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A PASTORAL OUTREACH TO UNINVOLVED LONG-TERM SYNAGOGUE MEMBERS

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Doctor of Ministry Degree

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Studies Program
New York, New York

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My special thanks go to my advisors, Carol Ochs and Ann Akers, who by leaving me be, allowed me to discover what I needed to do in order to prepare, execute, and complete this project.

For twenty-three years, Temple Emanuel of Greater New Haven has been my community. I am grateful for the support and encouragement that the membership has offered, which over the years has allowed me to grow professionally and personally.

When my colleague and friend Hesh Sommer suggested that we might do the D. Min. program together, I knew that this would be an opportunity to magnify the learning for both of us. Our continued study and self-reflection undergirds much of the results of this work. Hesh's friendship is a gift.

To my wife Rita belongs the deepest thanks. Her love and support makes my life full and keeps me balanced.

I hope that my parents know that they did a good job.

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Chapter One: A statement of the problem or issue addressed by the Project:

A. The background of the issue among the congregants to whom I plan to minister.

I have been the rabbi of Temple Emanuel of Greater New Haven (T.E.) for 23 years. The synagogue has been in existence for 33 years. I am its second full time rabbi. At present, the community consists of about 200 member families.

Temple Emanuel was created by a small group of members of Mishkan Israel (M.I.) an old established Reform synagogue in the New Haven area. Originally, the desire of this group was to create a school for their children that would reflect a less religious agenda than that of Mishkan Israel. There was to be less emphasis on ritual and Hebrew language; and more on Jewish culture and history and communal activities that would connect the children to each other and to the liberal Jewish agenda of their parents.

When I came to the synagogue, the congregation had moved back to a more traditional synagogue agenda. Yet it still perceived itself, and was perceived by the larger New Haven Jewish community as the 'alternative' synagogue. Along with the fact that its origins are as a break off from the large and established Reform Synagogue, We are one of four synagogues, two Reform and two Conservative, within a 20-minute drive from each other. So that families who live in the area really do have alternatives. There is a choice of communities each with different approaches with which to affiliate.

The strongest symbol of the alternative roots of our community is in our use of music. When I interviewed for this position twenty-three years ago, I was fairly confidant that I would be chosen because the congregation had a history of choosing clergy whose musical styles was

closer to that of a song-leader rather than that of a cantorial virtuoso. As a product of the 60's as well as the Reform Jewish Youth movement I play the guitar and lead services with a modified 60's Jewish folk style. The success of this style is due to the communal spiritual connection that is encouraged and created through singing together. This musical style is still the most important component of our congregation's identity.

Although our worship style supports connection, not every member who joins becomes connected. Our membership has kept fairly constant over the years with approximately 15 families leaving and the same number joining each year. In the earlier years especially, this in and out represented those families who joined specifically for our school program and who left after its completion. For these folks, education for their children was their main need. In addition, others who remained members for a number of years following their children's education have ultimately left the synagogue for various reasons. Some have relocated as a result of the vagaries of the job market. For those who have not relocated, aging results in changes in needs and perspective. Some join other congregations. Others continue to express their Jewish values in the myriad of other Jewish organizations that exist in the larger community.

Along with this consistent turnover, there has been, as well, a consistent core group of members. This core group is divided into two segments. The first segment consists of the regulars. These folks are connected to the community in various ways: socially, ritually, in social action activities, etc. I have noticed over the years that the other segment of this core group, about 20 families, have been consistent members but their consistency includes keeping their distance from involvement in any of the religious, educational, or social programs that the synagogue offers. Unlike many people who leave the synagogue after their children complete

their religious school training, these folks have retained their membership. While some of these folks may have been involved during that period in their lives when their children were still young, they seem now to be satisfied with just paying their dues and perhaps coming to services on the High Holidays.

This Project of outreach to these folks will be directed towards understanding the dynamics of this segment of the congregation and towards addressing their unspoken needs.

B. The specific needs to which this project will address

One of the reasons that I chose to commit to a pastoral counseling program was to redress a deficit in my pastoral style. This deficit can be verbalized as a reticence, or a resistance to reach out to people more assertively when there is or might be a need to do so. This reticence is strongest with those members who are most distant from the center of synagogue activity. During these past years of study initiated by the pastoral counseling program, I have come to understand the nature of this deficit. I have become in touch with a level of anxiety that has clearly affected my repertoire of behaviors. Specifically, my desire to limit this anxiety has resulted in a kind self-protection, which prevents me from reaching out, and doing more than I am already doing for fear that I will become too overwhelmed.

After working on a self-analysis of my psychodynamic history (below), I can identify more clearly the issues implicit in this resistance. Simply put, this resistance has had two components. First, passive anger at those whose own distance from me stirs up feelings associated with issues of abandonment in my past. Second, a need to avoid the anxiety that results from repressing feelings of anger and hurt associated with feelings of abandonment.

Coming to the program was a decision to understand and address this deficit, and to move through this anxiety to a more complete level of functioning. Becoming aware of my own penchant for distancing (approach-avoidance) has helped me see more clearly that this neurotic style has surely meant that I have not been as present for others as I would have liked to be. Perhaps this is a reason why the membership has not grown as much over the years as it might have. Perhaps people needed more from me than I was able to give.

The segment of twenty or so member families mentioned above have accepted my more passive stance. I have wondered about the possibility that their apparent acceptance of this distant style is in some ways a mirror of my own more passive role. The fact that they retain membership, that they are willing to pay yearly dues which is often substantial, yet do not take advantage of any programming suggests that their distant stance is in some way comfortable for them. Perhaps a more active involvement in the community would raise issues with which they would rather not deal. Perhaps this distance vis-à-vis the synagogue; or Judaism; or the rabbi, is a reflection of their need to keep at bay the feelings that they would rather not re-experience. Perhaps their distance reflects old issues that have kept them away. Perhaps the couple's decision to keep their distance is reflecting the issues of one member of the couple more than the other.

Whether my tentative hypothesis is accurate or not, this outreach project will be an attempt to re-engage these folks with the purpose of offering them the opportunity to relate to a more assertive rabbinic presence. It will offer to these folks the opportunity to experience the synagogue as a more caring community. It will offer an opportunity to reconnect with the synagogue, Judaism, and the rabbi.

C. Relevance of this Project to ministry in a wider sense.

First, this project offers other clergy a window on how the personal development of clergy affects leadership. As we clergy address the needs of each person and family as they progress through the life cycle, we need to be aware of how our own progress affects the nature of our work with the individuals and the communities that we lead.

Second, every congregation has a segment of its membership that is distant from the center of the community. This project hopefully will offer some insights and suggestions about how to encourage those in the periphery to draw spiritual sustenance from the caring community we all want to create and support.

D. The rabbi's psychodynamic history.

The purpose of the following is to identify the salient points of my psychodynamic history. This is required given that one of the goals of the project is to identify how a change in clergy function effects a change in the functioning of the synagogue community. The focus will be on identifying the problematic components of my history, those issues with which I have been struggling for many years and which are the source of my behavior that seems to have prevented full functioning.

One should not get the impression from this material that I do not know or value my strengths and talents. Rather, this self-evaluation is meant to build on these plusses and widen my repertoire of skills.

As I have tried to make sense of these issues I have come to identify particular behavioral patterns that relate to the history of my relationships with each of the members of my family. The following outline identifies the connections.

1. I am the younger of two siblings. My brother is almost five years Older than I. This age differential along with my brother's excellence in a number of areas, intelligence; sports; music; and social skills, shaped my early rivalry with him:
    A. As I ran after him to follow him, be like him, compete with him, he pushes me away, belittles me. In the first or second grade, I developed a hesitation (similar to stuttering) in my speech. This was due to my frustration in trying to get a word in edgewise during family discussions. This speech problem cleared up with some speech therapy within a year or so. I identify my need to be heard as a strong motivator in choosing to become a rabbi. My successes reflect a success in this arena of our competition.
    B. I give myself the Hebrew Name *Ya-akov Shir*, Jacob of song, reflecting my awareness of my Jacob behavior: Running after him; using passive aggressive ways to compete with him; continuing to see him as the older and smarter one who was my role model. Steve took up the guitar and was a leader in his peer group. I followed suit becoming a song-leader in the NFTY youth movement. Both my brother and I were following the lead of my father who would sing and play and was the life of the party. I still use my musical talents as part of my rabbinic style.
    C. My brother's success in the synagogue youth group led me to follow his path. During his high-school years, he verbalized his desire to become a rabbi. I ultimately take his place when he moves on to other activities and interests.

D. I discover that if I work hard in school, I am able to be a better student than my brother since he chooses not to put in any effort but rather to rely only on his intelligence. I think this was his mode of teen-age rebellion.

E. I find that my male friends tend to be like my brother. I am attracted to males that are competent and who fill the role of one who is wiser and who sets a standard to which I aspire and that I often cannot meet. On the flip side, my anger comes out at arrogant males whose stance feels to me like rejection. This transferential anger directed at brother/father substitutes is really repressed anger at my brother for continually pushing me away. This is a replay and reflection of oedipal issues. I want to be the leader of the family. But my historic role is to be the third in line. I demand that I be taken seriously. My narcissistic and grandiose thrusts are in conflict with oedipal guilt.

F. My punishing super-ego is in part attached to this dynamic of setting up impossible standards that I often cannot meet. Choosing to study Talmud following ordination, and studying Electrical Engineering in College, reflects this dynamic.

G. My present relationship with my brother is one of equals. Over the years, we have attempted to clarify our history and have reshaped our connection. Likewise, relationships with male friends now reflect this equality. It also reflects the lessening of the anxiety that has been associated with the tensions of the past.

2. I began with my brother for two reasons. The first is because he is the only one of my immediate family who is still alive. The second is that in many ways, my brother served as a second father. Here are thoughts about my first father.

A. My father spoke about himself as an unwanted child. He was the

youngest of four siblings. He was clearly depressed, in the neurotic range, for most of his life. He was an insurance salesman who did not rise in the company. He saw his role, or rationalized his lack of ambition, as helping his clients rather than seeing his clients as a stepping-stone for his advancement. This moral stance is something that I learned from him and that I value, even as I struggle to transcend the neurotic piece. The depressive part of his decision not to better himself was in his feeling that he didn't deserve to do or be more than he was. He accepted his role as the least important one of his family. There is a family secret: One of my father's two older brothers committed suicide in his late 20's. I assume that his serious depression is related to the unhappiness that I witnessed in my father and, in a much smaller degree, my other uncle.

B. My father chose as his wife a woman who, like his own mother, had as part of her personality a critical and rejecting stance. My mother was the major breadwinner in our family. In this regard, my father repeated the pattern of his own father who apparently was not a go-getter. I'm sure this all played a part in my father's low self-esteem.

My choice of and relationship with my first spouse reflected the same dynamic. The combination of my own low self esteem, ambivalent feelings towards my mother, led me to choose a strong willed woman who was perceived by me over time as critical and rejecting. This led to an unsatisfying relationship for both of us. The first ten years of our marriage of thirteen years coincided with ten years of postgraduate study, rabbinical school, and Ph.D. program. During these years, my first wife was the major breadwinner in our family.

My brother was angry with my father for his meager financial support of the family. This anger was a reflection of my mother's anger at my father. Following Alice Miller (1997), my mother's need for support from her children led her to unconsciously place us in the role of fulfilling her needs by taking her side.

C. I repressed my anger at my father because I witnessed the result of my brother's rebelliousness. Spanking or the threat of it was my father's form of discipline with us. We used to joke about how we had to keep our backsides against the wall when our father was mad. The fear of a spanking was a second source of my penchant for passive aggressive behavior as well as a punishing super-ego.

D. My competition with my father and brother for my mother's love and attention was easy to win, at least so I perceived it, given his depressive abdication of his own life. The guilt and shame for such a grandiose perception is another source of my punishing super-ego, as well as my pattern of approach-avoidance.

3. This brings me to my relationship with my Mom.

A. My mother was the sixth of seven siblings. Her mother, whom I never met, developed some kind of mental illness late in life. My mother called it 'dementia praecox', a term for schizophrenia that is no longer used in the literature. She ultimately was hospitalized in a state of catatonic depression. My mother used to say that it was her older sisters who raised her. Given the deficits of my grandmother's mothering of my mother, my own development reflects the results of this intergenerational deficit.

B. Due to two medical operations during the first months of my life, my

mother became over-protective of me. This over-protectiveness continued beyond my childhood and resulted in magnifying the ambivalence that I felt about my mom. On the one hand I loved being her special one; on the other hand, I hated her overbearing concern and involvement in everything I did. It is this ambivalence is another source of my penchant for approach-avoidance behavior.

C. When my mother goes back to work, I experience for the first time what I can identify now as the emotional experience of being abandoned. Abandonment is a big issue for me. Perhaps this issue arose originally as a result of my early experiences in the hospital. To prevent abandonment, I hold on to things. I try to keep things from changing. One of the reasons that I married my first wife was to hold on to the earlier supportive young girl who was continuing to grow and who wanted more in her life than just taking care of me. I was trying to forestall abandonment. I have replayed this dynamic with others: trying to hold on to ambivalent relationships for fear of being abandoned. I becoming anxious when my attempts fail. The anxiety is the result of not wanting to let go of an ambivalent relationship like the one I had with my mother. The anger is transformed and expressed passively and through passive aggressive and self-destructive behavior.

D. My mother's continual state of anxiety is a trait that I have inherited. My brother and I used to joke about this calling my mom a walking nerve ending. In the counseling context, this anxiety has prevented me from listening carefully to people. My need to respond immediately to what I am hearing is not helpful. In addition, my response is usually directed at trying to quickly fix the situation. This

reflects my behavior with my mother. I was always trying to do what I needed to do so that I wouldn't have to deal with her anxiety and therefore my own.

Beyond the difficulty in keeping anxiety in check during the counseling context, this pattern of responding quickly in order to reduce anxiety rather than doing things with more care is a behavior with which I continually struggle. A good bumper sticker for this behavior might be: Ready; Fire; Aim!

4. The following identifies specific issues that have narrowed my rabbinic functioning.

A. Difficulty with abandonment: When I feel abandoned, I respond with anger, which is turned both inward and outward. The inward anger becomes depression and feelings of low self-esteem. A punishing superego leads to feelings that the abandonment was my fault. The outward expression of the anger is expressed through a partial functioning. The best way to describe it is as a kind of repressed narcissistic rage that is expressed in a passive aggressive way. I hold back the good stuff while I sulk or stew. To ward off feelings of expected abandonment or rejection I often act unilaterally. I have come to see that this behavior as my way to short circuit the possibility of putting myself in the position is hearing others saying no.

B. Feelings of specialness or grandiosity: The need to feel that I am the loved one is the ying to the yang of abandonment. I have come to see that a necessary condition of my best functioning is in the need to sense that others see me as special, that I am valued for my uniqueness.

C. This need for feeling special is what leads me to this project. In my work at the synagogue, I have not reached out to those whose own issues have prevented them from reaching out to me. My sense, right or wrong that these folks do not want what I have to offer has resulted in my letting them be while concentrating on those who want my attention. As the distance increases, I feel guilty about not fulfilling my professional obligations to be more available to these folks.

D. Struggles over whom I am and what I am supposed to be doing. My overbearing mother created a neurotic style that waits for others to tell me what I am supposed to feel and do. E. Hanna (1990) writes about 'false self compliance' as part of the motivation of those who become professional helpers. It has often been difficult for me to be in touch with, or to express my own desires, as I have been anxiously focused on whether I am fulfilling the desires and needs of others. At the same time I am resentful if my 'giving' to others is not acknowledged in some way. The psychic energy needed to follow this script often exhausts me. I need to take private time to recoup. This is part of my dynamic of approach avoidance. I pull away to protect myself and to regroup. True self—flow—is what I am trying to maximize.

E. Difficulty with criticism: I respond with anger when others do not mirror my grandiosity. The anger is expressed in passive ways, often towards myself as well as towards others. Taking time to recoup, for example, has an aspect of this dual punishment. I don't give as much as I might want.

F. Difficulty with anger. More often than not, I am unable to feel my anger in a direct way. Instead, if I am criticized for example, I feel knots in my stomach. The only way I can understand this behavior is to assume than in some primal way, my

existence is imperiled by feeling anger, anger that is called forth when not being treated as special. Anger imperils my existence. Given my father's penchant for a *'patch in tuchas'*, my trouble with anger is also attached to Oedipal guilt.

G. Need for private time, which has always been one of the ways I have asserted my agenda over that of others. That is, in being alone I am doing and being myself---my thoughts are mine—my being is mine. This, in itself, is not problematic. The problem is that often the need for private time is part of my distancing dynamic, a protective device to limit anxiety.

Chapter Two: Principles that guide and inform

A. Religious principles pertinent to the Project

In the previous chapter, I suggested that coming to terms with who I am has to be a boon not only to me personally, but to those whom I serve. This dual affirmation is reflected in the Jewish principle *tikun olam*, the bettering of the internal and external world. Any pastoral project is meant to better a clinical situation among a group of folks in the minister's work setting. This project takes into account the connection between that betterment and the betterment of the clergy-person who executes the project.

The goal of this project is to reach out to long-term members who have been distant from the community offering them the opportunity to think about their relationship to the synagogue to Judaism and to the rabbi. Hopefully this outreach will clarify and strengthen these relationships. This goal is predicated on the idea that the clarification of these relationships, both for me and for them, will be a *tikun* resulting in a more active and less distant relating.

Here is one verbalization of the meaning of *tikun olam* as suggested by a modern student of Kabbalah. " Each time we do something that raises consciousness, we lift sparks of holiness to new levels. This is called *tikun ha-nefesh*, mending the soul, and *tikun olam*, mending the world, bringing it closer to its source. Although initially the ideas of mending the soul and mending the world seem different, in reality they cannot be separated; we cannot raise sparks in ourselves without raising those in the world, and visa versa" (Cooper, 1997, p. 179).

The affirmation that there is a connection between the integrity of each individual and the well being of the external world flows from the foundation doctrine of Jewish theology, Monotheism. The Jewish faith begins with the belief in The One. God is the source of

everything that has been, is, and will be. And at every moment, God underwrites, so to speak, the visible and invisible lines of connections between all of our experiences and all of the understandings of these experiences that lead us to our map of existence.

While God's essence always remains a mystery and unknowable, a corollary of the affirmation of The One, is that there is an underlying unity supporting the overwhelming diversity, which we humans experience in this world.

In relation to pastoral work, the two frames of reference that we take into account, theology and psychology, although studied as independent realms, cannot at base really be independent. The same human experience, consciousness and cognition that are the source of any theology are also the source of psychology as well as all the other scientific and social scientific disciplines. Given the affirmation of The One, these frames would have to be seen as more than just complementary disciplines, which together can create a holistic understanding of our work with people. One would have to affirm that they are, at their deepest foundations, different approaches to understanding the same truth. They are related disciplines that attempt to understand what it means to be human. Although the mystery of our humanity and God's holiness ultimately remains, we come closer to an understanding of them when we keep in sight the truth that all knowledge is connected. It's the message of the allegorical blind men who, by touching different parts of an elephant, can together come to a more accurate picture of what an elephant is than any of the individual pictures drawn by each separately.

Before examining the specific connections between the theological and psychological principles implicit in this project, something has to be said about the general connection between the realms of psychology, science, and theology. Our desire to understand, to explain, to reach for explanations of how things work in the world requires trust in the measure of

regularity we experience in the workings of the world. Scientific truth results in the process of the identification and the mapping of the regularity implicit in nature. But how do we develop the ability to trust in the regularity of the external world? The ability to trust develops in the human psyche before our full cognitive abilities appear (Kegan, p. 117). Trust in the consistency of the workings of the world is engendered in the human psyche during infancy because our parents and caretakers have related to us with continual regular care. With such gifts from our parental figures, one's basic trust becomes directed outward with the attitude that there is a pattern in the workings of the universe and that the pattern is, in part, knowable and trustworthy. We humans respond to this regularity and seek to identify it. This is the goal of the physical and social sciences. And the disciplines of engineering and other practical studies are directed towards the use this knowledge for human benefit.

Regularity is a two-fold gift. It is a gift from our parental figures, as well as from The Creator. The daily liturgy focuses our attention on the Creator's gifts. We recite a morning and evening blessing for the regularity of the rising and setting sun. And we recite, as well, a blessing for our bodily regularity without which we couldn't exist.

Without the regularity of nature there would be no life, as we know it. From the human point of view then, the laws of nature are not value neutral. Rather that regularity supports the development and continuation of life in the universe; and specifically the development of the human species with its cognitive ability to discover these laws.

It is often said that the laws of nature are impersonal. But there are some now in the scientific community who are close to saying that the laws of nature imply a source who 'cares' about our existence. This idea that our existence suggests a caring source is known as the anthropic principle (Hawking p. 124). This principle states that the physics and chemistry

of the universe are such that if they were any different than they are, life could not have developed in the universe. The reality that the laws of nature favor human development implies that the order in universe is more than impersonal.

The human ability to understand and make use of the laws of nature makes it possible for humanity to accept the task of making life even better for us and for the world. It is a Jewish assertion that the Creator brings us into the world to be junior partners, so to speak, in the task of making the world better. This is the Jewish concept of *tikun olam*.

This partnership is implied in the biblical assertion that humanity is created in the image of God. Just as God creates so do we humans create through means of our intelligence our talents and our soulfulness. Our uniqueness among the living species of our planet is a reflection of God's uniqueness. We are conscious of our selves and the world about us. We see, hear, think and feel, and respond by first understanding and then trying to make our world even better. The rabbinic sage Rabbi Akiva reflects on this partnership when he said: How greatly God must have loved us to create us in the image of God; yet even greater love did God show us in making us conscious that we are created in the divine image (Pirke Avot 3:18).

This consciousness of our connection and relationship with God brings us to what I think is most fundamental connection between the arenas of Jewish theology and psychology. And that is that both are addressing the bedrock human experience of 'relationship'. The primary Jewish theological assertion that there is one God with whom each of us is called to be in relationship. This relationship, this covenant, *brit*, is a reflection of the universal human experience that each of us must come to terms with the reality that 'An Other' besides us really exists. Solipsism is a philosophic form of atheism. It is a form of denial of, or blindness to the reality of the given of our inter-connectedness with others beside ourselves.

Each individual human life begins with a relationship between two human beings; and the subsequent development and quality of that life is shaped by the experience of relationship with other beings, human and 'divine'. Everything we are and everything that we do is a function of the nature and quality of our relating to others. We are creatures; we do not physically create ourselves; and we do not come into being alone. History exists both before and after we do. Our physical existence is due to others, and The Other. The kind of persons we become is, in great part, a result of our interactions with others. Martin Buber, the theologian of relationship, poetically expresses this in his classic work, I And Thou: "In the Beginning is relation" (p. 18).

Buber asserts that there is no I that is totally independent or separate from others. There is only an I who relates to others either as objects (I-It), including self objects (object relations), Or there is an I who relates in a more expansive way to beings in their wholeness, whose presence, whose otherness and independent reality is respected and honored (I-Thou). "There is no I TAKEN IN ITSELF, but only the I of the primary word I-Thou and the I of the primary word I-It" (p. 4).

We become who we are through relating to the world and the beings that surrounds us. Our experience of the world includes the address and our response to the presence of God, whom Buber calls, the Eternal Thou. We discover what we must do in this life in moments of relation with God. Here is how Buber expresses his understanding of Divine revelation: "Man receives, and he receives not a specific 'content', but a Presence, a Presence as power. First there is the whole fullness of...being raised and bound in relationship. Secondly, there is the inexpressible confirmation of meaning. Meaning is assured...This meaning can be received, but not experienced; it cannot be experienced, but it can be done... and this is its purpose with

us ".

Viewed from this Jewish theological stance, we have never been or are ever alone. God the Creator has set it up this way. We learn through living that we are called to care for others. For without the care that was bestowed upon us by others, we would not be the people we are. We depend on this world and the people in it to help us grow. We cannot reach the level of being thoughtful, fully functioning people without the existence of others who care.

You the reader of these words and I their author are capable of this moment of communication because there were others who helped us reach our present place in our development as humans. Our present state of cognitive and emotional development is due to a font of love and caring which has been 'good enough' (Winnicott, 1963, p. 73), and has mitigated against the necessary experiences of loss and pain which are a part of living in relationship with those who have loved and cared for us.

What we have learned from living is that the gift of our existence as well as the persons we have become is founded on the love and care with which others have blessed us. We are in, so to speak, love's debt. It is this sense of debt, this sense of joyful obligation that binds us to give back to others the gifts that were given to us. In living we learn that we are bound to others and the Other.

The Ten Commandments is the Jewish tradition's symbolic way of summing up of what the human species has learned about the mutuality of our existence. The commandments are written on two tablets. Each of which affirms our separate yet connected obligations to The Other and to others. Humans are to respond to God, the ultimate Other, in specific ways as identified in commandments one to five, and are to respond in other specific ways to other human beings with whom we come in contact as identified in commandments six to ten.

The motivating gift of God's love and care is asserted in the first commandment, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of Bondage" (Exodus 19:2). God's self identification here is as a God who hasn't forgotten the Israelites, who knows their pain as slaves in Egypt and who is finally fulfilling his promise to Abraham to take care of his descendants. This first commandment obliges us to take seriously the notion that the universal God of the Universe is not just an idea, an 'It', but a Presence who cares for each individual.

The covenant that identifies the specifics of appropriate human behavior reflects the outcome of the process of human maturation. Primary narcissism of childhood must give way to agreements that limit our behaviors based on impulse and selfishness. In living with others we are called to identify those things that we must do for others, and those things we cannot do. The honoring of these do's and don'ts communicate that a caring relationship has been established and that it is continuing. This is the deep meaning of the positive and negative commandments enshrined in the Torah.

The covenant implies a community of believers and doers. The folks who have chosen to be involved in this project have kept their distance from the community. The question driving this project is what is the source of their ambivalence. Is there something in the life experience of these folks that might suggest a reason for their distance? Has the synagogue ever been a place of comfort and meaning for them? Has the synagogue been a place of trauma? Are there other arenas in life where these folks find connection? Does the present synagogue community represent the failure of others to be available in times of need? Does the synagogue remind them of an unfulfilled promise of love and caring? Does the Rabbi represent earlier parental figures who were not available to give the love and care that we all need to

become fully loving and trusting people? Are there particular moments in the history of their involvement with the synagogue or the rabbi that are the source of alienation?

Whatever the sources and reasons for the ambivalence and distance, this project is based on the theological premise that reaching out with caring concern to these folks, is an act of *tikun* fulfilling the commandment of being holy as God is Holy (Lev.19:2). This commandment of 'imitating God' flows from the assertion in Genesis that we are made in the image of God.

Robert Katz, in his book Pastoral Care and the Jewish Tradition, identifies the rubric of 'Imitation of God' as the religious underpinning of Jewish pastoral care. " The most fundamental theological foundation for rabbinical counseling can be found in the principle of *imitatio Dei*. To imitate God, who loves everyone, would be to care for everyone also. Every Jew was expected to follow this ideal" (p. 44).

The act of reaching out with the willingness to listen with an empathetic ear is the essence of Jewish pastoral care. It is fulfilling the commandment to be holy as God is Holy. A Talmudic interpretation of being holy, of following after the *Shechina,* the divine presence, reads, "Be like Him; just as he is gracious and compassionate, so you be gracious and compassionate".

Scientific studies of the question of what is the essential ingredient for successful therapy reflect this theological affirmation. "From the research on the outcomes of psychotherapy we have good reason for believing the success of therapy is not a function of the particular personality theory or identifiable therapeutic approach favored by the therapist (Smith and Glass, 1977). The usual conclusion drawn from such research that 'it's the therapist not the theory,' that successful therapy is largely an ineffable matter" (Kegan, p. 256).

One hears in this statement and in Kegan's further discussion of 'natural therapy', discussed below, that the essence of helping people to be the best they can be is simply being available to them when they need us. To be an empathetic ear and an empathetic responder is the essence of helping people moving forward in their lives. Relationship is the key, Buber's I-Thou relating is growth producing.

Katz asserts that empathy is where religion and psychotherapy converge. He outlines what an empathetic stance means for the rabbi who attempts pastoral counseling. "When we enter into counseling relationships...we require the talent of identifying with others, ...of entering into the world of their experience without losing our capacity for detaching ourselves from our emotional involvements. When we counsel, we must use 'ourselves' as caring and compassionate persons...We rabbis do not possess ready-made answers to the problems of our people...We need to encounter persons, not patients, to relate to them and to their inner worlds as guides" (p.105).

To be a guide implies that the rabbi and the counselee are walking the same path together. The guidance offered comes from the rabbi's ability to communicate that he or she understands the struggle the counselee is experiencing, that he too has struggled with similar issues. The counselee knows that he is heard and that the rabbi understands and that his goal is to help the counselee to discover a path that will lead to a moving ahead in living life.

In one sentence Katz, raises my own struggle with distance when he asks whether we clergy are able to set aside our penchant for distancing through hiding behind our role as teacher and leader to become fellow travelers with others in the task of living a more expansive life. "Can we reach out to those who need us as companions in the search for meaning, self esteem, and moral integrity" (p. 97)?

Using Buber's terminology one can expand on this vital question to religious leaders. Clergy relate to their congregants in the various hierarchical roles that are part of the clergy-congregant relationship. This I-it relating takes the form of teacher-student; leader-follower; wise one-initiate. An empathetic stance opens the door to a less hierarchical relating. While we remain who we are, we are prepared to let go of our superior role in the give and take of sharing truth. Whatever judgment our traditions may make about what we are hearing are suspended for a time, as we allow the give and take of the moment to support of the process of growth This 'holding environment', discussed below, does not imply an abandonment of the values of our tradition to a moral relativism. Rather it acknowledges that there is an implicit self-judgment in the blocked growth of the counselee that will be addressed in due time. Further, it is an affirmation of our faith that those who come to take counsel with us have encountered the Eternal Thou, and have a sense of the meaning of their lives. Our role here is to help him or her live out that meaning.

This project is an attempt to fulfill this commandment. It has to have some effect in strengthening the participant's ties to the synagogue community with which they have chosen to affiliate. It is an act of *tikun* for the synagogue community, the participants in the project, and for myself as well.

B. Clinical Principles under girding this project:

Clinical principles, using Buber's terminology, are in the realm of I-It. They are general principles which organize how one approaches the moment of clinical activity. The paradox of pastoral counseling is that whatever the theoretical principles that inform, the approach of the

pastor, the moment of communication between pastor and congregant cannot be limited to these principles. The moment, if truly reflecting an I-Thou connection, will include yet transcend them. Still, the pastor must have an approach that communicates an expertise and a vision that is in part the reason why the congregant is willing to trust the pastor at the outset.

The first principle is a structural one. It is often helpful to picture a synagogue or a church as similar in structure to a family. The clergy fill the role of parental figures, while the congregational members take the role of the siblings in the family. In this project, the participants are those siblings who are the farthest removed from the center of the family and its activities. They absent themselves from most family occasions and their contact with the parental figure is likewise comparatively distant.

This project is initially motivated by the parental figure who is looking to understand the reasons for the distance and, if possible, to bring these members closer to the community and the rabbi. The participants have not, on their own, expressed a need to speak with me or, as far as I know, to other members of the leadership about their relationship to the synagogue. My invitation to them to participate in this project, as stated in chapter one, represents a parental outreach of concern for these folks, concern for my own deficits, as well as concern for the congregation as a whole.

Edwin Friedman's approach, which takes into account family process in congregational life would suggest that the parental figure's relationship with the congregation will reflect the issues that the clergy has in his family. "...All clergymen and clergywomen, irrespective of faith, are simultaneously involved in three distinct families whose emotional forces interlock; the families within the congregation, our congregations, and our own. Because the emotional process in all of these systems is identical, unresolved issues in anyone of them can produce

symptoms in the others, and increased understanding of any one creates more effective function in all three" (1985, p. 1).

As outlined above, I have identified the struggle around my own ambivalence and distance in my family of origin as the motivating factor in choosing this project. If it is the case that my rabbinate of 23 years has reflected this penchant for distancing, it would also be true that congregants who have accepted this stance for all these years may not be looking to change their stance. So as I move to make a change, the homeostasis of the synagogue system might tend to keep the distance in tact. I would have to expect that there would be some resistance to change both from the participants as well as internally. I should expect my own struggle around this issue to intensify even as I act to breakthrough to a new level of functioning.

The participant's decision to accept the invitation implies at least willingness if not a desire on their part to think about the history of their Jewish connection, their present ambivalent connection to the synagogue, and perhaps consider a different stance concerning that connection. Both the invitation by the rabbi and the acceptance by the congregants communicate a desire for greater connection by both parties.

Friedman also identifies another principle of the family systems approach that relates directly to this project. The principle is symmetry (p.58-62.) "In emotional life, every cause can produce exactly opposite effects and every effect could have come from the opposite cause, with the result that the more polarized things seem to be in a family, the more likely that they are somehow connected." Specifically, being stuck in emotional issues of one's family of origin can lead to the either of two extreme actions: Can't leave home, or, can't go home. The folks involved in this project are family members of the synagogue who seem to have

difficulty in coming home. This would suggest that issues of family of origin are involved in the dynamics of the group of people with whom I will be working.

The second principle comes under the rubric of developmental theory as outlined Robert Kegan in his book, *The Evolving Self.* His developmental schema widens the psycho-social approach of Eric Erickson to include the incites of Jean Piaget in cognitive development, and Lawrence Kohlberg in moral development, in outlining the picture of normal human development during the life cycle (Chapters 1-3, also p. 294).

Kegan's clinical approach is an extension of Winnicot's idea of the 'transitional space' (Scharff p.45-6), or 'holding environment'. Such an environment is required not only between an infant and its mother, but is necessary throughout the human life cycle as each of us, in our relating to others, pass through the stages of our lives. "In Winnicott's view the 'holding environment' is an idea intrinsic to infancy. In my view it is an idea intrinsic to evolution...What Winnicott says of the infant is true for all of us, even for you at this moment. There is never 'just an individual' (p. 116).

One hears the echo here of the theological assertion that the human experience is the experience of relationship with others; and that our well-being is founded on our continued interconnectedness.

In speaking of the developmental path we humans travel, Kegan prefers the verbiage 'emerge' from 'one culture of embeddedness' to another. He puns on the word emergencies, in the title of chapter two, 'The natural emergencies of the self' to suggest that developmental movement in one's personal life feels like an emergency. And, since we experience these emergencies throughout our lives as we move from stage to stage, it makes perfect sense that situational depression is the most common emotional dislocation (p. 270). The process of

moving from one self to another leads to experiencing a sense of not knowing who one is and who one is becoming. Thus depression is a natural experience as we mourn our past selves, and as we fear to know who we are becoming and what will become of our lives.

Kegan names the process of the natural flow of holding environments through which each of us passes through out the life cycle as 'natural therapy'. That is, our family; the school setting; friends; social groupings; religious communities; all play a role in helping us develop and emerge. Self conscious therapy is needed when 'natural therapy' isn't enough and we need extra help with difficulty we are experiencing as we emerge to a new stage of developmental truce, or as he calls it, developmental plateau.

The approach in this project will be to see the sessions, both with the individual couples as well as the group sessions, as a holding environment in which the individuals can review their past and present Jewish identities and connections. The willingness to partake in the project implies that there may be a desire for such a re-evaluation. The hope is that this re-evaluation may encourage an emergence to a new more connected Jewish self.

The role of the clergy person in this approach is the one who offers a safe place for the participants to do the work of emerging. The chief characteristic of the successful clergy person in this model, is an empathetic pastor who listens and whose responses encourages growth rather than raising counter productive questions that get in the way of the work of the participant.

The issue of counter transference must be clarified in this approach. The pastor must be clear about the distinction between his issues and agendas and those of the participants. Further, the thrust of this particular project requires the pastor's focus on his transferential response during the interviews for the purpose of identifying and attempting to understand

problematic behaviors so that he might emerge to a greater level of functioning.

Yalom (1980, p. 404) explains transference as follows. "The use of the relationship to illuminate the past is the traditional transference approach to the patient-therapist relationship, where the patient "transfers" feelings and attitudes from important figures, especially parental ones, onto the therapist. The patient dresses the therapist, who serves as a manikin, with the feelings that have been stripped from others. The relationship with the therapist is shadow play, reflecting the vicissitudes of a drama that transpired long ago. The analytic therapeutic goal of recapturing and illuminating events in early life is well served in this approach".

In this project, the pastor will observe how he transfers to the participants, the congregation, and the advisors, the issues of his early life.

The particular issues for which I have to watch during the interviews with the participants are the following. First, to be aware of anxiety in response to what I am hearing which leads to jumping in too quickly rather than allowing the individual the chance to verbalize as much as she is able. Second, I need to be careful of my penchant for needing to be heard, and for teaching rather than listening. I have to watch out for the desire to argue about the rightness of my position.

Third, I have to focus on the participants rather than thinking about external issues like 'the congregation as a whole', or the hoped for outcomes of the project, etc. I need to focus on what is happening in the room.

The third principle identifies the source of ambivalence that is at the heart of this project. It is the ambivalence implicit in the struggle that every human being experiences through out the life cycle in trying to balance the thrust for independence and the thrust for inclusion. Kegan calls these two thrusts the 'psychologics' of integration and of differentiation.

"These two orientations I take to be expressive of what I consider the two greatest yearnings in human experience...one of these might be called the yearning to be included, to be a part of, close to, joined with, held, admitted, accompanied. The other might be called the yearning to be independent or autonomous, to experience one's distinctiveness, the self-chosenness of one's direction, one's individual integrity...Our experience of this fundamental ambivalence may be our experience of the unitary, restless, creative motion of life itself" (Kegan, p.107).

The folks who keep their distance from the synagogue would seem to favor the more independent stance. Yet in its essence, a congregation represents the inclusive stance. And a covenant theology as expressed above would certainly reflect this thrust. And although the dilemma of ambivalence addressed by this project is one that is experienced by everyone in some form, the participants' ambivalence is magnified. In addition, this dilemma at our synagogue is, in principle, heightened given the liberal stance of Reform Judaism that has always honored the thrust towards autonomy.

Kegan disagrees with Freud's bias towards valuing the autonomous stance. For Freud, groups are necessary and can be a source of ethics, but group dynamics tend to diminish rational thinking. Freud prefers that individuals invest the energy of their libido in the search for truth rather than in the false protection against anxiety through identification with what he calls 'the primal horde' (1959). Kagen's model "recognizes the equal dignity of each yearning, and in this respect offers a corrective to *all* present developmental frameworks which univocally define growth in terms of differentiation, separation, increasing autonomy." (1982, p.108)

Yet the Freudian approach may offer an explanation of why some folks consistently remain at the edge of the community. In the individual sessions I will be looking for early childhood dislocations that might result in the avoidance of making closer connections.

Chapter Three: Method of Carrying out the Project

The aim of this project is to aid members who are distant from the active synagogue community to clarify and live out their decision to express their Jewishness within the synagogue community. The goals of this project are:

1. To provide the individual participants with an opportunity to establish a more direct relationship with the rabbi by presenting a more proactive rabbinic presence.
2. To provide an environment in which individuals can feel greater freedom to explore personal identity issues and their relationship to their Jewish identity.
3. To increase their perception of the synagogue as a caring community and a place to experience acceptance and comfort.
4. To provide a forum in which these folks can bond under the auspices of the synagogue thereby helping them over come any feelings of isolation and alienation from the synagogue.

A. Approach and procedure

1. The approach will include both individual and group meetings. I will invite five couples to participate in the project. I will explain that my project is an outreach to folks who have been members for 20 years; that the intent of the invitation is my desire to deepen the connection with these folks and to offer them the opportunity to share with me their thoughts feelings about their connection to the synagogue and to Judaism. I will explain that the project reflects my desire to be more proactive with members than I have been in the past.

2. I propose to meet with each couple for three 1hour sessions. The approach during these sessions will be to encourage expressions of areas of difficulties experienced in connecting with the synagogue, rabbi, and Judaism. The following areas of concern hopefully will be addressed in open dialogue:
    a. How did each individual's family of origin relate to and connect with Judaism and the synagogue? How does each individual's understanding of their Jewish identity now differ from that of their parents?
    b. What are the differences between each person's Jewish identity in the present family unit; and how have these differences manifested themselves in the couple's decision to keep somewhat distant from connection with the synagogue community?
    c. Are there other reasons for the distance? Does it reflect alienation due to a particular moment or event in their history with the synagogue? Or does it reflect a general style that the couple has in relation to other communal groups.
    d. What were the original expectations of the couple when they joined the synagogue? Were there particular activities with which you had hoped to become involved?
    e. Were these expectations fulfilled? If not, how do you understand this reality.
    d. Are there other areas in your life which mirror a desire for connection that have for some reason also have not come to pass.
3. Following these individual meetings, the group will meet with me for three

sessions of one and a half hours each for mutual support and learning. Following the model of the process group, my role will be to encourage the creation of a supportive working group that hopefully will verbalize an agenda for further connection with each other and the wider synagogue community.

B. Anticipated outcomes and methods by which they will be assessed:

1. The participation of these folks in the project will be seen as the beginning to successful attainment of goal 1. In addition, the expression of ambivalences, and perhaps particular hurts and frustrations by each individual, will help them feel that the rabbi and the community are willing to listen to their issues and concerns. This outcome will further indicate the successful attainment of this goal.

2. The expression of struggles concerning participant's personal identity and relationship to the Jewish community along with a willingness to share issues of anxiety and conflict in group and individual sessions reflect the attainment of goal 2.

3. The decision of participants at the conclusion of the group sessions to continue their participation in other synagogue programs would be evidence of the attainment of goal 3.

4. The decision of participants to attend further study sessions on a more consistent basis would indicate a desire to continue the bonding process and would suggest the attainment of goal 3.

Chapter Four: Outcomes

A. The preparation

The project began with the sending of the following letter to the first five prospective couples:

Dear A. and B.

For the past two years I have been involved in completing course work in fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctorate in Pastoral counseling. This program when completed will award me the Doctor of Ministry degree from Hebrew Union College.

I am writing to you to invite you to consider helping me in the next phase of my studies. I would like to invite you to becoming part of my D. Min. project. This project is not a dissertation. Rather it is a practical project aimed at an issue of pastoral care in congregation life. The project is to have two foci. It should both benefit those participants in the project as well as those working in ministry who might want to read the finished paper.

The project that I have chosen to undertake is an outreach effort to long-term members of the synagogue who have not been actively involved in the community for many years. The purpose of this outreach is to offer you and four other couples the opportunity to share your thoughts about how you understand your consistent commitment to the synagogue while at the same time keeping some distance between yourselves and the synagogue community. As you well know, there are many former members who have left the synagogue for all kinds of reasons. Many leave after their children complete their Jewish education. You are among those who have continued their membership indicating a strong commitment to Judaism as expressed through a synagogue. The focus of our meetings will be directed towards understanding how

the synagogue fulfills your Jewish needs, and if not, how you understand your continuing loyalty. Our discussions hopefully will offer you the opportunity to review the history of your particular involvement with Judaism in general, and with the Temple in particular.

This particular project suggested itself to me as a result of my studies these past two years. My studies have helped me become more pro-active with people. It seems most appropriate to reach out to long-term members like yourselves who have consistently been willing to support the synagogue these many years. I appreciate your loyalty and want to offer you something in return. This is an invitation to experience more of the benefits of membership than you have been receiving in recent years.

The issue of caring for members of a church or synagogue who are somewhat removed from the center of the community's activities is a universal problem among religious institutions.

I am in the process of identifying five couples who are willing to take part in this project. The involvement would be as follows. Each couple will meet with me for three one-hour sessions. In these sessions we will be discussing the above issues in relation to your particular situation and history. My agenda is simply to suggest a series of questions to begin our discussions. Your issues and concerns will guide the direction of the sessions. After I have met with all five couples individually, we will all meet together for three one and a half hour sessions to refocus the discussions towards a communal perspective.

Take some time to think about your possible involvement in this project. I'll be calling you in a few days to discuss all of the above. I hope you will find the thought of possible involvement at least intriguing if not beneficial.

Fondly,

Gerald Brieger, Rabbi, Temple Emanuel

I followed up this letter with a call to each couple. When a couple declined the invitation, I sent another letter to another couple. Meetings with the five couples, in bold below, were arranged after the completion of the letters and calls to eleven families.

The following are the responses of the eleven couples to my call:

A and N. I spoke to N on phone. She was interested but said A was not. Two days later N had yahrtzeit and was planning to come to synagogue and would tell me of their decision. When she came she said that they would not be involved.

H and M. I had spoken with M months ago about this project. She was interested in the concept of reaching out to old time members. After I sent the letter, she called and curtly said that they were not interested. H had always expressed that whatever involvement they have had has not been motivated by his interest. M is an artist whose only involvement has been with the artwork in our prayer book. I was amazed at the curtness of our phone conversation. I would have expected and was hoping that she might say more given her initial interest.

J and A. My first conversation with J was not positive. He thought that they were not appropriate for the project. He said he was not very religious. I said, 'think about it a bit. Don't make a quick decision. I'll call you back'. J again expressed his ambivalence in our second phone conversation. He said they hadn't spoken much about it. I accepted their refusal and said that if they change their minds they were still welcome to call.

D and R. I spoke to D. He said he was reluctant. He is a private person. He was still thinking about it. They called a week later to say that they were not interested.

Cliff and Carol. Carol called me to say that they were intrigued, and that they would like to be involved. I explained the process and they said just call us when you are ready.

Ed and Ellen. Spoke with Ed in Boca Raton. They have moved there and are keeping up membership. They will be back in May for the summer. He spoke for both of them in saying that they were willing to participate. I explained the purpose. He was positively interested in these discussions. He even offered to help through e-mail communication with the participants. He is a computer consultant. Ellen is a retired teacher. When her children were in the religious school she became involved by teaching kinder garden. When her boys were bar mitzvah, her involvement waned. Ed

has always been absent. He expressed the fact that his interest was piqued because of what he saw as the 'scientific' nature of the project.

Bob and Beth. I called Beth. She was excited and was waiting for me to call. She had wondered about the issue herself. Beth is a child psychiatrist; Bob is a retired surgeon. Bob gets on the phone and asks me about the orthodox issue in Israel. Beth mentions a psychologist-rabbi friend who was impressed with the project.

M and E. M was interested but says E is concerned about the time commitment. He says they will rethink it. Fifteen minutes later E calls me. She says she has been feeling disappointed about my not connecting with her son when he was getting married. It was an inter-marriage. She had been upset with me but never had an opportunity to verbalize it. She further says that perhaps if they were more active in the synagogue earlier, E. might have not intermarried; 'It's is too late now'. She then expressed her ambivalence. 'This is not what I want to do right now. Actually I am unclear about what I want to be doing right now.' We speak about the fact that our relationship is good. She feels comfortable in saying these things to me. She knew that if she didn't call right then she never would do it later. She says they will call if they change their minds; 'I didn't say no yet.' They do not call back.

Al and Ann Ann said that were ready to talk about the issues of the project over the phone. They had had already much discussion about it. They are video photographers and they reminded me that they are at synagogue more than most people. She said that she has videotapes of my services with her wherever she goes. I asked if Al was ok with the project. She implied that he was; she said to him that this is an important thing to do.

X and X. They expressed no interest; and they resigned their membership one year later.

Dan and Dana. I Spoke with Dana who expressed her ambivalence in relation to the time commitment. When I asked about Dan, she continued, "I was a Mishkan Israel brat--and was involved as a child with Sunday school and youth group. Dan has no back ground so he doesn't know how this would help." She asked me how many couples have said yes so far. I told her that two couples have said no and that you are the second who are thinking about it. She said reiterated the problem of the lack of time. I said that when four couples have agreed, I would call her again. When I called after the tenth couple said, No, spoke with Dan, and I think he made the decision to say yes.

B. The Individual Sessions

All five of the couples who agreed to take part in the project were consistent in their willingness to meet with me for the three individual sessions. This suggests that, for them, the outreach was successful in fulfilling an unspoken need. It clearly was a renewal and strengthening my relationship with each couple. Each in a different way found it a worthwhile opportunity to think about their Jewish past and present.

A list of Jewish issues raised by the all of the couples in one form or another contains the following: Belief in God; observance or non observance of defining Jewish rituals like dietary laws and Sabbath observance; anti-Semitism; Jewish self-hatred; intermarriage; concern for the continuation of jewishness in their children and grand-children; religion as irrational superstition.

Particular couples raised the following personal issues: The Holocaust and its effects; homosexuality and its effects.

The following summaries and excerpts from the individual sessions indicate the issues that were raised by each couple. Each set of interviews is, as would be expected, unique. Not every issue identified the chapter 3 was addressed by each couple. But the overarching goal of serious struggle with Jewish issues was met. Each couple tackled Jewish identity issues, of the past and present, both personal and communal.

Al and Ann.

At the first meeting with Al and Ann, I learned things that I never knew about their history with the synagogue. They have been at the synagogue even longer than I (27 years). In addition, some of my initial expectations were not on target. I expected Al to be a tag along;

that their connection to the synagogue was minor; and that their ambivalence would not be identified. I was wrong on all accounts.

When I asked about why their involvement with the community waned, their answer was that life was overwhelming, and that they had no time for synagogue.

Al: We had problem with the twins. They were driving us crazy we couldn't relate to anything. We couldn't handle it. We did this tough love thing with them...When they were home we had nothing but battles. Religion was just an extra.
R: You just didn't have any time.
Both: Right.
R: This is an important issue for me to learn about. Was there any way that I could have been helpful?
Ann: No, between psychiatrist, psychologist. Work; helping B, keeping S normal, there is no way that anyone could have come in. You called a couple of times; but I could not deal with more. We were stretched.
R: I hear you. So where did you get your support during all of this awful stuff.
Ann: From my husband.
Al: There was just the two of us (They say this in such a loving way).
R: This is not bad.
Ann: We also had the shrink.
R: You went together or individually?
Ann: Both.

Here is a list of the issues that were overwhelming for them. Al's always working and being on the road; continuous dealing with family crises: twins rebelling, Al's brother dying, Ann's mother dying, B.'s marrying and going to live in Israel.

My expectation that Ann called the shots was incorrect. Both were verbal; and both asserted themselves. Both had a positive connection with their Jewishness and with the synagogue; and their connection was stronger than I had expected.

Both Al and Ann were products of Conservative backgrounds but of different synagogues. Al had a negative experience, Ann a positive one. Both identified these experiences in relation to the rabbi and his leadership style. They joined a Reform synagogue because she wanted to understand the prayers. Al wanted his children to have a better experience than he did. He didn't want them to learn Hebrew by rote. He also wanted a less authoritarian style, which left a bad taste in his mouth. He wanted a more liberal style in his

home. He notes that his mom didn't allow meat and milk to be served together, yet she had bacon in the house.

In the early years of their marriage, Al was always on the road. This was difficult for Ann, so they moved back home so that they would have some connection with family.

Ann' grand parents were orthodox. She met Al at the B'nai Brith youth group. Ann was concerned that Al wouldn't want to be members of a synagogue, yet Al raised the issue himself.

I asked about expectations when they joined. She said that they expected that would always be connected. They have been members even longer than I have been the rabbi. They joined in 1971; I came in 1977. Ann was involved with the kids during their school years. They also loved the fact that the members were involved in working together fixing up the barn--doing the work themselves.

Their continuing connection at the present is a vicarious one. They both affirmed that they read our monthly bulletin regularly. And as vidoeographers, who edit bar mitzvah and wedding tapes, they are present, so to speak, at many services.

Ann identified the moment that it became impossible for her to 'sit' in the sanctuary. The loss of her mother marked the beginning of her inability to be a participant in the service. It would make her cry and she didn't want to have sad feelings.

This issue of abandonment comes up through out the sessions in a number of ways. She is pained by a series of losses the most recent being her eldest daughter's move to Israel and her other children's moving on in life.

She identifies abandonment as her issue. She speaks about her growing up with an extended family that were lived near each other and were together often. She misses this kind of family connection very much.

Ann's attempts to reconnect to the synagogue family have not been successful. She speaks about her attempt to connect with the synagogue group who work at the soup kitchen. Her outreach for community connection fails because, she says, others are not really interested in responding. Her words: 'people kept their distance'.

Al mentions his involvement with the service organization, Knights of Pitheas which he identifies as part of his ongoing 'Jewish' connection. The meetings are at the synagogue.

Beth and Bob

Beth is a psychiatrist; Bob is a retired surgeon. Beth has two sons from a previous marriage, A. and J.; Bob has 3 children from a previous marriage. Beth and Bob have never come to the synagogue other than for family b'nai mitzvah and for the High Holidays.

Both Beth and Bob have strong historical connections to Judaism and to their jewishness. For Beth, her grandfather whom she calls, in Yiddish, zayda seems to be the strongest source of her connection. Here is her remembrance of his unique effect on her.

Beth: I have this wonderful memory of sitting with my zayda when I was 16 and he was about 92 and it was getting dark and we were sitting at the table he had just started lit the candles and he said, 'Aren't those Shabbes candles beautiful. Its too bad that I won't get to see too many more'. It was so beautiful. I never knew that women were supposed to light the candles. It was always he who lit although I said it with him...the prayer for bentch licht...
My zayda lived with us from the time I was four. He lit the Shabbes candles every week; he kept kosher for himself. We were entirely non kosher. He was born in Russia. My mother was born in Philadelphia. Her mom was Lithuanian and her father was Polish. My parents met in Atlantic City where my grandfather a little grocery store and my dad as a little boy was delivery boy and he met my mother when she was 11. We didn't have to do anything because we were girls. But my oldest sister took me to the Community Center Sunday school and it was great. I loved it; and it was a very long distance. We would go by bus. And then she didn't want to go any more. I tried to go myself. I had to walk 20 min to a friends house in the middle of winter. Eventually I gave up. It was too hard for a fifth grader.

R: Were your parents supportive of this.

Beth: Yeah it was all right. Whatever I wanted to do was ok with them. That was the way they were. We lit the candles every Friday night.
R: Even after you grandfather died?
Beth: No we stopped. When he died I was away at medical school. It stopped for me when I was at college at 18. My brother the youngest of four he did go to Sunday school and Hebrew school and he was bar mitzvah. And it was a big deal.

It would appear that Beth breaks her connection with Jewish practice as do many when leaving home for college and in addition, her loss of connection overlaps with the death of her zayda.

She says above that she loved her conservative religious school experience. She also speaks positively about her 12 years of Jewish summer camp. But she always comes back to her zayda.

Beth: I was going to say, when I was young, we didn't have much but we went to camp every summer. And it was a Jewish culture camp. It wasn't a more religiously oriented camp, but we had services every Friday night and Saturday morning. We wore white. I sang in the chorus. There was kosher food. We said a beracha before every meal and at the end of every meal. This was for 12 years. We certainly had some Jewish connection. I was glad to have some Hebrew. And also my zayda he would daven himself.
R: At home or at shule?
Beth: When he could walk he went to an orthodox shule. When he couldn't he had a friend drive him to a conservative one? He led the seders. He never imposed anything on us. He never said you should be doing this. He never said one word about it. Maybe he felt he couldn't say anything because he was in my father's house. He read the Forwerts. I'd always look at the pictures at the back because it was all I could understand (yiddish paper). Every now and then in the back they would sometimes have some English.

This is the first hint of Beth's feeling about her father, a man who needed to take the role of the king of the castle.

When Beth speaks about her two boys A. and J., the picture she paints reflects the two sides of her ambivalent feelings about Judaism. A. seems to live out the role of her zayda. Beth tells A. the stories about her zayda and A. takes on his role. A. lights candles every shabbat. A's wife is not Jewish but she agrees to do this with him. A. observes a form of kashrut but does not demand that his wife does the same. All of these behaviors reflect the picture she paints of her zayda.

J. expresses the more ambivalent side of Beth. The ambivalence is expressed through the issue of belief in God and the disconnection with ritual. Beth says of J. that 'he likes being Jewish but does not believe in God and he is not religious, just like me'.

Here is a bit of our conversation about atheism.

R: You identify yourself as an atheist?
Beth: Yeah.
R: As compared to being an agnostic?
Beth: Well, I suppose I could be an agnostic on the atheistic side of it. I pretty much believe that. I believe in spirituality in some way... Being good...and connecting...that kind of thing...It doesn't make sense to me. To think that there is some supernatural being. It just doesn't make sense. I really think that science may understand theology eventually.
R: Understand...Well science identifies regularities and connects them one to another; and identifies formulas for them. But science never can explain why there is a regularity only that there is; and then identifies the nature of that regularity.
Beth: Yeah, at this point.
R: You know in college, I studied electrical engineering. I loved physics. It was the study of quantum mechanics, along with the fact that engineering didn't fit my personality style, that led me away from engineering. Quantum mechanics was the connection to spirituality from the science side. The metaphors used to picture quantum theory get too impossible to picture; they no longer mirror the world that we understand. It is with quantum physics that the split between scientific truth and 'the mythology of religion' breaks down. Mythology is also just metaphoric way to explain something. But here you have a scientific metaphor that is not understandable, almost mystical. So that's where...I come from. If you read Steven Hawkings book...
Beth: I've been thinking about him as you were talking.
R: He speaks about those scientists who accept the anthropic principle. The principle states that laws of science are such that nature favors the development of life and ultimately, of humanity. If scientific laws weren't as they are, we wouldn't exist. So that fact means that nature is not neutral. Rather, nature supports consciousness and our coming into being. Its kind of a scientific way of moving in the direction of God, of a source of existence that is at least not neutral to our coming into being. So this is how I came to be more affirmative about God from a scientific perspective.
And it's interesting to me to speak to folks who affirm atheism. I only know of one other person in the synagogue who is so direct in his affirmation of atheism.....My question always is, why be loyal to the tradition? Why be good? The issue is how else to understand the transcendence of morality?
Beth: Yeah

Bob's ambivalence seems basically to be related to two issues, to his experiences of anti-Semitism, and to his strong negative feelings about orthodox Jews whom he sees as hypocritical and overbearing. In the following dialogue, Beth is about to affirm what would seem to be a possible acceptance of some kind of 'theism' when Bob overrules her. He appears to equate any belief in God with orthodoxy.

Bob: I was subject to some anti-Semitism. My career choice was made because one of my mentors told me that I should become a doctor not an engineer--This without actually ever telling me directly. He's

Italian. He said I would not do well. And I knew what it took to get ahead in the post war era. There was a Jewish physician on the Yale faculty in the 40's...I don't believe in God but I have a very strong connection to being Jewish: the holocaust; the traditions; food.

R: So it's an ethnicity more than anything else for both you? Is that the right way to say it?

Beth: Yeah. It's interesting. When we were in Italy on Rosh Hashanah. We find a synagogue and we go and things like that.

R: Solidarity, being at home with your own traditions?

Beth: Yeah solidarity. Wherever we go, Hungary we go to a synagogue. Who was it, Oh yeah, Hannah Senesh parachuted in from Israel. It's very moving. We feel strongly about it. We feel connected to a theist...

Bob: Well I don't. I'm really prejudiced against the religious right, the Jewish religious right. They are intolerant. They feel that they are better than you are. Doesn't this go against the tenants of their religion.

Here are Bob's memories of his experiences of anti-Semitism. He expresses a sense of shame about his Jewish identity and wishes he could hide it. Perhaps his anger at orthodoxy is connected with their assertive unashamed visibility.

Bob: I was subjected to anti-Semitism in the Navy. I had fights..., well one of them was with a Jewish kid from Brooklyn who wanted me to cheat on an exam and help him, which would have led to my being thrown out of school. In boot camp, I was the only Jew among 110 kids. They were all from coal mining areas. When I was in college. I was ashamed to be Jewish. I thought I would have been better off as a gentile. Even at Yale medical school I knew that Jews had no power.

On the positive side of the ambivalence, Bob strongly values the ethnic part of his Jewishness. This is what Beth found attractive about Bob.

Beth: My first husband was anti-Semitic. He never encouraged anything. So I just rolled with it. And Bob liked his Jewishness and so we blossomed.

Bob: There's a tremendous feeling of tradition and you know, thinking my of my mother's borsht. Carrying on the tradition of Yiddishkeit...We've had, up until this year, Passover at our house.

Beth: Bob makes his mother's borsht. He's a great cook.

When Bob speaks of his first marriage, he identifies himself as the source of the Jewishness in his first family. He sees himself as the source of the Jewishness in his second family as well. He asserts that he is the reason that his elder son and his stepsons were bar mitzvah.

In the following, Bob mourns the fact that that Jewishness has not taken root in the children of his first marriage.

R: So you join a synagogue. You succeed in interesting A. in coming to Hebrew school. Is this the basic reason you joined, or would you have joined anyhow?

Beth: I think it was the kids.
Bob: (disagreeing) You have to join a temple. I was a member of Mishkan Israel during my first marriage (16 years).
Beth: Did the kids go to Sunday school?
Bob: They moved to NY to live with their mother. A1 had an interesting experience with...his mother had already become Christified she didn't do anything. It was always my job. I went to some orthodox synagogues but they wouldn't have anything to do with me. I wanted my son to be bar mitzvah when he was 13 but they didn't have enough time to train him so we got an appointment at Emanuel with R. Sobel and he said we don't do bar mitzvah's here; but we are starting. He probably will be the first one to be bar mitzvah here. He must promise to go to Sunday school through confirmation. And guess what-he did that. A woman next to me during the bar mitzvah was crying. Because it was the first and it was beautiful. And then he stopped. He has no interest any more. He married a non-Jew. My grandson has never been circumcised.

Bob returns again and again throughout the sessions to the bar mitzvah ritual, both his sons' and his own. These are the important moments of his Jewish life.

In the following, Beth and Bob assert both sides of their ambivalence about their connection to the synagogue.

Bob: What makes people come to the synagogue on the Holidays. Are they afraid if they don't come, something will happen to them?
Beth: That's us.
Bob: I'm not talking about us, I'm talking about the masses who come religiously on holidays and then don't show up the other 360 days of the year.
R: Why do you think they do this?
Bob: I think there is a fear factor...not generated by you, but rather it's internal. I'll give you an example...
Beth: I don't think that's so. I think they come because of their old connections.
R: That's why you come.
Beth: Yeah.
Bob: I came more this year than most because I really wanted to come.
Beth: I came on my son's yahrtzeit, and on the high holidays.
Bob: I like a good chazen (cantor). I miss a good chazen in your temple...The choir in Stamford are not Jewish; they get paid for it.
R: Do you like the choir?
Bob: I like it. There is a choir also at temple Emanuel in New York.
R: So why do you come
Bob: For a spiritual connection

As our discussions continued, the nature of each one's ambivalence is further clarified. Beth's Jewishness has a passive quality. It is others who are Jewish for her, first her zayda, then Bob and then her sons A. and J.

Bob's Jewishness is, at the moment, ethnic. But he is struggling with the possibility of connecting further with the religious part. Here are their ruminations about why they are and have been distant from the synagogue community.

R: Are there any thoughts or discussions that you have had following our first meeting.
Beth: No. It made me think like if there was at the synagogue some program or something. It's just like...it doesn't take any preference to go. I was thinking about that.
R: What do you mean preference?
Beth: Well I decided to do something else. Something looks interesting, but you know, it's just that I go skiing.
R: Do you make anything of it?
Beth: No its not because I don't like Judaism its just that it hasn't really been a big part of my daily life. You know things get into a pattern. And we ski.
Bob: But we are Jewish!
R: Jewish skiers.
Bob: No we are Jewish period!
Beth: We are Jewish skiers.

As the discussion continues, each expresses a kind of elitism concerning the kinds of people who go to synagogue. Beth raises the issue of atheism, while Bob identifies philanthropy and good deeds, which, he asserts, are of short supply among synagogue attendees.

Beth: It still doesn't answer my question?
R: Which is; why don't you come to synagogue?
Beth: Yeah
R.: So what do you think?
Beth: Well I don't really know. I don't have any strong feeling about God. That is probably part of it.
Bob: I don't equate going to synagogue with being a philanthropist or being good to other people.
R: There are two different things going on here. Lets separate them. If I heard what you said Bob, it is that philanthropy and doing good is the purpose of religion and that is not present in the synagogue.
Bob: No...Yeah being a good person. Help the underdog. It doesn't always follow that those who go to synagogue are those kinds of people...Our congregation does a lot of good... Beth, What does your orthodox nephew do for other people?
Beth: Children of Chernoble and all sorts of things
Bob: All Jewish causes...
Beth: When we joined the temple our friends were in different places; so the members of the synagogue were not our friends. So we don't go for social reasons. And there are some people there who are a little obnoxious like you find in any group. The social groupings were already formed before we joined.

Beth's passive stance would seem to reflect the picture she draws of her mother. Here are her thoughts about her mother and father.

Beth: My siblings were disappointed with my mother, and I sort of accepted her limitations. My brother began to have a good relationship with her; he had accepted it too.
R: Was there something about her style that was difficult that you were able to accept earlier?
Beth: She was very passive. She wasn't creative, or motivated to instigate things. And I just saw her as a victim of my father's harsh and mean ways, like calling her stupid and stuff like that. Probably it's my temperment...I just thought she was the best. And when I analyzed it in my analysis and I realized that if she had stood up to my dad he wouldn't have looked so bad. She never told him to stop.
R: You think he would have?
Beth: Maybe, if she had any guts. But someone without any skills, she worked as a kid, so she was...she wasn't mean and she wasn't nasty. I just thought she was great. And she was fun. Like you Bob, when you say let's go, Her bags were packed and she was ready to go. When she was here we had a lot of fun. Go out she'd laugh. She was well liked. But she didn't initiated, not anywhere. I can remember when my brother (7 years younger) came home with his report card, and I asked her how did he do, she said. I don't know? You don't know? Did you asked him? I called the school and of course they had given out the report cards he had failed almost everything. Well how can you let him go out if he hasn't given you his report card? So I was trying to raise him. She was always there, but I filled in the gaps.

Here is Bob's verbalization of his ethnic connection with Jews and his disconnection with gentiles.

Bob: Let's bring it to me.
R: OK
Bob: I would like it...we have two remaining kids as far as marriage is concerned. I would love it if one or both would meet nice Jewish people.
R: I don't blame you.
Bob: And its not happening. I don't relate to gentiles like I relate to Jews. You know what I mean?
R: But that's you. I bet your kids don't make a distinction between Jew and Gentile.
Beth: I don't think they do.
Bob: We visited friends in Marblehead Mass. They are gentile and I am Jewish. There is no question that there is a difference. He thinks of me as Jewish. He would almost say this is my Jewish friend Bob.
Bob: But I would love J to come home with a Jewish girl.
R: Did you tell him that?
Bob: Oh yes he knows.
R: It doesn't matter to him.
Bob: Well I don't know if he...I wasn't in love with his girl friend for a couple of reasons. Mainly she was very Gentile. She had no knowledge of any Jews really in her life. So she didn't have any of the ambiance of someone who knows Jews in growing up.

Bob recently attended a funeral of a colleague and it leads to reflections about his own life. In particular, he conjures up a picture of his childhood memories of being in synagogue with his dad. He wonders, for what appears to be the first time, about his father's knowledge of Hebrew; and this leads him to think about his own knowledge and lack thereof. The subsequent conversation suggests that both Bob and Beth might be willing to study Hebrew together. It is on my agenda to invite them to join the next adult bar mitzvah class.

Bob: My father would sit next to me at synagogue and with his cronies who would take snuff to stay awake, and he would read very fast. I don't think my father understood what he was saying...My father never learned English, how to write or read...

Bob: Why didn't I ever ask him? Why didn't I ask my father, do you understand all that stuff? I was more interested in going outside and fooling around on the synagogue steps. I loved the snow.

R: If your father were a scholar, he probably would have taught you, but even if he didn't understand the meaning of the Hebrew, that doesn't mean that others don't know.

Bob: Well, he obviously went to cheder in Russia, and I did too. I could read the Hebrew, but I couldn't translate, which is kind of stupid.

R: I want to know, if it was the case that all these guys really did know Hebrew, does that bother you.

Bob: No, not at all. I'd be impressed. But I don't think they did...You know, that's a good point because when we in the synagogue in Livorno, Italy. Those kids, anywhere from 15 to 45 years old, they came in while the service was going on, picked up the prayer book. There's not a word of Italian in the prayer book. They opened the page up to the right place, so they must have known. At least they knew the words.

R: It's very easy to do, even if you don't know every word. If you are a davener, you know what service to look at you know what it's called, you know what it sounds like...

Bob: I feel kind of stupid I've been going to synagogue all my adult life and I have had ample opportunity to memorize the repetitive prayers...

R: With a little effort you would discover that you know more than you think; and with a little study, all the stuff that you know would become organized very quickly. It's in there.

Bob: So you think I could actually learn Hebrew?

R: Why not?

Beth: You really follow it very well. I watch you during services.

Bob: Oh yeah I follow it but...For example, I read the kaddish, but I don't understand it. It has a lot of foreign sounding words.

R: Bob, are you thinking about studying Hebrew

Bob: I don't know.

R: Well, do it together. Beth, you also talked about being bat mitzvah.

Beth: Yeah, A said to me, 'why don't you get bar mitzvahed?'

Bob: Well we would have a nice excuse to have a nice party.

Beth: We always need a good excuse for a party.

R: There you go.

Bob: Are you proselytizing me rabbi?

R: Not me Bob

Beth: I'm pretty good with languages. I went for twelve years to a Jewish camp, so I am really good at transliteration. I can read that pretty fast.

Bob: I'll tell you what I would love. I'm not sure I'd like it enough to do it. I'd like to be able to go to a service and understand what I am saying.

R: Yeah, well that would be the point of the studying.

If it is the case that Bob did not get the message from his dad that to be Jewish requires knowledge and connection to the spiritual activities of the synagogue, the question remains, what did his dad stress, if anything? Bob's answer, "I think he wanted more than anything to bring home a Jewish girl. And Beth adds, "And you did it twice."

For Bob, the ethnic aspect of being Jewish expresses the positive side of his ambivalence. And, similarly to Beth's son A, Bob's children seem to live out the negative side

of the ambivalence for him. None of his children have married Jews and his daughter actively affirms both atheism and hostility towards religion as the source of much evil in the world.

I wanted to follow up an earlier discussion about Bob and Beth's affirmation of atheism. Despite their agreement on this issue, it seems that there are different motivations involved. For both, it is part of their elitism. Rationality and the scientific approach is a mark of higher culture; while 'superstition' and simple-minded thinking is a mark of a lesser cultural status. But for Beth, it is a more emotionally charged issue. Beth lost a son at age four to herpes encephalitis. Rather than anger at God, Beth chooses a faith in science which she believes will, in the future, solve the problems that vex humanity. Beth does not make the possible connection of the death of her zayda, or her son, or the passive acceptance by her mother of her father's strong authoritarian style with them, as possible sources of her own passive distance from the synagogue. I have this in the back of my mind when asking her about her atheism.

R: I wanted to ask you (Beth) about your atheism. I wondered about it.
Bob: When we watch sports on TV and hear the players say, 'With the help of God I was able to score that basket, each of us goes crazy. So, that may be a good preface for her...Because you go crazy, too. You say, come on!
R: Why does it bother you?
Bob: Because.
Beth: You know what bothers me
Bob: They think of it as a human being with a beard.
Beth: No, what bothers me is that they have it wrong. That they can have their value system and not have it imposed on other people. It makes it seem like whatever they're saying that's the way it should be in the world. There are other (ways), you know, not everyone calls it God. They call it other things. People talk about it too much. They're not thinking that they have the responsibility to behave and do things without thinking there is someone watching what they do and helping them make the shot.
R: Too dependent?
Beth: Yeah. If they do it for that, then they do it for everything. It's not that they had some bad luck, it was that God was upset with them...There is this fanaticism about God being there all the time, directing your life and giving you your favors. That's just superstition...I think there's a lot of chaos and randomness. And I believe that sometimes the chaos is a positive thing; and sometimes the chaos is a negative thing, and sometimes you're just lucky. That's what it feels like. You know, even when my son got sick, really sick; and he eventually died. I never even...I was glad to have a formal way to bring it to a close. I had his casket here. He was cremated.
R: How old was he again?
Beth: He was six when he died and he was 4 when he got sick, so he lived like a vegetable. He had herpes encephalitis. He was the middle boy and it never...I didn't even think any of those things like, what has God done to me. Most people, in this day and age, don't die of herpes encephalitis. In the early 1900's,

you'd get measles, chickenpox, you'd die; you'd get a strep throat, you'd get rheumatic heart disease, everything. You were lucky to grow up. But, in our day and age, it's quite unusual. I just thought it was part of his immune system... You know, I didn't feel I needed to bring God into it; but I did need the formal structure that I was familiar with.

R: I don't know where I read this. Nietzsche said, 'You don't have to believe in God to be angry at God.' How do you respond to that?

Beth: That's a great saying. Well, I don't agree. I sort of feel like I couldn't be angry at God. I was angry at my bad luck that to have this poor kid get this bug and it goes to his brain. And I was angry at the lack of control in that I couldn't save him. When my kids would get sick after that, they'd get a high fever, it didn't feel like I burdened them feeling like oh my God they are going to get this disease.

R: The reason I ask about the atheism is because you said last time...You tied the atheism to not coming to synagogue. Why would that be?

Beth: Well, it just, I don't know because I really don't have to be a believer to go to synagogue; because I went all those years to camp and I didn't know what I believed and as I got older I didn't have any strong feelings. And I used the formality of the synagogue. I think the main reason is I'm not pulled there by anything. We go skiing; it's not convenient.

Bob: Well we are hedonists in a way.

R: You're missing my question. Specifically I was wondering about issues of authority. Can you tie the authority aspect of God to your feelings about your mom's passive response to your dad's authority?

Beth: Well his authority was evident only when he was annoyed or when we made noise or something went wrong. But I don't know. (Long pause) I haven't thought about it that way before. Certainly it didn't feel like believing in God was the most important thing at all anytime I went to synagogue.

R: Yeah, well, it's interesting because I think you're right. I think that the connection between belief in God and the activity of the synagogue is not necessarily in everybody's mind. But you made the connection. So I'm wondering about that part. You know this book by Anna Maria Rizutto, a psychiatrist who wrote a book on how children image of God?

Beth: Oh yeah, I read the excerpts from it.

R: She suggests that one's sense of God has to do with one's early experience. What is life doing to you, is it positive is it negative. Perhaps your critique of fundamentalists in their passivity, for example, would suggest a kind of an image that you reject. God is a protective parent that these folks need to hold onto to be alive. And your verbalization of being independent is the flip side of it. But, one can be independent and still have a positive connection with 'the authority', The Source of Existence. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Beth: Yeah.

R: So some one who has a strong feeling about God, either positive or negative, is reflecting something. So I was wondering is it your Dad, or something else.

Beth: Could be; there could be a connection there. It could be why it never came into my life in a more positive way.

Cliff and Carol

Cliff and Carol responded to my letter of invitation saying that they were intrigued and wanted to be involved. Our first meeting was on Tue. April 28 in their home.

Both Cliff and Carol grew up the Bronx around the corner from each other. Despite their physical proximity, their early experiences both in their families of origin and in their families' connection to Judaism were quite different. And these differences appear to be determinative in reflecting their present different approaches to Judaism and to the synagogue.

Carol grew up very close to the Orthodox synagogue where her family was connected and active. Although Carol doesn't consider her family to be 'orthodox-orthodox', her description of her family's connection to the synagogue reveals a connection that is consistent and meaningful.

Carol: My parents both came from orthodox backgrounds. They kept kosher. But they weren't really orthodox to the point of obsessive ness. They were much more relaxed. They weren't really orthodox-orthodox.
R: Your father didn't go to shul on a regular basis.
Cliff: Absolutely he did.
Carol: Not every Saturday Cliff; he went because he was very involved. He was the head of the men's club. He davened, he knew everything (prayers) by heart. He just knows it all. But it wasn't like he went every Saturday. He was a Levi so he was called upon when needed. They had a good time my parents. They were very involved. But we lived two blocks away.

Cliff's experiences were radically different. Cliff's father died when Cliff was nine. And Cliff's memory of the synagogue's response to his loss was, to use Cliff's verbiage, 'not impressive'. The loss of his father and the lack of support during this difficult time for him and his family left a bad taste in his mouth. As a result, Cliff has kept his distance from the community and has developed his own personal version of Jewishness that he defends passionately. He expresses anger at those who one might call religious hypocrites; that is, those who honor the forms rather than the ethical underpinnings of Jewish practice.

R: Cliff, were your parents orthodox?
Cliff: I would surmise that... it's not really knowable.
R: What does that mean?
Cliff: Well my father died when I was nine. And my mother, I guess she grew up orthodox...its hard for me to ascertain that.
Carol: I think your father's family was more religious. Your mother also left her parents young. So she had a hard time to figure out how to do things.
R: How old was your father when he died?
Cliff: He was 29 and I was nine. My brother was seven and my sister was five...I'm probably more repelled by organized religion per say. When I used to go with my brother and my sister to say yizkor at the synagogue, (speaking very quietly now) we would stand in the back of the shul and say yizkor and all of the men would be looking at us and chuckling. People don't know what is going on in your life. They don't have any idea what you're going for and why you are doing it. I was no longer impressed. I never found out what they knew or didn't know. But for me personally, religion is how you live your life. Religion is not what you may say or what other rabbis may say. I measure my religion by the way I run my life, period. I don't need anything else.
Carol: I try to live my life every day as a good Jewish person, because everyone knows I am Jewish. And I want to think that Jewish people are good people.

Cliff: Let me say, my opinion is being Jewish is the way you live your life. If I take anything away from it was a set of rules that make sense. Forget about all the reading between the lines with all writings and the books and this and that. Basically how you live your life and how you conduct yourself that's the essence of being Jewish...I don't feel that I can be a person that doesn't reflect my values. And hopefully they are not negative or wrong, that is, in a way that is not in keeping with being Jewish...I don't know how anybody else thinks. This is the way I feel. I don't really care about what other people think. The only way you change people is in the way you act.

It would seem that part of Cliff's ambivalence towards 'organized religion' is due to his anger and disappointment at those in the synagogue of his youth. He needed compassionate support when his dad died. Instead he experiences rejection. As a result, Cliff has no expectation that a religious community can be a supportive one. He created his own definition of religion that places the emphasis on the individual's ethical/moral action rather than on the community's theology and ritual. In his words: 'Basically how you live your life and how you conduct yourself, that's the essence of being Jewish."

Cliff's disappointment at the synagogue of his youth is replayed at Temple Emanuel around the issue of my inability to officiate at his children's intermarriage. This disappointment is raised when Cliff and Carol offer their thoughts about why they have not been involved in any of the synagogue's activities.

Cliff: I don't think we would be inspired (to come)
R: There is a difference here. You (Cliff) would not be inspired to come because of your history, while Carol would be more likely to want to come.
Cliff: Before my kids were married I might have considered it. After I don't think I would. Well E didn't marry a girl who is Jewish. B didn't marry a guy who is Jewish. And in both situations I got a little more estranged.
R: Because I don't perform intermarriages?
Cliff: Yes.
R: Did you find a Rabbi?
Cliff: Absolutely. I was particularly annoyed when I get letters from the treasurer about dues; and also about the push to get people of mixed marriages to join the synagogue while at the same time you won't officiate.
R: You have difficulty with the contradiction.
Cliff: No. I don't have any difficulty with it; I don't like it. I don't really care whether you have difficulty (I start laughing) with it or not. I get really angry about the fact that...it's not something that I find really acceptable. I wouldn't argue about the contradiction, I just find it unacceptable. And I just go to the synagogue so that our kids are going to spend the holidays with us they will have a place to go. And I don't join a different synagogue because it is convenient not to. But I'm not real thrilled. I'm also unhappy about a letter I got some years ago after we made our building pledge that they did not think that we gave enough. So they changed the rules. I found it very distasteful the way it was done. Now I understand that they needed more money, but it was a pissy-ass way to go about notifying us.

Carol: (speaks further about the board of honor which one's name was supposed to appear)
Cliff: So I'm not enamored with it. Yet with it all, its only because we have a certain value of the tradition that we go. I don't necessarily dislike the service. I think you do a good job. I think I like some of the cantors better than others. Other than that, I'm not happy with the synagogue.
R: The intermarriage issue is a tough one.
Cliff: It's not tough.
R: Its tough for me...There are issues that go beyond any one particular person. You have a right to say I don't like it; I don't want to talk about it. There is nothing I can say to that. But...I have to think about that. You don't. You can be concerned only about your family.
Cliff: The point is it didn't help. My perception of the synagogue is not high to begin with. It didn't get better. There may be all kinds of arguments. But it's irrelevant because it really doesn't do anything to me.
R: In general people hope that religion will support them. And sometimes, even when it tries, it doesn't succeed. One can't argue with that. When you start from a place where you're not connected where it hasn't been an important part of your being...this case with your sister and your brother saying kaddish...to lose a parent is very hard. I certainly understand why you were and are disappointed. For a man to lose a father at such a young age is I think is a real trauma. One's relationship to one's father even when he is alive is such an important thing.

Cliff's ambivalence is seen in his verbalization of why they joined Temple Emanuel. They had been members of the large Conservative synagogue for three years; but they felt uncomfortable there and needed to make a change.

Cliff: Yeah it was just by chance that we came to TE. There were a lot of conversations about the guitar.
Carol: Oh you were really wild.
Cliff: Everybody had a big opinion about that one way or another. I think we were ambivalent...it was OK.
Carol: I liked it I found it...
Cliff: It was ok because I think.... Services were relatively short.
R: (I start Laughing)
Cliff: ...And to the point. Its not they were short and shortsighted, but it covered the territory. It didn't, like in conservative services do the service twice. This was never important for me.
Carol: We get together for break the fast with our friends for the past 30 years. This is one of the problems. All our friends belong to different synagogues. We all talk about each service and what the rabbi said. One of friends never heard their rabbi because the service was so long that they left before the sermon. At least I know what you said!
Cliff: This is probably is the biggest positive factor in the service. It did what it was supposed to do it covered the territory. I know that I am getting more out of it.

In a later session, Cliff, with Carol's agreement, sums up the reason they remain members.

Cliff: I don't consider myself very religious but I always think of myself as a practicing Jew. That doesn't mean religious; it just means the way you live.
R: Right, based on how you have defined it, that's right.
Cliff: Well, the Ten Commandments. I am sure it's not always perfect but that the way I try to approach things. I think that if I consciously think about it. That's the underlying thread; so now, that leads to the question: why bother being a member of the Temple? We do it a little bit for ourselves but much more so, I think, for the kids even though they are out of the house.
R: You said last time when they come back...
Cliff: Oh they will come for the holidays.

R: They come specifically for the holidays.
Cliff: There's no question, they are going and we don't bend their arms. When it comes to the Jewish holidays we don't have to break their arms to go cause they are going. They like to go and it's nice to have a place to go. The service is easily understood; it's no problem.
Carol: It's enjoyable!
Cliff: You know there a lot of religious issues that are uncomfortable to a lot of people whether or not it is your religion. You understand or you don't understand that aspect. People act in different ways, depending on how they were brought up or what they believe or what they don't believe, so it's kind of easy to go to a service that has all the elements that we think about as being part of a particular holiday. But doesn't have anything in it that, for one reason or another, is difficult to get over or get through. It has nothing to do with the sermon, which you may or may not agree with, or whatever else but generally the whole situation is pretty easy and I think that that is probably why we probably stay. It takes a lot of work to be part of a religious service in an orthodox form or you just stand there and mouth the words.
Carol: You might not get anything out of it.
Cliff: I probably never would have thought anything about this, why we approach it and why we bother until you asked us to think about it; but I think that's the answer. There's a certain continuity we are trying to keep over and above all. We don't know if that's necessarily the best solution to the particular problem at hand, if you want to call it a problem, but that's the way our family is developing.

While Cliff's distance reflects the negative experiences of his youth, Carol's childhood connection to her synagogue is reflected in her unhappiness about her present distance from synagogue life.

Carol: The one thing-you know you look back and everything is fine, things have been good, you are satisfied with your kids; but if I had known when we first looked for a house, I wouldn't have bought in Bethany. I would have bought in an area where there was a synagogue. Because our lives got more and more complicated and it became very difficult to really have a connection unless you made that a top priority and I hadn't. I got involved with the Board of Ed. in our town, and a lot of things that took all my time. And knowing what I know now, I would have rather bought in an area where there was a synagogue and whether it was Conservative or Reform, I think I would have found my way to involvement. It's really hard from here. Car-pooling for Hebrew school was difficult. It's far. Also over the years, here (our town) is where the kids felt connected they had no other places they really wanted to go and we didn't either. So for as much as we go (to synagogue) we're comfortable but we never made it central.
Cliff: The synagogue is not the center.
Carol: It was for me when I was growing up but it isn't for us.
Cliff: We are not close geographically; but we are also not close socially.
Carol: The few friends we have been close to over the years have been in other places. We have a few acquaintances at the synagogue...
Cliff: There is no benefit to go to one of our friend's synagogues there are equally far away.

Carol distance from the synagogue has led her to a level of assimilation into the non-Jewish community that leads her to a sense of uneasiness.

Carol: Well sometimes today I feel badly that I have gone so far towards assimilating. I feel uneasy that I feel more comfortable with people who are not Jewish than I do with certain people who are Jewish. This is so different than my childhood years. The first time I ever saw a Christmas tree I was probably 8 or 9 years old and it was so gaudy. I don't even think it was beautiful. It just looked so foreign and strange. It

> was totally outside my Jewish world...I find it's scary now that I am more comfortable with non-Jews than many Jewish people. They feel more like us.

This is not an issue for Cliff. Rather he strongly asserts that his version of Judaism is superior not only to a more ritualized Judaism, but he asserts that Judaism is in principle superior to Christianity. So ironically, his Jewish identity asserts itself as a given, an integral part of who he is.

Dan and Dana

Dan and Dana were members of the synagogue when I came to Orange. They have been members for 29 years. They were married at the other Reform synagogue in the New Haven Area, Mishkan Israel, where Dana grew up. But when they we moved to Orange they joined T.E. because of its location and because they had made friends with others in synagogue. Both are natives of the greater New Haven area.

Dana has a half sister, the daughter of her father's first marriage, to whom she doesn't speak. Her father's first wife died as a result of a miscarriage that she performed on herself! This, according to Dana, led to her father's anger and distant attitude towards children. Dana's Father was very active in and served as the president of the M.I. synagogue.

Dana's Mother died six years ago. She called the M.I. rabbi to officiate as I was out of town at the time. Dana was disappointed that I did not respond in a way that was comforting. (See below)

Dan is an only child whose parents were from Poland and Russia. Although they were not religious, their cultural Jewishness was strong. They spoke Yiddish at home. Dan's first language was Yiddish. Dan's family never belonged to a synagogue. This was, in part, due to the family's financial situation. Dan's father was a carpenter. Dan's mother died when he was 16. His father died right after Dan and Dana's marriage.

Dan has a childhood memory of playing at the Orchard street shul in New Haven where they went only for *Yizkor*, the memorial service for the dead on Yom Kippur. Dan's family was very ethnically and culturally Jewish but not religious. "We were poor, said Dan, and therefore I did not go to the Yiddish school."

Dan speaks about the Jewish friends of his youth: his involvement in the A.Z.A. youth movement, his friends throughout college. For Dan, these connections are the core of his positive Jewish identity. When I asked him about whether he felt a lack due to his meager Jewish education, he answered; "Not at all. I was not bar-mitzvahed, and neither were most of my friends."

Dana's mom was brought up at the conservative synagogue B.J., but she was a rebel. Dana doesn't remember much about the jewishness of either family except the Seder at mom's family. Her Father was from a German Jewish assimilated family.

Dana was the first girl to ask the 'Four Questions' at the temple Seder. This was on TV. Her father, although president of the synagogue, was not very religious. For Dana, Dan's ethnic jewishness, in contra distinction to her father's assimilated jewishness was important.

Dan and Dana have two daughters both who are married Jews and who continue their parents model of involvement in Jewish life.

Dan: We are fortunate that both our girls married Jewish boys. I don't know why.
Dana: They laugh when I would give them my 'head in the oven' spiel. We go up to Manchester New Hampshire for Rosh Hashanah services to be with S. The service like the old days at TE. The service is outside on the lake with guitar and lots of singing.

Here is a bit of the dialogue about their connection to T.E.

R: Why come to T.E.
Dana: Orange is closest to our home. I loved your predecessor M.W. and the girls loved you. It was important that the kids wanted to go to Sunday school.
Dan: I was surprised that we came to TE but the kids were happy.
Dana: We had friends from Orange who were members and it was easy. I miss some things. I was active on the education committee when the kids were little but now, my life doesn't revolve around the synagogue.

R: I know how important your particular seats are for you on the high holidays. And I always love to see you sitting up close year after year.

Dana: And it is still important for us. We come early because there are so many new people. I've never missed a yizkor. I light yahrtzeit (anniversary of a death) candles at home. This is what is important for me. I guess I don't get any solace in coming to synagogue. I do enjoy it when I'm there.

R: If you lived in Hamden rather than Orange, do you think you would be more active at M.J.?

Dana: No. I've been very active in many Jewish organizations: in ORT in the education committee of synagogue; Daughters of 1853 (Women's burial society for German Jews). It still exists. The monies now are given to New Haven Jewish foundation.

R: I'm wondering about your feelings that you find no solace at T.E. Do your feelings about this have any thing to do with your history?

Dan: I am surprised at your statement Dana; we do get comfort when we come.

Dana Yes...we were always involved in Jewish organizations. Even today... Israel Bonds, I've done it all. Federation—oy. I don't feel a need for the synagogue.

Dan: When we attend services, I am very happy. Maybe I'm learning something about myself, I feel very good especially when the kids are there. For them to remember that they are Jewish; and you always think of your loved ones. Now I ask, if I get so much comfort, why don't I go more often? (I think its because Dana says that she's not interested). I don't know...the competition of all our activities. I really do get comfort. I don't get bored; I don't fall asleep....

Dan: I've never been active in synagogue (religious) affairs. I'm more into the business end. I was on the cemetery committee at one time. I was active in the Israel Bonds organization. Dana was my representative. I have a very happy marriage. Dana leads the way in social activities.

Dana: We don't have a lot of friends at TE anymore. That may have something to do with it. We go now and don't know anybody. This is what happens. We read the Shofar. There are great things happening at the synagogue, the 'Grey zone' at Long Warf Theatre, The Chinese banquets. But we always seem to have other plans. I'm glad the temple is doing these things I'd like to go. L. wants to join but she lives too far. That's the main reason we remain; they love it. It's very important for them. They don't want to break the continuity. She is very happy about the education at Bridgeport J.C.C. The kids are being brought up the right way. L. lights the candles every Friday night. S. is coming along.

Discussions about 'family' dominated all our sessions. It is clearly the most important element of Jewishness for both of them. It is also puts each of their attitudes toward the synagogue in perspective. Dan begins as an outsider from synagogue life. Although he has no history of religious connection, his positive Jewish ethnic identity allows him to enjoy and find meaning as an adult in the experiences that he has at services during the holidays. He feels guilty about his not coming more often. He wonders about it, especially given his enjoyment of the experience.

Dana asserts that there is nothing that she needs from the synagogue that she is not already getting. She seems to be unaware of the anger she feels about her father's early distance from her during her formative years. The negative part of her ambivalence appears when she asserts that she experiences no solace from services.

In our discussions about family I asked about Dana's father

R: What was your dad like?
Dana: He was a tyrant. I loved him dearly but he was very strict and very strong. You didn't cross his path. But he was a very loving man. I was afraid of him sometimes.
Rabbi: Were you the favorite
Dana: (Pause) I guess I was. I mean he never wanted me. My mom was 38 when she had me. And she wanted a child. And she told me later that it was the best thing that ever happened. I think I was definitely his favorite. I mean we talked every single morning. If he didn't call me I knew something was wrong.

Here is her painful memory of a moment when her father was not there for her.

Dana: And then the one time when I told you I said the four questions at the Temple Seder; and I was so excited. And something happened to the lights and my father went to fix them and wasn't even there to hear me. I mean, that's the type of thing I lived with my whole life. I mean, something happened with the lights at Mishkan Israel and my father was trying to fix them. And so he wasn't there when I was doing my four questions and I was disappointed.He was never around.
R: So, where did the resentment for that go?
Dana: I have no idea. I don't think it did. I haven't found it yet. It hasn't bothered me. When I was away at college, at camp, my father would type me a letter every Saturday, every single Saturday he would write to me. Now, that was a pretty good father.
R: Payback for all the other stuff.
Dana: The longest letters. What they did every day. Unbelievable letter writer. He would go to the office every Saturday and his job was to write. You didn't call, you weren't allowed to call home, so you'd write letters.
Dan: This seems inconsistent with the relationship that you're talking about now. He would write letters. He was very helpful, he would cut out articles for us and friends and send them out.
Dana: Yeah, he was a real do-gooder. He was a do-gooder for everybody.
Dan: Which is not consistent with...well, I take that back. I guess that's the way that he was brought up and that's the way he brought his daughter up. But he was very helpful, very considerate.
Dana: He was a real do-gooder. I mean, he would look through the columns; he'd go through and find everybody's name and call them. He used to read the Register with a scissors and he'd clip. He had the best clipping service going. And he would send everybody articles. That was his love.

Here are more of Dana's ruminations about her growing up with father and mother:

Dana: My dad was always going to meetings. He was never home. It was interesting. He was that much older at the time that I was growing up that he didn't participate in too many activities. My mother didn't either. I was left to do a lot of things on my own. I mean, I would take the buses to places. You got very independent very quickly. It was wonderful. I'd get on my bike and go. I would get on the bus and go and it was very easy. There were no carpools. To go to Sunday school I would take the bus to Sunday school. I would take the bus downtown and walk to M.I.
R: When you were growing up, M.I. was downtown?
Dana: Yeah, I would get there myself. My mother was very active with things. We had a live-in maid when I was growing up who really took very good care of me. My mother never saw me in the mornings. She was still sleeping when I went to school. My father, forget it. Every day, from 5 – 5:45 my father would stop to see his mother every single day. He did not miss a day of seeing his mother. He was a very devoted son. You don't do things like that anymore but that was the ethic in those days; and every Sunday we used to have dinner there and if you weren't there by 12 o'clock you were in trouble. When her clock chimed 12 you better be there. She was a real staunch German woman, even though she was born in the United States, but she still had that ethic. You didn't cross her path, boy. She was tough. I

mean, a wonderful woman, don't get me wrong, but it was a very different way. You had to come dressed. You didn't smoke, I mean my mother or father would never smoke at her house in those days. If you wanted a cigar you would go outside. Things like that. It was a whole different way of being brought up than the kids are today.

I used to come home for lunch, because the grammar school was around the corner, so you'd come home for lunch you didn't eat lunch at school, and my mother would sometimes be there and she'd say those weren't the clothes I laid out for you but she never saw me in the morning when I got dressed to go to school but that was fine, I didn't know any different.

R: How did she spend her day?

Dana: She was very busy with organizations, too.

R: So you really have...

Dana: ...a Background for it all.

R: You collected your parents' style and so do your kids now. Family really is such a powerful thing for you that is the center of it all.

Dana: I was very independent all of my life. I didn't have any brothers or sisters at home. I was an only child and my father I'll never forget. I used to butt into conversations at night and he didn't like that. He used to have a little card in his pocket that said MYOB, Mind Your Own Business, and if I asked a question he'd pull out the card and I wouldn't say anymore and if I wasn't eating properly or I did something wrong, I got sent to the kitchen with the maid for dinner, which I loved. But I mean that was the ethic, you didn't interrupt, you didn't have a family conversation. I mean, he talked to my mother more or less at dinner and I was there. He was tough; he was very tough. I loved him dearly but he was a very tough man. He didn't want children. That's basically what it was all about.

R: He didn't want your stepsister either?

Dana: Well, yeah, but she wasn't home then. She was a freshman at Syracuse. We were never living in the same house together.

R: You knew? You could feel from him that he didn't want you or you just heard about it.

Dana: No, I never realized it. Later on, I realized it. He wouldn't admit it until the end. But we were very, very close.

R: How do you understand this?

Dana: I think he just had such a hard time raising my sister with her mother when she was dying when she was 10 and she committed suicide, which I found out many, many years later. She aborted with a coat hanger.

R: She aborted?

Dana: She aborted a second child with a coat hanger; and as a result, she died.

R: Where did you learn all this?

Dana: I must have heard it somewhere but we never talked about these kinds of things. But it was so different than today. I mean, today you talk to your kids and they know everything that's going on. You know all the things that they did. It was never like that growing up, but yet I didn't know anything different so it didn't bother me.

Dana: My parents never took me on vacations with them.

R: You stayed home with this maid?

Dana: Yep. I always stayed home with the maid. They did send me to camp in the summer.

R: They did?

Dana: Oh yeah, I did go to camp every summer. That was getting rid of me.

Here are Dan's ruminations about his mother's early death. It leads to their speaking about the importance of their private prayers.

R: What was it like for you to lose your mom?

Dan: It's hard to remember. I think I just got used to it. She was in an oxygen tent. And the day she died, I was at the movies by myself. After the show I stopped in the hospital to see her as I did every day. And they told me go home and see your father. I ran home and everybody was downstairs crying and I was kind of

shocked. I think I just got used to it. I don't remember any emotional trauma. I feel funny about it after all the dramatizations that you see on TV.

R: What do you mean funny about it?

Dan: That I can't remember the emotional sorrow and sadness if not hysteria. I don't remember any of that. Maybe I couldn't understand what was going on. I used to eat at my aunts who lived in my house after she died. Then two years later I was drafted. And that was a blur

Dana: And me on the other hand I prayed for my father to die. He was so sick. And I used to pray just take him already. He was so sick. It was awful. And my mother was very sick too at the end. But she just dropped dead at home. I talked to her before she died...both of them were a relief when they died.

R: Dana, do you pray a lot.

Dana: um hmm.

R: You do. You have a relationship with God.

Dana: um hmm.

R: That's really nice!

Dana: Yup. I must say I don't do it every day but I do it often

Dan: I don't think you know this Dana. From the time my mother died I said kaddish every night before I would go to bed; and I did that may until L. was born; for my father too. It was a way to keep connected. And I wear my mother's wedding ring.

Dana: So do I.

I had been sensing some negative feelings from Dana. These were finally expressed.

Dan: You are learning a lot. We are learning too. Verbalizing does make a different. I was speculating how to answer certain questions that you had asked. It led us to talk about these things.

R.: I chose this outreach project because of one of my own personal issues. When I don't see people on any kind of regular basis, I tend not to reach out to them. I have felt sort of uneasy about this.

Dana: I felt badly, I must say, when my mother died. You did call me when you came back from a vacation and got the message that she had died. I called you back but you never called again; and I really felt bad.

R.: I don't blame you.

Dan: I really did. Herb was wonderful but I felt that I really should have heard from you too.

R.: You are right; you should have. I'm sorry.

I asked them if there was anything that they might need now from the synagogue, for example studying Hebrew. Their answer:

Dana: Not at this point. Working for sisterhood is out, no time. I'm not friendly with anybody.

Dan: I would add to that question 'that you are not getting elsewhere" we are already doing too much most of the time. We all run too much. Life is harder now. There's grand parenting, always more to do.

The following suggests a difference of the feelings that Dana and Dan have about their involvement in the project. This difference reflects their feelings about involvement in the synagogue. Dan is more positive, Dana more ambivalent.

Dan: There's going to be one group session or more than one?

R: Well I had planned three.
Dan: Three oh ok. That will be interesting. I am looking forward to that.
R: Yeah.
Dana: What was that?
Dan: I am looking forward to the group sessions.
Dana: Oh yeah?
R: Yeah, because you get a chance to share with others and as I said. I still have another session with you. I have one more session with two couples and then I still have to meet Ed and Ellen, so I hope.
Dana: We had dinner with them last week. They are very nice.
R: You did? Did you happen to talk about this by any chance?
Dana: No, we never did. We didn't say a word.
R: You knew them before?
Dan: Yeah. Well, Ed's a very good athlete and we played tennis a few times. We had a scheduled tennis game this Thursday at the country club followed by dinner.
R: Yeah, so I hope if we finish all the individual sessions in June and the group sessions in August, then I can write it up and hopefully.
Dan: You better keep the tapes. There's no way you'll remember it all.

Ed and Ellen

Ed and Ellen were members of a conservative synagogue in another town before they joined T.E. That synagogue closed and instead of joining the Conservative synagogue in Orange where their friends belonged, they chose T.E. The reason was that T.E.'s religious school met only twice a week; while at the Conservative synagogue school, the students had to attend three days a week.

Both Ed and Ellen attended more traditional synagogues in their youth and had strong feelings about their individual Jewish backgrounds. Ellen grew up in New Jersey in a town that was on the border of a Jewish neighborhood. She remembers that her parents were wishy-washy about the seriousness of their Jewish commitment. Ellen's ambivalence is a reflection of that of her parents; and, as the following suggests, is supported by Ed's ambivalence.

R: Where did you grow up?
Ellen: In New Milford, near Teaneck. New Milford is a lower class town with no Jews. And I felt uncomfortable. If you are Jewish be Jewish if your not then don't.
R: So you reacted to their wishy-washyness.
Ellen: Yeah for example they'd preach against the orthodox people. We'd never be like that. We are so open minded and liberal...At one time they thought about joining the ethical culture society and then the Unitarian church. But then as soon as we started dating a non-Jew they went crazy you know so.
R: Were they Yiddishists?
Ellen: My mother was raised in a Zionist home and they were kosher.

Ed: A communist home (laughing).
Ellen: My grand father was a card carrying communist, both from the old country, Hungary. Anyway He had a very bad experience as a kid. He worked for an orthodox man and he beat him or something so he decided that he didn't like orthodox people and he poo-pooing religion. So that's where my father came from. They are both very intellectual. So that's that we had to find our own way.
Ed: But we totally switched roles.
Ellen: I would love to be a little bit more observant.
Ed: I don't put any roadblocks in her way, except that I won't show up!
R: Isn't that a roadblock?
Ed: I guess it is (every body laughing).
Ellen: Now, the fact that we are still members is because of his ingrained guilt.

In the following Ellen reflects on the positives of her past involvement in T.E., and then asserts the irony that she is the one now who is prepared to leave the synagogue.

Ellen: But I think T.E. served us well in the years that we needed it. And I really enjoyed being a Saturday schoolteacher.
R: I forgot about that; how long did you do this?
Ellen: I taught the 2nd grade for 5-6 years. That when I felt the most connected. I went to a few sisterhood meetings; but I have always been active in Hadassah. And you can only spread yourself so thin. And I guess the years when we were preparing our kids for their bar mitzvah and they were required to go to services one a month, that was actually nice. I enjoyed it anyway.
Ed: (Laughs)
Ellen: I am much more prone to be a member of a synagogue than Ed. The irony is now I'm more prepared to drop out now than Ed.
Ed: As an aside 30 years ago, a lifetime ago, the roles were reversed; I was an atheist and although I did grow up in an orthodox home where my father to this day gets up and prays every morning. He was an army chaplain, and although I wasn't religious, because of all the indoctrination, I was aghast that Ellen put up Christmas stockings
Ellen: And I ate cheeseburgers
Ed: Even to this day for reasons that escape me I don't eat a cheeseburger; who knows why?
R: Its part of you.
Ed: I guess over the years we've done a bit of a flip-flop.
R: You got interested and took some courses and taught in the religious school.
Ellen: And Hadassah! For some reason, I joined Hadassah and we had a study group and I just read all about Judaism and I became fascinated and when we had kids I didn't want to raise them like my parents raised me. Which was very inconsistent. This week we're religious, this week we are not.

Ed's ambivalence is fueled by a different dynamic. He speaks at length about his childhood inability to really connect with his Jewish studies. He grew up in Bridgeport Connecticut and attended an Orthodox synagogue. He speaks of his father who, in Russia, was known as a genius in Jewish studies. He honors his father's love of Judaism but never really became attached to it.

R: Did your dad teach you?
Ed: He did a bit. He was sort of a classic 40-50's era parent that was kind of disconnected from his kids; not in a negative sense. He was a wonderful man but he was not a touch feely father. My mother more raised

us; my father was the patriarchal presence but not really heavily involved. I can recall that we worked together for my bar mitzvah. I was a smart kid, it wasn't hard for me; but he wanted to make sure that it was perfect. He was a scholar. Yes we were kosher; my grandmother lived with us upstairs a two-floor walk up.... The experience in Europe was the defining moment.

Ellen: Your dad spent his life trying to right the wrongs. I think that's why he married your mother. I really do.

Ed: I think you're right. But over the years I sort of drifted. I just never had the heart for it and in a lot of ways I never saw the point to it. Because I am a rationalist. I have trouble with things that I perceive as sort of irrational. What's up? Why do this? And because I couldn't find a good answer to those things, I began slowly to reject them.

And then again for irrational reasons, none of us is consistent, I sublimated all of this stuff and played the role for the kid s as best I could. When we had to go with the kids to services I participated. But once the kids were out of the house and on their own, I could let it go. The boys are now men they have responsibilities and attitudes of men. It's very edifying to me. I don't have to worry about what I do on their behalf.

Ed is bothered by his inconsistency about wanting to remain members of the synagogue. He understands it as an irrational tribalism about which he is uncomfortable.

Ed: I think it's important, not only for the holiday services. I am a rationalist in everything I do and I'm proud of it. I am not a spiritual person; I'm a rational person. And what I do in regard to the synagogue is irrational and it bothers me (He is pounding in time to his words on the table).

Since Jews, who are such a small percentage of the people in this area... those of us who can afford to do it should support the synagogue even if you don't participate.

R: So it's a loyalty

Ed: I don't what it is really. It's a tribal thing more than any thing else. I haven't been able to figure it out; and not being introspective, I don't really try. Bottom line, it feels right to do that. And we are not even residents any more. Yet it seems right. We have been members for a long, long time.

R: Will you look to join a synagogue in Florida.

Ed: Ultimately we probably will. We live in Boca Raton there are 12 thousand synagogues there. It's basically Israel. To give you an example, within walking distance from our house there is a synagogue with 11 hundred families. But we haven't yet done it because we are still part timers there.

R: And as soon as you do join, it sounds like you (Ellen) would like to go.

Ellen: Yeah right; I could find a new husband...

Finally, and most importantly, Ed's affirmation of rationalism is motivated by his family history. Both of his parents were holocaust survivors; and for Ed, rationalism is the antidote to the evils of the mindlessness that results from fundamentalisms of any kind. Thus for Ed, Orthodoxy of any kind is dangerous because of what it might lead to. He never says it directly, but he seems to equate orthodoxy with the first step towards Nazism.

Ed: The further into orthodoxy you go, the more irrational it becomes until at the far end you are basically in my view, you are mindless. You are no more than a Honda robot. Because all you do is simply follow a set of rules and you don't think (hitting the table). And it really troubles me, because one step beyond that, and you can become very dangerous. That's what worries me about fundamentalist Christians and Jews. At the far right wing its like you are a computer you are programmed to act a certain way at every

point in your daily life. You are following a script. Well once step beyond if you get the right person in the wrong place and time…and then look out. **My mother lived through a situation where people stopped thinking. Intelligently worldly cultured people stopped thinking. And bad things happened.** I'm not extrapolating but it troubles me. I don't like mindless activity. And I realize that Reform Judaism is not in any stretch like that.

R: The irony is that this is your religious passion, if I could use that word.

Ed: No. No.

R: This is your religious passion to make sure that one's mind doesn't get lost. To repeat what you have said, religion is the symbol of mindlessness.

Ellen: You're a good listener Jerry.

Ed: I think that that's an accurate generality.

Ellen: It's a shame.

Ed: It is a shame and I realize the irony or inconsistency in the fact that there are some very intelligent people who are very religious. And it is very difficult for me to reconcile that so I just choose not to bother. I'm certainly not suggesting the religious people are foolish or stupid or unintelligent I'm just saying… to the right…mindless.

R: Are you afraid that you might become mindless.

Ed: No. There is not a chance in the universe.

Ellen: Not to worry.

Ed: Correct. Look, the 60's were a time of religion a different kind of religion. I didn't buy into that either. I guess I'm flawed. It's very difficult to get me to do something that I don't perceive as right or correct. I think Ellen will vouch for that.

R: Sounds fundamentalist to me.

Ed: No I'm just not easily swayed from my worldview. If that's fundamentalist, so be it. Its not anyone else's set of rules it's my rules.

R: That's right.

Ed also affirms that the best of religion is found in its ethical lessons. But he then asserts a kind of elitism in understanding religion as a necessary way to help foolish people to reach the ethical standards that rationalism would lead them if they were more thoughtful.

Ed: There's another problem. Religion assumes at some level that people are too foolish to do the right thing. And that may be right in general.

Ellen: It is a guide to primitive people.

Ed: Right, exactly, and instead of just saying what to do, it works it through metaphors and allegories and stories and fire and lightning. If you stay true to your own ideals as reflected in the golden rule, as far as I'm concerned, that's religious. I'm being a real idealist here I know. It's very simple. I'm a fundamentalist according to my own rules, and that's a very important distinction.

R: That's the balance. The struggle in order to learn, you have to open to hear other points of view. You still always have the right to hold to your own.

Ed: I agree.

R: Blocking out what other people are saying is…

Ed: that's a failing of mine (Ellen laughs) I'm the first to admit it.

Ellen: And guess what, you got it from your upbringing, your parents. You got the golden rule, as well, from your parents who were religious people. You think you came up with it yourself?

Ed: Of all the possible ways, I chose my way for me. Not that I invented them. If everybody could do that…Don't kill people don't steal this is good stuff you are trying to create a community you can't have people killing each other or stealing or screwing each others wives and husbands Its not good.

In a later session, Ellen raises the key issue that has kept her family away from the synagogue community in recent years. During his high-school years, one of her boys, M, came out as a gay man. This was a traumatic event for both Ed and Ellen. Ellen reflected on her initial need for privacy and her fear that people would gossip.

Ellen: Well I want to bring something up. Six years ago we had a big life changing experience. M told us he was gay. So it would be a good thing to talk about.
R: (Silent amazement; I had heard a rumor about this at the time)
Ellen: Pretty shocking; and I wanted to come to you but at that point, I was so worried about people finding out in the community; and privacy that I didn't. But 6 years later I feel more comfortable in talking to you about it.
R: Yeah. Wow.
Ellen: Yeah. Major major wow. What happen was, that after he told me, I learned about a group called Pflag.
R: Pflag (Parents of Lesbians and Gays). sure.
Ellen: You've heard of it; and they meet at M.I.; and I ended up running it.
R: Really.
Ellen Cause they had a leadership gap; and they had no one to run it; so I thought it would be the blind leading the blind. Luckily for me another friend, not from the temple, whose child was a contemporary, came out at the same time and we went to the meeting together. In terms of Judaism it was very comforting to be Jewish especially to be a reform Jew because it is much more tolerant.
R: Sure.
Ellen: The people who came to pflag came from all different denominations. It was just held at M.I. who very kindly offered to house it there; and the poor parents who were Catholics just died and agonized over it because the Catholic Church just preaches and preaches against it.
Ed: Orthodox Judaism is no better.
Ellen: I'm sure.
Ed: I had that run in with Rabbi H. in another town. He wrote an op Ed piece in the paper, which was the typical orthodox line. I thought of stopping in and talking to him fact to fact and then I decided he wasn't worth my time, the moron; so I wrote him a nasty letter. And he responded. The theme of my letter was that he was espousing a philosophy that another group of people espoused about 50 years ago.... He wanted to create a dialogue but I wasn't interested. I said what I had to say...In relation to my comments last week you have to be careful with religion because it can become really evil real fast.

Here is a bit of our discussion concerning the question of whether I would perform a commitment ceremony.

Ellen: OK Jerry here is a good question for you. I know that you don't believe in officiating at interfaith marriages. Would you perform a commitment service?
R: I've struggled with it. I used to say that I am more sympathetic to performing a gay marriage than an intermarriage because when you intermarry, this is my tribal side perhaps; you are making a choice not to support the tribe. But if, as we all feel, that being gay is not a choice, then not to perform some kind of commitment ceremony is saying to the couple that religion doesn't support their choice for monogamy and commitment.
Ed: The reason it isn't proven is because it is politically explosive for both sides. Most scientists who value their careers don't want to touch it. The gay activists don't want it to be true.

R: Can you explain that to me.
Ed: Yes. Then it will be viewed as a genetic defect that can be corrected.
Ellen: People have an easier time calling it a commitment ceremony rather than a marriage.
R: The problem for me is that since people know only what a marriage ceremony is, a commitment ceremony still feels like a marriage. It's very confusing. I'm no closer to any solution that feels comfortable. I could see doing something privately. And when I say privately I mean privately, the couple and me. As soon as it becomes a public ceremony it becomes a marriage which by definition is a public declaration. And that's what people really want. I have no solution.
Ed: That's understandable. It's a difficult issue.
Ellen: Your explanation is interesting. Because you are right, they didn't choose to be gay why shouldn't they have a right to as much happiness as everyone else. I think it's wonderful when they have a commitment ceremony. And they spend their lives together in a committed way.
R: Does M. talk about that.
Ellen: Yeah, He says he very much wants it some day, but it hasn't happened for him yet. He is not really open about his private life.
Ed: Ellen, there is nothing wrong with that. Jeeze I never told my parents anything about my private life. Maybe some kids do but most don't
R: Girls do more than boys. Boys are different.
Ellen: Well I feel a little left out.
R: You wish he were a girl on this point (all laugh).
Ellen: That's the only aspect...Too bad he is not more feminine.
Ed: There you go

C. Group Sessions

Attendance at the group sessions was fairly consistent. Three of the five couples were at all three sessions. Beth and Bob, and Dan and Dana, missed one session each. Beth and Bob had a prior commitment. Dan and Dana chose to attend the finals of a tennis tournament.

All the ten individuals were active participants in the discussions. The individuals seemed to enjoy this opportunity to discuss the issues raised with each other. Most of the issues raised in the individual sessions were reiterated in the group. There appeared to be little difficulty for the individuals to express their feelings, both positive and negative, about their connection to Judaism and to the synagogue.

The cacophony of all the various points of view about how each sees the synagogue and how each identifies their Jewish commitments and frustrations, and needs, leads to the following:

Ed: Sitting here listening to this, we have, and I'm an engineer, too many variables and not enough equations. Everybody here and the others, who don't participate in the synagogue, have their own specific reasons. If you try to solve that by trying to providing benefit for each one of those people, For each one says what's in it for me or for the group...The problem is everybody has different reasons...My point there is, that your dissertation or paper may be very interesting, but I suspect sadly that it's not going to come up with any solution...I'm a cynic, by the way, what drives me to participate might be dramatically different from what would cause somebody else to participate.

Bob: He wants to know what variable would help you participate.

Ed: There is no variable that would cause me to participate. I'm just being honest, guys.

Beth: I wanted to say. Suppose after these meetings we all get bonded and we form this social group and then we want to be together so that something would come out of it.

Ann: I thought that was one of your reasons.

I: Well, it certainly was a thought. But I must admit after meeting individually with everyone I don't expect it. (Laughter) But if it happened I would call it a miracle.

Bob: Well, when I came into the room, I was delighted to see that Ed was here.

I find myself inserting my own issues into the discussion. I feel like an outsider because it feels like I am the only one who cares about the religious component of being Jewish. Even an attempt to widen the discussion to 'spirituality' leads to a dead end. The group expresses its disdain for 'orthodoxy' but does not want to talk about a liberal alternative. The universal bottom line for the group is the concern for their children's continuation of the tradition. Yet their own personal stake in Judaism, which is surely a prerequisite for that continuation, remains vague and unfocused while the negative part of their ambivalence is more easily asserted.

Cliff asks, "What do you want from us?" My answer is the following:

R: In a Reform context each individual is called to determine what it is that he or she should or shouldn't do from a ritual and a communal standpoint. Each should be trying to discover what it is that they should be doing as Jews. I decided to do this project, in part, because I want give back to the congregation that has been so good to me. You are part of this congregation. You are not physically around much; and like I said, I have been resistant to reaching out. So, this is an opportunity to think about these things. You're right Ed. It's not an issue of solution. It's an issue to expand possibilities. This is an opportunity for individuals to think about, and perhaps on their own, decide to do something differently, if they so wanted. If they don't do, is that a failure? Absolutely not. You have this chance to think about it; and I have fulfilled my obligation to be available. That's what I'm doing.

Ellen: I think it's good. I feel closer to you than before just by sharing those sessions. And if I ever need contact in the future I would feel more apt to do it now than before.

Dana: I think we all work very hard when our kids were growing up to bring them to Temple, to get them to bar mitzvahs, bas mitzvahs, confirmation class, weddings, you know and I think we did put a lot of time in

when our kids were younger and now it's not as important to be here as it was then and I think that's basically what it's all about.

R: And that's ok.

Bob: I don't know.

R: That's where she is and that's ok. Everyone feels their own way. Everyone is in a different place. Is there anything beyond concern for the kids? Is there anything in Jewish life you want for yourself? Some people have answered no. It is only for the kids.

Ellen: I can see one thing, knowledge. I have a need for more knowledge of Judaism. I need courses in Hebrew, Yiddish, in basic Judaism. That would entice me. Coming to services doesn't do it for me. Greater knowledge is what I need.

Ann: Would you come to the synagogue during the week?

Ellen: I used to. I came for a Hebrew class.

Ann: Do you read the Shofar?

Ellen: Not regularly.

Ann: How many of you read the Shofar? It's keeping the contact.

Dan: That is an interesting question. What is beyond the children, or in addition to the children?

Bob: When we travel we seek out the synagogue and we go to services.

Dana: We went to synagogue in Hong Kong. We sat upstairs; and I didn't know one thing that was going on. But it was a very good feeling to be there.

Bob: I visited the synagogue in Newport. It bothered me when I went to that church in Newport on the hill and way August Belmont's tomb. He was a German Jew who built Belmont Park, converted to Christianity and is buried there.

Al: I go to a lot of synagogues in my job of editing videos. I get to see a lot of services. I see different rabbis and different approaches. It amazing. I get to see the same people over and over again. As the bar mitzvahs pass through, the crowd starts changing. You see the cycles. People all say the same thing: I come to this synagogue because of the kids. It's the only reason. Or I come to the synagogue because it is the 'in' synagogue,.the social place to be the place where a lot of activities are happening. They use it to network. That's what I hear in the twenty different synagogues. It's an observation. I go to churches for weddings and the like.

R: You hear the same things?

Al: Yes. You hear the same things. People say, ' I haven't been to church in a long time. I used to come when I was young when I was scared; but then I got older and I changed my mind. I became more worldly.'

R: You are taking video at these life cycle events. It would be different if you were there with, what I call, the core congregants who come on a regular basis.

Al: Right. But I do see the core group in certain synagogues. Every Saturday, they're there early to say the prayers. Then I see them dying off. The core group is an elderly crowd. There are usually no kids. It's a social event too because there is a Kiddush afterwards.

In the final session, the trust level in the group increases enough to allow a widening of the areas of discussion. Ann raises the question of gender difference in relationship to Jewish commitment.

R: So, here we are. What do you think?

Ann: I want to know how many men were forced into this.

R: That's a good question.

Beth: That were what?

R: How many men were forced into this?

Ann: Or coerced?

Bob: I agreed with it.

Beth: Well he wasn't happy.

Ann: After he said yes or after he came.

Beth: During the process. Right Bob?

Bob: Why are you saying this?
Beth: She asked a question and reaction and we're supposed to be honest.
Bob: How do you know that I wasn't happy?
Beth: Because you said, 'Do we have to go? (Lots of laughter)
Bob: Oh, ok. Well, it wasn't an enjoyable experience like going to a baseball game.
R: Well, that's true.
Ann: Was it intellectually stimulating?
Bob: Yes. The last meeting I came to I found it very interesting. I wanted to get into Ed's head a little more .
Ed: No one gets into my head.
Bob: (To Ann) I think I've known you before.
Ann: Right I felt that too.
Bob: You do marriage videos and things like that.
Ann: Yeah, we did it for you?
Bob: Yeah I think that's it. And I have nice vibes. You have a place in Cheshire. I think you were terrific.
Ann: Thank you that's very nice of you to say. This is taped. Can I have this section of this tape for commercial purposes? (lots of laughter)
Al: Oh I remember now. This was a wedding in New York.
Bob: Yeah.
Ann: We were asking the question about…
Cliff: Ann, are you going to get a degree too? (laughter)
R: See how easy it is.
Ann: We were asking the question about whether the men were coerced into coming. I've done a little research, not necessarily at Temple Emanuel, but with other synagogues and the people who were on the board were mainly women. And there were three women at one synagogue that I did speak with. And their husbands don't want to attend synagogue. They are not involved on the board. They go to the High Holidays because the feel they should. The men go to some of the social functions and enjoy them when they are there.
Ellen: That's really odd, because in the old days women were not allowed.
Ann: It was an ego thing with the men. The synagogue was like a men's club.
Bob: On he high holidays I see many of my colleagues from work.
R: Some facts. The men have yet to answer the question, but we will take them off the hook for one second. The board has always been egalitarian in this synagogue. Both men and women have had equal opportunity to be involved or not involved. So it doesn't feel to me like this is more a feminine institution than a male institution. Sisterhood is now defunct because women are basically working full time. That's what I see in terms of the synagogue
Ann: What about the men's club
R: We've never had one. It was an ideological position of the temple when I came. In fact they didn't have a sisterhood either. They idea was that everyone should do everything together. But then sisterhood was created in time but a men's club never formed.
Ellen: I was active in it for a while. I remember I would go to the opening and the final dinners. They were always in the evenings.
Ann: I went to Bible study a few times, twice. I thought it was interesting. But it was way above my head.
R: It was?
Carol: Where was the class?
Ann: Here.
Carol: Recently?
Al: Yeah, she says to me recently, I'm going to the synagogue for Torah class. I say, where? She says at the synagogue. I say, I didn't know they had that.
Ann: I read it in the Shofar that you were having torah classes. I thought that you were following the weekly portion. I looked up on the web site to find out the portion. Our Temple web page is easy to get to.

In the following, Ed and Cliff who are most passionate about their points of view join together in venting their anger at Orthodoxy. Al and Ann try to support the traditionalist

position. Bob and Beth are quieter. After expressing what they see as the irrational and hypocritical nature of Orthodoxy, Cliff finds a way to express his disagreement with Ed's position. The focus of the discussion is the problematic nature of the traditional Sabbath prohibitions. Specifically the focus is on the use of the Internet on the Sabbath, and on the fact that the Jewish Community Center is closed on the Sabbath. How can it be, they ask, that it is forbidden to download and study religious material on the Sabbath? Isn't this what the Sabbath is for? And why would the community choose to prevent Jews from coming together on the Sabbath for communal activities?

Ed: Getting back to my original point. I don't have the word to say how ridiculous it is. Here's somebody who logs onto a website, wanting to download a portion of the Torah. That person obviously has an interest, and obviously has some intent of reading it, because otherwise why on earth would you download it? Do you think there is a God who would have created a law that says don't do this?

R: No.

Cliff: Ok, so the people who, in some way, set up this constraint are idiots. I'm sorry. I cannot use any other word but idiots. Hypocrite is too nice a word. They are idiots. This is the kind of thing that those of us who have a lot of problems...My God what's wrong with them. Do you understand where I'm coming from on this?

R: Of course, of course, I can.

Cliff: You don't know whether to laugh or to cry. A young boy or girl or an adult wanted to download a portion on any day of the week they should be so overjoyed that the last thing you'd want to do is put a constraint on it.

Ann: We're not Jews to the Orthodox because we don't honor this law.

R: No. No. No.

Ed: I don't want to be a Jew. If that's the definition of a Jew, I don't want to be a Jew. But, I mean, the point is I don't want to be tied to that kind of thinking.

Al: It's in the Torah somewhere.

Ed: You know that's not good enough, because ultimately there is a higher authority who is God, and I suppose, I mean, I don't know much, but I know that one should study on the Sabbath, that much I know. I do come from an orthodox home, believe it or not. And I think that certainly Torah study would be more important than the concern for a mouse click. It's incredible!

R: You're struggling simply with fundamentalist thinking.

Ed: I'm struggling with dogmatic, unthinking, neurotic, idiotic constraints!!

R: Tell me how you feel about this Ed. (laughter)

Ed: Well, you know, that's my style. I call them like I see them and I'll defend this against anybody at any point in time. I don't think anybody can take that away. It's idiotic.

Ann: A question...Can I be a devil's advocate...

Ed: No, it's so irrational. I cannot defend it. It's the same kind of thinking of these morons out in Kansas who are teaching creationism as scientific fact.

Ann: Do you accept Jews for Jesus?

Ed: Well, I mean, it's not up to me to accept or reject them. I have no right to do that.

Ann: Yeah, but isn't that what you are doing that with the Orthodox.

Ed: No, I said their position is idiotic. And I won't back off from that. Believers are believers are believers. I mean, if the Jews for Jesus want to believe in Jesus, that's their privilege. I don't agree with it, but you

know, that's okay with me. I won't characterize their position as being idiotic; I will characterize the fundamentalist position who won't let somebody study the Torah on the Sabbath because you have to click a mouse once as being idiotic, because there's a spirit of the law and the letter of the law.

R: This is, of course, what Reform Judaism is all about.

Ed: Again, for us, the Jewish Center, the JCC is a place where Judaism can be inculcated into the younger people into people in can be a meeting place, but in our hectic world most people have a greater opportunity on the weekend than they do during the week. Closing the center on Shabbat. Again, I know it's another inflammatory issue. I wouldn't characterize that as idiotic. It's a little bit different, but to me it's silly because you are giving up an opportunity for people to meet and to do whatever it is that they felt like doing. Yet you're losing a real opportunity as a community to get people together and yet because the fundamentalist, the Orthodox, won the show on all this, everyone else was cowed.

Ann: Not in Fairfield, the JCC is open there.

Ed: Is there really? Wow! I didn't know that. Well, that's encouraging.

Beth: I guess the orthodox have the power here.

Cliff: Power is money.

R: I don't think that's the issue. I don't think it's orthodox money that made the difference. The agreement here in New Haven is that we don't want to alienate one part of the community.

Ed: My point is that no one would ever say to the Orthodox that they should go against their beliefs. I certainly wouldn't. But why, on the other hand, not let those who want to be there go. It is as much ours as it is theirs. I donated money. They are killing the goat. They are saying if we don't have it, nobody will have it.

Cliff: The people who are members there obviously believe in it and don't mind it. Because if they minded it and didn't believe in it, they wouldn't have joined.

Ed: Good point.

Bob: The solution to this is to have a place to meditate or pray so that Saturday morning people could come together for a minyan.

Ann: They'd have to drive.

Cliff: There is nothing wrong with adhering, remembering and keeping centuries old tradition. This reminds me of Passover. It really doesn't have anything to do with adapting; it has more to do with your original statement about the spirit rather than the letter of the law. There is nothing wrong with keeping it the way it is. You utilize it. There is something very nice about having traditions that are consistent and haven't changed. You can change it as you go.

Ed: How much in life really hasn't changed in your lifetime. Think about it, the marriage ceremony. Take the Seder for example. When I was a little kid, The Seder went on for three hours. Today they don't take that long.

Carol: Well if you go to an orthodox Seder it probable will take that long.

Cliff: Whatever the time, the story of the exodus is the same.

Ed: The story's the same. There's nothing wrong with maintaining tradition as long as you recognize that over time you have to adapt to changes in so many different things. You don't have to change the tradition per se, but you have to adapt, but maybe you recognize that it's a bit much to sit a family down for three or four hours, which is really what it is supposed to take, if you think about it for a second.

Cliff: I don't think that that is the most important consideration. I'm not disagreeing with your ideas about how people want to treat things and how they run their life. That's up to them. I don't have to do that. But I find it interesting and I rather cherish the thought that it hasn't changed in five thousand plus years; and I consider that a kind of interesting statement about people. And most certainly I don't for a minute consider not cooking on Saturday even though it's the Sabbath. This is not where I'm coming from, but on the other hand, I find it extremely interesting that the 10 commandments you don't have to change because they make

Beth: Put it on the wall of your house, in every room.

Cliff: I always had this thing over inside this door. They don't know what's in there, they don't follow it, but if I think about it, there is something very compelling. There must be something very positive. And also says to me that there is something that allows people to adapt. Because you can't tell me that over 5000 years using the same set of "rules" people haven't adapted, they have; but how much of it one follows, there is a sect here and a sect there, but I think that that's emblematic in Jewish people. Orthodox in New York is not the same as Orthodox in Mississippi, or the same as in Greece. There is room for everybody.

I don't' agree with a lot of things but I sort of like the continuity. That's the way I look at it. I don't get as upset as you do Ed.

Beth: Except when they close the Jewish Community Center on Saturday.

Cliff: No. It doesn't bother me. I just don't go. If Carol joined, I wouldn't go anyway.

Carol: No, That was never the issue of why we didn't join. We never have time to go, it's not the Sabbath issue.

In discussion the problem that everyone seems to be having with Orthodoxy, I raise the possibility that the deeper issue may be that of the human struggle with authority in general. This leads to an alternative suggestion offered by Al, that the issue is Jewish self-hatred.

R: Perhaps what we are really discussing is the struggle against authority, a personal issue that we all deal with in many ways. It may be a struggle against our parent's style of parenting. On the one hand there is a desire to be connected with others; on the other hand there is a desire to be independent. This is a big issue for everyone.

Al: Maybe it's the reaction against the negative image of the stereotyped Jew that many non-Jews have. We say, 'I don't really want to be that person', so you try to disassociate yourself from that.

R: In other words a kind of self-hatred. Other people will look at us and see what we see, people we don't respect, people who are not nice.

Al: Not nice people. Yeah I don't want to be associated with that group of people that everybody always making fun of. I want to be accepted.

R: The irony is that it is often non-orthodox Jews, like us, who have more difficulty with their orthodox brothers and sisters. Many people who aren't Jewish, look at orthodox Jews like they are quaint like the Amish. When you look at an Amish guy, you don't get a knot in your stomach like we do when we see Jews who reflect badly on us in some way.

Bob: There is a separation between the Jewish people and Jewish religion? I'm a Jew not necessarily because of God and the 10 commandments but because of my heritage. You know the Jewish people.

R: Well, we talked a lot about that. I pushed that issue last time, You weren't here Bob. Are we a people or are we a religion

Bob: The Einstein's and the Freud's, it's the Jewish people who are have made such important contributions to humanity.

R: It's both. It's both. If there weren't a Jewish religion there wouldn't be a Jewish people.

Ellen: Do you ever notice when some one does something wrong and its reported in the News Paper and it's a Jewish name.

Beth: Oh God yeah.

Ellen: We are very self-conscious of that. You don't want anybody to make you look bad.

Al: Because you're a minority. You're a minority in the world. I don't want to be associated with those people.

Ellen: I remember when that son of Sam thing happened and I said to my fried who is Italian' Oh my God I can't believe it's a Jewish name. And she says, what do you mean? When I hear a Mafia name, I never get embarrassed.

Al: What about Monica Lewinsky.

Ellen: That bothered me.

Beth: Did you read the story in the paper about an Israeli boy that murdered somebody in Maryland?

Bob: I was embarrassed for the Israeli Government.

Ann, who throughout the group sessions seemed to be the most interested in the keeping the focus on the question of the group's specific connection to Temple Emanuel, brings us back to task.

Ann: Why did you join Temple Emanuel? I know that you live some distance from the synagogue.
Carol: E was about 7 years old and we had heard about Jerry. I was looking for a Reform synagogue we had belonged to BJ for a year and it was too large very cold. I had grown up with orthodox. I didn't want a service where when you walk in at 10:00 a.m. you didn't know what was going on. You know High holidays kind of thing. I wanted to be able to know what was going on all the time and being a part of it.
Ann: Beth
Beth: I don't remember why we joined except that Rabbi W before you married us. I didn't belong to any temple before that. I had known A.L. as a Rabbi because he was from the D area and I met him from my first husband. And he helped us through a crisis because we lost a child and so he did the funeral. But I didn't have an urge to join anything. And then, I guess it was because I met you (Bob) and you were proud of your Jewishness and happy about it and wanted to belong
Bob: The kids were Bar Mitzvah...
Beth: Yeah but that was after we joined the synagogue. My first husband was Jewish but he wasn't connected.
Ann: Ellen
Ellen: We had joined the Milford synagogue which was dwindling fast; and we lived in Milford at the time.
Ann: Why did you join (to herself)? I cold called. I asked if there was a lot of English in the service.
Beth: That kind was kind of a warm call, that's not a cold call. That's an organized intellectual approach. You know.
Al: There is one synagogue that I refused to join. The synagogue I went to as a kid. I was repulsed by it. Any one my age who went there talks about this rabbi. He was a tyrant. It was like an orthodox shule even though it was conservative.
Bob: What was the problem?
Ann: I though he was mental; and he thought he was God...It was a terrible feeling when he went to speak, everybody in the class, not that he was boring, but he was off in a different hemisphere usually it didn't pertain to what was being said, as I remember. He did turn off a lot of young people. The older generation kept him there because they brought him in and they wanted to be loyal to him.

As the last session was coming to a closed I asked about how people were feeling about their participation in this project. Here is the group's response:

R: I want to know because this is our last session, what have you learned about yourselves, about me, your thoughts about Judaism. Has this been helpful to you in any way that you didn't expect. What do you think?
Ed: I'm hoping this was helpful for you.
R: It has.
Ed: I would not want. I wouldn't want to be you right now, because it's not clear to me, I mean, to be honest, it's not clear to me what you're going to extract from all this, but then again, in looking at a transcript, there will be some trends and issues you'll be able to pull out of it.
R: That's my job. I'm wondering about it for you.
Ed: For me?
R: For each of you
Ed: It was interesting to hear the comments but I don't think it grew me as a person to be very frank. But I mean, there were some interesting discussions that converged into nothingness but that's typical of any group.

Beth: I was curious as to why I was always attached in the way I was. When they asked for money. We gave pretty easily. I'm just curious about why, of course I didn't find out. I thought it would be interesting to explore it, and be helpful to you.
R: So you didn't learn anything new.
Beth: No, just listening to the others say some of the things I was feeling.
R: You are not alone.
Beth: Yeah
Bob: We showed up all these times.
R: Yeah.
Ann: You missed once. (Lots of laughter)
Beth: Thanks a lot. How soon we forget your name. (more laughter)
Ann: Do you have any intellectual, stimulating conversations on a daily basis? Do you meet with people, large groups of people?
Bob: That's interesting. Yeah, that's a very good point. Usually when we have discussions like this, one person is a Republican another is a Democrat so we have an argument rather than a friendly discussion. I listen to you all pretty much without any rancor. It's nice to know what other people are thinking.
Ann: I want to respond about why we give money. My feeling is that Jews give money because it is part of our upbringing. When you were a kid did you have pushkes (charity boxes)? We have two of them. And I don't know what to do with them when they are filled up. Should we bring them here?
Carol: I have the blue old one. You cut it open when its full and they give you a new one. That's what I like. My mother did it, my grandmother did it. When the kids took a test, 18 cents (in the charity box)!
Beth: When they took a test they put money it?
Carol: Yeah.
I appreciate that you have reached out to us, because it's been such a long time. When you first called, I was so intrigued about it because I wondered myself. And I do it because of my background and cause I want to do it. Will I become more involved, probably not because my life is just gone in too many directions? But I do feel more bonded
Ellen: We've all bonded. It was fun.
Carol: You know, E (Ed and Ellen's son) is sleeping at A's (Bob and Beth's son) house tonight.
Beth: Really.
Ellen: When we came I didn't know too many people, only vaguely. It was interesting. We learned a lot about one another. I was also flattered Jerry that you reached out. That was really ok.
Beth: You did a lot of work.
Al: I think you just scratched the surface. Now you have to put it all together. You're going to be doing a lot of work, too in figuring out a thesis.
Bob: Are you planning to write this up?
I: Yeah.
Bob: Who will read it?
I: Well, I have two advisors. One from the Rabbinic school and one from the Post Graduate Center for Mental Health; and they're the ones who will pass judgment on the project which will lead to the granting of the degree.
Beth: What's the degree?
I: Doctor of Ministry. And then the product is in the library of H.U.C. and students in the program to look at it. Those are the people .who will see it. These kinds of projects are not published. You need to get permission to see them.
Beth: We can't see it?
I: I will have a copy. Yes, you can see it, of course.
Ann: Will you notify us, should we call you?
I: When you read in the Shofar that I have gotten the degree, you'll know that it was accepted and then I'll have a copy here and you are welcome to come in and take a look at it.
Beth: And don't call and ask if he's done it yet.

D. Outcomes beyond participation in the individual and group sessions

It has been about one and a half years since the conclusion of the last of the sessions. I had hoped that as a consequence of the outreach, there would be an increase in the visibility of these folks at synagogue activities. Here is an outline of the limited success of this goal.

Al and Ann	Ann came by herself to one session of a Bible study group that has been meeting consistently for a number of years. She commented later that she felt too much like a beginner. Ann has also come to services twice, once with Al. She said to me that she was able to sit in the congregation, now, and was planning to come more often.
Beth and Bob	I called and invited them to a lecture at the synagogue about Jewish life in Italy. I thought it would be of interest to them. They came. They also asked me to say a prayer for a friend who was sick.
Cliff and Carol	Both attended the service in honor of long time members of the synagogue, that is, members of twenty years or more. The idea for this service was a result of the project. Both have come to four services in the homes of members who were mourning the loss of a loved one.
Dan and Dana	Neither have been involved in any synagogue activity.

Ed and Ellen	I invited Ellen to speak of her experiences as a mother of a gay son at a communal healing service. She also made a written contribution to a sermon I preached on 'Lost Dreams'.

Chapter Five: Discussion

A. The couples who declined the invitation.

Given the presumption that the eleven couples that were invited to take part in the project have been comfortable with their distant stance, it made sense to assume that those who declined the invitation were continuing that behavioral pattern. The fact that I was prepared to be more assertive does not mean that these folks were prepared to respond. The first four couples called following the sending of the letter of invitation declined and have not taken part of any activities at the synagogue other than attendance at the High Holidays.

On the other hand two of the others have appeared at synagogue for Shabbat services. I presume that this was, in part, their way of responding to my outreach. One couple came in response to a new program initiated by the Board of Directors. The program paired older members with new members. These families were invited to host the *oneg shabbat* (coffee and cakes) following services.

The wife of a second couple responded to my call as an opportunity to express her anger at me for not reaching out to their son some years ago prior to his marriage to a Christian girl. She also expressed her guilt about not being good Jews. She blamed herself for the intermarriage of her son by not caring enough to be consistent synagogue goers. She said it was 'too late'. This couple came to services one night after returning from a trip to Israel. We had a number of warm discussions since about their trip and about how things are going with their children.

In five of the six couples who declined the invitation a similar pattern appeared. The

female was more likely to have considered involvement; but this was overridden by the male's greater need for distance. This pattern is most likely explained by gender role difference. Because of my active involvement in the religious school, I have had more contact with the mothers than the fathers. The mothers tended to be more visible because of their day-to-day carpooling obligations. I would see them when they brought their children to religious school and when they might come in relation to the children's religious school activities.

B. Meetings with the couples

The natural therapy approach sees these meetings as opportunities for the participants to do some personal learning about their Jewish past and present. The sessions both alone and with the other couples are holding environments where learning can be initiated reviewed and tested. One cannot learn fully from the contents of the sessions what the participants learned. One can only create the space that can encourage such personal work.

A change of behavior might be a signal that something has changed in the individual's relationship to the synagogue community. The outcomes following the sessions outlined in the last chapter are the only evidence of such a change. From this point of view, my role in outreach and proceeding with the project fulfills my goal of initiating and encouraging. The rest is up to the individuals.

In reviewing the sessions, one can, from a Freudian approach, identify a rubric under which would fall all of the particular reasons for the couples' distance from the community. The theme is varieties of childhood trauma. Here are the specific traumas that were shared in session that appear to play a part in the couple's distance:

Al and Ann: Ann's role as caretaker of her family leads her to be continually overwhelmed.

Bob and Beth: Beth's ambivalence towards her authoritarian father.
Bob's experiences with anti-Semitism

Cliff and Carol: The death of Cliff's Dad and the response of his synagogue.

Dan and Dana: Death of Dan's mother.
Dana's ambivalence towards her distant, authoritarian father.

Ed and Ellen: Both of Ed's parents were Holocaust survivors.

C. Changes in congregational functioning as result of the project.

Friedman suggests that a change in clergy functioning effects the functioning of the congregational family. As I prepared and executed the project, I let the Board and congregation know what I was attempting to do. I stressed the outreach component as my contribution to the attempt of the synagogue to re-energize and re-involve old members. I hoped it would be a model of how the Board should respond to those who are distant. The results have been very encouraging. The following is a list of programs that have been initiated by decision of the Board of Directors of the synagogue since the beginning of work on this project. They all

indicate a desire to reach out in new ways to the membership.

1. Special *oneg shabbat* in honor of all long term members of the synagogue

2. Special *oneg shabbat* in honor of all graduates of the religious school.
3. Special lunchon in honor of an active long term member family who was moving away.
4. Revitalization of a program to send food to the homes of folks in mourning and to families in which a member was experiencing a hospitalization.
5. Program to honor another long a term member who had been deeply involved over the years.
6. Creation of an e-mail list to let people know of happenings at the synagogue as well as among members. This is how Cliff and Carol started coming to the *shiva minyan* at the home of a member for whom there was a death in a family.
7. Program of pairing different segments of the membership and inviting these families to organize one *oneg shabbat* during the year.

D. Personal learning.

Before identifying what I have learned, I need to identify the process. During the two years of class work for the D.Min. program, my colleague and friend Hesh Sommer, with whom I traveled from New Haven to New York every week had the opportunity to do two things. We would discuss the materials that we were reading for the program; and we also helped each other to honestly confront our various and varying personal issues that arose

during the program. That we were able to do this work together set the model for our continuing meetings once a week for a year and a half following the conclusion of the pastoral counseling program. During this year and a half, which coincided with the execution of the project we continued to review what we had learned as well as reading other articles and books. We also continued both our personal work as well as discussing our counseling cases and synagogue issues. Throughout this period and beyond I was continually trying to piece together all of my history and my issues into some consistent framework. This personal work was successful.

The most important lesson learned in doing this project is how not to misinterpret absence. Before executing this project, absence felt to me like abandonment. Meeting with the couples helped me see how narcissistic this stance was. Dan, who seemed to relish the opportunity that the sessions offered, quoted his favorite saying of Abraham Lincoln, who when being introduced to a certain individual he didn't know well said, "I don't like that man. I'll have to get to know him better". In expressing his own feelings of enjoyment at our getting to know each other better, he affirmed the crux of the value of this project. Reaching out can only serve to better human connection, a pre-requisite to *tikun olam*.

The meetings suggested a need on my part for greater humility. It became clearer to me that those who show little or no interest in what I have to teach are not necessarily indicating a lack of Jewish commitment. Beyond our need for being heard and being a focus of the religious community, our role is to listen and to be open to the way others frame their religious needs and understanding. As clergy persons, our focus often differs radically than those in the pew. If I can speak for clergy who choose to commit to congregational life, the 'psychologics' of inclusion is a major part of our motivation to do this work along with our commitment to the

religious and spiritual core of our tradition. Those who are distant however from the community apparently have a lesser need for inclusion; and whatever need they do have is expressed through other means.

Furthermore, Jewish culture is not limited only to its religious core. Commitment to Jewish continuity does not always, or necessarily translate into religious fervor or active synagogue involvement. The commitment of the five couples to their Jewishness as they defined it and live it, and their commitment to the continuation of the Jewishness of their families is real and strong. This had to be the case, or else they would not have agreed to be involved in this project.

Ironically, joining a synagogue today is not in itself a statement of religiosity. It is the way that most Jews choose to make sure that their children will learn enough to be connected to Jewish history, culture, and religious practice. And it is a way to insure that the life cycle moments of everyone in the family can be celebrated in the context of a Jewish community that is known and is prepared to help when called upon.

E. Concluding the Project

My own issues around seeing this project to its conclusion need some discussion because they relate directly to the goal I raised in Chapter one: looking towards a better level of functioning. The issues of my own homeostasis had to be acknowledged and dealt with before the work could be finished. The issues were the following.

1. I needed to mourn the death of my mother in a way I hadn't done before. In doing so I came to understanding for the first time that my resistance in doing the work is directly connected to my ambivalent feelings about my mother's working with me during my early school years. There is a part of me that is angry that she is not here to help me the way she used to. This anger has been cloaking the sadness of my loss. The anger itself is related directly to my discussion in chapter one about abandonment.
2. This anger was the source of the resistance to do the work which was expressed both in the execution of the project and in the write up.
3. Concerning the write up, I wanted and was waiting for someone to magically help me with it like my mother used to. Getting in touch with my feelings of missing my mother freed me to move ahead.
4. Concerning the execution of the project, my anger at my mom's overbearing help, and the anger at her not being around to help me was, ironically, transferred to the advisors for not showing a more active involvement during the process and was expressed passively by a refusal to think through how I would keep in mind the principles outlined in chapter two. In other words, although the work done in preparation for the project was in my head, I was resistance to following through on keeping focused on the clinical principles. This passive aggressive behavior of always doing it my way is the flip side, or as Friedman (1985) identifies it, the symmetrical alternative to always being the nice guy.
5. Resistance to acknowledging this familiar unhelpful behavior slowed the forward movement for a while. Coming to terms with my inner life has required

some regression in order to get in touch with my dynamic. Resistance to what one is learning about one's inner motivations means that this project had to take as much time as necessary to face these difficult personal issues. I was not aware until I reviewed my work and completed the final write-up how much I have learned about myself; and how much this learning has freed me to move ahead.

In addition I would add the following items of learning:

1. I experienced becoming overwhelmed in the group sessions by the over stimulation due to the bombardment of 10 people talking and responding all at once. I realized that the anxiety this caused is due in part to a loss of control. It reminded me of the anxiety I used to feel every Shabbat after services when I try to be available to every one during the social hour.
2. I did succeed in letting the participants set the agenda of the sessions, but my impulsive response to anxieties discussed above often would click in. I found myself often feeling like I was fighting or competing with some of the participants. Specifically, I felt this most strongly with Cliff and with Bob.
3. Despite this lack of control in keeping my comments to a minimum, I was amazed in listening to the tapes that the participants would continue their train of thought regardless of what I might inject into the discussion. It is a demonstration of the wisdom that it is a waste of time to inject too much of your own issues into the process of supporting others in their odyssey. I was relieved

that the participants were able to express what they needed to say. It suggests that the sessions were helpful for them in their working through their own issues.

4. By focusing on the repetition of familiar unhelpful patterns of behavior, I have come to accept these neurotic styles as the givens of my personality even as I continue to strive to find ways to transcend them. I know that such transformation has and is occurring.

Our lives and our identities are always in process. This project allowed me both to move backwards and to move forwards. When Cliff says to me at the end of the group sessions, "You haven't convinced me", but then at the *oneg shabbat* in honor of long time members, he comes over and greets me with a body language that communicated a sense of positive intimacy, I knew that the project was worthwhile for others as well as for me.

Carol sums it up her way when she said at our last group session, "I appreciate that you have reached out to us, because it's been such a long time. When you first called, I was so intrigued about it because I wondered myself. And I do it because of my background and cause I want to do it. Will I become more involved, probably not because my life is just gone in too many directions. But I do feel more bonded

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