Ritual Reimagined: The Theory, Practice, and Innovation of Lifecycle Rituals

Jaclyn Fromer Cohen and Deana Rae Sussman, May 2014

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This thesis explores the theory, practice, and innovation of lifecycle rituals. The primary goals of this thesis are to explore the scholarship of ritual theorists for the purpose of assessing the ritual process writ large, exploring the intersection of belief and observance, ascertaining the elements which render a ritual meaningful and successful, developing a rubric by which to evaluate ritual, and ultimately creating new rituals that fall under a new, more comprehensive definition of "lifecycle ritual."

Our study of abstract theory and our active engagement in fieldwork (including a survey, workshops, field observations and evaluations, and interviews) has enabled us to offer an argument for the expansion of the definition of lifecycle ritual. Traditional lifecycle rituals include the basics: birth, *b'nai mitzvah*, marriage, and death and mourning. Yet this thesis evidences the countless gray areas between these major moments. It seeks to understand how we can expand the definition of lifecycle ritual to include those non-traditional moments in an innovative, creative, and wholly meaningful way.

Our research has led us to understand that ritual is oftentimes prompted by liminality, being betwixt and between. Therefore, our thesis focuses on three core times of need; three instances where people find themselves on the threshold. Here is where we see opportunities for substantial, meaningful lifecycle ritual innovation: times of celebration, times of loss and sorrow, and times of trauma and transition. To that end, our thesis presents a ritual prior to the ordination of rabbis or cantors, a ritual mourning the loss of a relationship, and a cycle of rituals for cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery.

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This project was a labor of love.

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CHAPTER ONE: RITUAL THEORY AND CRITICISM

Ritual is the cornerstone of Judaism: Jewish practice, Jewish experience, and Jewish identity. It is the physical manifestation of the desire to mark life's transitions in a meaningful way. For centuries, Jewish lifecycle rituals have served as markers for life's many moments of joy and pain: birth to death, *simcha* to sorrow. From *brit milah* to *shiva,* major life moments are often associated with the Jewish rituals that marked them.

Oftentimes, liminality is the impetus for ritual: the moment when one crosses a threshold. Transitioning from one status to another can be extraordinarily powerful. Judaism, in its extraordinary wisdom, provides us with excellent opportunities for honoring those moments: when a baby becomes a member of the covenant, when a teenager transitions from childhood to adulthood, when two people enter into the bond of marriage.

While Jewish tradition acknowledges and celebrates these monumental life moments, those markers are not all encompassing. Occasionally we find ourselves without a proper marker to acknowledge a unique, sacred moment. Sometimes a traditional ritual may seem limiting and exclusive, inappropriate for our current needs. Other times, we find ourselves limited by the category of "lifecycle ritual" itself. What does this term mean? What is a life cycle ritual? How does our tradition most commonly define it?

Rabbi Richard Levy defines ritual as "composed of one or more actions which may accompany and dramatize a liturgical text, enable the worshipper to re-create in the present an event in the religious past, and/or bridge the spiritual/physical divide by entering into a

relationship with God through one's body, clothing, and other material objects, thus transforming the material into a symbol or even a manifestation of God's presence."[1]

However, ancient Jewish texts define ritual from the point of view of the normative Jewish male. These rituals, (which include birth, *brit milah, bar mitzvah*, marriage, and death and mourning) constitute the category that we know as "lifecycle rituals." As a whole, the rituals that fall into this category have remained largely unchanged for many generations. The first documented, perceptible shift originated from the feminist movement of the 1970s. According to professor of religious studies and renowned ritualist Vanessa Ochs, "they [Jewish feminists] have innovated a new body of Jewish rituals being performed here in America and around the world by women as well as men. The many new rituals reclaim, refashion, and revise traditional ways."[2] And while feminist scholarship has paved the way for innovation, feminine Jewish lifecycle rituals still largely follow the framework of the traditionally defined lifecycle moments (birth, baby naming, *bat mitzvah*, marriage, death and mourning).

But what about the non-traditional moments? What about those transitional, liminal times that are outside of the established framework of Jewish tradition? For example, what happens when a person learns that he or she is terminally ill? He or she is no longer healthy, no longer able to live the life they once knew, yet they are not in the clutches of death. Arnold van Gennep defines *rites de passage* as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age."[3] Using this definition, we understand these non-traditional lifecycle moments to be

[1] Rabbi Richard N. Levy, email to authors, May 8, 2013.

[2] Vanessa Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2007) 46

[3] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage.* Translation by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1909) cited in Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure,* 2nd Ed. (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008) 94

liminal, and as such, they deserve to be marked in a sacred way. Thus, we propose an expansion of the category of "lifecycle ritual" to include any time in a person's life that is a significant, transitional, or liminal.

DIVERSIFICATION AND EXPANSION OF LIFECYCLE RITUALS

To illustrate our point, we offer the life story of award winning director and producer Steven Spielberg. Spielberg has certainly participated in the traditionally defined Jewish lifecycle rituals - he has spoken at length about his Jewish upbringing, *Bar Mitzvah*, and supplemental Jewish education - however there are numerous moments in his personal and professional life that we hypothesized were unmarked in a Jewish way.

A brief glance at his biography several significant times in Spielberg's life that could have been enhanced by Jewish ritual, offering the opportunity to deepen a celebration of success or recognize a loss.

1. The creation of his first short film in 1958, which garnered him a Boy Scout merit badge in photography

2. The divorce of his parents during his childhood

3. The acquisition of an internship at Universal Studios

4. The release of his first mainstream feature film, "Jaws" in 1975

5. The co-founding of his production company, Amblin Entertainment in 1981

6. Receiving his first Academy Award for Best Director for the film "Schindler's List" in 1993

7. The founding of the Shoah Foundation in 1994

8. The awarding of an honorary degree from USC Film School (to which he was not accepted for his undergraduate studies) in 1994

9. The completion of his undergraduate degree at the University of California Long Beach in 2002

10. Receiving a diagnosis of dyslexia in 2007

As we can see from this handful of times in Spielberg's life, there were many moments of change and transition. Hence, multiple opportunities for Jewish rituals that would have allowed the Jewish community to come together in support, comfort, and celebration. These moments, no less than birth, *bar mitzvah*, marriage, and death, qualify as lifecycle moments. And thus, these missed opportunities both highlight the need and serve as the impetus for the diversification of the category of lifecycle rituals.

In essence, we are seeking to, in some sense, individualize life cycle rituals; not in the hopes of marking every single moment of one's life, but rather elevating selected moments to enhance one's connection to God, family, community, etc. We cannot state outright where, when, and how an individual will or should crave ritual; rather we are positing that clergy can and should recognize these times of need and see them as opportunities for Jewish ritual.

RITUAL THEORY

The diversification of lifecycle rituals necessitates the creation of new rituals. Thus, the primary goals of this thesis are to explore the scholarship of ritual theorists for the purpose of assessing the ritual process writ large, exploring the intersection of belief and observance, ascertaining the elements which render a ritual meaningful and successful, developing a rubric by which to evaluate ritual, and ultimately creating new rituals that fall under our new, more comprehensive definition.

In order to achieve these goals, a survey of ritual theory is an essential first step. Our research includes the works of Victor Turner, Catherine Bell, Ronald Grimes, Barbara Meyerhoff, Tom Driver, Roy Rappaport, Vannessa Ochs, and Stanley Tambiah, among others. The following pages constitute the foundation from which we will build our case for reimagining ritual.

VICTOR TURNER

Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner discusses the concept of liminality and communitas with regards to ritual in his book, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. He defines liminality, or liminal spaces as transitional:

"Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between in the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that

ritualize social and cultural transitions."[4] According to Turner, liminality represents the space between two separate entities. Those in liminal spaces are often represented as possessing nothing; they are nameless, faceless beings whose futures are indeterminate.

Communitas emerges during the liminal period itself. Turner defines communitas as "an unstructured, or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus,* community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders."[5]

Philosopher Martin Buber uses the word "community" rather than "communitas," describing it as being *with* a group of people in a way that transcends simply standing alongside another; when one is in *communitas*, one is experiencing the I-Thou connection. "Buber lays his finger on the spontaneous, immediate, concrete nature of communitas, as opposed to the norm-governed, institutionalized, abstract nature of social structure."[6]

Communitas may be established by tragedy or ecstasy, bringing people to a heretofore unforeseen relationship with the once-strangers, now-community-members alongside them. A World Series championship win, for example, may establish a city-wide sense of communitas whereby people turn to the person sitting next to them and feel an instant kinship as a result of a shared experience. We cannot force communitas to occur; it must happen spontaneously, naturally. But when it does happen, we regard it as sacred.

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[4] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure,* 2nd Ed. (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008) 95

[5] Turner, 96

[6] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*. Translation by RG Smith. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1958), cited in Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure,* 2nd. Ed. (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008) 127

CATHERINE BELL

In "Constructing Ritual," scholar of religion and ritual studies Catherine Bell discusses not only how people construct ritual, but also how they characterize ritual with regards to thought and action. Ronald Grimes explains: "Catherine Bell argues that scholars employing theories invent the very phenomenon they claim to discover. She believes at the root of the idea of ritual is a longstanding Western philosophical split between thought and action in which ritual is associated with action rather than thought. However, she says, ritual is also construed by theorists to be the means by which this ridge is bridged."[7]

Bell provides a thorough evaluation of the work of Clifford Geertz, a theorist concerned primarily with finding meaning in ritual. Geertz implies that each participant experiences the rite through his or her individual lens, thus imbuing it with individualized meaning. According to Geertz, "ritual participants act, whereas those observing them think. In ritual activity, conceptions and dispositions are fused for the participants, which yields meaning."[8] For Geertz, the ritual act is the vehicle for the fusion of thought and action. We learn, therefore, that when ritual fails, it is typically due to disconnect between the community's cultural framework of beliefs and its actual pattern of social interactions.

[7] Catherine Bell, 1992. "Constructing Ritual." In *Readings in Ritual Studies,* edited by Ronald Grimes, 21-33. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996) 21

[8] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) cited in Catherine Bell, "Constructing Ritual." In *Readings in Ritual Studies,* edited by Ronald Grimes, 21-33. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996) 26

TOM DRIVER

In the aptly named "Transformation: The Magic of Ritual," Professor of Theology and Culture at the Union Theological Seminary Tom Driver pushes us to reclaim the power of magic.[9] Driver argues against the common Western tendency to regard magic as superstition; he posits that magic holds the key to meaning in ritual as it evokes moral and social transformation. Driver cites Arnold van Gennep's realization that "without magic, religion is powerless. Since the rites of religion are techniques of transformation, Van Gennep realized, when people divorce religion from magic they end up with metaphysics on the one hand, empirical science on the other, and religion is gone. This is the fate to which most liberal religion in Western society has very nearly come. Having mostly turned away from its own magic, it has little to offer, and its numbers are declining."[10] For Driver, to separate magic from ritual is to divest that very ritual of its meaning.

Driver points out the necessity to see ritual as a performative act. He therefore discusses ritual using the terminology of theater. The example he offers is from the Christian religion: "liturgical vestments are costumes; and bread, wine, baptismal water, pulpit, and Bible are props for Christian worship, in just the same sense as props are used in theater: they are the materials that need to be made ready for the anticipated action. In themselves, they are not much. In the final analysis, it is the action, not the dress that counts."[11]

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[9] Tom Driver, 1991. "Transformation: The Magic of Ritual." In *Readings in Ritual Studies,* edited by Ronald Grimes, 170-187. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996)

[10] Driver, 174

[11] Driver, 178

Part of the transformative magic that Driver speaks of has to do with the ever-evolving life of a ritual. The term "ritual" connotes a sense of unchanging action, unable to transform. Driver however, cautions us against this temptation. Rather, "rituals are in fact not changeless, and the attempt to make them so violates their nature. Instruments of transformation, they are themselves transformed by the processes of which they are a part: 'To perform a ritual the same way twice is to kill it,' said Stanley Walens, 'for the ritual grows as we grow, its life recapitulates the course of ours.'"[12]

STANLEY TAMBIAH

Social anthropologist and Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University Stanley Tambiah's work focuses on the interrelatedness of religious and non-religious rituals, for they share several important features and may, at times, be undistinguishable. In "A Performative Approach to Ritual*,"* he discusses the reasons why one might include ritual in the category of performance.[13] To this end, Tambiah offers the following definition of ritual: "Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)."[14]

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[12] Stanley Whalens, *Feasting with Cannibals,* 1981; cited in Tom Driver, "Transformation: The Magic of Ritual." In *Readings in Ritual Studies,* edited by Ronald Grimes, 170-187. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996) 182

[13] Stanley Tambiah, 1979. "A Performative Approach to Ritual." In *Readings in Ritual Studies,* edited by Ronald Grimes, 495-511. (Upper Saddle Hill, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996)

[14] Tambiah, 497

This definition would suggest that formality, stereotypy, condensation, and redundancies are modes of communication. For Tambiah, ritual has specific components that may be deconstructed in such a way that we may study the elements that make ritual a success or failure.

Tambiah explains that American national ceremonials are often described as "civil religion" for this very reason; these non-religious ritual shares similar elements to religious rituals. "Rituals built around the sacrosanct character of constitutions and legal charters, and wars of independence and liberation, and devoted to their preservation as enshrined truths, or to their invocation as great events have a 'traditionalizing role' and in this sense may share similar constitutive features with rituals devoted to gods or ancestors."[15]

In "A Performative Approach to Ritual" Tambiah provides a thorough analysis of the parts of speech, intonations, and stylistic elements of performances, discussing how each choice made can effect the success or failure of the ritual. For example, Tambiah discusses the notion of parallelism, which he perceives as a device and idiom of formal speech, chanting, and singing, and is common in greetings, farewells, petitions, and courtship overtures. It is, in essence, a modality of speech that connotes a unique, special event or occasion. He connects this with the religious realm in citing the high frequency of parallelism in the utterance of sacred words, healing, communicating with spirits, and determining ritual relationships.[16]

For Tambiah, redundancy is a necessary evil. Human beings are often distracted and do not hear everything in the way that it was meant to be received. Therefore a certain degree of repetition is imperative to audience comprehension.

[15] Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual," 498

[16] Tambiah, 504

Tambiah offers a great deal of wisdom in his ability to take apart a ritual, breaking it down into disparate parts which may be evaluated for efficacy.

BARBARA MEYERHOFF

In "Death in Due Time: Construction of Self and Culture in Ritual Drama," anthropologist Barbara Meyerhoff discusses the connection between religious and secular ritual.[17] Through a description of a public celebration of the ninety-fifth birthday of community leader Jacob Kovitz, Meyerhoff "illuminates a number of aspects of ritual: the distinction, yet interconnection between secular and sacred ritual; the oscillation between planned aspects of ritual and improvised ones; the impact of ritual on time and continuity; the power of ritual to change experience and transform lives; and the capacity of ritual to demonstrate the continuity between one human being and all humanity."[18]

Meyerhoff's thick descriptions not only of the events that occurred, but the participants' reactions to the events, gives the reader a rich understanding of the context of this celebration so that we may fully understand the meaning of these events. As she examines the death of Jacob Kovitz in the middle of the public celebration of his birthday, her main focus remains on how people construct ritual. She posits that, "ritual is prominent in all areas of uncertainty, anxiety, impotence, and disorder. By its repetitive character it provides a message of pattern and predictability. In requiring enactments involving symbols, it bids us to participate in its

[17] Barbara Meyerhoff, 1984. "Death in Due Time: Construction of Self and Culture in Ritual Drama," In *Readings in Ritual Studies,* edited by Ronald Grimes, 393-412. (Upper Saddle Hill, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996)

[18] Meyerhoff, 393

messages, even enacting meanings we cannot conceive or believe; our actions lull our critical faculties, persuading us with evidence from our own physiological experience until we are convinced. In ritual, doing is believing."[19] Thus, the death and the participants' reactions subsequent to that death provide a wonderful mechanism for investigating the construction of ritual.

For Meyerhoff, symbols are extremely important to ritual. She posits that "symbols carry implicit messages, distinguishable from the overt ingredients intended by the designers of ritual; they are part of its creation but not clearly planned or controlled. When they are well chosen and understood, they do their work unnoticed."[20]

ROY A. RAPPAPORT

In his article, "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual," anthropologist Roy A. Rappaport, discusses a more formal approach to ritual.[21] He defines ritual in terms of its "most conservative, or canonical, aspects. For him, sanctity is a quality of discourse, specifically "the quality of unquestionability."[22]

[19] Meyerhoff, "Death in Due Time: Construction of Self and Culture in Ritual Drama," 395

[20] Meyerhoff, 400

[21] Roy A. Rappaport, 1979. "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual*,"* in *Readings in Ritual Studies,* edited by Ronald Grimes, 427-440. (Upper Saddle Hill, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996)

[22] Rappaport, 427

For Rappaport, ritual is a form or structure, "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers."[23] It is not an easy feat to determine what is formal and what is not about ritual. However, increasing the amount of formality surrounding a ritual or rite produces invariance. Second, he clarifies a distinction between *ritual* – the formal, stereotyped aspect of all events, and *rituals,* relatively invariant events dominated by formality.[24]

Rappaport defines "liturgical order" as "includ[ing] not only the fixed sequences of words and acts providing form to individual ritual events, but also to the fixed sequences of rituals that lead men around circles of seasons, along the straight paths that depart from birth and arrive at death, through the alterations of war and peace or along the dream tracks that cross Australian deserts.[25]

For Rappaport, ritual might be characterized by formality but he recognizes that all that is formal is not necessarily ritual. Performance is necessary to ritual; if there is no performance, there is no ritual. A general view he offers is that ritual not only communicates something but is taken by those performing it to be "doing something" as well. The word liturgy comes from the Greek for "public work," meaning something that is done and acted out publicly.

Rituals act as a conduit for the transmission of narratives. But, "whatever else may happen in some human rituals, in all rituals, both human and animal, the participants transmit information concerning their own current physical, psychic, or sometimes social states to

[23] Rappaport, "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual," 428

[24] Rappaport, 428

[25] Rappaport, 430

themselves and to other participants."[26] Particularly in animal rituals, the information content of a type of ritual is exhausted by the messages concerning their current states being transmitted by the participants. In other words, the participants read what they want to read from the greater context of the situation. Additionally, one of ritual's most potent characteristics is that it is not entirely symbolic. Some of it is overt or inherent.[27]

On the topic of words and language selection, Rappaport asserts that "whereas acts and substances represent substantially that which is of the here and now, the words of liturgy can connect the here and now to the past, or even to the beginning of time, and to the future, or even to time's end. In their very invariance the words of liturgy implicitly assimilate the current event into an ancient or ageless category of events, something that speechless gesture, moral substance, or expendable objects alone cannot."[28] Words are power, and in Rappaport's vision, they are undeniably essential.

Rappaport reminds us that acceptance of an act does not necessarily translate to one's belief in an act. However, it is sufficient to establish one's obligation to something greater. Rappaport suggests that the formal acceptance in the absence of something more profound may be fragile, but when it is experienced, "it supports acceptance with conviction or belief."[29] This leads to a feeling of unification with a higher power, a meaningful and poignant experience. "At

[26] Rappaport, "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual," 429

[27] Rappaport, 430

[28] Rappaport, 436

[29] Rappaport, 439

the heart of ritual – its 'atom,' so to speak – is the relationship of performers to their own performances of invariant sequences of acts and utterances which they did not encode."[30]

RONALD GRIMES

In his article, "Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performance," renowned ritual studies scholar Ronald Grimes argues that a rite, like any other cultural event, is likely to be less than perfect and therefore subject to some type of criticism.[31] He offers a typology of "ritual infelicities," and discusses those elements that contribute to their status as "infelicitous." In Grimes' opinion, there are many different lenses through which one can determine the success of a ritual.

In order to illustrate these, Grimes introduces the idea of ritual criticism: "Criticism is a notion nurtured specifically in the humanities, but it has been appropriated in both the social sciences and theology. Ritual criticism is a practice thoroughly entangled with norms, judgments, and evaluation. But whether it is an artistic or scientific practice is a matter of debate."[32]

Grimes raises the question of whether or not ritual can actually *be* evaluated. He advocates for engaging in ritual critique in the same way that one would literature or science. Grimes equates infelicitous performance with ritual failure. This type of performance leaves participants feeling flat, disengaged, or feeling as though no type of transformation has taken place.

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[30] Rappaport, "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual," 441

[31] Ronald Grimes, 1990. "Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances," in *Readings in Ritual Studies,* edited by Ronald Grimes, 279-293. (Upper Saddle Hill, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996)

[32] Grimes, 280

"Ritual is not a single kind of action. Rather, it is a convergence of several kinds we normally think of as distinct. It is an impure genre. Like opera – which includes other genres, for example, singing, drama, and sometimes even dancing – a ritual may include all these and more."[33] The smorgasbord effect makes ritual all the more challenging to evaluate, since it stretches over so many mediums. Additionally, it is difficult to prove that a rite has failed in all different phases and on all levels on which it is critiqued. Hence the need for a rubric with which to evaluate whether or not a ritual has "worked."

Grimes explicates the failures of rites, citing J.L. Austin's work as his foundation for critique.[34] A philosopher of language, Austin provides examples of infelicitous performance related to language. His general categories fall into types: "misfire," "abuses," and "ineffectualities:"

<u>Misfires</u>:

- **Nonplays** - procedures that do not exist, therefore the actions are disallowed. Nonplays fall within a category of legitimacy; According to Grimes, Austen claims they "lack an acceptable conventional procedure."[35] An example of a nonplay would be when "William O. Roberts designed initiation rites for the youth of First Church of Christ in Middletown, Connecticut … a denominational executive responded, 'In Christianity we confirm faith. We do not initiate people.' In his view Christian initiation is a nonplay."[36] For similar reasons, some

[33] Grimes, "Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances," 283

[34] J.L. Austin, "How to Do Things with Words." From the William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University, 1955. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962)

[35] Grimes, 285

[36] Grimes, 285

Jews would say the same of the Reform movement's practice of confirmation, a practice that does not exist in traditional liturgy or text.

- **Misapplications** – Legitimate rites, but the persons and circumstances involved in it are inappropriate," for example, the pomp-and-circumstance funeral and communal feast of a ten year old Javanese boy. The celebratory nature was inappropriate following the death of a child.[37]
- **Flaws** – Ritual procedures that employ incorrect, vague, or inexplicit formulas, including nonverbal or gestural formulas. An example of this would be "a Mescalero Apache [named Look-Around-Walter] believ[ing] that a protective rite failed, allowing him to be struck by two bullets, because he had been singing a deer song instead of the one that properly belonged to him. As soon as he changed his song he was healed."[38]
- **Hitches** – Misexecutions in which the procedures are incomplete.[39] An example of this would be "a librarian [declaring] 'I hereby open this library,' only to discover that the key had broken off in the lock."[40]

<u>Abuses:</u>

- **Insincerities**– An act that is "professed but hollow:" ritual insincerity amounts to saying and doing things without the requisite feelings, thoughts, or intentions. Grimes references the Canadian Kwakiutl who did not believe in shamanism, but who later learned it in order to expose it.[41] The Jewish laws *mitzvah* of the *shofar* may serve as an example of a ritual insincerity as they must be done with the proper intention in order to fulfill the *mitzvah.* Maimonides explains that

[37] Grimes, "Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances," 285

[38] Grimes, 285

[39] Grimes, 285-286

[40] Grimes, 286

[41] Grimes, 286

"A person who occupies himself with blowing the shofar in order to learn does not fulfill his obligation. Similarly, one who hears the shofar from a person who blows it casually does not fulfill his obligation."[42]

- **Breaches** – Failures to follow through; abrogations of ceremonially made promises. In other words, saying that one is going to do something in a rite but then not actually doing it. An example of this would be President Nixon's violation of his oath of office by his involvement in the Watergate scandal.[43]
- **Glosses** – Procedures that hide or ignore contradictions or major issues. "Glossing over conflict is a function that rites proverbially do well" … a gloss must not be too thin or too thick in a ritual act; people must be able to see through it as well as participate in the façade. Clothing, makeup, words, language can all be used as glosses in a rite.
- **Flop** – All the procedures may be done right but the rite fails to resonate;[44] an example of this would be "a retirement ceremony where … the praise was so exaggerated and the jokes so strained that the farewell went flat; it flopped."[45]

Ineffectualities:

- **Violations** – Reflect moral judgments and are often culturally relative. Violations are effective but may also be demeaning. Grimes cites clitoridectomies as an example: "rites such as initiations that deliberately maim or inadvertently degrade are difficult analytically as well as morally."[46]

[42] Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*: *Hilchot Shofar* 2:4

[43] Grimes, "Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances," 286

[44] Grimes, 286-287

[45] Grimes, 286

[46] Grimes, 287

- **Ritual contagion** – Occurs when a rite spills over its own boundaries. It may be effective, but it is uncontained. An example of this would be a person documenting a voodoo rite in Haiti, only to find themselves possessed by the rite they were observing.[47]
- **Ritual "opacity"** – When a ceremony or some element of it is experienced as meaningless; it is unrecognizable, uninterpretable, or fails to communicate some sort of message. For example, performing a ritual in a language foreign to the majority of the community would be an example of a "ritual 'opacity.'"
- **Ritual defeat** – When one performance of ritual invalidates another, through recent memory or live action. For example, a baby that has both a baptism and a *brit milah* would be the subject of a ritual defeat.
- **Ritual omission** – The rite does not fail, rather, one fails to perform it. An example of this would be a person participating in a rite but forgetting or neglecting to utter the key words involved in the act. For example, one may recite the blessings for wine, spices, and fire during a *havdalah* ceremony but fail to conclude the ceremony with "*hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol*;" a critical ritual omission failing to separate the sacred from the mundane.
- **Ritual misframes** – More likely to be committed by outsiders than insiders, the result of misconstruing its genre; missing the point of the act.[48] As Grimes suggests, it is not always easy to tell what one is actually witnessing; therefore, it is quite possible for an observer to misframe the rite. For example, one who attends a *bar mitzvah* who understands the party to be the primary purpose and the ceremony the secondary purpose would be misframing the rite of the *bar mitzvah*.

Grimes goes on to detail several examples of ritual infelicities in the Hebrew Bible. He offers the episode of Moses and Aaron in Egypt, standing in the palace of Pharaoh with his magicians,

[47] Grimes, "Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances," 287

[48] Grimes, 288

as an example of "defeat."[49] For this, Grimes claims, is an episode of "sorcerers and magicians who pit their rites against one another."[50] Grimes also highlights the episode of Cain's offering in the early chapters of Genesis.[51] When God rejects Cain's offering, Grimes calls this an example of ritual "insincerity," claiming that Cain's intentions and thoughts were not appropriate or genuine. Finally, Grimes highlights the well-worn tale of Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son, Isaac. In looking to the animal who eventually found himself the target of the sacrifice, Grimes calls this episode a "misapplication" because the object sacrificed, while intended to be human, became an animal.[52] Further, Grimes calls this episode a "violation," since the act of sacrifice was never completed.[53]

Grimes further examines these acts of ritual infelicity in the Hebrew Bible by examining the story of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, who perished after offering an unplanned or "strange fire" to God.[54] Grimes calls this act a "misfire," but is not clear to us what sort of misfire it is. It is important to know the context in which this episode occurred; did the sons' actions represent insincerity? Was this a result of an unplanned and therefore poorly timed ritual? Grimes links this finally to "contagion," claiming that the performance may have leapt beyond proper, expected boundaries but it is unclear why.

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[49] Exodus 7:8-12

[50] Grimes, "Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances," 289

[51] Genesis 4:3

[52] Genesis 22:13

[53] Authors' Note: This adds to the complicated nature of the reading of the Akedah. Traditional Jewish literature reads this text as a test of Abraham's faith and devotion to God; here, the ram was always intended to be the sacrifice. For Grimes, the intended sacrifice was a human being, Isaac, and therefore the ritual was never completed in the way that it was intended. For Grimes, this was a violation of the ritual act.

[54] Leviticus 10:2

Grimes laments that infelicitous performances often go ignored, claiming that they are essential to understanding and critiquing the impact of ritual. He goes on to explain that infelicitous performances do not necessarily answer the "point-of-view problem, if one imagines there is some universal, meta-ritualistic criterion which, like a meter stick, can be used to measure every rite cross-culturally.[55]" Perspective is everything, and humans, Grimes claims, "resist having their rites, myths, and dreams subject to criticism."[56]

Ronald Grimes also writes on the relationship between ritual and media. "Not long ago," Grimes claims, "the terms 'ritual' and 'media' would have been regarded as labels for separate domains – the one sacred, the other secular; the one term designating a religious activity and the other denoting tools and processes for transferring information. Media not only intruded upon but also profaned rituals." [57] So begins Grimes' take on the presence of media in a ritual act or rite.

He goes on to portray several different examples of this enmeshment of sacred and profane: filming a rite in a documentary style with little to no commentary, TV coverage of a papal mass, a cyberspace wedding, putting one's hand on a television to receive healing power from an evangelist, and so forth. Also included in this category would be taping weddings and *b'nai mitzvah*, live streaming *tefillah* services, etc. Grimes struggles with this conflation of ritual and media, yet he also acknowledges the importance of the connection between the two in the modern era. "We participate in [some of] those events, even though we do so at a distance. In

[55] Grimes, "Ritual Criticism and Infelicitous Performances," 290

[56] Grimes, 291

[57] Ronald Grimes. *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 4

such cases, the event is not just described but made present. The rite reaches toward and includes viewers. No longer mere viewers, we are ritualists, congregants rather than audience members."[58]

Grimes seeks to identify and categorize ritual through the lens of media research: "On the one hand, ritual is used as a synonym for religion and the sacred. On the other, it is identified with anything routine, patterned, or stylized. Defined too narrowly, its relation to ordinary life is obscured. Defined too broadly, its difference from ordinary interaction is occluded."[59] One must be careful and walk a fine line in one's definition of ritual, particularly as it pertains to the presence of media. We often see this issue as synagogues seek to engage twenty-first century congregants. For example, some congregations offer *minyanim* via internet connection. This raises the question of whether ritual viewers from afar contribute to the critical mass of a *minyan*; can they be counted among the ten?

The Conservative Movement says no; one may participate in a *minyan* via internet connection provided that a quorum of ten already exists in a single location.[60] However, upon close analysis of the *halacha* surrounding *minyanim* it becomes clear that the answer may be open to further interpretation. The *Shulchan Aruch* provides the parameters for constituting a *minyan*. The rules are as follows: ten people are constitute a *minyan*; all ten people must be able to see the *shaliach tzibbur* (the leader); all ten people must be in the same space. So long as these stipulations can be met, it is permissible for a *minyan* to be convened over the internet.

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[58] Grimes, *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts,* 5

[59] Grimes, 11

[60] Rabbi Avram Israel Reisner, "Wired to the Kadosh Baruch Hu: Minyan via Internet." *T'shuva* presented to the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly, March 13, 2001

According to UC Santa Barbara Professor Marcos Novak, cyberspace can be defined as *transcending* space and time. Understanding space to be purely physical limits us; it does not allow our minds to encompass the realm of possibilities that are now available to us in understanding the true meaning of space. This definition of space allows us to consider the possibility that one present with a community through the internet is in fact part of the community and may be counted in a *minyan*. If we are to understand cyberspace as "liquid architecture," we allow for the possibility that the remote places from where people connect to our *minyanim* simply are simply extensions of our physical architecture.[61] And so, it would seem that the presence of media and technology in ritual need not be a barrier but rather a conduit for participation. However, though it is permissible, it raises one clear question: does the presence of media enhance the ritual experience or detract from it?

Grimes wonders, when ritual and media meet, "who are the actors? What constitutes on and off stage? Where is the audience? What scripts dictate the performance? If nothing else, performance theories keep us from forgetting the obvious. They call attention to the surfaces upon which we humans inscribe meaning and on the basis of which we act."[62] These questions of what is reality and what is not, what is scripted and what is not, who are the actors and who are not, are all questions inherent in the documentation, evaluation, and critique of ritual.

When individuals are involved in ritual through the lens of a camera, or as bystanders with no role (rather than participants or individuals seated in the place in which the ritual occurs) they "are led to watch ritualists the way they watch animals in a zoo – with fascination at

[61] Deana Sussman, "#InternetMinyan." Paper presented as final exam for Reform Decision Making course through HUC-JIR, May 2013

[62] Grimes. *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts,* 13

occasionally seeing their behavior aped but comfortable in the knowledge that they inhabit a plane of being that is different from that of the animals."[63] It is daunting and somewhat misleading for individuals to be "present" in a ritual but removed from it; this "double impulse" of which Grimes speaks is complicated: "Rites are among the most common occasions on which humans reach for cameras, but they are also one of the occasions during which cameras are most often forbidden. This double impulse, to display and to sequester, has long marked ritual events, and the introduction of media produces additional complexity and interpretive torque into this impulse."[64]

Ronald Grimes also offers a specific, focused take on the field of ritual criticism. In laying a foundation for an understanding of ritual criticism, Grimes first establishes the parameters of the field of ritual studies: "The scope of ritual studies reaches from ritualization among animals through ordinary interaction ritual to highly differentiated religious liturgy. It includes all types of ritual: celebrations, political ceremonies, funerals, weddings, initiations, and so on. Although ritual studies may include textual analysis, it pays primary attention to performance, enactment, and other forms of overt gestural activity."[65] Rituals fall into diverse and complex categories, and the religious liturgy with which it interplays is often complex, as well.

Grimes presents one definition for "rite" and one for "ritual." Grimes claims: "The term 'rite' (from the noun *ritus)* denotes specific enactments located in concrete times and places.

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[63] Grimes, *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts,* 22

[64] Grimes, 26

[65] Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory.* (Waterloo: Ritual Studies International, 2010) 6

Usually, they can be named: *Bar Mitzvah* … Baptism … they are the actions enacted by "ritualists" and observed and studied by ritual studies scholars."[66] From Grimes' definition, a rite is an actual *act;* a ceremony, a passing; something enacted by a leader, whom he calls a ritualist. Separately, "ritual" (from the Latin adjective *ritualis)* here refers to the general idea of which a rite is a specific instance. As such, ritual does not "exist," even though it is what we must try to define; ritual is an idea scholars formulate… ritual is what one defines in formal definitions and characterizations; rites are what people enact."[67] In other words, the rite is the theoretical ritual coming to fruition.

This distinction becomes important to our work as we attempt to evaluate ritual writ large. Thus, the rubric we present in Chapter Two separates the ritual into three distinct parts: the rite, the ritualizer, and the *kahal* (community).

Grimes presents the qualities of ritual, discussing how these affect its success or failure. Among these descriptors: "performed, embodied, enacted, gestural (not merely thought or said); formalized, elevated, stylized, differentiated (not ordinary, unadorned, or undifferentiated); repetitive, redundant, rhythmic (not singular or once-for all) …" and so forth.[68]

The following table presents some of the positive and negative qualities of liturgy, as laid out by Grimes. A sample of these dichotomous categories:

[66] Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory,* 7

[67] Grimes, 8

[68] Grimes, 10

Positive	Negative
Active, energetic, dynamic, moving	Passive, inert, static
Friendly, warm, welcoming, at home, comfortable, personal	Distant, cold, impersonal, formalized
Shared	Private
Communal, assembly-oriented	Individualistic, hierarchical, private[69]

From these categories one gleans that the positive and negative aspects of liturgy are often felt, experienced, and encountered; in other words, it is often challenging to name "the operative vocabulary is nontechnical, nontheological, and not specific to liturgies."[70] In effect, the actual content of the liturgy must exist within a framework of the ritual as a whole.

Grimes presents a particular case study from the "Catholic Liturgical Evaluation of Vatican II." The dense, scholarly document presents a significant setup of liturgical evaluation and ritual critique. Here Grimes presents how the information must be evaluated and with what tools it *can* be critiqued:

- **The instrument** – the questions, checklists, and other devices used on site to evoke memories, reflections, and judgments about recollected rites.

[69] Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory,* 38

[70] Grimes, 38

- **The document** – The reports as organized, summarized, prefaced, and edited by staff, editors, and ghostwriters.
- **Participants' memories and perceptions** – the rites as selectively perceived and partially remembered by those who filled out the forms and wrote the reports.[71]
- **The texts** – official liturgical writings and directives that formed the liturgical enactments.
- **The rites** – The liturgical enactments themselves, which, like all performative genres, are performed in a particular time and place.[72]

In these various selections by Ronald Grimes, we are pushed to extend ourselves beyond the normative categories of ritual. Grimes encourages us to employ the same tactics of critique that one uses in any other social or scientific disciplines; he see ritual as simply a genre amidst other forms of performances.

VANESSA OCHS

Vanessa Ochs is a scholar and ritualist based at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville who focuses on the theory of creating new Jewish rituals in her book, *Inventing Jewish Ritual.* Ochs presents an outstanding argument for, and examples of, creating new Jewish ritual. Ochs breaks the book down into sections, offering several different essential questions to an aspiring ritualist: *what does it mean to be a "ritual innovator?" From where did ritual innovation emerge? What do objects and materials have to do with new ritual? How can we stretch innovation to include tradition, as well? How do we respond to change*? Ochs' chapters are rich

[71] We will not be including this particular tool as part of our ritual evaluation; we fear that it would take away from participant's experience of the ritual.

[72] Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory,* 25

in detail and narrative. They provide the reader with an extensive background on ritual innovation as well as a taste of what that looks like in communities of various Jewish denominations found in North America today.

To be a ritual innovator, one must be a visionary. One example of this is Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, the first woman ordained from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and the first woman to serve a Conservative congregation, who played a role in the creation of a ceremony to celebrate the birth of a Jewish baby girl. Ochs writes, "she saw herself as a responsible Jew taking logical, ordinary steps totally in keeping with the spirit of ancient tradition."[73] Rabbi Sasso shares: "It should be nothing out of the ordinary, but it is. It is 1970 and such a ceremony has never been done before. We don't think of ourselves as making history, but as making holy a moment that has long yearned for sanctification. What is more amazing than our living room experiment is that some thirty years later covenantal ceremonies for daughters are being enacted in living rooms and synagogues across the country."[74]

Ochs details a story of her own encounter with ritual innovation. Her husband, a professor, asked her to "make a ritual for the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim graduate students who helped [him] move all [his] books into [his] new office at school."[75] In response, Ochs created a housewarming activity in which guests were instructed to bring objects from their traditions that might bring blessing into the Ochs' new home. As academics, Ochs and her husband try to "open up our Jewish communities so we can share them with the friends who

[73] Vanessa Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2007) 2

[74] Ochs, 2

[75] Ochs, 3

make up our community. Otherwise, they would just be witnesses to our curious Jewish ways and we would not know their support."[76] Their way of doing this is through ritual. In this example of ritual innovation, the couple encouraged guests to bring objects from their own traditions and share them with those gathered for the ritual. Together, they created an "interactive *mezuzah*," where people wrote blessings in the words of their own tradition, rolled them up, and inserted them into a folder beneath the *mezuzah* itself.

Ochs goes on to introduce the "Jewish Ritual Toolbox," a tangible guide for assembling meaningful and intentional new Jewish ritual. One compartment of this metaphorical toolkit holds texts such as biblical passages, teachings of the sages, folktales, and prayer liturgies. Jewish and Hebrew poems and songs also fall into this category. These texts may be quoted whole or reworded, and/or given new emphases to reflect contemporary sensibilities and situations. A second compartment holds familiar and resonant Jewish ritual actions and objects. Typical actions include blessing, praying, singing, lighting candles, memorializing, smashing a glass, standing under a canopy, etc. A third compartment holds enduring, core Jewish 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, etc.[77]

On the topic of her own experience with ritual innovation, Ochs writes: "… I did not become a ritual innovator overnight. I had to learn to honor good faith efforts made to celebrate and transmit Judaism. I needed to recognize that even clumsy or misguided efforts held redemptive

[76] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* 3

[77] Ochs, 6

possibility – if only for the innovator. Less successful ritual practices would fade away. Even the innovations that were misguided, even crude or tasteless, would not destroy "the whole thing." Successful practices might catch on, grow in popular acceptance, and become legitimized and promoted by rabbis. But neither the endurance of a new ritual nor rabbinic approval defined its success. A meaningful ritual might be created by just one person drawing upon Jewish tradition. Even just once."[78]

Sometimes, the creation of a new ritual can evoke feelings of awkwardness or unfamiliarity. Ochs writes, "witnessing ritual works-in-progress in those earlier days, I noticed the rough transitions, the awkwardness of improvisation, the difficulty of being moved by a practice that came with no memory of having done it before. When an innovation felt especially uncomfortable to me, the feeling was visceral, almost like disgust, something I couldn't always think away. I was irritated when an innovation took place without my being given fair warning or the chance to step out… but, I discovered I could modulate my response…. I could give them a chance."[79] Ochs highlights the need for openness and flexibility when introducing people to new ways of accessing ritual.

Ochs adds that a natural ritual is one that seems as if it has always been done this way. She writes, "For me, a natural ritual was one that *seemed* to be so old and distant from the here and now that it felt timeless: this is what made the ritual have the patina of venerability: full of power and resonance, it demanded to be preserved."[80]

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[78] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* 13

[79] Ochs, 28

[80] Ochs, 29

But what led us to this period rich with ritual innovation? Ochs posits a combination of factors: what has made the field swell and expand in the last forty years has been "the spiritual stance shaped by democracy and open access … and the dramatic change brought by Jewish feminism."[81] As Ochs sees it, the growth of catalog Judaism and the impact of Jewish feminism each laid the foundation for this growing field of ritual innovation.

Jewish catalogs essentially offered Jews a "plethora of accessible tools to those who embraced counter-culturalism, communicated an ideology born out of the movements for peace, civil rights, women's rights, ecology, and consumerism. You did not have to be an expert or depend upon others to make the world a better place … you, yourself, had the right to challenge inherited traditions and to penetrate formerly mystifying passages."[82] Judaism was in the hands of its owners, capable of being shaped and determined by Jews themselves, and not the institution of Judaism writ large. These catalogs convinced modern Jews that they had a choice when it came to their practice. If they were dissatisfied with something, they were allowed to stretch it. They were encouraged to push its boundaries, particularly when it came to gender and observance.

Jewish feminism was one of the first movements to push the ritual envelope in a significant way. "Jewish feminists have alternated between two approaches: adaptation of existing rituals and creation of new ones. In adaptation, the Jewish practices men have traditionally performed are made available to women. Feminists critical of adaptive rituals (sometimes referred to as "add women and stir") have questioned the value of putting their energies into either making

[81] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* 39

[82] Ochs, 40

women's versions of the already existing, privileged rituals that Jewish men are performing, or fighting for the right to perform those rituals in communities that forbid them to do so."[83] Years of negotiating between these two tensions have forced feminists to articulate their ideas on what Jewish women's spirituality could look like.

Ochs presents a number of characteristics that unite these new rituals for Jewish women:

- Marking the unmarked
- Fostering community
- Allowing for improvisation and personalization
- Privileging the spirituality of the individual over that of the entire Jewish people
- Taking place in less regulated space
- Being self-explanatory and easy to use
- Allowing for spontaneity
- Promoting a Jewish women's agenda

These characteristics[84] resoundingly echo the sentiment that Judaism is an entity that can be pushed, stretched, and built upon. "As Deborah Nussbaum Cohen explains in her guide, 'we don't feel so much that we are breaking from Jewish tradition as much as we are building upon it, extending it, creating the next chapter of our prayer books.'"[85]

Ochs cautions against neglecting our blind spots in ritual. She writes, "Just as our interests shape the way we construct our narratives of new ritual, so do our blind spots. For instance, I

[83] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* 47

[84] A feminist rite may encompass one of more of these characteristics and functions

[85] Debra Nussbaum Cohen, *Celebrating Your New Jewish Daughter: Creating Jewish Ways to Welcome Baby Girls into the Covenant."* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001) cited in Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2007) 54

tend to assume people from all backgrounds should be made to feel welcome in the context of a new Jewish ritual. Thus, in narrating a new ritual, I might fail to chronicle how being attentive to the presence of non-Jews and unaffiliated Jews may have played a significant role in its construction or performance."[86] Ochs essentially advocates for being aware of one's blind spots; to be careful, open and present to the need for authenticity in the creation of new ritual.

Symbolism in ritual becomes increasingly important for Ochs. She reminds us that we must "… understand how the study of material culture can illuminate our understanding of the role objects play in new Jewish rituals."[87] Some people assume that the creation of new ritual begins with the object used when in reality, the opposite is true. Ochs gives the example of a couple who had recently adopted a baby and sought a naming ritual. They asked, explaining that "*I* [We] *want to create a Jewish ritual to welcome our adopted baby. What do we need to say and do? What do we need to get?"*[88]

Ochs says "the creation of new ritual is usually far more complex than this orderly, belief-driven scenario. A new ritual practice can emerge *because* a concrete object has been created, borrowed, or transformed. *After* a practice has been reenacted over time, a set of beliefs might emerge."[89] Ochs goes on to use the example of Debbie Friedman's renowned *Mi Shebeirach,* calling the song itself a kind of artifact that gave rise to a practice now repeated throughout Reform congregations in North America. Yet, Friedman's *Mi Shebeirach* is not simply a catchy song that existed and was adopted by Reform Jews. The song reflected something that "the Jews

[86] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* 83

[87] Ochs, 87

[88] Ochs, 87

[89] Ochs, 89

in the pews" wanted to articulate even though some of the rabbis found it theologically problematic. The popularity of the song was representative of a deeper need of the community that somehow became encapsulated in this seminal piece of liturgy.

Material culture is defined by anthropologist James Dietz in functionalist terms as being comprised of "objects used by humans to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, and to benefit our state of mind."[90] In our context "functionalism means an analytical tendency in sociology, anthropology, and certain forms of psychology such as behaviorism to understand social institutions, activities, and processes by observing their objective consequences and their impact on the social system as a whole."[91] Functionalism operates on the principle that "in every type of civilization, every custom, material object, idea and belief fulfills some vital function, has some task to accomplish, represents an indispensable part within a working whole."[92]

According to Ochs, material culture is important because of the messages it contains. The choices we make when purchasing food and clothing, how we give gifts, prepare meals, take photographs, plant gardens, collect souvenirs, and go house hunting all tell a story of who we are and what matters to us. So too is this true for religious studies. Currently, the focus in material culture studies has shifted to questions of how things matter, to whom do they matter, and in what ways? These are not merely functionalist questions.

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[90] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* 90

[91] Rabbi Dr. Rachel Adler, "Functionalism." Unpublished article, Los Angeles, November 2013.

[92] *Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* 2nd ed., s.v. "Functionalism in Sociology"

Many social scientists who study religion are functionalists. They seek to answer the question "What social functions does religion perform for society?" In looking at a Shabbat service, for example, some social scientists might look for integrative functions, which are observable consequences of the service. Here, they might posit that the service functions to "bring the group together, to affirm group identity, and to rehearse the values of Judaism so that these values continue to be inculcated in group members."[93] Other social scientists might believe that the service meets the psychological needs of the community.

The problem, however, with using functionalism as a lens to study religion is that religion, as a whole, cannot be empirically verified. "There is something about religion that is irreducible and not objectively measureable: the experience of the sacred or the numinous, the sense of having touched some ultimate reality that is not usually accessible."[94]

On studying new ritual through the lens of material culture, Ochs offers the Hebrew word *kedushah* as a conduit: "Religious people are intimately acquainted with material culture: ordinary objects such as bread, wine, hats, shawls, chairs, golden rings, and roasted eggs create, express, embody, and reflect sacredness. For sacredness, one could substitute such words as holiness, sanctity, separateness, and specialness. Or one could use the Jewish term that describes all abstract and concrete movements towards sacredness: *kedushah."*[95] The task of striving for *kedushah* often imbues holy objects with meaning.

Ochs claims that traditional Jewish objects fall into one of four distinct categories. They are:

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[93] Adler, "Functionalism"

[94] Adler, "Functionalism"

[95] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual*, 93

- ***Klei Kodesh*** – Holy Objects
- ***Tashmishei Kedushah*** – Accouterments of the *klei kodesh;* the objects associated with the *klei kodesh.* For example, the linen clothing of the ancient priests; these could only be used for another holy purpose. Therefore, rather than disposing of the worn out linen of the *kohahim*, it was used to make wicks for the *menorah.*
- ***Tashmishei Mitzvah*** – Ritual implements. Unlike holy objects, these objects do not have sanctity in themselves. For example: one is permitted to throw away a *lulav* and *etrog* after Sukkot. However, *minhagim* (customs) have emerged to treat them like *tashmishei kodesh*; *lulavim* are used to fire the oven to bake *matzah* for Passover and the *etrogim* are made into jam or liqueur to be consumed on *Tu B'Shvat*.
- ***Reshut*** – Optional ritual implements. These "quasi-sacred objects" have no inherent sanctity, as they are not required by law in order to fulfill a mitzvah. For example, a cup for washing one's hands and saying the *b'racha* (blessing).

Ochs clarifies the difference between explicitly Jewish objects and implicitly Jewish objects. Objects that are explicitly Jewish can facilitate, instigate, and suggest Jewish ways of being. They establish Jewish identities and serve as reminders that the setting one occupies is Jewish. Objects that are implicitly Jewish, by contrast, do not readily reveal the Jewish work they do. It is not always clear that they designate people or places as being Jewish, as signs do. They are not overt creators of Jewish ways of being and doing, as catalysts are. Still, these objects may participate in the literal fulfillment of *mitzvot*.[96]

New Jewish objects serve to act as agents of change and stability. These new Jewish objects introduce, retell sacred stories, generate rules and spiritual possibilities, make rituals tangible,

[96] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* 108-109

provide assurance and comfort, appeal to those on the fringes, and address communal needs.[97] In more ways than these, Jewish objects serve to root ritual. With the creation of new rituals in particular, objects anchor the creative acts in which ritualists engage.

Ochs maintains that, even with the stretching of ritual to include new and innovative ritual, "Judaism is sustained by our capacity to innovate while maintaining and cherishing the practices and commitments of the past."[98] For example, the Torah will always be the Torah. Even if individuals today *access* the Torah differently than in the past, (through technology, spoken word, theater pieces, etc.) the Torah will always remain our *Etz Chayim*, our tree of life. Its identity and significance to Judaism remains unchanged.

In looking at today's modern rituals, Ochs notes that the stretching of ritual has now spread the proverbial canopy far enough that Jews today think that "this is the way things have always been done" for some new rituals. "Lightning now strikes, so to speak, not for performing the new rituals but for failing to perform them."[99] Additionally, Ochs makes the poignant quote that "What is utterly novel today may be the traditional Judaism of tomorrow… The expansive mode of Jewish ritual innovation has embraced Jews of all definitions, all denominations, and all levels of affiliation and identification."[100] The future holds endless possibilities for those wishing to have Judaism play a meaningful role in their lives.

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[97] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* 109

[98] Ochs, 115

[99] Ochs, 116

[100] Ochs, 117

In creating new ritual, the ritualist must be aware of the potential for participants to resist; they must then enter into a period of acclimation. Ochs asks the reader to consider, how might humans respond to ritual innovation? How does change resonate with all individuals, or with Jews specifically?

Ochs posits: "All religions with deep historical roots are works in progress, and Judaism is no exception… Sociologist Wade Clark Roof reminds us, 'Religion is socially produced, or more accurately, we might say it is constantly being reproduced. Far from being handed down from the heavens, religious symbols, beliefs, and practices are created and then maintained, revised, and modified by the often self-conscious actions of human beings."[101] Furthermore, "Invented tradition refers to "a set of ritual or symbolic practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, and which automatically imply continuity with the past."[102] According to Ochs, this is how tradition flows and grows.

Ochs goes on to remind us of the extraordinary creativity and flexibility of the Talmudists. They sanctioned the overt borrowing of what was "outside" by looking to their non-Jewish neighbors for comparison, and legitimizing the innovative practices becoming more popular among the general public. As Ochs points out, *Brachot* 45a and *Eruvin* 14b each state: "*puk*

[101] Walter Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 79, cited in Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2007) 139

[102] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* 141

hazei mai amma davar: look around, and see what the people are actually doing. Then legislate it." [103]

As Ochs points out, rabbis and community leaders are often unable to direct or curtail the ritual innovations of *amcha,* the people, especially when many practices take place outside the synagogue. Ochs summarizes this point by reminding us that the rabbis follow the people, citing the above Talmud statement for gravitas. As far as who is in charge, it is community specific: Ochs speaks of the CCAR (the Central Conference of American Rabbis), the ritual committees of synagogues, the rabbis of synagogues, and community leaders… However, "no one is *really* in charge of determining what intellectual, financial, and spiritual resources ought to address rituals that are absent or functioning weakly."[104] This is a community effort; something that requires the presence of many in order to enact and entice change for the future.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Taken together, these theorists have profoundly impacted our work as we engage in the study of ritual and ritual innovation. Whether we agree or disagree with these theorists is unimportant in evaluating their usefulness, for each has offered insights that have pushed us to expand our own theory of ritual.

Victor Turner's work in the realms of liminality and communitas has been hugely important to our work as we construct our own ideology of ritual innovation. In the fieldwork we

[103] Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual,* 149 (Authors' Translation)

[104] Ochs, 146

have done throughout rabbinical school, liminality has presented itself as *the* essential indicator for a need for a lifecycle ritual in some capacity. For example, during a synagogue Women's Retreat, the topic of liminality arose multiple times throughout the weekend.[105] In each instance, the women were astounded to find that there was a name for the very situation they found themselves in in various key moments of their lives: neither here nor there, in betwixt and in between. Liminality is an essential factor in determining the need to mark time as sacred and separate.

Additionally, Turner presents the idea of community as an essential component of ritual. He references Martin Buber's I-Thou theory in explaining that communitas transcends individuality.[106] According to Turner, "Buber lays his finger on the spontaneous, immediate, concrete nature of communitas, as opposed to the norm-governed, institutionalized, abstract nature of social structure."[107] In our work, we strive to mark moments of liminality and create a feeling of communitas amongst the individuals present at lifecycle rituals. It is our belief that the connection to a greater entity – God, community, synagogue, family, peoplehood – is essential in a ritual act.

Tom Driver speaks to the magic of ritual, a component we believe is essential to ritual theory and innovation. He cites Arnold van Gennep, stating that an absence of magic renders religion powerless. He asserts that ritual is very much a performance involving props, roles, and

[105] Fieldwork, Central Reform Congregation of St. Louis Women's Retreat, July 2013 (D. Sussman)

[106] Martin Buber, *I and Thou,* Translated by Walter Kaufmann. Reprinted in 1996. (New York: Touchstone, 1970)

[107] Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 95

costumes or vestments. Just as he believes Christian worship requires this, so too do we believe Jewish life cycle ritual requires a certain amount of "magic" in its performance.

Stanley Tambiah is important to our work on ritual criticism, specifically with regards to ritual critique. He claims that speech, intonation, and stylistic elements affect the success or failure of a ritual, an idea that resonates deeply for us. In many rituals, it is the ritualizer who is at the helm, steering a rite of passage through its transformative elements and into a new place. The presence, skill, and style of this ritualizer is hugely significant in determining success or failure. Stylistic and linguistic choices in the liturgy and ceremonial language are equally as important.

Barbara Meyerhoff speaks to the importance of symbols and symbolism in ritual. In her research she claims that symbols carry messages; a seamless incorporation of symbolism into a ritual act yields success. Meyerhoff also posits that the sacred and the secular can and should be interconnected. In our work, we seek to individualize the life cycle ritual and therefore, meaningful moments cross from the secular sphere to the sacred.

Roy Rappaport posits a theory of formality with regards to ritual. For Rappaport, ritual is a form or structure; a fixed order. Performance is necessary to ritual; if there is no performance, there is no ritual. We understand the desire for formality in ritual, but we do not believe that it is absolutely necessary in all circumstances. In our experience, some of the most powerful rituals have been spontaneous, informal, or more relaxed in nature.

Rappaport claims that the invariance in liturgy and text is what underscores a ritual's authenticity; we believe that going "off script" can be equally as powerful and potentially transformative, though it is important that it is somehow rooted in Jewish tradition or text.

Ronald Grimes contributes a great deal to the conversation surrounding ritual writ large, ritual theory, and ritual criticism. Grimes is among the few people to raise the question of whether a ritual can be critiqued and evaluated; ultimately he argues that rituals can and should be critiqued in the same way one would evaluate literature or science. He offers a tremendous amount of insight on what constitutes success or failure through the lens of ritual critique. He speaks to the ideas of boundaries, performative properties, definitions, and distinctions (particularly with regards to the difference between a "rite" and a "ritual," used in our work to achieve clarity between ritual as a concept and the act of the rite itself). Grimes' work (as discussed at length in the body of this chapter), has been crucial to our research as we seek to evaluate ritual.

While we appreciate what Grimes is offering, we are skeptical of his examples of infelicitous ritual. He seems to label rituals as infelicitous without providing the necessary details to explain his categorization. We find that his readings of infelicitous performances oftentimes lack the detail necessary to explain his points of view. However, the categories of infelicitous performance can be quite useful in critiquing and evaluating ritual. Grimes provides a framework for critiquing ritual and begins the conversation of how and why ritual may or may not work for people. Though Grimes' categories lack specificity, we intend to make use of them as we engage in the process of ritual evaluation.

Vanessa Ochs poses the questions which guide our work as a whole and help us to clarify our goals with this project. We see her essential questions as including:

- *What does it mean to be a ritual innovator?*

- *From where does ritual innovation emerge?*
- *How can we stretch innovation to include tradition and vice versa?*
- *How do we respond to change?*

Additionally, Ochs introduces the idea of the "Jewish Ritual Toolbox," encouraging and authenticating ritual innovation. The very idea that one has the "tools" with which to build, develop, and play with ritual is unfamiliar to most North American Jewish communities; a viewpoint that we can validate after countless interactions in our rabbinic fieldwork. It is our hope to incorporate and expand upon Ochs' work and introduce our own findings and ideas on the topic of ritual innovation.

The commonality between all of these theorists is that they are engaged in the conversation of how ritual can and should be meaningful to individuals and communities. Essentially, all are contributing to the idea that Grimes makes clear: that ritual can be critiqued and evaluated; there are indeed successful rituals and rituals which fall flat. There are those, like Rappaport, who have a more formal, concrete understanding of ritual; others, like Ochs, push the envelope and encourage creativity and flexibility. Altogether, each of these theorists helps to paint the picture of ritual for us as we move into the next phase of our fieldwork.

CHAPTER TWO: SURVEYING THE FIELD

The first chapter of our thesis focused on the abstract theory behind ritual, rites of passage, innovation, measures of success, and critique. Chapter One was our opportunity to synthesize and contribute to the field of ritual theory, and it set the framework for the next two chapters. Chapter Two represents our fieldwork. Within the body of this chapter, we will report, analyze, and interpret our findings. Chapter Three will build on our research – both academically and in the field – focusing specifically on ritual innovation.

Chapter Two aims to highlight how today's clergy engages in lifecycle rituals. It is a compilation of our field research. It includes interviews, our rubric, ritual evaluations (rubrics and narrative assessments), synagogue workshops, and a survey taken by clergy representing a variety of denominations and geographic locations throughout North America and Israel.. Among the questions we have asked: How do these rabbis and cantors conceptualize the idea of ritual? Where and when do they innovate, if at all? What are their struggles with lifecycle ritual and its innovation? How does the community with whom they work influence their choices? What are their measures of success? What are the qualities or identifying factors of a "successful" ritual? These are the questions we seek to answer in this chapter.

Those with whom we engaged in our fieldwork - whether through workshops, our survey, interviews, or observations - represent a diverse sampling of American Jewish life: men and women, gay and straight, young and not-so-young, traditional and progressive. Each participant in our thesis research had his/her own understandings of ritual and was open and willing to share

his or her vision with us. We felt honored to participate in these sacred conversations and were repeatedly reminded of the deep and lasting impact of Jewish lifecycle rituals.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

According to Rabbi Tali Zelkowicz, Ph.D., "surveys are the primary research tool of sociologists and demographers."[108] One must think carefully about what factors will be reliable and valid indicators that will speak to the topic at hand. During our fieldwork, we engaged in both qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research answers the questions of how things happen and why they happen. Quantitative research indicates how much of it happened. Our interviews and workshops represent qualitative data whereas our rubric, accompanying observations, and survey constitute our quantitative research.

The essential questions that drove this research include:

- How do we evaluate ritual?
- How do we explore the intersection of belief and observance?
- Which tools might help us ascertain the elements that render a ritual meaningful and/or successful?
- Can a rubric help in evaluating these findings?
- What is it that makes a ritual "Jewish?"

[108] Rabbi Tali Zelkowicz, PhD., Class Lecture, September 8, 2011

CLERGY SURVEY

Our survey for ordained rabbis and cantors on ritual had one primary aim and many secondary aims. The central aim of our survey was to shed light on the way in which rabbis and cantors in the field view, conceive of, and perform lifecycle rituals. The secondary goals were as follows:

- To gain insight on trends and commonalities with regards to modern lifecycle rituals across denominational lines
- To gauge how rabbis and cantors define ritual in their own terms
- To question how and in what ways external forces (beyond the ritualizer) influence the development and/or execution of a lifecycle ritual
- To unpack how congregants and clergy engage in conversation surrounding the lifecycle rituals that take place in their communities
- To ascertain what characteristics are most important in creating a successful or impactful lifecycle ritual

We cast the widest net possible with this survey while recognizing the limitations of time and social media. Our survey was done through SurveyMonkey, an online survey generator (www.surveymonkey.com). We sent out direct email invitations to clergy with whom we work and those with whom we have personal connections. Additionally, we posted links to the survey on various social media platforms, namely Facebook and Twitter. The survey was further spread by word-of-mouth from survey participants, as well as social media.

The majority of our respondents were Reform rabbis, which makes sense given our personal backgrounds, access, and connections. Our survey engaged male and female rabbis,

some at the beginning of their careers and others nearing retirement. We spoke with pulpit rabbis and cantors and non-pulpit rabbis and cantors; clergy from major metropolitan centers and small towns, as well.

Our sample size amounted to fifty-four participants. The following represents the breakdown of their gender, denomination, profession, and whether they work in a pulpit or non-pulpit position:

- 21 men, 33 women
- 42 Reform, 8 Conservative, 2 Reconstructionist, 2 Orthodox
- 45 Rabbis, 9 Cantors
- 43 pulpit positions, 11 non-pulpit positions

The first question asked rabbis to identify themselves and their contact information. The eleven questions that followed and their results are presented and interpreted in the following pages:

QUESTION #2: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF "RITUAL?"

- 21 respondents – 39.62% - stated "a rite – a ceremonial act or actions"
- 0 respondents – 0% - stated "a tradition whose authority stems from its fixed nature"
- 2 respondents – 3.77% - stated "an opportunity for creativity or innovation"
- 4 respondents – 7.55% - stated "a joyous or solemn occasion celebrated either publicly or privately"

- 26 respondents – 46%– stated "other"
- 1 abstained

Of those respondents who answered "other," each respondent offered his or her take on what constitutes a "ritual." For some, the answer was in a combination of all four answer choices. One respondent articulated: "I would say a combination of all of the above. It is a way to mark time that allows for a sense of transformation, and should include both a connection to tradition and an expression of the individuals for which the ritual is performed" (Respondent #12). In other words, for this respondent –a Reform rabbi—the answer lies in the in-between spaces of these particular boundaries of ritual as stated by us, the survey authors.

Other respondents related their answer to personal values. One respondent wrote that a ritual is "an action symbolizing deeply held values" (Respondent #14). This rabbi did not go on to explain what values those were, or from where they originated. However, this rabbi frequently performs life cycle rituals – over ten a month – and noted that he "always" takes a lifecycle ritual written down and adds his own embellishments. Another rabbi – a member of the Progressive Movement in Israel – added her take on the idea of deeply-held values. She wrote that a ritual is "a custom that often reinforces a value," (Respondent #50) but again, added no explanation of what that value actually is or how to define it.

A few more respondents noted that their definition of ritual was linked to holiness, to God's presence, or to the elevation of one's personal experience. A Reform rabbi wrote, "While a ritual is all of the above, I believe it is about creating a space for personal or communal elevation" (Respondent #54). Another respondent – a Chabad rabbi – stated that a ritual is "a religious observance that brings G-d's holiness into the world" (Respondent #46). An American Reform

rabbi living in Israel answered in the following way: "[A ritual is] a spiritual act that moves someone through a religious rite" (Respondent #27).

Altogether, 46% our respondents conveyed a belief that a ritual cannot be clearly defined through one distinct definition.

QUESTION #3: ON AVERAGE, HOW MANY LIFECYCLE RITUALS DO YOU PERFORM PER MONTH?

- 23 respondents—43.40%—reported "0-3" per month
- 11 respondents—20.75% —reported "4-6" per month
- 14 respondents—26.42%—reported "7-10" per month
- 5 respondents—9.43%—reported "10+" per month
- 1 respondent abstained

These survey results show that a clear majority of those surveyed perform only 0-3 lifecycle events per month. However, similar numbers report doing either 4-6 or 7-10 rituals per month. Very few reported performing ten or more each month. Given that 43 out of our 54 clergy members work in pulpit positions, this evidence is interesting, suggesting that there might not be a strong correlation between the number of lifecycle rituals one performs and the nature of one's professional position.

In examining the correlation between number of lifecycle rituals performed per month and openness to innovation in lifecycle rituals, the results proved somewhat inconclusive. Of the 23 respondents who reported performing 0-3 lifecycle rituals per month, 9 reported that they were mostly open to innovation, and 9 reported that they were very open. Of those who reported that

they perform 7-10 lifecycle rituals per month, 4 reported that they were mostly open to innovation and 8 reported that they were very open to change. It would seem then, that there is no correlation between the number of lifecycle rituals that one performs and his/her openness to innovation. This strengthens our theory that openness to innovation is a theological preference, not something one does in order to alleviate monotony and boredom.

QUESTION #4 – "WHAT RESOURCE(S) DO YOU TYPICALLY USE TO FACILITATE A LIFECYCLE RITUAL?" (RESPONDENTS WERE FREE TO CHECK ALL THAT APPLIED TO THEM)

- 41 respondents – 75.93% - use a progressive or liberal rabbi's or cantor's manual
- 27 respondents – 50% - use a conservative or traditional rabbi's or cantor's manual
- 32 respondents – 59.26% - use an alternative source, such as Ritual Well
- 43 respondents – 79.63% - use their own personal resource (written, published, and/or improvised)
- 14 respondents – 25.93% - noted "other."

Of the rabbis and cantors who responded to our survey, the clear majority were Reform clergy. So, it is not surprising that the largest percentages of clergy use a progressive or liberal rabbi's or cantor's manual and/or an alternative resource, such as Ritual Well. However, these numbers also indicate that the rabbis and cantors who took this survey often use multiple sources when crafting lifecycle rituals.

For those who noted "other," there were some unique answers. Respondent #46 simply wrote "*Halacha*," but gave no further explanation or example; respondent #51 wrote "*Shulchan Aruch*," and respondent #50 wrote "*siddur*," again with no examples. Respondent #39 wrote "old

prayer books written by women in German," but with no explanation.[109] And respondent #17 wrote, "other resources from the internet."

Many respondents spoke of more commonly used alternative sources, such as Rabbi Naomi Levy's collections of prayers, LGBTQ articles and resources, and materials that speak specifically to women and the female experience. These responses seem to corroborate our hypothesis that many important lifecycle moments fall outside the bounds of traditional Jewish rituals, highlighting a deep-seated need for ritual innovation.

These responses indicate not only that these clergy use multiple resources to conduct a lifecycle event, but also that they are open to using less formal, alternative methods of shaping a rite of passage. We posit that their answers spoke to a deep curiosity and investment in creating the most meaningful and resonant lifecycle experience possible for their audience, whether an individual or an entire community.

QUESTION #5: HOW OPEN ARE YOU, AS A MEMBER OF THE CLERGY, TO INNOVATION AND/OR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ALTERNATIVE LIFECYCLE RITUALS?

- 0 respondents—0 % - stated "not open"
- 10 respondents—19.23% - stated "somewhat open"
- 19 respondents—36.54% - stated "mostly open"
- 23 respondents—44.23% - stated "very open"
- 2 respondents abstained

[109] We believe that this respondent was referring to the Yiddish *tekhines* literature. See for example, Devra Kay, *Seyder Tkhines: The Forgotten Book of Common Prayer for Jewish Women* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004) and Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women* (Boston: Beacon, 1998).

The responses to this question are key in understanding how modern-day clergy approach Jewish ritual. An overwhelming percentage reported that they were "mostly open" or "very open" to innovation and implementation of lifecycle rituals. As noted in Question 3, this preference has nothing to do with the number of lifecycle rituals these clergy members perform per month.

Similarly, the respondent's denomination of Judaism does not always affect his or her degree of openness to innovation. Of the two Orthodox rabbis who responded to our survey, one reported that he felt "somewhat open, provided that it conforms with *halacha"* (Respondent #46). The other reported that he is "very open provided that the ritual must be in the parameters of *halacha*" (Respondent #51).

Very few offered commentary on their answers. Some used the comments to bolster their degree of openness, like Respondent #54 who said "innovate or die," or Respondent #38, who said "love it." Others used the comments to offer caveats to their degree of openness. For example, Respondent #32 reported that she feels "very open" to ritual innovation provided that it is "within reason and not anything goes." Respondent #4 explained that she is "very open" but clarifies that, "some rituals I believe should remain fixed: i.e I do not believe that a *Bar or Bat Mitzvah* should take place other than in a synagogue or in Israel. I am very open about the rest of lifecycle rituals."

From this we glean that modern day clergy members seem, in large part, to be open to ritual innovation and implementation. They see themselves, by and large, as mostly or very open and comfortable with innovation, yet there is some degree of variance about what, precisely, innovation means. Some seem to indicate that innovation knows no bounds, others seem to

express that their openness does not indicate that they are willing to abandon the core practices and laws that they see as contributing to a ritual's authenticity.

QUESTION #6: FROM YOUR PERSPECTIVE, HOW OPEN IS THE COMMUNITY WITH WHOM YOU WORK TO INNOVATION OR CREATIVITY IN LIFECYCLE RITUALS?

- 0 respondents—0% - stated "not open"
- 17 respondents—32.08% - stated "somewhat open"
- 23 respondents –43.40% - stated "mostly open"
- 13 respondents—24.53% - stated "very open"
- 1 respondent abstained

Given the responses to Question #5, these answers were a bit curious. While the majority of clergy reported that they are "mostly open" or "somewhat open" these same clergy members reported that they believe their communities are less open to innovation and implementation of alternative lifecycle rituals than they are.

Only 11 respondents provided commentary to their answers. One respondent, Respondent #52, explains that he "finds lay Jews to be far less open to ritual innovation than rabbis. For many things, doing it 'the right way' is an important expression of connection to the tradition. Changing it up seems to threaten that sensibility." Others, like Respondent #54, indicated that communities aren't knowledgeable about innovation because their clergy have not educated them: "I don't think many people realize what COULD be—because they are so used to WHAT is…or don't feel they have the skills to own their own Judaism. It's easy to get bogged down in the daily life of a rabbi and just open the CCAR Rabbis Manual without adding your [own]

kavanah. The daily challenge of the rabbinate is to create time and space to elevate and specialize rituals."

Others indicate that their communities are quite open to change, perhaps even too open. We learned that sometimes a community's lack of knowledge hinders their openness to ritual innovation, yet other clergy members believe this might sometimes serve to bolster a community's openness. For example, Respondent #26 explains that her community is "rather uncritically open. In fact, I can introduce them to very traditional rites that they've never heard of by presenting them as innovations." Others suggest that their community is very open not due to lack of knowledge, but rather because they are thirsty for innovation: "Our Campaign for Youth Engagement made it clear that many want individualization in their publicly celebrated rituals" (Respondent #13).

QUESTION #7 – "TO WHAT DEGREE DOES THE COMMUNITY WITH WHOM YOU WORK (INCLUDING COMMITTEES AND LAY LEADERSHIP) INFLUENCE THE CHOICES YOU MAKE REGARDING LIFECYCLE RITUALS?"

- 11 respondents – 21.15% - stated "not at all"
- 32 respondents – 61.54% - stated "somewhat"
- 8 respondents – 15.38% - stated "often"
- 1 respondent – 1.92% - stated "always"
- 2 respondents abstained

These findings indicate that most survey respondents – over 82% - are largely able to avoid direct influence from committees and lay leadership. In short, we posit that specifically for

clergy working on the pulpit in a congregational setting, a rabbi or cantor has either achieved certain status or *kavod* in their position, rendering them immune to the influence of outside parties or that they largely make autonomous decisions and their lay leadership simply goes along with it.

However, several of our survey respondents either serve as non-congregational clergy, *or* serve in non-pulpit roles within a congregation. Some of these respondents commented with the following: "I'm an outreach rabbi, not tied to a traditional pulpit" (Respondent #52); "I'm not in a pulpit position, so any life cycle events I officiate are freelance hires (i.e. not subject to anyone's rules but my own" (Respondent #47); and "I'm not a congregational rabbi so I have lots of leeway" (Respondent #26). One respondent commented: "I am not considered part of the "clergy" of the congregation and often don't have to speak with our congregation about ritual events I do outside my job" (Respondent #42).

These answers highlight that not every community functions the same. Rabbis in particular seem to experience very different boundaries and expectations when it comes to what they are "able to do" professionally. Questions of what a rabbi or cantor can or cannot do when it comes to the performance of a lifecycle event are mostly relative to the position, not necessarily to any particular organization.

QUESTION #8: "TO WHAT DEGREE DOES THE STAFF WITH WHOM YOU WORK (INCLUDING AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EDUCATOR, AND/OR FELLOW CLERGY) INFLUENCE THE CHOICES YOU MAKE REGARDING LIFECYCLE RITUALS?"

- 10 respondents – 20% - stated "not at all"
- 25 respondents – 50% - stated "somewhat"

- 13 respondents – 26% - stated “often”
- 2 respondents – 4% - stated “always”
- 4 abstained

Answers to this question showed slightly more variety than in Question #7, which asked specifically about the influence of lay leadership. For this question in particular, many of the comments shed light on the 70% of respondents who felt little to no influence from their professional staff and 30% of respondents who felt it “often” to “always.”

Some comments spoke to a culture of collaboration at a synagogue, community center, or Hillel. For example: “Our mandate is to be extremely welcoming. Thus I work with my staff and colleague to make sure the choices I make reflect that welcoming spirit, even when I have to decline a particular ritual (intermarriage) on religious grounds” (Respondent #52). Additional respondents spoke about a “sacred partnership” (Respondent #11) amongst the professional staff of a congregation and more than one respondent spoke to “being part of a clergy team and maintain[ing] a team approach to rituals” (Respondent #13).

One comment in particular spoke to the sacred responsibility of being a religious leader for a community: “As the spiritual leader I am the one who is charged with the responsibility of keeping Jewish life meaningful. When that responsibility is abdicated to executive directors, etc., however well meaning they may be will compromise a rabbi’s leadership” (Respondent #51). This respondent in particular wrote elsewhere in the survey that as a rabbi he was “not at all” influenced by lay leadership or fellow Jewish professionals.

Altogether this question highlights a higher level of influence from professional staff on decisions related to lifecycle rituals. This can speak to either a culture of collaboration, a superior

in a position of making decisions, or any number of additional factors not mentioned in the "comments" section of question #8.

QUESTION #9 – "HOW OFTEN DO YOU TAKE THE RITUAL THAT IS WRITTEN IN THE RESOURCE YOU USE AND ADD YOUR OWN CREATIVE EMBELLISHMENTS, INNOVATIONS, OR IMPROVISATIONS?"

- 0 respondents – 0% - stated "never"
- 8 respondents – 15.09% - stated "sometimes"
- 20 respondents – 37.74% - stated "often"
- 25 respondents – 47.17% - stated "always"
- 1 abstained

Perhaps unsurprisingly, not one respondent to our survey answered that they "never" add their own creative improvisations to a lifecycle ritual taken from their selected resource. Just under half of our respondents stated that they "always" do, and the rest fell somewhere between "sometimes" and "often." What this clearly signifies is that each rabbi or cantor who offered responses to our survey engages in some form of ritual innovation from time to time, if not regularly.

Only six respondents offered commentary on their answers. The commentary ranged from adhering to tradition, for example: "without compromising the *Halacha*" (Respondent #51), to "these resources are not the text, but the pretext for ritual celebration/commemoration. They are suggestions for how to mark and uplift. We each need to personalize and inspire." (Respondent #24)

From these answers we have gleaned that, for some clergy, as long as innovation falls within the boundaries of Jewish law it is acceptable. For others, the resource used is merely a jumping off point for creating a meaningful and touching experience for those involved in the lifecycle. Altogether, it is the responsibility of a rabbi or cantor to create a meaningful experience tailored to the individual needs of those with whom they are working.

QUESTION #10: HOW OFTEN DO MEMBERS OF YOUR COMMUNITY REQUEST THE PERFORMANCE OF AN ALTERNATIVE LIFECYCLE RITUAL? (ANYTHING THAT DOES NOT FALL UNDER THE "STANDARD" LIFECYCLE EVENTS: BRIS, B'NAI MITZVAH, WEDDING, FUNERAL)

- 4 respondents—7.55% - stated “never”
- 28 respondents—52.83% - stated “rarely”
- 16 respondents –30.19% - stated “occasionally”
- 5 respondents –9.43% - stated “often”
- 1 respondent abstained

This data shows that an overwhelming majority, 59.25%, of congregants either never or rarely seek out innovative or alternative lifecycle rituals. Less than 10% of clergy report that their congregants approach them often with these types of requests.

This data seems to have a direct connection with Question #6, which asked clergy how open their communities are to innovation in lifecycle ritual. As was evidenced in the analysis of previous survey data, many clergy feel that their communities are less open to ritual innovation than they are; this question’s data seems to corroborate these theories. Only 9 respondents

offered comments on their answers. Of these comments, 33% involve alternative uses for of *mikvah*, whether for affirmation ceremonies or ceremonies for life's transitional moments. One respondent explained that *Mayyim Hayyim*, the pluralistic community *mikvah* in Boston, offered a place for alternative lifecycle ritual involving *mikvah*.

This data leads us to wonder how much of this data represents communities who do not want to engage in alternative lifecycle rituals as opposed to communities who are not even aware of these possibilities. In other words, could the dearth of requests for alternative rituals perhaps be because the clergy themselves were not forthcoming with these opportunities? As we saw in previous questions, these clergy believe that their communities are not as open to innovation as they are, but perhaps this is because of a lack in education surrounding innovation.

However, one rabbi bemoaned the lack of interest from her community (Respondent #43) explaining that, "… We often encourage them to consider doing [innovation]. For example, we meet with *b'nai mitzvah* families for the first time a year before the ceremony. I always mention, 'We are not a bar mitzvah factory here. We do not see ourselves as a cookie cutter of ceremonies. If you have an idea or something you'd like to see as part of your ceremony, if you'd like to craft your ceremony so that's its personal and meaningful, tell me, so that we may work together to do so. We are only limited by the framework of Jewish tradition and our own imaginations.' Yet, I have never been taken up on my offer!" While we admire this respondent's openness, we wonder if perhaps the congregation has not been properly educated on ritual innovation, thus explaining the perceived hesitancy to come forward with requests.

QUESTION #11 – "TRUE OR FALSE: THE PRESENCE OF COMMUNITY (BEYOND THE PARTICIPANTS THEMSELVES) IS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT TO A LIFECYCLE RITUAL."

- 30 respondents – 61.22% - stated "true"
- 19 respondents – 38.78% - stated "false"
- 5 abstained

This question elicited 22 comments from our survey respondents. These comments ranged from a simple validation of the question – "Community enhances the ritual," (Respondent #50) to struggling with the question itself – "I say true, but there are also incredibly powerful ritual moments that happen with just the participant and family. I don't think that the presence of community is 100% always necessary, also depending on the lifecycle ritual, but I do agree that most of the time, it adds to the ritual" (Respondent #28). Some respondents articulated that for certain rituals – such as *mikvah* following divorce, sexual assault, or incest – the community is not only unnecessary, they are unwelcome.

One rabbi wrote perhaps the most poignant explanation of whether or not a community enhances a ritual: "While rituals may be observed in the family or individually, the power of Jewish rituals, I believe, is to contextualize the joy or sadness within the continuum of our people's existence" (Respondent #24). Whether a ritual happens in a public or a private setting, its meaning is not lost on the greater community of *am Yisrael;* a people whose rituals have sustained them for centuries and will sustain them for centuries more.

QUESTION #12: A RITUAL IS COMPRISED OF A NUMBER OF DISPARATE COMPONENTS WHOSE PRESENCE (OR NON-PRESENCE) MAY CONTRIBUTE TO THAT RITUAL'S SUCCESS OR FAILURE. PLEASE RANK THE FOLLOWING COMPONENTS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE AS THEY RELATE TO A "SUCCESSFUL" RITUAL,"1" BEING MOST IMPORTANT AND "9" BEING LEAST IMPORTANT: (SPACE, RITUAL OBJECTS, LITURGY, ARTISTIC/CREATIVE ELEMENTS, CHOREOGRAPHY, PRESENCE OF THE RITUALIZER, TRANSFORMATIVE ELEMENTS, SPIRITUAL DIMENSION, LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT OF THE KAHAL)

- 0 respondents—0 % - ranked "space" as the most important component
- 1 respondent—1.92% - ranked "ritual objects" as the most important component
- 6 respondents—11.54% - ranked "liturgy" as the most important component
- 2 respondents—3.85% - ranked "artistic/creative elements" as the most important component.
- 0 respondents—0% - ranked "choreography" as the most important component
- 10 respondents—19.23% - ranked "presence of the ritualizer" as the most important component
- 9 respondents –17.31% - ranked "transformative elements" as the most important component.
- 17 respondents—32.69% - ranked "spiritual dimension" as the most important component
- 7 respondents –13.46% - ranked "level of engagement of the *kahal*" as the most important component
- 13 respondents—25% - ranked "space" as the least important component
- 7 respondents—13.46% - ranked "ritual objects" as the least important component

- 1 respondent—1.92% - ranked “liturgy” as the least important component
- 5 respondents—9.62% - ranked “artistic/creative elements” as the least important component
- 9 respondents—17.31% - ranked “choreography” as the least important component
- 5 respondents—9.62% - ranked “presence of the ritualizer” as the least important component
- 7 respondents—13.46% - ranked “transformative elements” as the least important component
- 1 respondent—1.92% - ranked “spiritual dimension” as the least important component
- 4 respondents—7.69% - ranked “level of engagement of the *kahal*” as the least important component
- 2 abstained

The above data suggests that it is the “spiritual dimension: the presence of God, holiness, eternity, etc.” that has the most impact on the success or failure of a ritual, with nearly one third of respondents indicating that it is the most important component and only one respondent claiming that it is the least important.

The responses also indicate that “transformative elements: focus on the moment of transition from one “state” to another,” and “presence of the ritualizer: sense of presence of the person or persons facilitating the ritual” are key components in the success of said rituals. However, though these components were important for many of the clergy, there were also a good number of responses that indicated that the answer was not so clear-cut, as some of the clergy ranked them among the less important components.

Interestingly, it is "liturgy: the texts or prayers used in a ritual" and "spiritual dimension: the presence of God, holiness, eternity, etc." that received the highest overall average ranking: liturgy had an average ranking of 6.50 and spiritual dimension an average of 6.63.

We glean from this data that most clergy vary in their understandings of which components contribute to the success of failure of a ritual. However, most agree that spirituality, focus on the transformative elements, the presence of the ritualizer, and liturgy are among the most important components in contributing to the success of a ritual. Components of lesser importance include the more logistical, concrete components: the space where the ritual takes place, the ritual objects used, and the choreography of the ritual itself.

RITUAL EVALUATION

According to Ronald Grimes, ritual criticism might seem like an impossible feat, but it is essential to understanding ritual and creating successful and meaningful ritual experiences. Grimes explains that "the practice of ritual criticism presupposes the possibility of ritual failure, which is seldom taken account of in theories of ritual. Engaging in ritual criticism presupposes that rites can exploit, denigrate, or simply not do what people claim they do."[110]

A valuable tool for engaging in ritual criticism is a rubric, which represents the expectations and measures of success for a particular performance or task. The use of a rubric in this context allows us to break down the ritual (the rite, the ritualist [person conducting the ritual] and the *kahal* [the community of participants]) into minute observable components. The results

[110] Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory* (Waterloo: Ritual Studies International) 282

produced by these rubrics will provide the tools we need for discovering which specific elements impact the success or failure of a ritual.

This rubric was developed for use by us, the researchers, in our quest to find deeper meaning in ritual. This tool will enable us to gather quantitative and qualitative data for use in our research. We will use the rubric in conjunction with anecdotal research to support our findings, helping us to better understand the ritual process. This data will become the foundation upon which we adapt traditional rituals and create new rituals.

It is our hope that the rubric will transcend this project and find a home in Jewish communities who seek to elevate their ritual experiences, as is our firm belief that ritual is the natural embodiment of the universal human need to mark liminal moments. Our research will provide us with the tools for the creation of new lifecycle rituals. It is incumbent, then, upon clergy and the wider Jewish community, to use these tools to create meaningful ritual as the need presents itself. Only when we understand what makes a ritual "work" can we improve upon the foundation to heighten the journey.

LIFECYCLE RITUAL EVALUATION RUBRIC

	Area	Score	Comments
Ritual Space *(In what space is the rite taking place? Does it enhance the experience?)*	Rite		
Ritual Objects *(How are the objects being used? What type of symbolism do they connote? What memories or connections might they evoke?)*	Rite		
Time *(When in the calendar does this occur? Does the timing seem appropriate? How does the ritual connect to the season or religious calendar?)*	Rite		
Liturgy *(How are the prayers, words, and/or Jewish texts of the ritual employed?)*	Rite		
Language *(How do the linguistic choices enhance or detract from the rite?)*	Rite		
Music *(How is music being used in the rite? Is the music contemporary or traditional, easy to follow?)*	Rite		
Choreography *(How do the movements of the rite heighten the experience?)*	Rite		
Spiritual Dimension *(Is there a sense of the sacred or the numinous present during the rite?)*	Rite		
Transformative Elements *(Where do we see liminality present? What elements of the rite demonstrate transition and transformation?)*	Rite		
Diction *(Clarity of speech; is the ritualizer enunciating properly, is he/she easy to understand?)*	Ritualizer		
Literacy *(Is the ritualizer familiar with the rite and the liturgy?)*	Ritualizer		

Presence *(Does the ritualizer have a strong presence? How so/not so? What is the ritualizer's role in the rite?)*	Ritualizer		
Engagement with Participants *(How does the ritualizer interact with the person(s) undergoing this transformation?)*	Ritualizer		
Engagement with Kahal *(If a kahal is present, how does the ritualizer invite the kahal to participate?)*	Ritualizer		
Level of Engagement *(If a kahal is present, what is its role in the rite? Are they passively or actively participating? Are they involved in the transformative process?)*	Kahal		
Literacy *(Is the kahal familiar with the rite and liturgy? Does this affect their participation and level of engagement?)*	Kahal		

Key to Scoring System:

1. The element is non-existent; there is no evidence of it in the rite.
2. Struggles to include this element
3. Competent in this element
4. Succeeds in incorporating this element
5. Exceeds expectations in incorporating this element

FIELDWORK: OBSERVATIONS OF LIFECYCLE RITUALS

From October through December 2013, we had the opportunity to observe various lifecycle rituals conducted by rabbis and/or cantors. In these observations we were able to put the rubric we designed to good use.

Our primary purpose with these observations was to examine each lifecycle event through an anthropological/sociological lens. We were not present to celebrate or mourn; we were not present to pray or to sing. We were present to critique and analyze, to study the choices made and the response of those gathered in the *kahal.* It is important to note that the process of observation and anecdotal research is subjective. A trained observer can report on things he or she did or did not see and/or did or did not feel, yet these observations remain subjective to the person. For example, it is difficult and impressionistic to score on things like "spiritual dimension." An observer can report on whether the ritualizer specifically brings God into the ritual, or explains the religious and symbolic meaning of certain objects, but this data will always be a "softer" data in comparison with other forms of research.

Our findings are presented here with summaries immediately following. All names and dates in this section have been changed.

RABBI JASON SIMON – WEDDING – OCTOBER, 2013

LIFECYCLE RITUAL EVALUATION RUBRIC

	Area	Score	Comments
Ritual Space *(In what space is the rite taking place? Does it enhance the experience?)*	Rite	3.5	Beautiful environment; colorful flowers and greenery, feels secluded, *Gan Eden* feel; huge fig tree in the middle of the outdoor courtyard.
Ritual Objects *(How are the objects being used? What type of symbolism do they connote? What memories or connections might they evoke?)*	Rite	4.0	Chuppah, wedding program, ketubah displayed, kippot offered to guests, Kiddush cup displayed and talked about as part of coming lifecycle events, rabbi wearing tallit. Ritual objects spoken about to some degree, not overly discussed
Time *(When in the calendar does this occur? Does the timing seem appropriate? How does the ritual connect to the season or religious calendar?)*	Rite	3.0	Questionable: not yet sunset when ceremony begins, otherwise N/A
Liturgy *(How are the prayers, words, and/or Jewish texts of the ritual employed?)*	Rite	4.0	7 blessings written out in English in the program, began with "*bruchim habayim*" and *shechechiyanu*, creative versions of 7 blessings, not "Jewish feel," and no mention of God, priestly blessing at the end
Language *(How do the linguistic choices enhance or detract from the rite?)*	Rite	4.0	Many analogies and references to Jewish tradition (Abraham and Sarah's home=*chuppah*, etc.). The rabbi seemed to try to bring in Jewish elements but many non-Jewish elements (couple wrote their own vows)
Music *(How is music being used in the rite? Is the music contemporary or traditional, easy to follow?)*	Rite	1.5	Music present but detracted from ceremony. Beginning was flute and piano, then Canon in D, but then Wagner's Bridal March (completely throwing the rabbi off)
Choreography *(How do the movements of the rite heighten the experience?)*	Rite	2.0	No circling, photographer was very distracting, family and friends read 7 blessings but time spent getting each group up and down was tiring/boring for community and *kahal* was fidgety as a result.

Spiritual Dimension *(Is there a sense of the sacred or the numinous present during the rite?)*	Rite	3.5	Memory of those not present spoken of, references to traditional elements, *kiddish* cup "not just for this moment, but it is symbolic of the "cup of life" you are creating, etc."
Transformative Elements *(Where do we see liminality present? What elements of the rite demonstrate transition and transformation?)*	Rite	4.0	"journey continues, doesn't end here….", *kiddish* cup shows life that is moving forward, *sheva brachot* don't feel transformative and *harei at/atah* done quickly without much emphasis and explanation, but great deal of focus given to breaking glasses (2 glasses broken to represent equal partnership)
Diction *(Clarity of speech; is the ritualizer enunciating properly, is he/she easy to understand?)*	Ritualizer	4.0	Jason's speech was very clear though quiet, very calming and tranquil, good Hebrew enunciation
Literacy *(Is the ritualizer familiar with the rite and the liturgy?)*	Ritualizer	4.5	Very comfortable with both Hebrew and English, fluid—no awkward pausing to look at book, knew the liturgy extremely well
Presence *(Does the ritualizer have a strong presence? How so/not so? What is the ritualizer's role in the rite?)*	Ritualizer	3.5	Intentionally gentle and calming, became a facilitator, his presence didn't outshine bride and groom, didn't "take over," let participants steer the ceremony and blessings
Engagement with Participants *(How does the ritualizer interact with the person(s) undergoing this transformation?)*	Ritualizer	4.0	Very interactive but this is the nature of the ceremony
Engagement with Kahal *(If a kahal is present, how does the ritualizer invite the kahal to participate?)*	Ritualizer	3.0	Asks bride and groom to look out at the *kahal*, invites groups (predetermined) to *chuppah* for 7 blessings, but no other *kahal* participation.
Level of Engagement *(If a kahal is present, what is its role in the rite? Are they passively or actively participating? Are they involved in the transformative process?)*	Kahal	2.0	Passive engagement; groups doing 7 blessings were only ones involved, people in the *kahal* antsy during 7 blessings (seemed very distracted, putting on lip gloss, telling jokes, etc.)
Literacy *(Is the kahal familiar with the rite and liturgy? Does this affect their participation and level of engagement?)*	Kahal	1.0	People participating in the service read Hebrew but *kahal* doesn't say "*amen*"

ANECDOTAL ANALYSIS

On a beautiful October day, Deana had the opportunity to observe the wedding of Rebecca and Steven in Santa Monica, California. The venue was breathtaking: an outside courtyard of a luxurious beachside hotel. Though one need only step outside of the hotel to be a part of the hustle and bustle of this downtown beachside area, the courtyard itself felt wonderfully private and secluded. Music was playing as the guests began to arrive, welcoming them into a private Eden-like garden teeming with flowers, trees, and plants, all centered around a large fig tree.

The *chuppah* was gorgeous, seeming to have flowers of all kinds bursting from its frame. It seemed like a natural extension of its beautiful surroundings. All of the traditional ritual objects were present: *kippot* were given to guests as they entered along with wedding programs explaining the Jewish traditions which would take place. The *ketubah* was displayed next to the *chuppah*. The rabbi walked down the aisle holding his rabbi's manual and donning his *kippah* and *tallit*. Throughout the ceremony, these ritual objects seemed to be background players – they did not feature prominently into the life of the ceremony.

The bridal party walked down the aisle to Pachelbel's *Canon in D*, and while not a Jewish song with any religious tradition, it did not detract from the Jewishness of the ceremony. However, as the bride made her appearance, the string quartet began playing Wagner's *Bridal Chorus*. The community did not seem to be phased by this turn of events, rising and smiling at the beaming bride. However, as I looked to the rabbi, I noted the look of sheer surprise on his face, matching my own (Richard Wagner's anti-Semitism is undisputed).

The bride and groom did not circle one another before standing together under the *chuppah*. At that point, the photographer became an unwelcome distraction, moving around

often, asking the bridal attendants to help move a plant while the rabbi was speaking. It detracted from the flow of the service.

The rabbi had a very relaxed and gentle presence. It was clear that he was familiar with the prayers and rituals of the wedding ceremony, and the words flowed from his lips with ease. He had wonderful diction, clarity of speech, and varied intonation. Throughout the ceremony, the rabbi tried to bring in Jewish connections and symbols, linking the *chuppah* to the tent of Abraham and Sarah. It was clear that he knew the couple quite well and was able to speak to them in a natural way. He explained the ritual objects present, linking them to the bride or groom's family (i.e. *kiddush* cup), and explaining how these Jewish symbolic objects would help them to foster their own Jewish family. The rabbi's presence was warm, and he tried to direct most of the focus onto the bride and groom, skillfully facilitating the ceremony rather than competing for attention. In fact, though he did speak at various points throughout the ceremony, he did not give a formal charge.

The bride and groom elected for groups of family and friends to bless them with creative interpretations of the *Sheva Brachot.* Though these were beautiful and inspirational words, the logistics of getting each group of people up to the *chuppah* and back down hindered the flow of the ceremony and lengthening it tremendously. The *kahal* seemed to be bored and distracted by the end of the third blessing; some of them chatting idly in between blessings while others took out their cell phones.

Those who were involved in the ceremony were actively engaged, but the majority of the guests were passive observers, not contributing a great deal to the ceremony. Some of the technical difficulties added to this level of passivity and distraction. The wind continually blew into the microphone, making it difficult for guests to hear the words being said. The

choreography of groups of guests ascending and descending from the *chuppah* caused distraction. And though the courtyard seemed secluded, there were continually reminders that the hustle and bustle of the city were mere yards away; helicopters flew overhead, horns honked throughout the ceremony, and car alarms went off.

That being said, the ceremony was one that captured a sense of spiritual dimension. The rabbi invoked the sacred wherever and whenever he could, contributing to the holiness of the day. Though the formal moment of transformation would normally be the vow exchange and ring ceremony, much more emphasis was placed on the breaking of the glass. The rabbi explained that both the bride and the groom had elected to break glasses to represent the equality of their partnership. Immediately upon hearing both glasses break, the *kahal* shouted "*mazel tov*!"

In conclusion, this was a relatively strong example of a lifecycle ritual. Here, I believe the rabbi was key to achieving this. It was his strong yet warm and gentle presence, his ability to invoke the sacred moments, and the ease with which he could integrate Jewish tradition into his words that were the most instrumental in making this a meaningful ceremony for Rebecca and Steven.

RABBI SAM REYNOLDS – BABY NAMING – OCTOBER 2013

LIFECYCLE RITUAL EVALUATION RUBRIC

	Area	Score	Comments
Ritual Space *(In what space is the rite taking place? Does it enhance the experience?)*	Rite	3.0	Clubhouse overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Not a formal space, almost everyone standing. No formal designation of ritual space, looked like a living room
Ritual Objects *(How are the objects being used? What type of symbolism do they connote? What memories or connections might they evoke?)*	Rite	1.0	Only a certificate and unused table without a tablecloth
Time *(When in the calendar does this occur? Does the timing seem appropriate? How does the ritual connect to the season or religious calendar?)*	Rite	2.0	2 months after baby's birth, Cheshvan 16, 5774, 11:00 am No context with regards to time, no reason given why 2 months after birth
Liturgy *(How are the prayers, words, and/or Jewish texts of the ritual employed?)*	Rite	1.0	No Rabbi's Manual or written-out liturgy of any kind, "off the cuff." Only blessing was Priestly Benediction, everything else was more conversational in nature
Language *(How do the linguistic choices enhance or detract from the rite?)*	Rite	3.0	Speaking directly to child and family, but again without formal structured ritual language
Music *(How is music being used in the rite? Is the music contemporary or traditional, easy to follow?)*	Rite	0.0	No music present
Choreography *(How do the movements of the rite heighten the experience?)*	Rite	1.0	Almost non-existent, he had family gather together, but no movement otherwise. He stood next to family and *kahal* next to them
Spiritual Dimension *(Is there a sense of the sacred or the numinous present during the rite?)*	Rite	1.5	Somewhat present, mention of Song of Songs in relation to the name chosen for the baby. Priestly Benediction was spoken with all family members touching. But no real sense of numinous or sacred
Transformative Elements *(Where do we see liminality present? What elements of the rite*	Rite	1.0	No focus on the moment when the child received the name, casually mentioned that this was the name the

demonstrate transition and transformation?)			parents chose with very little context given
Diction *(Clarity of speech; is the ritualizer enunciating properly, is he/she easy to understand?)*	Ritualizer	2.0	Easy to understand but seemed very rushed. Speech pattern and tone varied
Literacy *(Is the ritualizer familiar with the rite and the liturgy?)*	Ritualizer	2.5	No actual rabbi's manual present or liturgy of any kind. Familiar with the rite itself but very informal, and spontaneous even
Presence *(Does the ritualizer have a strong presence? How so/not so? What is the ritualizer's role in the rite?)*	Ritualizer	4.0	Great presence, dominated the room. No trouble holding the attention. Very easy and comforting presence, had good command of his own authority in the space
Engagement with Participants *(How does the ritualizer interact with the person(s) undergoing this transformation?)*	Ritualizer	3.5	Physical contact with the baby, spoke directly to parents and sister
Engagement with Kahal *(If a kahal is present, how does the ritualizer invite the kahal to participate?)*	Ritualizer	2.0	Very passive engagement, it appeared that he was only speaking to the family and the *kahal* were merely onlookers, not participants
Level of Engagement *(If a kahal is present, what is its role in the rite? Are they passively or actively participating? Are they involved in the transformative process?)*	Kahal	1.5	Very passive participation, responded with "*mazel* tov" at the end, but other than that, not involved in the process
Literacy *(Is the kahal familiar with the rite and liturgy? Does this affect their participation and level of engagement?)*	Kahal	1.0	There was no literacy for the *kahal* to be familiar with other than "*amen*" and "*mazel tov"*

ANECDOTAL ANALYSIS

On an October afternoon, Deana and Jaclyn had the opportunity to observe a baby naming ceremony performed by Rabbi Sam Reynolds. The short ceremony took place in a clubhouse overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Though the ceremony was originally planned to have taken place outside on the porch, it was a cold and windy day, and thus it was decided to move

the ceremony indoors. The clubhouse was very informal and relaxed. Though there had been some decorations outside, they were not moved inside for the ceremony. The setting was not transformed in any way, and did not feel like a sacred space. There were no Jewish ritual objects present aside from a hastily filled out baby-naming certificate.

The rabbi gathered everyone into one room, and asked the immediate family to stand next to him. Everyone was standing for the duration of the short 10 minute ceremony. The baby-naming ceremony took place 2 months after the child's birth, yet no explanation was given as to why they had decided that this was the appropriate time.

The rabbi began by welcoming everyone. It was clear that he had performed this ritual many times before, and seemed a bit rushed in doing so this time. He had no rabbi's manual or liturgy of any sort, and spoke very informally; "off-the-cuff" so to speak. His informality and casual nature in this case did not enhance the intimacy of the occasion (as sometimes happens when the rabbi is able to perform a ceremony without needing to look at a book).

The short speech focused primarily on the baby's name, which the rabbi related to the Song of Songs. However, there was no moment of transformation when the baby became a member of the Jewish people. There was no announcement of the baby, rather just a restatement of the name and an explanation of why that name was chosen. The rabbi did not invoke the numinous or spiritual dimension during this ritual.

However, it is important to note that the rabbi had an exceptionally strong presence. He dominated the room, and did not encounter any difficulties in holding everyone's attention. He gave off a very easy and comforting presence, and had good command and authority in the space.

The rabbi spoke only to the immediate family in this ceremony, and therefore the entire *kahal* played no part in the ceremony at all, except for a half-hearted "*mazel tov*" at the end of the ceremony.

Afterward, the rabbi gave the certificate to the parents and promptly left. In conclusion, this gave us a great deal to think about in terms of the key components of a lifecycle ritual. The ceremony itself was virtually non-existent, but the rabbi's presence was phenomenal. It made us wonder: which of these is more important in creating a "successful" and meaningful lifecycle ritual for a family? How would it have looked if there was a great deal of emphasis placed on the moment of transformation, the ritual space, and the spiritual dimension if the rabbi himself did not possess such a strong presence?

RABBIS JEREMY REID AND ANDREW MARCUS – WEDDING – OCTOBER 2013

LIFECYCLE RITUAL EVALUATION RUBRIC

	Area	Score	Comments
Ritual Space *(In what space is the rite taking place? Does it enhance the experience?)*	Rite	5.0	Took place in recently renovated synagogue, aesthetically pleasing, much Jewish symbolism within the space itself (*ner tamid*, stained glass windows with Jewish symbols and Hebrew words, etc.)
Ritual Objects *(How are the objects being used? What type of symbolism do they connote? What memories or connections might they evoke?)*	Rite	3.5	*Chuppah* spoken about in depth, made by sisterhood/first couple married under it, but *kiddush* cups were only softly acknowledged -- no explanation, *tallit* was present but no narrative, *ketubah* displayed but not spoken of (not consistent)
Time *(When in the calendar does this occur? Does the timing seem appropriate? How does the ritual connect to the season or religious calendar?)*	Rite	N/A	Sunday evening, Oct. 6, 2013; not on Shabbat.
Liturgy *(How are the prayers, words, and/or Jewish texts of the ritual employed?)*	Rite	4.0	Traditional opening *(braruch haba'ah), sheva brachot*, priestly blessing, vows in Hebrew, personal vows in English
Language *(How do the linguistic choices enhance or detract from the rite?)*	Rite	3.0	2 rabbis co-officiating, choices in language emphasized the different rabbis, one rabbi made it a point to clearly state he knew the bride better than the groom while the other rabbi made choices that acknowledged both of them
Music *(How is music being used in the rite? Is the music contemporary or traditional, easy to follow?)*	Rite	3.0	Not a lot of music, *baruch ha'bah* was sung, *sheva brachot* sung, music walking down the aisle was *Dodi Li* for the bride, secular music for exit (upbeat tempo meant to mirror excitement)
Choreography *(How do the movements of the rite heighten the experience?)*	Rite	3.5	Went smoothly except for microphone which was an issue the entire ceremony (mic wasn't on when first begun, couldn't hear bride and groom recite vows, etc.), friend to sing *sheva*

			brachot, transition was smooth
Spiritual Dimension *(Is there a sense of the sacred or the numinous present during the rite?)*	Rite	4.0	Mixed; one rabbi brought in God, the other didn't. All factors combined made it feel as though the spiritual dimension was inherent in the rite; felt very much like a Jewish wedding involving the couple being joined together before God and their community
Transformative Elements *(Where do we see liminality present? What elements of the rite demonstrate transition and transformation?)*	Rite	2.5	Could not hear bride and groom take their vows; one rabbi discussed the joining together of man and woman. Breaking of the glass was not emphasized or explained and *kahal* didn't know how to respond
Diction *(Clarity of speech; is the ritualizer enunciating properly, is he/she easy to understand?)*	Ritualizer	Visiting Rabbi: 4.5 Home Rabbi: 2.5	Visiting Rabbi: spoke clearly, was direct, thoughtful, spoke with dramatic emphasis were needed Home Rabbi: had monotone voice, did not appear to use much dramatic flair, and his diction was not as clear as the visiting rabbi
Literacy *(Is the ritualizer familiar with the rite and the liturgy?)*	Ritualizer	Visiting Rabbi and Home Rabbi: 4.5	Both very knowledgeable , both very familiar with liturgy
Presence *(Does the ritualizer have a strong presence? How so/not so? What is the ritualizer's role in the rite?)*	Ritualizer	Visiting Rabbi and Home Rabbi 4.0	Both had strong presences, just different. Home Rabbi was authoritative and had gravitas. Visiting Rabbi was charismatic, thoughtful, and light hearted and clearly knew the bride and groom as a couple better
Engagement with Participants *(How does the ritualizer interact with the person(s) undergoing this transformation?)*	Ritualizer	Visiting Rabbi: 4.0 Home Rabbi: 3.0	Visiting Rabbi: engaged with both, really spoke to both of them as individuals and as a couple Home Rabbi: spoke primarily to the bride and her rootedness in the community
Engagement with Kahal *(If a kahal is present, how does the ritualizer invite the kahal to participate?)*	Ritualizer	Visiting Rabbi: 4.0	Visiting Rabbi: asked participants to turn and acknowledge their community, asked community to respond with "amen" after each

		Home Rabbi: 3.0	blessing. Home Rabbi: engaged crying nephew during the ceremony
Level of Engagement *(If a kahal is present, what is its role in the rite? Are they passively or actively participating? Are they involved in the transformative process?)*	Kahal	2.0	Kahal was mostly passive
Literacy *(Is the kahal familiar with the rite and liturgy? Does this affect their participation and level of engagement?)*	Kahal	2.0	Some responded with amen, others didn't; all offered silent prayers to the couple; slow to say "*mazal tov*" at the end of the wedding

ANECDOTAL ANALYSIS

The wedding of Sarah and David took place at a large synagogue in suburban Chicago. The synagogue, recently renovated, was aesthetically beautiful. The ceremony took place indoors as the sun was setting outside. The room felt cavernous and large - only 150 or so of the presumed 500 seats were taken.

The space felt highly saturated with Judaism; everywhere one looked there were Jewish elements. A *Ner Tamid* hung above a very large ark. There were stained glass windows with various Jewish elements and Hebrew letters. The *chuppah* looked like a large white cabana, and the canopy was designed by the Temple sisterhood. It featured significant Hebrew phrasing.

The ceremony was conducted by two rabbis. One, the rabbi of the congregation where the ceremony took place, wore a suit, *tallit*, and *kippah*. The other rabbi, a friend of the couple, wore a suit with no *tallit* or *kippah*.

The visiting rabbi took the first half of the service, up through *Kiddushin.* He appeared to know the couple very well and spoke to both their personalities. A singer, he sang a few of the

prayers in Hebrew. He talked beyond what felt comfortable time-wise for two officiants; it felt like he gave one and a half charges to the couple.

When the home rabbi took over, he also gave what felt like one and a half charges to the wedding couple. At this point it felt like a case of "dueling rabbis," with each trying to out-talk the other. The home rabbi made it clear that he knew the bride and her family very well; that the groom was lucky to be marrying into this family. This set up an uncomfortable dynamic and made the couple appear as non-equals. It established the site of the wedding as the home turf of the bride and not her groom.

When the rabbi asked the two of them to recite their vows, he did not turn the microphone towards them. One had to strain to hear them say their Hebrew vows to one another beneath the *chuppah*. This provided us with some technical challenges, as we were not able to hear the vows so clearly.

Comparing the two rabbis, the visiting rabbi had more of a presence. He was dramatic and direct, using his musical abilities to his advantage. The home rabbi was low-key, spoke in a monotone voice, and used very little warmth or humor to deliver his message.

As was stated above, the moment of transformation - when the couple recited their wedding vows and exchanged rings - was muted. One had to really strain to hear the bride and groom, as they were not mic'ed. The bride and groom wrote their own personal vows to one another; vows that gently touched on their Jewish values. Those vows, read in English, were in fact amplified by the microphone.

Though it is not technically a transformative element, the conclusion of the ceremony - the breaking of the glass - felt anticlimactic. The rabbi did not explain how the community was to respond once the glass was broken. (Though, we assume most of those gathered knew what to do) When the groom smashed the glass, it was very light and barely audible. Almost no one yelled "*mazal tov."* Once the groom leaned in to kiss the bride, then the crowd began calling out "*mazal tov."* It felt awkward and disjointed.

The community was almost nonexistent in this ritual ceremony. Due to the cavernous space of the sanctuary, the *chuppah* felt particularly far from where we were sitting towards the middle of the main section.

However, the visiting rabbi asked the congregation to say "*amen*" or sing along to the blessings chanted. The home rabbi addressed the bride's two-year-old nephew when he began crying in the middle of the ceremony. Finally, at its conclusion, when the glass was smashed, as stated above, the community did not realize what was happening and was therefore slow to congratulate the couple. But eventually, they did say "*mazal tov*" with *ruach*, or energy.

As the ceremony took place in a space that was clearly Jewish (as stated above) the inherent Jewish nature was clear. However, some of the Jewish elements of the service felt downplayed. The *ketubah* was placed on an easel at the front of the *bimah* for the community to see, but it was not acknowledged once or read publicly during the ceremony. (It was read aloud in the *ketubah* signing, which was not open to all wedding guests)

The *kiddush* cups used for the wine were only softly acknowledged as belonging to someone's family. Perhaps we weren't fully paying attention, but we were not sure why those particular *kiddush* cups were significant.

The *tallit* draped around the couple's shoulders at the Priestly Blessing was given no narrative. It was simply wrapped around with no explanation as to whom it belonged or from where it came. It looked old, like an heirloom, but it was completely unclear if it was a relic of one family, if it was purchased by the couple together, etc.

The visiting rabbi brought in a lot Judaic elements than the home rabbi. He quoted Rabbi Meir in his [long] charge to the couple. He also connected the idea of individuality and differences to the couple themselves; themes that were present in the artistry and Jewish phrases on the *chuppah* canopy. This he connected to the "*yud*" and the "*hey*" of "*ish*" and "*isha."* (A reference to God and holiness) The home rabbi did not appear to invoke much Jewish tradition.

Overall, this wedding ceremony was beautiful and filled with love, but it lacked gravitas and felt disjointed. The two rabbis had such vastly different approaches and unfortunately came across as though they were competing with each other for who had a closer relationship with the couple.

The transformative element lacked the drama or the gravitas that we have seen at other weddings. In this ceremony, perhaps because of the two rabbis and their different styles, there appeared to be no clear, concrete focus. There was no climactic moment in the entire ceremony.

The most moving, emotional point was the one authored by the couple themselves; the personal English vows they spoke to one another. But English vows are not required for a valid marriage and thus, this element was not a transformative moment in their time beneath the *chuppah.*

RABBI PETER KRAMER AND CANTOR DAVID STEIN – BAT MITZVAH – NOVEMBER 2013

LIFECYCLE RITUAL EVALUATION RUBRIC

	Area	Score	Comments
Ritual Space *(In what space is the rite taking place? Does it enhance the experience?)*	Rite	3.5	Industrial park complex, well decorated inside. No windows, a flat screen TV hanging above the bimah. Beautiful wood and glass ark and wood lectern.
Ritual Objects *(How are the objects being used? What type of symbolism do they connote? What memories or connections might they evoke?)*	Rite	4.5	*Tallit* (and presentation of *Tallit*), very large *Hanukkiah*, Torah as a centerpiece of the service, passed from generation to generation
Time *(When in the calendar does this occur? Does the timing seem appropriate? How does the ritual connect to the season or religious calendar?)*	Rite	5	This was a Shabbat of *Hanukkah* and Thanksgiving, as well (a big family weekend). Time framed the ritual itself and was used as a backdrop for the ceremony. (Psalm 150 – *Hallelujah* – was the opening psalm; the rabbi connected it to time)
Liturgy *(How are the prayers, words, and/or Jewish texts of the ritual employed?)*	Rite	5	Standard Reform congregation *B'nai Mitzvah mincha* service. Congregation uses *Mishkan T'filah siddur*, liturgy is used and explained clearly to *kahal*, bigger moments such as *Shema* and Priestly Blessing are foci of the service.
Language *(How do the linguistic choices enhance or detract from the rite?)*	Rite	4.5	Language used is mostly positive, supportive, and encouraging. Service is in a style accessible for adults and children. At one point, rabbi talks about biblical Judith cutting off someone's head; shocking, jarring contrast to rest of service (and everyone gasped).
Music *(How is music being used in the rite? Is the music contemporary or traditional, easy to follow?)*	Rite	5	Cantor truly co-leads service. Entire service is either sung or, when rabbi is speaking, cantor is playing piano or guitar underneath. Music very present in rite. Cantor guides *kahal*

			in singing
Choreography *(How do the movements of the rite heighten the experience?)*	Rite	4.5	No real choreography present in this rite, but the setup enhances the engagement between rabbi and cantor: cantor sits at piano, facing rabbi at lectern. *Bat Mitzvah* stands to right of rabbi, essentially in between two clergy members.
Spiritual Dimension *(Is there a sense of the sacred or the numinous present during the rite?)*	Rite	4.5	Constant reference to "the holy one," or "the holy presence;" *Hallelujah* and giving praise to God as core refrain
Transformative Elements *(Where do we see liminality present? What elements of the rite demonstrate transition and transformation?)*	Rite	5	In addition to *Bat Mitzvah* chanting Torah and *Haftarah*, rabbi references transition of time in *Shechecheyanu* at service's beginning; addition of *L'dor Vador*, passing of Torah from generation to generation. Clear that we are in a transitional moment
Diction *(Clarity of speech; is the ritualizer enunciating properly, is he/she easy to understand?)*	Ritualizer	Rabbi: 4.5 Cantor: 3	Rabbi speaks clearly and coherently; cantor mumbles or swallows words while also singing, sitting at a piano bench
Literacy *(Is the ritualizer familiar with the rite and the liturgy?)*	Ritualizer	Rabbi: 5 Cantor: 5	Very clear that this was a rite of passage with which both rabbi and cantor were incredibly familiar
Presence *(Does the ritualizer have a strong presence? How so/not so? What is the ritualizer's role in the rite?)*	Ritualizer	Rabbi: 4 Cantor: 4.5	Rabbi and cantor both have strong presences. Rabbi is more willing to step back and let *Bat Mitzvah* be in the spotlight. Cantor much more in-your-face and direct and center stage when he was not quietly playing music underneath rabbi's speaking.
Engagement with Participants *(How does the ritualizer interact with the person(s) undergoing this transformation?)*	Ritualizer	Rabbi: 5 Cantor: 5	Both rabbi and cantor spoke directly to *Bat Mitzvah*. It was clear they both knew her, and her family, well.
Engagement with Kahal *(If a kahal is present, how does the ritualizer invite the kahal to participate?)*	Ritualizer	Rabbi: 4.5 Cantor: 4.5	Rabbi and cantor both clearly valued the presence and involvement of *kahal* in the *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony. Constant sense of engagement with those in the congregation. No barriers for

			newcomers or non-Jews. Non-Jews allowed to do *aliyot*.
Level of Engagement *(If a kahal is present, what is its role in the rite? Are they passively or actively participating? Are they involved in the transformative process?)*	Kahal	4.5	*Kahal* was active and very participatory, knew when to rise and sit and bow for *Bar'chu,* knew the response for the Torah blessing, etc.
Literacy *(Is the kahal familiar with the rite and liturgy? Does this affect their participation and level of engagement?)*	Kahal	4.5	It was clear that the *kahal* knew what was going on in this rite of passage.

ANECDOTAL ANALYSIS

On a Saturday evening in November during the holiday of Hanukkah and the weekend of Thanksgiving, Jaclyn had the opportunity to observe a Bat Mitzvah at a Reform congregation in the West Valley. The Bat Mitzvah took place within the sanctuary of the synagogue. It was an independent afternoon service; a rite of passage for one child only.

It was clear from the moment one walked into the synagogue that this was a Jewish space. Jewish music was playing on loudspeakers in the lobby of the synagogue itself: contemporary Israeli music as well as *Hanukkah* songs. These songs set the tone for the experience: they conveyed that what was about to take place was a specifically Jewish event.

The synagogue is located in an industrial park in the West Valley. The industrial park itself is not the most sacred-looking place; however, the congregation has transformed the internal space into a spiritual center for their community. In particular, their sanctuary – the location of the *Bat Mitzvah* – featured elegant wood panelling, a wall made of Jerusalem stone, comfortable seating, and many Jewish ritual elements. The large ark and lectern were

aesthetically impressive and structurally accessible. In addition, the lighting was set to strike a spiritual, contemplative tone.

The *Bat Mitzvah* was officiated by two clergy: a rabbi and a cantor. Together, the two created a service that was emotionally welcoming, framed by music and text, and which celebrated the learning and growth of the *Bat Mitzvah* girl. Both ritualizers were personable, friendly, and engaging. They invited the congregation to participate wholly in the ceremony and continued to support participation throughout the two hours. Each appeared to be a master of his craft – the rabbi with his selection of text, delivery, and diction; the cantor with his choice of music and his ability to frame each element of the rite with song.

There were several transformative moments to the ceremony: the passing of the Torah from generation to generation, the reading of the Torah by the Bat Mitzvah girl, the giving of the tallit and the recitation of the *tallit* blessing, and the completion of her *Haftarah* portion, at which point the *Bat Mitzvah* girl broke out into a huge smile. The reinforcement of time and space by the rabbi, as well as reminders throughout the service of the holiness and sanctity of the rite, contributed to an overall feeling that this was, undoubtedly, a rite of passage in which the *Bat Mitzvah* girl was passing from one identity to another.

The Jewish elements of the ceremony were everywhere; there was no denying that this was a Jewish experience. From the music which played as one entered the synagogue to the tallit and its blessing to the Torah to the *havdalah* candle and the menorah used to celebrate *Hanukkah*, these elements made it was clear this was a Jewish ritual experience.

The community was engaged in the *Bat Mitzvah* in a clear, cohesive way. Both the rabbi and the cantor emphasized full participation by the *kahal* in the ceremony and, in turn, the *kahal*

responded with fluency and *ruach,* or energy. The community prayed out loud and whole-heartedly with the *Bat Mitzvah* girl, supported her with "*yasher koach*," smiles, and encouragement throughout the ceremony, and knew when to rise and sit without prompting by the rabbi.

It appeared as though the community in which this *Bat Mitzvah* took place was fluent in their Jewishness and in the ritual activity that took place.

In conclusion, this was a strong and vibrant example of a lifecycle ritual. The community was fluent in the ritual, the ritualizers were clear in their purpose and motivation, and the *Bat Mitzvah* herself appeared to recognize her own participation in a transformative experience. It was eye-opening and fascinating to observe this rite of passage.

WORKSHOPS ON RITUAL

During the summer of 2013, we had the opportunity to run separate workshops at the synagogues for which we were interning. These workshops were intended for discussion, evaluation, and learning based on the topic of "ritual." Here we present our summaries of the workshops we conducted.

TEMPLE JUDEA, TARZANA CA, SUMMER 2013 – JACLYN

WORKSHOP 1:

The participants in this workshop were four women between the ages of 50 and 75 plus the facilitator. The women who participated in this workshop are all engaged and active congregants at this synagogue. They claimed to feel compelled to participate in discussions and study centered around the topic of lifecycle ritual.

First, we began with a set induction. It was a word association exercise focused on the core word, "ritual."

Here are some of the words these participants associated with "ritual:"

-Tradition
-Comfort
-Commemoration
-Family
-Memories
-Community
-Milestone
-Archaic
-Selective
-Proprietary
-Exclusionary
-Liturgy
-History
-Connection
-Repetition
-Prayer
-Celebration
-Meaningless
-Thought provoking
-Negative and positive
-Relevant

At first, the women all called out positive words. Then Participant #1 apologized and said, "I don't mean to be negative but ..." and added "meaningless." Once she offered her word, I believe the participants felt free to share more negative, less enthusiastic words. The floodgates opened and the words turned from wholly positive to more of a mixture.

Towards the end of the exercise, Participant #2 asked if I was defining ritual as "something that is repeated, like a family ritual, or a one-time ritual?" I explained that it was something that would define together because the term "ritual" may take on many different identities. She responded by saying that she "thought that tradition and ritual were two separate things." Participant #1 added that it sounded like the rituals we were discussing today had to do with transformation.

Next, we moved into the text study and discussed liminality. The word "liminal" was clearly a new entity for all four women. We discussed waiting on a threshold in reference to the following Victor Turner quote:

> "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between in the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions."[111]

Participant #3 mentioned the Yiddish phrase "*nisht ahein und nisht aher"* meaning, neither here nor there. Participant #4 mentioned that she saw a very clear connection between the "standing on a threshold" idea and the idea of alleviating anxiety. Earlier in the workshop I had

[111] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* Second Ed. (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008) 95

referenced a head shaving ceremony for a camper at Camp Newman in the summer of 2011 that I had created and facilitated. Here, Participant #4 reminded us of the event and pointed out that she believed it must have been a tremendous alleviation of anxiety for the girl involved.

I asked participants if they could think of other liminal spaces in Judaism. They mentioned:

- The period of time in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur
- Transitioning from one senior rabbi to another (the synagogue recently transitioned from a longtime senior rabbi to a senior rabbi entirely new to the community)
- Transitioning from their old building to their new building (the synagogue underwent a massive reconstruction between 2010 and 2011)

Participant #3 referenced to coming back into the building after it had been completed. She pointed out at though she typically spent Rosh Hashanah up in Northern California with her children and grandchildren each year, the year of the completion of the building she chose to stay at her synagogue, the one in which we held the workshop. "Praying there made it really MY space," she offered.

Several of the women in this group are involved in the caring community at the synagogue, a group which provides some degree of comfort, attention, or celebration from lay people in the positive and negative life cycle moments of congregants. When I asked if they felt that the caring community provided a degree of comfort in a liminal time, Participant #2 agreed and claimed, "being in that group - it makes us feel good. We feel touched by the work that we do."

The conversation soon returned to the texts as we looked at the following "Ritual as Performance" quote from Tom Driver:

> "Liturgical vestments are costumes; and bread, wine, baptismal water, pulpit, and Bible are props for Christian worship, in just the same sense as props are used in theater: they are the materials that need to be made ready for the anticipated action. In themselves, they are not much. In the final analysis, it is the action, not the dress that counts."[112]

Participant #4 shared that she firmly believed a ritual was not a "ritual" without community. When Participant #2 asked if she felt that meant that a private, family gathering was not a ritual, Participant #4 asserted that she felt the distinction between them was that a ritual needed community and a tradition needed something else. For her, "there are blurred lines between tradition and ritual." Additionally, she asserted, "we need to be specific about what's a Jewish ritual and what is not."

Additional quotes from the conversation around the Tom Driver "Ritual as Performance" quote included:

- "Music is central to my prayer experience and I just don't want to hear that choir."
- "When it's a service, I want to be the one belting it out."
- "I like a good old-fashioned *chazzan*."
- "It's not that I don't like it, I just like the warmth. I like putting my arms around the person next to me. That's ritual for me."
- "A performance is when you go to a wedding where the rabbi really doesn't know the couple."

[112] Tom Driver, 1991. "Transformation: The Magic of Ritual." In *Readings in Ritual Studies,* edited by Ronald Grimes, 170-187. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996)

- "There's no negative to symbols if they're used in the right context. It's the words that are spoken, not the objects themselves."
- "Music is *so* central."

Participant #2 them told a story about her son's recent wedding to a non-Jewish woman from a Mexican Catholic background. "They wanted to incorporate Jewish traditions. My son and his new wife each stomped on the glass together and conveyed that this meant they were breaking the barriers between [their] two traditions." When I asked about the response that the action garnered, she said that people "responded really positively."

Finally, the last quote, a Vanessa Ochs quote on innovation in ritual, sparked an emotional reaction in a room filled with women. The quote states:

> "To be a ritual innovator, one must be a visionary. Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, the first woman ordained from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and the first woman to serve a Conservative congregation, played a role in the creation of a ceremony to celebrate the birth of a Jewish baby girl. [Rabbi Sasso] saw herself as a responsible Jew taking logical, ordinary steps totally in keeping with the spirit of ancient tradition. Rabbi Sasso shared: "It should be nothing out of the ordinary, but it is. It is 1970 and such a ceremony has never been done before. We don't think of ourselves as making history, but as making holy a moment that has long yearned for sanctification. What is more amazing than our living room experiment is that some thirty years later covenantal ceremonies for daughters are being enacted in living rooms and synagogues across the country."[113]

[113] Vanessa Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2007) 2

When I asked what they thought was so captivating about the text, they answered:

- "What was once unique has become commonplace today, like a women's *seder*. It required courageous women to get the ball rolling. Someone had to be brave."
- "New rituals *have* to be created; there's a place for new rituals."
- "We're on the brink, but no one thinks about it. Things evolve and [they] become the expected."
- "This matters so deeply to me."

We concluded our workshop with these ideas and questions still lingering, vowing to pick up there at our next workshop.

TEMPLE JUDEA, TARZANA CA, SUMMER 2013 – JACLYN

WORKSHOP 2:

The second workshop took place about two weeks after the first. It involved the same participants from the first workshop, plus the addition of two women: one in her early 70s who is friends with Participants #2 and #3, and one in her early 50s who serves as ritual chair on the temple's board. This workshop felt much more conversational than the first. Participants mainly shared stories from their pasts.

First, the participants reviewed what was shared during the first workshop. They cited some of the texts we examined and highlighted some of the takeaways with which they were wrestling, post-workshop.

Among their takeaways were the following:

- Ritual might have a negative connotation, and that's okay
- There are discrepancies between "ritual" and "tradition"
- Liminality – the crossing of the threshold – is significant and important
- Parts of our tradition are indeed ritualistic

The participants then engaged in a lengthy discussion riffing on the difference between "ritual" and "tradition." I made it clear that it was neither my job nor my responsibility to define it for those participants; that part of the fun was for them to define it for themselves.

Next the participants returned to the opening exercise from our first workshop and the words they associated with ritual. Among their observations were the following:

- For some, *comfort* is the central word
- For others, it's *familiarity*: ritual as something that is repeated often
- Participant #4 stated, "being in a foreign country, I feel comfort when I think of Judaism; walking into any sanctuary and knowing what's happening"
- Participant #3 again brought up the Yiddish concept of "*nisht ahein und nisht aher*" and its relationship to liminality; neither being here nor there.

Participants went back to the idea of ritual innovation and asked one another, and Jaclyn, how something becomes popular or accessible. In other words, how do congregations and/or communities get to the point of "this is the way it's always been done" with regard to ritual innovation? Finally, we concluded our workshop with a discussion on "grey area" in Jewish ritual. Namely, what are the places that exist in our lives where we wish we possessed a ritual of some sort to help with our transition? Congregants cited the following:

- Becoming an empty nester
- The loss of a child and the need for a different type of ritual to mourn the loss of a life "not lived"
- Saying goodbye before college
- Getting a job, losing a job
- A ritual for performing a mitzvah
- Starting a new school or new program
- Sanctifying one's new home

Each of the participants spent considerable time describing why they felt it was necessary to have these rituals, without actually considering or mentioning what those rituals might look like. To conclude, we said "*todah rabah*" to one another and I thanked each of them for participating.

CENTRAL REFORM CONGREGATION WOMEN'S RETREAT – ST. LOUIS, MO
SUMMER 2013 – DEANA

During my summer internship in St. Louis, Missouri, I had the opportunity to help envision and plan the annual women's retreat at a nearby conference/retreat center. The theme of this year's retreat was "Transformation." During planning sessions, it was determined that I would lead a workshop on "Transformation through Ritual," during which I would discuss how we use ritual to mark transitional and transformative moments in a Jewish way.

To begin the session, we used synectics to help us gain a better understanding of what we mean when we say "ritual." Synectics is an activity that takes participants through a series of brainstorming exercises to help them to create metaphors for a selected word; in our case, "ritual." At the end of the process, the participants of the CRC Women's Retreat selected the following metaphors as their favorites:

- A ritual is dancing.
- A ritual is a risk
- A ritual is poetry

This exercise enabled us to open up a discussion about ritual in more concrete terms, helping congregants to understand that the word "ritual" connotes countless ideas that differ from person to person.

Afterward, we moved into a conversation about the wider purpose of ritual. To this end, I provided them with Victor Turner's definition of liminality, also cited above in Jaclyn's workshop:

> "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between in the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions."[114]

This sparked an intense discussion about the concept of liminality itself. One participant remarked "I think I have been in a liminal state for some time, but I didn't realize there was a

[114] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* Second Ed. (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008) 95

word for it!" Many of the participants wholeheartedly agreed with this statement, and excitedly began discussing what this new word meant to them.

I then posed the question: "Looking back, have there been occasions in your life when you felt like you needed a Jewish ritual, but, for one reason or another, there was not one for you?" As the participants pondered this question, I could see the wheels turning in their heads. After having been introduced to this new word, "liminality," I could see many of the women looking back on occasions, both happy and sad, where ritual would have been helpful to them but was absent.

Overwhelmingly, the responses seemed to indicate that there were many opportunities to celebrate happy occasions in the Jewish community, but tumultuous or sad occasions were left unmarked, causing the women to express feelings of isolation. As it turned out, a large contingent of women present on the women's retreat this year were divorcees, and one by one, they began to wonder how the painful transition from married to single could have been tempered by a Jewish ritual to mark the time in a sacred way.

The rest of the conversation and workshop continued these discussions, with women thinking about the ways in which they could mark the liminal phases of their lives and seek out Jewish ritual when they felt that they needed it.

This workshop was invaluable to our research. The metaphors the women came up with for rituals not only beautiful and inspiring, but they are enormously helpful in thinking through the multiple meanings of ritual. But most importantly, it helped me to recognize the power Jewish ritual can have in normalizing an experience. The most basic lifecycle rituals, *brit milah*/naming ceremonies, *b'nai mitzvah*, weddings, death and mourning, are universal; all

people move through these stages of life, and it is comforting for many to know that they are not alone in their joy or in their pain. In expanding the definition of lifecycle ritual, we have the power to normalize a greater number of life experiences for our communities, showing them that they not only have a Jewish way to mark this transitional phase, but that they are not the first nor the last to have encountered this liminal moment.

INTERVIEWS

When we began work on our thesis, there were two individuals referenced over and over in the field of ritual studies; people to whom so many others encouraged us to speak. One is an Orthodox female rabbi in the Los Angeles area who received ordination from Reb Shlomo Carlebach. Her work in ritual innovation – and her lens on ritual as an Orthodox Jewish woman – is well-known. The other is the executive director of *Mayyim Hayyim* Living Waters Community Mikvah in the Boston area. This organization is lauded and recognized worldwide for its progressive and innovative use of *mikvah* in Jewish ritual.

We had the opportunity to interview both these women. Below are our summaries from each interview:

REB MIMI FEIGELSON – IN-PERSON INTERVIEW – OCTOBER 2013

On Thursday, October 10th, 2013, we had the opportunity to visit Reb Mimi Feigelson at her home in Los Angeles, California. Reb Mimi, the first Orthodox female rabbi and a scholar of Chasidic Thought, serves as the *Mashpi'ah Ruchanit* (spiritual mentor) at the Ziegeler School of

Rabbinic Studies. Because of her unique background as both an Orthodox woman and a rabbi, we knew that she would have an understanding of ritual unlike anyone else. We were therefore eager to have the opportunity to talk with her and ascertain how she engages in ritual while still remaining within the realm of Orthodox practice; how does she innovate and yet maintain an authentic Orthodox Jewish lifestyle?

We first asked Reb Mimi to tell us a little bit about her background and her journey to becoming a rabbi. She shared with us that she grew up in Israel, living first in Rechovot and then in Jerusalem. She explained that she has always had a relationship with God, cultivated in large part by her teachers and students. She did not grow up aspiring to be a rabbi, but rather she aspired to have a meaningful relationship with God and to live a life of service.

She began taking classes with Rav Kook, the chief rabbi of Rechovot, at the age of 12. At the age of 16 she joined the Gesher Youth Movement, which brings together religious and secular Israeli youth. During that time, she spent some *Shabbatot* in Modi'in learning with Rabbi Shlomo Carlbach, but didn't stay connected to him, and soon after, she embarked on what would become a six or seven year journey into the *Hareidi* world.

But Reb Mimi found it hard to remain in the ultra-Orthodox world because of her intense love of learning. In her early 20s she found her way back to the home of Shlomo Carlebach and entered into a *rav-talmid* relationship, learning about the Jewish philosophy of *hasidut,* seeking to have ownership of her own religious life. Reb Mimi continued learning, always finding study partners, teachers, and students. She soon became the associate director of Yakar, and the director of its' woman's Beit Midrash and began teaching full time.

It was then that she came to realize that the only thing standing between her and her rabbi's *smichah* (rabbinic ordination) was her gender. Together with Danny Gordis, they approached Reb Shlomo Carlebach and declared that they wanted to study for *smichah.* It is important to note that at the time, Reb Mimi didn't realize the implications of this momentous decision; she didn't realize what seeking *smichah* as an Orthodox Jewish woman meant in terms of feminism, politics, or denominations. Reb Mimi only wanted a link to the lineage, and did not approach her *smichah* with the idea that she was going to be the first female Orthodox rabbi.

Reb Shlomo Carlebach understood and nurtured Reb Mimi's love of learning and dictated the trajectory of study (*halacha* and *Gemara)* that would lead her to *smichah*. There would be some parallels to the learning that takes place in other Orthodox seminaries, but Reb Shlomo wanted to teach rabbis of the 21st century. Reb Mimi describes this warm acceptance as an "affirmation of who she is."

Many years later, Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University in Los Angeles, had a vision of what a rabbinical school with a spiritual mentor could look like. And though she loved Jerusalem with all her heart, Reb Mimi knew that Reb Shlomo didn't ordain her to stay in Jerusalem. Going to America would mean that she could impact the lives of the Ziegler rabbinical students at the American Jewish University.

We then broached the subject of ritual and Reb Mim's relationship to it. Reb Mimi explained that gender and feminist theology are not the constructs with which she frames of the world. To her, participation, inclusion, and presence are the most important components to ritual regardless of gender.

She began her discussion of ritual with an anecdote about *davening* at home for three years because she wouldn't *daven* without a *mechitzah*, but at the same time she needed to be in to be in a place where it was important that women were present and the community was *davening* together as a community of men and women, even if women weren't leading any part of the service or considered part of the *minyan*—which was difficult to find in Jerusalem. For Reb Mimi to make peace with being on the other side of the *mechitzah*, she explained that she needs the men to understand that her silence on the other side of the *mechitzah* is not a deficiency on her part, but rather what is expected of her because of her gender role. Therefore, she explains, it is up to the men to adequately honor her silence through intensity and proficiency in their prayer.

Reb Mimi explained to us that in order to understand how Orthodox women can find a place in religious life, one must ask "what needs to be here, and what would honor this sacred space?" Sometimes this plays out as silence, sometimes presence, and other times the ability to create where there is space to create. For Reb Mimi, what happens on the men's side of the *mechitzah* is irrelevant; men have a different construct of obligations, obligations that are not required of women. It is here, precisely because of this difference, that we find the freedom to create and innovate. Reb Mimi explains that we, as women, should not seek to mirror the obligations and rituals of men; we should not strive to take on identical ways of learning and praying. In Reb Mimi's words, "if you have an obligation, you are bound to a structure. If you don't, then you have the opportunity to decide what can be."[115]

[115] On how Orthodox Feminists perceive halakhic vacuums as opportunities for religious creativity, see Rachel Adler, "Innovation and Authority: The Case of the 'Women's Minyan Responsum'" *Gender Issues in Jewish Law: Essays and Responses.* Walter Jacob and Moshe Zemer, eds. (New York: Berghan Press, 2001)

With regard to ritual innovation, Reb Mimi claims that she first must ascertain if there is a structure already in place. Where there is a ritual, she works within that ritual, if there is not, she—as she calls it—"gets to play." When there is a ritual in place she can "dress it up," so to speak, where there isn't, she can "read the white spaces between the black letters." For example, Reb Mimi will not alter the structure of a *brit milah*, but she might add *nigunim* or create a space for the baby's mother to be heard in a way with which she is comfortable.

Reb Mimi told us a story about the first funeral that she performed in order to better illustrate her relationship to ritual. A number of years ago, while visiting Canada, she was asked to officiate at the funeral of a Reform rabbi. Here, she confronted the dilemma of how she could officiate the ceremony if, as a woman, she was not permitted to sing in front of men? She called upon her mentor, Rabbi Mickey Rosen, for advice. Rabbi Mickey was able to provide Reb Mimi with a *teshuvah* from Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef who permitted the recitation of *Birkat HaGomel* in synagogue even when men were present. He explained that, "when the constellation is one of holiness, where the *Shechina* dwells, one need not be concerned with men's improper thoughts, as the holiness of the moment will leave no room for such thoughts."``````Reb Mimi uses this story to help explain that she needs a *halachic* way in; if she can avail herself of a *halachic* source to support her, she can work through it.

Reb Mimi left us with the following questions to ponder as we continued our research:

1. In creating Jewish rituals, who are we answering to and who are we responsible to?

2. What does it mean to be responsible to the tradition and/or to God?

These questions are important ones for us to consider, and they have helped us think about the question of boundaries. Are there boundaries to ritual innovation, and if so, what are they? What does it mean to innovate and yet remain true to the tradition? How much of the tradition must we retain in order for a ritual to remain wholly Jewish?

CARRIE BORNSTEIN – SKYPE INTERVIEW – OCTOBER 2013

On October 22nd, 2013 we interviewed Carrie Bornstein, executive director of the *Mayyim Hayyim* Living Waters Community Mikvah in Newton, Massachusettes. *Mayyim Hayyim*, which first opened its doors in 2004, has been lauded as an innovative space with dynamic programming in the field of Jewish ritual. It includes not only spaces in which men and women can immerse in the *mikvah*, but offers educational programming, as well. To quote its website:

"*Mayyim Hayyim* is a resource for learning, spiritual discovery, and creativity where women and men of all ages can celebrate milestones like weddings and *b'nai mitzvah*, where conversion to Judaism is accorded the honor and dignity it deserves; where survivors of trauma, illness, or loss find solace; and where women can explore the ritual of monthly immersion on their own terms. A busy center of community life, *Mayyim Hayyim* provides 1400 immersions and over 110 educational programs every year, art exhibits in our gallery, national consultation services, and meaningful volunteer opportunities and training."[116]

[116] About Page; *Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters Community Mikvah* Website: http://www.mayyimhayyim.org/About; No Author

The organization has received several awards, grants, and international recognition for its work. Their mission statement includes a quote by Rav Kook: "The old becomes new, and the new becomes holy." This is the business of ritual innovation in one of its finest forms.

Our interview with Carrie Bornstein took place over Skype. First she told us her personal story, beginning with her upbringing in the Reform Movement and her first experience at the *mikvah* before her wedding in 2003. In speaking about her experience in this Orthodox *mikvah*, she said, it felt "okay, important, and meaningful. Neither positive nor negative. It simply was."

When Carrie visited *Mayyim Hayyim* for the first time, she was "blown away" by the experience. She could completely relate to her *mikvah* lady (the woman helping her immerse in the *mikvah)* and the experience was filled with intention and meaning. "It was so positive for me personally," she said. Soon after that experience she became a volunteer with the organization. After serving various professional roles with *Mayyim Hayyim*, including Assistant Director, she was eventually hired as its executive director, the position which she now holds. "We are in the business of innovation," she told us. "The organization constantly asks itself, are we remaining relevant? Are we staying innovative? This is how we make our impact."

Mayyim Hayyim recently completed a capital campaign to pay off their mortgage. As Carrie said, "Now, *Mayyim Hayyim* is owned by the community." Moreover, *Mayyim Hayyim* has buy-in from an interdenominational rabbinic council. This council, featuring Jewish leaders from the multiple denominations represented in the Boston Jewish community, works to help *Mayyim Hayyim* achieve its goals, maintain a connection to tradition, and uphold a standard of innovation and accessibility.

As Carrie stated, the *Mayyim Hayyim* experience is centered on the individual. She stated, "From the first interaction an individual is asked, *what are you looking for? Why are you coming?* We try to figure out how best to serve them, right from the initial contact." This process includes a heavy emphasis on openness, warmth, and welcoming.

Carrie informed us that those being trained to work in the *mikvah* (the majority of whom are volunteers) first learn a "mirroring exercise." This is intended to help volunteers understand that the person immersing in the *mikvah* is the one in charge and that the volunteer working with them is expected to follow their lead. Volunteers are instructed to use intentional, positive, and empowering language. Their goal – and the goal of the organization – is to say yes whenever they can.

Some other mantras used by those who work at Mayyim Hayyim include:

- "Don't step on anyone's *kavanah."* (intention)
- "Our definition of Jewish is the widest definition possible."
- "Don't push anyone into the water."

These mantras stress the heavy emphasis the organization places on personal involvement in one's own Jewish rituals.

When asked about how the organization actually does to supplement the *mikvah* experience with Jewish text, Carrie told us their team works diligently to offer an expansive list of readings, prayers, and guides. Visitors are empowered to bring into the space what is meaningful to them, and *Mayyim Hayyim* helps them craft the ceremony they so desire. *Mayyim Hayyim* believes strongly in a visitor having the experience *they* want to have, recognizing that people come to the

mikvah for all different reasons. But – it is a wholly *Jewish* experience and thus, the *Mayyim Hayyim* staff does their best to craft it as such.

From this interview we learned that what has made *Mayyim Hayyim* so successful is their progressive approach to ritual innovation. Their ability to bend tradition, coupled with their partnerships with more traditional rabbis and Jewish leaders in the Boston area, has made them deeply successful. It has helped them achieve recognition and financial stability, and it has gotten the broader Jewish community to take them seriously. *Mayyim Hayyim* has recognized – through its title, programming, staff, and vision – that they are most successful when they have buy-in from the community.

Finally, when we asked Carrie what she thought were the emblems of success, she informed us: "We get dozens of letters from people every day, thanking us for giving them a truly transformative experience. There's no greater validation than that." Additionally, many organizations throughout the world have contacted *Mayyim Hayyim*, attempting to replicate what they have created and the work they have done in their own towns and cities. This, for Carrie and for us, spells success.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have attempted to uncover and highlight how Jewish ritual exists "in the field." How do rabbis and cantors conceptualize ritual? How do congregants view ritual, liminality, or the idea of transformation? How does it impact them, if at all? How does ritual innovation manifest in communities throughout the country and the world?

We have done our best to present the perspectives shared with us over the past few months, but know that this is only the beginning. We hope that our project sparks further conversation amongst rabbis and cantors in all denominations about the impact of life cycle events at which they officiate. We have already been told that the questions in our survey prompted our participants to think more deeply about the standards they hold. To us, this is the greatest gift our thesis could offer. To quote our teacher Michael Zeldin and the Rhea Hirsch School of Education motto: "*question what is and imagine what can be.*"[117] We believe our third chapter will do that, and more.

[117] "Become a Leader in Jewish Education" page; Rhea Hirsch School of Education at HUC-JIR Website: http://huc.edu/academics/degree-programs/become-leader-jewish-education; No Author

CHAPTER THREE: CREATION

From our extensive research and fieldwork there emerges one final question: what is it that human beings *seek* with regards to Jewish ritual? Furthermore, what is it that humans yearn for that Jewish tradition, as it currently stands, does not address? The echoes of this singular question reverberate through each aspect of our field research. And, this is the question that this final piece of our thesis seeks to answer.

Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner posited that liminality is the impetus that launches various forms of ritual. He explains that, "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between in the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, and ceremonial."[118] Liminality, as we have seen, often serves as the point of entry for people to recognize their need to mark an important life moment in a sacred way. It is our belief that Jewish ritual can and *should* fill that void. Embracing the holiness of Judaism in an innovative way - of which we will present three examples in this chapter - is the link from one end of the proverbial threshold to another.

Our research, both in abstract theory as well as field work, has proven that many people *do* have moments in their lives that they want to mark in a Jewish way; moments to which most traditional lifecycle rituals do not currently speak. In our survey, members of the clergy have shared that they are open and eager to explore the world of ritual innovation (with caveats, depending on denomination and a variety of other factors). Chapter Two proved that many clergy members cannot define ritual in a single sentence, but rather find it to be multifaceted and

[118] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* Second Ed. (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008) 95

without a clear definition. Not a single clergy member from any denomination indicated that a ritual's authenticity derives from its fixed nature. Furthermore, we found that approximately 81% of the clergy surveyed identified either as mostly or very open to ritual innovation.

In seeking to ascertain which elements contribute to the success or failure of a ritual, we learned from the majority of these clergy members that it is spiritual dimension (the presence of God, holiness, eternity, etc.) that is the most impactful. Transformative elements, the presence of the ritualizer, and liturgical choices are also key components in the success of a lifecycle ritual. We have used this information to shape our creation, re-imagination, and innovation of lifecycle ritual in this chapter.

A number of ritual theorists have taught us that a new ritual is most seamlessly incorporated into Jewish tradition if it seems as though "it has always been done this way." As we engage in the re-imagination of lifecycle rituals, this is the mantra that pervades our consciousness.

The Talmud teaches that Rabbi Hanan once asked, "What is the law?" Rabbi Abaye answered simply: "Go and see what the people do."[119] As we take a look around our diverse communities today, Jews appear to be asking the following question over and over: "*how do we connect in new ways?"* Jewish professionals, clergy, and lay leaders are responding in force with creative and alternative ways of being, living, and *doing* Jewish. They are meeting people where they *are:* engaging in creation, innovation, and reimagination in synagogues, JCCs, hospitals, schools, organizations, homes, and much more. However, as we learned from our research, the way in which clergy often respond to new ritual needs is often "off the cuff," spontaneous, or improvised. Clergy often react to individual needs as they arise, rather than respond thoughtfully

[119] Babylonian Talmud, *Eruvin* 14b (Authors' translation)

and intentionally. Imagine how much more impactful these rituals could be if they were formalized and shared with others who might encounter the very same demands.

In the following pages we are proud to present three separate lifecycle rituals that we have created. Using our first two chapters as a foundation, we have jumped into the world of ritual innovation with gusto. We have looked to the Jewish world to see what people *do*, and are now seeking to infuse that "doing" with holiness, intention, and meaning.

Ronald Grimes explains that there are two models for ritual creation, the "plumber" model and the "diviner" model. The two must work in tandem in the world of ritual innovation. The ritual plumber's model "is practical and free of high-flown expectations. Ritual plumbers are not enamored of the rhetoric of art. They feel more comfortable with the notion of inventiveness than with the boastful-sounding idea of creativity." In the "diviner" model, on the other hand, "circumspection and allusion are the essence to this model...You wait, attend, contemplate, watch, see what emerges...Your aim is to find, 'to divine' the right tone, which, when struck, will cause the right thing...simply to shatter like glass or explode into dust that the breezes can carry to the four corners of the world."[120]

In this section of our thesis, we see ourselves working primarily in the realm of the "diviner's" model. We have waited, observed, researched, asked the right questions, and have tried to intuit what it is that people yearn for. Yet, we are ever mindful of the importance of the role of the plumber, the necessity of fixing what is broken. "Without a serious commitment to both the nuts and bolts of ritual, and without a devotion to the mysterious breath of its life, rites of passage flounder."[121]

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[120] Ronald Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Reinventing Rites of Passage.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 12

[121] Grimes, 13

As “diviners” we have chosen to focus on three core times of need in the human life trajectory where we see opportunities for substantial, meaningful lifecycle ritual innovation: times of celebration, times of loss and sorrow, and times of trauma and transition.

To that end, we present in the following pages a ritual prior to the ordination of rabbis or cantors, a ritual mourning the loss of a relationship, and a cycle of rituals for cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery.

RITUAL ONE: *HAVDALAT EREV RAV*

A PRE-ORDINATION RITUAL FOR CLERGY

A RITUAL FOR *SIMCHA* (JOY)

Receiving one's *smicha* - rabbinic or cantorial ordination - is a momentous event. It is filled with emotion: excitement, nervous energy, happiness and joy. Yet it is a bittersweet time, for it is the end of one era and the beginning of another. It is a transition from student to professional and from a community of peers to a much broader community of Jews. It is a change in status, lifestyle, and potentially in geography. Above all else, it is a moment when one leaves behind an identity - that of rabbinic or cantorial student - and becomes a rabbi or cantor, the person that others turn to for answers in times of need. It is with this in mind that we chose to create a ritual prior to ordination.

The ordination day itself is its own ritual. It is a day of pomp and circumstance when a person is surrounded by family and friends. It is a day of great excitement and celebration. Yet there is little time on that day devoted to personal reflection. There is limited space for the recognition of this particular, individualized liminal life moment. Ordination is a ritual for the community; it is the *community* that witnesses the transformation from student to rabbi. The ritual we have composed is a ritual for *us.* It is a more private, personal rite where we can gather together with our classmates and recognize the holiness of the moment.

We chose to repurpose the ritual of *havdalah* for this pre-ordination ritual. In *havdalah*, we recite the blessing separating Shabbat from the rest of the week. We say "*hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol" –"* [Blessed is the One] who separates the holy from the mundane." In our pre-ordination ritual we use this same blessing and the framework of *havdalah* to recognize our

transition from students to *klei kodesh* – instruments of holiness. This ritual gives us the opportunity to mark the moment, recognize its symbolism, and bless one another as we move forward into this new phase of our lives.

PREP-WORK FOR PARTICIPANTS

Prior to the ritual taking place, we ask that participants first find a candle that speaks to them in some way. This is a candle that will represent their moment of transition. It is our hope that this candle will remain with them in their professional office throughout at least the first part of their career. It should be a candle that physically appeals to them, has a pleasing scent, and/or corresponds to a certain feeling associated with their impending ordination.

Next, we ask that participants compose a brief "blessing for moving forward" that they will share with the rest of their classmates. The blessing is meant to apply both to the individual and their classmates, recognizing the journey they have traveled together and the paths that each of them will take separately in the weeks, months, and years to come. After the ritual, the facilitator(s) should collate these blessings into a book of some sort so that participants may refer back to them.

PREP-WORK FOR FACILITATOR(S)

This ritual centers on the element of fire. We suggest the ritual take place on the beach with access to a bonfire pit. If that is not possible, someone's backyard, a park, or a lake are sufficient.

Facilitator(s) should make sure to have matches, a braided *havdalah* candle, *kiddush* cup, and a spice box. Facilitator(s) should make sure someone with a guitar is present to play not only

the *havdalah* melodies but other songs and *niggunim,* as well. Facilitator(s) should prepare copies of the ritual itself for participants to follow along.

By the end of the ritual, it is our hope that participants will have honored their journey through rabbinical school, recognized their moment of transition, and looked ahead to the future.

THE RITUAL OF *HAVDALAT EREV RAV*

OPENING: *GESHER TZAR M'OD*

Kol ha'olam kulo	כל העולם כולו
Gesher tzar m'od	גשר צר מאד
V'ha'ikar	והעיקר
Lo l'fached klal	לא לפחד כלל

The whole world is a very narrow bridge and the most important part is not to be afraid.

WELCOME

Bruchim Habaim, welcome to our *Havdalat Erev Rav*. Tonight, we come together as classmates to share in the joy that next week will bring, and also to honor the journey that we have walked together and that we will conclude together next week.

Receiving our *smichot* is a momentous event towards which we have each worked for five years, six years, or most of our adult lives. This time is charged with emotion: we are excited, nervous, joyful, and ready for what lies ahead. Yet it is a bittersweet time, for it is the end of one era and the beginning of another. It is a transition from student to rabbi, from a community of peers to a much broader community of Jews. It is a change in status, lifestyle, and perhaps location. Above all else, it is a moment when we leave behind our identities as students and embrace our new identities as rabbis.

Next week's ordination ceremony is its own ritual. It is shared by us, our families, friends, and the community. Tonight is a ritual for *us.* It is a more private, personal rite where we can recognize the holiness of the moment that is upon us; where we will honor our journey through HUC, mark this moment of transition, and look ahead toward our futures.

We chose to repurpose the ritual of *havdalah* for this pre-ordination ceremony. In *havdalah*, we recite the blessing separating Shabbat from the rest of the week. We say *hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol* - [Blessed is the One] who separates the holy from the mundane. In our *Havdalat Erev Rav* we use this same blessing and the framework of *havdalah* to recognize our transition from students to *klei kodesh*.

The Torah teaches that Moses stood before the burning bush during his moment of transformation from runaway Egyptian prince to leader of the Jewish people. When God called out to Moses, Moses responded with "*hineini*." We too have been called to lead the Jewish people and have answered with a resounding "*hineinu*." We stand **here**, before **this** fire, ready to take on our new roles just as Moses took on his.

As we light this *havdalah* candle, we pause to reflect on the holiness of this moment. The wicks of this candle are intertwined just as our journeys to the rabbinate are intertwined. And from this combined light we light our own candles, reminding us that even as we part ways, we will always be connected to this source of light that unites us all.

Facilitator(s): We now light this braided *havdalah* candle, whose multiple wicks represent our interwoven paths. We invite you to come forward and light your own individual candle.

Participants come forward to light candles, one by one.

Facilitator(s): Prior to the ceremony, we asked that you all take a few minutes to compose a "blessing for moving forward" to be shared tonight. We will intersperse these blessings throughout tonight's ceremony and ask that you share yours when you feel the moment is right. Right now, we invite three of you to start us off.

Sharing of blessings one, two, and three.

BLESSING OVER WINE

Facilitator(s): We begin with the blessing over wine, representing the sweet beginnings of our journeys in Israel. We entered into this program unformed, unsure of what the next five or six years would bring. What kind of rabbis would we become? What kind of rabbinate would we create for ourselves? Our relationships with one another and our time at HUC were just beginning. Tonight, we honor those early days of HUC and raise this glass of wine in recognition of all those who helped us embark on this sacred path.

All:

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Facilitator(s): We invite three more people to come forward and share their blessings.

Sharing of blessings four, five, and six.

BLESSING OVER SPICES

Facilitator(s): We continue with the blessing over the spices, representing the depth of our collective experience. We recognize that our journey has not been without struggle, but we have met each challenge head-on. We use spices to enhance natural flavor; to bring out the rich and robust undertones that sometimes need just a bit of help to shine through. Tonight, we recognize the depth and quality of our HUC experience. We honor the struggles, the doubts, the

insecurities, and ultimately, the ability to truly see ourselves and find our own voices. These are the spices that have made us into the people we are today; the rabbis that we aspire to be.

All:

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא מיני בשמים

Blessed are you, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of all the different spices.

Facilitator(s): We invite three more people to come forward and share their blessings.

Sharing of blessings seven, eight, and nine.

BLESSING OVER FIRE

Facilitator(s): We continue with the blessing over the fire, lighting the path toward holiness and Torah. We lift up our hands to see the light reflected on our fingernails as we recite the words of this blessing, knowing that though the light comes from a single source, we each receive it in a different way. Tonight, we think about the journey ahead and the ways we will bring forth this light to the communities we will each be blessed to serve. As we do so, may we remember the source of this light, knowing that it burns brightly within each of us and lights our paths forward.

All:

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא מאורי האש

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, Creator of the lights of fire.

Facilitator(s): We invite four more people to come forward and share their blessings.

Sharing of blessings ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen.

BLESSING OVER DISTINCTION

Facilitator(s): We conclude with the blessing over distinction; the separation of holy from profane. Though Shabbat is the pinnacle of the week –the time of joy and celebration—we appreciate the weekdays because, without them, we would not fully understand the sweetness of Shabbat. These are the days of creation; the time when our work is accomplished. The weekday is the journey that leads us toward the holiness of Shabbat.

In approximately one week, we will officially become *klei kodesh,* vessels of holiness. We will receive the *smicha* that we have spent years working toward. We will hold in our hands the future of the Jewish people. However, tonight we also acknowledge the sacredness of the *chol,* the journey that has led us to this most holy of life's moments. We do this together as peers, friends, and colleagues grasping at the light each of us carries within us; the light we will take forward into the great Jewish world.

When we extinguish our individual flames in just a moment, we will say goodbye to the *kedushah* of Shabbat and welcome back the *chol* of the week. Tonight, in this ceremony, we will also bid farewell to the *chol* that brought us to the *kedushah* of ordination. And even though ordination will bring us to a new path, we remember that we do not walk this path alone. When we are feeling lonely, isolated, or unsure of ourselves, we will recall the *chol* that led us here. And in those moments, we will look to our candles and remember the sweetness of the journey, the depth of the spices, and the flame that continues to light our path ahead.

All:

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם המבדיל בין קדש לחול

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe,
who distinguishes holy from profane.

Facilitator(s): We conclude with a blessing from one of our beloved teachers, Rabbi Richard Levy.

Blessing from Richard

Extinguish Flames, ask all to blow out candles.

CLOSING SONGS AND BLESSINGS

Shavua Tov* and *Eliyahu HaNavi

Facilitator(s): We close with the words of Ani v'Atah:

אני ואתה נשנה את העולם - אני ואתה אז יבואו כבר כלם

אמרו את זה קדם לפני - זה לא משנה

אני ואתה נשנה את העולם

אני ואתה ננסה מהתחלה - יהיה לנו רע אין דבר זה לא נורא.

You and I will change the world, you and I. Then all will join us. Though it's been said before, it doesn't matter. You and I will change the world. You and I will start from the beginning. It may be difficult, but it does not matter.

RITUAL TWO: *SHIVAT GERUSHIN*

A POST-DIVORCE PERIOD OF MEANINGFUL MOURNING

A RITUAL FOR *HEFSED* (LOSS)

Divorce is a complicated time in the life of any individual, couple, family, or community. Divorce is the end of a phase of one's life, whether for good or for bad. However long a marriage or relationship lasts, the end of that relationship is a time fraught with emotions spanning the spectrum: guilt, grief, sadness, relief, excitement, pain, and so forth. As has been articulated to us by several people throughout our year of thesis research, divorce most prominently results in deep feelings of loss.

Within the construct of *halacha*, it is necessary for a woman to obtain a *get* (divorce document) to end a marriage. Similarly, in secular law, the granting of a divorce requires a couple to appear in court in the presence of a judge. In both cases, a piece of paper effectively ends the marriage. These are rituals unto themselves. They represent the official ending of one phase of being and a movement forward into the next; from married to single again. However, we argue that for some individuals (particularly those seeking a greater sense of closure) this is simply not enough.

A marriage often begins with pomp and circumstance, high expectations, and is filled with hopes and dreams. A couple typically begins their life together surrounded by family and friends sharing in their joy. And yet, the ending of a marriage does not often touch this level of symbolic significance. Divorce is often mired in sadness and/or shame. However, it is equally as important to conclude a marriage in a meaningful way. For that reason, we have created a ritual for the ending of a marriage that repurposes the period of Jewish mourning known as *shiva.*

We have intentionally chosen *shiva*—the seven-day period of mourning following the burial of a loved one—as the foundation for this ritual. Though a person has not died, a relationship has. No matter the context or cause, the loss is felt deeply. As such, we strongly believe that divorce warrants a period of mourning.

The goal of this ritual cycle is to give those coping with a divorce - whether an individual or an entire family - a structured way to mourn the loss of the relationship. It is framed in such a way that the first half the week's activity honors what has been lost and the second half of the week focuses on transitioning to a new normal.

Additionally, though this ritual specifically focuses on divorce, it is adaptable to fit the ending of any relationship: engagement, friendship, partnership, etc. Its primary objective is to help an individual, family, or community cope with the loss of a relationship in a meaningful way.

THE RITUALS OF *SHIVAT GERUSHIN*

SHIVAT GERUSHIN NIGHT ONE

MEAL OF CONDOLENCE

Just as a mourner returning from the cemetery is greeted in his or her home (or wherever the house of mourning is located) with a meal of condolence, so too should the person receiving his or her *get* or certificate of divorce be greeted by a meal at his or her home. This meal should be prepared and served by family and friends, symbolizing the system of support to which the mourner has access. Just as it is customary to allow a mourner to speak first, so too should the family and friends of the recently divorced individual extend the same courtesy. This first night is a time for the shock to settle in, to begin to accept the reality of the loss, and to express these emotions in a way that is comfortable and meaningful to the divorcee.

K'RIYA

Traditionally, *k'riya* is the symbolic tearing of a piece of clothing worn throughout the seven day period of mourning. For this repurposed *shiva,* the divorcee will wear this piece of clothing through night four. This item of clothing should be personal and should, in some way, be associated with the lost relationship. Perhaps it was an article of clothing worn on the last anniversary or perhaps it was a scarf given by an ex-husband or wife. The act of tearing this piece of clothing serves to harness the depth of one's sorrows in a deeply personal way, thereby outwardly expressing one's grief.

On the one hand, *k'riya* is about rending, division, and separation. On the other hand, division and separation in the case of divorce can come as a tremendous relief. When people feel

trapped in a relationship that feels hurtful, the cutting of their fetters may serve to liberate them. In this act of *k'riya*, we invite the divorcee to mourn the loss of the relationship, feel the tearing apart of what once was, and also remember that they are now free from a relationship that has reached its conclusion.

It is our recommendation that this act take place immediately after receiving a *get* or certificate of divorce, but it may be done upon returning to the house before the meal. As the divorcee engages in the act of *k'riya*, he or she should recite the following blessing:

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם מתיר אסורים

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, who frees the captive.

SHIVA CANDLE

Traditionally, the *shiva* candle is lit upon returning from the cemetery. The burning flame symbolizes the life of the person who is now deceased. In this repurposed *shiva* ritual, the light symbolizes the relationship that once was. Upon returning home, the divorcee should light the *shiva* candle (which we suggest allowing to burn for the entire seven day period) while reciting the following blessing:

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, who has brought me to this time of transition. I light this candle in memory of what once was, recognizing that it can never be again. I light this candle as I mourn the loss of my relationship. May I be mindful over these next seven days of the difficulty that comes with saying goodbye. May I be patient with myself and with loved ones who have offered me their guidance and support. May I forgive myself and others who have caused me pain. And may I be sustained by the knowledge that I will soon enter into a new phase of my life with courage, grace, and dignity. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, whose presence dwells within me.

SHIVAT GERUSHIN NIGHT TWO

During the period of *shiva*, a mourner is surrounded by loved ones, friends, and family who share in the pain of the loss. During this repurposed *shiva* ritual, it is our hope that friends and family gather together to support the recently divorced individual, acknowledging the sorrow and grief that accompanies the end of a marriage.

During *shiva*, it is customary to allow the individual to speak first: he or she dictates the flow and content of the conversation. So too should the divorcee direct the conversation. In the cycle of grief, an individual must accept the reality of the loss, internalize feelings of grief, adjust to life without a loved one, and form a lasting connection with the deceased. As one mourns the death of a relationship, he or she must engage in these same processes. During the second night of *shiva*, it is our hope that the divorcee will begin to internalize the feelings associated with grief, both positive and painful. Mourning the loss of this relationship cannot only be about disparaging the other partner or dwelling on the painful memories of lost love. Rather, it must be a combination of positive feelings and negative ones, honoring the good parts of the relationship along with the bad.

Oftentimes, the divorcee will need some permission to engage in these types of conversations; permission to speak their bitterness. During the Passover *seder*, we eat the *maror*, the bitter herbs, to acknowledge the painful shackles of slavery from which the Israelites broke free. Here, we invoke the blessing of *maror* to give the divorcee permission to shed the tears of bitterness and anger that may accompany a divorce.

On the other hand, it is essential to acknowledge the sweetness of the relationship, as well. There were, hopefully, some moments of passion or compassion that the partners shared. Perhaps beloved children were a result of the union.

One of the most potent Jewish symbols of sweetness is honey. We eat apples and honey on *Rosh Hashanah* to look forward to a sweet new year. Israel is imagined in the Torah as *eretz zavat chalav u'dvash,*[122] a land flowing with milk and honey. Here we invoke the blessing over the sweetness of honey not only to acknowledge the happy and joyous moments of the past, but also to symbolize hope for the future.

On this second night of *Shivat Gerushin*, we invite the divorcee to recite both of the following blessings, the first over the bitter herbs and the second over the honey:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על אכילת מרור

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who makes us holy through commandments, and commands us to eat the bitter herbs.

יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלוהינו אבותינו ואמותינו שתחדש לי חיים מתוקים

May it be your will, Adonai our God, God of our fathers and our mothers that You renew me for a life of sweetness.

SHIVAT GERUSHIN NIGHT THREE

In the grief cycle, an individual must begin to create a new normal for him or herself. He or she will likely be asking himself or herself: *How will I engage in a world as an individual rather than as a part of a couple? I have been a part of a twosome for so long that I no longer know how to be single. For so long, my identity was a husband, wife, or partner -- who am I now*?

[122] Exodus 3:8

The divorcee is now facing a change in identity, a liminal moment where he/she must cross into a new category of being. How can we help ease the transition? We must offer the opportunity to reclaim space, to reclaim identity, and to reclaim one's own *self* as an individual. One's home is the ideal place to do this. In most cases, the married couple previously shared a home, and yet, if they are now divorced, that home was likely not a *shalom bayit,* a home of peace. On night three of *shiva*, we offer the recently divorced individual an opportunity to reclaim his or her space, to establish a true *shalom bayit*.

For the ritual aspect of Day Three, we suggest the divorcee and/or family members remove all *mezuzot* within the home, symbolically cleanse the area of the door frame where the *mezuzah* hung, say a blessing over the entire home, and then re-affix the *mezuzot* to each of the door frames. In this way the ritual serves to symbolically cleanse the home. It also affords the divorcee an opportunity for a new, refreshed *Hanukkat Bayit* - a ceremonial rededication of one's personal space. If the divorcee has recently moved to a new home, rather than reaffixing *mezuzot*, friends and family are invited to provide new *mezuzot* for the new home.

After cleansing the area and reaffixing the *mezuzot*, the divorcee will recite Psalm 30, a psalm that speaks to reemergence into light after a period of darkness. It is entitled *Mizmor Shir Chanukah Bayit L'David:* a Song of the Dedication of the House of David. The psalm speaks to the pain of grief, hoping that someday soon, God will help turn mourning into dancing.

We recommend the following steps:

1. Removing *mezuzot* carefully from their locations within the home.
2. Taking a lightly colored cloth and some water, gently running the wet cloth over the door frame where the *mezuzah* once hung.

3. Saying the following blessing:

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, protector of humanity. Protect me [and my family] as we reclaim this space, our home, together. Allow us to grow within these walls as one new, redefined, whole, unit. Let this home be a place for joy, comfort, and peace. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, who dwells within this home.

4. Re-affixing the *mezuzah* to each door frame in which it once stood. (Divorcee may wish to move *mezuzot* around to different walls)

5. Reciting the following words before affixing each mezuzah:

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וציונו לקבוע מזוזה

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe,
who hallows us with mitzvot and commands us to affix the mezuzah.

6. Recite Psalm 30

מזמור שיר חנוכת הבית לדוד:
ארוממך יהוה כי דליתני ולא שמחתאיבי
יהוה אלוהי שועתי אליך ותרפאני:
יהוה העליתמן שאול נפשי חייתני מירדי בור
זמרו ליהוה חסידיו והודו לזכר קדשו:
כי רגע באפו חיים ברצונו בערב ילין בכי ולבקר רנה
ואני אמרתי בשלוי בל אמוט לעולם:
יהוה ברצונך העמדתה להררי עז הסתרת פניך הייתי נבהל:
אליך יהוה אקרא ואל אדני אתחנן:
מה בצע בדמי ברדתי אל שחת היודך עפר היגיד אמתך:
שמע יהוה וחנני יהוה היה עזר לי:
הפכתמספדי למחול לי פתחתשקי ותאזרני שמחה:
למען יזמרך כבוד ולא ידם יהוה אלוהי לעולם אודך.

A psalm; a song of dedication of the Home, of David.
I will exalt You, O God, for You have raised me up,
and You have not allowed my enemies to rejoice over me.
O God, I have cried out to You, and You have healed me.

O God, You have brought my soul from the grave;
You have revived me from my descent into the pit.
Sing to God, God's pious ones, and give thanks to God's holy name.
For God's wrath lasts but a moment; life results from God's favor, in the evening,
weeping may tarry, but in the morning there is joyful singing.
And I said in my tranquility, "I will never falter."
O God, with Your will, You set up my mountain to be might.
You hid Your countenance and I became frightened.
To You, O God, I would call, and to God I would supplicate.
"What gain is there in my blood, in my descent to the grave?
Will dust thank You; will it recite Your truth?"
Hear, O God, and be gracious to me; O God, be my helper."
You have turned my mourning into dancing for me;
You loosened my sackcloth and girded me with joy.
So that my soul will sing praises to You and not be silent.
O God, I will thank You forever.

7. Following the rededication of *mezuzot,* the divorcee and/or family and/or guests should gather together for a meal.

SHIVAT GERUSHIN NIGHT FOUR

Night four is the transition from the goal of the first part of the week – mourning what was lost – to the goal of the second part of the week, creating a new normal.

The action of this night is simple: the divorcee will take the piece of clothing torn on the first night of *shiva* and tie it together again. As Jews, we are continually engaged in the work of *tikkun olam*, mending the world. But tonight we pose the question: what does it mean to mend one's personal world? The symbolism in the act of retying the torn fabric is quite profound: though the fabric has been mended, it will never be the same as it was before it was torn. Even with the best tailor, there will always be a scar of some sort present in the material. But scar tissue – the evidence of mending – isn't simply a disfiguration. Rather, it makes the whole entity

stronger and more resilient. Tonight, we challenge the divorcee to engage in the work of personal *tikkun olam,* the mending of his or her personal world, while remembering the scar that remains is a symbol of strength for the journey ahead.

We recommend the following steps:

1. The divorcee should remove the article of clothing. (Presumably, he or she has been wearing it the past three nights)

2. Taking the piece of clothing in his or her hands, the divorcee should symbolically or physically re-tie the tear, or fix with a safety pin, saying the following words:

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of comfort and compassion. As I stitch this piece of clothing back together, I symbolically begin to mend this tear in my heart. I know that I will never truly forget the path my life has taken - the path that brought me to this time of mourning. But I know that I must move forward into the great unknown. As I repair this piece of clothing that once meant so much to me, I am reminded that I will one day be whole again, though never the same. The scars I bear will make me stronger, more resilient, and more compassionate. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, the spark of enduring connection.

SHIVAT GERUSHIN NIGHT FIVE

One of the most difficult parts of grief can be one's lack of ability to move from one phase to the next; to see a path forward. Night five of *shiva* affords the divorcee the opportunity to shine a light, figuratively, to illuminate the road ahead.

The writing of a personal *brit* - a covenant - has deep roots in Jewish tradition. Noah and God form a *brit* - an agreement between one another that the world will never again face total destruction. Abraham and God create several *britot,* establishing the expectations one has for the other.

In this exercise, the divorcee has an opportunity to think about the covenant he or she is personally making with himself or herself. This will involve asking the following questions about how life will progress in these uncertain days following the end of a marriage: *What will be different in my day to day reality? What will be the same? How will I exercise compassion towards myself? How will I exercise compassion towards others? How will I find humor and joy today? What are the "bottom-line" promises that I should make for myself?*

This period of mourning inevitably brings with it a myriad of feelings. Sometimes even the most simply daily tasks may seem insurmountable. Some of these "bottom-line" promises might include:

- I promise that I will eat nourishing food every day.
- I promise to go out with a friend at least once per week.
- I will find one thing to laugh about every day.
- I will not engage in self-destructive behaviors as a mechanism to cope with my grief.

This personal *brit* can be a private document, or it can be shared with friends and family. There are no rules, no guidelines for this *brit;* the divorcee should feel free to let his or her creativity flow.

After the individual is finished writing his or her personal *brit*, we invite the divorcee to say the following blessings. The first blessing, the blessing we say when we see rainbows, comes from the aforementioned *brit* between God and Noah after the flood and reminds us that hope emerges from even the worst destruction. The second blessing then establishes the divorcee's *brit* with God for the new life upon which he or she will now embark.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם זוכר הברית ונאמן בבריתו וקים במאמרו

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who remembers, is faithful to, and fulfills Your covenant and promise to creation.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, wellspring of compassion. Empower me to heed the words that I have written, to keep the promises I have made to myself, to continue on the path forward one step at a time. Remind me that though I have been brought low, this path will help me to once again stand upright. Protect me on my journey forward, and illuminate my path toward happiness. Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Source of support on this new journey.

SHIVAT GERUSHIN NIGHT SIX

The final act of this seven-day period of mourning involves a trip to the local *mikvah.* First, however, the mourner should take a walk around the neighborhood, symbolically acknowledging their return to society after a period of mourning. The mourner acknowledges that though he or she is still grieving, the grief must take on a new form and cannot prevent him or her from living life as normally as possible.

In this ritual, we encourage the divorcee to take a walk around his/her neighborhood, perhaps accompanied by family and/or friends. Just as the mourner has been isolated and must now return to society, so too must the divorcee begin to interact with the world once again, acknowledging that though it will be different, he or she must begin to walk the path of life on their own.

After taking this walk, the divorcee should go to the local *mikvah*. If the community in which one lives does not have a kosher *mikvah,* a ceremony can take place in a natural body of water (lake, river, ocean, etc.).

The *mikvah* is traditionally used for family purity. It is typically associated with the laws of *niddah;* physical cleansing following a woman's menstruation and reproduction. However, *mikvah* within this context is an opportunity for rebirth. Emerging from the healing waters of a *mikvah* can be a holistic, moving, and spiritual experience.

It is our hope that the divorcee approaches the *mivkah* as the true final act of his or her week of *shiva.* The waters of the *mikvah* should serve as a symbolic separator between one identity - married - and another - single.

The following words come from the *Mayyim Hayyim* Living Waters Community *Mikveh* and Education Center's collection of immersion ceremonies, "A New Beginning: Ceremonies for the *Mikveh.*" Here, you will find a *kavanah*, an intention, to be read before entering the *mikvah*, and three blessings to be read with each immersion.

INTENTION

To be read before preparing for immersion.

I stand here, having completed the unbinding of a relationship.

I stand here as a Jewish person with dignity and strength.

I stand alone, a whole and complete person, no longer bound as a companion and partner.

FIRST IMMERSION

Take a moment to reflect on what you have left behind.
Slowly descend the steps into the mikvah waters and immerse completely so that every part of your body is covered in the warm water of the mikvah.
When you emerge, recite the following blessing:

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו בטבילה במים חיים

Blessed are You, God, Majestic Spirit of the Universe
who makes us holy by embracing us in living waters.

SECOND IMMERSION

Take a deep breath and exhale completely,
while gently and completely immersing for the second time.
When you emerge, recite the following:

May I turn toward the light.

May I turn toward hope.

May I turn toward new possibilities.

THIRD IMMERSION

Take a moment for personal reflection …
Relax, and let your body soften, as you slowly and completely immerse.
When you emerge, recite the following:

May I emerge from these living waters open and refreshed;

Strengthened to move forward.

May I have the courage to accept what this journey will bring. Amen.

***SHIVAT GERUSHIN* NIGHT SEVEN: SHABBAT**

In Jewish tradition, *shiva* is not observed on Shabbat. To that end, we invite the divorcee to celebrate Shabbat and rejoice in its sweetness. This night is observed whenever Shabbat falls during the cycle of *Shivat Gerushin*, after which the schedule resumes its normal pattern.

On Shabbat, the divorcee should make arrangements with a friend or family member with whom they would like to spend Shabbat. Though this is a difficult time, Shabbat offers a respite and release from grief, if only for a day. As our tradition teaches us, *yism'chu b'malechutecha shomrei Shabbat v'korei oneg Shabbat* - those who keep Shabbat and call it a delight shall rejoice in God's kingdom.

AN ABBREVIATED *SHIVAT GERUSHIN*

Some might find it burdensome to set aside an entire week for *shiva* observance and wish to shorten the experience yet still derive meaning from the ritual acts. In this case, we recommend observing three nights of *shiva*: Night One, Night Four, and Night Six. These three nights mirror the major transitional moments present in the full *Shivat Gerushin*.

Night One includes the meal of condolence, *k'riya*, and the lighting of the *shiva* candle; these are the preliminary acts which allow the divorcee to begin to mourn the loss of the relationship. During Night Four, the divorcee engages in the act of writing a personal *brit*, or covenant, to help adjust to a new life without his or her former spouse. Night Six includes the walk around the block and *mikvah* experience, both of which serve as symbolic separators, helping the divorcee transition from one identity to another – from married to single.

RITUAL THREE: *T'KUFAT SARTAN*

A CYCLE OF RITUALS FOR CANCER DIAGNOSIS, TREATMENT, AND RECOVERY

A RITUAL FOR *CHAVALAH* (TRAUMA)

Cancer. In the year 2013, cancer seemed to appear everywhere. It took up residency in the bodies of the young and the old, the rich and the poor, of every race and religion. In many ways, cancer is the great unknown of this generation. There appears to be no rhyme or reason as to whom it strikes, at what time, and whether or not treatment will be successful. Sometimes chemotherapy, radiation, or alternative medicine works beautifully. Other times, the effects of a cancer treatment are what ultimately end the life of the patient. And whether you are the patient, family member, friend, community member, or health care provider, everyone's lives are touched by this mysterious and unpredictable illness.

In our experience with providing spiritual and emotional care to patients and families wrestling with cancer, it has become clear that illness in general is a difficult subject for many to broach. Clinical Pastoral Education teaches us that presence is the key to successfully providing care for people; simply being there, engaging in active listening, and offering a sympathetic and compassionate ear is invaluable during these times. And yet, during our pastoral care experiences, we have noticed a distinct lack of open and honest dialogue between certain involved parties: patients talk to the rabbi, and family members talk to the rabbi, but oftentimes patients and family do not talk honestly and openly with one another. All involved parties are scared, anxious, and emotionally charged for different reasons. Yet, it is vital to the emotional and spiritual well-being of the whole family that these conversations take place.

Through our research, we have waited and observed. We have watched and listened. We have taken the emotional temperature of our communities. Altogether, it is clear to us that there is great opportunity for Jewish ritual in the midst of this uncertainty. We believe that as people step into the unknown world of cancer treatment, there should exist a framework for holy conversations, a reclaiming of personal dignity, and a recognition of the road traveled.

To that end, we have created three separate rituals to honor three distinct phases of the cancer cycle: diagnosis, treatment, and post-treatment. Because each individual and family experiences cancer in a different way, these three rituals are meant to be accessible, adaptable, and open-ended. A cancer diagnosis does not always result in treatment; a chemotherapy treatment does not always result in hair loss. And, most importantly, a cancer treatment is not always successful. Yet, we believe that it is possible - in fact, necessary - for human beings to mark these uncertain moments in a Jewish way.

We offer the following three rituals with the sincere hope that there will come a time in the not-too-distant future when they will be rendered irrelevant. Additionally, we remind the reader that this ritual may be adapted for an illness with a treatment cycle similar to the one outlined here.

DIAGNOSIS: *SICHOT K'DOSHOT* (HOLY CONVERSATIONS)

The importance of holy conversations cannot be overstated. With the diagnosis of cancer comes the uncertainty of the future for all involved parties: *What will be the fate of the patient? How will a family function while simultaneously balancing the needs of the patient? What will the treatment cycle look like for the patient?* These are the types of questions that need to be posed but often go unasked.

For the patient, the diagnosis of cancer is a shift in identity from healthy human being to cancer patient. For the family, the diagnosis of cancer means balancing both of these identities and trying to live life as normally as possible while still being mindful of the new limitations that this diagnosis brings.

This ceremony is meant to serve as a mechanism for dialogue and conversations between family members and other figures in the support system.

PART ONE: THE LIVING WILL

A living will, or an advance medical directive, allows a patient to dictate his or her preferences for medical care during the treatment cycle. Advance medical directives are used to designate health care proxies, make decisions about life support measures, and consider end-of-life care. These are difficult decisions that come from deeply rooted personal beliefs, which oftentimes creates strife between the patient and the friends and/or family members charged with these directives. The first part of the *Sichot K'doshot*, the Holy Conversations Ritual, allows all parties to consider these ideas and engage in these difficult conversations.

In order for the conversation to go smoothly, both the patient and the friends and family members will need to complete the requisite preparations. Both the patient and the family

members should then agree on a trusted mediator to help to facilitate this conversation and convene this first part of the *Sichot K'doshot*. Once all parties have come to a consensus, each should sign the living will and return it to the patient who will bring it to the second part of the *Sichot K'doshot* ritual.

PREP-WORK FOR THE PATIENT

After receiving such a devastating diagnosis, it is only natural to be overwhelmed, shocked, confused, and scared. Throughout the course of treatment, you will go through different phases and states of emotional and physical well-being. Oftentimes, family members will want to talk with you about your progress, but you might not want to share. Other times, they may be afraid to ask you, and you will want nothing more than to talk. Now, you have the opportunity to shape these conversations: to be open and honest about the kind of care you would like to receive - medically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Sharing your wishes with loved ones is a gift beyond measure. It provides them with certainty in the face of uncertainty; clarity where there seems to be none. These conversations affirm the dignity and sanctity of human life, even in the face of illness.

A living will, or advanced directive, gives you the opportunity to make decisions about medical and end-of-life care. Many shudder to think of asking and answering these questions, claiming that they are too morbid and ultimately unnecessary. However, you have entered a place where these questions are not only pertinent, but essential.

A living will, or advanced directive, is an extensive document which deals with such questions as *"Who your health care proxy will be?" "Will you want ventilators and other machines used to keep you alive?" "What kind of comfort care will you want during these*

times?" There are innumerable examples of living will documents, and it is important to note that in order for these to be legal and binding they must go through a notary. We recommend the *Harvard Medical School Advance Directive* (available online), but encourage you to use the version with which you are most comfortable.

PREP WORK FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Though you are not the patient, the diagnosis of cancer in a friend or family member may understandably be traumatic for you as well. As with the patient, a host of feelings and emotions will present themselves at different times throughout the process: shock, fear, anxiety, and even joy if and when treatments begin to work.

However, you must also begin to envision what this process will look like. As the primary means of support for the patient, you have a unique role in the process, and thus it is essential that your voice be heard as well.

As you prepare for this facilitated discussion, we encourage you to prepare yourself to be open and honest in this conversation. It is unwise to agree to measures of care that you are not comfortable with, yet at the same time, we encourage you to be open to the possibility that the patient's wants and needs may differ from yours. Consider carefully what your boundaries will be, and how you can best offer support to the patient during this time.

PART TWO: THE ETHICAL WILL

Ethical wills are deeply engrained in Jewish tradition. In the Torah we read as Jacob gathers his sons close toward the end of his life, imparting words of wisdom and sharing his end-of-life thoughts. Traditionally, an ethical will speaks to how you would like to be remembered

after you pass from this world to the next. Here, however, we are repurposing the ethical will to serve as a guide for moving forward in the cancer cycle.

PREP-WORK FOR THE PATIENT

In this ritual of *Sichot K'doshot*, the ethical will serves not as a will of remembrance, but rather a will of ethics (as the name suggests) providing you with an opportunity to think about the values that will guide your journey through the cancer cycle: *How would you like to live out these values during the stages of your journey? In what ways can your family and friends be of service in helping you achieve these goals?*

The ethical will can take any form you would like. It can be something as straightforward as a letter, but may also take on a more creative form such as a piece of artwork, an audio recording, or a quilt that you create. This document (or alternative form) is meant to help guide your journey, and thus we invite you to create it in a way that is meaningful and helpful to you. Some questions you might consider as you create your ethical will:

- *How do you envision your treatment cycle?*
- *Who will be your sources of support during this time? How will you spread the support network so that the burden doesn't fall on one person in particular?*
- *What kinds of information on your progress will you want to share with your friends and family, and how would you like it to be shared?*
- *What values will guide your decision making throughout the process?*
- *How will you hold yourself accountable to your loved ones?*

- *What steps will you take to remain emotionally present during your treatment cycle?*

Please take some time to create your ethical will, and when you're ready, we invite you to convene the *Sichot K'doshot* ritual.

PREP-WORK FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

As a caregiver and part of the support system of the patient, your life will be profoundly impacted throughout this process, as well. It is important for you to think through the ways in which you would like to navigate your path forward, the ways in which you can help the patient, and also the times when you might need to take a step back and find yourself again.

For your part in the *Sichot K'doshot* ritual we invite you to write a letter or a blessing of some sort to be shared with the patient. This is your opportunity to share your hopes and wishes, but also your fears and concerns with the patient as you begin this journey together.

THE RITUAL OF *SICHOT K'DOSHOT* (HOLY CONVERSATIONS)

PATIENT HANDS LIVING WILL TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Patient: "When they say I cannot hear you, sing me lullabies and folk songs, the ones I sang to you. I will hear them as an unborn child can hear its mother's music through the waters of the womb. When they say I can feel nothing, press your face against my forehead, rest your hand against my cheek. I will feel them as the woman at the window feels the wind outside the glass. When they say I'm past all caring, brush my hair and braid it in ribbons. I will know it as the seashells on my table know the rhythms of the sea. When they tell you to go home, stay with me if you can. Deep inside I will be weeping."

Naomi Halperin Spigle

Family and Friends:

Night is when the big questions come.
Tucked into the top bunk
you call Heaven,
your sister fast asleep on Earth,
you wait for those final moments
before the day's gates close
to hurl your most pressing questions
into the dark … *when did time start?*
Where is everything that died?
One night you said if Dad and I had just been astronauts
we would have understood everything -
as if all the mysteries of living
would be perfectly clear
if only we could get enough distance.

Lying beside you, eyes closed, the night sky
opening within me, I felt myself floating
weightless, and I pictured the earth.
There were no trees or people or bread or cars.
It looked like that photo we've all seen
taken from space - the blue and green sphere

with veils of white around it. I found it wholly
unfamiliar, almost unlovable. In the dark
I felt your skinny arm next to mine.
We didn't say another word that night,
just lay there, drifting, with our questions.

"Astronauts," by Judy Katz

PATIENT SHARES ETHICAL WILL

FAMILY MEMBERS SHARE BLESSINGS OR LETTERS

HOLY CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN PATIENT AND FAMILY MEMBERS AND/OR CAREGIVERS

CLOSING BLESSING

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who enables us to engage in holy conversations, filling our lives with meaning and purpose. May we be guided by strength, compassion, patience, and understanding on this journey. May we speak words of kindness and grace, even in the face of pain and uncertainty. Help us to be mindful of one another; attentive to our respective needs, fears, and hopes. Give us the strength to support one another on the twisting, turning road we now walk together. Blessed are You, Adonai, who opens up our lips that our mouths may declare our love.

TREATMENT: *GILUACH ROSH* (A HEAD SHAVING RITUAL)

Giluach rosh is Hebrew for "shaving of the head." We have chosen to include this *giluach rosh* ceremony to mark the "treatment" part of this cancer cycle. While we recognize that cancer treatments do not always result in hair loss, we *do* acknowledge that treatments almost always wreak havoc on the body. It is deeply important for a cancer patient to feel as though he or she is taking control over some aspect of his or her physical body. The choice to do so is symbolic of his or her individual strength, and strength is a core piece of this ceremony. However, present in this ritual is also an acknowledgement that the patient has no control over many aspects of this process: treatment, results, and reactions of family and friends, to name a few. To that end, in this ceremony the patient simultaneously embraces control while surrendering a part of him or herself to a higher power.

We see the importance of hair in the Bible specifically through the vows taken by Nazirites. Nazirites are individuals who pledge themselves to God for a specified period of time and for a specific purpose. During this time, Nazarites are to refrain from consuming grape products (wine), touching a corpse, or cutting their hair.[123] Once a Nazir has completed his or her service to God, he or she "shall shave his [or her] consecrated head at the door of the tent of meeting, and shall take the hair of his [or her] consecrated head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings."[124] Hair is an essential component of a Nazirite's vow and identity. In Judges Chapter 13, we encounter Samson, a Nazir. His crowning glory was his hair, the source of his strength. Once it was cut by Delilah, he was rendered powerless and left unsure of who he would be without it.

[123] Numbers 6:3-9

[124] Numbers 6:18

Hair is a core piece of a person's identity. It is a defining characteristic, the loss of which can often be felt as a significant blow to one's confidence. A man or woman whose hair is graying, receding, or falling out may often choose to color it or seek medical attention to stimulate regrowth. Society at large places a premium on thick, luscious locks. It is to this end that the loss of one's hair during a cancer treatment is so devastating.

The *giluach rosh* ceremony is intended to help the patient take control in a seemingly uncontrollable situation. Its secondary purpose, however, is to dedicate one's hair, his or her crowning glory, to something greater. Just as the Nazir dedicates his or her hair to God, so too do we encourage the patient to dedicate his or her hair to a program or organization that provides hairpieces to those who would otherwise be unable to afford them (examples may include: Locks of Love, American Cancer Society, and Pantene Beautiful Lengths). If one's hair is too short to be donated, we suggest that one make a monetary contribution to one of these organizations.

Surrendering to a higher power is a true act of courage. Recognizing that we cannot control everything in our lives – particularly when it comes to a potentially fatal disease – is perhaps the most courageous step of all. It is with this in mind that the final piece of the *giluach rosh* ceremony involves the burning of one's recently shaved hair. In the Torah we read that Moses stood before a burning bush; a bush that was aflame yet not consumed by fire. In that moment Moses gave himself up to God; he surrendered to a higher power knowing the journey ahead would follow an uncertain path. In this ritual we ask the cancer patient to do the same; to relinquish control and spiritually give him or herself up to God, a higher power, or to a force much greater than him or herself alone. As one looks into the flame as their hair is consumed by fire, let it be a symbol of the tension between an individual's desire for control and his or her utter lack of say over what his or her future holds.

If one's hair is long enough to donate, we still suggest burning a small portion before donating the rest to a worthy cause. Additionally, this *giluach rosh* ceremony may be adapted to serve as a ritual for those shaving their heads in solidarity with a cancer patient.

THE RITUAL OF *GILUACH ROSH*

A CELEBRATION OF STRENGTH, A RECLAIMING OF DIGNITY

OPENING SONG: *OZI V'ZIMRAT YAH*

Ozi v'zimrat yah	עזי וזמרת יה
Vay'hi li li'shu'ah.	ויהי-לי לישועה

God is my strength and my song
And will be my freedom.

WORDS OF WELCOME FROM FACILITATOR(S)

B'ruchim Habaim, welcome to our *Giluach Rosh* ceremony. We come together today to honor (patient's name) and celebrate his or her courage in the face of the unknown. *Giluach Rosh* is Hebrew for "shaving of the head." Here, in this moment, (patient's name) has reached a juncture in his or her treatment. The medicine that we hope and pray will heal his or her body has also wreaked havoc upon it.

This ceremony is a reclaiming of personal strength and dignity. It is a moment in which (patient's name) can proudly affirm his or her ability to control some small aspect of an uncontrollable situation. Rather than passively allowing the chemicals and cancer to dictate his or her personal appearance, (patient's name) has claimed that power.

However, surrendering to a higher power is a true act of courage. Recognizing that we cannot control everything in our lives – particularly when it comes to an illness– is perhaps the most courageous step of all. It is with this in mind that the final piece of the *Giluach Rosh* ceremony will involve the burning of (patient's name's) hair. In the Torah we read that Moses stood before a burning bush; a bush that was aflame yet not consumed by fire. In that moment

Moses gave himself up to God; he surrendered to a higher power knowing the journey ahead would follow an uncertain path. In this ritual we ask (patient's name) to do the same; to relinquish control and give him or herself – spiritually – up to God, a higher power, or to a force much greater than him or herself alone.

We recognize that the backdrop of this ceremony is change and transition. And so, we pray together….

PRAYER "FOR BEING OPEN TO CHANGE," FROM *SIDDUR SHA'AR ZAHAV* (ALL)

Mi Shebeirach Avoteinu v'Imoteinu. O God who blessed our ancestors
Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar; who bestows miraculous things to those who are open to your blessings, send your insight and love to (patient's name) as life's journey brings change.
Like Sarah, may we have the strength to continue forward
even if we are not sure where our path may lead.
Like Abraham with his son Isaac, may we have the courage to turn challenges into blessings,
even as we grapple with life's unmarked paths.
Like Hagar with her son Ishmael, may we be granted a glimpse of what is Divine,
so that we may turn our fear into faith.
O Source of all, who revealed the Torah to our people,
let us be open to witnessing Your ways in our lives.
We bless You, O God, who guides our journeys.
And let us say, *Amen*.

WORDS FROM THE PATIENT

Should the patient wish to speak to those assembled, he or she now has the opportunity to do so. These words can be words of gratitude, anxiety, uncertainty, etc.

PRAYER "ON LETTING GO" (FACILITATOR)

To let go is to cherish the memories, to overcome and move on. It is having an open mind and confidence in the future. Letting go is learning and experiencing and growing. To let go is to be thankful for the experiences that made you laugh, made you cry, and made you grow.

It's about all that you have, all that you had, and all that you will soon gain. Letting go is having the courage to accept change, and the strength to keep moving. Letting go is growing up. It is realizing that the heart can sometimes be the most potent remedy. To let go is to open a door, to clear a path, and set yourself free. – Anonymous

INTRODUCTION OF HEAD SHAVING (FACILITATOR)

We stand here on the precipice. As (patient's name) comes forward for the shaving of his or her head, we find ourselves united as one community acknowledging the changes that our beloved (patient's name) is going through. Not only will this head shaving physically impact (patient's name), but it will also serve as the embodiment of the many changes that accompany illness, treatment, and recovery. We stand together in solidarity with (patient's name), our friend, our loved one.

SHAVING OF THE PATIENT'S HEAD

To create a sacred space, the facilitator may decide to play music as the head shaving is taking place. This will both dull the sound of the razor's buzz and soothe guests' potential shock at watching hair disappear from their loved one's head. Conversely, having a silent atmosphere where guests must focus on the sound of the buzzing may heighten the holiness of the moment. It is up to the facilitator and the patient to decide.

ESA EINAI – I LIFT UP MINE EYES TO THE MOUNTAINS

Esa Einai el He'harim	אשא עיני אל-ההרים
Me ayin yavo ezri?	מאין יבא עזרי

Where will my help come from?
My help will come from God, maker of Heaven and Earth.

DEDICATION OF THE HAIR

We now hold in our hands (patient's name's) hair. Just as the Nazarites of the Bible dedicate their hair to God, so too does (patient's name) dedicate his or her hair to a worthy cause. (Patient's name) has chosen to dedicate his hair – either physically or symbolically through a monetary donation – to (organization of patient's choosing).

As we watch as the hair is consumed by fire, we acknowledge the tension between (patient's name's) desire for control and his or her utter lack of say over what his or her future may hold. In this moment, (patient's name) gives him or herself up to something greater—to God, to the elements, to community, to holiness, and ultimately, to the great uncertainty.

As we read in Numbers 6:18, "The Nazirite shall shave the head of his Naziriteship at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and he shall take the hair of the head of his Naziriteship and place it upon the fire….of the peace offering."

And so, we pray together that this offering of hair will lead to comfort, compassion, grace, and above all, peace.

(Patients name) will now recite a prayer of dedication and supplication:

O God and God of my ancestors, I choose to offer you this small piece of myself. I pray that as my hair becomes ashes it reaches you in a way that my tears and my pain cannot. In this moment, I surrender myself to you while I also celebrate my own courage and strength. Source of Strength, I pray that you continue to guide me on this journey and lead me on the path towards peace.

BLESSINGS FOR THE PATIENT FROM FAMILY MEMBERS AND GUESTS

This is an opportunity for those gathered to share words of blessing, encouragement, and support with the patient. These do not need to be "formal" blessings; they can take any form or shape.

CLOSING SONG—GESHER TZAR M'OD

Kol ha'olam kulo	כל העולם כולו
Gesher tzar m'od	גשר צר מאד
V'ha'ikar	והעיקר
Lo l'fached klal	לא לפחד כלל

The whole world is a very narrow bridge and the most important part is not to be afraid.

SIX MONTHS POST-TREATMENT: *L'ACHER* (RECOGNITION OF THE ROAD TRAVELED)

Six months after a patient has completed treatment, his or her body is in a very different place than it once was. For each patient the road to recovery and/or remission is different. However, one thing is certain: they are not the same, mentally or physically, that they were before their diagnosis. Likely, their lives have changed, as well. Relationships with family, friends, and coworkers have likely gone through transition. Priorities that once seemed so important may have fallen by the wayside in the midst of the chaos of treatment.

To this end, we offer a ritual to mark the end of the treatment cycle. During the diagnosis and treatment, there was an identity shift from healthy person to cancer patient. Now, it is time to reverse it; to leave behind the identity of patient and reclaim an identity as a person freed from the shackles of cancer. Now is the time for the patient to rediscover himself or herself as a healthy or healthier person while recognizing the difficult road on which they have traveled and emerged anew.

The final step in this cycle involves a trip to the local *mikvah.* If the community in which one lives does not have a *kosher mikvah,* a ceremony can take place in a natural body of water (lake, river, ocean, etc.).

The *mikvah* is traditionally used for family purity. It is typically associated with the laws of *niddah;* cleansing following a woman's menstruation and reproduction. However, *mikvah* within this context is an opportunity for rebirth. Emerging from the healing waters of a *mikvah* can be a holistic, moving, and spiritual experience.

It is our hope that the patient submerges in the healing waters of the *mikvah* and re-emerges a transformed person, honoring the transition and the journey.

The following words come from the *Mayyim Hayyim* Living Waters Community *Mikveh* and Education Center's collection of immersion ceremonies, "A New Beginning: Ceremonies for the *Mikveh."* Here, you will find a *kavanah*, an intention, to be read before entering the *mikvah*, and three blessings to be read with each immersion.

INTENTION

To be read before preparing for immersion.

I have come here today to acknowledge the recent challenge(s) in my life.

May this immersion help me put closure to what was and open me to what is yet to come.

When I emerge from these *mayyim hayyim*, living waters, may I be filled with renewed energy and a sense of direction for my life's journey.

May God grant me strength, courage and peace. Amen.

FIRST IMMERSION

Slowly descend the steps into the mikvah *waters and immerse yourself completely so that every part of your body is covered by the warm water. When you emerge, recite the following blessing:*

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו בטבילה במיים חיים

Blessed are You, God, Majestic Spirit of the Universe
who makes us holy by embracing us in living waters.

SECOND IMMERSION

Read before you immerse:

Hineini. Here I stand, ready to move through this transition.

I acknowledge the losses and lessons of the past and I open my heart

to the blessings yet to come.

As my life continues to change, I know that I am sheltered beneath the wings of the *Shechinah.*

Take a deep breath and exhale completely, while gently and completely immersing for the second time.

THIRD IMMERSION

Read before you immerse:

To take the first step

To sing a new song -

Is to close one's eyes

and dive

into unknown waters.

For a moment knowing nothing risking all

But then to discover

The waters are friendly

The ground is firm.

And the song -

The song rises again.

Relax and let your body soften, as you slowly and completely immerse for the third time. When you emerge, recite the following blessing:

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו מלך העולם שהחינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

Holy One of Blessing, Your Presence fills creation.
You have kept us alive, You have sustained us,
You have brought us to this moment.

CONCLUSION OF THESIS

As we write this conclusion, it is January 2014 and the end of our time at HUC-JIR is drawing near. One year ago we began this thesis in the home of our advisor, Rabbi Dr. Rachel Adler. We sat together at her dining room table, eating Thai food while discussing the work of ritual theorists who profoundly impacted our understanding of ritual innovation.

Over the past year of our lives, we have each experienced highs and lows, triumphs and challenges, and advances and setbacks. We now stand poised in an uncertain time - a liminal space - in which neither one of us is certain about what the future may hold. In a way, this entire experience has served as a microcosm of the very ideas and questions that our thesis served to address.

This is *life*, filled with inexplicable sorrow and overwhelming joy. This is the human experience. We have both chosen careers in the rabbinate, serving individuals and families in their most sacred, profound, and simplistic life moments. Our purpose is to be present for others in their highs and lows of life. And while we acknowledge and appreciate the many traditional Jewish rituals, as well as the advances of ritual innovators that have come before us, we feel confident and proud that our research has been able to contribute to this body of literature.

We have studied together in *chevruta,* wholeheartedly agreeing with some theorists while vehemently disagreeing with others. We have observed clergy members as they performed life cycle rituals and asked them to think about the ways in which they serve to help people in liminal moments. We have surveyed the field to find out how ritual is being used on a daily basis. And finally, we have used this accumulated data to shape our own ritual innovations.

Traditional lifecycle rituals include the basics: birth, *b'nai mitzvah*, marriage, and death and mourning. Yet our research has proven over and over that there are countless gray areas in between those major moments. Throughout the entirety of our thesis it has been our overarching goal to "question what is and imagine what can be."[125] We have sought to understand how we can expand the definition of lifecycle rituals to include those non-traditional moments in an innovative, creative, and wholly meaningful way.

Ritual theorist Ronald Grimes explains that innovators fall into two categories: ritual plumbers and ritual diviners. Without ritual plumbers answering the emergency calls, ritual diviners would not have the opportunity to see the forest through the trees. We acknowledge the importance of both roles and intend to play them both throughout our lives. Sometimes we will react to the situation at hand and create ritual in a moment of crisis. Other times, we will see a need that is yet unfulfilled and seek to fill the void.

In the introduction of our thesis, we explained that, "we find ourselves limited by the category of "lifecycle rituals" itself" and posed the questions: *"What does this term mean?" "What is a life cycle ritual?" "How does our tradition most commonly define it?"* We answered with a quote from our teacher and mentor Rabbi Richard Levy: "Ritual is composed of one or more actions which may accompany and dramatize a liturgical text, enable the worshipper to re-create in the present an event in the religious past, and/or bridge the spiritual/physical divide by entering into a relationship with God through one's body, clothing, and other material objects, thus transforming the material into a symbol or even a manifestation of God's presence."

[125] Become a Leader in Jewish Education" page; Rhea Hirsch School of Education at HUC-JIR Website: http://huc.edu/academics/degree-programs/become-leader-jewish-education; No Author

A year's worth of study, research, and fieldwork has enabled us to now offer our own definition of lifecycle ritual: "Ritual is an opening; a doorway to a holy experience with the Divine. Ritual should be deeply rooted, authentically representing Jewish tradition, yet simultaneously open to reinventing itself. It is meant to be engaging, textured, and meaningful to participants, helping them to cross the threshold from one state of being to another. Ritual is meant to provide clarity in the face of ambiguity and serve as a spiritual marker in uncertain waters."

This definition is one that we will take with us into the communities we will serve throughout our careers. We are certain it will remind us to find the holy spark within the mundane, carrying us through not only funeral intakes, sessions with wedding couples, and meetings with new parents before the birth of their first child, but board meetings, parking lot conversations, and fundraising calls, as well. We are proud that it has emerged from a year of intense study that we will carry with us for the rest of our lives.

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