a bargain with the powers that be. The mourner struggles to assert some authority over the overwhelming forces over which he or she has no control or may try to atone from some transgression, real or imagined.

There are two especially difficult things for humans to face. One is the sense that they are powerless over the forces that run the universe. The other is the fact that God's justice, is, at best, hard to discern and, at

worst, non-existent. In *Sukkat Yisrael* the mourner strikes deals in order to stave off these bitter truths, as well as the inevitability of the loss he or she is facing. But it is also here that the mourner works out a new relationship to God.

People will do or believe almost anything to avoid feeling powerless.

> Katherine came to me shortly after her mother's suicide. She sat across from me with despondent eyes framed by a popular short, spiky haircut. "My mother hated my hair," she moaned. "If only I hadn't cut my hair, she would probably still be alive."[240]

The belief that a haircut, or a different doctor, or not having left the room at a crucial moment (the list is infinite) could have made a difference in averting "the severe decree" is also a kind of bargain. These beliefs, which are often voiced with the opening phrase, "if only" are only thoughts, but they can soon become rigid beliefs- thought forms- a kind of vow to which mourners commit and may hold for a lifetime.

They choose to suffer this unmerited guilt because they would much rather feel responsible for the suffering they face than to be catapulted back to that terrible place of lower *Yirah* , where one, overwhelmed by loss, feels so powerless. It is often more comfortable to believe that one has some degree of control over the forces that affect their lives- even if

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[240] See ff. 133 above.

one is left with the burden of guilt- than to accept that we live in a capricious universe.

The belief that "Life is Absurd" is a painful foundation stone. So mourners wrestle. They try to make sense of the world. They appeal to a just God. Like Job, they raise their voices, to try to find some role for themselves in the working of the universe and to call forward a God who will offer, if not justice, at least an explanation. In so doing, they continue to re-define their understanding of that universe and of their relationship with Holiness, just as Job did when he put his hand over his mouth in recognition that the Holy Mystery could never be fully understood.

Liturgical and Rabbinic God-wrestling

The liturgy of Jewish prayer gives us many places to which we can bring the struggle to reclaim our place on the earth, as we present the struggle to God in the form of prayer. The petitional prayers, which are inserted into the liturgy within the Weekday *Amidah*, ask God for favors. Within defined categories, *bakashot* or requests are made of God, which are likely to describe, either directly or through a metaphoric connection, the categories of human yearning. In addition, we have the *mishberach*, a prayer for healing, into which our own need for healing can be inserted. *Tachanun*, *Slichot*, and other prayers also give us an opportunity to bring our deepest needs before God.

Rabbi Johanan's definitions of prayer are especially important in *Sukkat Yisrael*, beginning with his confidence that God would answer the prayers of the directed heart on the promise in Psalms. To reiterate:

> You will listen to the entreaties of the Lowly, O lord, You will make their hearts firm; You will incline your ear. (Ps.10: 17)

The latter words in the definition given by Jastrow to describe Johanan's word "*pegiah*" are relevant. To reiterate, he translates *pegiah*, a word whose more intense meanings were explored in *Sukkat Kadosh* as:

> to strike against, come in contact with, meet (in a hostile sense) to attack strike... intercede or pray...[also] to beseech or. entreat ...to be stricken [or in the *hifil* form] to cause suffering [241]

It is in *Sukkat Yisrael* that beseeching and entreating are heard. It could be heard in Abraham's pleas on behalf of the people of Sdom or his initiation of negotiations for a family burial place:

> Abraham bowed low to the people of the land, the Hittites and he said to them "if it is your wish that I remove my dead for burial, who must agree to INTERCEDE for me with Ephron son of Zohar.9Let him agree to sell me the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 23:7-8)

"*Keri'ah*" *or "Call"*[242] *is the next word for prayer given in Johanan's Midrash.* Defined in *Brown, Driver, and Briggs* as "to proclaim, read, demand, or read

[241] Jastrow. *op. cit.* p. 1136.

aloud,"[243] it suggests an alternative voice for the recitation of prayer than the quiet voice of Hannah. This word is used frequently in Psalms:

> CALL upon Me in time of trouble; I will rescue you, and you shall honor Me. (Ps.50:15)...Have mercy on me, O Lord for I CALL to You all day long (Ps 86:3)... In my time of trouble I CALL You, (Ps.86:7)

R. Johanan's seventh word for prayer, *nippul*, means "to fall, lie down, or be dropped" In the *hitpa'el* it means "to prostrate one's self."[244] One can assume that this position demonstrates both a sense of personal horror and a plea for God's mercy. Following his failure to execute the last of the Amalekites, Saul flung himself prone on the ground. (1Sam.28:20) When Judah and his brothers reentered the house of Joseph, so terrified were they that they flung themselves on the ground before him (Gen. 43:18) Moses chose this same posture for his prayer on behalf of the Israelites it was this posture he chose:

> When I lay prostrate before the Lord those forty days and nights because the Lord was determined to destroy you. (Deut. 9:25-26)

Perhaps he should have chosen it on his own behalf.

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[242] Jastrow. *op. cit.* p. 1409.

[243] BDB. *op. cit.* p.894-6.

[244] Jastrow. *op. cit.* p. 926.

Pillul is a more familiar word for prayer. According to Brown, Driver and Briggs, it means "to pray, intercede, judge, plead, entreat, mediate, [or] incriminate oneself."[245] It appears to include the opening of the heart in confession, fear, and remorse and is the word used to describe Jonah's prayer from the belly of the great fish. When God sent serpents against the people in response to their complaints in the wilderness, the people came to Moses and said,

> We sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. INTERCEDE with the Lord to take away the serpents...And Moses INTERCEDED for the people. (Num. 21:17)

A somewhat different mood is represented altogether in R. Johanan's final word for prayer, *Tahanunim*. This word is in the title of the Biblical *parasha* upon which Rabbi Johanan was commenting, *v'Ethanan*. *Tahanunim* can mean "to bend oneself, to supplicate, or to beg,"[246] but in contradistinction to many of the other words for prayer on the list its root means "to caress, grace , favor , or bandage." [247] According to Rashi,

> this is used when one seeks an undeserved favor, for truly righteous and humble people never feel that they have a claim on God's mercy [248]

To use this form of prayer is to ask for grace from one in power.

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[245] BDB. *op. cit.* p.813.
[246] Jastrow. *op. cit.* p. 484.
[247] *Ibid.*
[248] Schnerman, Nosson & Zlotowitz, Meir (eds.) *The Chumash: The Stone Edition.* Mesorah Publications, Ltd. Brooklyn, 1993. p. 959. ff 23.

> Esther fell down at [the Kings feet and besought him (ויפל-תחנו) with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews. (Est. 8:3)

This was the word used in the advice from Job's friend Bildad the Shuhite. Bildad, like those in *sukkat yisrael* who are unwilling to believe that God could be capricious, encourages Job to "make supplication to the Almighty" on behalf of the sins of Job's deceased children. For Bildad insisted that they were doubtless to blame for their own misery because "God does not pervert justice." (Job 8:5)

Significantly this was the form of prayer that Moses used in his attempt to convince God to change the decree and let him go into the land. It is the word, which gives this *parasha* its title. According to the Midrash, the fact that Moses used only *tachanun:*

> implies that he prayed not as one who demands his right but as one who asks for grace [He did this because] the proverb... 'Take care that you are not taken at your word.' (Ex. Rab. 32:2.)

The importance of this form of prayer is illustrated by the fact that Moses himself is credited with the success of prayer in *Exodus Rabba* 32:2.

> The good advocate knows how to present his case clearly before the tribunal. Moses was one of the two advocates that arose to defend Israel and set themselves...against the Holy One...[Moses & Daniel IX, 3] set their face against the Attribute of strict Justice in order to plead for mercy on Israel's behalf (Ex. Rab. 32:2.)

This passage implies that prayers may be answered because of the persuasive powers of a good lawyer. If this were so, this was something

that Moses appeared to be more effective on the behalf of others than on his own behalf. However hard the effort to move God and the universe with prayer, more often than not it remains that the ways of the powers that be continue to be shrouded in mystery. Therefore the vows that are made in bargaining and pleading with them are themselves in need of remedy.

Be Careful What You Promise:
An Excursus on Bargaining: Vows and Oaths

Judaism takes vows and oaths quite seriously. In fact there are two tractates of Talmud committed to just those subjects: *Massekhet Nedarim* (vows) and *Massekhet Shevuot* (oaths). The importance of these assertions is testified to in the following line from the Talmud. It is found in *Massekhet Shavuot*, which states that when the commandment:

> "You shall not take the name of YHVH your God in a vain oath" was given at Sinai, the entire world trembled.
> (B.T:Shavuot 39a)

There are two kinds of vows, נדרי הקדש (*nedari h'kdesh*), vows of dedication to the Temple and נדרי איסור (*nedari issur*) prohibitive *nedarim*.[249] For the purposes explored here, we might understand the first as promises made to God regarding behavior concerning observance, such as, "I will go to synagogue every Shabbat, if You will make my husband come back to me," or "I will keep a kosher home if You will restore my daughter to health,." An example of a prohibitive *nedar* with reference to this subject might be to promise that if the husband returns

[249] Shottenstein. *B.T. Nedarim.* General Introduction. p. 1.

or the daughter becomes healthy, the person making the vow would never again eat chocolate or drive over the speed limit. An oath or שבועה *shevouah* is a more formal declaration, uttered out loud and confirmed by another with a declaration of "Amen." This might take the following form:

> Person making the oath: I (insert name here) hereby make an oath with my mouth to never drive over the speed limit again.
> Witness: Amen.

While all of the above bargains made with God may represent worthy actions, because of the seriousness attached to vows, it is important to understand how they may be annulled, so that a person does not become a slave to a promise made that more than likely will not have an effect on this situation. In the process, I will venture an exploration of the theology behind the vows.

The annulment of vows (התרת נדרים- *hatarat nedarim*) can be effected when a person comes before a single sage or a panel of three knowledgeable laypeople. It is up to them to determine if grounds for annulment (called a פתח- *petakh* or an opening) exist. According to the Talmud,

> Just as we find an opening for one to be released based on his concern for the honor of his father and mother, so too do we find an opening for him based on his concern for the honor of the Omnipresent יפתחו לו בכבוד המקום [*iftakh b'khvod haMakom*]According to R. Eliezer, this latter opening is also a valid basis for annulment of a *nedar* (*B.T. Nedarim*: 64a.)

Dare I assert that by conceiving of God in human terms, one dishonors God? By assuming that a tit-for-tat promise might move The Holy One or effect history, is not one simplifying the conception of God and doing a disservice to the mystery that is The Holy One? May I further assert that as one who has bargained with God in the above manner lets go of the pediatric understanding of the way in which Holiness operates in the world, he or she has the opportunity to embrace another understanding of Holiness. I further assert that this new perspective may provide a more rewarding opportunity to "walk in God's ways" in good times and in bad.

According to notes in the Schotenstein edition of the Talmud the process of annulling a vow is effective by the following means:

> 5. We say to him, "If at the time you made the *nedar* you would have known that your vow would bring dishonor upon the Omnipresent, would you have vowed?" If he says no, we many annul the *nedar*.[260]

Could this be understood as meaning, "if you understood God differently, would you have made this vow? If so, this would allow people's commitments to change with their understanding of God.

In keeping with the understanding that mourners need community, we find in Schotenstein another note which states that:

> Release from a *neder* must be granted by others; one cannot release himself from his own *neder*. The Rabbis feared that if an opening based on the honor of the Omnipresent were

[260] Shottenstein. *B.T. Sukkah 15a. note:* 5.

> permitted, people would apply it themselves to all their *nedarim* , for this opening is indeed applicable to all *nedarim*.[261]

Other bases for annulment of *nedarim* include חרטה (*Kharata*) or regret as well as *nedarim* which are made on false premises. A new development may also annul a *nedar*. A situation that would provide an opening for annulling such a vow would take place when someone makes a vow and then the circumstances change... אילו הייתי יודע ש (*eelu hayiti yodea she'...*) (if only I had known that)....[262]

Nedarim which are based upon false premises are automatically null and void.[263] In addition, there is a category of נדרי שגגות (*nedari shagigot*) or unwitting *nedarim*. Here a person stipulates that the *neder* is being made for a certain reason, and it emerges that no such reason exists. Would not a radical change in theology merit such reasons for annulment?

Finally a *nedar* which is made when a person is in distress is not considered binding.

The Altar in *Sukkot Yisrael*

As Fire and Water were placed on the altar in the previous *sukkot*, Earth is the element representing the sojourn in *Sukkat Yisrael*. When entering the *sukkah* one might encounter piles of earth mixed with rocks. When beset

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[261] *Ibid.* 64b note 1.
[262] Shottenstein. *B.T. Nedarim.* Note.
[263] *Ibid.*

by suffering, we struggle to find our place on earth again as we negotiate a new relationship with God and with the world in light of our new understandings. We wrestle to find partnership with the forces that run that world. The rocks represent the obstacles that must be faced in trying to cope with that challenge. A rock also is reminiscent of Jacob and his anxious nocturnal struggles. It represents earth at its hardest as humans struggle to get life out of matter and find sustenance on this planet where terrible things often happen. Yisrael describes that striving with the earth to find partnership with Holiness in the effort to allow things to grow.

My Sojourn in *Sukkat Yisrael*

In the years after the deaths of my mother and sister, I became a gardener. I learned about organic soil improvement and made an elaborate chart of companion plants, which when planted close together protected each other against garden pests. I concocted natural pesticides from mixtures of garlic, vinegar, and Tabasco, which left a residue on my vegetables so strong that I could harvest a salad that was already dressed.

Radishes were among the first seeds I put in the ground: an early warning system guaranteed to sprout within the week. I remember the anxiety, which followed my sowing those seeds. Nervously, I counted the days, with little faith that I would soon see life coming out of the ground.

My friends, native to the rural area to which I had escaped in a vain effort to run away from my history, laughed at my lack of faith. They didn't understand that my anxiety over the birth of these radishes reflected my shattered faith in the life process as the result of the deaths of my mother and sister. Planting vegetables had been a bold step back into the river of life. That summer I harvested much of my menu from my own garden. And from that I learned that life continues. Even in the face of death it was still possible to find partnership with the forces of life. Like Jacob, I had bargained with life and had prevailed. I left *Sukkat Yisrael* with a sense of partnership with God.

Leaving *Sukkat Yisrael*

When one leaves *Sukkat Yisrael* one finds something new on the altar: a loaf of bread, which symbolizes, in the words of the blessing over bread, the effective partnership of the human and The Holy as they work together to bring forth bread from the earth.

A Meditation of *Sukkat Yisrael*

It is here, in Sukkat Yisrael that the mourner becomes empowered to "walk in God's ways," having found the partnership between heaven and earth that reveals the embodiment of holiness. Again, the Hebrew letters provide the content for meditation- this time the letters of God's name, יהוה. Just as the human is created in God's image, these letters present God, in the image of a human being. Imagine them written vertically. The yud represents the head, the upper hey represents the arms and sholders, the vuv, the spine and the lower hey the pelvis and legs. By connecting the human body to the letters of God's name, each day presents the opportunity for this intimate partnership, as we embody God and "walk in God's ways."

סוכת יהודה

Chapter Twelve: *Sukkat Yehuda*: Moments of Grace

"Now I will praise God, therefore she named him Judah." Genesis 29:35

Sukkat Hodaot is the final *sukkah* that mourners will enter. It is the gateway to The Promise Land, a place at the edge of the wilderness where one pauses to reflect on the journey. And here those who have made the passage are again stunned by the experience of *Yirah*. But here it is the sense of radical amazement that is characteristic of Higher Awe- based in love and not fear. This is an expression of reaching the *mochin de gadlut*- the expanded consciousness that was not available in the earlier stages of grief when the pain felt so localized and personal. Having braved the hardships of the *Sukkot* of *Kavod*, *Kadosh*, and *Yisrael*, the journey takes a surprising turn and becomes much less of a burden.

This *Sukkah* is linked with Kubler-Ross' last stage, which she dubbed "acceptance." Her writing makes clear that this stage is neither a time of bleak resignation nor hopeless surrender to the severe decree. Nor, she says, is it a time of happiness.[254] Yet many hear those implications in the word "acceptance." Rather, this stage indicates that the person dealing with loss has made peace with the situation and no longer is feeling despair, anger or the need to contest the decree.[255]

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[254] Kubler-Ross.*op. cit.* p. 113.
[255] *Ibid.*

I have named this *Sukkah* after *Yehuda* or Judah, the eponymous son of Jacob, whose descendants lived in the southern province of Judea surrounding Jerusalem, and who was the ancestor of King David. Judah's name, like that of his father after he had faced his challenges, is a name for the descendants of Abraham. The word "Judaism" also comes from his name.

Judah is an interesting person. He is not an exemplary individual. He played a major role in his brother, Joseph's, initial misfortune. He initiated Joseph's sale to the Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt (Genesis 37:26-27) and while he may have been responsible for saving Joseph's life in the process

> What profit is it if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishamaelites, and lent not our hand be upon hims, for his is our brother, our flesh. (Gen. 37:26-27)

he also participated in deceiving his father as to the nature of Joseph's disappearance. (Gen. 37:32-35)

After Joseph's disappearance, in a story told in Genesis 38, Judah was derelict in fulfilling his obligations to the Levirate Law as well as to his daughter-in-law, Tamar, following the deaths of his sons who were her successive husbands. Later, he accused her of being a harlot, when, in fact, he had been the party to her sexual act.

However, Judah also is a model for the possibility of transformation. He demonstrated remarkable growth and maturity both in admitting that "she was more in the right than I," (Genesis 38) when he discovered that Tamar's "playing the harlot" was acting in order to preserve the Levirate laws. He also showed high character when he stood up to Joseph in Egypt, offering himself as a prisoner in place of his brother Benjamin. (Gen. 44 18-34) So much were his transgressions reversed that he is rewarded as the progenitor of the Davidic line from which tradition holds that the Messiah will sprout and the ultimate redemption will come. This reversal of fortunes and its Messianic promise also make Judah's name a good one to mark this *sukkah* in which healing will be restored. For here in *Sukkat Yehuda* the mourner moves from intense struggle to the amazement of a sense of gratitude, not for the loss, of course, but for the fruits of the struggle that has taken place.

According to the Chasidic commentator known as the Ishbitzer, in *Mei Shiloach, Parshat va'Yeshev*, Judah was the son of Jacob for whom Grace descended. He did bad things, but they worked out and with very little effort of his own they were turned around.[256] This in one of the reasons I have chosen his name to mark the *sukkah* at the edge of the wilderness of grief in which the mystery of healing begins to reveal itself. For despite all the hard work of mourning, healing is likely to appear as a mysterious act

[256] Rabbi Jonathan Omer Man *in a lecture on Mei Shiloach, Parshat va'Yeshev*. around 1990.

of grace. Often one who has suffered feels as if he or she happens upon it as if by chance

The word, "*Hodaot*," means gratitude or thanksgiving. Similar to the name "*Yehuda*," it is also a word for praising God. At his birth his mother, Leah, chose his name saying, "Now I will praise God," (Genesis 29:35.) which is the meaning of the name. According to Brown, Driver and Briggs, the root of the name is ידה, which means, "praised...object of praise."[257] The *Maskilon Dictionary* links this root with the modern Hebrew words "להודות" which means, "to thank" and "הודאת" which is an admission of thankfulness meaning "thanks to."[258] The common Hebrew word, "תודה," meaning, "thanks" has this root, as does the word for thanksgiving, "הודיה."[259]

Celebration and gratitude are primary modes of prayer. The liturgy is filled with praises of thanksgiving. Most blessings are constructed as blessings of gratitude. At the beginning of the month and on holidays, *Hallel*, (Psalms:113-118) is recited, which employs a cognate of Judah's name, "הודו" to praise God. In Hebrew word play we see that "יהודה *Yehuda*" contains the four-letter name of God (יהוה) and the letter "ד" "*dallet*" which stands for the number four. How appropriate for the *sukkah* in which God's presence is so palpable.

[257] BDB. *op. cit.* p. 397.
[258] Maskilon. *op. cit.* p.
[259] Ibid.

Returning to Deuteronomy Rabba's Midrash on *Parshat V'ethchanan*, we find evidence that praise and celebration of God is also one of Rabbi Johanan's understandings of prayer. It is a word that is seemingly at odds with all the other words of struggle that he has used to depict prayer. That word is "*rinnah*."

Rinnah is an expression of adoration of God. It can sound like "singing, chanting, or rejoicing... The singing praise of the righteous.[260]" It is the sound of joy and exultation described by God in the challenge of Job to imagine the moment of creation,

> When the morning stars sang together and all the divine beings SHOUTED FOR JOY (Jb.38: 7)

This is the experience in *Sukkat Yehuda*.

"*Rinnah*" breaks the unrelenting agony of the words associated with prayer. According to R. Johanan "*rinnah*" is an important companion to a prayer of petition. And perhaps, the reason for the failure of Moses' petition was that he may have failed to accompany his plea with a suitable accolade. Johanan remarks:

> you might think that a man may pray for his needs [without prefacing his prayer with hymns and psalms] and thereby discharge his obligation ...[but] Solomon... 1Kings 8:28... defined prayer as "to hearken unto the cry rinnah and to the prayer-tefilla"

[260] Jastrow. *op. cit.* p. 1475.

Solomon's pairing of "*rinnah*" and "*tefilla*" indicate that some sort of adoration must accompany supplication. "*Rinnah*," according to Brown, Driver, and Briggs, means, "to give a ringing cry." [261] Most of the time that cry is offered in joy and praise.

> [God is willing] to hearken to the song and to the prayer (1Kings 8:28) In a place where there is song, there is to be prayer. (B.Ber 6a)

This word for prayer is present in Ps. 100, which is introduced, as "מזמור לתודה"-A psalm for praise," in which the root of the word for Yehuda is found in the word, "לתודה." This Psalm's instructions for the way in which God is to be worshiped are consistent with the experience of *Sukkah Yehuda*: "Worship God in gladness; Come before God with SHOUTS OF JOY." (Ps. 100)

While often overlooked in the opaque view of mourning as continual suffering, it needs to be acknowledged that within the grief process there are little moments of grace when the mourner may feel like bursting out in song. These are the experiences that can be encouraged in *Sukkat Yehudah*. Such a moment may be felt the first time the mourner sleeps through the night without awaking in an anxious state, in a pool of perspiration. Those who suffer are often so steeped in the agony of grief that they are not able to notice anything outside of ourselves. All of a sudden they may be overcome by a surprising ecstasy when the sound of a

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[261] BDB. p. 943.

bird unexpectedly makes the heart soar. It may be delight taken in playing with a child or perhaps the thrill of a beautiful garden. After feeling that it would be impossible to ever feel unbridled joy, the mourner is almost accosted by a moment in which he or she is astonished by that joy. Initially this "*hodaot* moment" is likely to be followed by a startled or guilty reaction as well as by the thought: "Oh my goodness, I never thought I would feel that sort of thing again!" And very often that awareness may plunge him or her into a bout of survivor guilt, exclaiming, "how dare I feel joy when I have lost..."If there has been a death, there may be a sense that the deceased is being betrayed. If there has been a divorce, the belief (which has become a kind of vow) that it will be impossible to ever be happy again has been challenged. I like to think of these astonishing moments of unbidden happiness as moments of grace. I see each of them as creating a pearl and after enough of these "*hodaot moments*", the mourner has a full necklace, providing evidence that he or she has moved from the *Sukkot* of the wilderness of grief into the promised land. These are moments of joy in which the shift has taken place and the mourner moves from the wilderness, crossing over into another experience of *yirah*.

A Hodaot Moment

> One day, several years after the deaths of my mother and sister, I was driving through the mountains and came to a ridge, overlooking a deep valley. It was a beautiful bright place just beyond the shadows of a dark and sacred Redwood Grove. It was a place I had never been before. Standing in the midday sun, I surveyed this new landscape. My heart soared as I took in both the beauty and the startling recognition that I was beginning to emerge from

> the wilderness of grief. Standing on that ridge at the height of the sun, I basked in the mystery that is healing. I began to dance. My mourning had turned into dancing. If such a moment were to occur today, I would be moved to sing words from the Hallel songs of praise,
>
> "הודו ל כי טוב -כי לעולם חסדו -
> *Hodu Adonai Ki Tov, Ki L'olam Chasdo-*
> Praise God because God is good.
> God's loving-kindness goes on forever."

The Altar in *Sukkat Yehuda*

On the altar of *Sukkat Yehuda* is a feather, symbolic of the element of air. This speaks to the breathy sighs of relief as the winds blow and suffering seems to take flight, if only momentarily. Also on the altar is a silver trumpet, like the ones blown by the Levites in the Temple when the daily psalm of praise was read. The trumpet, a wind instrument, symbolizes the triumph and celebration that come each time struggle is transcended and there is victory over pain. Slowly life asserts itself again and again. The mourner collects "*hodaot* moments" and marvels at the pearl necklace marking the moments of grace. He or she emerges from the time of the Broken Vessels (*Shevirat HaKelim)* to move into the final stage, which is the stage of *Tikkun*. Here the mourner makes a discovery, that it often experienced as a surprise. Once again he or she is overwhelmed by a sense of *yirah*. But in moving from this last *sukkah* the mourner encounters the higher awe, spoken of by Cordovero and Ginsburgh.[262] This is awe that is based not on fear of God, but on reverence and love.

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[262] See above p. 112.

In the Talmud's *Tractate Sukkah* the ones who dwell in the *sukkah* are commanded to gather the *Arbat Haminim*, the Four Species which are used to celebrate the holiday. These include the *lulav* or palm branch, the *etrog* or citron, the *hadas* or myrtle, and the *aravah* or willow. The celebrant takes the Four Species in hands, shakes them and recites the *hallel* .

On the edge of this wilderness, with The Promised Land in sight, the mourner who has dwelled in the four *sukkot* of grief, holds within him or herself the gleanings of these separate experiences as if they are one. And with these gleanings are the four elements of creation: water, fire, earth and air, representing the wholeness, the *shleimut* that is at the core of healing. They are gathered to the heart and these words of praise are recited:

הודו לי כי טוב - כי לעולם חסדו
Hodu l'Adonai Ki Tov, Ki L'olam Chasdo.
Praise God because God is good.
God's loving-kindness goes on forever.

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