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פרקי אבהות

Pirke Abahut:
A Jewish Guide for Fatherhood

By Joshua M. Brown

Thesis Adviser: Rabbi Richard Levy

Submitted February 29th, 2008

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Introduction

וַיְהִי אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר
אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי: ב וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ
אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל
אַחַד הֶהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ:[1]

> Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am." [2] And He said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you."[2]

This passage has become the defining text for Jewish fatherhood. It is an unfortunate reality. Every year as Jews approach our holiest days, we begin to think about how we can interpret a text in which a father nearly slaughters his own son. While many have re-interpreted this text to explain that Abraham is actually caring for Isaac or even that Isaac is willingly a part of the sacrifice, I will interpret this text in its most *pshat* form.

Avraham, the patriarch whose Hebrew name begins with "father", is not the model of a father we wish to emulate as 21st century Jews. Rather, *Avraham* represents that which we do not wish to do to our children. He is the father who prioritizes his job before his family, never knowing exactly how to talk to his son. He is not an open man, willing to struggle with his personal weaknesses, but rather the father who responds to his son professionally. When Isaac calls out to his father as they approach the altar, Abraham responds just as he did to God earlier in chapter 22; "*Heneini*"[3]. For Abraham, his son and his professional mission are one in the same and he addresses them in exactly the same manner.

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[1] Genesis 22:1-2
[2] JPS Translation Genesis 22:1-2
[3] Genesis 22:7

Abraham is not alone. For centuries men have embodied many of the values Abraham emits in this intimate interaction with his son. In fact, another reading of this text is to praise Abraham as a strong man. "The narrative teaches . . . the value set by God upon the surrender of self and obedience."[4] We can even look at this obedience and faith as a theme in Abraham's life.

> The first time God bids him [Abraham] to take leave of his father and to cut himself off from his past; now, in this last theophany that he is to receive, God asks that he sacrifice his beloved, longed-for son and thereby abandon all hope of posterity. On both occasions Abraham responds with unquestioning obedience and steadfast loyalty.[5]

In the Ancient Near East, sacrificing humans was a known practice. Today, we balk at the idea of killing a human for God's sake. But sacrifice has not entirely left our ranks. Looking at the relationship between the modern father and child we realize that children are deeply affected by the deeds of their fathers.

In the movie *Parenthood,* Keanu Reeves plays the role of Todd, a soon to be teenage father reflects on his own father: "You need license to buy a dog or drive a car. Hell, you even need a license to catch a fish. But they'll let any a**hole be a father."[6]

Todd is Isaac 2000 years later. And while Abraham is known as a terrific test taker for God and the Israelite people, he never seems to pass the test at home with his children. Isaac never addresses his father after the *Akedah* and some would that he never actually recovered from this scene. The overpowering nature of the Akedah narrative as well as Abraham's image as the "Father of a Nation" leaves us wondering about the effects of promoting this text today.

Perhaps Abraham teaches us about fatherhood through his faults. He is a father more committed to God, his boss and his work and the mission of creating the people Israel than he is to his own son. How many men today face the same struggle? Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin writes in

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[4] Driver, Samuel R., The Torah: A Modern Commentary, Revised Edition, URJ Press 2005 p.148
[5] Sarna Nahum N. The JPS Torah Commentary, Jewish Publication Society, 1989 p. 150
[6] Movie: *Parenthood,* scene in which Tod speaks to his mother-in-law about the role of fathers in children's lives.

his book Searching for My Brothers, "For many men, work and career have become the new holy of holies."[7] The challenge of serving your family with your heart and providing for them is nothing new. Men have always been concerned with career whether they were fighting wars, harvesting food or playing the market. Ambition outside the home is nothing new to men and certainly a common theme in our Torah.

The stories of our patriarchs continue as fathers lead their families on journeys. They struggle with kings and angels and God. They served their families well by providing safety in what must have been a very dangerous world.

Parenting today faces different challenges. Men and women are both responsible for providing that still needed shelter. After a long wait, women have entered the workforce breaking through ceilings with enthusiasm to become CEOs, rabbis and political leaders. We continue to learn a lot from womens' journeys into what was once male only territory. One of the most important lessons is that women cannot simply become men, nor do they wish to be. This is possibly most evident when we watch Jewish women look at our text. In the new Women's Commentary to Torah edited by Dr. Tamara Eskenazi, for example, the women Torah scholars ask the question "What was Sarah thinking when Abraham sacrificed Isaac?". What an interesting question that men have never asked.

I point this out in order to illuminate the idea that men and women do not simply switch roles when they enter each others gender stereotyped territory. Women Torah scholars are not just like male Torah scholars and so too men who wish to become a greater part of their children's lives will not be just like the many generations of women who preceded them.

The challenge Judaism must address today is that there are many men who want to get a license to be a father. Men who do not want to be Abraham waiting for their boss to tell them it

[7] Salkin, Rabbi Jeffrey K. Searching for My Brothers. P. 8

is OK to nurture their children rather than sacrifice them. Moreover, in the age following feminism there are many men who have no choice but to be the nurturing parent in a child's life.

Torah is quite descriptive in its account of the role of the man in biblical times. So too are the rabbis and later commentators when they refer to the role men played in Jewish communities and even in their family's life. In this thesis I aim to be prescriptive rather than descriptive. My research will be a search for the license that Jewish can have as they raise their Jewish children.

In her book Engendering Judaism, Dr. Rachel Adler writes about the monopoly many metaphors have acquired in Jewish tradition: "If a metaphor is perfectly congruent with what it describes, why bother using supplementary metaphors?"[8] The story of the Akedah, the pre-eminent father story in our tradition, is in NOT perfectly congruent with the fatherly experience we want it to describe. Feminism encountered this very problem and thankfully has given us the tools to address it in response to modern fatherhood. "In prayer books and theologies, any metaphors incongruent with this image[9], such as God as Mother, or female lover, have been censured and erased. Instead of a diversity of metaphors, we restrict ourselves to this single one, repeating "God the Father" and "God the King" until we forget that there are other metaphors possible."[10]

This thesis will be an exploration of Jewish tradition, its text and ritual, in order to seek out the alternative metaphors and tools available to the Jewish father. It is my hope that once we access the Jewish metaphors that speak to the twenty-first century father we will be giving license to many men to break through the glass ceiling at home.

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[8] Adler, Rachel Engendering Judaism, p. 87
[9] referring to the image of God as a patriarchal male specifically, but it can be understood generally.
[10] Ibid p. 87

There will always be different types of fathers and with those differences we will have different levels of commitment. But Jewish practice can serve to direct these differences toward a common good. Jewish narrative and ritual can make active fatherhood more accessible to Jewish fathers and the Jewish community can help support these men as they walk into a path often unnoticed.

The following tools are cornerstones of this thesis:

Halakhah: "Halakhah is the act of going forward, of making ones way. A halakhah, a path-making, translates the stories and values of Judaism into ongoing action . . . . [It is] potential legal systems through which Judaism could be lived out."[11]

Tradition: The narratives, rituals and customs of the Jewish community, past and present.

Ritual: Jewish practices that allow the participant to convert the mundane into the sacred.

Mitzvot: Evidence of the relationship between God and the Jewish people.[12]

[11] Adler, Rachel Engendering Judaism p.21
[12] Adapted from an interview with Rabbi Richard Levy in The Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles, 11/4/05

Unit 1: Perspectives of Fatherhood

As I wrote in the introduction to this thesis, my goal is to be prescriptive, giving men Jewish tools they can use to become active, nurturing fathers. In order to be prescriptive however, we must first be descriptive, assessing both masculinity and themes dominant in Jewish tradition.

In **Chapter 1** I address some the dominant themes of masculinity in Jewish tradition, exploring biblical, rabbinic, medieval and modern works. Certainly each of these genres represents a different period and at least one different Jewish man. And each could be a thesis unto itself. By exploring this variety of text I will be able express the themes that are dominant throughout Jewish history and seek the meta-halahkot, or overarching masculine themes in Jewish tradition.

In **Chapter 2** I look at the modern man and the many challenges he faces as he enters his home and works to become an active father. This chapter will serve as the foundation for the chapters to follow which will prescribe actions to be taken by the Jewish community and individual fathers in order to break through the glass ceiling at home.

Chapter 3 takes a closer look at the particular problem facing men in religious movements today. Men have been fleeing churches and synagogues for decades now. The first wave of literature regarding this dilemma has just hit the shelves. My goal is to understand this data in relation to men's relationship with their children in a religious setting.

Chapter 1: Fathers of Tradition

Biblical Fathers: *Lech Lecha*: Go and Find Yourself

Biblical literature is filled with a variety of men. Just looking at their names we can understand how different each of them could be; Abraham, the father of a nation, Isaac, the one who laughed, Jacob, the one who follows closely. But none of the patriarchs can be summed up in a single word or phrase. The men of the bible have complex stories and the messages can be overwhelming.

Martin Buber wrote of a negative frame that can help us narrow the search for the biblical character(s) that are most illuminating for our lives today. Writing about biblical leadership he limits his search by the following criteria:

> "I must exclude from the inquiry all those figures who are not *biblical* leaders in the strict sense of the term: and this means, characteristically enough, I must exclude all those figures who appear as continuators, all those who are not called, elected, appointed anew, as the Bible says, directly by God, but who enter upon a task already begun without such personal call . . . . thus I do not consider figures like Joshua and Solomon because the Bible has such figures in common with history – they are figures of universal history.[13]

There is no father in our bible who fits Buber's criteria greater than Abraham. He is a man chosen by God to forge a new path. Moreover, he is not only a leader or father of the Israelite nation, but he is the example by which the later Jewish nation points to as *Abraham Avinu*, our father. The path he builds is followed by the patriarchs in his family, creating what we will understand as a biblical style of fatherhood. By focusing on the unique nature of Abraham's fathering style and its impact on later generations, we discover that he illuminates three important paths that can be claimed as biblical innovations for fathers. The first path we

[13] Buber, Martin On The Bible, p. 140

will explore is father as a patriarch on a journey. The second path Abraham forges is the father as a partner or co-parent with his spouse Sarah and God. Finally, we will learn from Abraham and his children that the Israelite man is not a father of physical power, but rather a man able to manipulate power in his favor with a keen mind.

Path 1: The Patriarchal Journey

Before we were a people of the book or a chosen people, our Israelite ancestors were a people led by men and women seeking an identity along a journey. The message comes as early as the creation story in chapter 3 of Genesis. In Eden, Adam and Eve do not need to know about themselves. They do not even see that they are naked. But after they eat from the forbidden fruit, God creates the first common trait among Israelites and one that will have a direct impact on every patriarch to follow. They are a people on a journey, a people seeking change both in their location and their identity.

> So God banished him (Adam) from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken.[14]

Adam and Eve are banished from their home and Adam's mission is to till the land. Later in Genesis, Noah too is sent from his home, and his purpose becomes tied not to land, but to overcoming the challenges of the rising flood and finding a land to dwell in.

But perhaps Torah illuminates this message most directly when Abraham is given his mission by God.

> "God said to Abram, *Lech lecha*, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you."[15]

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[14] Genesis 3:23
[15] Genesis 12:1 JPS Translation

And for the remainder of the five books of our Torah, the Israelite people, led by their patriarchal path builders, never stop journeying.

As Rachel Adler writes, we "learn this Torah of self and other . . . from being the people other peoples knew as *ivrim*, the ones from the other side of the river, the boundary crossers. As boundary crossers, *ivrim* are bridgers of worlds, makers of transitions."[16]

The originators of the Israelite family were skilled in the crossing of boundaries. The fathers created by this boundary crossing are a biblical innovation and Abraham is a striking example.

It is important to recognize that God does not send Abraham on a trip. As a colleague recently taught me, "when you go on a trip you return to your home just as you left it. When you go on a journey not only might your destination not be the same place as where you embarked, but you are a changed person."[17] Adam, Noah and Abraham are sent from their homes on a journey. Even a pshat reading of our text understands that none of them return to their birthplaces, but more importantly, none of them are the same man they were when they left.

In Greek literature we find a motif of the father as a knight distanced from his son. When his son is born he buries a set of his armor in the ground in order that his son will one day mature, uncover the armor and adopt the image of his father as a warrior[18]. A father on a journey with his family does no such thing. Biblical patriarchy is unique in this respect. It is not a story of a distant father protecting his family from afar, but the opposite. Abraham keeps his family close to him, protecting them as he travels on his journey. Moreover, Abraham is not the image

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[16] Adler, Rachel "A Question of Boundaries: Towards a Jewish Feminist Theology of Self and Other. Tikkun 6/3 (1991) pp. 43-45, 87

[17] Ari Margolis, HUC Student in sermon discussion.

[18] As noted in Calvin Sandborn's book Becoming the Kind Father, p. xvii-xviii

of his father. He does not put on the armor of previous generations, but rather he is a dynamic man, seeking to create a new tradition for a new people.

Abraham was a patriarch on a journey, an *ivri*. He crossed boundaries physically as God sends him to the land that he will be shown. But Abraham is not just a crosser of physical boundaries. He also crosses into a new territory as he is challenged to become a new person.

Abraham is a dynamic character; his identity changes throughout his journey. Like a kid in school, he is measured for this change by the tests he passes.

> God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham," and he answered, "Here I am." [2] And He said, "Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you."[19]

In Torah, *nisah* is a testing or challenge of one's loyalty. This very word is used throughout Exodus when the Israelites question God's presence[20] referring both to God's loyalty to the people and the people's loyalty to God. What type of father is Abraham? He is a man with multiple loyalties and God's test puts these loyalties in direct conflict. In this case Abraham must reconcile the conflict of loving his child as represented by the statement *asher ahavta*[21], "the one who you love", with his devotion to God as represented by the statement *v'ha'aleihu sham l'olah*[22] "sacrifice him here".

The significance of a *nisah* at this moment in scripture is that it is one of many ways to illuminate a common occurrence throughout the remainder of Torah. Men in Tanakh are often facing conflicts on multiple fronts. They have conflicts within their family like the sibling

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[19] Genesis 22:1-2
[20] Exodus 15:25, 16:4, 17:2, 17:7, 20:20
[21] ibid - "the one who you love"
[22] ibid – "sacrifice him there"

rivalry we find between Jacob and Esau or Joseph and his brothers. But they also face external or political conflicts such as famine or slavery. Abraham is one example of this biblical conflict for the father, and God's test serves as an intersection between the political goal of serving God and the personal goal of raising a son. The conflict could not be more dramatic. The message of this conflict is repeated in the stories of fathers in Torah. Fathers do not eliminate either God or family in our narratives, but rather continue to intersect the personal and the political. In this story of Abraham, once Abraham passes this test, he is given license to be both father to his son and devotee to his Sovereign God. It is the first of many times we learn this lesson.

Looking at other men in Torah we find similar examples. When Jacob prepares to reconnect with his brother Esau he faces a conflict between his loyalty to his family and to God. In this instance, unlike the story of Abraham, it is Jacob who makes a request of God. "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; else, I fear, he may come and strike me down, mothers and children alike."[23] He cries for God's protection, but what he finds is that rather than choosing to be with God or with his family, the path is to be with both. As Norman Cohen points out in his book Self, Struggle and Change, Jacob's fear of Esau teaches us that "If we are to reconcile with the other side of ourselves (Esau), it will only happen if we are willing to embrace it."[24]

It is at this moment, as Jacob awaits the inevitable meeting with Esau, that he too learns to walk on a path with both family and God, rather than choose one over the other. As the text reads, "an *ish* or man, wrestles with Jacob until the break of dawn". Following this scene, Jacob is a changed person. This moment is proof that Jacob, like Abraham, is a person on a path of change. Moreover, this is where God intervenes in the story: "Your name shall no longer be

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[23] Genesis 32:12
[24] Cohen, Norman J. Self, Struggle and Change, Jewish Lights Publishing, p. 113

Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed."[25] Jacob is now Israel, and the Israelite nation will bear his name as a child does his father's.

Abraham and the generations of biblical fathers who follow him do not fit any one mold. They are dynamic leaders struggling with family conflict and external change. The path that they build is one with a loyalty to God, family and constant change.

Path 2: Between the Three of Us

There is an important partner in these struggles between family and God. The biblical patriarch was more than a CEO on the go, taking God's tests. He was also a man in relationship with his spouse. What is striking about these relationships is that the spousal relationship and the God relationship are quite similar. The second fatherly path Abraham illuminates is that biblical fathers create a family not only with their spouse, but with God as well.

Martin Buber explains the characterization of patriarchs as people who "beget a people. . . . They are the real fathers, nothing else, they are those from whom this tribe, this people, proceeds; and when God speaks to them, when God blesses them, the same thing is always involved: conception and birth, the beginning of a people."[26]

Buber's comment illuminates one of the unique traits of biblical fathers: they are in a spousal relationship with God. Moreover, this relationship, much like our modern concept of marriage between two people, is the impetus for the birth of a person and/or people. When God tests Abraham, a brit is created:

> "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of a multitude of nations.[27]

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[25] Genesis 32:29
[26] Buber, 145
[27] Genesis 17:4

Following this contract of fatherhood, the father welcomes God into the process of childbearing.

As soon as Adam and Eve are cast from Eden we read ""I have gained a male child with the help of God."[28] This crediting God with help in childbirth continues as God blesses Abraham and Sarah and also as Isaac pleads with God for a child from Rebekah.

> [15] And God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her Sarai, but her name shall be Sarah. [16] I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue from her." [17] Abraham threw himself on his face and laughed, as he said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?" [18] And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live by Your favor!" [19] God said, "Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come.[29]

> [19] This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac. [20] Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. [21] Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived.[30]

This belief that God is a partner in childbirth is so powerful among the patriarchs that when Rachel approaches Jacob asking for a child he responds as though she is speaking with the wrong person.

> When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." [2] Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?"[31]

This is a unique path taken by the patriarchs and their spouses (though Hannah and Elkanah demonstrate this too). Other children are not born in partnership with God. When Lot's children

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[28] Genesis 4:1
[29] Genesis 17:15-19
[30] Genesis 25:19-21
[31] Genesis 30:1-2

are born for instance the text simply reads "Thus the daughters of Lot came to be with child by their father"[32] In other instances, Torah simply lists the genealogy of a family.

This pattern of seeking God's help in childbearing is one of the paths that Abraham builds. As his children follow his lead and continue to rely on God to be a partner in their creation of a family, a people is created who will repeatedly claim connection to God through their lineage.

Path 3: Weapon or Wit?

Abraham is a father on a personal and professional journey. He is forging a new path for himself and for those who follow. He also teaches us that he is not on this journey alone. He is flanked by both his wife Sarah and his God. There is a third important trait that Abraham illuminates for us. He is a man not only capable of winning battles and sacrificing to God. He is also a man who uses his mind to survive.

There are times when Abraham is a model for the physically superior man. One of our most dramatic images of Abraham is at the Akedah, where he stands over his son holding a knife.

> "They arrived at the place of which God had told him. Abraham built an altar there; he laid out the wood; he bound his son Isaac; he laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. And Abraham picked up the knife to slay his son."[33]

We also know that Abraham was a man able to wage war:

> [14] When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. [15] At night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them; and he pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.[34]

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[32] Genesis 19:36
[33] Genesis 22:9-10 JPS Translation
[34] Genesis 14:14-15

But looking at Abraham in transit we find that he is not always a man wielding a weapon or waging war to survive the wilderness. When faced with a challenge or even the threat of his life, Abraham often uses his brain to outsmart his opponent. His strength is not only intimidation, but intellect. This is a path that his children clearly take to heart as we watch generation after generation of Israelite survives by the use of intellect. This is the third path he builds for us.

In parshat Lech Lecha, Abraham is caught in a power struggle. The land of Canaan is facing a famine and he, as the patriarch, must provide for his family. But when Abraham realizes that he may not survive an interaction with Pharaoh in Egypt he thinks his way out of the dilemma.

> **Genesis 12:11-20**
> 11 As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know what a
> beautiful woman you are." 12 If the Egyptians see you, and think, 'She is his
> wife,' they will kill me and let you live. 13 Please say that you are my sister, that
> it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to
> you." 14 When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw how very beautiful the
> woman was. 15 Pharaoh's courtiers saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the
> woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace. 16 And because of her, it went well with
> Abram; he acquired sheep, oxen, asses, male and female slaves, she-asses, and
> camels. 17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty
> plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram. 18 Pharaoh sent for Abram and
> said, "What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was
> your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife?
> Now, here is your wife; take her and begone!" 20 And Pharaoh put men in charge
> of him, and they sent him off with his wife and all that he possessed.[35]

Dr. Mignon Jacobs points out that this is a wonderful use of persuasion as power by Abraham. "Abraham uses [Sarah] to gain advantage in Egypt – he values his life but expresses no concern for her well-being. . . . By acting in a way that is consistent with the information that he receives, Pharaoh also complies with the ruse, but he is ignorant of the fact that he is being

[35] **Genesis 12:11-20** JPS Translation

deceived. Nevertheless, he (Pharoah) is punished for taking Sarah as his wife, suggesting that in issues of accountability, ignorance is not a basis for exoneration. . . . Abraham remains alive and is allowed to keep all the gifts that he received through deception."[36]

The beginning and the end of this famine motif are similar to our modern hero stories today. The leading man faces a life and death dilemma and turns toward it. And at the end of the saga, the leading man not only walks away unharmed, but he walks alongside his mass of wealth and the beautiful girl. But casting Sylvester Stalone or Arnold Schwarzenegger for the role of Abraham would be a gross mistake. The unique difference in this early biblical tale, like most Jewish stories of men, is that a man's muscle is not used to win the battle.

We can also take note that while the leading male does not pursue violence here with his own hands, he is not opposed to victimizing others. Sarah, while silent throughout the trip to Pharaoh's home in Egypt, is used as a weapon. Moreover, use of a woman to such a degree is without a doubt an abuse in itself. The text is clear that the wife of Abraham is an object of manipulation and it makes no apologies for the implied prostitution for her husband's benefit. And like the later narratives of the ten plagues and the exodus from Egypt, God does not hesitate to flex muscles and bring fear into the enemies of the Jewish man.

It seems that Abraham does not arrive at Pharaoh's doorstep like a knight coming to slay a dragon. Rather, he uses the power of his intellect to outsmart Pharaoh, taking advantage of his ignorance in order to protect his family. Abraham is a strong patriarch capable of humbling the region's rulers as he treks across the desert. One can infer that Abraham weighed his options. At some point he must have thought, "Can I sacrifice my wife's dignity for our survival?" For the generations that follow, the answer defined Israelite masculinity. The strong Israelite man

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[36] Jacobs, Mignon R. Gender, Power, and Persuasion: The Genesis Narratives and Contemporary Portraits. Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic2007 p. 87

was not defined by building the greatest structure or flexing the largest muscle. Rather, like Abraham he often survived and even thrived by using his mind.

But Abraham was not only a man of keen wit and intellect. In chapter 14 of Genesis we get to know Abraham's violent reaction when his brother Lot's family is threatened:

> **Genesis 14:14-15** [14] When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he mustered his retainers, born into his household, numbering three hundred and eighteen, and went in pursuit as far as Dan. [15] At night, he and his servants deployed against them and defeated them; and he pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus.

Abraham's power can be found in his military force as well. But this only reassures us that when Abraham uses his wit that he is doing so out of choice rather than necessity. We can glean that Abraham has a variety of weapons in his arsenal, but as we read further in our text we understand that perhaps the weapon of wit is preferred to that of physical power.

Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin reminds us that Abraham's sons and grandsons continue this trend throughout the Genesis narrative. They too win by thinking rather than fighting. He writes that "the great narrative code of the book of Genesis is sibling rivalry. How does this rivalry play out? One brother is always tough and classically masculine, and the other brother is softer and intellectual. Only one brother can win the covenant. The winner is always the weaker son. The [physically] stronger brother becomes something else, someone else, someone Other."[37]

Isaac, the child who lies silent on the altar, becomes the patriarch over his "wild ass of a man"[38] brother Ishmael. Jacob, well known for his wrestling, but clearly the weaker sibling in comparison to his brother Esau, "wins" through deception. He uses his brain to become the patriarch, never facing his brother physically. And Joseph, possibly the most politically

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[37] Salkin, Rabbi Jeffrey K. Searching for My Brothers: Jewish Men in a Gentile World. Perigree Publishing, New York, 2000 p. 28.
[38] Genesis 16:12

powerful of the men in Genesis, was the little brother sold into Egypt only later to break down and cry before his brothers.

As Rabbi Salkin points out, Jewish masculinity is not choosing to overpower another with physical strength. "Real patriarchs cry. They cry at moments of loss. . . . A man's weeping brings a well of redemptive water in the wilderness."[39] Israelite men are not Goliath. They are David. They are often weak in appearance, but wise, and they win with their brain and hearts, not only with their muscles.

There are of course examples of Israelite men able to kill on a whim like Samson and builders of great temples like Solomon. These are important characters in our scriptural history, but they are, as Martin Buber points out, characters of history. Moreover, as we will see in rabbinic texts, with the exception of modern Israel and its recent emphasis on stories such as the battle at Massada and the Maccabee revolt, the Jewish man as a macho hero is rarely the image our tradition emphasizes.

Rabbinic Fathers:

Martin Buber is clear in his theology that the bible continues to repeat itself throughout history. As we look at the stories of Jewish men throughout time we find that this is certainly true. From the Israelite men of biblical literature and continuing into the rabbinic period, Jewish men make unique choices in their methods for asserting their masculine identity. Striking in the rabbinic period is how reactionary the rabbis are as they make choices markedly different from the dominant culture. The rabbis' choices lead to the creation of what I will call a negative culture. By negative culture I do not mean to infer that Jewish culture was not positive, but

[39] Salkin, Rabbi Jeffrey K. Searching for My Brothers: Jewish Men in a Gentile World. Perigree Publishing, New York, 2000, p. 44

rather that it took on a shape opposite of the *goyim,* or other nations. It is as if the rabbis are watching the dominant culture and finding any way to get away from it. When the Romans and Greeks focused on the outdoors, the Jewish man went inside to the *heder*. As the dominant culture invested in the human body, the Jewish man once again invested in the mind. When masculinity was viewed as powerfully erotic and seeking many mates, the Jewish man became the "husband par excellence"[40].

Daniel Boyarin, a leading scholar in the quest to understand the Jewish male, points out that Jewish masculinity was not like that of other cultures. "In early modern eastern Europe, the ideal Jewish male, the Rabbi or Talmudic student, was indeed characterized by qualities that made him very different from, in fact almost the exact opposite of the 'knight in shining armor' heartthrob of our romantic culture."[41] He continues, dating this image as far back as the creation of the Babylonian Talmud itself. While I believe his timing was predated by the bible, his assertion is on track, pointing out that the Jewish man has always been a soldier of thought and not war.

In fact, Boyarin asserts that this difference led the Jewish man to adopt traits we often refer to as feminine or homosexual. His hypothesis understands the Jewish male throughout much of European history to be perceived as a "sort of woman"[42]. Referring to a midrash of male companionship, "Who is a friend? He that one eats with, drinks with, reads with, studies with, sleeps with, and reveals to him all of his secrets – the secrets of Torah and the secrets of the way of the world."[43] He writes; "Male intimacy, it seems, for the Talmudic culture includes the physical contact of being in bed together while sharing verbally the most intimate of experiences

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[40] Boyarin, Daniel. Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 1997. p.64
[41] ibid p.1-2
[42] ibid. p. 3
[43] Shechter Aboth, chapter 10

. . . . Thus, while we cannot draw conclusions about the sexual practices of rabbinic men from such a passage, we can certainly, it seems to me, argue that it bespeaks a lack of 'homosexual panic' such as that necessitated by the modern formation known as 'heterosexuality.' [This absence] permitted a much greater scope of behavior coded as 'feminine' . . . to be normative."[44]

Rabbinic literature is not shy about the love men share with one another as colleagues and friends:

> "What is in your heart about your fellow man is likely to be in his heart about you"[45]. "
> "And the Lord said unto Moses: 'Acquire for thyself Joshua the son of Nun' " (Num. 27:18). The word "acquire" here implies acquisition at much cost, for a companion is acquired after difficulties upon difficulties. Hence, say the sages, a man should acquire a companion for [everything]: for reading Scripture with him, reciting Mishnah with him, eating with him, drinking with him, and disclosing all his secrets to him.[46]
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> R. Hiyya bar Abba said in the name of R. Yohanan: When one of several brothers dies, all the other brothers have reason to be concerned. When one member of a fellowship dies, all the others in the fellowship have reason to be concerned.[47]

It is unclear whether the rabbis' motives in these passages and many others were homoerotic in nature or not. What is clear is that men need other men and rely on them for a degree of companionship that is highly valued in the rabbinic system. As the last passage claims, the difference between ones brothers and ones friends is identical. We love them both and we feel their loss as family members whether we are of the same parents or not.

But it is not only the Jewish man's life with other men that bring us to understand him as a different type of man. Others of the period also valued Jewish men for their rather feminine qualities. Boyarin points out this case in the Glikl of Hameln stories. "In her description of her

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[44] Boyarin, p.17
[45] Sifre Deut. #24
[46] ibid, #304
[47] BT Shabbat 105b-106a

young husband as the ideal male Jew of her time, she emphasizes his inwardness, piety and especially meekness. . . . Indeed many of these traits . . . would be more likely to fit the damsel in distress or an anchorite friar than a husband and man of the world."[48] Whereas Abraham's Sarah was silent as her man chose to win with wit rather than physical strength, the women of the rabbinic era cheered their scholars on.

Perhaps the most useful aspect of this strange gendering for the purpose of this thesis is the effect the masculine role had upon the father-son relationship. In his article *The Jewish Father: Past and Present*, Chaim Waxman covers the oft-quoted role of the Jewish father. Citing the famous Talmudic passage from Kiddushin 29a, "The father is required to circumcise his son, to redeem him, to teach him Torah, to assure that he marries and to teach him a trade. Some say he must also teach him to swim."[49] Waxman asserts a long held simple understanding of the fatherly role; the father's role barely reaches beyond taking care of his professional needs and teaching. Waxman notes that this "the Talmud is quite brief in its delineation of the duties and responsibilities of the father."[50]

Waxman falls in line with many Jewish teachers, including myself, who have relied upon this passage as a definition of fatherly responsibilities. It is direct, clear and succinct, but it is not the end of the rabbis' definition of a Jewish father. Thankfully, as we look further into rabbinic texts and the commentaries that follow we can find other clues as to what a Jewish father truly was in rabbinic eyes.

Boyarin explores opposing values in the Hasidic world as proof that Jewish masculinity sometimes included more than just teaching one's children. It also included loving them and

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[48] Boyarin, Daniel. Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man. University of California Press, Berkley, CA 1997. p.55
[49] Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 29a
[50] Brod, Harry, A Mensch Among Men: Explorations in Jewish Masculinity. Crossing Press, Freedom CA p. 60

sharing in the responsibility of raising them equally with one's spouse. Referring to what we may consider strange behavior for a man, Boyarin explains that "the Talmudic text, after all, does not indicate that sons are particularly close to their fathers; rather it indicates equal intimacy between children and either of their parents. Its function here, then, must be to support the point that sons are intimate with their fathers as well as their mothers"[51] A father's role, therefore, was multi-faceted.

Male intimacy and love is not a modern concept in Jewish tradition. In Talmud Yevamot 62b we read "One who loves his wife as he loves his own body and honors her more than he honors his body and raises his children in the upright fashion and marries them soon after sexual maturity, of him it is said, 'And you shall know that your tent is at peace'"[52]

This continues the theme of reaction against *goyim naches* that both Boyarin and Salkin cling to. It is not the perfect body, as Hellenistic influence might proclaim, that is the ultimate measure of a man's success, but rather the honor he gives his wife and the peace that is found within his home. More importantly, we are able to understand that the Jewish man who chose to be inside rather than outside and who was often deemed to be feminine by society was quite honorable by many standards. He was expected to be a scholar and lover of tradition as well as a teacher to his children. But teaching children to swim was not the end of his responsibilities. A Jewish man gained respect as a man when he honored his family above himself. He was to be admired by his children equally as a parent and most importantly, he was responsible for helping his children find their future homes. It was not his sword or public accolades that brought honor to his home. It was his devotion to his family.

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[51] ibid, p. 60

[52] Babylonian Talmud Yevamoth 62b as cited in Boyarin, p. 50.

The Jew was an "other" in every society. And therefore, like many minority groups throughout history, the Jewish man acted in an "other" way. Important for this work is the fact that Jewish men embraced "otherness", encouraging or even forcing the Jewish man by means of halakhah to adopt characteristics that the non-Jewish community would consider non-masculine.[53]

Responding to a college student's question Rabbi Salkin summarized Jewish masculinity explaining:

> It's not that Jewish men are wusses. It's that our code of masculinity is simply different. We demonstrate our masculinity through a love of ideas and words, an infatuation with argument and intellectual striving. Some people think that to be a man you have to know how to go it alone. Not Jewish men. We live like men in the midst of a community, showing responsibility and living lives of interconnection. Some people think that to be a man is to 'do what you gotta do.' Not Jewish men. We show that we are men through a strict adherence to a moral code. It means lifting ourselves higher than we ever thought possible.[54]

No matter how hard many Jews have tried, we have never lived in a vacuum completely separate from other societies. Rabbinic and Medieval times are no different. "Even in pre-exilic times the Israelites had to determine the extent to which they could draw on the riches of the cultures among which they lived. King Solomon built the temple of God with the aid of Phoenician architects and on the standard plan of Syrian temples. The psalmist modeled some his poems on Canaanite hymns to Baal and Egyptian hymns to Aton. The author of Proverbs drew upon the wisdom of Amenemope."[55] We also know from our experiences today as Jews living in America that our culture, while often antagonistic to the dominant Christian culture, cannot run away from it entirely. In fact, in the modern era we have often taken the tack of religiously walking with

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[53] Salkin writes: "What became the ideal Jewish male virtues? Virtues that the rest of the world might regard as being *unmanly* – restraint, renunciation, resignation, reconciliation, patience, and forbearance. Why did Judaism encourage such virtues? They were necessary because historical reality demanded them. Judaism became the task of training the heart and deed – the education toward virtue. P. 57

[54] Salkin, Rabbi Jeffrey K. Searching for My Brothers: Jewish Men in a Gentile World. Perigree Publishing, New York, 2000, p. 68

[55] Cohen, Shaye J. D. From the Maccabees to the Mishnah. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia p. 38

our neighbors, adopting similar practices such as the ritual ceremony of confirmation, in order to add meaning to our lives as well as feel a part of the dominant religious culture. And if we again remind ourselves of Buber's ideology that what happens today is no different than what has happened before, we must then assume that the Jewish man, like the Jewish community today, could not entirely run away from the gentile masculinity of rabbinic and medieval times.

In the centuries prior to the Common Era (BCE), Jews were eager to participate in Hellenistic life. "For most Jews the ideal solution was to create a synthesis between Judaism and Hellenism."[56] In fact, later "the rabbis expressed this beautifully in a comment . . . "May the beauty of Japheth (the Greeks) dwell in the tents of Shem (the Jews).[57]

But if Jews throughout time have been willing to compromise and even synthesize Judaism with the surrounding culture, what was different for Jewish masculinity? While Jews were willing to speak Greek and adopt Greek practices, Jews often tried to remain a distinct group through their social relationships. "In order to maintain their distinctiveness and identity most Jews of the ancient world sought to separate themselves from their gentile neighbors."[58] While public Jewish life could look Hellenic, Jewish home life was sacred and would not be touched. Shaye Cohen points out that "it is not until the Maccabean period that a general prohibition [on intermarriage] is attested."[59] The Jewish home was to remain Jewish in practice. While other rituals were altered to fit the dominant culture, including the language of the biblical text being translated into Greek, the home life of the Jew would move in the opposite direction. It would become increasingly difficult to bring the outsider into our family.

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[56] ibid p. 43
[57] ibid p. 43
[58] ibid p. 46
[59] ibid p. 50

Jews certainly adapted to their surrounding environment. Even the rabbis, who were in need of withholding their limited authority and voice among the Jewish people, changed their ways. But Jewish homes were not only "more Jewish" than Jewish life in public because Jews were trying to separate from the dominant culture. The Jewish home was largely left untouched by the dominant empires of the world. The reality was that empires cared a great deal about public authority, but could ultimately care less about the Jewish home life. "While it is true that Julius Caesar, Augustus, and their Julio-Claudian successors recognized the right of the Jews to live according to their own laws, emperors after 66, or 135 C.E., seem rarely, if ever, to have passed laws concerning the Jews or to have had anything like a Jewish policy. The Jews had no legal "personality" or, at most a rather thin and ephemeral one."[60] The Jewish home throughout history was possibly the one area in which the Jew retained the most authority. I believe that it is this freedom that permitted Jewish masculinity to grow and thrive in a way that it was not permitted in a more public setting. The Jewish man, within the confines of Jewish walls, either the home or the *heder*, did not have to be physically strong. He was able to be scholarly and to focus on making his home a place for peace.

Conclusion:

There are many paths taken by many fathers in Jewish tradition. If we narrow our search to those paths that are both unique to the Israelite or Rabbinic man we find that there is a meta-halakha or a path-making that occurs in our tradition. The biblical father builds a path as a man on a journey. He is in close relationship not only with his wife, but also with God as a partner and even spouse in the childbearing process. As Abraham shows us, the biblical father also excels at using his mind as a strength even when he may seem physically weaker.

[60] Schwartz, Seth Imperialism and Jewish Society 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E., Princeton University Press, Princeton and Cambridge, p. 187.

Rabbinic text does not follow the path of a man wandering in the wilderness. The meta-halakha here is a message of father as teacher and man as a reaction to the dominant culture beyond the walls of the *heder*. This is a world where men rely on one another and where love is not only accepted, but encouraged and even required between men. The ideal man is not a champion by the greater society's standards, but rather a scholar, a person who like Abraham is on a personal journey open to new ideas and change.

Chapter 2 – The Modern Father

> TNK **Numbers 14:18** God, slow to anger and abounding in kindness; forgiving iniquity and transgression; yet not remitting all punishment, but visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children, upon the third and fourth generations.'

Since its birth, Judaism has been concerned with the effects of one generation's actions upon another. In this particular verse the rabbis understand not only that every generation is different, but also that each generation is dependent upon the ones which came before it and those which come after it.

> Consider the implications of this verse by analogy with a four-level storehouse, one level above the other; on one there is wine; on another, oil; on still another, honey; and on still another, water. If a fire starts on any one of the levels, what is above it will extinguish the fire. But if all four levels should have oil on them, all four will burn down. Likewise, if children persist, generation after generation, in the wicked ways of their forefathers, punishment will be visited upon them. But if the generations alternate, one generation righteous and the next wicked, and so on, then "the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers" (Deut. 24:16). Hearing this, Moses rejoiced, saying, "In Israel, no one is a malicious destroyer of grapevines just because his father was a malicious destroyer of grapevines."[61]

There are two assumptions made by this passage important to the study of the modern Jewish father. First, the rabbis are clear that fathers are influential in their children's lives. The second assumption is that children should strive to be different than their fathers in order to be righteous. Both assumptions are telling of the issues fathers have faced throughout time. In this chapter I look at the modern father and the many challenges he faces as he enters his home and works to become an active parent. In particular this chapter focuses on four challenges facing fathers in the twenty-first century as they are informed by modern psychology..

1. The challenge of being the "other" in the child's life.
2. The challenge for the father to provide basic needs for the child.

[61] Midrash on Numbers 14:18 - Yalkut, *Shelah*, #744.

3. The challenge for the father to introduce the outside world to the child.

4. The challenge to spend time that is of high quality, but also time parenting the child.

Some of these challenges are ancient and have continued from generation to generation while others are arising as unique to the modern era.

While less notable than the challenges, there are benefits that fathers bring to their children's lives. The latter portion of this chapter will focus on these strengths fathers have brought to parenting throughout the generations and finally the unique role fathers could play for the future generations of children.

Challenges: The Oil that Burns from Generation to Generation

If Abraham was the father of our biblical world, then Freud has been the father of the psycho-analysis of the relationship between parents and their children. Like Abraham, whether the oedipal relationship speaks to us or not, it is the standard that all other theories are measured against and therefore will be the primary model I address in this chapter.

Challenge #1: Father as an "other" to the child.

The Oedipus complex in Freudian psychoanalysis refers to a stage of psychosexual development in childhood where children of both sexes regard their father as an adversary and competitor for the exclusive love of their mother.[62] Fathers, like oil, are an entity that is infinitely separated from the family in which they reside. This has been a major challenge for fathers to overcome throughout all of time and according to current psychologists it has not receded. Moreover, as dual-earner families become the norm in our society, men are faced with

[62] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oedipal_complex

a struggle to help fill the void of what was once a full-time "stay-at-home" job while being considered an "other" or outsider.

The father as "other" impacts the family in a variety of ways. We will explore the complex nature of this outsider status through the relationship between the father as one excluded from the mother-child relationship.

> The pediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott argued that "the infant and the maternal care together form a unit" Good enough mothering "includes fathers, but fathers must allow me to use the term maternal to describe the total attitude to babies and their care. The term paternal must necessarily come a little later than maternal". Winnicott held that the father's role in early infancy was to support the mother in her state of primary maternal preoccupation, to enable her to provide a holding environment and to avoid unnecessary impingements on the baby. . . . when the infant is in the state of absolute dependency on the maternal holding.[63]

As Winnicott explains. the mother and child form a unit. The father falls outside of this unit and is not privy to the connection formed with the child or the mother. Notice that this is not a relationship focused on time, but rather on dependency. The child is dependent upon the mother and not the father. While it is possible for the father to hold the baby, care for the baby and even feed the baby, both society and biological factors often place the mother into the role of primary caregiver. The father becomes the alternative to mom, or "other".

Not only is this dependency fulfilling the child's needs, but it is also providing the child with pleasure. "Good experience is usually associated with need fulfillment – when it is in the presence of the mother in tune with its needs, which usually means a mother in the act of attending to them."[64] Fathers, perhaps without even knowing that it is happening, may find themselves outside the child's source of need fulfillment and even happiness in the early stages of life.

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[63] Trowell, Judith and Etchegoyen, Alicia The Importance of Fathers: A Psychoanalitic Re-evaluation. Brunner Routledge, New York, 2003 p. 28
[64] ibid, p.77

But need fulfillment can come from fathers as well. Technology has blessed us with bottles and other tools that help the father fill the biological roles of mother. For instance, in the cases of single parent families in which the mother is absent we can imagine that a child's needs are met by a man. But we should not be fooled into thinking that our modern post-feminist society is as egalitarian in the home as it is in the workplace. While women have moved into the professional world, they often do not relinquish their domestic role. Dr. Wendy Mogel, a noted family therapist and author of The Blessing of a Skinned Knee, spoke with me about this reality. She believes that "women today are trying to be perfect men as well as perfect women."[65]

The intent is not to point fingers at mothers, but rather to illuminate the complexities of the love triangle that exists between parents and their child. Mother's, whether full-time parents or CEO's for corporations, continue to feel the pressure of being the primary caregiver or "perfect woman" as Dr. Mogel stated. The father's challenge is to overcome the lack of space and find a balance between his partner's emotional need to be a "perfect" parent and his need to be a professional father.

But this "otherness" raises a wide range of emotions in the child. It is not only that the father is not the mother. We must also concern ourselves with how the child views the father in relation to the mother. The father is a necessary other. This other often serves as a response or alternative to the mother. According to the French psychologist Jacques Marie Emile Lacan, "The child's sense of identity develops from seeing himself reflected in the other – the mother. . . . the father is seen as another brother wishing to take the child's place with the mother."[66]

[65] Interview 2 with Dr. Wendy Mogel
[66] ibid, p. 30

In this case the father takes on the role of what we would term a brother. The child relates to father as one would relate in a sibling rivalry competing for the other parent's attention. This is heightened even further as we consider the sexual relationship often present among parents.

The oedipal relationship is a love triangle. Traditionally it occurs when two people in relationship create a third object, the child, to love. For the newcomer with needs from one and possibly both of the parents, their love for each other can be viewed as another challenge. This challenge is particularly problematic for fathers as their children believe that their primary caregiver, the mother, often abandons them to seek the father.

"In fantasy, separation is always experienced as the mother retreating to the other room – the parental bedroom – with the second object, the father.[67] In this aspect of the oedipal theory the child becomes envious and even angry with the father. "The father is the hated depriving object, and this requires the father to have a capacity to be hated. The father has to accept that the central nurturing relationship involves the mother, and that he is excluded from the mother-infant couple. [68] And while the child is of primary concern, each member of this love triangle may feel similarly. "Essentially, the task for the mother, father and infant involves tolerating the link between two people they desire and which excludes them."[69]

[67] ibid, 81
[68] ibid, p. 85
[69] ibid, 95

Challenge #2: Providing Basic Needs

Fathers are not mothers and they face a challenge in breaking into the relationship between mother and child. The second challenge fathers face focuses on whether it is even possible for fathers to provide basic needs for their child. Perhaps it is ONLY the mother who can fill the needs of her child.

As we explore this second major challenge we find that fathers may face a tremendous disadvantage as their biological necessity seems to be diminishing with the progression of modern science in the field of fertility. "Winnicott reminded us that there is no baby without a mother"[70] One of the advances modern science teaches us quite clearly that men do not need to be present for childbearing or childrearing: "The acceptance of a whole new mode of procreation, ranging from 'do it yourself turkey-baster' inventions to sophisticated *in vitro* conception techniques, has contributed to the appearance that fathers are redundant beyond donating sperm."[71]

Women have a freedom that is biologically absent for men. Whereas a woman can birth her child without a surrogate, a man must find a woman should he want to have a child alone. But it is not the biological limitations that provide the real challenge for fathers. Most fathers find themselves in a relationship. The biological needs are covered by their spouse. Rather, the social and psychological implications of not being a necessary part of the biological creation of a child are significant as we consider challenges facing fathers. This challenge stems from biology, but is certainly made more difficult by the progressive nature of our society that often avoids gender differentiation.

> From the 1960's onwards, the women's liberation movement steered a difficult path between, on the one hand, stressing the equality of and importance of

[70] The Importance of Fathers, p. 93
[71] ibid, p. XV

> women, and at the same time on the other hand seeing motherhood as a potentially disadvantageous role in the battle for equality. There is little doubt that the new ideas on the importance of women . . . had the result that, in the second half of the twentieth century, there was an increasing loss of confidence in the value of the received sense of manhood and fatherhood[72].

Feminism raised a question we continue to ask and often fail to answer today. Are men necessary for childrearing? But asking for, needing and receiving assistance in childbirth is not a new phenomenon. Abraham and Sarah laugh at God when they are told they will have a child. When Isaac marries Rebekah, he seeks help in becoming a father to help Rebekah get pregnant. "Isaac pleaded with God on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived."[73] Seeking help in fertility is an old challenge. What is unique about this challenge for our generation is that a woman can turn to God or to a fertility doctor without need for a man.

The question then becomes, what necessary role does the father play in his child's development? Within the oedipal context, the father is an "other" often viewed as secondary. But there is more to raising a child than carrying it to term.

> Viewed in a broader context, any attempt to understand the respective roles of mother and father has to take into account three immutable facts.
> 1. That the woman has the essential procreative role
> 2. That the physical and psychological survival of the human infant requires the care of one other person
> 3. That the transformation of a biological baby into a fully functioning member of human society (i.e. socialization) involves more than mere physical and psychological survival.[74]

To push the father aside because he cannot fulfill the first fact above is to ignore a holistic perspective of childrearing. Children need another person to help socialize them and integrate

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[72] The Importance of Fathers, XV
[73] Genesis 25:21
[74] The Importance of Fathers, p. 83

them into society. As is discussed at the end of this chapter, fathers are ideal candidates for these needs.

Challenge 3: The Challenge of Opening Doors to the Outside World

The previous challenges may be viewed as disadvantages men face in our society due to their gender. Perhaps the third challenge can be considered an opportunity available primarily to the person taking on the role of the "other". This is the challenge of the father representing the outside world. One psychologist understands this in multiple stages: "There are three possible stages for the father. In the first stage, known as the mirror stage, the father is not distinct. In the second stage, the father intervenes and cuts the link between mother and child. And in the third stage the child wishes to be like the father rather than to be the lover of mother."[75] Cutting the link between the mother and child is an important stage for the child, but it can be a difficult transition for the father. This cutting of the link is one of the key actions a father can take as the representative of the outside world.

For Freud "the concept of reality is bound up with the father". But this also allows "the father [to] appear mainly as a powerful figure to be fought or to whom we must submit."[76] This stage of fatherhood is therefore closest to the traditional role of the father as the patriarch of the family. In his book Becoming the Kind Father, Calvin Sandborn, a lawyer by trade, chronicles the struggle this challenge presents. In telling his personal story, Sandborn relates the long tradition in masculinity of the man as an outsider to the intimate nature of domestic life. In this sense fathers are beings of doing what is outside like work, politics and fighting and not feeling what is inside the home such as love, peace and comfort. For him, man has remained a knight in

[75] ibid, 30
[76] ibid, 24

armor. "In fairy tales, the hero wears emotional armor as well as real armor. While he slays the dragon and saves the princess, he must always be brave. She shows emotions, but he doesn't. Instead, he is cool, powerful and 'in charge'. He's like Davey Crockett, 'The King of the Wild Frontier . . . the man who knew no fear. . . .Many like Batman, Green Hornet, the Lone Ranger and Zorro, actually wear masks to hide their faces and feelings."[77]

Sandborn believes that fathers leave masks and armor for their sons to adopt. This is his version of the burning oil present in every generation of men. He explains in his story that it is not only through fairy tales and comic books that this armor is transferred. It is in very real life changing moments that patriarchy has denied men the opportunity to express their emotions.[78] One of these moments took place when he lost his father at the age of 13. Immediately after hearing of his father's death he recounts the interaction among his brothers.

> "I choked like I had a bone in my throat; and for a brief moment I cried. . . . Gasping, almost retching, I stumbled down the sidewalk with Tom. When we got to the corner, David suddenly stopped, took a deep breath, and looked back at me. He braced his shoulders and spoke authoritatively, in his Marine voice, 'We're men in this family now, boys. We have to take this like men.' He snapped the twig in his hands in two, and threw it to the ground. . . . 'We've got the girls to take care of. We all have a job to do. . . . Think about it – Dad would want you to be strong champ', he said to me. 'Don't worry, Tom's the oldest now, so he's in charge. He'll take care of you.' He slapped the dust off of his hands, and strode quickly back into the house. By the time David slammed the door, I had stopped crying. I didn't cry again – or mention my father – for 15 years.[79]

Sandborn refers to this moment as a "Boy Code Lesson" and later explains how it turned his view of a knight in shining armor into a tin man with buried emotions. This is the challenge of representing the outside world. It is a system in which the father is authority of the outward focused image. He does not have the freedom or even the capability to be a master of his inside,

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[77] Sandborn, Calvin, Becoming the Kind Father, New Society Publishers, Canada. P.9
[78] ibid. p. 63
[79] ibid p. 49

emotional world. In Sandborn's words "Patriarchy has denied men the opportunity to speak their feelings."[80]

While overcoming the biological barrier of giving birth to a child is impossible, taking off the emotional mask of patriarchy is open to men. Moreover, as the "other" the man has the ability to become an-other source of emotional support for their child.

> When the baby arrives what it needs is a carer, who for a while, can devote themselves to the child. . . . Whoever takes on this role should, if possible, have a state of mind encompassing several aspects described by Winnicott as 'primary parental preoccupation', by Bion as 'reverie'. An adult in this state has unconsciously opened themselves up to the baby in a way that enables them to be deeply responsive to the baby's communications[81].

Men cannot choose their sex, but some psychologists believe that men can choose to overcome the long burning oil of being emotionless. Sandborn explains that in order to build this relationship we must overcome a patriarchal competitive nature of win/lose mentality and replace it with a sense of love for ourselves. In his book, that reads much like a memoir, he explains;

> "Too often men attack ourselves. I'm often shocked at how mean men can be when they talk about themselves. It's commonplace to hear men describe themselves harshly: 'I'm such a no good bastard; Really, I'm just a stupid sonofabitch'. As a young man told me, "I say things to myself that, if somebody else said it, I would punch them in the face."[82]

Sandborn believes that this is some of the oil that we inherit from our fathers. Personally, I did not relate to Sandborn's perspective until I recently observed it in action. At a retreat for fathers and sons at a camp outside of Los Angeles I supervised a friendly game of soccer; sons vs. fathers. The game was mildly competitive with high fives after every goal and a sense of comraderie among the two groups. Fathers would cheer for sons and vice versa. At one point in

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[80] ibid, 63
[81] The Importance of Fathers, p. 12
[82] Sandborn, p. 30

the game a 12 year old boy was passed the ball and had the opportunity to score. He pulled his leg back far and struck the ball with what looked like all his might. When the ball missed the goal, the boy, standing not so far from his father, fell down hitting the ground with his hand. "I'm so stupid . . . such a screw up," he said.

Missing the goal was not a big deal and it happened many times over the course of the game, but for this son, it was a let down, a sign of being a loser and not a winner. His father only a few feet away, along with the rest of the men, did not really notice the boy's disappointment. It is a normal reaction among men in a competitive setting. I was struck at both the intensity of the boy's reaction over a simple missed opportunity and the almost ambivalent response of more than twenty men. It was a sign to me that men, even at a very young age, may in fact be too harsh on ourselves.

Was this child's disappointment really his father's voice inside his head saying "How could you miss that shot?" I don't know. What is evident is that none of the men felt the need to react to this emotional outrage of hitting the ground with self-deprecating words. None of the fathers comforted the child or were even shocked by his outward disappointment. Rather, we all acted as knights in an armor that protects our vulnerabilities. It is a norm in male behavior as Sandborn points out. "We're only a couple of generations removed from King George V's declaration that the father's proper role is to frighten his children. Even today, half of all Americans agree that "the father must be master of his own house. And in this traditional patriarchy, the father-son relationship has been one of dominance and submission, not of emotional connection."[83]

[83] Sandborn, p. 29

Challenge #4: Travelling Together but getting Nowhere

The fire in the storehouse of fatherhood reaches back through generations of men to biblical patriarchy. It is a reality that has been studied by psychologists and experienced by fathers and children like Calvin Sandborn. But as the rabbis teach in their commentary, every generation is not only like the previous one, it also unique to its own time. We are not only burning the same oil of biblical patriarchy. There are new challenges that modern fathers must face.

As I mentioned in our discussion of Abraham, one of the primary traits of biblical fathers was their mission to be on a journey, constantly traveling. In my discussion with Dr. Mogel she reminded me that modern fathers are also known to be travelers with their children. Recounting her own experience with her father, she remembers both the importance of this traveling and reflects on the new challenges men face in the twenty-first century.

> I walked to school everyday with my father. We lived in Manhattan and we walked together everyday and we talked about his business. But also my father always wanted to know everything about my life. Even today, he wants to know the ages of the children that my daughter baby-sits for while she is in college. This is the beauty of the Jewish man – that he wants to know about his granddaughter's job.
>
> So one place fathering happens is in the car. . . . But I just went to the car show and I was shocked. There are big screen TVs in cars today. We saw these cars with large plasma screen televisions in them and then everyone is plugged in so you can't connect because you are connected. It is an erosion of the places where parenting takes place.[84]
>
> The car used to be great. Driving to soccer practice or a b-day party you would process. I don't know what percentage now, but these tools to shut kids up – these machines are the plug and everyone is all stopped up and isolated. And the daddy, completely the odd man out. He is losing out the most because he doesn't have a unique role. He doesn't provide something essential for the system.[85]

[84] Interview 2 with Dr. Mogel
[85] ibid

As I teach twenty-first century teenagers I realize that the television in the car is only the beginning of the new lover in our family triangle. Ipods, cell phones and GPS units are distractions in our lives that often prevent conversations. Dr. Mogel believes that these challenges effect the father in particular because occurrences such as riding in the car are not viewed as quality time. Calvin Sandborn adds a different perspective that is directed specifically at men trying to overcome the masked emotions of patriarchy.

> "When something impacted me emotionally – when the boss dumped on me, when I had an argument with my wife, when one of the kids disappointed me . . . I would feel upset for a moment. But then I would immediately divert myself from the feelings. Like my brother David, I threw myself into the job at hand. I'd work long hours. Or I escaped into reading. Or, I'd turn off the feeling and turn on the TV."[86]

I empathize with Sandborn. On September 11th, 2001 I arrived home just as the World Trade Center was struck by the terrorist planes. Like the rest of the country I, along with the eleven other men in my house, were in shock. For twenty four hours our lives were at a stand-still. Our world had been shaken in a way my generation had never felt. Other generations recalled Pearl Harbor or Kennedy's assassination. We knew immediately that 9/11 would be our moment to remember where we were. But on day two and day three, as emotions continued to flare, I noticed the men in my life becoming agitated. "When is sportscenter going to stop playing the news? When can I turn on sports again and get past 9/11?" We were not insensitive; in fact a close friend barely survived the attack. But we did not want to experience the emotions, we wanted to turn those emotions off by turning on meaningless entertainment.

Technology is a new love in our lives and men are known to be more interested in it than women. It can be a mask that we wear to hide our emotions and further disconnect us from

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[86] Sandborn, p. 50

relationships. But men face other challenges in expressing themselves. Sandborn claims that "intimacy with oneself prepares us for intimacy with others"[87]

Moreover, he explains that men are at a linguistic disadvantage to express these emotions.

> "Men, unlike women, lack a broad range of words to describe various emotions. This lack of emotional vocabulary is a real deficit – it's part of the reason that almost 80% of men have difficulty identifying what they are feeling. I knew when I was angry or feeling something quite powerful, but I didn't have the words for subtler feelings such as disappointment, discouragement, insecurity, irritation or the like. . . . I would use words that either exaggerated the feeling ("I feel like crap") or minimized it ("It's nothing – I'm just tired") As a result, I failed to experience the "disappointment" – because I was telling myself it was something else."[88]

Complicating this situation for fathers in particular is that the new role of the father expects him to be involved in the emotional side of the child's life to a greater degree than previous generations.

> In the modern, Western, nuclear family, mothers and fathers spend more time together than they did in the past and their roles are much less differentiated. Women no longer need to rely entirely on their husbands for material support or for obtaining power and status. Likewise, men now have social permission to be actively involved in parenting, and increasingly want to be given greater access to their children. . . . In the Western nuclear family we expect that fathers should be involved.[89]

With the changing role of women in our society, a space has been opened for the father to be more than just the one who communicates while driving the kid to school. Ironically, as the opportunities present themselves the space is filled by new competition like television and increasingly portable media. Adding to this concern is a long held tradition of men's limited emotional vocabulary. Today, as my experience proved on 9/11, men often rely on distractions

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[87] ibid p. 60
[88] Sandborn, p. 54
[89] The Importance of Fathers, 93,94

like television to distract us from emotional opportunities. These opportunities may be our best tools in creating the relationships we wish to harvest with our children.

Dr. Mogel raises some other concerns about what prevents men from getting to journey with their children:

> What kind of parent does a Jewish father get to be . . . I told you about how the men withdraw. It all seems as though the fathers are even wimpier now. I am thinking about the people I see in psychotherapy – the women are contemptuous about the men. Some of it is projection. What legs do men have to stand on now when the women can earn money and the emotional currency of women is overvalued. That women can relate to the children. He gets squeezed out and so what can he provide. And earning more money than the mom . . . big deal. We have this ambivalence toward money as it's dirty and we love it, so dad becomes that to us.

The twenty-first century parent faces many competing interests. We have more dual earner families, more distractions for our children and more technology that can grab our attention from our pockets, cars and couches. The expectations for fathers to be involved in their children's lives are possibly higher than ever before. Adding to the expectations are the "old" pressures to make money and the "old" ways of avoiding emotions by escaping to the television and sports. But it is not only society that wants dad to improve his role with children, it is the kids themselves. A Mori poll reported in *The Guardian* (10 April 1997) showed that 20% of 8-15 year old children could not recall sharing an activity with their father in the previous week and that 80% want their father to spend more time with them[90]. At a NFTY workshop for male teens, Camp Director Bobby Harris asked young men to talk about love in their relationship with their fathers. Author Doug Barden recorded their responses:

> *"My father doesn't have a clue as to what is going on in my life"*
> *"My father spends more time on his computer than he does with me"*
> *"My father is a rabbi, and sometimes I feel he cares more about the congregation than he does about me"*

[90] The Importance of Fathers, p. 47

"I wish my father would sit down more and talk with me about what's going on"[91]

Wrapping up the Challenges:

The role of the father is in transition. But we are sending mixed messages. On the one hand our children are wondering where the father is in their lives and on the other the traditional role of the mother does not fit or may not even be available to the father. Add this to the struggle men face sharing emotions and we find that the father has an uphill battle in the family.

The picture painted by children is more complex as well. Dr. Mogel believes that our children have become entitled and she worries for their future. This concern is intertwined with the challenges a father faces as previously discussed.

> I was at a beautiful private school and it is very progressive and casual and there were no seats left for the kids. And the teacher asked me if I minded sitting on the floor. So the teacher turned to a kid named Josh and said "Josh do you mind sitting on the floor so Dr. Mogel can have a seat" and Josh responded to the teacher in a whiney voice "No, but Lucy, you know I feel so much more relaxed when I sit on the couch."
>
> And I thought every issue is in there and I immediately flashed to his first job interview and wondered if he will survive. His mother has taught him that his world revolves around his comfort. So the doting mother handicaps our kids.
>
> We have these young men – what is it going to be like when his wife is diagnosed with breast cancer? What is strength, maturity, leadership? What is the unique role of the father or the shared role? It's so much less clear.
>
> ME: What would you tell those parents?
>
> DM: Oh, I beat them up (jokingly). Don't ask what's wrong. He comes home and complains about teachers and friends and being bored. Not getting the Nintendo Wii when other kids have it. Of course he wants the Wii, he has been brainwashed to want it. That's why we have Hannukah and birthdays and their own money. But when parents are worn down by life and then worn down by the kids genius by lobbying, and this is also a challenge of how manipulative the children are. The kids, they're so powerful. And then the dads – what does he feel about the situation, let's say he can't afford the Wii. He can't provide the

[91] Barden, Doug

Wii and that is HIS role as father. Does he feel ashamed because the only thing he can contribute is the Wii because no one else pays attention to me?

In this anecdotal story, Dr. Mogel highlights all of the challenges that I have raised for the modern father. He is a man struggling with his identity as it is associated with money. He is challenged to create a relationship with his children that values emotions, but he may not have the language and may feel more comfortable "buying" their love. The father also faces a complex competition with the mother, the primary lover of the children. Egalitarian parenting is possible, in my opinion, but only so long as we understand that this is one case in which fair may not be equal. A father cannot be artificially inseminated and carry the child to term and the father cannot feed the child from his own body. Moreover, the mother CAN do these things and even if she chooses not to, she remains a woman attached to a long tradition of gendered roles that pushes her to be the "perfect mother" and in today's world "the perfect man" as well. The position of the father seems somewhat lost, only able to react to the many changes and powerful forces that surround his desire to find a place in his family in which he can succeed and be a part of the team.

It is not my intent to paint a grim picture of the father. Family life is increasingly difficult for father, mother and child. But it is significant that the father is such a missing person in the observed family, as it reflects one of the main problems and difficulties in becoming a father that is, finding a role for him in the new family constellation[92].

Good Fathering is Needed:

Each generation of fathers faces challenges new and old. But this fatherly fire that the rabbis mentioned may also be a light for future generations. As discussed earlier, the role of the

[92] The Importance of Father, p. 133

father, while complex and often difficult, is important and even necessary. In this last section of this chapter I will address what fathers do to provide for their children's needs.

Fathers are an other to their children. They are not the mother. But this other plays an important role in the child's development. In the case of most families in which the father has not taken the place of the mother, the father becomes an important partner for the mother.

> If the mother is in this state of reverie, she needs another, usually the father to manage the practical external demands and to act as a protector so that, for example, the mother is not too exhausted by relatives and friends or by her own anxieties about the baby. Father can settle the baby to sleep, change the baby, give a bottle so that the mother can rest and recover, encourage visitors to stay for a short while only, and contain and help think about the mother's and baby's emotional responses. The concepts of 'holding in mind' and 'containment' are both vital aspects of the relationship between child and father.[93]

It is not only important to note that the father is a protector and guardian of the mother and child, but also that the father may have the ability to make the relationship between mother and child succeed. In this sense the father becomes a manager of mother and child. He is the person able to best understand their emotions and limitations. Standing just outside the immediate relationship between mother and child, the father may in fact have the best perspective of what steps to take next. But there is another important factor to keep in mind in this relationship. It is not competitive. Rather it is symbiotic. The mother and father are a team working to keep each other in balance and to provide for the child.

Certainly this is good practice for relationships, but perhaps it is the role of the father to model this behavior for the child.

> The baby needs total care early on, but then steadily moves towards separateness, a wish to be alone and then to leave. This process means parents have, to some extent, to be left behind, discarded. For those adults who were uncertain of themselves, or who found in the baby an intense relationship they have had with no one else, there is a dread of losing the child and a painful wish to hold on. . . .

[93] The Importance of Fathers, p. 12

> Fathers have to both accept this themselves and help the mother separate and relinquish the child[94].

Whereas we discussed the challenge emotions place before fathers, there is a light that burns from this oil that is important for the child.

> The father, by virtue of being less involved emotionally, can relieve the situation through his access to a fresh perspective. Probably the commonest example of this is when an infant gets into an inconsolable state and, despite her best efforts, it is just impossible for the mother to soothe "her baby". . . . At such times a fresh parent with a fresh mind who, in the infant's perception, is not part of the persecuting situation, can step into the breach to rescue the situation. This can restore a calmer state. . . . When there is an actual father who can act in this way, we can think of him as performing a symbolic paternal function.[95]

The child needs the father in order to understand that its relationships are not limited to the mother, but also that the mother's needs are not met solely by the child. This partnership of mother and father is one of the values Dr. Mogel believes we need to emphasize the most and one that many couples are leaving behind.

> I would like for them to start with examining their actions in the light of the message that they send their kids of how much they respect each other. That's the core. We are worshiping idols and the idols are our kids and their achievement. That has taken the place of God. It is so bad for the kids b/c it makes them so anxious and entitled. . . .
> I want the kids to see the parents cherishing each other – to see the mother really appreciating the father's strengths, his physical size, his experience in the outside world and bringing it into the inside world. I want the girls to see the fathers finding their mothers beautiful – potent antidote to the airbrushed world we live in.
>
> I want them to hear parents laughing together. My daughter once said to me when she heard my husband and I laughing in our room. "There is nothing that makes me feel more secure than to hear that sound." Parents don't realize this – they think it is all about the focus on the kid.
>
> Mothers need to think about what is unique about their husbands. I say to couples all the time "Why did you marry him . . . has it really changed all that much?

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[94] ibid, p. 16
[95] ibid, p. 77

> Then they are totally poetic – but when they have kids the kids take such center stage and I always say "the kids will be gone and if you haven't taken care of this relationship what is it going to be like[96].

This is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity. And I believe it is less complicated than overcoming years of patriarchal models or finding a way to break into the mother-child relationship. Sometimes it can even happen without any effort at all.

> A 13 month old baby whose mother had recently returned to work was observed at the end of the day after he had been collected from his grandmothers . . . . He appeared to like nothing better than lying on a settee, apparently taking pleasure in his parents' conversation with each other as they went about their evening chores. This was his preferred activity at that time of night and it had an unmistakably settling effect on him. This baby seemed able to tolerate the awareness of his two parents having a relationship with each other and it is this that will form the basis of an internal space.[97]

Internal space is an important element in children forming their identities. What strikes me about this case in particular is that the child is passive and in the margins of the action. This marginal role is important for the kid and it allows him to form an identity.

I believe this is a light challenge because in many situations the flame of a relationship is what brought the child into the world. The challenge is keeping the flame lit and making sure that the child does not replace the spouse.

The father represents a sense of power. Freud even described this as one of the strongest needs of a child. But the father also represents a sense of independence and the outside world.

> A key role for the father, which most men find they do intuitively, is to introduce the baby to the world. It is interesting to note that in general mothers appear to carry or sit holding their babies in the earliest weeks face to face, whilst fathers tend to hold the baby facing out into the world. . . . Many of the games fathers tend to enjoy playing with their children in a mutually pleasurable way tend to have elements of separation and return in them – a kind of losing/finding theme, perhaps enacting the necessary separation process.[98]

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[96] Mogel interview 2
[97] The Importance of Fathers, p. 81
[98] The Importance of Fathers, p. 142

Fathers represent the world beyond the comforts of home to their child. They are the platform by which many children reach out into the world and discover themselves. This is a stark contrast to the mother who holds her child close to her womb. Fathers not only bring the child to the world. They also bring the outside world into the home.

> The effect of "Daddy coming home from work" can bring relief to what can often be a stressful situation at the end of the day. . . . The father is also seen as instrumental in turning the baby's view towards the outside world away from the intense intimacy of the mother-child relationship, or as introducing the "third position" which is essential for healthy cognitive and emotional growth and development.[99]

The child needs to see that an outside world exists and it is often the father who brings this reality into the house. As discussed earlier, our world is leveling the roles of mother and father and it may seem as likely that the mother is the one "coming home from work". I accept this with one exception. Mothers continue to take maternity leave for a period of months. This trend is only beginning for fathers. The first paid family leave bill was passed in California only in 2004[100]. The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) does allow for any family member to take up to 12 weeks, but this is unpaid. This often leaves mothers, even those who work full-time, as the initial caretaker in the home and the father as the "coming home from work" model.

Fathers are often a bridge for their children to the outside world. They are also a bridge to the inner world of the child, giving the child a sense of independence.

> That is, the father is a child's primary experience of someone other than the mother. . . . the knowledge that someone else is thinking of and involved with the child frees the mother from her infant. It also frees the infant from the mother. It means that the child will have space to experience himself, can risk hating the mother, can even risk killing her in his mind, because there is someone else there to keep him alive[101].

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[99] ibid, 132
[100] www.babycenter.com
[101] The Importance of Fathers, 97

The child does not always need to hate the mother in order to gain from the father. But an overly obsessive relationship with the mother is unhealthy and the father is the healthiest option to help children realize that they can depend on themselves as well as others. "Mother and infant need someone else to intervene to prevent them from remaining stuck in a merged, claustrophobic, potentially murderous relationship"[102].

Research shows that children benefit most when the mother and the father together help the child gain a sense of independence. "We found that while secure attachment in infancy to the mother predicted early development of emotional understanding, if attachment to the father was also secure, the child's development was even further enhanced."[103]

Again, the message is that of the parents as a team, working together to help the child adjust to their new environment. In fact, a number of large-scale studies have demonstrated that the greater the involvement of the father in an infant's early care the more rapidly the infant develops and the more likely the infant is to withstand stress and to be socially responsive.[104] Some studies have also shown that a father can be quite successful at raising his children as the primary caregiver, the role usually taken by the mother.

> Evidence for the overlap between the role of the mother and father comes from the work of Kyle Pruett. This is a longitudinal, in-depth study of 17 families where the primary caretaker was the father. The findings over eight years support the view that the 'nurturing instinct' is not confined to females. Children develop extremely well in these families, and the child, far from demonstrating deficits in ego functions or object relatedness, seems more active, curious and less prone to pathological separation or stranger anxiety than infants whose primary dyadic relationship was with their mother.[105]

Unfortunately, we also know that not all people are good at nurturing their children. Calvin Sandborn's book is predicated on the anger of his father and his father's (and later his own)

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[102] ibid, 98
[103] ibid, 54
[104] ibid, 51
[105] ibid, 52

inability to be nurturing or what he terms"kind". In his process of self-change, Sandborn explains the steps that he took in order to become the "kind father" to himself. Looking at these steps I believe we can understand what a kind and nurturing father might look like.

1. Hold myself in friendly regard
2. Pay attention to what I'm feeling
3. Identify that feeling with accurate words
4. Articulate the feeling to myself
5. Give myself permission and support to actually feel it, grieve it if necessary[106]

This emotional experience is what Sandborn lacked in a father. He writes the book under the premise that this is what fathers should be to their children and that when this is absent for men, that they need to become this father for themselves. I am not sure that Dr. Mogel would agree.

> I just saw a family where they sing two songs and read two stories then they have four kisses then the dad comes in and reads a story and a song – it takes 40 minutes every night. The parents hate it. But they are trying to be with their kids and love them. It has gotten way out of control b/c the ritual has gone sour. Its much too manicured and organized. It has become a huge power struggle. What is the definition of a book between the parents and kids?[107]

Her point, I believe, is that the emotions must be authentic and not rehearsed or scheduled. Sandborn wishes for men to go through a conversion that may not be possible. Certainly, men have the ability to love rather than hate and I hope we can extend the vocabulary for men's emotions, but some people, men or women, I believe are less inclined to be extroverted in their emotional expression. Some people will never be warm and fuzzy. If they were to try, it would be putting on a mask of emotion and I have to agree with Dr. Mogel, it would not work.

The final aspect of fatherhood worth mentioning for this thesis came as quite a surprise to me. For many years I have heard spouses talk about their husbands or fathers as though they

[106] Sandborn, p. 60
[107] Mogel interview 2

were the "extra child" in the family. "I really have three kids" a mother of two children might say. To my surprise, this trait is not only common among men, but it is a welcome trait for them to hold within the family. Dr. Mogel explained, "A lot of the fathers I see are much more playful than the mothers."[108] This playful nature is not a coincidence. I already discussed the psychological significance of separation and return games that fathers often play with their children. Now, focusing specifically on some differences between fathers and mothers, many psychologists understand that a reaction to the "perfect woman" mother is the "playful father".

According to Mogel, there are 2 primary types of fathers in the traditional family structure.

1. The one who comes home and makes order, trying to make rules. Part of this is a reaction to feeling left out. One of those rules is to pay attention to me.
2. The second type take time to play and be sillier than the mothers. Freud too writes about wit and humor. Sometimes the dads are more fun and funnier. The moms say that the dad is another kid.

These playful moments should not be minimized in their importance. The father, representing the outside world and an alternative to the mother, can provide his child with important memories that can help forge their identity. Dr. Mogel explained how this same theme arose as she asked women about their most vivid memories as a child:

> One woman recalled that her father was a diver and when they spent time at the beach he would always dive and pick up starfish for her to keep. Another father took the kids on a hike one day and when they got to a stream he said "Boy I am thirsty" Turns out he had hidden some soda bottles under the bank of the river. He shocked his children when he reached down and pulled up these drinks out of the ground for his kids. Being the playful parent is important.[109]

Dr. Mogel was not interviewing these women about their relationships with their fathers. Unprompted, many of them referred to some of their strongest memories as memories with Dad. Moreover, many of these memories were of dad doing playful things with them. Dad was having fun.

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[108] Mogel Interview 2
[109] Mogel Interview 2

This is an exciting role for fathers to play as they look for models of fatherhood that are both accessible to them, beneficial for their children and not stepping on the toes of the mother.

Conclusion:

Like oil in water, fathers are an important commodity that remains separated from its environment. As the rabbis explain, fathers can also be dangerous. Sandborn helps us understand the angry father and the man who wears the mask. Dr. Mogel points out that fathers are not separated always by their choice. They have a long, uphill battle to fight. And when they choose to fight it, they should do it with a great deal of love and respect for the child's mother. Finally, fathers bring some unique qualities to a family. They are guardians. They are "other" and representative of the outside world. And they are playful, bringing a sense of fun into the family, creating memories that often last a lifetime for the children they help create.

Chapter 3 – The Jewish Father

Unlike the previous two chapters, chapter three will not focus primarily on the role of the father, but rather will shift to looking at a more specific man as he lives in a broader context. The specific man is the Jewish man and the broader context is not the acute perspective of his role as a father, but the rather obtuse perspective of his role as a man.

This chapter takes a closer look at the particular problem facing men in religious movements today by addressing the following questions:

- Is religion a deterrent for men?
- What may be different for the next generation of men?
- What is masculinity today?
- What are religious leaders doing to engage men?

This chapter is not only different in that it will leave the topic of fathers. It will also address a different form of research previously not focused on in this thesis. Biographical accounts are preferred to statistical research. This is not a chapter about a historical people, but rather about men living in our current society. This group of men has the ability to speak their minds, telling us exactly what has moved them and what inhibits them from utilizing Judaism as a tool to deepen their sense of masculinity and eventually their role as fathers. Moreover, as an active Jewish male who is both a son and a mentor, a brother and a learner, I feel that I can offer my experiences as valid as any other. Admittedly, my bias, as with many of my male classmates at HUC-JIR, is that I am not the traditional masculine model. I am not a serious sports fan or an avid athlete. I flock toward building relationships and discussion as I run away from competition and solitude. But I, like many Jewish men, remain an important voice to this work and cannot

omit the thread of stories and experiences that I know are part of at least one Jewish man's experience.

Is Religion a Deterrent for men?

Sometimes a books cover is as illuminating as the words in its pages. If you survey books about religion and men today you will find titles such as Fighting the Flight of Men, Why Men Hate Going to Church and Searching for My Brothers. The titles of these books (which I rely upon for the majority of this chapter) tell us that it is not only in our local synagogues that we may find men absent. This is a nationwide movement that crosses the barriers of religions, denominations and generations.

But is the problem religion? Is masculinity, simply put, in conflict with religious ideals? In his book Why Men Hate Going to Church, David Murrow claims that "the real reason [men] don't go to church is that [they] are already practicing another religion. The religion is masculinity."[110]

This perspective proposes that men simply have no need for religion in their lives. The void is filled, why look elsewhere. Perhaps men get the sense of community they seek from gathering at a sporting event or they find the emotional support they desire from fraternal organizations or even from work. It is a pill I have a hard time swallowing and one that I think may be misdiagnosed.

Turning to another Christian group we find that not all men are running from religion. Some, a very many in fact, have joined a religious group that is filling stadiums to celebrate God and not the touchdown.

In March of 1990, Bill McCartney, a man often surrounded by thousands of men as the coach of the University of Colorado football coach, set out to change the role of religion in men's lives. Envisioning a stadium packed with men praying together just as they cheer for his

[110] Murrow, David, Why Men Hate Going to Church, p. 3

Buffaloes. Coach McCartney joined by Dave Wardell, PhD developed the Promise Keepers. The mission is as follows:

> "Promise Keepers' mission is to ignite and unite men to become passionate followers of Jesus Christ through the effective communication of seven promises to God, their fellow men, family, church and the world. Promise Keepers' vision is simply put in three words: "Men Transformed Worldwide."

Only three years later Coach McCartney's vision was realized as 50,000 men filled Folsom Field at the University of Colorado for a Promise Keepers event. And only five years after its creation, in 1995, the Promise Keepers were filling stadiums across the country reportedly touching more than 750,000 men nationwide[111].

The very first Promise Keeper's conference was entitled "Where are the Men?". Just like the books mentioned earlier, this gathering was open and honest that men are seemingly absent from religious life. But the Promise Keepers did not think that religion was "un-masculine". Rather, they took the opposite path and gambled on the chance that religion could speak to men in a way sports, fraternities and work could not. Their gamble paid off and their mission continues to be realized as they hold conferences throughout the country every year.

The Promise Keepers message to religious professionals seeking to engage men is one of hope. In a matter of years, Coach McCartney was able to corral hundreds of thousands of men from all over the nation to engage in his religious movement. The message is clear; men ARE interested in religion.

But proving that Christian men can gather in a stadium for God's sake does not necessarily clarify what Jews can do to bring men back into synagogue life. Just finding 50,000 Jewish men would be a lifelong task in itself.

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[111] www.promisekeepers.org

As with any problem, the first step is to gather data in order to fairly assess the situation. Doug Barden, the former North American Federation of Temple Brotherhood's Executive Director, did precisely this when he decided to write an essay on the issues of male flight in the Reform movement including anecdotal and scientific research. In his book Wrestling with Jacob and Esau: Fighting the Flight of Men, Barden uses his background in anthropology and sociology to point out the challenges Reform Jews are facing as we confront the flight of men in our movement, a situation he refers to as a "crisis".

His essay focuses the problem of male flight not on the men, but rather on the congregation. "It should come as little surprise to my colleagues that throughout the Movement, there is a tremendous sense that many Reform congregations cater to children's needs first, women's second and men's, a distant third or not at all."[112]

Returning our thoughts to chapter 2 and Freud's analysis of the family dynamic, we can begin to understand that when the synagogue became a family center, serving the needs of children first, that men, as the "other" or representative of the outside world, felt as though their place was outside of the congregation. Classes focused on a child's education or even family values might be perceived by a Freudian man as not in his portfolio. Even reaching back to chapter 1 in which we explored the role of fathers like Abraham as the leaders of a journey for their children, we can understand that Abraham was most active in his son's life when it was part of his job. Barden's comment, that synagogues are child focused, is also a statement that they are not focused on the external world of the traditional male. They are not focused on work, but rather on school. They care less about politics than they do family values. There is an internal focus in our communities and men may be less engaged in such a path.

[112] Barden, Doug p. 11

The problem is not that family values or educating children are bad. I stand by these initiatives as some of the core factors that brought me, a man, into active Jewish life. It is rather that many men do not feel as though these are the areas in which they have expertise and therefore they can feel unneeded. Barden writes that "perceiving themselves as un-important, as in-valid, many men have responded with varying degrees of passivity, which I consider a form of male flight."[113]

While Christianity may have found a way to tap into men's spirits by gathering in stadiums, it seems that the synagogue continues to be more of a professional home than a playing field. Barden believes that the problem is deeper. It is not only that the synagogue does not appeal to men; it is also that it threatens them.

As men become adults there is a desire to teach as well as learn. I have noticed this trend in my own development as well as in the development of my male peers. As we leave high school and enter a world dominated by adults we seek opportunities to mentor others. Whether the interest is a shift from playing baseball to coaching baseball or, as it was for me, from being a primary learner of Jewish scholarship to balancing learning with teaching, men enjoy imparting knowledge to others. There is a sense of pride involved in standing before a group as its leader and I argue a mission to impart a legacy as we teach others to ride bikes, play ball or study Torah.

Barden's point that men are passive due to a perceived sense of un-importance is tied to many men's desire not just to be important, but to be able to transfer their expertise to others. His observation of the synagogue community is that the skills that became most valuable to teach were those in which men traditionally seemed to have the least expertise. Whereas a man in an orthodox setting may have the opportunity to teach a child how to wrap tefillin, a somewhat

[113] ibid, 11

technical skill, a man in a Reform synagogue may be asked to talk to his son or daughter about a difficult issue like sex, drugs or divorce. The technical aspect of this skill is the ability to have a vulnerable conversation. This is the world of dialogue and relationship building. It involves trust and maturity, patience and compassion. These are the traits that drew me to the rabbinate, but as I along with many classmates have realized, these are often traits associated with the feminine and not the masculine.

Does religion push men away? No, but Reform Judaism may no longer have a lot of room for men in its building that is an extension of the traditional home. For this reason it is not a surprise that one of Barden's primary suggestions is to create space for men.

> The challenge before the Reform Movement: creating gender differentiated space without reverting back to gender stratification. . . . creating multiple and diverse venues for the expression of both feminine and masculine spiritual energies. . . . creating a new Reform Jewish community paradigm that truly balances the needs of both men and women – in all their diversity, within each gender and between each gender, to give our congregants equal, but different opportunities to express themselves Jewishly, to continue their Jewish journey within Reform congregational settings.[114]

This is often viewed, as this quote portrays, as a separation that promotes sexism. But if we return to the Promise Keepers, we find that this is precisely what they did with great success. In speaking with a woman familiar with the Promise Keepers recently she relayed her story. "I was fascinated by this movement of men coming together for religious purposes and talking about values. When I asked if I could attend they said 'absolutely not'."

The Promise Keepers corralled hundreds of thousands of men into football stadiums. This brings me to believe that men are anxious for and willing to engage in serious religious practice, but they are not willing to sacrifice their sense of dignity to do so. Stadiums are without

[114] Berden, Doug, p.

doubt men's territory. They are big, bulky and loud. They scream testosterone. But as coach McCartney understood, they are also a masculine sanctuary. I know this personally.

At about the age of eleven, my father took me to my first University of Georgia football game. We drove an hour to the game, ate at a local hamburger joint and walked together into the stadium filled with almost one hundred thousand fans. It was a throw away game against a no-name school, but the stadium was packed. People did not care that this was a mismatch. They were there for the experience. It sounded like the Super Bowl as everyone screamed when the opening kickoff soared through the air and landed in the opponents hands. In a matter of seconds, my soul was touched and to this day I remain a Georgia Bulldog despite the fact that I never attended a single class at the University.

The feeling of anonymity among thousands, camaraderie with those next to me and sense of purpose greater than myself was present in that stadium for me that day. Sitting next to my father, without sharing words, he passed a tradition to me. It was something only he, as a man, could impart. This is what Coach McCartney created with the Promise Keepers and it is this stadium that Doug Barden challenges reform Jews to build in our synagogues. It is not about size, but it is about men's space.

Return to the words of Dr. Wendy Mogel in chapter 2 of this work. I mentioned her analysis of the wife who berates her husband for a minor parenting mistake, puncturing his already fragile confidence in fathering. Now place this model in the public sphere as it is in our synagogues. Is this like a stadium? No, rather, I imagine walking into some synagogue programs is like walking through the women's clothing section in a department store. It is a place the women tell us we must go with them knowing that we are lost and feeling alone.

In his book, Why Men Hate Going to Church, David Murrow portrays the flight of the Christian man as a phenomenon unique to Christianity. He claims of the world's great religions only Christianity has a consistent, nagging shortage of male practitioners."[115]

Clearly, the research completed by men like Doug Barden encourages us to empathize with our Christian brethren. With this in mind, Murrow's research may be quite valuable to the Reform Jewish community as well. His primary point is that churches are not speaking to men's needs.

Murrow believes that the church is actively, albeit unintentional, pushing men away. "Almost every man in America has tried church, but two-thirds find it unworthy of a couple of hours once a week. A wise Texan once told me, "Men don't go to church 'cuz they've been."[116] His point; churches do not speak to men.

He explains how this problem perpetuates a system that pushes even more men away, likening a female dominated church to a room that is set at the wrong temperature for men. "When dad wasn't around, Mom was free to set the thermostat where she liked it. So it is in most churches. Men have been absent or anemic for so long that the spiritual thermostat in almost every church is now set to accommodate the people who actually show up and participate: women, children and older folks. But men suffocate in this environment, so they leave."[117]

I believe synagogues are also setting their thermostats to the congregants who are most active and who voice their opinions. While I can't cite research, I can think of many families in which the women are quite involved in temple politics and have a vested interest in the coming changes and their male counterparts, while willing to accompany their wives and children, are

[115] Murrow, p. 8
[116] ibid, p. 7
[117] ibid, p. 14

ambivalent to any change in the temperature of the synagogue environment. At a recent meeting in order to gather a group of men for a new "men's seder" at the synagogue I was shocked as the men planning the experience continually discussed their best plan to get the men to show up.

> *We have to get to the wives and children.*
> *We should send flyers home with the kids.*
> *We should go to the next sisterhood meeting and tell the wives how important it is for their husbands to attend this seder.*
> *We won't get the men unless we get their families to compel them that this is important.*

This is the nagging journey through the department store I know all too well. It seems to me that it is not only the women and children setting the temperature, but it is women and children who are managing the man's schedule.

Murrow makes many other observations in his study of Christian that can inform us of our own communal challenges. He points out many differences that he believes are evident between men and others. Below is a summary of the differences he finds most important to this issue:

MEN	OTHERS (Women, older adults, children)
Challenge oriented: their key values are adventure, risk, daring, independence, change, conflict, variety, pleasure, and reward.	**Security Oriented:** key values are safety, stability, harmony, cooperation, predictability, protection, comfort, responsibility, support, and tradition.
Focus is external: masculine spirit is naturally directed outward. Men are always building things, creating things, and subduing earth.	**Focus is internal:** focus on the family with little outreach, waiting for world to come to them.
Absent: Men don't see other men in church. The more denomination affiliated the church the less men seem to attend.	**Present:** 61% of churchgoers are women and much more likely to be involved in church activities from bible study to discipleship.
Risk takers, fun lovers and dangerous men in particular are disinterested in church	**"Soft men", passivity highly valued:** Churches feel feminine and therefore more "feminine" men as well as women are attracted to them.
Testosterone makes it hard for men to sit still, they want to dominate.	**Serotonin** in women calms people down. Women are naturally more self-controlled, less aggressive, and less prone to violence than men.
Restricted by religion: Real men desire a wild life, enjoy sexual conquest, look at women, drink beer, go to parties and drive cool cars.	**Enjoy the security of church** where we live a restrained life, experience sexual deprivation/monotony, look at bibles, drink grape juice, go to potlucks and drive the church van.
Seek recognition: If you want to capture the heart of a man – especially a younger man – you have to offer him a shot at greatness.	**Humility Police:** those who see it as their job to humble anyone who might get praise or credit.
Love technology: Always want the fastest computer, the biggest engine, the smallest cell phone, the most powerful firearm.	**Technology is blasphemous,** believe that the sanctuary is holy ground and that bringing in modern technology defiles it.

The above is a sampling of the points I found most striking in Murrow's work. Later in this chapter I will share some of my concerns about this work and show how the Jewish male community (and certainly the Christian community as well) may be more complex than Murrow describes. But Murrow's work has important insights that should not be overlooked.

Certainly, much of Murrow's work would ring true with Freud's insights on the masculine role in society. Men are focused on the external and could be turned off by such intense focus on the internal, relationship heavy aspects of religious spirituality.

Larry Hoffman, professor of Liturgy, Worship and Ritual at HUC-JIR, would agree with Murrow that the 21st century congregant seeks a level of excellence in the religious product and that this may often be measured (especially by men) by the type of technology a synagogue uses[118].

Can synagogues be stadiums for men? From my role as a Jewish professional passionate about Jewish learning and family issues, I want to champion this work and bring men to the synagogue precisely to learn how to talk about the torah of their internal life with their children. I want them to learn how to be fathers who can sit next to their kids and talk about sex and drugs as comfortably as they would at a football game. But I am not every man. I am trained as a professional in the fields of family, social work and religion and I realize that there are other types of men quite fearful of entering this setting. It may be my locker room, but it is their women's section in a department store

One of the primary lessons for all good educators is not to shame their students. When we take the exploratory work of Doug Barden and align it with the success of the Promise Keepers, we may realize that men are seeking a place where they feel secure about their masculinity first and then step into vulnerable waters in which to learn about issues of family, relationships and the internal life where traditionally we have been observers and not professionals.

[118] notes from guest lecture, 10/07

What is different for the new generation of men today?

I attended college between the years of 1998 and 2002. In these four short years I watched as the internet moved from dial-up to high speed to wireless. As a freshman, only a few people I knew had cell phones. But as a senior it is difficult for me to imagine life without one. In four years I watched as the VHS tape and CD became obsolete, making way for the DVD and MP3 players that are now standard not only in our pockets, but in our cars. Six years later, I teach elementary, middle and high school children and wonder if they can even function without their ipods or cell phones. Times are moving quickly and our young men are moving with them.

This is the technology generation. They are plugged into a myriad of gadgets and media mediums. And the boys are more plugged in than the girls. "Adolescent boys . . . have the capacity for deep connections, and although they often lack depth at this stage, they need to stay connected to their friends, and often do so by 'checking in' with other using their cell phones (i.e. "I'm in the mall now" "I'm going home now")"[119]

Technology often seems distracting, but for today's generation of young men, it is also a safe opportunity for connecting to others. Yet, as our technology grows, I wonder if a boy's need to have face to face human interaction diminishes. Perhaps this is one of the challenges facing our youth movements in their desire to attract more young men.

> There is mounting statistical evidence, that at any given national NFTY youth event, for example, there will be a ratio of 65% girls to 35% boys. Does this indicate a disproportionate amount of young women? When a review of HUC-JIR enrollment figures indicates the ratio of female to male first year rabbinic HUC-JIR students is now approaching a 70%-30% ratio, is this cause for Movement concern?

While Barden uses these statistics to point out that there is cause for concern that men at large are not participating, I believe there is a more important message in these statistics. This

[119] Port, Lori, p. 11

generation of men is maturing during a time of Jewish absenteeism. And this absenteeism is being perpetuated by the young men themselves.

Boys and girls have different needs and girls' needs, much like women in our synagogues, seem to be more aligned with the Jewish programmatic product.

> "Girls need to feel competent in relationships, while boys gain confidence through skill building. Girls gain comfort in social settings by talking and bonding with each other first, and then they will participate in an activity. Boys gain comfort in social setting by participating in an activity, and then they will talk with each other. Boys want to know what they are going to do at an event. Boys like activities that involve their creativity, humor, passion, mischievousness, energy and curiosity. Girls don't want to move around. They want to sit and talk. They need to process. Boys want to move around. Only later will they sit and be reflective."[120]

By this standard, once again, I was not the traditional male. And yet that feeds into this paradigm, as I always felt most at home at the synagogue, where I could sit and talk with my friends. But for many boys today this is a problem. Going to a retreat in which they do not know what they will be doing or who they will be with may be a turn off for many boys. Add to this the common factors of immediate mixers to get to know each other and the more rustic camp setting where video games and cell phones are abandoned and a boy may feel as though the masculine steps he needs to take in order to feel comfortable and confident are not available.

There are logistical barriers for men today, but there are philosophical barriers as well. As a man of this generation, I, along with others, feel torn by two poles. The first is that I am a man, part of a long Jewish tradition and deep American culture that has emphasized my masculinity as a privilege. This pulls me to want to succeed as a professional, to be tied to my family of origin (parents) as well as my family of choice (children) to participate in the masculine cultural norms of America such as sports and politics in our world. The second polar

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[120] ibid, p. 11

influence is that of being a feminist, one who wishes to help women thrive as equals and diversify the privileged sections of society that have long been dominated by men. I am happy to give up my privilege, at least until I realize that it may also mean shaming my masculine heritage.

My place in society as a man as well as a child of parents from the 60's and 70's pulls me in these two directions. But it is the liberal synagogue that forces these two poles to come together for men today. During my time studying and working to be a pastoral caregiver, one of my Christian colleagues mentioned that race is the single most important ethical issue facing religious communities today. In that moment I did not realize that his statement was not true for me as a Jew. As a progressive religious Jew, race is an important issue for me as I cannot ignore the racism that continues to take place in America as well as issues that arise in Israel. But the single most important ethical issue for Jews, at least in regards to prejudicial treatment, is that of gender and sexism. Words like "egalitarian" and "gender neutral" are common descriptive terms used in our self definition. Just this year, the Reform movement published a new siddur with new gender inclusive language as well as a Women's Torah Commentary, the first of its kind to rely on women biblical scholars to provide the interpretation upon the text. The business of organized Jewish religion is gender inclusion. But it is a complicated business, especially for men.

Two HUC-JIR students reflect on the complications this intersection of gender has posed in their Jewish development as men in The Still Small Voice, a book edited by Rabbi Michael Holzman. Student David Segal writes about the struggle he faced as he tried to reconcile his feminism with his place in Jewish society as a male. As a well educated progressive Jewish man it is no surprise that David read Judith Plaskow's Standing Again at Sinai, a ground breaking

work that illuminates the privilege men have held in Jewish tradition. Thinking of the very disturbing verse in Exodus in which Moses speaks only to the men as the Torah is received, David reflects:

> The more I think about and live this narrative, the more I realize how profoundly it challenges men, too. Moses's women-wary admonition, now part of our collective religious memory, also alienates me and potentially anyone who identifies as a pro-feminist man. I cannot feel fully involved in a Judaism that does not give voice to the prayers, hopes and sufferings of my family, friends, and neighbors – women and men.[121]

I can add many stories to this account. In particular, I can add men's stories. While certainly women are upset with their marginalized role in some Jewish communities, it is also the men who are offended and sometimes they are more upset than the women. A husband once told me about his first trip to Israel in which he, and not his wife or daughters, walked out of a service because he was so disturbed by the second class treatment he felt his family received as his girls sat behind a mechitza. His wife was irritated, but accepted it.

This is the struggle of the modern Jewish man feeling feminist, but masculine all at once. David Segal continues his account.

> **All of this matters to me because *my* liberation from the yoke of oppressive gender barriers is bound up with women's liberation. . . . Yet, at the same time, I have sometimes felt excluded or overlooked by the feminist movement and feminist initiatives. I have been told more than once, upon questioning my exclusion, "Now you know how women have felt for thousands of years." This response is understandable and somewhat true, and I feel conflicted about how to respond. On the one hand, who am I to tell women not to react in anger or defensiveness at a man who wants "in" on "their issue"? On the other hand, maybe it is not just "their issue." As a man, I struggle to find a way to be involved in feminist progress in a sensitive and productive way.**

David's words are representative of the situation our synagogues represent. Reform synagogues are bastions of feminism. They are leaders in bringing women to the rabbinate, taking down the

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[121] Holzman, p. 109

mechitza and inviting women to the Torah as proud members of our community. But men, while supportive, are not always brought along for the ride. Even in those instances in which they are, we must return to the concept of men desiring to be useful and needed. Is a man necessary to bring a woman to Torah? Is he needed to help take down the mechitza or to be a part of the rabbi's message? I would like to say absolutely yes, but whether that is my understanding or not, I imagine for many men, they do not feel as though they are needed beyond the desire to fill a seat that may or may not be filled by a female peer.

> Another HUC-JIR student, Neil Hirsch points out the struggle he faced when his female classmates organized to perform the Vagina Monologues on the campus of HUC-JIR in Jerusalem. He raised two questions with his peers; "Can we put on a show that has no direct Jewish content?" and "Look at our class – we're two thirds women and one-third men. I thought the point of *The Vagina Monologues* was for women to express their voices in the face of non-egalitarianism. So, I cannot seem to figure out why it is appropriate for us – as a Reform Jewish seminary – to present this show. This just doesn't seem like feminism as equality, to me."

Neil's first question, "Can we put on a show that has no direct Jewish content?" strikes me as an example of gender as a progressive Jew's leading ethical issue. I imagine during civil rights movements no one questioned leaders like Martin Luther King or Andrew Jackson speaking in a synagogue as "not Jewish enough". Nor do I imagine this would be the case regarding women's rights in a time when women could not vote or for that matter read from Torah. The issue is Jewish not because of content, but rather because it is meaningful and important to the particular Jews who worship in this space. Neil's struggle with the Vagina Monologues represents what I consider to be the movement away from men's concerns. I was in Jerusalem with Neil and viewed this version of the Vagina Monologues, which added Jewish content I imagine due in part to Neil's question, and I remember many quiet discussions among the men about our feelings around the performance. In my recollection, it was not an opposition to the show that

struck our minds, but rather a question much like the one David Segal raised, which is "where is my voice in this feminist action".

The struggle for the twenty-first century man is unique in that to be a feminist man he may need to exclude himself from the action. This exclusion is difficult for anyone as women have proclaimed "now you know how we have felt". I argue that what makes it difficult for men is not only that it is exclusionary, but that men are a part of a long tradition, whether we like it or not, of being at the center of attention. We have had the privilege of watching other men lead synagogues and countries. We know that part of being masculine is being a mentor and leader. Yet, we live in a time when it may not be our turn to lead, and while we are OK with that intellectually, there seems to be a loss among us that keeps us from flocking to our synagogues to sit in the pews and watch a different model arise.

There is a silver lining to this struggle, a situation that I hope is a wave that will continue into the future for young Jewish men. As Jewish education continues to become more and more innovative it is clear that one of the best locations for forming Jewish identity is the Jewish summer camp. The URJ is continuing to emphasize the importance of Jewish summer camping and is expanding the programs both physically and in budget. Within these camps, as we know to be true in NFTY programs, young women tend to outnumber men with one general exception; Jewish song leading.

One might say that if there is any parent to the modern Jewish songleader, it is Debbie Friedman. The feminist who brought us Miriam, dancing with her timbrels, changed the lyrics of "Not by Might" from "Shall all MEN live in peace" to "shall we all live in peace" when a critic once yelled at her . . . we aren't just men anymore. And it is Debbie Friedman, this mother of Jewish songleading, who have energized so many men with her high spirited lyrics that our

stages and bimas across the country are flooded with men playing guitar, belting out Jewish tunes.

Doug Barden wrote that "a critically important goal for the Reform Movement today must be to help men recover their roles as singers of songs and tellers of tales, to help men reclaim their generative power to create memories and to answer questions." Jewish camps struggle to find FEMALE songleaders. After reading the stories of Jewish men, I believe that Jewish songleading is one place where men are singing their songs with pride and a place where they feel their masculinity is in concert with our feminist and Jewish progressive community.

In my experience as a Director of Education at a URJ camp I have watched as year after year the full-time staff try to nurture female song-leaders to join the song-leading team dominated by young enthusiastic men and their guitars. My research has shown me that my observation is not an anomaly and more importantly that there could be a reason why young men are drawn to this path as a method for expressing their Jewish masculinity.

In David Bergman's essay *A Funny Thing Happened On the Way from the Mosh Pit*, he describes how music, particularly high energy music with a physical component helped him form his masculine and later Jewish identity.

> At this concert, with its incredibly loud, syncopated music, I joined a mosh pit – a swirling mass of (mostly) other angry young men bounding in time with the music, hurling and slamming our bodies into each other with incredible force. . . . That night I experienced something I had only witnessed in anthropology documentaries: a kind of out of body ecstacy brought on through wild, raging dance. I was completely sober, yet the combination of the music and the dance made for something incredible.
>
> And a funny thing happened on the way from the mosh pit: I found myself talking to my male friends about what had occurred and how I experienced it. In doing so, we deepened our connection not just to the experience itself, but to each other. Any prior knowledge I had about such experiences was irrelevant. I

didn't need to know about the ritual to feel its power – I *did* the ritual and I *felt* its power.

Dancing a hora is not so dissimilar – with one major difference. I don't experience the same ecstatic state when doing so with a large number of women. As a man, and *inclusive* hora is inherently unsatisfying because it requires restraint – the way I am inclined to dance is too violent, not communal enough, not sensitive enough, too aggressive.

I share David's sentiments both from personal experiences and from watching other young men dance together. I would extend David's analogy of a mosh pit not only to include the hora, but also to include kabbalat Shabbat and the *rikudei am*, the celebratory dancing many men experience at Jewish summer camps following the Shabbat meals.

Here are the images that come to my mind.

During my time in Cincinnati I befriended a young orthodox rabbi, Zev. Zev and I shared a curiosity about Jewish life and an enthusiasm for Jewish experience. On many occasions I spent Shabbat with Zev and his family. As Shabbat came in we would walk the two blocks from his home to the small sanctuary that doubled as a beit midrash during the week. As I stepped in line among the thirty other men (and usually no women) who davened in this shul, I entered a mosh pit. Unlike my German influenced reform synagogue, the men stood close to one another and stood throughout most of the service. They swayed with great passion almost hitting each other. But the most vivid memory I have from this spiritual mosh pit is the fervor with which these men sang the prayers. Many of the men prayed the prayers with the roar of a lion in the jungle. They sang *Lecha Dodi* so fervently that I remember I could not help but stomp my foot with each hard syllable. LE-cha DO-di, LI-krat Ka-lah . . .

Zev introduced me to his mosh pit. It was an experience drastically different from the prayer I knew in my reform community. It was not peaceful or compassionate. Even the mourners kaddish was said with a sense of masculine toughness and not the closing English I had come to expect and love "May God send peace to those who mourn and comfort to those who are bereaved as together we say, Amen". No, Zev's Shabbat was a mosh pit not a peace circle. It lit a fire in me that I continued to desire on Shabbat, but one that I knew would be hard to find in a community that also valued inclusion and diversity as I do.

A little more than a year later, I discovered a community that lit this fire AND reflected my values. Following Shabbat dinner at URJ Camp Newman, the entire community walks up a steep hill to the peak of a hill overlooking the entire camp. Atop the hill they enter a tent and begin to celebrate Shabbat with *rikudei am*, cultural dancing. I remember vividly the mechitza and later the mosh pit that was created during each Shabbat at camp. There is a unique, and I believe quite unintentional gendering of the music that takes place at camp. As the songs transition from peaceful to more enthusiastic celebrations of Shabbat, the campers and staff are asked to get into cabin circles, which of course are separated by gender. The music begins to increase tempo and the songleaders begin to jump with the beat as they raise their voices. Soon, the community responds and the once peaceful circles of young men and women with their arms around each other become circular dances. Campers and staff start jumping to the beat as well and then the well known song made popular by Shlomo Carlebach, *od yishama.* As the song builds tempo, the camp community builds energy. Eventually, the men in particular begin to jump upon one another and even act out different dance moves as a group. The climax of the song is the final verse: *Kol sason v'chol simcha, kol chatan vkol kallah.* (the voice of joy and happiness, the voice of groom and bride). As the *bride* and *groom* portions are sung, the men and women scream either *chatan* or *kallah* respectively. It is a marker of the different genders celebrating Shabbat at camp. But perhaps while my fondest memory of this song is watching the men jump and dance as brothers just as the women do as sisters, the most telling image is the sweat dripping from their white shirts once the song ends. It is a physical, aggressive and spirited song and dance that brings these men together and that informs each of their Jewish identities as they celebrate Shabbat.

Sweat producing energy and gender separated singing and dancing is only one of the types of music that is engaging men in Jewish life and forming their Jewish identities. Matthew Stern writes in his essay *Jewish Music, Jewish Men* about the yearly gathering of Jewish musicians at Hava Nashira, an annual convention held at URJ Camp OSRUI.

> While some people see a dearth of men's involvement in Judaism, the song leader position does not follow this trend. At Hava Nashira '06, roughly 65-75% of the URJ Camp Song Leading track was composed of men. One camp . . . had a staff of seven male song leaders and no females. . . . [But] if female song leaders can get the job done, why is there such a predominantly male song-leading community in the Reform Movement today? Perhaps a certain degree of manliness contributes to the effectiveness of Jewish music. . . .

Matthew's observations match many throughout the Reform movement. I know of a young boy, no older than three, who spent every year of his life (even in the womb) at camp. Each summer when he returns to camp he brings his mini-guitar that his parents bought for him. As Rick Recht or Danny Nichols takes the stage he becomes enthusiastic and begins to strum his guitar and dance to the music. Perhaps he sees in these men, the model of a Jewish man that he wants to be. Moreover, his story is not unique. A former camper, who once found himself an outcast due to behavior and social inadequacies, now returns to many camps with his guitar. It is a trend I have watched in boys over and over again. The guitar and the music become their ticket to leadership among the Jewish people. Like Moses leading the people through the sea, I imagine these young boys feel a sense of Jewish pride as they stand atop stages or in front of our Torah scroll and sing to our people as we dance and clap, sing and pray to their beautiful spirits.

Who is the Jewish man today?

Both Jews and Christians are fighting to bring men back into the mainstream of our religious institutions. But like Jewish men of previous generations, we are not identical to our gentile counterparts.

While I cannot confirm that Murrow's assumptions about Christian men are fact, I am aware that some are clearly not representative of the Jewish man (and perhaps not even the entirety of Christian men). The modern community of men is diverse. We do not all "desire a wild life, look at women, drink beer and want a bigger engine". Where Murrow is short-sighted in his vision to understand the modern community of men as a diverse and complex body of people, Rabbi Michael Holzman is not. In his book, The Still Small Voice, Reflections on Being a Jewish Man, he does not rely on broad generalizations to show us how men are a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. Rather he allows men to speak for themselves, illuminating the places within Judaism in which they do feel as though they "fit".

Whereas Murrow claims that organized religion has not set the thermostat to respond to men's needs and desires, Holzman actually takes their temperature.

"I seek to understand the *how* of Jewish men's spirituality, to check the connections between the radio receiver, the amplifier , and the speakers, to find the frayed wires of the soul and the working circuits of the spirit. . . . I listen in, eavesdrop on the intimate, personal, vibrations of Jewish men's souls as they try to speak. . . . I want to hear what their voices are saying."[122]

These stories are incredibly important for this thesis, but even more important for the continued commitment of Jews to our men. As we record these stories we progress our narrative

[122] Holzman, p. xxiii

and reclaim a sense of masculinity that we may not have been able to hear among our feminist voices for some time.

One of Holzman's assumptions in this work is that Jewish men are not of one brand. There is not one hole that we fit into. We are an increasingly dynamic group among the Jewish people and therefore the Jewish community needs to address us in a variety of ways. As the editor of a selection of Jewish men's reflections on being Jewish, Holzman categorizes Jewish men into the following groups. Below are my interpretations of the five categories Holzman created in order to categorize men's statements.

1. The traditional masculine man
2. The anti-masculine man
3. External journeymen
4. Internal journeymen
5. Apprenticeships

He understands this diversifying of the Jewish man as a response to the feminist movement.

> When feminism opened the door to women, it also allowed men to explore a world of style, fashion, and expression beyond the thin noose of cloth allotted for expression in the uniforms of the past generations of suited warriors. This has spawned terms like "metrosexual", the sleek urban man who no longer relies on a wife or girlfriend to pick out his clothes. . . . Other men take a decidedly more retrosexual approach, asserting a more public and manly masculinity.[123]

There is no perfect manner to categorize the twenty first century man. But looking at some of Holzman's categories we can get a sense for some of the directions synagogue affiliated Reform Jewish men are moving.

The Traditional Masculine Man:

For the Jewish man this is a complicated category according to Holzman. "No matter how tough, strong, or athletic a Jew becomes, he remains aware that his Jewishness describes an

[123] ibid, p. xxxi

alternative definitive. . . . Somewhere along the line the stereotypically manly Jew asks himself if he has actually become the Swede.[124]

But Jews do fit into this category. I think of the many religious school textbooks focused on Jewish heroes such as Sandy Koufax and Moshe Dayan. I imagine most young Jewish men could point to at least one modern example of a traditionally masculine Jewish man. After all, the superheroes of our comic books like Superman and Captain America were believed to be the Jewish author's vision of the strong, hero able to level the playing field for the underdog, the Jew.

The Jewish man falling into this category is focused on issues like "sports, military service, fraternity, leadership, finance, and the image of the Israeli ideal man."[125] This traditionally masculine man either finds his Jewish connection through these manly activities or he "starts his journey within Jewish terrain – and then applies a masculine overlay to that behavior."[126]

The Anti-Masculine

Just as there are those Jewish men who chase after the image of superheroes there are those who run away from them. This is the second category Holzman describes. He terms it the man who is "fleeing traditional masculinity". "These are men who "ignore, abandon, or even reject the systems and established modes of masculinity, and in so doing they define a piece of their identity."[127]

Holzman further explains that he believes there are three reasons a man may choose to reject traditional masculinity:

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[124] ibid. p. 5
[125] ibid. p. 6
[126] ibid
[127] ibid, p. 62

1. They dislike the traditional masculine interpersonal behavior, or how it treats men and women.
2. They dislike the life options and/or feel it is too rigid a self definition.
3. They dislike the Jewish masculine systems and want to transform Judaism.

Simply put, these men are masculine visionaries. "They all conclude [their essays] with the need for change in the way that men see themselves and promulgate future expectations of masculinity."[128] I understand this Jewish attachment as a sense of *tzim tzum*. Now that there is space for men to make waves there are those who are willing, like Nachman, to lead the way. For these men, the coming change is exciting and they want to be a part of it.

The External Journeyman

The external journeyman is a man that Holzman likens to an Israelite wandering in the wilderness. He points out that "the Israelites of the desert generation will differ from those slaves raised in the confines of Egypt."[129] These Jewish men, wandering in a new environment are seekers. They are moved by a maturation often involving some sense of rite of passage or initiation. "While Judaism has formal initiation rites – namely bar/bat mitzvah and confirmation – these are rarely the moments of personal transformation . . . Men today find initiation, crisis, and wilderness at many points in their lives, often long after their teen years."[130]

In this section of the book, Holzman placed the biographical essay of Rabbi Dan Moskovitz, now a leader in the Jewish men's movement. Rabbi Moskovitz describes his feeling of maturation as he stood in the lobby of a short term apartment rental agency after his divorce. His story reads as though this lobby was liminal for him; it was a place from which time was still and he realized he was between the past and the future. The rite of passage came as he realized

[128] ibid, p. 63
[129] ibid, p. 124
[130] ibid, p. 125

he was not alone and other men were also renting these apartments, probably for the very same reason. As he writes "I found my traveling companions"[131].

Rabbi Moskovitz, along with many other men, are looking at the changing world that is our wilderness and trying to figure out where we, as men, fit in. For him the Jewish connection became other Jewish men. He needed a direction and a place where he could feel as though he fit in.

The Internal Journeyman

The internal journeyman, or the man seeking to "find his self" as Holzman writes, is not about the lobby of a leasing agency or the wandering about in the wilderness. This journey is about the soul of men. Holzman is clear to point out that soul and spiritual are not synonymous. "Men are so used to declaring, 'I am not spiritual' because we have excluded from the definition of spiritual what many men find meaningful and soulful."[132] These journeymen are involved in soul searching that acquires "deep meaning, purpose, and fulfillment through relationship, nonconformist father figures, healing, shelter, and personal integrity."[133] Like the men of the wilderness mentioned earlier, they too have rites of passage, but they are often eye opening as to their identity, such as the process of coming out as a gay and Jewish man.

Apprenticeships

The final category that Holzman explores is the role model or what I term, apprenticeships. He mentions that the most striking point of this closing section of his book is the "importance of relationship. Whatever conclusions men will discover on their own in a quest

[131] ibid, p. 134
[132] ibid, p. 197
[133] ibid

to hear the 'still small voice,' for some, that process will not be complete without the connection to another man."[134]

Of course men leaning on and learning from other men is nothing new. What is unique about the work of this group of Jewish men is the role their mentor played in their Jewish identity. Moreover, what may be most striking about these men is that many were more touched and moved to be Jewish once they became mentors rather than when they were the apprentice.

> "John Linder's essay exemplifies how a number of Jewish elders made valiant attempts to influence his Jewish identity, but how they all failed. He did not feel a desire to explore his soul until he was in the role of elder to his son, an experience that led eventually to his choice to return to school to become a rabbi."[135]

Analysis:

Michael Holzman and David Murrow raise intriguing questions for religious institutions to address. They both agree that religious institutions are not speaking to men. This assumption comes with many strings attached. It implies that men are interested in finding a deeper sense of meaning in their lives and that religion is a place for this meaning to be found. Both writers also understand that religious institutions are being held back by their inability to address men's needs. Murrow explains this as the churches thermometer being controlled by women while Holzman believes that Judaism is simply not tuned into Men.

When we take the next step along this path and try to solve some of these challenges we find that Holzman and Murrow are no longer preaching parallel messages. Murrow believes that there is a man, one who will be drawn to church when we increase the level of technology and tone down some of the overtly feminine themes such as peace and happiness in return for more challenging messages asking congregants to take risks. Holzman shows through his dialogue

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[134] ibid, p 255
[135] ibid, 245

with a variety of men, that there is no one brand of masculinity anymore. In fact he even gives an explanation for why this may be the case.

> **What does it mean to be a man? Fifty years ago, this was a ridiculous question. The expectations of manhood were assumed and understood. Men did not need to think about being men because most had little incentive to imagine any other form of existence. . . . Groups in power generally do not recognize the factor that grants them power. . . . In the last generation, women have moved from the margins of Jewish and general American life to the center. . . . Men had to start thinking about differently about the people around them because all of a sudden a whole lot of those people were women.**[136]

When men began to think differently about people, they also began to think differently about themselves. As stated previously, this change sparked terms like "metrosexual" and has helped open doors for men to become primary parents or fight custody battles in court as a parent with equal share in their child's maturity. Like Abraham, men are not in their father's position. They are in a new wilderness, where the old rules do not apply and they are redefining themselves in a myriad of ways.

This does not make Murrow's perspective wrong, it only means that he is not entirely right. Yes, churches and synagogues need to start setting the temperature to men's needs, but we can learn from women that these needs are going to be varied. Some men will come to be challenged and others will come to explore their inner soul. Some will want to find a mentor and others will want to go on a solitary journey. The lesson we take from Doug Barden, Michael Holzman and David Murrow is that the man is no longer the invisible entity in a congregation. His presence is not a given, but rather a question mark. The presence of men in a more patriarchal community was required, and therefore allowed men to feel as though their masculinity was invisible. The new system, one open to anyone, has allowed men to feel

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[136] ibid, p. xxx

invisible among the masses as they are rarely called upon for their masculine skills. This is ironic, for it may be this generation of men that is actually aware that their masculinity is a unique trait and perhaps a need that is not being met by religion.

What is the current response?

The voices of men are no longer considered the voice of our people as they once were. This differentiation led to the now established Men's movement and most recently to a wave of men's Jewish programming across our country. The last step to take before moving into the more prescriptive aspect of this thesis is to assess what steps are already being taken in our Reform communities.

The work of Holzman and Barden suggest that men have the following needs in our community:

1. Men's space
2. Mentoring relationships
3. Men often experience rites of passage/initiation rites as identity builders.
4. Men are not all the same. Men are not women.
5. Men are discovering (possibly for the first time) what masculinity is – what their unique role in society/family is.

I will now turn away from the biographies and studies and turn towards those who are acting on the ground to re-engage men in our communities.

The Men's Meeting:

One of the leaders of the men's movement is Rabbi Dan Moskovitz. A man who journeyed on his own spiritual struggle with masculinity, Rabbi Moskovitz has reached out to men through his designated men's group at his synagogue in Los Angeles. This group of about ten men meets on a monthly basis and share their lives. This is not a pep rally or a sporting event. It is a meeting to form relationships. But what may be most striking about this group is that it is NOT only the feminized man who is attracted to this gathering.

I had the opportunity to meet with Rabbi Moskovitz on many occasions. His group has now met for many years and while the participants have changed, the discussions remain the same. While the act of their discussions alone is warrant for applause and certainly an act that fulfills most of the needs outlined above, perhaps their guiding rules provide a model for how men's work, now in the spotlight, must take steps that previous generations of men did not need to define.

1. Confidentiality – what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, what is said here stays here.
2. No put-downs of others or talking about people by name who are not here – wives or bosses, present or former specifically.
3. Hear each other out; let a man finish. The emphasis is on listening to each other speaking from our hearts, rather than interrupting with argument or well-meaning advice. We get plenty of that in our normal lives.
4. You don't have to speak, but when you do, use "I" statements, no bullshitting, say what you mean and what you feel, and don't talk too long.[137]

Looking over these simple rules, I am drawn to think of arenas that once assumed these rules for men. In particular, I am drawn to images of what a synagogue could be or perhaps once was. Is a holy space not a place where we avoid *lashon hara* even moreso than we might in public. Is or was it once a place where men could gather and share their "I" statements without need for exaggeration and with confidence that someone would truly listen? Is a holy space, as some would consider Vegas, a space set aside from the rest to keep our vulnerabilities separate from the outside world? And is this space not elevated in our minds to keep us from name calling and putting others down?

The mere creation of such a space, often in the home of one of the participants, can be viewed as the failure of the synagogue building, and perhaps the community itself, as a place where men feel safe and able to most be themselves. I wonder whether women would feel such

[137] Holzman, p. 135-136

comfort today in our religious buildings in order to share these moments with the community. Is their comfort and freedom to be open the motivation for such changes like the sharing of healing prayers like the *mi shebeirach* before the ark and among our community? Yet for men, the rules must be defined and the space must be private.

Rabbi Moskovitz writes that he holds this men's group because "he wondered what it meant to be a man"[138]. It was a time for "getting to know each other and affirming that this was a safe place to share our stories. We started with a simple but powerful exercise – we had to introduce ourselves to the other guys without saying what we did for a living. As men so often we define ourselves by what we do, how we provide for our families."[139]

I applaud these men for starting a trend that is now reproduced in synagogues across the country and I hope that one day they make their way to the synagogue as well.

The Men's Retreat:

Education in America and certainly within the Jewish community is often understood as the response to our problems. It is a tool for climbing social ladders, leveling the playing field and decreasing the rate of crime. In the Jewish world, the retreat is an educational response.

Throughout the country, retreats designed specifically for men are popping up. Many are focused on the father-child relationship, but not all of them. I attended a father-son retreat organized by the Los Angeles Federation in 2007 and served as a staff member. Entitled "It's a Guy Thing", this weekend for 9th and 10th grade boys and their fathers included text study and rock climbing, batting cage practice and Shabbat worship. Perhaps the most meaningful moment of the entire weekend was a serious discussion in which fathers and sons were separated and asked to anonymously write their questions and concerns about the other on note cards. Quite

[138] "Why a Men's Group?" Dan Moskovitz
[139] ibid

similar to well known activities practiced in middle school sex-education classes in which the girls and the boys separately ask questions of one another, this sharing activity opened the eyes of boys and men to each other's world. It was a brief two hour discussion that everyone agreed could have continued for days.

The retreat was a terrific model for the work of this thesis because many of the issues present in small communities were eliminated. The retreat was well funded and well attended. Moreover, multiple congregations; reform, conservative and reconstructionist participated together. Following the retreat I recorded my observations:

Observations from the "It's a Guy Thing" Federation retreat for 9th/10th grade boys and their fathers.

Meaningful moments may require a significant number of participants.

During the weekend we had a few short programs (about 2 hours total) that involved personal sharing by participants. Questions such as "In what ways does your father/son fail or succeed?" to which many very meaningful responses were shared. One son mentioned that his dad works too much and that he hates how he beats him up (playfully) whenever they are together. When asked "what is something you are afraid to tell your child" one parent responded "that I was married before I met his mother". This was possible because the group was large enough to split the cohorts into fathers and sons who did not know each other. A group of fathers was able to be very frank with sons so long as their sons were not present and vice versa.

Since there were 50+ pairs at the event, we were able to facilitate different types of activities for fathers and sons to do together. Sometimes the activities were for fathers and sons to do in pairs like going to the batting cages or tossing a frisbee and other times they were group oriented like soccer or basketball. Still, many participants chose non-athletic activities like teaching their son to play poker or hanging out at the pool and playing board games. I wonder if these activities, even those requiring only a pair, could have taken place if the number of participants was less than 20.

Time was of the essence:

The overnight stay was integral to the bonding of the men and boys. Since everyone was there for the weekend, people were not cutting out to leave early or showing up late. We were able to stay up until 2am watching *This is Spinal Tap* as well as wake up together groggy and participate in programming. More importantly, the meaningful discussions take time. I would estimate that 1.5 hours is the minimum amount of time in which we could have made any

progress and we used every minute of t he allotted 2 hours. The more time, the deeper we could go.

Retreats build leadership, but retreats alone do not reach the masses.

This retreat took almost a year in planning and involved months of rabbis speaking to their congregants, speakers coming in to promote as well as an aggressive flyer and email campaign. Still, the result as the leaders of the program shared with me, was that they did not reach the "at risk" families. Moreover, most congregations only had about 5 pairs participate and many had only 2. The highest participation by a congregation was 8 or 9 pairs I believe. There is a concern that this self selecting group would spend this time with their kids without the organization of a Jewish institution.

The participants learned a lot and I know they left changed people and probably strengthened the relationship between fathers and sons. The entire last day was devoted to helping them prepare to reach out to other fathers/sons as well as to plan future events for their communities and themselves. In other words – in order for the retreat to succeed the participants had to become role models in their community and commit to continuing this process of learning and growth.

Returning to the criteria of needs for men in our communities, the retreat model was men's only space and it allowed for safe relationship building. The drawback seems to be that of commitment. Like many synagogue programs, this was a voluntary event and I wonder whether it drew a variety of men or if it was simply attractive to the men and sons who value the importance of building relationships enough to create them without a retreat.

The Men's Seder:

The intimate men's group gives men the freedom and comfort to open their lives to each other. The Men's retreat is an opportunity for a diverse range of activities, including relationship

building and physical exertion. There is also a trend of synagogues hosting men's only sdarim. I have yet to participate in such an event, but I have assisted in planning such an event and listened to a men's seder taped in a Reform congregation. It seems to me that this practice is where we need the greatest improvement. In comparison to the previous two responses to men's issues, the seder is the most ritually focused. Moreover, it is a clear link to the now prevalent women's seder. Is this one way to create the stadium effect that Coach McCartney built with his Promise Keepers? Perhaps it is. I believe only time will tell.

For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to note that these three areas are not the only methods synagogues and other Jewish institutions are utilizing to return men to Judaism, but they are prevalent. I know of men's discussion groups and book clubs as well as long established soft-ball or basketball teams and of course Brotherhood. There is no silver bullet for this question, but I believe that Judaism is not finished speaking to our men. It has much more to offer. This is the focus of the remainder of this thesis.

Unit 2: Prescriptive Fathering

In order to give Jewish men a license to become active Jewish fathers, this thesis explored the theme of fatherhood in biblical and rabbinic texts a psychological analysis of the role of the father and the challenges the modern Jewish man faces today. This exploration will serve as the foundation by which we can now move into the prescriptive unit of this thesis.

Unit 2 is dependent upon the descriptive nature of Unit 1 because it is a direct response to this foundational material. In Unit 2, this thesis will explore two motifs for response: narrative and metaphor.

Chapter 4 of this thesis will introduce the motif of narrative. Narrative will be explored as a Jewish motif that speaks directly to the gender issues fathers are facing. This chapter will also provide an understanding of how narrative can be a safe means for change as well as serve as a dialogue according to the works of Martin Buber.

In **Chapter 5** the narrative of King David is explored as a text that will speak to men today. A number of texts might be chosen in narrative work with fathers and I have provided a suggested list of texts in Appendix A. However, it is important to note that the choice of text, while important, is secondary to the approach to such texts. For this reason, this chapter explores the narrative of King David, but truly hinges on the commentary as it relates to fathers.

Chapter 6 explores the role of ritual in the lives of Jewish fathers. Ritual, unlike narrative, focuses on tangible acts and objects. It is also an intellectual enterprise like studying a narrative, but this is not its primary goal. Rather, ritual is focused on the "doing" of Judaism. It is perhaps the best tool available to fathers enabling them to live Judaism, making it directly relevant to their lives.

Chapter 4: Understanding Narrative

Introduction:

Every winter I, like most Americans, receive holiday cards from a myriad of old friends and family members. The pictures show how children have grown and how parents have aged gracefully. Occasionally on the inside of the cards is written a short personal message from the sender and a printed "Happy Holidays" message. But every winter there is one card that always stands out. It is different from the remainder of the cards because it has a story embedded in its fold. Every year the same family sends a holiday card with a rather full update on how each member of their family felt about the year. They reflect on their jobs and vacation as well as on their emotional highs and lows. While on the one hand it is a simple chronological account of their year, on the other, it is a detailed chapter in the story of the year for this family of three.

Their story, while personal and brief, is a narrative because it includes the following elements. First it brings me into their world. It is a window into their lives, showing me both the facts of their lives and the emotions that they experienced throughout the year. But it also punctuates my life as I think about times I spent with them in the past and wonder when I will share time with them again. It is in this sense that their story is not frozen in time, but rather a dialogue that transcends past, present and future. The second narrative element is their story's ability to inform my life. As I reflect on their experience, I think about what I would have done on that trip to Israel or what games I would like to play with my child. This is the transformative power of narrative. It broadens our perspective and allows us to challenge our identity. In its simplest form, this extended holiday card is a text filled with knowledge and wisdom. This is the third element. The story educates me, teaching me the core values that this family espouses.

This chapter will explore narrative in relation to these three elements; dialogue, transformation and education. Looking primarily at the work of Martin Buber we will find that dialogue is a powerful aspect of text and one that he and many who followed consider to be a primary Jewish method for spiritual connection. Diving into the work of Rachel Adler, this chapter explores the power of narrative to transform a father's perspective of his gender. While Adler did not focus on men, she was a leader in using narrative in the feminist movement's reclamation of traditional Jewish texts. Finally, leaning on the work of Dr. Isa Aron. chapter 4 will explain how narrative functions as an ideal educational technique for men facing a transition to the more complex variety of masculine identities in the twenty-first century.

Narrative as Dialogue

In reading the paragraphs packed with information about this family, my relationship with them deepens. I become more invested in their story, but more importantly, I feel a sense that they are people continually in an *I-Thou* relationship with me. Their card is a story reaching into my life. It brings me to think about the times I spent with them hiking and kayaking, but also to ask myself – "When will I get to kayak in Turkey?" and "Will my daughter challenge me to games of ping pong?" Their card is in their words, but it opens a dialogue for me. It is filled with details and emotions as well as insights into their lives that compel me to respond. This dialogue connects their narrative to my narrative and adds meaning to my life by helping me understand my identity.

The most important and longest lasting connection among the Jewish people is their link to a shared narrative. Jewish texts, whether biblical or rabbinic, offer the student an opportunity to connect with the people of our tradition. Whether reading the narrative of the avot and imahot, aggadic passages from Talmud or even the legalistic debates throughout Jewish tradition, it is clear that the reader will find a dialogue more often than a prescribed legal system listing

rules. Yes, we are a people of commandments, but even the commandments are given in a dialogical manner. "And God said to Moses . . ." or "Speak to the Israelite people" are often used phrases to introduce such lists. Dialogue is a pillar of Jewish tradition and this pillar offer Jews of all backgrounds, religious or secular, the opportunity to converse over a shared history.

Our sacred texts also reach into our lives as we study their narratives, entering into a dialogue that speaks to our lives in the present and informs us about paths for our future. Accessing this dialogue with our text does not happen when we open a book. This would be to treat tradition as an *IT* as Buber might claim. Rather, in order to transcend time through text and reap the immense benefits of narrative we must not see a book like any other, but rather, a living story.

Transcending time through text, we are able to understand our lives in a perspective larger than that of our local community. We gain understanding as to what elements of life are constant as well as learn new approaches to our life situation. This is an incredibly important function for the twenty-first century father who is stepping into what seems like new territory as a post-feminist man helping to raise his children. In order to understand how narrative transcends time, it is important to first understand that biblical narrative is rooted in **history**.

> This narrative, though it may have certain folkloric embellishments (such as David's victory over Goliath) is based on firm historical facts, as moden research has tended to confirm: there really was a David who fought a civil war against the house of Saul, achieved undisputed sovereignty over the twelve tribes, conquered Jerusalem, founded a dynasty, created a small empire, and was succeeded by his son Solomon. Beyond these broad outlines, it is quite possible that many of the narrated details about David, including matters bearing on the complications of his conjugal life and his relations with his children, may have been reported on good authority. Nevertheless, these stories are not, strictly speaking historiography, but rather the imaginative reenactment of history by a gifted writer who organizes his materials along certain thematic biases and according to his own remarkable intuition of the psychology of the characters.[140]

[140] Alter, Robert The Art of Biblical Narrative, p. 35

Alter points out that history, relayed through narrative, need not be accurate history, but are the perception of history by whoever authored the text. This fact in itself makes our narratives worthy of intense study. But while a biblical or Ancient Near Eastern scholar may seek to understand the perspective of the author of biblical narrative, what might a father living in the present day glean from such a story?

> What is the power of narrative? It fosters a continuation of stories. It allows you to have a connection over time with a group. The narrative gives you a common origin and gives the group a common identity. It helps you maintain an identity. We read the same stories year after year and that helps define our modern day identity.[141]

Narrative, as Dr. Leveen describes it above, is the glue holding you to a community as well as a bridge to the memory of this community. It gives us, both personally and communally, a sense of immortality as it allows us to think beyond ourselves and the limits of our time on earth.

Rabbi Michael Holzman writes that "the power of a story is that it reveals truth. In the complexity of life, stories often can be more instructive than explication."[142] Narrative not only links the past to the present, but it allows us to sift through time and find the eternal truths. As we reach into Jewish texts, we find that the stories of the Tanakh are not only stories repeated in every season, but stories repeated in every generation. The story of Esther and Mordecai fighting Haman is the story of the Maccabees, the Partisans and perhaps even the immigrant American Jew fighting to make it in America as a struggling merchant. The narrative is our people's memory repeating itself in history. When expounded upon and etched into the memory of Jewish peoples living in different countries at different times with different beliefs we are not only brought together as a people with a shared memory, we are brought raise the larger question; "What is the 'truth' that this story speaks?" Moreover, we may be compelled to ask

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[141] Notes from Adrienne Leveen's HUC-JIR Bible course, referring to Bloch-Smith
[142] Holzman, Michael The Still Small Voice, p. 293

ourselves "what is the 'truth' that I will choose for myself. For instance, as we read stories about brothers fighting, they beg us to ask "Am I my brother's keeper?" and as we listen to conversations between barren women and God we are brought to wonder, what will my legacy be on the next generation? This is a real dialogue about modern day truths. And yet, there is seemingly little new about the situation when we open our eyes to Jewish narrative.

Narrative serves as a dialogue bringing questions from history into our present lives. But narrative is not only about looking into history or opening a window into another person's life. And narrative does much more than give us alternatives or options to think about in a particular situation. As Rachel Adler points out, narrative helps us plan for the future with a degree of intention.

> "To determine where we ought to go, we must reflect on where we have been. We do this best by storytelling. As individuals we continually relate our life stories to ourselves and to others and project ourselves into possible futures through dreams and fantasies. We also lay claim as members of groups to the collective memories of the group. Transmitted from generation to generation, they help to constitute our sense of who we are and to shape our future actions. . . . Commitments emerge out of stories and are refashioned in stories."[143]

Narratives are a constant thread in our lives. Whether they are written on the back of a picture or in the oldest book, they transcend time, allowing us to look into our future with a sense of intention and hope for meaning. It is with this goal in mind that the working definition for "narrative", as this thesis will define it, is a dialogue that transcends time, bringing meaning to the reader's life through the deepening of relationships.

The Power of Dialogue:

The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber was not one to find a sense of God in religious practice or ritual. Rather, he turned to narrative, where a dialogue exists between God and man.

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[143] Adler, Rachel Engendering Judaism, p. 21

This led him to live his life as a Jew committed to Torah study, but unwilling to participate in halacha that was detached from ethical goals.

> A time of religious conversations is beginning – not those so-called but fictitious conversations where none regarded and addressed his partner in reality, but genuine dialogues, speech from certainty to certainty, but also from one open-hearted person to another open-hearted person. Only then will genuine common life appear, not that of an identical content of faith which is alleged to be found in all religions, but that of the situation, of anguish and of expectation.[144]

I believe that this religious conversation is raised by the pages of Jewish narrative. These narratives speak the truths of life experience mentioned by Holzman and open a dialogue that began thousands of years ago and will continue into our future. They are not recorded conversations, but rather ongoing dialogue. "Texts bring us into direct contact with Jews who lived centuries ago and continents away. When we study these texts we are not just hearing about these Jews, we are hearing from them."[145]

Buber categorizes our relationship to objects in which we can be in dialogue in three ways. We can be an *observer*, or one who "probes" in this case the text, and is "diligent to write up as many 'traits' as possible."[146] This act in my understanding is to study a text as we might prepare for a test. We want to know the names and the places as well as understand the structure. What is the climax of the story? This is the process of literary critique such as the historical-critical perspective.

The second relational category according to Buber is that of the *onlooker*. This is a position "which lets him (the reader) see the object (the text) freely, and undisturbed awaits what will be presented to him. . . . [this person] is not the least afraid of forgetting something ('forgetting something is good' he says). He gives his memory no tasks, he trusts its organic

[144] Buber, Martin, Between Man and Man, p. 8
[145] Aron, Isa p. 171
[146] ibid, p. 9

work which preserves what is worth preserving."[147] This is the practice of Torah lishma or studying for the sake of studying that is quite common in regular study groups. Parshat hashavua or daf yomi participants might find this relationship to the text most useful because it allows them to have a relaxed relationship to the text, but one that continues to see the text as an other, an *IT*.

While one might understand the onlooker and the observer to be polar opposites, Buber pushes them into the same category as he prefers his third category above all else.

> The onlooker and the observer are similarly oriented, in that they have a position, namely, the very desire to perceive the man [what I am calling the text] who is living before our eyes. Moreover, this man is for them an object separated from themselves and their personal life, who can in fact for this sole reason be 'properly' perceived.

This thesis, like Buber, prefers the third category of relationship to an "other"; that of *becoming aware*. This means that a text would "say something *to me*, addresses something to me, speak something that enters my own life. . . . The limits of possibility of dialogue are the limits of awareness."[148] This is a form of relationship to text that neither requires diligent notes nor reads the text for the sake of study. Rather, this thesis hopes to promote a relationship that seeks to empathize with the text in an effort to relate it to fathers' personal lives. In an ideal situation, the father would feel connected to the text. It would be an extension of his own experience and therefore help build meaning into his fathering. This is one brick in the path toward giving men license to be the fathers they wish to be. This relationship with a text, I believe, will enable fathers to feel that there is a path for them to take, rather than debilitate them in thinking that they do not know what they are doing. The latter seems to be common in many families as discussed in previous chapters.

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[147] ibid
[148] ibid

What does this text study look like? The *becoming aware* relationship could be found in the form of a sermon in which the preacher spoke the text, not as something to be referenced, but as if it was a living person's account of life. For example, in the Akedah, rather than describing this as a scene involving Abraham and Isaac, the preacher would refer to the text as if it were happening in the room at the moment. Grammatical techniques that aid this are the use of gerunds and similes. Below are two examples.

Example 1: Becoming Aware

The struggle for fathers today is like Abraham's. Walking up the mountain, listening to Isaac "Father, father . . ." "Hineini, my son, I am here". Yet knowing that there is danger ahead for our child and that we cannot stop it.

Example 2: Onlooker/Observer

Fathers face difficult struggles today. Abraham also faced these struggles. As we read in our text, Isaac calls out to Abraham and Abraham responds "Hineini, I am here my son". But was he really listening? After the moment when he raised the knife above Isaac, the two never spoke again.

It is my hope that the *becoming aware* text aids the reader by allowing him/her to relate to it personally, but without feeling as though they must pay attention to specific details. It is an attempt at establishing text as dialogue. There is another form of text study recently popularized that is clearly in the *becoming aware* category. Bibliodrama is a form of modern midrash that asks the person engaging the text to own it as their story. Usually, it involves at least one facilitator to help create the dialogue between the text and people. Below is an example of how the bibliodrama dialogue may play out, although it entirely depends on the people interacting.

Example 3: Bibliodrama

Setting: A room of fathers and sons.

Facilitator: Abraham is walking up the mountain with Isaac, when his son turns to him saying, "Father, here is the firestone and the wood, but where is the sheep?" "God will see to the sheep for His burnt offering, my son."

Facilitator: Abraham . . . what were you thinking as you said that to your son?

Father 1: I was thinking that I don't know exactly what to say.

Father 2: I was thinking that if my son knew what was going to happen, he would be disappointed in me.

Father 3: I wasn't thinking. Sometimes I find that it is easier just to do as I am told and trust that things will work out.

Facilitator: Isaac . . . why did you ask that question?

Son 1: Sometimes my dad does things that don't make sense to me.

Son 2: I don't trust my dad's boss. He always tells him what to do and makes him do things he doesn't want to do.

Son 3: I wanted to help my dad, but I didn't understand where all the materials were.

Facilitator: Son 3 . . . and how did you feel when your dad told you it would be taken care of.

Son 3: I felt like he didn't think I could help and that he thinks I am a young kid who won't understand the way things work for adults.

These examples strive to view text as an opportunity for dialogue that reaches from our deepest history as a people through the present and into our future. Bibliodrama is an emotionally rich tool that many have found meaningful in accessing narrative meaning. The above example is fiction which I created and would hopefully lead to a much longer discussion. It is important to note, that in an ideal situation, such as the one I begin to expose above, the conversation would continue much longer and deeper into the participants' opinions and feelings. This could happen with a great degree of anonymity as the participants are not necessarily referring to their own life situations, but rather imagining themselves in the places of Isaac and Abraham. It is not a perfect solution, as there may not be one, but it seems to be a step toward a *becoming aware* relationship to text.

The *becoming aware* relationship to text is not the most often utilized relationship Jews take to our texts today. We are much more likely to study *torah lishma* or as academics seeking to be critical of the text as we pull apart different techniques and compare one narrative to

another. But a *becoming aware* relationship may be the initial intention of the authors of Jewish text. Robert Alter writes that "Indeed, an essential aim of the innovative technique of fiction worked out by the ancient Hebrew writers was to produce a certain indeterminacy of meaning, especially in regard to motive, moral character, and psychology."[149] Whether the *becoming aware* method was the initial intent of the text or not, it is clear that it is a real and valid method for connecting to Jewish tradition. Moreover, as chapter 5 will explore, it is a method that has the ability to transform the Jewish man's understanding of himself, giving him a license to be the father he wishes to be.

Narrative in Relation to Gender:

Few if any biblical scholars will argue that narrative is unimportant. The same is probably true among psychologists. Narratives are important. But what makes a narrative important for fathers living in the twenty-first century is the narrative's ability to broaden a perspective for a person whose path is going in a direction with which he is unfamiliar. "A narrative helps us understand how a particular experience fits into a larger context. It provides for us at least two directions of motion and momentum upon which a man can travel at different moments of life. Narrative tells us where we have come from and where we are likely to go."[150]

This is the importance of a tool that transcends time. Narrative allows men facing new situations and new models to broaden their perspective of masculinity and/or fatherhood to include a model that may work better for them. Earlier in this thesis I referenced the work The Unkind Father in which the author expresses his inability to feel an emotion other than anger because he did not know about emotions other than anger. Where once he thought that the only masculine emotion was anger he soon came to realize that there were others like sadness and

[149] Alter, p 12
[150] Holzman, p. LVII

disappointment as well as fear and loss. His perspective of emotions was broadened. Appropriate and well chosen narrative has the power to open these doors for men facing a myriad of new opportunities as fathers.

How does narrative open these new doors? It provides multiple answers to a question or situation. Dr. Michael Zeldin, Director of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education, often reminds me that there are many right answers to most situations. Narrative preaches this message to men. It is a message we have a hard time hearing because, as discussed in previous chapters, we are often socialized to think in competitive terms. There is A WINNER and A LOSER. Narrative has the ability to open doors for men because its message is based in truth. Moses is not a "winner". Rather, he is a complex man, both hesitant to lead and over zealous with his emotions. He has strengths and weaknesses and he sometimes has to retry a particular task. We read a narrative and find that there is no single path to success. There is no messiah in our narrative. Abraham, Moses, David . . . . all were winners at different moments, but each man faced different challenges and "won" in different ways. Reading these narratives hopefully can help men broaden their perspective and look toward the dynamic future of fatherhood as an opportunity to make one of many right answers.

In his chapter "Men in Transition", Elliot Rosen explains one way in which men have traditionally formed their identity in relation to narrative. "The notion of the self-made man has been a category within which American men have sought to define themselves for generations. . . . The strong cultural strain for American men of going forth to seek one's fate and destiny is well documented in fact and fiction. As long as there is a wilderness, an uncharted frontier, there remains an opportunity to prove one's ability to create oneself as a man."[151]

[151] The Expanded Family Life Cycle, p. 124-125

As we look over recent Jewish scholarship regarding gender it is evident that there is a desire to change this narrative. Holzman writes that "the narrative we create in the synagogue, at camp, in the schools (day and supplemental), or at the federation event may not reflect where we actually are. The trick is to create a diverse and versatile narrative, to develop a variety of tools, ones that reflect our desires for equality, universality, and neutrality where appropriate, and others that use a healthy specificity to positive ends."[152]

Adding to Holzman's credibility in this claim for a new direction to be taken with our narratives is secular research surrounding identity redefinition rituals.

> Identity redefinition rituals (e.g. narrative study) function to remove labels and stigma from individuals, couples and families and often realign relationships between the family and the larger systems. . . . A reworking of an earlier idiosyncratic life cycle transition that went awry may be accomplished. New relationship options, previously unavailable because of the constraints of labels, become available. A balance of being both similar to others and different from others becomes achievable.[153]

This redefinition is what men are looking for today. But it is not easy. Changing the course of narrative that speaks to masculinity might be construed as pushing a train off its tracks. As my congregant asked me in the impetus for me to begin this thesis "are there really any men that represent good fathers by today's standards in Torah?" His question gets to the heart of the struggle with narrative. Do other models of fathering exist in our narrative beyond traditional patriarchy? In other words, is not Abraham just like Moses and David?

I believe each biblical character is unique, but more importantly, when we look at a particular character, as this thesis will do in chapter 5, we find that each character represents multiple masculine paths as well. There is not "one man" in Torah, so long as those reading the text seek the variety of responses our biblical make in their narratives. If we think our narratives

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[152] Holzman, p. XLVI
[153] The Expanded Family Life Cycle, p. 211

are narrow minded regarding masculinity, we might be compelled to change or replace them. This is not necessary and would weaken our tradition. Rachel Adler showed in her work Engendering Judaism, that we have a lot to learn from our narratives as modern Jews and that we should not run away from them, but rather turn into them and discover the truths we have not seen for too long. Leading the way for narrative redefinition in the feminist movement, her method informs this work and serves as the basis for the choice of narratives in chapter 5.

She wrote that "New understandings of Jewish narrative and Jewish values will be needed."[154] This is to say that we must not seek new stories, but rather we must try to understand our old stories in new ways. This perspective gives credibility to our text as a voice that is timeless. It is not the text that holds a narrow view of masculinity, but rather the interpreter of that text. "Our mission . . . is to make connections where there has been a rift, to make conversation where there has been silence, to engender a new world. . . . Together we can regenerate a world of legal meaning that fully, complexly, and inclusively integrates the stories and revelations, the duties and commitments of Jewish women and men."[155]

There is a rift separating men from Judaism and from a diverse range of masculine methods for raising their children. Engendering a new world for fathers means re-interpreting texts that speak to the issues men are facing.

While our understandings of narrative text may be new or at least nuanced in this thesis, the goal Adler mentions in her mission is not necessary a new idea. Alter writes that such a mission is probably at the heart of what makes biblical narrative unique. "Meaning, perhaps for the first time in narrative literature, was conceived as a process, requiring continual revision – both in the ordinary sense and in the etymological sense of seeing again – continual suspension

[154] Adler, p. 40
[155] ibid, 58-59

of judgment, weighing of multiple possibilities, brooding over gaps in the information provided."[156]

Narrative is a tool that helps to bridge gaps as well as open new paths for those who seek new models. As discussed in previous chapters, fathers continue to face new challenges as feminism takes root and women become rooted in the public sphere where they once were excluded. Re-visioning our understanding of narrative will help men revision their role and perhaps give them the power to be the father they probably never knew, but always wanted to be.

Narrative as a Learning Model:

Narrative learning is a particular mode of learning that invites a peer to expose a personal experience as a narrative. This mode is relied upon in the national program for Clinical Pastoral Education in America. Sitting among one's peers, a student writes an account, sometimes referred to as a case study or verbatim. These narrative accounts have three basic elements. First, they describe the background or context of a situation. Second, they recount the situation word for word, often in dialogue or scripted format. Finally, while there are many models of narrative learning to follow, most have some aspect of written analysis by the presenter included in the work.

The act of narrative learning takes place when the presenter reads their narrative to his/her peers, sharing his/her analysis and then receives input in two "rounds". The first round of input is factual or informative questions about the case. These questions help clarify background and contextual issues that may not have been evident in the initial report. The second round broadens the discussion allowing for more analytical questions as well as suggested solutions that may not have been considered by the presenter.

[156] Alter, 12

This methodology was created by Stephen Brookfield, prominent leader in adult education. The benefits of a narrative learning model is that it allows students to express their thoughts in a different way as well as help people focus their analysis and get to the "root of the problem".[157]

Unfortunately, the authors of our biblical narrative were not writing according the precise rules of narrative learning, but they were not far off. Biblical and rabbinic narrative often provides detailed elements of a situation. In fact, following in the tradition of such scholars as Rashi, Jewish scholars often look closely at the text assuming that no word is written without great intention. This close analysis of a narrative text is parallel to the practice of narrative learning as Brookfield presented it. And like the narratives shared in the Clinical Pastoral Education program across the country, reading a detailed narrative text can help us express our thoughts in a different way and focus our analysis on the problem at hand. It is a model conducive to learning about our identity and for the purpose of this thesis, a strong model for fathers to explore possible paths in their growth as parents.

In her book Becoming a Congregation of Learners, Dr. Isa Aron writes that "Jewish learning can be very powerful. . . . and in the context of a synagogue, it can serve as a catalyst for change."[158]

The crisis, as Doug Barden and Michael Holzman call it, of male flight from religious practice has awakened congregations. As I referenced in earlier chapters, religious institutions often cater to children and women, forgetting that men are integral members of a family and more importantly, that fathers may need help in understanding their role in the family.

Dr. Aron followed this process in light of how congregations are seeking to change:

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[157] Notes from *Teaching* course at Rhea Hirsch School of Education, 2007
[158] Aron, Dr. Isa Becoming a Congregation of Learners. P. 14

> The time is especially ripe for synagogues to evolve alongside current changes in the way Americans of all faiths "do religion." . . . .
>
> - The baby boom of the fifties and sixties, when most of our current synagogues came into being, made synagogues child-centered havens for struggling mothers in suburbs. Even if there was a "typical" family structure back then, there certainly isn't anymore.
> - Synagogues now must work with a population seeking spiritual meaning and personally transformative insight from the wisdom of Jewish tradition. Ultimately, synagogue transformation depends on, and leads to, personal transformation of individuals.[159]

For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on the father who was a baby boomer or who is the child of baby boomers and his desire to seek spiritual meaning in order to transform his understanding of his masculinity and eventually his role as a father. Dr. Aron's work informs this section as it shows us that text, and in the case of this thesis, narrative text, is an educational tool that can aid fathers in this transformative process.

As mentioned above, Dr. Aron's work builds upon the theme of Buber as she also considers text to be a dialogue that challenges ones personal identity. "To engage in the study of a text means becoming involved in it, not only intellectually, but also emotionally. Texts stimulate us to examine our lives in light of the stories they tell and the legal and philosophical principles they embody. . . . this special power derives from the fact that the learner is discovering core Jewish values on his or her own. "[160] In this light, Jewish texts are a particular form of conversation. They are educational, but they are also emotional, illuminating our inner life.

Returning to the issues raised about men in this thesis we understand that men are interested in learning, as Murrow and Barden point out in their work, but only a select group of men are naturally interested in the more emotional aspect of spiritual work. Too often this is perceived as women's work. Spirituality somehow becomes synonymous with personal sharing,

[159] Aron, IX
[160] ibid, p. 171

touching or singing. I believe Dr. Aron's work opens our eyes to a type of spirituality that is inherently masculine in approach because it is focused on study and learning. This spirituality is not "touchy feely", but rather it is an example of true empowerment, allowing men to explore their inner life from a learning perspective. The emotions come after the learning. This is an important model for men as it allows them to focus on a skill (text study) as a way of opening the door to a more personal exploration of their life.

Text study is a safe entry point for men because it allows us to focus outward first and does not expose vulnerabilities. Creating this safe space for men is a need. Moreover, it is a need women may not have, but one that probably becomes even more important for men when vulnerability increases. For instance, in a men's only study group, the facilitator may be able to ask more personal questions at an earlier point in the learning because the men find comfort in other men's presence. Rabbi Dan Moskowitz is known not to get to the text in his regular men's group because they become invested in more intimate, spiritual conversations. On the other hand, if you were in a mixed gender study group the situation might be different. First, we can assume that women, who are likely more socialized to share their emotions, may desire to unpack these emotions early in the conversation. Men on the other hand, as research suggests, may prefer to focus on the concrete, more subjective and less intrusive study of a text.

Text study is not only helpful to men because it allows them to feel secure in sharing emotions. It also provides connections to other people, an important need for the man who is no longer wandering in the desert alone, but who is stepping into new territory with the others of his generation.

> All Jewish learning . . . enables learners to connect their personal struggles to larger social and ethical ideals. When a group of learners engages in this type of discussion over an extended period of time, the bonds that form among the participants are strong and durable. Though the participants' original purpose in

> joining the group may have been intellectual stimulation, the solace they find in the text and the emotional and social connections they form with fellow learners are what keep them coming back.[161]

In this light, a goal of text study is entirely separate from, albeit dependent upon, the text. Men find security in making connections. This is true even when they have not honed the skills in order to make these connections often. Narrative study helps men create connections to other people. Moreover, in ongoing study groups either of chevruta learning or group learning, a community is created, opening the door wider for men to explore their identity with others. This need for men to feel a part of a community recently arose during a meeting of men at HUC-JIR in Los Angeles. Rabbi Richard Levy asked each of the 8 male participants to explain why they wanted to come to this two hour meeting about men's issues at HUC. As we introduced ourselves and responded to the question, I was pleasantly surprised to hear many of my peers express their desire to build a sense of camaraderie among the minority of men in our community. In comparison to most Jewish communities, the HUC student community is quite small and intimate. We know each other well and are often willing to share personal experiences with classmates. Most Jewish communities do not have the built in intimacy of the HUC-JIR campus. Rather, they must draw the men away from work and family in order to help them create a community and explore their Jewish identity. Text study, as a simple, time limited, but regularly scheduled activity is conducive for compelling men to begin journeying down this path.

Text study is attractive to men because it allows them to explore emotions without feeling as though they are being feminized as well as allowing them to build a community among their male peers. Perhaps the most important reason to utilize narrative texts in work with fathers is that it allows for an intense and long lasting change.

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[161] ibid, p. 24

> Researchers who study cognition have found that facts embedded in vivid stories are most likely to be recalled. Similarly, values and practices embedded in texts resonate more strongly, particularly when one has wrestled with the text. The impetus to repair one's relationship with a sibling is less likely to come from an exhortation than from a discussion of, say, the complicated relationship between Joseph and his brothers, and the comparison that can be made between one's own situation and theirs[162].

Narrative is a powerful form of learning. But perhaps "learning" is a complicated word to assign to this process. The learning Dr. Aron describes from her research is learning that facilitates change. It often involves mending relationships or finding new paths in one's life as suggested by passages such as the one above. This is "learning" in the sense that we often use the word "growth". Growth is deeper than learning. Many educators use Bloom's Taxonomy in order to formulate questions for their teaching. The taxonomy places different types of learning on a hierarchical scale. The lowest level of learning is knowledge based learning. It involves memorizing or remembering particular facts. The higher levels of this taxonomy are analytical or synthesis forms of learning. This is narrative learning. It allows one to identify motives and make educated judgments. With a synthesis level of understanding for instance, a student should be able to form new ideas by combining knowledge from multiple sources including ones own life experience.

Men often find comfort in the category of learning we know from Benjamin Bloom as knowledge. It offers immediate gratification and is often skill focused. It is also quite objective. You either know it or you don't. Narrative learning offers fathers an opportunity to find a degree of comfort by approaching a text that spans the levels of knowledge learning, but reaches a level of analysis and synthesis as well. Reaching these higher levels is what I term "growth" rather than the traditional use of the word "learning". It is a form of acquiring knowledge that pushes

[162] ibid, p. 172

fathers to broaden their perspective, giving them a license to be a type of father that they may have never imagined before.

Chapter 5: Prescribing Narrative

Having explained the "why" question regarding narrative study among fathers, this chapter will focus on the "how" and "what" questions. How can fathers study narrative together? This is a particularly difficult question as we know from research that all Jews and particularly men are not attracted to text study. In her article *Jewish Men and Adult Learning*, Lisa Grant points out that only 13% of men are attracted to studying Jewish texts. This is the lowest percentage of all the forms of adult Jewish study covered and it is 5% less than that of women engaging in text study. This chapter proposes methods that will help raise this percentage, encouraging forms of text study that are more attractive for fathers. Moreover, as Doug Barden points out in his new book The Gender Gap, the more we try the more likely we are to find something that works. It is in this light that this chapter explores some of the traditional methods for text study such as the "Downtown Text Study" as well as methods less often encouraged in men's groups such as bibliodrama.

It is important to note in light of the "how" question, that sometimes the best study for a father does not necessarily directly cover the topic of fathering. As discussed later in this chapter, we often choose texts about fatherhood, such as the *Akedah* in order to open the discussion about fatherhood. But if we return to our psychological analysis, as this chapter will in the commentary it presents, we are called to address the necessity of a committed relationship between the father and the mother. It is in this light that the "how" question will focus on relationship building among men, but also on the issues raised in the work of Becoming the Kind Father and in David Murrow's work Why Men Hate Going to Church. These texts inform us that men, as much as we may hate to admit, are often limited in their ability to express their emotions.

At the beginning of his latest work, Doug Barden outlines this theme as well. He writes: "[Men] have a tendency to prefer talking in intellectual, abstract terms and are less interested in expressing emotions and strong feelings openly. . . . [They also] focus more on external subjects (e.g. a task, a text, a sports game, or experience) rather than internalizing or individual socializing.[163]

The study opportunities in this chapter hope to aid fathers in freeing themselves of these stereotypes giving them a license to succeed in building stronger more intimate relationships with their children. The question "How can fathers do this in text study?" therefore will be answered in short by showing that text provides alternative models of masculinity that deepen a man's understanding of himself and help him become a father who is not defined by a single stereotype such as the bread winner or disciplinarian. Rather, the texts presented in this chapter will help men understand what tools they have at their disposal and when it may be appropriate to use these tools to be a successful parent to their child.

Why David?

The majority of this chapter will focus on the question of "what should men study together?" This question has been a long personal struggle me as I explored texts throughout my studies. As I have mentioned earlier in this thesis, Abraham has become the default model for fathers in Jewish text. If we were to poll Jewish students and teachers, I believe we would find that the narratives of Jacob and Joseph follow as other texts often chosen to help men find meaning in our tradition. It is no surprise. These are tremendous texts filled with the struggles of the work vs. family debates as well as conflicts among brothers and conflict resolution; all

[163] Barden, Doug The Gender Gap, p. xii-xiii

important topics for men to address. This chapter seeks to move beyond these texts for many reasons, but topping this list is the goal of showing a more varied and detailed description of a man. The story of David is a detailed account of his maturing process from the underdog son to ascension to the throne of Israel. It includes a range of experiences from overcoming adversity to failing to repeated challenges in his personal relationships. David is not the ideal. He is probably not the father we want to emulate today, but his narrative is detailed and varied in its descriptions. It is this variety of descriptions that will allow fathers to transform their perspective of masculinity today as they enter a dialogue with a man who slayed warriors, cried with soldiers, pursued many women and wrote beautiful songs.

Goals of this Narrative Exploration:

As discussed earlier in this thesis, *torah lishma* is not the preferred method of study proposed by this work. Rather, the narrative exploration of this thesis seeks to accomplish specific goals and therefore to enter the study of text with specific intention.

In this light the goals of this narrative exploration are:

- Broaden men's perspective of the goals of fatherhood in the 21st century
- Give men tools they can access as masculinity continues to change with women's dynamic roles in society.
- Aid men in learning how to build relationship with spouse/wife as a method for teaching their children how to form relationships.
- Create dialogue between a father, the Jewish narrative and other fathers.

Lenses:

In recent years two important Torah commentaries have arrived on the shelves of Reform Jewish scholarship. The new edition of the classical Plaut Commentary and Tamara Cohn Eskanazi's The Women's Torah Commentary are paving a path for Jews of the twenty-first century. Each text in its own rite explores a new direction in commentary by exploring text

through a modernized gender lens. The major change for the new Plaut commentary is its gender neutral perspective. This change reflects the place of the Reform community at large as we are no longer focused on a masculine only perspective of God. Taking a further step down this path is Dr. Eskanazi's work which compiles commentary entirely from female biblical scholars. This innovation in text study breaks through the glass ceiling as it raises questions from a female perspective. If the new edition of Plaut reflects where the community is at the moment, I believe The Women's Torah Commentary is showing the Jewish world where we will be heading in the future. I worry that this exciting move giving women a voice they have long deserved will leave men muted. In this light, this chapter strives to be a parallel text to the Women's Torah Commentary. It seeks to show men where we can take our Torah scholarship in the future and more importantly, it will speak to the questions that the twenty-first century father will face. Questions that while they may not speak only to the new issues facing fathers, are new to our study of Torah.

As mentioned previously, it is not only the content of a text that must be considered, but also the format in which those texts are explored. Every community of men, like all communities, is unique. In an urban center such as Los Angeles, a synagogue community may have men who work a distance from home as well as men who are full time parents. In smaller metropolitan areas it is likely that many men work in the same area. This could be a great opportunity to gather in a downtown setting for lunch meetings. Whatever the setting and unique traits of a community, the commentary that follows in this chapter is intended to meet the goals listed above by reading the text through the following lenses.

Three lenses will inform the commentary that follows in this chapter. The psychological lens seeks to help men understand their role as fathers in ways that psychoanalysts like Freud and psychotherapists like Dr. Wendy Mogel would read the narrative. The cultural lens will inform the modern Jewish father with an understanding of the current opportunities and challenges facing men of faith in our communities. It relies on the work of those who have already begun to address the "crisis" of male disengagement from religious communities such as Doug Barden, Rabbi Michael Holzman as well as Christian perspectives such as Murrows, the author of Why Men Hate Going to Church. This lens also pays particular attention to the work of feminists and now post-feminist theologians like Rachel Adler and Isa Aron. As mentioned in chapter 4, these theologians proposed methods for students to enter a process of transformation through the study of text. Finally, each page of commentary written in this chapter will help fathers create a dialogue among their peers. This commentary is informed by the work of Martin Buber and the taxonomy formulated by the educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom. Following these question sequences offers fathers the opportunity not only to broaden their perspectives by understanding the complex nature of characters such as David in our biblical works, but also seek to open the narratives of father's lives to each other, building community and support systems.

Format of the Daf Abahut: The Father's Commentary:

This chapter includes three *dapim* as examples of narratives to be studied with fathers in mind. The texts need not be studied with fathers or even men alone. Daf Abahut 3 in particular speaks particularly to the relationship between men and women and may be interesting to explore in a mixed gender setting or perhaps among women.

Following the model of many rabbinic texts, the father's commentary places the primary and secondary texts on the same page. The page is divided into four sections.

Narrative:

The middle section is intended to be the focal point of the study session. This is the selected narrative from the larger story of David. The texts in this section were chosen for their correlation to the four goals listed above. Other texts, both within the story of David and throughout the Tanakh could be appropriate for men's studies.

L'dor v'dor – Psychological Commentary

To the left of the narrative segment of the *daf* is commentary from psychoanalytical sources. It is important to note that the texts chosen for both this section and the Tarbut Abahut commentary were not written with the narrative text in mind. Rather, this is an eisogetical exercise in which both the narrative and commentaries were chosen because they speak to issues pertaining to modern fatherhood. L'dor v'dor utilizes sources such as Dr. Wendy Mogel, a psychologist and author of The Blessing of a Skinned Knee, as well as the research of psychologists in the book The Importance of Fathers, which largely relies on the oedipal theory of Freud. Other psychologically based notes are included as well.

Tarbut Abahut – Cultural Commentary

To the right of the narrative is the cultural commentary. This commentary is also eisogetical and relies on religious cultural writing primarily from the last five years. The sources in this commentary have focused on the issue of male flight in the Jewish and Christian communities. Authors such as Doug Barden, Michael Holzman and David Murrows serve as the primary sources for these comments connected to the primary text.

Dialogical Commentary:

At the bottom of each *daf* is a series of questions. These questions attempt to open discussion among those studying these texts. Bloom's taxonomy was utilized in order to assist those studying this text to reach higher level and personally relevant levels of discussion. Benjamin Bloom developed a hierarchy of questions in order to aid the teacher in educating students. The hierarchy is listed below. Categories closer to the top of this page are lower level questions and categories toward the bottom of the page are higher level questions. The goal of the educator should be to reach the higher level (anylsis/synthesis) questions but also to make sure to cover the lower level (knowledge) questions. People tend to remain "stuck" in the knowledge level questions because we often think of learning as the acquisition of facts. Bloom's taxonomy helps us understand that a variety of levels must be reached in most learning situations.

3 Levels of Bloom's Taxonomy:

Level 1: **Knowledge/Comprehension**
- Knowledge: This requires students to recall or recognize basic information. Key words in a question include "**define**", "**recognize**", "**recall**", "**remember**". Example: What are modern man's greatest curses?
- Comprehension: Requires students to rephrase or explain information in their own words.

Level 2: **Application/Analysis**
- **Application:** Asks students to apply learning to a new situation.
- **Analysis:** Expects students to show that they can evaluate a situation in response to the learning.

Level 3: Synthesis/Evaluation
- **Synthesis:** Key words in a question might be "**produce**", "**design**" or "**develop**". Ex. Write a personal prayer for Sukkot.
- **Evaluation:** Asks students to make a judgment.

Evaluating the Dapim:

Having looked over the three *dapim* proposed by this thesis it may be useful to explain how these texts address the goals outlined earlier in this chapter.

Daf Abahut 1 – The Father-Child Relationship

This narrative begins with David's struggle over his sick child. Fasting in order to gain God's mercy proves unsuccessful. The end of the narrative is more hopeful as David becomes a father again. The commentary in this *daf* focuses on the role of the father-child relationship. This relationship is complex and increasingly complicated by modern times. While this thesis largely focuses on the changing role of fathers in the twenty-first century, this daf is centered on a traditional masculine role. It highlights the struggle for a father to be the protector of their child as well as the connection to the outside world, in this case God's help. The dialogue is constructed to help men think about how they fulfill this role of protector, but also how they can work through those moments, like David in the narrative, when their protection proves useless. This *daf* addresses the following goals:

- Broaden men's perspective of the goals of fatherhood in the 21st century
- Create dialogue between a father, the Jewish narrative and other fathers.

Daf Abahut 2 – The Father to Man Relationship

This narrative focuses on the relationships between David, Saul and Saul's son Jonathan. Jonathan and David create a friendship pact representing their love for each other, promoted by Jonathan more than David. This relationship contrasts the jealousy, fear and anger which permeate the relationship Saul takes toward David. In this complicated triangle of men we are brought to wonder about the types of relationships involves. One may view Saul as the father of

Jonathan, but also the father of David so far as he welcomes him into his house. Moreover, is Saul reacting to his fear and concern as a father or a king? What about David? Is he reacting to protect his friend Jonathan or is he protecting his thrown or even his own life? Every angle opens possibilities for fathers to explore relationships among men. Highlighting these themes is psychological analysis about the emotions men are accustomed to expressing. This includes anger as well as a natural desire to befriend other men. Culturally, anger seems to be encouraged through masculine socialization in America. Minimally, men are discouraged from forming close relationships with other men out of what seems to be homophobic tendencies. This commentary also points out men's default emotion of anger. The dialogue seeks to help men understand some of their common emotions and possible challenges in forming relationships with other men.

This *daf* addresses the following goals:

- Broaden men's perspective of the goals of fatherhood in the 21st century
- Create dialogue between a father, the Jewish narrative and other fathers.
- Give men tools they can access as masculinity continues to change with women's dynamic roles in society.

Daf Abahut 3 – The Father-Spouse Relationship

This narrative focuses on the relationship between David, his wife Michal and his public persona. It opens with David's excitement at the arrival of the holy ark, which he shows both openly and physically. Michal does not approve of this sovereign man showing what she believes are inappropriate signs of emotion in public. An argument ensues which leaves Michal childless, essentially writing her out of the future narrative. The psychological commentary in this daf focuses on the role of the father as the keeper of the outside, public world for his child. It offers depth to the often mimicked "Honey, I'm home . . ." scenario in which a father only

comes home at the end of the day to greet his family. The cultural commentary focuses on the role spirituality can play in fathers lives even as there is a clear flight of men from spiritual space. The dialogue for this daf hopes to move the discussion towards methods of showing public affection for one's spouse in front of children in order to help them understand what it means to respect other adults as well as find fulfillment in their whole person.

This *daf* addresses the following goals:

- Broaden men's perspective of the goals of fatherhood in the 21st century
- Aid men in learning how to build relationship with spouse/wife as a method for teaching their children how to form relationships.
- Create dialogue between a father, the Jewish narrative and other fathers.

Chapter 6: Prescribing Ritual

Professor Larry Hoffman teaches that there is a difference between an authentic ritual and an inauthentic ritual. An authentic ritual is "convincing". For instance, at the end of a wedding, if the ritual of the service is authentic, then everyone feels compelled to shout *mazel tov* at the end. They are convinced that the ritual was authentic. If they are unsure about its authenticity, they may look around at each other wondering what just happened[164].

Ritual practice is not magic. There is no special spell that a rabbi or practicing Jew can use that will make the ritual "work". But rituals do have real effects on many of those who practice them. As we open up this chest of ritual practice for fathers, we struggle with the issue of authenticity as Hoffman points out. Moreover, this struggle has no magical answer. Ritual practice is a trial and error system. Vanessa Ochs, author of Inventing Jewish Ritual, explains that rituals can fulfill any of the following functions:

- Rituals establish new communities and sustain existing ones:
- They give us things to do and ways of being that help us to give sense and order to life
- They carry us through changes and crises in life that might otherwise be unendurable
- They coordinate our expectations of what we think is going to happen and how we are supposed to react
- They create boundaries and necessary separations
- They create bonds and links between people that can transcend time and space
- They allow us to recognize, experience, and be sustained through life's great jows and sorrows, and all the hard to categorize emotions in between
- They allow us to remember, to mark time, to synchronize our psyches with natural cycles
- They confirm a sacred presence in the world, and move us to live in ways that are more moral and more righteous

According to Ochs, if a ritual fulfills any of the above functions, it is working effectively, even if there are those who remain uncomfortable with the particular ritual.[165]

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[164] Notes from Liturgy Course with Dr. Rachel Adler
[165] Ochs, Vanessa Inventing Jewish Ritual, p. 30

Comparing Ochs and Hoffman provides an understanding for how complex the world of ritual practice is. Some, like Hoffman believe that the authenticity of a ritual is a requirement and may be quite difficult to reach. Others, like Ochs, understand authenticity in an abstract manner. It can be reached when a ritual accomplishes any number of functions and these functions or criteria for authenticity could change depending on the context of the community. It is with these opinions in mind that this thesis defines a ritual in our context as a planned experience honoring the relationship between God and the Jewish people.

What is the significance of a "planned experience"? A ritual does not take place at random. Rituals require planning. Moreover, often the planning for the ritual is also a ritual. "The rituals of Judaism encompass all those preparatory acts that come before the main event: inviting guests, the shopping, the trying on, and the kneading and chopping."[166] Shabbat is a good example. Friday afternoon in Israel, or in any Shabbat observing community, is fraught with the ritual of preparing the house for guests and finishing one's week. Dr. Michael Chernick reflects that Shabbat in his house is often a time of great stress and he knows that arguments and bickering are much more likely to occur on Friday afternoon than any other time during the week. Nonetheless, both the Shabbat table and the preparations in the hours leading to the meal are planned experiences reflecting the relationship between the Jewish people and God.

What does God have to do with it? Rituals are clearly possible without God. Thanksgiving, the 4th of July and the secular New Year's are all celebrations with rituals consistent from year to year. Jewish rituals are particular in that they create a liminal space that brings a sense of Godliness to an otherwise mundane situation. Shabbat rituals bring a sense of *kdusha* to what might otherwise be a meal like any other and wrapping oneself in a tallit, blessing the action in God's name as well as referring to the obligation to wrap in a tallit, make

[166] Ochs, 32

this action different from putting on clothes in the morning or wrapping oneself in a scarf. The action itself may be mundane, but the inclusion of God in the process makes the action holy.

Why are rituals important for fathers?

In the previous two chapters this thesis explored the importance of narrative in the transformative efforts of fathers. Ritual, like narrative, will help fathers find meaning in their relationship with their children, spouses and friends. But ritual adds three important elements that are rarely possible in the study of narrative.

1. **Narrative is focused on ideas while ritual focuses on action.** Narrative requires study. It is a cognitive process. Rituals focus on an action that either associated with an object, space or time. They may not require study, but they do require participation. Often the meaning in a ritual does not appear until days, months or even years after the ritual takes place. Some wonder why fathers often cry at their child's bar/bat mitzvah. One explanation is that this is the first life cycle event (ritual) that they remember experiencing as a child. We rarely study rituals. More often, we perform them. Vanessa Ochs reflects that even the creation of rituals seems unnatural to the process of a ritual because we are not accustomed to thinking about them, just doing them. "In my family you lived and performed Judaism – you did not invent it."
2. **Narrative is about connecting your story to another story. Ritual is about writing your story.** Dr. Wendy Mogel relates that every week her husband would share one aspect of the traditional *eishet chayil* blessing that he felt she embodied during that week. Doing rituals is often a process of writing not reading or retelling. When we bless our children on Shabbat or welcome them into the covenant at a simcha bat or bit milah ceremony we certainly recall the generations that came before from our narrative. But

ritual is not solely about this narrative, it is about constructing our narrative. When a father takes part in the ritual mitzvah of circumcising his son (symbolically or literally) he steps into the story, acting out a specific role that is real. Even if the father is not the mohel, he is much more than referencing Abraham and the initial covenant between the Israelite people and God. Because this is a ritual and not only a narrative, the father is actually making a covenant, not just referencing one.

3. **Narrative focuses primarily in the past and rituals plan for the future.** When a bat mitzvah is presented with a tallit prior to her first experience blessing Torah, she is preparing for the future: the coming action of reading Torah. The ritual giving of a tallit, like all mitzvot requiring a blessing, first blesses the action and then performs it. Once this ritual is performed one is then able to bless Torah, another ritual practice that prepares us for an event in the future. Rituals in this sense are preparatory; they prepare us for what is about to occur. For fathers, this could mean helping men prepare for the roles and responsibilities of raising their children. Or, as is now the case in many Israeli Reform congregations, the ritual of blessing one's child prior to their entering the army can prepare us to experience intense emotions and face our fears. This is the power of ritual to help us plan for the future.

Types of Ritual:

Just as the definitions and purposes are varied regarding rituals so to are the methods for classifying them. This chapter explores the theories of two religious scholars. The work of Vanessa Ochs recently hit the shelves of bookstores and libraries. Her book Inventing Jewish Ritual gleans wisdom from her experience on a journey of ritual practice beginning with her own traditionally observant family to the progressive Jewish community she joined in Boston that

explored liberal and traditional models for ritual practice. Rabbi Richard Levy is director of the HUC-JIR rabbinical school in Los Angeles. He is a leader within the Reform movement not only as a director, but also as a former CCAR president and powerful voice in the 1999 Pittsburgh Principles which have set the path for the future of the Reform movement particularly in the field of religious practice.

Both Ochs and Rabbi Levy use particular frames in order to better understand and explain ritual practice. Ochs refers to the "Jewish ritual toolbox". This toolbox has three primary components.

1. **Texts:** Biblical passages, teachings of the sages, folktales, and prayer liturgies are the primary documents, but there are also Jewish and Hebrew poems and songs. . . . Legal documents, such as the wedding contract and the writ of divorce, are also in this category, and they provide frameworks for adaptation.
2. **Actions and Objects:** Among the actions are blessings, praying, singing, lighting candles, memorializing, sitting low to the ground in mourning, tearing one's clothes in grief, smashing a glass, etc. . . . Turning to this rich vocabulary, the innovator seeks actions and objects that can symbolically connect the new ritual to the past and do its necessary work in the present. . . . They make the ritual feel as if it is already "ours", and genuinely Jewish, even if we have never heard of it before.
3. **Understandings:** about the presence of God, the merit of ancestors, the obligation to lead a sanctified life, the blessing of the land of Israel, the significance of preserving Jewish memory through study, and all the ethical obligations held toward fellow Jews and all of humankind.[167]

[167] Ochs, p5-6

The toolbox Ochs describes is not ritual itself, but rather the preparation needed to create ritual. Nonetheless, it is a classification that can greatly inform the work of this thesis. Picking and choosing these different "tools" from Ochs' toolbox one can imagine a ritual practice woven with a quote from Isaiah, candle lighting and a deep sense of connection to the state of Israel. This perspective is open to innovation and quite apt at fitting the needs of a community. If there is a weakness to Ochs' understanding of ritual, it is the absence of a clear authority. Traditionally, rituals are performed as *mitzvot* or commandments given by God or a religious authority. Ochs bypasses this step in her toolbox, placing emphasis on the meaning a ritual takes in a person's life. While some may understand this as a shortcoming of her work, it is a testament to the deep commitment Ochs has to ritual practice playing a vital role in the lives of Jews. If she bypasses authority in her ritual work it is only because she finds the power of ritual greater than that of any authority who could prescribe it.

Rabbi Richard Levy offers a perspective of ritual that does not bypass God as an authority. Rather, he proposes that we create new ritual practices in dialogue with God. "For us, the issue is not how we can be faithful to halachah, but rather, how we can expand halachah to be faithful to the call of God, to build a sense of holiness into the widest swath of our life."[168]

In his recent book A Vision of Holiness, Rabbi Levy focuses on the role of *mitzvot* in our lives. His focus was not on ritual practice, but his work offers wisdom that is easily applied to a vision of creating meaningful ritual for the fathers in our community. Rather than refer to the ritual "toolbox", Rabbi Levy in his focus on *mitzvot* points out the changing nature of Reform perspective regarding ritual, or as he writes "ceremonial" aspects of Jewish life.

> "Where the Reformers of the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform chose to divide the "laws" into ethical and ceremonial, Pittsburgh 1999 returns to the more normative Jewish division: *mitzvot bein adam la-Makom*, mitzvot between human beings

[168] Levy, p. 128

> and God, and the *mitzvot bein adam la-chaveiro,* mitvzvot between one human being and another. While the "moral laws" were always binding, the 1885 Pittsburghers regarded the "ceremonial" laws as instrumental only if they could "elevate and sanctify our lives."[169]

Rabbi Levy and the leaders who compiled the 1999 platform were not concerned with the goals of this thesis. But this thesis is concerned with the direction of the 1999 platform so far as it will serve as a guiding force for Reform Jews, and specifically fathers, as we continue to find more significance in ritual practice.

The de-classification of *mitzvot* from "ceremonial" or "ethical" to *mitzvot bein adam la-Makom* and *mitzvot bein adam la-chaveiro*, informs fathers that a *mitzvah* is not about duty, but rather about relationships. "The Centenary Perspective traces these endeavors to a 'relationship between God and the Jewish people,' indicating that God plays a part, even though it is the people that records the relationship."[170]

This new perspective of ritual could prove valuable to the work of giving fathers a license to engage in Judaism with their children because it gives rational support for ritual practice. Whereas ceremonial practices were often discarded as unnecessary or even irrational in the past, the *mitzvah* as a type of dialogue or relationship takes God off of a high pedestal and places God in a direct partnership with the father. It is the difference between a father performing the rite of *brit milah* because the God of Abraham commanded all Israelites to circumcise their sons thousands of years ago, and a father who thinks of *brit milah* as an intimate conversation about his role as a Jewish father. The Pittsburgh Principles do not place God far away and above the people, nor does it bypass God as Ochs may be criticized. Rather, it brings God closer through the act of conversation.

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[169] ibid, p. 51
[170] ibid, p. 97

Three Classifications Informing Ritual Practice for Fathers:

This thesis, as it is informed both by Rabbi Levy and Vanessa Ochs, paves a third path in the work of innovative ritual. This path speaks specifically to fathers and draws upon the tools suggested by Ochs and the relationship with God promoted by Rabbi Levy and the Pittsburgh Principles.

In order to best understand the roles rituals can play in the lives of fathers this thesis proposes three categories for ritual practice: ritual objects, ritual space and ritual time. Exploring these categories will illuminate the opportunities innovative ritual practice presents to fathers in the twenty-first century.

Ritual Objects:
Get Excited!!!

In elementary school I often struggled with motivation. I was a good student, but I was not excited about school and certainly not excited to do homework. Eventually, I was given advice to seek help from an object. "Find your favorite pen and make it your friend. Every time you do work, take out this special pen and use it to write your papers and complete your homework." The trick worked and I began enjoying my homework. In fact, it may have worked too well. I remember clearly about two weeks later, losing this pen and going to my mom in tears because I felt so attached to this new object in my life that I could not believe I misplaced it.

We have the opportunity to create this deep relationship with our ritual objects as well. Moreover, forming this relationship with our objects will serve not only to motivate Jewish fathers to participate in Jewish life, but it will help them build stronger ties to their children.

The tallit is one of the most innovative ritual objects currently in the general practice of almost every Jewish community. Whether orthodox or reform, tallitot over the past decades

have become more colorful and creative than ever before. Women are largely to thank for this innovation. As they adopted the practice of reading from Torah, they also adopted the practice of creating tallitot that reflected a more feminine design. Rather than the heavy cotton and traditional black stripes often donned in pictures of rabbis in the "old country", women began using silk and pastel colors as well as adding new images and designs. Ochs points out that this innovation changed what was already a new ritual for women into a ritual with a special connection to the object. "Making a ritual of selecting one's own tallit became an important milestone for a bat mitzvah girl along her path of preparation for the ceremony."[171]

I have three tallitot. One was given to me by my family's havurah at my bar mitzvah. It is small, silky and white. The second, the first tallit that I chose myself, was purchased from a sweet orthodox woman in the Mea Shearim neighborhood in Jerusalem. It is quite large, as it covers most of my body, almost touching the floor when I wear it. I purchased my third tallis after months of walking in and out of the *Gabrielli* store on Hillel street in Jerusalem. It is big, but not as overpowering as my Mea Shearim tallis. It was the most expensive of the three and it is the tallis that fits me best both in terms of style as well as size. I take pride in wearing it and remember every aspect of choosing it to be mine.

Like my special pen as a child, these tallitot have stories making them an extension of me. Moreover, on the occasion that I do not have one of these tallitot with me when I pray, I feel them missing. This is the power of ritual objects. "They serve as spiritual agents; they produce a sense of religious identity, prompt holy and ethical actions, and forge connections between the individual and the Jewish community."[172] My tallitot have become these spiritual agents for me. When I wear my long blue tallit I recall the traditional atmosphere of Mea Shearim and feel a

[171] Ochs, p. 20
[172] Ochs, p. 87

powerful sense of God covering the majority of my body. My red tallit that took me months to choose is the closest to my heart. It is MY tallit, the one that I want to wear most often and the one in which I sometimes just put on for meditation. The small silk tallit that my Havurah gave me at my bar mitzvah connects me to the souls of those who helped shape my Jewish identity. I often wear it proudly on the bima at the many pulpits in my life in order to recall the first bima I stood upon as a thirteen year old boy. While my search for tallitot was quite intentional, many enter this spiritual exploration not knowing how moving it can be. Rabbi Levy comments that many "young Jews in hip tallitot" are "unknowingly practicing a remarkable form of *hidur mitzvah* (beautifying a commandment).[173]

Fathers have this opportunity as well, although I find it rare that they are as enthusiastic to search for meaningful ritual objects as their wives or children. There is a minority of men who do take on this *hidur mitzvah* and their excitement for Judaism and their children grows. A personal story illustrates the opportunity open for fathers to explore:

While in Israel, my college roommate contacted me regarding tallitot. His soon to be father-in-law was seeking advice on purchasing a tallit. Already an active Jew through his participation in a synagogue choir, this father wanted to have a "special tallis to wear down the aisle and then to wrap around his daughter" when she was to be wed to her groom. He would continue to wear this tallis as he traveled with his choir, singing prayers in synagogues around his city and for some time to come.

Transforming and Stabilizing:

This father used a ritual object to create meaning and connection in his life. This brings us to the second important aspect of ritual objects in the licensing of fathers; the ability of a ritual object to be both transformative and provide stability.

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[173] Levy, p. 117

Ochs states that ritual objects can function as both agents of change and, later, of stability [because]

- They retell sacred stories
- They generate rules and spiritual possibilities
- They make the ritual tangible
- They provide assurance
- They appeal to those on the fringes
- They address communal needs[174]

Of these functions perhaps the verbs Ochs uses are more important than the subjects of her descriptions. Ritual objects have the ability to transform because they "generate" something new. They transform through a creative process of "making" this new ritual relevant. And they bring in new people because they are "appealing". Rituals also use verbs of stability. These are words that deal with the old, not the new. Ritual objects "retell" old stories, like the story of a father walking his daughter down the aisle. They "address" needs such as the role of a father in his daughter's life and her continuous role in his life. They "provide" continuity as they retell these stories whenever the tallis is wrapped at shacharit.

Just as Ochs points out that ritual objects can be "read", Rabbi Levy extends this idea, explaining that a *mitzvah*, such as that of wrapping oneself in a tallit, is really the beginning of a conversation. "A command is a call – it involves a voice different from one's own. . . . Mitzvah suggests that the individual is in conversation with another: a text, or the God who issued the mitzvah in the first place, or members of the people Israel who have been listening since Sinai."[175]

Return to the father's tallis which he wore at his daughter's wedding. It was new and therefore it provided a sense of change, but it was also a source for continuity. Perhaps he will wear it when his other child marries, wrapping her in it as he wrapped his eldest. Perhaps it will

[174] Ochs, p. 108
[175] Levy, p. 128

speak to him, recalling important memories in his life as he touches the fringes while reciting *shema and v'ahavta*. Perhaps every time he wraps himself in a tallis that he chose and that touched his child during a holy moment, he will remember the holiness that he has brought to this world in creating a child and fulfilling the mitzvah of helping her create a family. I cannot know what this tallis will say to him, as it is a conversation I am not privy to. But I can imagine that there are many fathers unable or even just ignorant of the transformative change and powerful continuity of values that a ritual object can bring to their lives. I wonder if the enthusiasm of the young women who flock to purchase a tallis for their bat mitzvah can ignite a fire in men to seek meaning in this ritual as well.

Ritual objects are truly conversation pieces that can excite us about Jewish life with our children in mind. They have the ability to call out to fathers, like my tallitot did to me as I searched for them in Jerusalem. And they have the ability to serve as a means for transformation and for continuity. This is a great step in the licensing of men as fathers. Moreover, this licensing is not limited (as this chapter is) to the ritual object of a tallis. The list of ritual objects is endless. The men in my family for a long time wore mezuzah necklaces and I know other families with special kiddush cups, kippot, Tanakhs and challah knives. Each object has the ability to call to a father, walking with him as he is drawn closer to his children. Moreover, objects can stay with us through the peaks and valleys of our lives, helping us later to tell the story that we lived.

Ritual Space:

It is often stated that Judaism is not as concerned with holy space like other religions. Islam has holy sites throughout the Middle East such as Mecca, Medina and the Al Aksa Mosque. Muslims aim to make a pilgrimage to these sites in their religious life. Christians also hold particular sites or areas to be holy. The Western world in particular is speckled with

churches that are not only historically significant, but also carry religious significance such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Vatican. For Jews, the closest holy space we cling to might be the Kotel or Western Wall of the Temple in Jerusalem. Holding this site in particular esteem is still considered among Jews in some circles as idol worship. Shifting the frame from a space that is in itself holy to a space that inhabits holy actions, the tables turn drastically. If we consider the need for a space in which holy actions (rituals) take place, we find Jewish tradition and culture demand the use of particular spaces. Most modern religions have a house of worship, but while Muslims are known to stop and pray in their homes, at work and even as they are going on their way, Jewish custom prefers prayer to happen amidst the community in a house of worship. We may not consider synagogues a necessity, but ritual actions such as reading Torah, gathering in a minyan and celebrating around a Shabbat table call us to value rituals in need of sacred space. Rabbi Levy points this out from Reform traditional practice even as it does not refer per se to a synagogue, but to a space that is a home for holy practice. Referring to a havdallah evening spent at the beach he writes: "Reform Shabbat observance has generally tended to seek holiness in space, seeking out locations where one's physical surroundings manifest *hadrat kodesh*, the beauty of holiness of the day."[176]

It is therefore an interesting dilemma that much of the recent material published about the crisis of the men and fathers fleeing from our communities focuses on creating "men's only space". This section of chapter 6 will not address this question directly, but rather focus on the importance of creating a space for rituals valuable for fathers. This space will prove to be a place where men can find a sense of community. This community lends itself to allowing men to feel comfortable in their surroundings, freeing them of society's shackles on their emotions. One

[176] Levy, p. 141

hypothesis of this thesis is that this freedom of emotions will create a stronger connection between the father and his children.

Meeting Space:

Vanessa Ochs describes a ritual space that she created with her husband, a college professor and his students. Knowing that study of Jewish texts would take place in his office, this small community created what they termed an "interactive mezuzah". A traditional mezuzah was placed on the door of Peter's (Och's husband) office as well as an envelope that would hold blessings written by the students throughout the year. The practice is innovative and exciting in itself, but for the purpose of this thesis it is particularly telling because it changed the mundane status of this office to a place where sacred study took place. Ochs describes it as follows: "The ritual acknowledged both change and transformation, uprooting and now stasis: an empty space in Halsey Hall was now marked as a home for scriptural study, and the sense of community the students already had created amongst themselves as young scholars of religion was affirmed."[177]

Jewish sacred space draws the community in. It becomes a place where people gather for the practice of Jewish ritual. Yet, among Jewish men and therefore fathers, we know that there is a decreasing sense of Jewish space and Jewish community. Traditionally, all Jewish space was also men's space. My grandfather was a *shamash*, or keeper of his shul in Memphis, Tennessee. As a child I was often told stories about the importance of this space in his life. This was the place where his community gathered. As I look back on these stories, I understand that the synagogue was a home and gathering place as much as it was a place to direct (then) men's hearts toward God. Perhaps most telling of this was my grandfather's friends. All members of the shul, they would attend meetings together as social gatherings. In fact, his closest friends, a group of about 8 guys (none of whom I believe ever went to college) referred to themselves as

[177] Ochs, p. 5

"the fraternity". They did not haze each other or even prefer exclusive activities, but they did form a sense of community from the holy space of the synagogue.

I am not proposing that Jewish fathers form "fraternities" across the country. But I do believe there are opportunities for men to find a sense of sacred space. And as is important to this thesis, this sacred space will serve as a means for Jewish fathers to ritually practice building an intimate Jewish community among their families and friends.

In Chapter three I explained the power of the Promise Keepers, a group of now millions of Christian men who gather in stadiums to build their community and direct their hearts toward God. Jewish fathers cannot fill a stadium, but they can sit in another arena and form community. In the 1980's the UAHC (now URJ) promoted "Reclaiming Shabbat" as a reform Jewish practice. Perhaps Jewish fathers could hear this call to them in particular.

Abraham Joshua Heschel's book Shabbat, is widely known for explaining Shabbat as a ritual practice in time and not space. I wonder whether it is more helpful for fathers to begin to understand Shabbat, and particularly the Friday night Shabbat meal, as a ritual practice that is rooted in BOTH time AND space. The importance of space for men is that it often needs to be created. Shabbat is not just a family dinner. It is a family dinner that is prepared and involves building blocks in order to add holiness to the moment.

I know of one man in particular who, after losing his job, began to bake challah for his family every Friday. It was a practice he learned as a child growing up in a home that had Shabbat dinner every week. With time on his hands, this father converted his role from breadwinner to holy bread maker. As the practice became permanent and friends joined the Shabbat table, the challah became quite famous. Eventually, friends began to ask him to make challah for them. Months later local grocery stores began requesting the homemade challah.

Today, this family bakes challah (although not in their home oven) for thousands of people in the Bay Area.

This story is more than nostalgia for an American dream. For our purposes the financial success this challah brought to the family is useless. The communal success is priceless. The act of preparing for Shabbat brings people together. It is an act of creation mimicking the act of God in the book of Exodus bringing manna to the Israelites. As noted in earlier chapters, fathers are desperate to understand what they can bring their family other than money. A man's worth in baking challah, I argue, can far outweigh his abilities to pay the bills because bread is not challah unless it is shared over a Shabbat table with family and friends. It is the space that makes the challah, not the person or the action. Challah needs a table and a community just as men need a safe place to feel among their "fraternity" whether it consists of men, women or children.

Preparing a sacred space is in itself a ritual. As Vanessa Ochs states:

> Jews were "making" Judaism and were being expressively Jewish when they sent New Year cards, shopped and cooked for Passover, and searched obsessively for the right dress for the bat mitzvah girl and her mother. . . . The rituals of Judaism encompass all those preparatory acts that come before the main event: inviting guests, the shopping, the trying on, and the kneading and chopping.[178]

Shabbat preparation can be intense and rushed. Sometimes it involves hours of preparation to pull the meal together. Often this job is too big for one person and can be overwhelming. But as David Murrows points out in his book Why Men Hate Going to Church, men are attracted to challenges. "Difficult" and "intense" may be attractive to many men. Perhaps prioritizing the Shabbat meal at the end of a long work week will help fathers take on some of the very real challenges in parenting that men are often ignorant to. It involves making sacrifices and often rushing to get food and clean. But it is an important challenge that I believe pays off exponentially. Whereas the traditional business focused man struggles and rushes to make sure

[178] Ochs, p. 32

his business life is perfect, the Shabbat observant Jewish father struggles to make sure his family has a sacred space worthy of gathering around to share the stories of their week and relate to each other not as businessman to child, but as father to daughter and spouse to spouse.

A word on Patriarchy:

Traditionally, one may consider the father to be the patriarch of the Shabbat table. Perhaps it is true in some homes, but this is certainly not the desire in most progressive homes. Modern society desires men and women to share responsibilities. While sacred space in a Jewish context traditionally separates genders, egalitarian Jewish ritual practice can be equally as meaningful. The father need not take on the traditional role in the Shabbat meal of leading prayers and "running" the meal. He can be the baker or the chef as mentioned previously. More importantly, he can be the spouse and the father. Rabbi Dan Moskovitz often begins his Men's group sessions with the question "Describe who you are to the person next to you . . . without mentioning your profession". Shabbat offers fathers this opportunity every week. It becomes a space where the home and the family are the centerpiece and can welcome the weekend as a time to be a father rather than a break from work.

Sacred Emotions:

At the Shabbat dinner table, after singing Shalom Aleichem each person picks an illustrated Shabbat angel card and reflects on the positive "angelic" character trait written on it, such as "openness", "insight", "perspective" or "healing". People are invited to share how the trait relates to the past week or how they might incorporate the trait in the coming week. It might concern hopes, say, about starting a new job or a new relationship; or it might occasion a prayer for peace in the Middle East.[179]

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[179] Ochs, p. 16

The above is a description of rituals that are made possible largely by the creation of a sacred space. This is the second major benefit of sacred space; it is a place open to fathers sharing their emotions. I have mentioned two instances in which fathers shared their emotions ritually in this thesis. One was the recitation of the *eishet chayil* prayer at a particular family's Shabbat table and the other is the common custom of fathers speaking emotionally to their children on the occasion of their bnai mitzvah in the synagogue. Both ritual spaces lend themselves to men expressing themselves personally, not professionally. (Ironically, at many bnai mitzvah I have noticed that the child refers to the father as the one who paid for everything). The Shabbat table, as described in the example above, becomes a *mikdash me'at*, a small sanctuary or safe place for men to be themselves. In his book Becoming the Kind Father, Calvin Sandborn expressed the immense struggle he faced as he tried to come to terms with his father's angry and often abusive emotions. Think of Shabbat space in its most masculine forms; it is structured, often formal, a created space involving a sort of building and even alludes to practices such as the priestly sacrifice and the honoring of those at the table. Perhaps if we help fathers understand the qualities of Shabbat space that may be attractive to men, we can enable them to overcome some of the blockades men face because Shabbat space may initially feel quite feminine. Sharing emotions to many men feels like group therapy, a women's project. But it does not have to be. It can also call to men as an activity that is part of the challenge of Shabbat and an opportunity to guide the family, as Dr. Mogel describes, like a cruise ship director, with one's spouse. Shabbat, while sacred in time, may be most valuable to men in that it provides a safe space for them to be themselves personally, not professionally.

Ritual Time:

As mentioned above, time is often considered a normative mode when we consider ritual. Jewish tradition allocates an incredible amount of time to holidays. The Jewish calendar is arguably the most powerful authority in the Jewish world. Regardless of your Jewish affiliation, Jewish time is a part of Jewish practice. In regards to Jewish fathers, time becomes another interesting paradox. Many psychologists point out that fathering is too often relegated to "quality time". "Fathering – the active and intimate involvement in the lives one's children – is too frequently diluted for and by men to the comfortable notion of 'quality time'. The fact that no qualitative parenting can be accomplished without hands-on responsibility for both the pleasures and pains of children's lives is a frequent source of conflict between husbands and wives."[180]

The Shabbat table clearly offers this experience of both "quality" and "quantity" in that it requires preparation (perhaps a ritual involved in time as well as space) which we can consider "quantity time", but also enables the family to spend "quality time" focusing on getting to know each other better. This section will focus on how we can offer rituals that will help fathers understand, through time bound rituals, that they need to be involved in quality and quantity time with their children.

Just as men are finding a limited amount of space in religious life so too are they finding a lack of ritual time. A female colleague recently shared a personal story that illuminates the complex nature of ritual time. At her son's brit milah ceremony, she asked if some of the women in the family could take the place of one of the traditionally male roles. The impetus for this switch is not important, but the officiating rabbi's response illuminates one response men probably need to hear. "Let the men have some time with the kids" the rabbi replied, "it's

[180] Carter, McGoldrick, The Expanded Family Life Cycle, p. 135

important". Both quality and quantity time are important for successful fathering. Ritual practices like brit milah offer a structure for these opportunities. The rabbi did not offer the often egalitarian message promoted in much of progressive Judaism's rituals. This response would have been to say "of course a woman can take on the mitzvah, it does not matter whether it is a man or a woman." For the father's sake, this rabbi differentiated between father and mother.

Before I address how time bound rituals can empower fathers, it is important to address the role egalitarian practice plays in these rituals. The previous brit milah scenario may be interpreted as sexist in that it prefers a man to woman. The goal of this thesis is to promote successful practices for fathers that are in-line with the feminist movement which informs much of Reform Jewish practice. It is important to note the changing gender roles in our society today. To do this we need to understand the above scenario on two different planes; the religious and the secular. In our religious context men have been preferred for honorary roles such as sandak in a brit milah ceremony. There is no question that women have traditionally been excluded from these moments and progressive Judaism continues to overrule tradition in the name of egalitarian practice. But if we understand the secular, or post-feminist nature of our society, we understand that perhaps the responsibility in child-rearing is disproportionately laid upon the female. While women continue to make tremendous progress in the once male dominated professional world, men are not making as much progress in the still female dominated domestic world. Expecting a father to be a central participant in the child's ritual welcoming ceremony sends the "quality" message – "You, the father, are important to this child". Moreover, I imagine many rabbis would have responded to the scenario by inviting the women and men to share roles. This is egalitarian and in line with much of feminist thought. But we also know that it is important for the father to know his child separate from the mother. Perhaps this chapter and

chapter 7 can help us understand how the father can be both feminist in thought and proclaim his role as a qualitative and quantitative time giver to the child.

Benefits of Time Bound Rituals:

Time bound rituals as this thesis will define them are moments in time in which time essentially stops in order to sanctify a moment in a person's life. This is largely synonymous with the oft used term "life cycle events". Time bound rituals are possibly the rituals that speak to fathers more than any other. They often reflect a direct intersection between religious and secular life. This thesis focuses primarily on the time bound ritual of a child's *brit milah* or *simchat bat* and will refer to it as the primary example in the discussion of time bound rituals.

Stand at Attention:

Time bound rituals benefit fathers in that they require his full and undivided attention. Multi-tasking is a valuable skill if not a need in today's world. As terms like blackberry, palm and smart refer not to living beings but to technologies intended to help us do multiple things at once, the time bound rituals ask us to focus only on life. The first benefit of a time bound ritual is that it requires a father's full and undivided attention. Unfortunately, the moments in which our cell phones are off are becoming scarce. When a father takes part in his child's ritual naming, he is required to focus his entire attention on the child. Moreover, this break in our multi-tasked time is an opening for reflection. Vanessa Ochs points out that reflection is now a vital aspect of ritual practice. "We might even call the current style of reflection a new spiritual practice in itself."[181] In order for fathers to reap the benefits of a time bound ritual most will need guidance from a rabbi or other leader in reflective practice. Just as space bound rituals require preparation so too do time bound rituals offer us an opportunity to prepare for our role as fathers. A spiritual guide might ask a father: "What type of father do you want to be?", "What did your father give you that you need to give this child?", "What will you need to sacrifice for

[181] Ochs, p. 133

this child?" These questions help a father reflect on his role with the child and can be asked in the preparations for the child-naming ceremony. Perhaps this is an opportunity to look at some of the dapei abahut located in chapter 5 with the father as he prepares for this ceremony.

Time-bound rituals are not only a time for the father to prepare, they also offer a sense of comfort as they are never surprises. "It is harder to be moved by a practice that surprises you at each step than by a familiar practice that evokes dozens of memories and strums a lifetime of patterned responses."[182] Time bound rituals are planned, offering the father time to get ready for moments that may otherwise be uncomfortable. Life cycle events, as mentioned previously in regards to the father's bnai mitzvah speech, are often emotionally charged. If we can prepare fathers for the emotion we may allow for their emotional participation in these moments. Thinking about the difference between the traditional role of the father which was quite distant from emotional connection, this is a positive change. Moreover, as both parents continue to spend more time working than previous generations, children will require more emotional support from both parents. Father's are likely to need assistance in fulfilling this role. A well prepared time bound ritual offers this opportunity.

Another benefit of time bound rituals is their ripe invitation to allow Judaism to relate directly to the participant's life. Most Jews are secular and unaffiliated. Even among synagogue affiliated Jews, many only enter the synagogue a few times a year for major holidays like Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Time bound rituals on the other hand call to Jews across the entire spectrum of secular practice. It is common practice for secular Jews to intermarry, but many feel moved to have a religious ceremony for their wedding. A friend planning to marry her Baptist fiancé recently invited me to officiate at her wedding. "We aren't religious, but we want to have a chuppah and break the glass at our wedding". In other words, religion is not important to us,

[182] ibid, p. 22

but we want to frame this time bound memory in a Jewish context. As Jewish professionals passionate about teaching a relevant Judaism we could not ask for a better opportunity to bring Torah to the masses. Regarding such milestones in peoples' lives, Rabbi Levy wrote: "These rituals, like the holidays, are ways of bringing Torah into everyday life. . . The celebrations of rites of passage recall events in the personal lives of our biblical ancestors."[183] It is in this light that time bound rituals transcend time. The brit milah ceremony becomes more than a welcoming of a child into our covenant. This teachable moment is available to us because the moment is inherently liminal. Whereas most rituals create liminal space, the time bound ritual is often liminal without the ritual. Naming one's child or entering into a covenant with a spouse are liminal moments whether they take place in a synagogue or a hall of justice. This natural liminality of the moment allows religious ritual to teach and prescribe more than might be possible in moments in which the liminality must be created. For instance, since the father is already moved by the moment of his child's circumcision, the religious role of the rabbi becomes one of helping the father direct his thoughts toward his future relationship to the child.

The final aspect of time bound rituals important for this thesis is the opportunity to create innovative time bound rituals. While ritual objects and ritual spaces continue to be invented with each generation of Jews, time bound rituals have seen little change over the years. In the last century we have welcomed new time bound traditions such as the bnot mitzvah ceremony and confirmation, but personal time bound rituals have only been created by a few elite religious Jews.

> Women rabbis and other knowledgeable Jewish women have also created new rites to celebrate specific periods in women's lives. Rabbi Laura Geller may have been the first woman to create a ritual to accompany the weaning of her first child, drawing her inspiration from the biblical mention of such a rite for Isaac.

[183] Levy, p. 151

> In Reform and Jewish Renewal circles, rites have been created for menarche, menopause, miscarriage, and other life events."[184]

These strides, (by no coincidence all feminist in nature) are steps in the right direction. They take moments that are naturally liminal and add religious significance and meaning. Fathers have the opportunity to add meaning to their lives and the lives of their children by following this lead. Moreover, it may be the men who can take these time bound rituals and spread them to the masses.

Fathers will never experience menopause, but they do experience the loss of a miscarriage or the excitement of becoming pregnant with their spouse. A male friend recently reflected with me on the act of becoming a father. I understood the following statement not as a sexist perspective of male and female roles (as it may be read in such a way). Rather, I heard in his voice a realization of the power of partnering in creating a child. I imagine his emotions are common among fathers. "Sometimes I look at her and think 'WOW' only a few months ago she was so much smaller and now I see her and I think I DID THAT!!!!". Men are affected by the cycles of our children's lives. Fathers are much more than breadwinners, even if that classification has long been their title. Time bound rituals offer fathers an opportunity to prepare for and express emotions that my have previously been masked by the intense social pressure for the man to fit a particularly masculine mold.

Conclusion:

> "Jews keep Judaism alive through inventing new rituals – moving, fulfilling, and authentically Jewish rituals."[185]

Perhaps this is a two way street. I wonder whether the ritual practices in Judaism also breathe life into fathers, allowing them to be more "alive" than they have been previously. But

[184] Levy, p. 155
[185] Ochs, p.1

in order for rituals to breathe this life into men, they must speak to men's lives and reflect the changes in our society that men are facing.

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DAF ABAHUT 1 – FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

2 Samuel 12:16-24

L'DOR V'DOR

6. וַיְבַקֵּשׁ דָּוִד: *David entreated God*
. . "I cannot think of any need in
hildhood as strong as the need for
ne father's protection"
I read as quoted in
The Importance of Fathers, p. 23

6. David thinking of his child.

בְּעַד הַנַּעַר: The father is a child's
rimary experience of someone
ther than the mother. . . . the
nowledge that someone else is
hinking of and involved with the
hild frees the mother from her
nfant. It also frees the infant from
he mother. It means that the child
ill have space to experience
imself, can risk hating the mother,
an even risk killing her in his mind,
ecause there is someone else there
o keep him alive.
The Importance of Fathers, p. 97

1. Why have you acted this
nanner . . . parents' urge to
verprotect their children is based
n fear. "At what age can the
hildren stay home alone?", "How
lo I explain to my 8 year old why I
von't let him go to the bathroom in
restaurant by himself?"
Dr. Wendy Mogel

3. he will never come back to
ne. It is like Dad to be passive in
arenting. "Dad is often the last
ne standing. Some try to make
rder and the second type take time
o play and be sillier than the
nothers. Freud too writes about
vit and humor. Sometimes the
lad's are more fun and funnier.
The mom's say that the dad is
nother kid."
Dr. Wendy Mogel

4. She bore a son: After months
f thinking, feeling and planning,
he baby arrives and a man becomes
father with a real live baby – but
lso a family. For many men this is
he culmination of something that
as been longed for, but others can
eel trapped and resentful.
The Importance of Fathers, p. 11

4. God favored him: Torah
eaches that there are three partners
n the creation of a person – God,
he father, and the mother.
Dr. Wendy Mogel

NARRATIVE . . .

2 Samuel 12:16-24 [16] David entreated God for the boy; David fasted, and he went in and spent the night lying on the ground. [17] The senior servants of his household tried to induce him to get up from the ground; but he refused, nor would he partake of food with them. [18] On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell David that the child was dead; for they said, "We spoke to him when the child was alive and he wouldn't listen to us; how can we tell him that the child is dead? He might do something terrible." [19] When David saw his servants talking in whispers, David understood that the child was dead; David asked his servants, "Is the child dead?" "Yes," they replied. [20] Thereupon David rose from the ground; he bathed and anointed himself, and he changed his clothes. He went into the House of God and prostrated himself. Then he went home and asked for food, which they set before him, and he ate. [21] His courtiers asked him, "Why have you acted in this manner? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but now that the child is dead, you rise and take food!" [22] He replied, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept because I thought: 'Who knows? God may have pity on me, and the child may live.' [23] But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will never come back to me." [24] David consoled his wife Bathsheba; he went to her and lay with her. She bore a son and she named him Solomon. God favored him.

TARBUT ABAHUT

16. he went in and spent the night lying on the ground: I want men to find a place within their congregation to do their *inner* work, their I-God, transcendent, private, emotional healing, etc. But I also want them to express their newfound spirituality *outwardly*; express themselves publicly.
Doug Barden

16. he went in and spent the night lying on the ground: There is not enough stillness, not enough silence in the life of today's American Jewish man.
David Gottheb

19. David understood: Something happens in that moment where he discovers a new direction. The wilderness can do that. At first it appears terrifying, but then it can be life-giving.
Michael Holzman

23. why should I fast: when men realize that the accumulation of wealth and control are not enough, the sense of loneliness and emptiness can be overwhelming.
The Expanded Family Life Cycle

24. he lay with her: Sex is how we on earth can bring repair to the Divine Self. We have much more power than we ever knew.
Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin

DIALOGUE . . .

- What are David's roles in this narrative? (griever, protector, lover, companion, etc.)
- What role do you associate with most as a man? As a father?
- What are the similarities as to how men today might react in David's situation? What are the differences?
- Of the actions David takes in this narrative, which would you take and which do you think would be most difficult for you to take?
- What are your fears as a father? How do you react when facing these fears?
- Do you feel that you need to protect your child? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How might you imagine God as a partner with you as a father?

DAF ABAHUT 2 – RELATIONSHIPS AMONG MEN

1 Samuel 18:1-16

L'DOR V'DOR

. Jonathan loved David as himself: "Men court men", says ne observer of the male condition. The popularity of buddy movies eflect this, as does the emphasis on eam sports, fraternities . . . Jokes, arcasm and humor serve a similar urpose.

The Expanded Family Life Cycle

. Jonathan and David made a act: Men have difficulty creating nd sustaining same-sex friendships . . there does seem to be a longing n the part of men for a more ustaining, nurturing connection vith other men, although this is ften thwarted by powerful cultural trains of homophobia.

The Expanded Family Life Cycle

. all that he lacks is kingship: The father's ability to support the hild . . . will be profoundly nfluenced by his own life, and that n this way he will profoundly nfluence the developing infant's apacity to face loss.

The Importance of Fathers

. From that day Saul kept a ealous eye: [Man] believes that he nust be a Hero. He competes to e the best stud, husband and ather; to have the biggest house, tc . . . He believes that the whole vorld is divided into winners and osers – and that if he loses he will e worthless. So he won't give imself a break.

0. Saul threw the spear: Neurological and chemical differences influence the tendency for females to be less competitive in heir learning style, while males tend o be more impulsive and ggressive.

Ezra Rotstein

NARRATIVE . . .

When David finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself. [2] Saul took David into his service that day and would not let him return to his father's house. -- [3] Jonathan and David made a pact, because Jonathan loved him as himself. [4] Jonathan took off the cloak and tunic he was wearing and gave them to David, together with his sword, bow, and belt. [5] David went out with the troops, and he was successful in every mission on which Saul sent him, and Saul put him in command of all the soldiers; this pleased all the troops and Saul's courtiers as well. [6] When the troops came home and David returned from killing the Philistine, the women of all the towns of Israel came out singing and dancing to greet King Saul with timbrels, shouting, and sistrums. [7] The women sang as they danced, and they chanted: Saul has slain his thousands; David, his tens of thousands! [8] Saul was much distressed and greatly vexed about the matter. For he said, "To David they have given tens of thousands, and to me they have given thousands. All that he lacks is the kingship!" [9] From that day on Saul kept a jealous eye on David. [10] The next day an evil spirit of God gripped Saul and he began to rave in the house, while David was playing the lyre, as he did daily. Saul had a spear in his hand, [11] and Saul threw the spear, thinking to pin David to the wall. But David eluded him twice. [12] Saul was afraid of David, for God was with him and had turned away from Saul. [13] So Saul removed him from his presence and appointed him chief of a thousand, to march at the head of the troops. [14] David was successful in all his undertakings, for God was with him; [15] and when Saul saw that he was successful, he dreaded him. [16] All Israel and Judah loved David, for he marched at their head.

TARBUT ABAHUT

1. Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David: In a man's mind, relationships are something men have with women, not with other men. A man has to overcome a truckload of fear and suspicion to *have a relationship* with another man.

David Murrow

5. He was successful: With American masculinity's emphasis on individualism, accomplishment, competition, and success, American culture pushes men to achieve their goals and earn the rewards of capitalism. Many Jewish men swim happily in these waters. Halachic Judaism offers these answers as it explains exactly what is right and wrong. Liberal Judaism is lacking. . Adolescent boys complained about youth group activities that were all discussion, group-process, open-ended without resolution.

Michael Holzman

7. The women sang as they danced . . . David was playing his lyre: When feminism opened the door to women, it also allowed men to explore a world of style, fashion, and expression . . . this spawned terms like "metrosexual" the sleek urban man who no longer relies on a wife or girlfriend to pick out his clothes.

Michael Holzman

12. Saul was afraid: I see now that for my dad and later for me, anger was a way of avoiding big feelings like grief . . . men commonly use anger to escape their real feelings. . . . While it is not OK for men to be vulnerable or sad, anger is a powerful emotion, so anger is OK. . . . I didn't know enough words to accurately describe my feelings . . . instead of telling myself I felt "disappointed", I would exaggerate "I'm pissed off".

Calvin Sandborn

DIALOGUE . . .

- How do David, Jonathan and Saul express themselves?
- How is David like the modern "metro-sexual"?
- When have you felt like acting upon someone as Saul did to David?
- How would you characterize the relationship between Jonathon and David?
- If David were living today, do you think you would befriend him?
- Of the potential fathers in this story, which would you like to be emulate? Why?
- Analyze the role men play in your life?

DAF ABAHUT 3 – FATHER-SPOUSE RELATIONSHIP

2 Samuel 6:16-23

L'DOR V'DOR

i. leaping and whirling before od: One psychologist claims that irents today "worship" their ildren as idols when they should orship God showing children that irents also follow a sense of order id feel obligated to a greater ower than themselves.

Josh Broun

i. she despised him for it: ome worry that parents do not spect each other. "I want the kids see the parents cherishing each ther – to see the mother really preciating the father's strength's, is experience in the outside world. want girls to see the fathers nding their mothers beautiful. . . . want them to hear their parents ughing together."

Dr. Wendy Mogel

0. David went home to greet is household: Perhaps David ought he would be received ifferently at home. "The effect of Daddy coming home from work" an bring relief to what can often be stressful situation at the end of the ay. . . . The father is also seen as nstrumental in turning the baby's iew towards the outside world way from the intense intimacy of he mother-child relationship, or as troducing the "third position" hich is essential for healthy ognitive and emotional growth and evelopment."

The Importance of Fathers, 132

2. among the slavegirls . . . I ill be honored: Kids are all orried that their parents are going get divorced today because they now people with divorced parents. hen children see their parents onored by other adults, in articular their spouses, they feel a ense of security that divorce is not mmanent.

Dr. Wendy Mogel

3. no children: Some feel that here is no child without mother. ut, the experience of the father as "third person" fosters the child's wareness of its own identity.

The Importance of Fathers

NARRATIVE . . .

16 As the Ark of God entered the City of David,
Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the
window and saw King David leaping and
whirling before God; and she despised him for
it. 17 They brought in the Ark of God and set it
up in its place inside the tent which David had
pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt
offerings and offerings of well-being before the
God. 18 When David finished sacrificing the
burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being,
he blessed the people in the name of the
Sovereign of Hosts. 19 And he distributed
among all the people -- the entire multitude of
Israel, man and woman alike -- to each a loaf
of bread, a cake made in a pan, and a raisin
cake. Then all the people left for their homes.
20 David went home to greet his household.
And Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet
David and said, "Didn't the king of Israel do
himself honor today -- exposing himself today
in the sight of the slavegirls of his subjects, as
one of the riffraff might expose himself!" 21
David answered Michal, "It was before God
who chose me instead of your father and all
his family and appointed me ruler over the
God's people Israel! I will dance before God 22
and dishonor myself even more, and be low in
my own esteem; but among the slavegirls that
you speak of I will be honored." 23 So to her
dying day Michal daughter of Saul had no
children.

DIALOGUE . . .

- What makes David manly in this narrative?
- Describe the relationship between David and Michal?
- If David's children were there watching him before the people, what would they learn about the outside world that he represents?
- If you were David in this scenario and you arrive home to Michal, how would you respond? What would be a good way to respond if your kids were watching?
- What prevents men from "leaping and whirling" or "dancing" in synagogues today?
- How can we help men become "singers of songs" in our community?
- Who are the slavegirls that we try to impress today? What dances do they expect men to do?

TARBUT ABAHUT

16. leaping and whirling: The synagogue must focus its energies on the family . . .And help men recover their roles as singers of songs and tellers of tales, help men reclaim their generative power to create memories or to answer questions.

Doug Barden

16. leaping and whirling: We are trapped in a culture that sends the message that men of faith are sissies; the man who prays with heart and soul is somehow suspect.

Dana Jennings

18. sacrificing the burnt offerings . . . blessed the people: The distance from rituals is a contributing factor to the breakdown in civic cohesion among men, which further undermines efforts to bring Jewish men together in a religious context.

David Bergman

21. David was chosen by God, not a masculine father figure like Saul. Unless we can create a new counter-culture, one that embraces both the feminine and masculine spiritual energies of our people within our synagogue community, we are all going to lose out.

Doug Barden

22. I will be honored: Not only do men want to be great, but they want to be recognized as being great. An athlete who wins a championship wears a ring the rest of his life. A fellow who gets the high score on a video game calls his friends over to look at the screen. Businessmen work hard not just for money, but also for the recognition that accompanies their achievements.

David Murrow