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PARENTS AND THE BAR/BAT MITZVAH TRANSITION: ACTIVE INTERVENTIONS WITH PARENTS WHOSE ELDEST CHILD IS PREPARING FOR BAR/BAT MITZVAH

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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

> March 1, 2000 Advisors: Rabbi Nancy Wiener, DMin Ann Akers, Mdiv

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CHAPTER 1:The State of Need

The Bar/Bat Mitzvah of the eldest child in a family is often a time of rapid transition and heightened anxiety for the child who is entering adolescence. 1 It is also a period of remarkable and rapid change for the entire family. In addition to the developmental changes the child experiences as s/he enters adolescence and the impact these changes have on the entire family system, many parents find that their eldest child's entering adolescence marks their own entry into a new developmental stage. This period, generically referred to as "middle age" is often a time when individuals find themselves reassessing their lives, as they find their positions within their family constellation changing and a new phase of life beginning. Children are beginning their process of breaking away and self-differentiating. grandparents are aging and parents are often beginning to confront their own mortality. Because these changes occur at the same time as the B/Mitzvah, this life-cycle event often becomes a focal point for the heightened anxiety created by ongoing and changing family dynamics. The child becoming B/Mitzvah, and often the B/Mitzvah itself, become the focus of anxiety in the family, obscuring the multi-layered process of developmental change that is

¹ While these issues and dynamics are present for each child in a family, they may be heightened for the first child. Preto observes that "For adolescents to master the developmental tasks.... The family must be strong, flexible and able to support growth. This is often easier with each successive child...." (Preto, 1987, p.264) Many families, when asked how the B/Mitzvah of a second or third child compared to that of the first, have told me that for the eldest child they were far more anxious. When asked "Why?" most replied, "Because now we've been through this before."

occurring.² As a result, families approaching their eldest child's B/Mitzvah often experience increased, and at times overwhelming, anxiety. This anxiety often manifests itself in predictable ways: parents' becoming overly fixated on their child "performing" well; family struggles surfacing as numerous generations are brought together and honors distributed; parents' struggling with their child's insistence on increased independence; and parents' revisiting their own memories and wounds from their adolescence through, and with, their child at the very moment their child is pulling further and further away from them. In extreme cases, this anxiety manifests itself in parents' acting out around issues related to the party or other such peripheral events. By focusing on their child's "performance readiness" or on the party celebrating this achievement, parents overlook the larger emotional and developmental changes.

All too often, synagogues and rabbis contribute to these dynamics by focusing only on preparing the child and the entire family for the ritual behaviors central to the B/Mitzvah service. In Bar/Bat Mitzvah Education: A Sourcebook, Cantor Helen Lenerman gathers a wide range of important B/Mitzvah material and lesson plans for B/Mitzvah preparation. While clearly expressing concern for providing access to the B/Mitzvah for the child and the family through education, all of the material focuses on the ritual of B/Mitzvah. Even the section on Family Education is focused exclusively on imparting

²The individual upon whom family anxiety is placed is commonly referred to as the "identified patient".

information to the family as a whole. A similarly narrow approach is taken in The Bar/Bat Mitzvah Planning Book by Jane Lewit and Ellen Epstein. This book is an excellent resource for families planning a B/Mitzvah. Nonetheless, it entirely neglects the role of the family in the B/Mitzvah and pays no attention to the powerful transitions taking place in the nuclear and extended family. In his book Putting God On the Guest List, Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin identifies some of these changes but focuses specifically on helping families gain greater understanding and appreciation of the rituals surrounding B/Mitzvah. In Bar/Bat Mitzvah Basics, Cantor Helen Leneman provides a survival guide for parents focused on ritual and celebration. The one exception in the book is a brief chapter on family dynamics by Dr. Judy Davis. These resources are typical of the way in which the current system of B/Mitzvah preparation fosters an increased knowledge of Judaism with the intent of increasing both the child's, and the entire family's, connection to rituals surrounding B/Mitzvah. Yet they fail to address the powerful dynamics at play as the family enters a new stage of life. Unfortunately, focusing on ritual familiarity and cognitive knowledge tends to overshadow and obscure the emotional significance of this event. Through such a focus rabbis and congregations miss an opportunity to help reduce anxiety and to allow families to do significant emotional and spiritual learning and growth. Hence, most of the available material focuses on the rituals surrounding the celebration of B/Mitzvah, rather than on the natural developmental forces occurring within the family at the time of the B/Mitzvah.

There are notable exceptions in which authors, including rabbis and family therapists, focus on the powerful emotional dynamics taking place in a family in the months leading up to a B/Mitzvah, however their observations have rarely been turned into active interventions. One groundbreaking exception is found in the work of Dr. Judy Davis. In her article "The B/Mitzvah Balabusta: Mother's Role in the Family's Rite of Passage" and her book. Whose B/Mitzvah Is This Anyway?, Davis, a family therapist who has spent over twenty years examining the emotional systems of families as they encounter B/Mitzvah, identifies many of the forces at work in a family during this period. She observes that at their best "life-cycle rituals are the original form of therapy". (Leneman, 1996, p.47) Through such life-cycle moments, growth and learning can be maximized. At their worst, however, life-cycle events are highly structured performances that obscure the true drama that is taking place in the lives of the various family members. More than anyone else writing today, Davis focuses more fully on the potential of the B/Mitzvah as a time for emotional learning and growth for the entire family.

Under the right conditions, B/Mitzvah is a "teachable moment" during which there is tremendous potential for both the individuals involved, and the family as a whole, to move in new directions. Yet all too often, an opportunity pregnant with potential for learning and change is missed. However, the focus can be shifted and the developmental issues addressed at the time that families learn about the more specifically religious elements of B/Mitzvah. Davis notes that, by

working in consultation with rabbis, teachers and B/Mitzvah families, one could design a set of educational sessions which could go a long way in 'coaching' participants towards greater awareness of the developmental significance of the process (without taking the magic out of it by making it too self-conscious an experience) and could help them focus their energies in ways that would enhance the ritual's potential for being what Friedman calls a 'golden opportunity for growth'." (Imber-Black, 1989, p.203-204)

Yet while Davis recommends active intervention, she falls short of describing the exact form this intervention might take. Here is one example of where such an approach is useful.

Example 1-

G came to see me three months before her son J's B/Mitzvah. She began with a series of questions related to the study for, and rituals of her J's B/Mitzvah. In the course of the conversation she informed me that she and her husband were having difficulties. She asked me to keep an eye on her son to see if he was acting out as a result. Her conscious focus was entirely on J and his becoming B/Mitzvah.

D-- So J isn't the only one undergoing a transition right now.

G-- You know, I never thought of it that way. It is just that my husband is looking at the rest of his life right now and trying to decide what he wants- and if I am part of it. Don't get me wrong, we love each other and both of us have been faithful-- our trust is still in tact.

D-- So it is the distance.

G-- Exactly, distance-- and a life assessment.

D-- Boy is that common.

G-- (her eyes open wide) It is? That's a relief-- doesn't make it any less work, but it is a relief.

D-- I was reading a book yesterday-- the author observed that any long-term marriage is actually a number of different marriages to the same partner.

G-- That's exactly it-- we had a pre-kids marriage, and then a young kids marriage-- and now we are struggling to create "kids are older marriage". Now if we can just get through to J.

D-- About what?

G-- (getting a little softer and showing embarrassment) He says he doesn't believe in God.

D-- Did you when you were his age?

G-- Come to think of it no.

D-- So he comes by it honestly—it's pretty normal.

G--(Lets out a sigh of relief that surprises me in its intensity.) Thank God! I thought I had totally fucked my kid up!!

Ostensibly, G came to see me about J and his B/Mitzvah. The real content of her visit, however, was the on-going issues within her marriage and her own self-doubt regarding whether she had parented J well for the last thirteen years. Yet while the B/Mitzvah prompted G to come see me, it potentially obstructed the real content of her distress. Had I only focused on the presenting issues regarding the B/Mitzvah we would not have had the opportunity to begin examining the real issues.

In the introduction to his book <u>Putting God On The Guest List</u>, Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin (1996) writes,

Moses ascends Mount Sinai to receive the tablets of the covenant. "Adonai said to Moses to "Come up to me on the mountain *veyeheh sham*, and *be there*." (Exodus 24:12)

Menachem Mendle of Kotsk, a great Chasidic teacher, asked, "If Moses had to come up the mountain, why did God also have to tell him to 'be there'?" Because, the Chasid answered, it is possible to expend great effort in climbing a mountain, but still not be there. Not everyone who is there is there. Sometimes they're somewhere else.

One barrier to families' being fully present at a B/Mitzvah is a lack of knowledge and familiarity with the tradition. This barrier is aptly dealt with through a traditional program of education. A second barrier to families being fully present during the B/Mitzvah however, is the emotional change and anxiety evoked by the ritual itself and the life-changes associated with it. When such dynamics are obscured by a singular focus on ritual, they remain a barrier. This project will address the latter barrier. It is an attempt to "diminish emotional blind spots and inner conflicts that otherwise would prevent [parents] from understanding, evaluating, selecting and then utilizing the ideas that are relevant." (Clinebell, 1984, p.326) The goal is to anticipate and to de-pathologize the often anxiety evoking transitions encountered during this period and to shift the full weight of the focus of this transition from the child and the B/Mitzvah to the family system as a whole so that everyone can "be there"— can be fully present at the B/Mitzvah.

Educative-Counseling

As noted above, the issues raised by B/Mitzvah are not merely educational or ritual issues. B/Mitzvah raises a host of psychodynamic and systemic issues for each of the participants, and for the family as a whole. These issues are best encountered through a process known as educative-counseling. Through educative-counseling the rabbi brings both educational and clinical skills to bear on the B/Mitzvah experience, thereby creating an

opportunity for the entire family system to encounter the developmental issues directly and thus grow emotionally. Educative-counseling is,

a helping process that integrates the insights and methods of two pastoral functions with the single objective of fostering the wholeness of persons. This approach involves the personalized communication of certain knowledge, beliefs, values and coping skills as an essential part of the counseling process. (Clinebell, 1984, p.323-324).

Educative-counseling is vastly different from the approach currently taken by most B/Mitzvah education programs. Through educative-counseling, the focus of meetings with parents or B/Mitzvah students shifts from imparting information to facilitating self-discovery and personal growth. "By utilizing counseling skills and sensitivities [educative counseling can help] persons understand, evaluate and then apply the relevant information to coping with their particular life situation." (Clinebell, 1984, p.324) Moreover, it is "particularly useful in preventative group counseling-- small group experiences designed to prevent future problems by preparing people to meet 'developmental crises' constructively." (Clinebell, 1984, p.324) Since, through active intervention, this project seeks to anticipate and to de-pathologize the often anxiety evoking transitions encountered during this period and to shift the full weight of the focus of this transition from the child and the B/Mitzvah to the family system as a whole, educative-counseling is well suited. This project aims at reducing and increasing the spiritual significance of an eldest child's B/Mitzvah by helping families gain a broader perspective and a deeper understanding of some of the changes taking place in their lives.

The difference between educative-counseling and most current models for B/Mitzvah preparation is obvious. Educative-counseling also differs significantly from a purely clinical model of counseling. Through educative-counseling,

the minister communicates information in this spirit, 'here is some information (concepts, values or approaches) which, from my experience and understanding, are valid. I believe they may be useful to you in meeting your needs, so I share them for you to consider. If you wish I will help you evaluate their relevance and apply them to your situation.'" (Clinebell, 1984, p.326)

More specifically, educative-counseling adds three specific goals to the counseling process: (1) the process of discovering what facts, concepts, values, beliefs, skills, guidance or advice are needed by the person or persons coping with a problem or transition; (2) the communication of these directly or the attempt to help the person or persons discover them for themselves; (3) and helping the person or persons utilize this information to understand their situation and to respond to it in the most constructive and growthful manner possible. (Clinbell, 1984, p.325) By helping parents reframe their understanding of the B/Mitzvah and then allowing them to find new ways of approaching the B/Mitzvah, an educative-counseling intervention will open new vistas for them into their own lives and the true power of this life-cycle moment.

Caution must be taken, however, lest the clergy-person equate merely transmitting information with genuine learning. (Clinebell, 1984, p.329)

Educative-counseling only becomes useful as it relates to the individual's

inner life. (Clinebell, 1984, p.327) For this reason, the counseling component of the process becomes particularly significant.

In summarizing her study of the B/Mitzvah as a multigenerational ritual, Judith Davis notes "the B/Mitzvah lends itself to being developed as a therapeutic intervention." (Davis, 1988, p.203) Through a combination of educational and therapeutic modes, this project provides a proactive model for helping Jewish parents whose eldest child is about to begin the process of study toward B/Mitzvah to gain a better understanding of:

- -<u>Their child</u>, including his/her developmental changes as s/he begins the process of separation and individuation typical of adolescence.
- --<u>Themselves</u>, as their child moves toward B/Mitzvah. These personal insights often include reflection upon:
 - -Their own experiences of B/Mitzvah and the unconscious ways in which those experiences may be impacting upon their current experience and their handling of their child's experience
 - -Their own experience of adolescent separation and individuation and the ways in which that experience may be impacting upon their handling their child's experience.
 - -Their need to adjust their interaction and parenting of their child as s/he begins the maturation process.
 - -The changes they are going through as they enter their own mid-life transition

-- Their family, and the need for the family to adjust to new patterns of behavior as a major developmental transition is approached.

While families experiencing B/Mitzvah are usually aware that the event itself is meaningful, they are often unaware of the depth of its significance from both a religious and a secular perspective. Often the answer to the question, "Why is it important to you that your son/daughter become a B/mitzvah?" is met with a look of confusion or the most superficial answers. Yet the anxiety most families experience suggests that a truly profound transition is taking place. As the family rabbi, and the one who will be officiating at the B/Mitzvah service of their child, the rabbi/cantor or clergy are in a unique position to help parents gain a better understanding of the broader context of this event and its impact on each member of the family system. The rabbi or cantor is also in the unique position (as will be further discussed below) to help bridge the gap between those areas that are perceived as "religious" and those that are usually not, such as the emotional dynamics within the nuclear and the extended family.

CHAPTER 2: Religious and Clinical Principles

Ritual and Family Development

Prior to entering into a discussion on B/Mitzvah specifically, it is worthwhile to discuss the relationship between life-cycle rituals and developmental transitions that occur naturally throughout our lives. Dr. Eugene Borowitz observes that there are both religious and secular rites.

Secular rites mark special moments. Religion does this as well, but, because of its transcendent view of things, it goes much further. It seeks to turn everyday life into special moments. It aims to have us share its seers' insight that every moment is a precious gift, not anything we could by right demand. (Borowitz, 1984, p.416)

Borowitz goes on to note that there are three main types of religious rites. There are those rites that seek to refresh and sanctify our usual sense of time. There are those rites that celebrate moments in the history or mythology of the Jewish people. And there are those rites that help transform individual and familial existence. Borowitz notes that this latter type of ritual arises as a response to natural life-moments. Borowitz also notes that every religion marks individual and familial life-transitions through the creation of religious ceremonies. These rituals do not create the transition but through them the natural life-change is imbued with religious meaning, is discussed through particular religious vocabulary, and is connected to a particular community and God-concept. Thus he observes that religious rituals provide "us with words to say on such occasions; in some cases, the described acts to do." (Borowitz, 1984, p.416) Similarly, Erik Erikson said that religion,

Elaborates on what feels profoundly true even though it is not demonstrable; it translates into significant words, images, and codes

the exceeding darkness which surrounds man's existence and the light which pervades it beyond all comprehension. (Erikson, 1958, p.21.)

Family therapist Kenneth Terkelsen refers to these life-cycle transitions as "second- order developments". According to Terkelsen, first-order developments involve new mastery and adaptation by an individual, while second order developments signify a change in status and a transformation of meaning. First order developments are achieved through growth and learning. Second order developments are conferred upon the individual and are more concerned with the meaning behind what is occurring. In a second-order transformation, positions change and roles within the family are reassigned. Terkelsen observes that when a second-order transition occurs, "a family's prior system of meaning gives way under the advance of a new shared reality." (Terkelsen p.39) This transition is often most difficult on the individual who is directly undergoing the change. It may result in a sense of discontinuity; "of being a changed person in a changed family." (Terkelsen p.39) However, every member of the family may have a sense that things are different and that family patterns have lost their sense of predictability. (Terkelsen p. 39) Thus, these infrequent second-order developments trigger structural changes that are all encompassing for the family.

Such developments correspond to the major life-cycle events that occur for individuals and families. Terkelsen divides these second-order events into two categories: normative events and paranormal events.

Normative events correspond directly to the family life-cycle and include marriage, the birth of a child, the entry of a child into school, the entry of a

child into adolescence, the launching of a child into adulthood. Paranormative events modify the normative flow of the family unit and include miscarriage, marital separation and divorce, illness, disability and death, relocation of the family and marked changes in the family unit's socioeconomic status. Strikingly, the former list of normative events that evoke a second-order development are often accompanied by Jewish life-cycle rituals. Thus, these rituals emerge from a normative point in the life-cycle and provide both a vocabulary for marking the moment and, in the case of religious ritual, a broader view that includes the greater community and divinity. (Terkelsen, p.41)

In speaking of these life-cycle events, Borowitz reminds us that while the life-cycle is a human experience, a religious ritual marking such a transition is fundamentally different than a secular one such as a "sweet sixteen". He observes,

the difference between religious and all other human rituals arises from religion's unique focus: its rites direct us to God. By words, acts, tunes, attitudes, silence, perhaps with the use of special or ordinary artifacts, we human beings pause and reach out to God." (Borowitz, 1984 p.417)

Thus, a second-order event such as a B/Mitzvah, functions on two levels. It is both a religious ritual that connects us to one another, to tradition and to God, and it is a second-order developmental transition that marks a period of rapid change within the family structure.

An Overview Of The History Of The B/Mitzvah

B/Mitzvah is a post-biblical invention. The biblical age of majority was twenty, for it was at twenty that a young man became fully liable for any misdeeds (Numbers 14:29), was required to pay the annual half-shekel offering to the sanctuary (Exodus 30:11) and was required to participate in a census of all those able to serve in the military (Numbers 1:3). Only during the rabbinic period did the age of majority move to coincide with the onset of puberty.³

In the 2nd century, rabbinic sage Judah ben Tema, described the chronology of life in this way

At five, one should study Scripture, at ten, one should study Mishnah; at thirteen, one is ready to do *mitzvot*; at fifteen, one is ready to study Talmud,; at eighteen one is ready for the wedding canopy; at twenty one is responsible for providing for a family' (Mishah Avot 5:24).⁴

Thus, the Mishnah refers to a thirteen year old as becoming responsible for the fulfillment of mitzvot. It was at thirteen, therefore, that a boy formally became part of the community-- able to participate fully in the congregation and fully owning the consequences of his actions. In the Talmud this issue arises in a discussion about the obligation to fast on Yom Kippur.

behavior.

³ It can be noted that when the rabbis moved the age of majority to thirteen, the Biblical age of twenty was neither revoked nor overturned. This introduces an area of apparent ambiguity into the Jewish life-cycle. However, by the rabbinic period circumstances required neither active priests nor a standing army. Thus, these requirements at the age of twenty became less relevant than in the past and the age of thirteen apparently becomes dominant.

⁴ Thus, the rabbis introduce an entirely new category that focused on ritual

At the age of twelve, they must fast to the end of the day by Biblical law, [all this] referring to girls. R. Nachman said, 'At the age of nine and ten one trains them by hours, at the age of eleven and twelve they must fast to the end of the day by Rabbinic ordinance, at the age of thirteen they must fast to the end of the day by Biblical law, [all this] referring to boys (Yoma 82a).

Similarly, a thirteen year old is also held responsible for any oaths that he has made. (Niddah 5:6) In the Talmud (Kiddushin 16a) and the writings of Maimonides (MT Ishut 2:9-10) the age of majority, for boys and for girls, depended on the appearance of two pubic hairs. In Genesis Rabba we find that,

For the first thirteen years of a son's life a father is obligated to attend to his son's conduct; thereafter, he should say, 'Praised be He who has exempted me from the liability now resting upon him' (Genesis Rabba 63:14).

Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel (the most authoritative Jewish legal authority of the 13th and 14th centuries) established the 13th birthday as a basic part of Judaism asserting, "It is a law given to Moses at Sinai that a male must take responsibility for his transgressions (*bar onshin*) at the age of thirteen and a girl at twelve." (Maslin, 1979, p.73) By the time of the writing of the Shulchan Aruch, the Code of Jewish law, the age of majority had already been set at twelve and one day for girls and thirteen and one day for boys. (Shulchan Aruch 225:4)

Thus, B/Mitzvah is the invention of the rabbis who set the age of majority within the Jewish community at 13 when, in fact, it had been seven

years later in Biblical times.^{5 6} When the term "B/Mitzvah" is used in rabbinic literature it simply refers to a young man who has become thirteen and one day and now bears legal rights and responsibilities for himself. As such, on his thirteenth birthday a Jewish male was not only permitted, but was obligated, to take upon himself the responsibilities of adult Jewish life. From the perspective of Jewish law, once he turned thirteen, a boy was able to give testimony in court, take responsibility for his own actions, and be counted as part of the ten adult Jewish males required for public worship service⁷ (Friedman, 1989, p.140).

Hence, for nearly two thousand years Judaism has noted a change in legal status for boys at the age of thirteen. In ancient days

to mark the importance of the occasion, the father would take his B/Mitzvah to a man of learning, who would bless him and pray for him, beseeching God to make him worthy of a life devoted to the study of Torah and good deeds. (Soferim 18) (Jacob, 1983, p.84)

By the 16th century, the B/Mitzvah as we know it, had developed. On the Saturday that coincided or immediately followed his 13th birthday, a young man was called to the Torah in front of the entire congregation to recite the

⁶ In Genesis Rabbah 38:13, it is noted that Abraham was thirteen when he broke his father's idols.

⁵ According to a rabbinic insight, the *yetzer hatov* or "good inclination," is developed in the thirteenth year of a child's existence (Avot d'Rabbi Nathan 16:3).

⁷ The need for a quorum of ten adult Jewish males is a rabbinic tradition. While rabbinic tradition has attempted to find Biblical precedent for this requirement is, in fact, a later tradition. According to one tradition, the number 10 is derived from the Book of Numbers, 14:27 where the ten spies opposing the invasion of the land of Israel are described as "an evil congregation". Others derive the number form the ten righteous people who could not be found in Sodom. (Plaut and Washofsky p.27)

blessings for the final *aliyah* and to read this last section of the week's Torah portion. This was an extension of counting in the *minyan*. The boy becoming B/Mitzvah would then read a section from the prophetic tradition, known as the *haftarah*.⁸ From that point forward the boy was considered an adult for the purposes of Jewish rituals. However, regardless of whether or not a boy was called to the Torah, from the moment of his 13th birthday, he was still regarded as a B/Mitzvah--- a Son of the Commandments, and given adult status in the community (Jacob, 1987, p. 90).

It is important to note, though, that in its earliest form, the ritual of B/Mitzvah did not stand alone as an independent ritual. Rather, a boy celebrated becoming a B/Mitzvah as part of a regular communal worship service. Since this took place in the context of the worshipping community, it was a celebration of the youth's ability to now begin to fully function as part of the community. The boy's *aliyah* (being called to the Torah to recite the blessings) was just one of many on that day, and the "reception" was usually a small breaking of bread to which the entire community was welcomed. In this context, the true celebration was less about the child himself than it was about welcoming another adult into the active life of the community. Thus, there was no such thing as a B/Mitzvah Service, but rather, there was a

⁸ Salkin notes that while B/Mitzvah was a peripheral observance for the most part, that there were examples of it being a central rite. One such instance was the case of the converses-- those Spanish Jews who converted to Christianity under duress in the 1400's but maintained their Jewish identities in secret. On the thirteenth birthday, a Converso child was informed of his Jewish identity (Salkin, 1996, p.10). Due to circumstances, this was done, however, without the normal attendant rituals.

communal worship service during which a young man <u>became</u> a B/Mitzvah. On the occasion of becoming a B/Mitzvah, a Jewish boy was, "...publicly tested and feted, proclaimed an adult by the adult world, religiously and socially acknowledged as having entered the community of Jews." (Joseph, 1994, p.93) Thus, as Rabbi Eugene Borowitz observes, the religious ritual and lifecycle rites, "connect us with our Jewish people." (Borowitz, 1984, p.416)

Until recently, there was neither a formal celebration of adult status for girls, nor any ritual to mark coming of age. In a Reform Jewish text written in 1954 by Rabbi Israel Bettan, one possible, although likely apologetic, reason for this was proffered.

The exclusion of girls from this form of initiation might, of course, be interpreted as an act of discrimination, mirroring the time when women stood none too high in the intellectual and social scale. Yet, when we consider the fact that women were legally exempt from religious duties the performance of which was linked to a specific time, we may discern in the Rabbinic attitude not a disparagement of women, but a more just appraisal of the value of her time. What she had to do at a given time—the Rabbis may well have held—was of infinitely greater importance than the punctilious observance of some ritual practice. (Jacob, 1987, p. 84)

Regardless of the reason, it was only at the beginning of the 20th century that, after the progressive branches in the Jewish community began to embrace gender equality, the long-standing exclusion of women from full participation in Jewish ritual, including B/Mitzvah, ended.⁹ One notable

⁹ It is important to note that in the 19th century, the Reform movement created a ceremony of Confirmation. This ceremony arose as a response to an early rejection of B/Mitzvah by the Reform movement. It was attached to the

response to this was the establishment of a formal ritual to welcome girls into the adult Jewish community with the same sense of celebration conferred upon boys for centuries. In response to this, Rabbi Mordechai Kaplan established the first Bat Mitzvah in 1922¹⁰ when his daughter Judith was called to the Torah as a Bat Mitzvah in New York in the synagogue of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism. It is notable that Kaplan's four children were all daughters. When asked about the need for a Bat Mitzvah ritual Kaplan apparently replied that he had "four good reasons" to institute this ritual. (Lewitt and Epstein, 1996, p.8) A change in status for girls at age twelve and one day was nothing new. In fact, the Babylonian Talmud notes, "scripture has thus made man and woman equal regarding all penalties of the law."11 (Baba Kamma 15a). However, it was only with the Bat Mitzvah of Judith Kaplan that a new era, in which this change in status was given public and communal recognition, was ushered in. The observance of Bat Mitzvah immediately took hold in many parts of the country and, with the women's

observance of the holiday of Shavuot and was celebrated by Jewish boys <u>and</u> girls somewhere between their 15th and 17th birthday. (Dosick, 1995, p.178

Friedman notes that this was about the same time as the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote. (Friedman, 1989, p.140) Thus, the development of bat mitzvah is an excellent example of larger societal trends impacting directly upon the development and form of Jewish life and ritual and the way in which an individual's personal experience can lead people ro rethink what has "always been done."

¹¹ This is based on the biblical verse, "when a man or woman shall commit any crime". (Numbers 5:6)

movement of the 1970's, became an accepted and expected coming of age ritual for girls from liberal Jewish families. 12

In the past seventy years the observance and the importance of B/Mitzvah has changed for both boys and girls. In 1949, Isaac Levitats, an observer of American Judaism wrote,

The B/Mitzvah has become the most important milestone in a Jew's life in America. Never in our millennial history was so much importance attached to this ceremony. (Salkin, 1996, p.11)

More recently, Friedman observed,

Today, from a religious point of view, depending on the branch of Judaism, the ceremony can be just the scriptural blessing, a reading of the portion in Hebrew, which the child may have just memorized, or a rite with more emphasis on the meaning of the portion, with the child giving more than a stereotyped thank-you speech and, adding a talk that interprets his portion.

In terms of contemporary sociology, the B/Mitzvah, especially for the Jews of middle-class suburbia, often appears to be an event of great social importance. In some places it has been joked, "The bar has become more important than the mitzvah." And it might be added, "The caterer more important than the rabbi." (Friedman, 1989, p.140)

Not only has B/Mitzvah increased in importance, but as American Society has become increasingly individualistic¹³, so too has B/Mitzvah. The

¹² In this regard, Orthodox and traditional Conservative Bat Mitzvah follow much the same model today. In Reform congregation the Bat Mitzvah often leads the worship service and focuses more on reading from the Torah than from the Haftarah.

¹³ In his book <u>Bowling Alone</u>, (Simon and Schuster 2000) Robert Putnam describes the way in which American society has rapidly moved toward a far more individualistic form than ever before. Part of this shift toward extreme individualism, he observes, is an over-all privatization of religion in which individuals focus on their own lives and meaning to the detriment of the communal focus that is historically a significant part of religious life.

shift from a communal event to an individual one is clear. As Salkin (1996) observes,

William St. F. St.

Bar and bat mitzvah has not only grown in importance; it has also come to mirror trends in American Judaism. Take for instance, 'privatization'-- the focus on the individual and the resulting diminishing of religious community. We see this in Reform Judaism's Shabbat morning service often being almost totally dedicated to the bar and bat mitzvah ceremony. (Salkin, 1996, p.11-12)

The impact of this shift from the public to the private sphere is many fold. As Borowitz observes,

Liberal Judaism does not consider people isolates whose lives move in essential detachment from others. Rather, our Selfhood is fulfilled in our relationships not only with spouse but also with family, friends, community, people, society, and God. We can be true to ourselves, therefore, only as we are involved with them. (Borowitz, 1984, p.418-419)

Moreover, "Our personal lives, Judaism teaches, cannot be detached from family and folk." (Borowitz, 1984, p.418-419)

A second change that has occurred in modernity is the compartmentalization of religious practice and religious identity. In many families, B/Mitzvah has lost its religious meaning and is done as a matter of course. For others, it is merely regarded as a series of ritualistic behaviors. And for still others it has social significance, but no specifically religious significance. This can be contrasted to the original B/Mitzvah which was a celebration of the boy coming of age within the context of family, and community, two entities whose lives were affected by this change.

Theological Underpinnings For This Project

This project's theology is based upon the Lurianic Kabbalistic notion of raising sparks of the Divine presence through Tikkun Olam— the Healing of our World. According to Rabbi Isaac Luria sparks of the Divine Presence are spread throughout this world but are hidden from sight beneath shards of the original vessels that had contained them. Through the performance of mitzvot (acts of religious obligation and/or kindness), sparks of the Divine Presence are released and freed to rejoin their Source. With each act a spark of Divinity is released into the world. Through this process the world is made more whole and brought closer to the original state of balance and perfection (Dosick, 1995, p.1-2). Therefore, every opportunity to show kindness or perform an act of healing between, or with, people is an opportunity to be part of this process of Tikkun Olam. Every missed opportunity to show kindness or perform an act of healing is a time when the sparks could have been lifted but were not.

When families focus on "performance readiness", the party, or on the child rather than the entire family's transition, opportunities for raising sparks and releasing a greater sense of wholeness and holiness within the family and within each of the individuals involved are missed. This project is theologically rooted in trying to maximize the opportunity for increased intimacy present in this experience. Moreover, this project asserts that just as the release of sparks is said to be good for the healing of the world, the

release of psychic energy and the enhancement of communication is good for families. Friedman notes,

an awareness of family process can enable a minister to draw on the natural strengths in families to enrich religious experience... when clergymen facilitate the meaningful involvement of family members at life-cycle ceremonies, they are in fact allowing natural healing processes to flow, and doing what religion had always intuited but what modern times has come to be called therapy." (Friedman, 1989, p.125)

An additional theological perspective informing this project comes from the I/Thou theology¹⁴ of 20th century theologian Martin Buber. According to Buber there are two types of interactions that can occur between individuals or between an individual and God. The "I-Thou" relationship is one that is not impacted by time, space or other elements. The "I-Thou" encounter only occurs in the present moment, but can only be identified after it is over. In an "I-Thou" relationship each party recognizes the other as different but indescribably worthy. The "I-Thou" moment is a moment when divinity is present in the relationship. Buber contrasted the "I-Thou" relationship with the "I-It" relationship. In this relationship one party relates to the second as an object, rather than fully celebrating their personhood. The I-Thou interaction is the more intense and immediate of the encounters. While the "I-Thou" relationship is characterized by deep intimacy, the "I-It" relationship is characterized by far more distance between the two parties. In modern society the ability to relate on a basis of true intimacy and connectedness has been negatively affected by the increasing pace of life and the intrusion of technology that ostensibly aids our capacity to connect with one another but

actually increases our isolation. As a result, in modernity "I-It' is eclipsing the 'I-Thou' encounter". (Cohn-Sherbok, 1997, p.25)

The "I-Thou" encounter can be neither planned for, nor anticipated. Yet a setting that is open, honest and emotionally "safe" is fertile ground for such an encounter. Ideally, the process leading to B/Mitzvah and the event itself can create conditions in which various "I-Thou" encounters between family members might occur. Both are opportunities for members of the family to enter into a deeper and more profound and loving relationship with each other. All too often, however, hidden family dynamics, unspoken expectations, and misdirected anxiety reduce the B/Mitzvah to an "I-It" encounter in which true intimacy is never achieved. An opportunity for the intimacy of an "I-Thou" encounter is lost. Once again the hidden potential is never achieved.

Unfortunately, "I-Thou" encounters, which can only occur in the present moment but which can only be recognized as such after the fact, are rare. Most people tend to focus on relationships that occurred in the past or consider the possibilities of relationships in the future, rather than being fully present in the moment itself. When considering the B/Mitzvah, people often focus on the past, trying to heal old wounds and unmet needs through current relationships, or focus on the future, allowing their expectations for "what will be" to guide them. Past hurts and angers and unspoken expectations, therefore, obscure the closer and more intimate encounters, which depend on the present, from occurring.

Biblically we find that the personal name for God- Yod Hay Vav Hay is the present participle of the verb "to be". Like true intimacy, God cannot be encountered in the past or in the future. God can only be encountered in the moment. By helping families openly discuss unresolved issues and unmet dreams of the past and express unspoken hopes for the future, it is hoped that an opportunity to encounter each other, and God, in the present moment is created. This does not, however, necessarily mean encountering one another or God in the moment of the highly scripted and orchestrated event taking place on the *bimah* (pulpit), but rather, the true intimacy of the B/Mitzvah may occur during the moments leading up to and following the event.

Finally, this project is predicated on the belief that "religion" must be more broadly defined than is common in modernity. "Religion" is about how we interact with ourselves, each other, the world and God. The Bible addresses all aspects of life, as do the Mishnah and the Talmud. In the world that initially created B/Mitzvah, Judaism continued to provide the orienting worldview for Jews and the Jewish community. Medieval Jewish law codes, including the Shulchan Aruch, make no distinction between the realms of politics, economics, ritual, or spirituality. Each of these realms was understood to be an integral part of the relationship and responsibility the Jew had to the world and to God. For our ancestors, religion and life were synonymous. This was, of course, necessary since the Jew, as an individual and as a member of a community, was disenfranchised from the larger

society. In such a world of isolation all aspects of life <u>had</u> to be governed by Judaism.

This all began to shift in the late 18th century. The Emancipation of the Jew, and the invitation to become part of the greater social framework, "caused our people to reshape the inherited faith of Judaism." (Borowitz, 1991, p.9) Emancipation liberated the Jews from 1500 years of physical, social and economic segregation that had necessitated a Judaism that addressed all aspects of life. (Borowitz, 1991, p.9) The result was "an astonishing break with the discipline that had ordered our people's life for well over a millennium." (Borowitz, 1991, p.10) In modernity, Judaism and its institutions no longer provided the sense of all-encompassing meaning and support that it had previously. God and religion moved from the center of people's existence to the periphery as modern, secular elements took center stage in people's lives (Borowitz, 1991, p.11) Thus,

modernity constituted a grave challenge to this conception of the personal and collective Jewish self. Emancipation— the opening of Western societies to Jewish participation on a formally equal footing, or the promise of that opening— meant the sudden or gradual end to many elements of the social segregation that under girded Jewish tribalism. Even before the granting of civil rights, the politically autonomous Jewish communities which governed daily Jewish life for centuries had lost much of their authority, ceding effective control to emerging state and national governments. Over time Jews dispersed to Gentile towns, cities, and neighborhoods and integrated in lesser or greater degree into the surrounding Gentile societies. (Cohen and Eisen, 2000, p.30)

The result of this was a privatization of Judaism in which, to a great extent, secular laws and culture guided daily living, and Judaism was relegated to the far more narrowly defined realm of "religion". In a popular

book about reintegrating Jewish values into the workplace, Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin laments.

Once upon a time, "religion" and "life" were seamless. Not only did we pray these words from Deuteronomy twice a day, but we believed them: 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. And you shall Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might...Speak these words when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way.'

Religion was not just about how you prayed. It was about what you learned; what you wore; how you behaved sexually; what you ate; how you cared for your body; if, when and with whom you traded. As the Talmud states, 'Whoever says the words of Torah are one thing and that the affairs of the world are another thing is like one who has no God.' Claiming that religion is one thing and that 'the real world' is another is tantamount to atheism.

But somewhere along the way, we asked religion to be silent about what people did in their everyday lives. as religion became relegated to life's leisure moments, for many people it had less of an orienting influence in their lives than a hobby. (Salkin, 1994, p.33-34)

The impact of the way in which Judaism has been separated from the bulk of daily life in modernity has a direct impact on the way in which people relate to B/Mitzvah. Just as one's religious identity is now split from the rest of one's life experience, so too is the ritual celebrating the coming of age within this religious identity split from the rest of life's experiences. While B/Mitzvah speaks to one coming of age within Judaism, for most Jews it is not bound to the developmental coming of age that is at B/Mitzvah's core. This misguided splitting is even apparent in the most recent books on the emotional dynamics present during B/Mitzvah. Judy Davis (1998) notes that the approach taken by a therapist is markedly different that that taken by rabbis and Jewish educators. She comments that her approach is,

different from, but complimentary to, the more familiar perspective of the Rabbi and Jewish educator. Whereas their focus is on the religious and spiritual aspects of the experience and on the bar/bat mitzvah's potential to help us and our children become more connected to Judaism, [I focus] on the family dynamics involved in the process, the bar/bat mitzvah's potential to help us evolve through the interlocking cycles of our lives. The traditional concern is to make the experience as religiously meaningful as possible. My concern... is about making the experience as developmentally useful as possible. The views are different, but intrinsically related." (Davis, 2000, p.9)

The splitting between the secular and the religious realms is particularly remarkable since the very word religion is derived from the Latin root *religio*- often translated as "to connect". William James defines religion as the search to be in harmony with an unseen order of things. It is "a man's total reaction upon life" (James, p. 40). Religion is not about a series of ritualistic behaviors or set theological beliefs. Rather, religion employs these behaviors and beliefs in order to increase our connection to one another and heighten our ability to live in harmony with an unseen order of creation. From this perspective, when we enhance our capacity to relate to one another, appreciate one another and create intimacy with one another, we are increasing the religious meaning in our lives.

By breaching the perceived split between religion and daily life we can come to recognize that the relationship of family members to one another and the developmental dynamics occurring ARE religious in nature. We, however, must expand our understanding of what it means for an event to be religious. We can help both the individual, and the family, recognize that a connection to religion, spirituality and Judaism is not separate and apart from the developmental changes they encounter. They are part and parcel of life's

experience, which by its very nature, is religious. Moreover, throughout Jewish tradition there is a repeated theme that true connection with one another is a means to connect with God. Thus, in the Mishnah we read, "When two people sit and words of Torah pass between them, the Divine Presence rest between them." (Pirke Avot 3:3) Similarly, one early Hasidic rabbi stated, "If you want to serve God begin by serving others." In other words, we must expand our definition of religion to include an understanding that religion encompass all aspects of life, particularly our interactions with one another.

The prophet Malachi prophesied that in a healed world "God shall reconcile parents with children and children with parents..." (Mlachi 3:24) The hearts of both can only be turned to each other when old hurts, angers and experiences are healed. Only then can parent and child address each other in that specific moment. Through a more holistic approach to the B/Mitzvah preparation the opportunity is created for parents and children to gain new insight into what this moment means for them.

A goal then, is to create a synergy between the religious aspects of the event as traditionally defined, and the developmental and relational aspects as therapeutically defined. The individual best suited for this task, then, is a Rabbi or Educator who has clinical training. Such an individual represents the religious tradition at all times, and can add insights from the tradition into a conversation on family emotional process. By his/her very presence in the discussion, the aforementioned synergy is modeled.

Clinical Principles

Developmental Issues

In the months prior to and following a B/Mitzvah, each member of the family is undergoing significant individual changes. Eric Erikson's work introduced the psychological notion of the stages of human development. Erikson broke the human life-cycle into eight distinct stages of psychosocial evolution, often termed, psychosocial development. (Erikson 1950) For Erikson there were four childhood stages; Infancy, Early childhood, Play age, School age. There was a single adolescent stage of development. Finally, Erickson defined three adult stages of development; Young adulthood, Adulthood and Old age. While others have defined the specifics of the lifecycle differently, theorizing different numbers of stages, choosing various points of demarcation for the transition from one stage to the next, the significance of Erikson's theory of development remains unchallenged. Erikson's other significant contribution was to illustrate how each stage has it's own range of emotional tasks that must be accomplished. As an individual moves from one stage to the next they attempt to resolve and complete the tasks from the prior stage and address new challenges. The conflicts that arise from the shift from one stage to the next is termed a "crisis". Thus, by their very nature, life-cycle transitions bring with them a developmental crisis.

As the B/Mitzvah approaches the developmental transition, or crisis, is not borne by any one individual. Rather, a wide range of developmental transitions occur within the entire family simultaneously. As the eldest child

enters his/her thirteenth year, the entire family, which underwent a developmental transition thirteen years prior, with the child's birth, enters a time of unprecedented change. During a relatively short period: the first-born child enters into adolescence; the parents enter mid-life; the grandparents move toward old age. As this occurs for each of them there are powerful developmental and intra-psychic forces at play. These forces not only act within each individual, but in turn, impact the entire system, as well.

The Adolescent

The most obvious change occurring in the family is the entrance of the child into adolescence. Often, this is the only change acknowledged by the family and the community. Louise Kaplan begins her work on adolescence observing that

More than birth, marriage or death, adolescence entails the most highly elaborated drama of the passage from one realm of existence into another. It is that critical point in a human life when the sexual and moral passions come to fruition and attain maturity. And it is then that the individual passes from family life into cultural existence. (Kaplan, 1984, p.15)

Adolescence allows the synthesis of all the previous stages of development while simultaneously setting the stage for the entry of the individual into adulthood. (Allen, 1997, p.156) Thus, adolescence is the fulcrum upon which childhood experiences and adulthood hinges. In relating adolescence to B/Mitzvah, Davis (1998)observes,

It's not clear why thirteen was chosen as the age of responsibility, the age for bar/bat mitzvah. Was it because Abraham was thirteen when he shattered his father idol's, because Jacob received the firstborn's

blessing at thirteen, or because the rabbis felt that this was the age of psychological puberty, the age at which a boy was capable of growing two pubic hairs?

Whatever its origin, thirteen is probably the worst time to have a bar/bat mitzvah. It's probably also the best. From the child's point of view, a more awkward, embarrassing time couldn't be imagined. From the point of view of child development experts, it couldn't be better. (Davis, 1998, p.65)

While the physical and emotional signposts of adolescence may precede or follow the actual ceremony of B/Mitzvah, the convergence of these two events is significant. The B/Mitzvah is not only a symbolic demarcation of entrance into a new stage of life, but coincides with the physical and emotional transitions into adolescence, as well. This transition into adolescence is triggered by the rapid physical growth and sexual maturation that begins at puberty. This in turn triggers moves toward establishing or solidifying individuality and triggers heightened moves toward separation and individuation from his/her family of origin. This shift, in turn, causes all relationships within the system to shift.

At this developmental stage body image, emergence as a sexual being, peer pressure and identification are all forces pulling at the individual. Adolescence is a time when, "changing and often conflicting social expectations about sexual roles and norms of behavior are imposed on adolescents by the family, school, peers and the media" (Preto, 1989, p.257). Most of all, in America, the adolescent is intent on establishing increased autonomy and taking greater responsibility for his/her own decisions while

maintaining a sense of safety and security within the family--the very system from which they are attempting to break free.¹⁵

The most marked changes are those in physical and sexual self. For girls, the average age for the onset of menstruation now coincides with the ritual age of thirteen for B/Mitzvah. ¹⁶ For both boys and girls, however, the physical self enters into a radical period of rapid growth and development. The physical growth of this period is accompanied by the discovery of the sexual self. "The physical and sexual changes that take place have a dramatic effect on how adolescents describe and evaluate themselves, and radically alter how they are perceived by others." (Preto, 1989, p.258)

According to Erik Erikson (1959), adolescence is a transitional time upon which early experiences and future development are balanced. At this point the adolescent begins to struggle to find answers to the question, 'Who Am I?'. Many adolescents experience marked changes in social behavior. During adolescence the brief periods of independence that may have emerged during the grade-school years, described in psychoanalytic terms as the latency period, become more pronounced and extended. (Toman, 1993, p.82) People outside the family begin to assume increased importance. Adolescents may become more attached to peers and others outside the family than ever before. (Nichols, 1988, p.34) For periods of time these other

¹⁵ In <u>The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families</u>, Mary Pipher (1996) observes that this process of separation is not nearly as developed in other countries.

relationships may take on seemingly more importance than members of the immediate family. (Toman, 1993, p.82) While this is developmentally appropriate behavior, as the youth begins to negotiate his/her way in the world, it may be evoke a profound sense of loss within the parents. Even when these forays into the larger world are received positively by the parents, they introduce a new dynamic into the family. Walter Toman (1993) observes that

Parents do want their children to become independent-- not overnight, but gradually-- and they want to know how the children have been faring in their attempts. On the other hand, they want to keep their children; they don't want to lose them to other people. Both parental motives are normal. Their respective satisfactions and the compromises between them have to be worked out with their children time and again. As all involved get more experiences, negotiations become streamlined and are often even omitted. A tacit understanding emerges. Only when the youngsters want too much freedom and independence or when because of their disappointments they try to withdraw to a little enclave outside the family, do arguments arise and new negotiations take place. (Toman, 1993, p.83)

As this period begins, parents may be

Faced with the reality of seeing children who may have been conforming and even docile during elementary school years become alternately hostile and rebellious, moody, boisterous, quiet, uncertain, stubbornly assertive, and, on occasion, their 'old, sweet self.' (Nichols, 1988, p.34)

Power and control issues may suddenly emerge in families that had formerly been relatively calm and peaceful. Moreover, as emotionally challenging as this period may be for the teens, it is often psychologically difficult for the parents, as well. (Nichols, 1988, p.34)

¹⁶ Preto notes that there has been a trend toward an earlier onset of menarche for the past 200 years. While the average age was 16 in the 1800s,

Parental Entry Into Midlife

While the changes in the adolescent are often the focus of change in the family, parents are undergoing their own developmental change. It is a time of change that is no less profound. Carl Jung first proposed a separation between the first half of life and the second. He placed the age of forty as the mid-point between the two. For an adult Jew, this period often coincides with their eldest child becoming B/Mitzvah. Thus, contemporary Jewish theologian Peter Rubenstein observes that b/mitzvah ceremonies not only mark the child's entrance into adolescence but also mark the parent's entry into middle age. Daniel Levinson notes that this period is a bridge between early adulthood and middle adulthood. It is a time when an individual must come to terms with his [her] past and to prepare for the future. (Levinson, 1978, p.192) For many, this period carries with it a series of internal and external changes including a pull to re-evaluate one's life, dreams and achievements. Levinson observes that for many men [and women], this period evokes powerful struggles within the self and with the outside world. (Levinson, 1978, p.199)

Both men and women begin undergoing major physical changes during this period. By the late thirties and early forties, both physical and psychological powers have peaked and begin to decline. (Levinson, 1978, p.213) For women it may be the beginning of menopause. McGoldrick notes

it has now dropped to 13. (Preto, 1989, p.258)

This transition had generally been viewed negatively as a time of physical and psychological distress as women move toward old age. On the contrary, for many women it is a turning point that frees them sexually from worries about pregnancy and marks a new stabilization in their energies to pursue work and social activities. (McGoldrick, 1987, p.53)

For men there is often a noticeable change in their hair, from graying for some to complete loss for others. For both men and women there is often a serious decline in strength, stamina and an increase in fatigue. (Baab, 1999, p.10-11) Vision and hearing become less acute and memory, both for long-term information and for the capacity to learn and recall vast amounts of new information, has diminished. (Levinson, 1978, p.213) Both men and women often notice an increase in the ease with which they gain weight and a decrease in their ability to lose weight and to gain muscle mass. These changes may heighten a feeling of not being in control and may in turn give rise to feelings of incompetence or inadequacy. (Baab, 1999, p.11)

The internal changes individuals encounter, while less noticeable than the physical, may have an even greater impact. Levinson, who wrote about men's lives, but whose work in this area is relevant for both men and women, observes that

a man in his mid-twenties is but a step beyond adolescence. His preadult self, with its ties to parents and the pre-adult world, operates with great force throughout early adulthood. Although some developmental gains may be made in the Age Thirty Transition, he will not be much more individuated in the late thirties than he was at 25. After the Early Adult Transition, the next great opportunity for developmental work on individuation is the Mid-Life Transition. In this period, a man must modify the early adult self (including, as it does, the baggage of unresolved problems from childhood and adolescence) and the life structure of the late thirties. (Levinson, 1978, p.196)

During this period a significant shift in roles and modes of relating may occur. After years focusing on career, many men begin to long for deepening relationships, while after years of nurturing children, women who have stayed home with their children may find themselves beginning to explore issues of competence and mastery. (Baab, 1999, p.12) If the woman has been the primary nurturing parent, she may respond to her child's newfound sense of independence with a profound sense of loss. At the same time, however, her child's growing independence may free up a great deal of time and energy that can now be channeled elsewhere. (Baab, 1999, p.13) For women who have worked full-time the changes are no less profound as they seek new balances between work, home and family. In addition, the "pressures against women feeling good about working" (McGoldrick, 1989, p.35) may decrease as their children grow older and more independent. Moreover, studies show that home is "seen as supporting and nurturing the male worker for his performance on the job". While this is not the case for women (McGoldrick, 1989, p.35), the growing independence of her children may come as a relief for working women. While such changes may be rich, exciting and ultimately healthy for both the individuals and the entire family system, such changes in any one individual can trigger an avalanche of change within the entire family.

Middle age is the time when losses begin to accumulate with increasing speed. For many, this not only triggers a life reevaluation, but also prompts the asking of more existential questions. For many, this also serves as the impetus to begin

facing old wounds and receiving healing. These wounds can include prior sexual abuse that we were not able to deal with in our teens or early adulthood, limits we placed on ourselves because of cultural or family values we received, or negative views of ourselves that we were unable to shake off in our 20's or 30's. A growing understanding of the redemptive nature of suffering often characterizes midlife. (Baab, 1999, p.21)

The individual may also re-evaluate a marriage. Monica McGoldrick (1989) notes that the birth of the first child, more than the marriage itself, marks a transition into a new family unit. (McGoldrick, 1989, p.171) Thus the entry of this child, the "glue" for the family, into adolescence, and the concurrent breaking away of this child, forces a significant shift in the structure of the family. Preto notes that the marriage,

emerging from the heavy care-taking responsibilities of young children; may be threatened as parents review personal satisfaction in the light of the militant idealism of their adolescent children. Moreover, for many women it may be the first opportunity to enter or reenter the work environment unencumbered by the restrictions they faced during the earlier years of child rearing. For men, it may be a time to reevaluate their own career paths at the time when they are maximizing their professional careers. (Preto, 1989, p.257)

Thus, the very success of having nurtured an eldest child to this point may mark the beginning of a period of emotional disruption in which roles change significantly.

Finally, the child's entry into adolescence itself may spark significant changes or questions for the parents. Psychologist Laurence Steinberg (1994) notes that parents may transfer their own dissatisfaction with life into the conflict with their teenage children. They may feel jealous of their adolescent children's physical prowess or sense of discovery. Moreover, the

feelings of loss resulting from the empty nest syndrome may start as early as the eldest child's entry into adolescence at twelve or thirteen. Thus,

the parents' psychological turmoil before the empty nest usually starts somewhere around the beginning of their child's adolescence, when most children enter a period of disrespect for their parents. Suddenly, their parents are no longer very smart, knowledgeable or cool. For those parents who have enjoyed having an almost godlike stature in their children's lives, this step is painful indeed. (Baab, 1999, p.49)

Even the teen's burgeoning sexuality may trigger strong emotions within parents and other family members. It is not uncommon for family members to feel a sense of confusion or heightened anxiety when adolescents first begin to express new sexual interests. (Preto, 1989, p.258) This is particularly true for parents who are uncomfortable with their sexual identity, due to unresolved issues of sexuality from their own adolescent years, doubts about their own sexual prowess or concerns over sexual decline as they age. Such individuals may have tremendous difficulty as they watch their children discover their own maturing bodies and sexuality. (Baab, 1999, p.50)

Many people entering midlife become aware of their own mortality and the mortality of those around them for the first time. At the same time that children experience their passage toward adulthood, their parents, who may just be entering middle age, begin to pondering whether they are still useful and creative or if they have reached a point in their life in which they have stagnating. Levinson (1978) notes that a central task of mid-life is to struggle with the polarity between youth and age and to begin wrestling with their sense of mortality and their wish for immortality. He observes that

as early adulthood comes to and end, a man is assailed by new fears of the 'loss of youth'. He feels that the Young-- variously represented as the child, the adolescent and the youthful adult in himself-- is dying. The imagery of old age and death hang over him like a pall. A number of changes commonly occurring at around 40 intensify the sense of aging. A man experiences some of these changes as minor and takes them in stride, but others strike with great impact, arousing his anxieties about getting old and confronting him with his own mortality. (Levinson, 1978, p.213)

A changing body and diminished physical capacity only serves to remind individuals that they are entering a new period of their lives that brings them one step closer to old age. Strikingly, for the modern American Jew, mid-life occurs close to the median age of parents of children who are B/Mitzvah. (Salkin, 1996, p.35)

At this time in their life, external reminders of mortality increase, as well. While loss is part of life at any point, by the late thirties to early forties the probability of loss increases dramatically. (Levinson, 1978, p.214)¹⁷ The B/Mitzvah's parents own parents, often now in their sixties and seventies, are more likely to be dealing with issues such as retirement, illness or death. Therefore, as they enter middle age, their own parents may increasingly call upon them and become increasingly more dependent upon them for assistance in integrating the losses and changes that come with entering old age.

People in their midlife years often face confusing or just plain sad situations with their parents. Many people in their midlife years will lose one or both parents to death. For some, this will be their first encounter with the death of a loved one. (Baab, 1999, p.57)

¹⁷ I recently heard from a friend whose father is dying. He commented that his father's illness not only saddens him but it also makes him suddenly begin to realize that, although he is only 50, he is feeling remarkably old.

As an individual enters middle age, "a lot more people, it seems, are dying or getting seriously ill. There are more accidents and heart attacks, more divorces, depressions, alcoholism, job failures, troubles with children or parents, suffering of all kinds." (Levinson, 1978, p.214) All of these experiences cause the individual to notice these problems more in others and to identify with these losses as their own.

Thus, due to a convergence of timing, the B/Mitzvah is not only a public coming of age for the child but for the parents, as well. It ushers in a new stage of life and it this new stage, a new series of challenges, struggles and opportunities. Not only do individual parents change, but their relationships with one another and within their family change as well. In fact, in many cases, the B/Mitzvah is the first time parents are throwing the party celebrating a life event rather than their parents' hosting it on their behalf. Thus, for many parents, the B/Mitzvah is a "coming-out party" in which they show their family and friends what they have accomplished. In a very real way, the B/Mitzvah is the parents' invitation to "move from the children's table and sit at the adult table". Yet this powerful transition is often all but overlooked.

Grandparents Enter Old Age

For grandparents the changes are no less real or powerful. At a B/Mitzvah, Jewish grandparents are able to celebrate the achievement of

their grandchildren and, through them, affirm their own commitment to Judaism and the Jewish community. Yet the event itself may make them acutely aware of the flow of time and their own aging. This is particularly true since their grandchild's coming of age often coincides with their own retirement, the possibility of moving and the increase of illness and death for themselves or their peer group. (Preto, 1989, p.257) Thus,

Among the tasks of families in later life are adjustments to retirement, which not only may create the obvious vacuum for the retiring person, but may put special strain on a marriage that until then has been balanced in different spheres. Financial insecurity and dependence are also special difficulties, especially for family members who value managing for themselves. And, while loss of friends and relatives is particularly difficult at this phase, the loss of a spouse is the most difficult adjustment, with its problems of reorganizing one's entire life alone after many years as a couple and of having fewer relationships to help replace the loss. (McGoldrick and Carter, 1989, p.19-20)

As people reach this age they begin to ask a new set of life questions. They ask, "How did my life matter?" "Was my time well spent?" "What did I mean to others? "What can I look back on with pride?" "Did I love the right people?" (Pipher, 1999, p.16) The answers to these questions may have deep and profound impact on their lives. In addition, this period is marked by a change in status for individuals. This is true both within the family and the larger society, as well. (McGoldrick and Carter, 1989, p.20) An inability to make this shift in status is reflected, at one extreme, in the inability of some individuals to relinquish power, and, at the other extreme, in an over-

¹⁸ This may, in fact, be one of the root causes of the anxiety many parents feel.

dependence upon the next generation. (McGoldrick and Carter, 1989, p.20)
Thus,

for the individual who retires, particularly for men in our society, there is a loss of meaningful job roles, productivity, and relationships that have been central throughout adult life. Whether retirement was desired or forced will affect the adjustment. Loss of the role as family provider and a likely income reduction may bring additional stress. Working women may experience less difficulty with their own retirement if they maintain role continuity as homemakers. Wives in traditional marriages often have greater difficulty with their husbands' retirement, which may bring loss of job-related stress and social network. Residential change at retirement adds further dislocation and loss of connectedness with family, neighbors, and community. The transition involves reorientation of values and goals and a redirection of energies. (Walsh, 1989, p.314)

In addition,

illness is a prominent concern to most older adults. Fears of loss of physical and mental functioning, of chronic painful ailment, and of progressively degenerating condition are common preoccupations ever though most elders to maintain good health. Physical and mental deterioration may be exacerbated by depression, helplessness, and fears of loss of control. (Walsh, 1989, p.318)

There is, however, a new landscape for aging in our society. While people are living longer, the physical and emotional distance that has become the hallmark of modernity have separated the generations more than ever before. Therefore, as individuals move from what Mary Pipher (1999) refers to as "young old-age" to "old old-age", they may find themselves lacking the emotional and physical support received by prior generations of elderly. Pipher (1999) notes that while many people are living longer and healthier lives, those individuals who are unhealthy are living longer, as well. Often, they live in isolation. She observes that,

bodies last longer than brains, support systems, or savings accounts. We don't have the resources, the rituals or the institutions to make our old feel like elders. (Pipher, 1999, p.17)

At this age, many people are, for the first time, considering the need, whether imminent or somewhere in the future, for nursing care. The sense of loss and fear sparked by merely considering the question must not be minimized. Pipher notes that the impact of these modern changes touches all generations.

Many [older] people in rest homes or even in their own homes or apartments had almost no contact with anyone but other old people and/or their caregivers. Meanwhile, all over America we have young children hungry for "lap-time" and older children who need skills, nurturing, and moral instruction from their elders... Children play with cyberpets while old women stare out their windows at empty streets. Grandparents feel lonely and useless while a thousand miles away their grandchildren are not getting the love and attention they desperately need." (Pipher, 1999, p11)

Such ageism remains prevalent in our society. McGoldrick and Carter (1989) observe that, "because older age is totally devalued in our culture, family members of the middle generation often do not know how to make the appropriate shift in relational status with their parents. (McGoldrick and Carter, 1989, p.20) The B/Mitzvah of an eldest grandchild may be the first time that this inability to adjust becomes manifest. It is for these reasons, whether they are conscious of it or not, the B/Mitzvah can be a bitter/sweet event for grandparents.

Conclusion

For the child, the parents and the grandparents, while the developmental transition is a natural occurrence, it still carries with it a degree of anxiety and stress that is highlighted by the public ritual marking a change in status. If left unspoken and unrecognized, these powerful feelings will be expressed elsewhere while their root cause will be left unexamined. If, however, a safe space is created for discussing these issues, the door to increased growth and reduced suffering is opened to them. In addition, many times the individuals experiencing these strong feelings think that they are alone and unique. Through the educative component of this counseling model, participants will learn that such transitional stresses and conflicts are natural and common.

Systemic Perspective

While understanding the individual changes and transitions each member of the family is experiencing is important, it must not be forgotten that these transitions are occurring in the context of a larger unit-- the family. It is therefore helpful, if not imperative, to look at what is taking place in the larger context, as well. Nancy Garcia Preto (1989) observes that,

adolescence demands structural shifts and the re-negotiation of roles in families involving at least three generations of relatives. Adolescent demands for more autonomy and independence tend to precipitate shifts in relationships across generations." (Preto, 1989, p.256)

Moreover, she notes that,

the adaptation in family structure and organization required to handle the tasks of adolescence are so basic that the family itself is transformed from a unit that protects and nurtures young children to one that is a preparation center for the adolescent's entrance into the world of adult responsibility and commitments. This family metamorphosis involves profound shifts in relationship patterns across the generations, and while it may be signaled initially by the adolescent's physical maturity, it often parallels and coincides with changes in parents as they enter midlife and with major transformations faced by grandparents in old age. (Preto, 1989, p.255)

Without a doubt, there are multiple layers of transitions taking place in a family whose eldest child is becoming B/Mitzvah. These changes take place for each individual in the family system, and for the system as a whole. Hence,

It is not uncommon for parents and grandparents to redefine their relationship during this period, as well as for spouses to renegotiate their marriage, and for siblings to question their position in the family. (Preto, 1989, p.256)¹⁹

It is also not uncommon for the pressures and stresses of this time to crossgenerational boundaries.

The impact of this life-cycle event upon the family system was not entirely lost on the ancient rabbis. Traditionally, at his son's B/Mitzvah, a father would recite the prayer *Baruch she-petarani me-onsho shel zeh-* "Blessed is the One Who has now freed me from responsibility for this one". While most scholars interpret this as the father's no longer being responsible for the boy's transgressions (Salkin, 1996, p.7), the blessing itself indicates an understanding that the B/Mitzvah of a child is a transition whose impact

¹⁹ For siblings, while not the focus of this project, the transition may be no less profound. Not only is their older sibling the focus of attention throughout the B/Mitzvah preparation, but as family position begins to shift their place and function in the family may be no less affected than any one else's.

extends beyond the bounds of the child himself. Yet, as previously noted, the overwhelming focus of energy surrounding B/Mitzvah is directly on the child.

This blessing also indicates a major shift in the meaning and impact of the B/Mitzvah. In the past, the B/Mitzvah was truly considered an adult and was offered the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of adulthood. It was for this reason that the father would offer a blessing of release from his parental responsibilities. As a ritual marking a change in status, the B/Mitzvah was a clear demarcation of the shift in responsibility. Today, the B/Mitzvah does not mark the entrance into adulthood so much as the start of the passage into adulthood. The child is still a child, and his/her parents are still responsible for him/her. Rather than offering a clear demarcation of responsibility as it once did, the B/Mitzvah now marks a time when roles and responsibilities are in flux and boundaries are shifting. At the extreme, B/Mitzvah creates confusion in the new adolescent who receives competing messages of dependence and independence from the very same ritual.

There is a particular religious ritual that has become part of many B/Mitzvah services, which is symbolic of much of the change occurring within the family. This ritual consists of passing the Torah from great-grandparents, to grandparents, to parents until it is finally passed to the young person becoming B/Mitzvah. This ritual is a physical demonstration of the passing from one generation to the next not only of tradition and values, but of position within the family, as well. On the one hand this provides each new generation with the foundation and anchoring to go forward. On the other

hand, each generation must break free of the past and find it's own way in the world. This process of breaking away often results in a certain degree of conflict with prior generations.

This tension between the teachings and traditions of the past generation and the need of the current generation to seek its own path is nothing new. As Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer-- the founder of the Hasidic movement in the late 19th century taught:

Why do we say: "Our God and the God of our fathers"? There are two kinds of people who believe in God. One believes because he has taken over the faith of his fathers, and his faith is strong. The other has arrived at faith through thinking and studying. The difference between them is this: The advantage of the first is that, no matter what arguments may be brought against it, his faith cannot be shaken: his faith is firm because it was taken over from his fathers. But there is one flaw in it: he has faith only in response to the command of man, and he has acquired it without studying and thinking for himself. The advantage of the second is that, because he found God through much thinking, he has arrived at a faith of his own. But here too there is a flaw: it is easy to shake his faith by refuting it through evidence. But he who unites both kinds of faith is invincible. And so we say "Our God" with reference to our studies and "God of our fathers" with an eye to tradition. The same interpretation has been given to our saying "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob" and not "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" for this indicates that Isaac and Jacob did not merely take over the tradition of Abraham; they themselves searched for God. (Buber, 1947, p.14)

Thus, the Baal Shem Tov teaches that this prayer encapsulates the struggle within the individual adolescent, and the entire family, to strike a balance between inheriting meanings from the past and creating or discovering them for oneself. The process of change in adolescence from mere inheritance to discovery often evokes an emotional crisis.

On a psychological level, the passing of the Torah also provides an analogy through symbol of the way in which emotional patterns and stresses are passed from one generation to the next. Parents of a child entering adolescence, however, often find themselves revisiting their own adolescence. Un-addressed patterns the parents themselves experienced growing up with their parents may be unconsciously repeated. Parents may try to compensate for their own unresolved adolescent struggles through their child however, healing one's own wounds, and compensating for one's own wounds through others, is rarely successful. Actively and directly raising some of these issues creates the opportunity for parents to address their own unresolved issues on an adult level rather than through their child or the event.

Case 2

R's B/Mitzvah was one month away. While he had been working hard, the work had been a struggle and he was far behind. Not only was R dealing with the study material and the stresses of adolescence, but he was still adjusting to his father's having abandoned the family. In addition, R was anticipating the imminent death of his maternal grandmother. R struggled through his lesson looking more desperate with each moment.

D-- R, you seem really stressed.

R-- It is just too much to do.

D-- Are you working hard?

R—Absolutely-- every day for an hour and a half. It is just too much. I have another portion of the Torah to learn and I haven't started my Haftarah yet.

D-- What if you focused on polishing what you have done and don't read your Haftarah in Hebrew at all. You can do it in English.

R-- (Relief on face) Oh that would be great! Thanks. Now I can do everything else better.

(The next day R called me.)

R-- I need my Haftarah on a tape.

D-- I thought you were going to focus on everything but your Haftarah.

R-- Well, my mom wants me to do it.

(An hour later T, R's mother called.)

T-- He's got to do his Haftarah- his grandfather wants it. As it is his grandfather is angry that the Haftarah is not chanted at our synagogue. He's screaming at me that 'You Reform Jews don't know what you are doing'. I'm getting it from all sides. And we need to talk-- R's Torah portion deals with a husband's sending his wife away. R's father abandoned him last year-- and R is having a hard time dealing with it. The speech he wrote is just not good in this context.

(As we talked it became clear that it was T who was having the hardest time dealing with it. R was actually quite pleased with the speech he had written on his portion.)

Each member of the family had an agenda that put stresses on the other generations. The grandfather had an agenda related to the traditionalism of the B/Mitzvah. T was stressed about the familial issues related to her divorce. R wanted to please both parents and was scared to death by the B/Mitzvah itself. In the process, neither of the adults was thinking about the emotional or spiritual needs of the other two. Preto observes that,

because adolescent demands are so strong, they often serve as a catalyst for reactivating emotional issues and they set triangles in motion. The struggle to meet these demands often brings to the surface unresolved conflicts between parents and grandparents, or between the parents themselves. Requests for greater autonomy and independence, for example often stir fears of loss and rejection in parents, especially if, during adolescence, they felt rejected of abandoned by their own parents. (Preto, 1989, p.256)

This is particularly the case for parents who made a conscious effort to raise their child differently from the ways they themselves had been raised. Their desire to "fix" the perceived errors of their parents in their own upbringing are often frustrated when their child enters into conflict with them. As parents try to respond to their adolescent's conflicts,

efforts to ameliorate the tension often repeat earlier patterns of relating in the parents' family of origin. Parents who have made a conscious effort to raise their child differently by avoiding the same 'mistakes' their parents made often have a particularly rude awakening. When their children reach adolescence, they are often surprised to observe similarities in personality between their children and their parents. (Preto, 1989, p.256)

The intergenerational conflict during this time can be profound. Preto observes that the stress felt by one individual or generation in the family may be "transmitted both up and down the generations". She observes that, for example,

the conflict between parents and grandparents may have a negative effect on the marital relationship that filters down into the relationship between the parents and the adolescent. Or the conflicts may travel in the opposite direction. A conflict between the parents and the adolescent may affect the marital relationship, which ultimately affect's the relationship between the parents and grandparents. (Preto, 1989, p.257)

The Work of Edwin Friedman

Edwin Friedman, a rabbi and a family therapist, did groundbreaking work in applying the family systems model developed by his teacher Murray Bowen to religious rituals and ceremonies. He notes that most often when we attempt to understand rites of passage we focus either on the culture that Provides the rite or on the individuals who are passing from one stage of life

into another. In his dual role as rabbi and therapist, Friedman came to the conclusion that not only is the family an integral part of the rite of passage but, "it is probably correct to say that it is really the family that is making the transition to a new stage of life at such time rather than any 'identified member' focused upon during the occasion." (Friedman, 1989, p.119) The child becoming B/Mitzvah may appear to be the focal point of the B/Mitzvah, but in reality, the entire family is undergoing an equally powerful transition. Friedman notes that in the months preceding a life-cycle ritual the entire family system seems to go into flux and it is possible to open doors into relationships and initiate changes that might have seemed impossible at other times. Thus the life-cycle moment itself becomes a fertile environment for examining possibilities for change and reassessment.

Friedman takes this approach one step further when he notes that the timing of life-cycle rituals is anything but arbitrary. Rather they are usually, "the coming to fruition or culmination of family processes that have been moving toward those ends for some time. (Friedman, 1989, p.120) From the perspective of B/Mitzvah, the ritual occurs at the exact time when developmentally both the individuals and the entire family system are undergoing significant changes. As such, Friedman observes, the ceremony is not in itself efficacious, but rather it is celebratory of changes that are occurring organically regardless of the presence of a specific ritual. The effect of the ritual is determined by what has already been developing within the family system and the impacted individuals. The ceremony, however,

provides a focus for the events, and brings the family members into conscious contact with one another. Friedman notes that,

on the one hand, therefore, the celebration event itself can be a very useful occasion for meeting people and putting people together, for reestablishing relationships, for learning about the family (both by observation and by hearing tales), for creating transitions, as in leadership, or for the opportunity to function outside or against one's normal role... On the other hand, my experience with rites of passage suggests that the more important time for becoming involved with one's family is in the months before and after the celebration, using the event more as an excuse for reentry. (Friedman, 1989, p.124-125)

Such an interventionist approach can not only allow a family to approach a rite of passage with greater ease and less anxiety, but it can engender a process through which "the crises these events precipitate become golden opportunities for inducing change in otherwise stable dysfunctional relationship patterns" (Friedman, 1989, p.126). Friedman refers to these moments as "hinges of time" (Friedman, 1989, p.120). As such, they connect one period in life to the next. Friedman asserts that by increasing the awareness that each individual in the family may be making a transition and that the entire family system may be undergoing significant changes, allows the "natural healing power" of life-cycle ceremonies to be released. (Friedman, 1989, p.125)

In applying his perspective to adolescence and the B/Mitzvah,

Friedman makes a number of observations. First, he notes that "something as obviously individual, no less child focused, is really very much a family rite."

Second, he theorizes that increasing the awareness of the entire family to this fact "actually increased the effectiveness of the passage." (Friedman, 1989,

p.140) For Friedman the power of this lifecycle moment in Jewish life, the B/mitzvah, comes from

the force of family togetherness: All the family intensity, the problems with relatives, the unspoken feelings, the pressure to relate that many individuals spend much of the year trying to avoid, become unavoidable.... [for Jewish families] around a B/Mitzvah. (Friedman, 1989, p.141)

He notes that this is not dissimilar to the impact of Christmas on Christian families. He further notes that heightened dysfunction occurs at both times, often resulting in an increase in divorce, suicide or emotional or physical breakdowns.

Friedman's work is based on a paradigm for understanding human dynamics known as family systems theory. Family systems theory looks at the family as an entirety. It conceptualizes interlocking relationships within the family. (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1996, p.167) and begins from the assumption that families are "inextricably interconnected." (McGoldrick and Gerson, 1999, p.6-7). Thus, according to this understanding of family dynamics,

rather than functioning as autonomous psychological entities, individual family members are inextricably tied in thinking, feeling and behavior to the family relationship system. (Ibid p.168)

What happens to one member of a family has a direct, although not always predictable, impact on every other member of the family. Thus, in a family neither people nor their problems, anxiety or solutions exist in a vacuum. While problems or anxiety may manifest themselves in one individual or one part of the system at a given time, a family systems perspective assumes that

these reflect the system's adaptation to its total context at that moment. While one individual may be presenting a problem, he may have taken the weight of the entire family's anxiety upon himself, thereby relieving the rest of the system of the burden of anxiety. Addressing the individual's anxiety will only help temporarily, since the anxiety does not belong to him alone, but rather is coming from a wide variety of sources. Of Moreover, the adaptive efforts of the system reverberate throughout many levels of a system--from the biological to the intra-psychic to the interpersonal, i.e., nuclear and extended family, community, culture and beyond." (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberg, 1999, p.7-8)

At a minimum, family systems theory considers families over the span of three generations. This three-generation approach assumes that an emotional dynamic, particularly a trauma, will remain in the emotional system of a family for at least three generations. (Papero, 1990) ²¹ For example, alcoholism in one generation may appear not to be present in the children but will manifest itself in the grandchildren. Similarly, a murder in one generation may have an impact on the family two generations later. Only by looking at the entire family can these connections and patterns be seen and the "true"

²⁰ Family systems thinking began with the realization that, taken out of his family a schizophrenic person might improve, only to relapse once returned to the family context.

This is uncanny in light of the Biblical warning from God that, "I will visit the sins of the parents upon the children to the third and fourth generation.... () While the authors of the Bible were not familiar with family Systems Theory, it is not unlikely that they had observed a similar phenomena in families that emotional processes are passed form one generation to the next.

source of the problem determined. In addition, the three-generation perspective is significant since,

families repeat themselves. What happens in one generation will often repeat itself in the next; that is, the same issues tend to be played out from generation to generation, though the actual behavior may take a variety of forms. (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberg, 1999, p.8)

The patterns of one generation may be explicit or implicit models for family functioning into future generations. While patterns may have been adaptive in one generation, in successive generations they may become the source of dysfunction.²² This "multigenerational transmission" (Bowen 1978) of repeating emotional processes can transmit anxiety from one generation to the next. (McGoldrick and Gerson, 1999, p.8)

In addition to multi-generational transmission, a number of specific aspects of family systems theory are significant for our purposes.

Emotional Triangling

Bowen theorized that two-person relationships tend to be strikingly unstable. (Bowen 1978) In order to find stability the parties tend to bring a third person or object into the relationship and thereby create a coalition. For this reason, the basic "unit" of an emotional system tends to be a triangle. While stabilizing the system, triangles short-circuit direct communication, trap anxiety and reduce intimacy.²³ When anxiety is low in a system and external conditions are relatively calm, the dyad, two-person relationship, may be

enough to manage the emotions of the relationship. When the system is placed under stress, however, such as when a major family life-cycle event approaches, the dyad may no longer be able to handle the emotions. (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1996, p.173) At such times, "the twosome may 'reach out' and pull in the other person, the emotions may 'overflow' to the third person, or that person may be emotionally, 'programmed' to initiate involvement." (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1996, p.173) Moreover, Goldenberg and Goldenberg observe that,

Should anxiety in the triangle increase, one person in the triangle may involve another outsider, and so forth until a number of people are involved. Sometimes such triangulation can reach beyond the family, ultimately encompassing social agencies or the courts. (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1996, p.173)

Thus, the anxiety in a family may increase as a B/Mitzvah approaches. In the process, a series of triangles may manifest themselves that include, but are not exclusive to, the synagogue, the service, a specific ritual within the service or the clergy. Awareness of triangles, and, at times, describing, highlighting and then "de-triangling" them, creates a potential for healing the system and lowering the anxiety.

<u>Differentiation of Self</u>

Differentiation of the self speaks of the degree to which an individual is able to distinguish between the intellectual process and the feeling process he/she experiences. In other words, the more differentiated a self is, the greater one's ability to avoid having his/her behavior result automatically from

the drive of feelings. (Kerr and Bowen, 1978) Thus, "a differentiated person is able to separate thinking from feeling and remain independent of, though not out of contact with, the nuclear and extended family." (Nichols and Schwartz, 1991, p.373) No one is fully individuated, rather, there is a continuum of individuation. Where one falls on this continuum depends, in large measure, upon the course of his/her family history. The degree of differentiation of self can best be observed in an individual and a family at times of anxiety, such as a B/Mizvah, Thus, Papero observes,

To the degree that one can thoughtfully guide personal behavior in accordance with well-defined principles in spite of intense anxiety in the family, he or she displays a level or degree of differentiation. (Papero, 1990, p.48)

Emotional Fusion

Emotional fusion is the opposite extreme on the continuum from differentiation of the self. People at this low end of the scale are dominated by the feelings of those around them and are so fearful and emotionally needy that they sacrifice their individuality in order to ensure acceptance from others. (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1996, p.171) The greater the fusion between ones emotions and intellect, the more that person is fused to the emotional reactions of other people." (Nichols and Schwartz, 1991, p.376) Thus, fusion is the way "that people borrow or lend a self to another." (Kerr and Bowen, 1988, p.346)

Like differentiation of the self, emotional fusion is transmitted from one generation to the next. When one is emotionally fused emotions flood the intellect and impair the ability to function rationally and with a high degree of

competence. (Nichols and Schwartz, 1991, p.376) "Emotional fusion consists of tense interconnection and dependent attachment, overtly expressed or reactively rejected. Both the clinging, dependent person and the aloof, isolated one are equally caught up in emotional fusion; they merely manifest it in different ways." (Nichols and Schwartz, 1991, p.376) Bowen observed that individuals tend to choose mates who are at equal levels of undifferentiation. (Kerr and Bowen, 1988) Emotional fusion often becomes manifest as the system enters into periods of stress such as a B/Mitzvah.

Emotional Distance

McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger observe that there

are many types of relationship patterns in families. Of particular interest are patterns of relational distance. People may be very close or very distant or somewhere in between. At one extreme are family members who are very distant from or in conflict with each other. The family may become so distant that it breaks apart. At the other extreme are families who seem stuck together in 'emotional fusion.' Family members in fused or poorly differentiated relationships are vulnerable to dysfunction, which tends to occur when the level of stress or anxiety exceeds the system's capacity to deal with it." (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.10)

During times of stress key family relationships will undergo tremendous transition in regard to the degree of emotional distance. This is especially the case at points of life-cycle transition. Moreover,

symptoms tend to cluster around such transitions in the family life cycle, when family members face the task of reorganizing their relationships with one another in order to go on to the next phase." (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.10)

At the time of B/Mitzvah, the emotional distance among all members of the family is in flux, it is not uncommon for increased stress to result as old emotional patterns are abandoned and the family reorganizes.

Identified Patient

Family Systems Theory suggests that any number of emotions can be transferred from one experience and focused elsewhere. When these emotions are placed upon an individual s/he is known as either the Identified Patient (IP) or the Index Person. (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.3) In this case, generalized stress, anxiety, along with parents' unresolved adolescent experiences, unresolved dynamics with parents or clergy may be focused on one individual within the system in order to relieve the entire system of the burden of carrying the weight of the anxiety. In many families this manifests itself in the child's becoming B/Mitzvah or on the event itself. While this may affect immediate relief from the stress, it closes off opportunities for dealing with the actual cause of the stress, thereby reducing the opportunity for growth and learning. Until the Identified Patient is depathologized and the real issues brought to light, the system remains in crisis where learning and growth cannot take place. In the case of a B/Mitzvah, the IP may be the child, the service or some aspect of the day that becomes the focus of the system's anxiety.

Anxiety²⁴

Family Systems Theory assumes that chronic anxiety is omnipresent throughout life. "While it may manifest itself differently and with different degrees of intensity, depending on specific family situation and differing cultural considerations, chronic anxiety is an inevitable part of nature..."

(Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1996, p.168) Moreover, the anxiety of one generation may be transmitted to future generations and continue to impact the lives of family members. (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.8) In fact, "unresolved issues in earlier phases of the lifecycle lead to more difficult transitions and complexities in later life-cycle stages." (McGoldrick, 1989, p. 169) Anxiety is particularly aroused as members within a family struggle with the dual tug of togetherness and individualism. (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1996, p.169) It will then particularly manifest itself at moments when the family is stressed.

Anyone who has worked with even a single family approaching

B/Mitzvah appreciates the power of the anxiety it evokes. Otherwise "normal"

people may become reactive and unreasonable as the date for the B/Mitzvah

approaches and their anxiety increases. Anxiety that is otherwise hidden

becomes overt as the members of the family struggle with the tension

between family togetherness and personal individuation. However, as noted

above, the individual manifesting the anxiety, or the specific focus of the

²⁴ Gary Ahlskog defines anxiety as, "...a generic term not limited to nervousness or 'butterflies in the stomach.' It refers to any signal of psychic

anxiety, be it an individual or an aspect of the event itself, is not necessarily the true cause or seat of the anxiety. Since the family is functioning as a unity, the anxiety from one cause may become attached elsewhere in the system. The clinician must be careful not to assume that the observable or reported focus of the anxiety (the presenting problem) can be accepted at face value.

Rather than speak in terms of anxiety, Davis uses the term stress to describe the heightened sense of agitation many families encounter while preparing for a B/Mitzvah. She notes that there are two kinds of stress that enter into the B/Mitzvah process. Healthy stress is "the kind that is inherent in all life-cycle rituals. It comes from the pressure of our biological clocks and the pressures of the performance." (Davis, 1998, p.17) Davis observes that parents anticipating a B/Mitzvah simultaneously confront three sources of healthy stress-- the changes taking place for the child, the changes taking place for the parents, and the parents confronting their own unresolved spiritual questions as heir child prepares to affirm his/her Jewish identity.

Some families, though, encounter unhealthy stress as a result of the

myths and doubts we carry around in our heads about bar/bat mitzvah. The myths are the unspoken assumptions about right and wrong ways to 'do' a bar/bat mitzvah. They are the 'shoulds' we keep measuring ourselves against: this should be easier; this should be harder; we should be more religious; our child should be more enthusiastic; we should be making a different kind of party; our parents should be more supportive; and so on and so on." (Davis, 1998, p.18)

A central source of unhealthy stress, Davis observes, is the myth that B/Mitzvah should be enjoyable and should not cause high levels of stress,

discomfort which a person is unable to specify further without self-

confusion or conflict. Therefore the counseling will seek to normalize healthy stress and to identify and diffuse unhealthy stress.

<u>Genograms</u>

Genograms are a visual snapshot of the family constellation over three generations. These pictorial representations are a significant tool for evaluation and assessment in family therapy. The importance of a genogram for understanding the family derives from the fact that

the family life-cycle is a complex phenomenon. It is a spiral of family evolution as generations move through time in their development from birth to death. One might compare this family process to music, in which the meaning of individual notes depends on their rhythms in conjunction with each other and with the memories of past melodies and the anticipation of those yet to come. Genograms are graphic pictures of the family history and pattern, showing the basic structure, family demographics, functioning and relationships. They are shorthand used to depict the family patterns at a glance. (McGoldrick and Gerson, 1989, p.164)

Genograms can reveal aspects of family life that have been hidden, either consciously or unconsciously. Family secrets have a tendency to bar true communication and damage the capacity for intimacy. And revelations of secrets can "help families understand their current dilemmas and provide solutions for the future." (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1989, p.4) Family systems theory teaches that "coincidences of historical events or of concurrent events in different parts of a family are viewed not as random happenings but as a series of occurrences that may be interconnected systemically, though the connections may be hidden from view." (McGoldrick,

exploration." (Ahlskog, 2000, p.37)

Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.10) Through a genogram, family events that seemed to be random, can suddenly take on a clear pattern.

While similar in appearance, genograms are fundamentally different from family genealogy trees. While family trees record demographic information, family history and family stories, the genogram concerns itself with family trends and the family emotional processes across three generations. (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.188)

(Details on the creation of a genogram can be found in Appendix A.)

The genogram is a useful mechanism for encouraging people to "step outside of themselves" and observe their family from a less emotion-laden perspective. The paradox of the genogram is that while it depicts the emotional system of the family, its creation serves to buffer people from it. The genogram shifts the participants away from individualistic thinking and encourages the individual or family to begin thinking about the family system as a whole. (McGoldrick, Gerson, Shellenberg, 1999, p.149) It "conveys a major systemic assumption: that all family members are involved in whatever happens to any members" and suggests the "ongoing connectedness of the family, with both past and the future." (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.149) In a culture as individualistic and psychoanalytically oriented as ours, people are unaccustomed to thinking in systemic terms about their family. The genogram is a relatively nonthreatening means of shifting the focus from the singular to the familial. It shifts the focus from the IP (Identified Patient/Index Person) and encourages

people to look for patterns instead of individual problems. Once someone sees one family pattern, in fact, they tend to find additional patterns for themselves. (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.4)

Moreover, the genogram interview provides a framework for discussion that is relatively anxiety free. The process of gathering material for the genogram "facilitates building rapport with family members by exploring their relationships around key family traditions and issues of specific concern to the family." (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.149) It allows all parties involved to "partner" with one another in a project. Creating a genogram "becomes a collaborative task that empowers family members, since they are the experts on their own history and the therapist is only the recorder and witness of it." (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.10) Meanwhile, the interview provides a structure for gathering information on major family experiences and may "provide almost instant access to complex, emotionally loaded family material" in a "relatively non-threatening way." (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.150) In addition, it allows family members to make observations about their family, rather than the clinician having to point it out.

The focus of the genogram is to clarify family patterns by collecting and organizing information in a way that is easily accessible. (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.157) moreover, they are "an important tool for reframing behavior, relationships, and time connections in the family, and for

'detoxifying' and normalizing the family's perception of itself. (McGoldrick, Gerson and Shellenberger, 1999, p.157)

The applicability of the genogram for this project is tremendous. First, the genogram allows for a focus during the initial session. In addition, it may help lower the initial anxiety. Most participants in the program will come in with the dual stress of dealing with B/Mitzvah and meeting with the rabbi. The genogram can thus become a separate focus. By its very nature, the genogram will both allow and encourage the parents to begin thinking about the B/Mitzvah and their lives from a systemic perspective. In a graphic form laid out before them, they will see the flow of the generations. Often, a genogram can "provide families with their first inkling of intergenerational family relationship patterns." (Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 1996, p.182) The applicability of employing a genogram for this project is captured by McGoldrick and Gerson who write that

once the children reach adolescence, the task is to prepare the family for a qualitative change in the relationships between the generations, as the children are no longer so dependent on their parents. During this period triangles are likely to develop involving the adolescents, their peers, and their parents, or the adolescents, their parents and their grandparents. The genogram often reveals the family boundaries and multigenerational patterns that are predictive of how easily the family will adjust to this phase. (McGoldrick and Gerson, 1989, p.174)

Thus, a genogram allows all of the previously described dynamics, from triangles to emotional distance, to emerge.

Psychodynamic Principles

There are two key psychodynamic principles that must be mentioned.

The first is transference, the second object relations and intimacy.

Transference

Transference is one of Freud's most significant contributions to the understanding of human dynamics. It

may be referred to as the universal tendency to experience present relationships under the sway of past relational experience and conflict. Modes of perceiving, conceiving, and relating with a person are influenced by the effects of other, past, significant relationships, particularly those in which unresolved conflict exists." (Shafranske, 1993, p117)

In a practical sense, transference is "a client's way of showing you what cannot be said directly." (Ahlskog, 2000, p.34) It is not, as is popularly believed, a repetition of a real reaction to a real person from the individual's past, but rather, is a "complex relationship between fantasy and reality, conscious and unconscious dynamics…" (Ahlskog, 2000, p.34)

One suspects that positive transference is taking place when the client/congregant feels closer to, more secure with or more positive about the clinician/clergy person than actual experience might warrant. Ahlskog notes,

clients are transferring—carrying into the room with you—their standard expectation that they will be better off keeping up a good front, saying the right thing, and protecting themselves against the dreaded possibility of being misunderstood or unappreciated. Most often this position contains the assumption that you are an *authority* in whose presence only "correct" ideas should be expressed, or else clients have *idealized* you and assume that the most important thing is to look good in your eyes. (Ahlskog, 2000, p.35)

Similarly, when the feelings of the client/congregant run more negative than actual experience warrants, the clinician/clergy-person might suspect that negative transference is occurring. Thus, "negative transference refers to distortions that disrupt relatedness and progress toward achieving goals in the present because a prior set of unrelated needs interferes." (Akers and Ahlskog, 2000, p.118) In both types of transference, the client/congregant experiences feelings that originate in past life experiences but have been transferred to the current encounter with the clinician/clergy-person. Stephen J. Rossetti and Wilfrid L. Pilette describe the role transference may play when it involves a member of the clergy writing,

When a priest appears in public, he finds himself the object of many intense emotions. Some believe he is a special person who must be close to God. When these people are with him, they try to be good. Others have been scarred by years of abuse by their fathers or by painful encounters with Church leaders in the past. For these people, the priest may symbolize the abuse they experienced. He may become the focus of their rage.

All of these strong emotions can be experienced by people before the priest even opens his mouth. They may not have met him before-- as a human being, he may be a complete stranger. But they are not looking at his face or the expression in his eyes. They are looking at his Roman collar. (Rossetti and Pilette, 1992, p.11)

Even when the transference is less apparent it may be quite active, manifesting itself in the assumption by congregants that certain topics are taboo when speaking with clergy. (Ahlskog, 2000, p.35) Akers and Ahlskog aptly note that, "Sometimes clergy are prone to lamenting these situations instead of recognizing an opportunity for pastoral care." (Akers and Ahlskog, 2000, p.118)

Countertransference, on the other hand, is a similar process experienced by the clergy or therapist. It is not, as is often believed, anything the therapist feels relating to the client (Ahlskog, 2000, p.36), but rather, refers to "what you [the therapist or clergy] unwittingly show the client from your own interior, unrelated to the client's concerns." (Ahlskog, 2000, p.36) Countertransference occurs when the clergy or therapist neglects to contain his/her feelings and shows them to the individual or couple through word or action. This becomes problematic in that it conflicts with the client's own process. (Ahlskog, 2000, p.36-37)

Intimacy and the Marital Relationship

There are many theories about mate selection. According to one perspective, people choose, and marry, their mate in order to gain some dimension that they are lacking or, from a psychoanalytic perspective, have repressed. Thus,

individuals marry in order to do something to, or for, themselves; to grow, to leave home, to have an umbrella to shelter themselves from the world's worst rains, to take a piggyback ride toward a better future. (Stahmann and Hiebert, 1997, p.24)

The process whereby two individuals partner and create an emotional bond begins long before they wed and, ideally, continues throughout their marriage. However, externals such as a wedding, cohabitating or even procreating, are neither a reflection of, nor an indication of the degree of intimacy within the relationship. In fact,

it is likely... for a couple to be married already, psychologically speaking, before they possess a marriage license. It is also possible for a couple to have a legal marriage but not be or ever to have been married psychologically. (Stahmann and Hiebert, 1997, p.32)

Often, internal factors of one or both of the partners, will impact the degree of intimacy they can achieve and maintain. An understanding of "object-relations" theory" can be guite useful when working with, couples. Object-relations theory is the bridge between the individualistic approach taken by classical psychoanalysis and the family system approach. (Nichols, 1988, p.49) Objectrelations theory deals with issues of human relatedness, development, and motivation, beginning with an understanding of the ways in which the infant relates to its primary nurturer and the ways in which the infant deals with the discovery that it is a separate entity from its nurturer. Finally, it suggests that, "the patterns of relating and the internalized residues of the early experiences, as developed subsequently, provide the basis for later intimate relationships." (Nichols, 1988, p.49) According to object- relations theory we need to carry our early experiences as a means to keep continuity with early childhood and as a means to maintain a sense of "continuity with the past and thus to have a basis for present functioning and relating." (Nichols, 1988, p.49) This is accomplished by carrying early experiences in our minds as memories or internal objects. "Good objects" are the internalized memories of external experiences of pleasure and satisfaction. Such experiences had the capacity to satisfy our inner needs and are thus maintained as positive. "Bad objects", on the other hand, are those early childhood experiences that occurred when we needed a person but they were not there to satisfy us.

Whether they died, disappeared, ceased to love us or were merely unavailable at the time, we experienced their absence as frustration or rejection. In such a situation,

That person or object is internalized in a more fundamental and vital sense than is memory. The person experiencing the frustration or rejection is emotionally identified with the internalized object. We thus construct an inner psychic world that replicates the original frustrating and unhappy situation. Linked to the bad object, we continue to feel deprived and unhappy and have a temptation to project the bad object back onto someone in the external world. (Nichols, 1988, p.49)

One can easily comprehend why such a situation can be deleterious to a martial relationship.

As an eldest child enters adolescence, and the family and the individuals who create the family change, the martial relationship also enters a period of flux. Internal and systemic changes that are common to this period may destabilize the very balance that has existed in the family. It is not uncommon for the very dynamics that brought a couple together to now become a source of conflict.

Two other significant unconscious processes for rabbis utilizing this model to understand are introjection and projection. Introjection is the process whereby the person draws the intrinsic qualities of an external object inside his/her psyche. Projection, on the other hand, is the opposite process in which undesired aspects of oneself are "cast out" onto others.

This complex internal system manifests itself in an unconscious drama that takes place within the relationship. Thus,

just as each person seeks a relationship, each part of the personality seeks to be acknowledged in any primary relationship. So in the

relationship with parents, spouse, or lover, children, and therapist, the average person will seek to be understood completely, and the denied parts of the self will tend to rise to the surface, as if seeking acknowledgement, each in its turn. (Scharff and Scharff, 1991, p.14)

However, while we all do a certain degree of seeking to recapture the sense of integration and wholeness of infancy, when one or both partners are unable to maintain a sense of balance between the good and the bad internal object (a situation known as split object relations) difficulties emerge.

One of the more significant treatment issues in terms of object relations in marital therapy is the discovery and successful use of methods of reintegrating (or perhaps integrating) the individuals as individuals so that good and bad objects can be experienced together. The individual, in other words, requires help in bringing dissociated parts of the self together so that the partner can be related to in current and reasonably realistic terms rather than on the basis of object-relations distortions. He or she needs to build an inner world that corresponds reasonably well to the external world in which he or she is participating so that it is not necessary to attempt to coerce or otherwise draw the marital partner into patterns of interaction based on unresolved interactions and relationships from the past." (Nichols, 1988, p.66)

Awareness of these unconscious forces allows the therapist/clergy to gain a deeper perspective on the marital relationship and may help explain observations related to intimacy.

CHAPTER 3: Specific Method of Carrying Out The Project

As the first step in this project, a personal letter will be sent, or a phone call made, to couples who fit the project parameters inviting them to participate in this project. The parameters include:

- -An eldest child who is to become B/Mitzvah within the next vear²⁵
- -An intact marriage in which both adults are the biological parents of the child becoming B/Mitzvah²⁶
- -A marriage that is endogamous

A series of four sessions will follow a couple's agreement to participate in this project. The sessions should be held at least one week apart, but no more than one month apart.

Davis notes that in her research she only worked with families in which the eldest child was becoming B/Mitzvah since, "...it is this child, it is said, who takes the family over the 'growing-edge'" (Davis, 1995, p.217) Moreover she observes that, "According to the developmental literature, families with a first adolescent are facing a number of very specific tasks. Among these include, (1) allowing for the child's increased autonomy, (2) mourning for the loss that autonomy implies, and (3) allowing for the evolution of the parents' relationship, not only with each other, but with their own parents who are generally aging and increasingly requiring a different way of relating." (Davis, 1995, p.128)

In many cases, where there is an interfaith marriage or there has been a divorce, that dynamic becomes a dominant issue overshadowing the areas this project intends to address.

Preliminary Session Outline

These sessions will begin with a clear description of the goals, intent, process and assessment of the meetings. Not only will an outline of the sessions be provided, but an in depth description of the thinking that motivates these sessions will be offered. As Clinebell (1984) notes, this approach underscores the ways in which educative pastoral counseling differs from other modes of counseling, particularly family therapy.

One of the main messages that will be offered is that even if a child is technically prepared for his or her B/Mitzvah, by having learned the Hebrew reading and chanting and having written a speech, in many cases neither the parents nor the child are emotionally prepared for this experience. The goal of the sessions is to help the parents move in the direction of being prepared; by examining some of the possible dynamics at play. While the child is not the focus of this project, by having some of the homework assignments focusing on the parents' interacting with the child, s/he may also become better prepared.

A Four Session Model

The project is modeled after three observations made by Judy Davis during her more than ten years as a practicing family therapist working with B/Mitzvah families during the year prior to the service. The first observation is that the event is more complex and more emotionally charged than most

families suspect. It is a major transitional event in the life of the entire family. Second, the B/Mitzvah is, by definition, a time of great turmoil for all of the family participants. Third, the B/Mitzvah ushers in a new phase in life for parents, as well as for the B/Mitzvah. This project differs from Davis' work in two significant ways. First, in Davis' work she dealt specifically with families from a counseling perspective and left the religious dimension to the rabbi and cantor. In the case of this project the individual implementing and facilitating the sessions has some clinical training but is also the same individual who will officiate at the B/Mitzvah service. This, in and of itself, is a significant difference, since it allows theological issues to enter into the discussions, as well. Secondly, Davis approached her subjects from the perspective of a researcher observing and describing families through this process. My goal, as the family rabbi, is to facilitate sessions that will enhance the meaning of the B/Mitzvah itself, and the quality of their life as individual's and as a family in general. In a sense, this project is a "real-world" application of Davis' research.

Session 1: B/Mitzvah From A Multigenerational Perspective

Task: Participants will speak about their own B/Mitzvah experience.

Preparation: In preparation for the meeting participants will be asked to read the Introduction and Chapters 1-3 of Whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is This Anyway? Chapter 1 addresses the various forms and causes of stress associated with B/Mitzvah. Chapter 2 concerns itself with some of the myths and false assumptions that make B/Mitzvah more stressful than it might otherwise be. Chapter 3 introduces the notion that there are many layers of meaning and drama taking place as a family approaches B/Mitzvah.

Goal: To have parents revisit their own experiences and, by doing so, their family of origin, in order to gain increased awareness of how past experiences may be impacting current living. To begin to examine how their own expectations regarding the B/Mitzvah may be unconsciously influenced by their experience as a B/Mitzvah.

Questions to be discussed:

What do they remember?

What was most meaningful?

What was most challenging?

How did it/did it not impact on them?

What role did their parents play in their preparation and B/Mitzvah? What do they think their parents were hoping to achieve through them

becoming B/Mitzvah?

(Look for how the spouse is being perceived in the parent's role

with regard to this B/Mitzvah)

How were issues of gender dealt with in their families of origin?

Were girls given the same opportunities as boys?

Were there any differences in treatment focused only on B/Mitzvah or did they extend to other activities and opportunities as well?

How might these differences be repeated or overcompensated for in ones own nuclear family?

By revisiting the family of origin, multigenerational dynamics which are beneath the surface can be made explicit. In addition, by revisiting the family of origin, they can come to see that the family they have created is not an exact replica and that patterns and expectations do not have to be repeated.

The concept of a genogram will be introduced and, as homework, parents will fill out a simple genogram of their family.

Homework: a) Parents will be asked to set time aside to share their own B/Mitzvah recollections (both good and bad) with their son/daughter and to discuss what it meant to them. b) Parents will then be asked to share with each other and their child what they hope their child's B/Mitzvah will be like and will mean to their child and their entire family.

c) Parents will be asked to read Chapters 4 of Whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is This Anyway? which describes some of the many changes taking place as individual moves toward adolescence. This chapter also introduces the concept of the genogram.

d) Parents will fill out a genogram for their family.

Session 2: A Trip Down Memory Lane: Asking parents to revisit their own adolescent experience²⁷

Task: Participants will share their own adolescent issues, experiences and struggles and through this the concept of multigenerational process will be introduced.

Goal: To provide participants the opportunity to begin processing unresolved adolescent issues in an adult arena, rather than through the parenting they offer their own child in anticipation of the B/Mitzvah- and, hopefully, thereafter.

Questions to be Discussed:

Was your own adolescence an easy or a difficult time? How did your B/Mitzvah fit into the ease/difficulty of this period? In what ways was adolescence a time when you became your own person?

What were your dreams and hopes when you were an adolescent? How was your parents' parenting during your adolescence? How do you remember your parents' dealing with your separation and individuation?

How are you handling you child's process similarly/differently? What were the messages your parents gave you about your sexuality? What messages are you giving your own children?

Teaching:

Offer a general outline of family systems thinking and multigenerational process.

-Use two of their own examples as illustrations-- one positive one negative-- in order to illustrate that multi-generational process takes place in both the positive and negative realms.

-Use Exodus verse: "I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation..." as an example of multi-generational transmission.

-Quote "Teach them diligently to your children." What messages had they intended to teach and what messages may they have inadvertently taught?

²⁷ The first session focused on the B/Mitzvah experience specifically. This second session shifts the focus to the adolescent experience in general.

-Use the ritual of the Torah being passed from one generation to the next as an active and relevant illustration of what takes place in families unconsciously.

Homework:

a) Participants will ask their child what the child imagines their parents' (the B/Mitzvah's parents) adolescent experience was like.

b) Parents then share some stories of their own adolescence with their children and talk about their experience of their parents' parenting

during that period.

c) In preparation for the next session, parents will be asked to read Chapter 5 of Whose Bar/Bat Mitzvah Is This Anyway? This chapter specifically focuses on the changes being encountered by the parents during this time.

d) Each participant will be asked to create an "Emotional time-line", reflecting his/her emotional life graphically, by depicting the emotional highs and lows that have brought them to this time in their lives. This can include hopes, dreams, achievements, setbacks and disappointments.

Session 3: Just Who Is In Transition Anyway??: Shifting the Focus From B/Mitzvah Child to B/Mitzvah Parent

Task: Participants will examine and articulate some of the changes and struggles they are encountering

Goal: Assessment of their own life transition with the goal of normalization-helping them to acknowledge that they have entered as major a life transition as their child has. This is a developmental crisis for them as much as it is for their child. A goal here is to help them realize that if they are having a difficult time it is natural and there is "help."

Question to be Discussed:

When your child was born what were your hopes, dreams, illusions, fears- for yourself, for your marriage, for your family?

Teaching:

An outlining of what takes place in families as the eldest child reaches adolescence. Using the work of Levinson, Friedman, McGoldrick, Preto etc.

Homework:

Parents will be asked to sit down with each other and then with their child and draw up a "Family Covenant" for the next stage of their lives. This should include the hopes, dreams and values that they currently hold.

Session 4: Sharing Emotional Time-Lines; Summary and Assessment of Project Results

A fourth session will be devoted to couples sharing their time-lines and family covenants with each other and with me, as well as discussing how the sessions were/were not helpful to them.

Means to Assess Results

The assessment of this project will come in three forms.

First, throughout the sessions participants will be allowed to share their stories and insights. From these exchanges the participants' own statements and reflections will provide evidence as to whether or not they display an increased degree of self-reflection. In addition, I will reflect on how willing people were to engage in the process and how clearly these issues seemed to resonate with them. Second, I will have the opportunity to observe each of these families as the B/Mitzvah approaches and to assess how issues shared during the sessions are manifested. Third, through my discussion with each set of parents at the end of the third session, I will gain perspective on whether the sessions helped them lower their anxiety and gain insight into the powerful transition occurring. Although this will, in part, be assessed through my own observations, I will be particularly interested in hearing whether they thought the hours spent together were well spent. Finally, over the past fifteen years I have worked with nearly one thousand families whose child was

will try to heed Clinebell's caution that people who come to an educative-counseling setting at the request of the clergy may be less motivated than if they were to come at their own initiative. (Clinebell, 1984, p.330)

becoming B/Mitzvah. This experience has given me a unique perspective against which to measure observable differences in the project participants' anxiety levels, behaviors etc. and those of the average congregant.

If the assessment shows that this program of sessions is constructive and helpful to participants, it is my intention to expand it to include all families within our congregation.

Anticipating the Project

Prior to my beginning this project I would often describe B/Mitzvah as "an individual celebration that begins a period of rapid change in an adolescent's life as s/he moves from childhood and its dependence on parents, toward adulthood and an increased sense of independence." As I began to research, and then write-up, the theoretical underpinnings for this project, I came to recognize that such a description of B/Mitzvah was incorrect. By focusing on B/Mitzvah as an individual observance, rather than as a transition that impacts everyone in the family system, I was reinforcing the same singular focus on the child that other books and studies on B/Mitzvah had mistakenly been stressing for years. As a result, I began to watch families, and their emotional dynamics, more closely than ever as a B/Mitzvah approached. I quickly gained a far greater appreciation for what parents, siblings, and even grandparents, experience as part of this process. I realized that much of the strong emotion parents often expressed, not infrequently by acting out or throwing temper tantrums in the presence of, or

focused on the clergy, resulted from their own individual or familial developmental struggles. I began to understand why, time and again, I found individuals, who had always seemed calm and reasonable, became anything but calm and reasonable during the months before the B/Mitzvah. I also began to understand why they seemed to quickly return to their former selves as soon as the service was completed. They were as much a part of the emotional drama surrounding B/Mitzvah as their child, yet they, and often I, were strikingly unaware of it.

As a result of this insight I changed my approach to families prior to the B/Mitzvah. Whenever an adult family member expressed strong emotions that seemed disproportionate to the issue at hand, I began to adopt a more therapeutic stance than before. I paid as much attention to the individual's affect, and the emotional "music", as I did to the words they were uttering. In many cases, I found myself more effective in addressing the issues at hand. In addition, I began spending time during the final family rehearsal focusing on the powerful emotional forces at work in families prior to B/Mitzvah.²⁹
While I began with the B/Mitzvah child him/her self, I always shifted my focus to the parents. My initial comments at this session now go something like this-

I used to refer to B/Mitzvah as an individual ceremony, and Confirmation, which takes place in the 10th grade, as a communal ceremony. I was correct in regard to Confirmation, since you will lead the service as part of your entire class, but I was totally wrong with

²⁹ It must be noted that while the parents might benefit from this discussion at a far earlier time, the current structure of our congregations' B/Mitzvah preparation program does not allow for such a discussion until this late date. This project is a first step toward a substantial transformation in both the content and timing of such interactions.

regard to B/Mitzvah. B/Mitzvah is not an individual celebration and it is not an individual transition. It is a family celebration and a family transition because each and every member of your family is going to enter a new stage of life this Shabbat. For the youth becoming a B/Mitzvah the changes are fairly obvious--s/he is beginning the journey toward adulthood. S/he will test boundaries in new ways that will stand the entire family on its head. For siblings the transition is often difficult. Siblings often feel overlooked as the focus is placed on the B/Mitzvah. The entire balance in the family is thrown off and everyone has to seek a new balance.

But for you, the parents, the changes are often entirely overlooked. This B/Mitzvah is a celebration of hopes, dreams and promises that began thirteen years ago. Yet it is also filled with challenging new territory for you to navigate. Your child is beginning to move toward adulthood and is pushing at the old limits. The means of communication and the elements of balance that used to work may not any more. For many parents this is the first party they have ever thrown for the family. And that comes with tremendous stress. Many parents realize that as much as this is a coming of age for their child, it is a coming of age for them as adults, as well. And that is never easy.

The impact of these words has been as surprising as they have been remarkable. Parents who had thus far focused on their child's "performance readiness" suddenly sit quietly. As I speak, their faces change, their heads nod and often tears come to their eyes. Time and again I have watched them hold their child, or their spouse, closer. A number of parents have later commented that it was at that moment that they were able to refocus their energies on their child and themselves and the B/Mitzvah took on a depth of meaning they had not expected. Moreover, each time I mentioned my demonstration project, someone inevitably comments that they wished I had been working on it earlier so that they could have participated. Clearly, by drawing attention to the fact that a B/Mitzvah is a religious ritual marking a

second-order developmental transition for the child and for the entire family, a new, and meaningful, perspective on the event becomes evident.

As my background work for the project progressed, I met with two families in greater depth than normal. Although I had not formally begun my project, I employed many of the insights that I had gained during my preparation for this project. I conceived of these meetings as "trials" for the actual implementation of the project. A review of these meetings is significant to later developments in the project.

Couple 1:

I first met with S and T after T had asked to see me regarding stress she was feeling at her children's upcoming Bar and Bat Mitzvah. (She has two children of approximately the same age and my predecessor had agreed to allow them to become B/Mitzvah together.) During our initial conversation it was clear that much of the stress came from the fact that she and her husband were approaching the day from very different positions. She reported that S was not only unsupportive, but was actively seeking ways to sabotage the children's preparation. This included repeatedly sharing stories of how much he hated religious school, encouraging them to spend time doing other things, and being generally disinterested. I asked to meet with the two of them and they agreed.

During my first meeting with the two of them the forces creating stress became clear. T had grown up in a relatively religious household. In recent years her parents had begun leading a ritually traditional Jewish life-style. T

feared that no matter what she did her, parents would be disappointed and would judge her decision to raise her children in a Reform Jewish context. As we talked she expressed surprise that, as a middle age woman, she still had such a strong desire to please her parents. S, on the other hand, had a deep-seated resentment of Judaism that stemmed from his own experience in childhood. He had hated religious school, had not become B/Mitzvah and, as an adult, felt no connection to organized Judaism. Not only was he opposed to the B/Mitzvah, but he had not wanted to join the synagogue or send the children to religious school at all.

As we met, it became clear that because S had no frame of reference for the experience his children were having, he felt excluded from the family. In addition, he felt uneducated, and incompetent and commented that it was bad enough that his kids were growing up, without them doing things that he couldn't understand. When asked how he felt about coming to the *bimah* for the honor of an *aliyah* he replied that since he had never done it nor did he know how to do it, he had no intention of participating. As a result, T felt totally unsupported in the children's studies and S felt forced to affirm something that he rejected. The conflict was playing out in their relationship.

I had a scheduled meeting with the children a few days later to work on their *divrei torah*- Torah speeches. In anticipation of this, I invited S and T to sit in on the session. I thought this might help S feel more involved in the process. They agreed. It was during this meeting that the degree of S's ambivalence became clear. Half way through the session he stood up,

announced that he had to leave for his tennis game, and proceeded to kiss his children goodbye. S and T did, however, agree to continue meeting with me privately.

I decided to see if an approach rooted in psycho-education might help. Over the next few meetings I outlined some of the pressures parents might feel as their children approach B/Mitzvah. These included their own individual growth, changes in their marriage, changes in their immediate family and changes in their extended family. Most of all, I assured them both that stress was completely natural at moments of transition such as this. They seemed exceedingly relieved to hear this and agreed to further meetings.

When I next met with S and T, I asked what they had to share with their children from their own experience. T said that she had little to offer since she, unlike her brothers, had not been permitted to become a B/Mitzvah. She admitted that, since this was the case, having a daughter becoming one felt like a victory. It was immediately clear that because of this, she had a great deal of emotional investment in this event and was angry with T for standing in the way of it. For his part, however, S replied that he had absolutely nothing to offer since he had never become B/Mitzvah. "So what you offer is an inability to understand what your children are going through?" I asked. "Right!" he answered and stared off into space. I suggested to him that he was not giving himself enough credit and that he was missing an opportunity for them to learn together as a family. I urged him to see what

would happen if he allowed himself to become more involved in the process. It was then, that the following exchange took place.

D-- The thought of reciting the blessings over the Torah must terrify you?

S-- (nodding) More than you know.

D-- If you were able to learn them, would you be more willing to participate?

S-- It doesn't matter much to me, but I would like to do it for T and the kids.

I offered to help him learn the blessings and then suggested that either, or both, of his children could tutor him as well. "It might be a good chance for them to be the teachers and you to be the proud dad." He replied that he would think about it.

The B/Mitzvah took place a week later. The day went smoothly and S actually did the *aliyah*. At my request, we met a week later. S and T were noticeably more relaxed and they were physically affectionate in a way I had not seen in the days prior to the B/Mitzvah. I asked them how it had gone for them. They both responded that it was a remarkable experience. T commented that her parents had been proud of her and the kids. S said he was happier with it than he thought he would be. T commented that a friend had joked that now all she had to do was plan the weddings. I asked her how she felt about that. She laughed nervously and said, "I'm not ready for that." "No" I replied, "but having this event behind you sure puts you all into a new

stage of your lives and clears the way for events such as that." "Oh my God, you're right!!" she replied as she laughed.

When I asked how our sessions had either aided or detracted from the process they replied that it had helped in two ways. First, it allowed them to discuss issues that certainly would not have come up under other circumstances. Second, through our interactions it allowed them to feel a sense of connection to me, and through me to Jewish tradition, in a way that would not have been possible otherwise.

I asked S if he was proud of his children's accomplishment.

S-- Yes, but not in a religious way-- more in the way that they achieved something and were able to stand in front of others and show their level of maturity.

D-- I see. So if they had been in a play and had done an excellent job it would have felt just the same?

S-- Well, no. They've been in shows and it wasn't like this. There was some 'quality' to it that I can't explain.

I understand this 'quality' to be the dimension of religious experience.

Although S's personal resistance was so great that he was unable to articulate this, he was still able to feel the difference in spite of his resistance.

These sessions served a number of purposes. First, they allowed S and T a safe venue for dealing with stresses that were pulling at them and pulling them apart. Second, they allowed me to help reframe the experience the family was having. I helped them to give voice to the feelings and pressures they were encountering, and to explain and define what they were

encountering. Finally, these sessions allowed them to reduce enough of the stress to allow the beauty and power of the event to come through.

Couple 2:

It was five week's before M and G's daughter, J, was to become B/Mitzvah. With the B/Mitzvah so close, our schedules prevented us from actively pursuing the entire project format in full. However, at my invitation, I met with them to gain a sense of what a discussion with parents might look like, and to gain insight into how best to formally proceed with the project. We met three times-- twice prior to the B/mitzvah, and once following it.

I immediately gathered some relevant family information. M, the woman, is 38. She had married shortly after high school and had never gone to college. She was proud and expressed comfort with her decision to throw herself fully into her role as mother and homemaker, although a later comment threw this assertion into question.

M-- She throws it up at me that I never went to college. Now she says she doesn't want to go.

G-- If she doesn't want to go to college that's okay with me. It didn't hurt M.

M-- Look, I wouldn't force her to go, but I think it is important for her development.

M's comment suggests that, on some level, she may be compensating for her own perceived shortcomings through her hopes and dreams for her daughter. While she seems satisfied with her own life-choices, I wondered if she has thoughts about "what-if? M's compensating through J also emerged in an exchange regarding her own Jewish upbringing. M commented that

neither she nor her sister had been provided with any formal Jewish upbringing. Neither became Bat Mitzvah. On the other hand, her brother did go to Hebrew School and become B/Mitzvah. "I resented that!" she said forcefully as she recollected. She then noted that this only added to the importance of J is becoming a B/Mitzvah.

G, the man, is 46. A well-educated businessman, he was very proud of his academic achievements, mentioning them numerous times in the conversation. At first I wondered if G's comments about his education were a means of putting himself in a one-up position from M. M, who took great pride in G's achievements, showed no discomfort with this. In fact, as they spoke, they clearly displayed a partnership of equals. They appeared to have a deep love, respect and appreciation for one another. At one point M commented, "The kids see a nice relationship in the house-- as did each of us growing up." In fact, both G and M's parents were living and still married.

One of the most powerful moments during the second session came when I asked them to focus on J's emerging sexuality. M replied, "It is so different now than it was for us. They grow up so quickly and become sexualized so fast. There's the make-up, the nails and who knows what else." I asked how they were dealing with it. G jokingly replied, "Not too well." He then related the following exchange between himself and J.

G-- I'm not ready to have a teenage daughter!!"

J-- Well dad, you had better be!

In the discussion that followed it became clear that they were struggling to establish new boundaries within the family that would allow J to become a little more independent, while maintaining their control over her. Part of the difficulty with this may have stemmed from M's own adolescent experience. While she was very close to her parents, she also actively rebelled against her perception that they were too strict. By her own account she acted out with drugs, alcohol and sex. G, on the other hand, never rebelled. "Such things," he said, "were unheard of in my house. You just didn't do it, especially since my parents were hoping I would get a sports scholarship to college." What emerged in the follow-up discussion, however, was the fact that he never acted out due to fear of retribution from his mother. Throughout his upbringing she had been overly strict, bordering on abusive. His father had allowed it to happen. Thus, their own individual boundary issue in their families of origin during their adolescence may have been playing an active role in their own struggle to find a balance with their own emerging adolescent.

After the B/Mitzvah I met with them for a follow-up session. They both seemed far more relaxed that they had been at the two prior sessions.

- M-- I was a bit less emotional than I thought I would be- because I was so well prepared.
- G-- Part of our comfort had to do with the fact that we knew that she was ready, performance-wise, to be up there on the *bimah*.
- M--Talking so much helped me realize that we've done a good job parenting our children. That made a real difference.

Later in the conversation G offered an insight that paralleled the observation that the B/Mitzvah is the opportunity for parents to move from the "children's table to the adult table". He said,

I got into the room where the reception was, I looked around, and I realized that this was the first time we were the ones throwing the party. And we had all the people we loved there with us. Our wedding was different-- that was thrown for us, but this one, this we threw ourselves and invited them to come. That made it totally different for me.

I asked them what the aftermath of the B/Mitzvah was for them.

- G-- Since the service, it really feels like we have a full-blown teenager.
- M-- I have to tell you, I'm not ready for this. I'm just too young. And since the service, J talks to and treats her younger sister like she was a little kid.
- G-- She's a teen with no respect and we're not too happy about it. I guess it had started before the B/Mitzvah, but I may just be more aware of it now. Like M, I'm especially disappointed in the way she is treating her sister.
- M-- This really marked the fact that I'm getting older. Especially since I started having kids at a young age so most of my friends have much younger kids. It was the first time I realized that I'm going to be forty. Ready or not, here I come. (laughs)
- G-- It isn't a chronological age thing-- it is a stage thing. It wasn't that long ago that we were scrambling to find a babysitter so we could have a night out and away from the kids.
- M-- As much as it is a new stage for us, it is especially a new stage for J. She's fighting for her independence.
- G-- And we're experimenting with giving her more of a leash but it is hard.
- M--- This is a new stage in our lives.
- G-- We're losing control to a certain extent. I'm not sure I like it a lot.

I asked them if they were at the point in their lives that they thought they would be when J was born 13 years ago. M replied, "I don't know that I had any expectations." It was clear from our discussions that while they may not have had any expectations, they had benefited from the time, opportunity and encouragement to reflect on the path life had taken.

Shifting To A Three Session Model

These sessions caused me to believe that the assumptions upon which this project is based are accurate. I became convinced that new vistas of meaning would open up by simply moving these insights from a rabbinic monologue followed by a brief discussion a few days before the service to a series of educative counseling sessions held weeks or months before the service. At the same time, however, I also recognized the need to re-evaluate the actual project. The appropriateness of the insights from my studies were clear, yet the actual content of the sessions was far too ambitious for four, one-hour sessions. Unfortunately, my time demands, and a fear that four hours was already a lot to ask of people, prohibited me from expanding the time allotment for the project. Moreover, I recognized the need for the rabbi facilitating these sessions to come into them less focused on his/her agenda and more willing to be attentive and listen to the couple's agenda. These two couples had shown me that if I gave them enough space during the meetings,

they would lead me to the most relevant issues facing them.³⁰ It was clear that for the sake of trying to achieve the stated goals I would have to pare down the actual project.

As a result, I made two substantial changes in the project. First, after my own difficulty finding enough time for four sessions, and having received feedback that four sessions was too large a commitment to ask, I reduced the number of sessions from four to three. I assumed that if a fourth session became necessary I could always add it. Second, I replaced the highly structured approach I had first envisioned with a more "participant directed" one that focused on an increased use of the genogram. I did this in order to allow the content of the meeting to flow from the genogram interview. This served a number of functions. First, the genogram would provide a clear structure to the first meeting. Second, it would allow me to inquire into the emotional system of the family in a less intrusive manner. Third, since, by its very nature, a genogram is a multigenerational device, it would reinforce the core message of this project that B/Mitzvah is about the entire family, not just the thirteen-year-old child. Fourth, it would allow me to be far more flexible and see where the discussion with each couple would go, rather than imposing a specific agenda on each session. The new structure looked like this:

This is reminiscent of Gary Ahlskog's recommendation that, at first, a counselor should remain silent and allow the client to guide the discussion to the central issues. (Ahlskog, 2000, p.12)

Session 1:

<u>Purpose</u>: Introduce the purpose and theory behind the project and begin the genogram interview.

<u>Homework</u>: Ask each adult individually to consider what this B/Mitzvah means to him/her. Then first discuss it with their spouse and then together discuss their feelings and insights with their child.

Session 2:

<u>Purpose</u>: Complete genogram interview, review homework and discuss issues that were raised by the homework. <u>Homework</u>: Have each parent draw a graphic depiction of the emotional highs and lows of their life, thus far.

Session 3:

<u>Purpose</u>: Continue discussion of the genogram, review homework and assess helpfulness of the sessions.

Although this new model for the project is substantially abbreviated from the earlier model, the modes of assessment remain the same. The participants' own statements and reflections will provide evidence as to whether or not they display an increased degree of self-reflection as a result of the project. Through my observations as the B/Mitzvah approaches I will note how issues shared during the sessions are manifest and have been impacted by our sessions. Through a verbal evaluation of the project with each couple I will note whether the sessions helped lower participants' anxiety and helped them gain insight into the powerful transition occurring. Finally, my own observations of these families at the B/Mitzvah itself will allow me to note observable differences in the project participants' anxiety levels, behaviors etc. and those of the average congregant.

CHAPTER 4: Results of The Project

Initial Disappointment

Having changed both the number of sessions, and the purpose and structure of the sessions themselves, I was ready to carry out the project. Unfortunately, my enthusiasm quickly diminished. Five of the six couples I invited to participate in the project declined the invitation. While those declining were all reticent to offer reasons. I was able to gather a few comments. One person said that the project made perfect sense, but that it would enter into areas that were too emotionally raw for her. Her marriage was under enough stress and this would only increase it. She observed that she was already finding the B/Mitzvah draining emotionally and had no interest in opening a Pandora's Box of marital issues, as well. A second woman initially expressed enthusiastic interest, but later recanted. I had been meeting with her, G, about issues surrounding her anxiety over her daughter's B/Mitzvah and difficulties with her extended family. After a discussion with her about this anxiety I extended an invitation to participate. G responded with great excitement and observed that it might, "help us understand some of the stuff going on that is just really strange, and it would be great to be able to help you complete the project." The next day, however, my phone rang.

G-- Rabbi, I spoke with R (the husband) and we are going to decline your invitation. (Her voice was shaking and a bit cold.) Thanks for thinking of us but we're just not interested. We are looking forward to working with you on the rest of the preparation for the big day. And thank you for meeting with me yesterday. It was a big help.

D-- I understand G, and I thank you for giving your participation consideration. Just for my own information, you seemed excited by it

yesterday, would you be willing to share some of your reasons for declining to participate.

G-- (Silence for a while) Well, it just isn't something we have room for. There is enough going on in our lives right now. And besides, the three sessions seems like an awful lot. R felt especially strongly that he just didn't see the need. Good luck, and have a good day.

As the B/Mitzvah approached, F, the B/Mitzvah, was well prepared. Yet at each of our meetings it was clear that she was terrified. I spent a great deal of time trying to calm her and to assure her that she would be successful on the day of the B/Mitzvah. She seemed unsure, but responded that she would trust me. As high as F's anxiety was, however, her mother G's anxiety was even greater. G called me before and after each of F's lessons. She peppered me with questions such as, "What happens if F refuses to get up there on the day of her B/Mitzvah?" I did my best to assure her that everything would be fine. She seemed put- off by my assurances. On the day of the final rehearsal for F's service, I observed an interesting dynamic. Before the rehearsal G had called me.

G-- Did Cantor tell you what happened at the rehearsal?

D-- Tell me. (In fact he had told me it was fine!)

G-- F was terrified. I'm not sure she can do this. What will we do if she can't?

D-- Tell you what- let's see how it goes this afternoon. If there are issues, let's deal with them then.

G-- I hope you know what you're doing.

They arrived for the rehearsal. F looked terrified, but she took her place on the *bimah* and led the service perfectly. All the while, her mother, G, was pestering her with comments like "Straighten out your *tallit*", and "Speak louder". At one point I approached G and asked her to let me run the rehearsal. After, G looked at me and asked, "Well??!!" I replied that it was as good a rehearsal as I had seen. (It was, in fact, excellent.) "I hope you are right!" came her reply.

On the day of the B/Mitzvah, G was an emotional wreck, while F was calm and did a fabulous job. At one point I whispered to her, "I know you are shy and it is hard for you to be up here. Seems to me that if you can do this, you can do anything you want-- so long as you are willing to work for it and have the courage to go forward despite your fear." For the first time that day F beamed. After the service, G's anxiety had somewhat abated but was still significant. In reflecting on this dynamic I was reminded of a statement by Edwin Friedman. He wrote,

No wonder I have never been really successful in calming a B/Mitzvah child's anxiety no matter how well prepared he was. It was not his anxiety I was dealing with. No wonder mothers whom I had previously perceived to be models of efficiency and astute reasonableness approached me almost on the verge of hysteria in seeking B/Mitzvah dates. No wonder fathers running top government agencies and used to living with daily crises seemed to go limp at this period. (Friedman, 1987, p.141)

The Actual Project

I became concerned that there would not be enough participants to make this project successful. As previously discussed, I had intentionally limited the pool of potential participants to include only those couples whose

eldest child was becoming B/Mitzvah. In addition, in order to eliminate the issues raised by divorce or intermarriage, I had chosen to only work with couples in endogamous, intact marriages. Now, however, these restrictions threatened to limit the pool of potential participants to the point where there might not be enough couples left who fit the description. I was concerned that the actual project might be delayed indefinitely. Fortunately, I identified three other potential couples and each agreed to participate in the project. These meetings with Couples 3,4,5, and 6 were far more productive, interesting and powerful than I anticipated.

As the first step in implementing the project, I set up a series of three meetings with each couple. Due to time considerations and my desire to explain the project fully and answer any questions couples might have, I made the invitation over the phone. Ideally, I would have met with each couple for the full three sessions before beginning to meet with the next. This would have required a minimum of twelve weeks, however, and due to conflicts with my schedule and the schedule for the project, I scheduled myself to be meeting with two different couples on any given week. All of the sessions, therefore, were held over a six-week period.

During the first session I explained the purpose and rationale for the project. After explaining the purpose of a genogram, I began a genogram interview. In each case, the discussion that ensued quickly guided us to a specific issue, or issues, that were sources of anxiety for the couple. In two cases the couple reported having been unaware of the issue prior to our

discussions. At the end of the first session I asked each partner to take some time to consider what the B/Mitzvah meant to him/her as an individual. I asked the couple to share their thoughts with one another after spending time considering it alone. I asked them to follow this conversation with a discussion with their child. Each couple readily agreed although most shared immediate concerns that the event had less "religious meaning" than it did "emotional meaning". This gave me an opportunity to discuss the meaning of "religion" in our world and to describe the issues surrounding the "split-thinking".

At the beginning of the second session I asked if there were any thoughts or questions from the first session. We then completed the genogram interview, providing time throughout to focus on any issues that emerged during the interview. After this, we discussed the homework. Each of the two homework assignments intentionally focused on emotional issues, rather than the specifics of B/Mitzvah ritual. I hoped that by simply addressing the emotional material with their rabbi and in the context of B/Mitzvah sessions it would help bridge the gap between the realms of religion and their emotional life. Before the end of the second session I assigned the homework for the third and final session. The "emotional time-line" was a chance for them to revisit the emotional high and low points in their lives. I asked them to graph their lives in any way they chose. However, I instructed them to pick events that were emotionally meaningful to them, rather than culturally

significant. I also asked them not to share their work with one another until we met for the next session.³¹

At the beginning of the third session I asked if there were any thoughts or questions left over from the last session. I then asked each partner to take a turn sharing his or her emotional time-line.³² The follow-up conversation included asking them if they had been surprised by anything on their partner's chart and what, if anything, they had learned. Finally, I asked them whether or not this had been a productive endeavor and why. I hoped that, having spent three hours together, they would feel comfortable enough to answer honestly. I made sure that they understood that my hearing that the sessions were not positive was as valuable for the project as hearing that they were.

In keeping with educative-counseling, I inserted teaching elements wherever appropriate. The teaching topics included: family systems theory; the value and importance of genograms and three-generation perspectives; the history and development of B/Mitzvah; an expanded definition of religion; adolescent development; mid-life issues; and the challenges of family emotional transitions. While each of these topics was not covered with each couple, I found that it was helpful for me to have a deep familiarity with this

The second session with Couple 2 was so intense that I neglected to ask them to complete this assignment. Not only did this oversight not impact their participation in the project negatively, but it also highlights the need for the facilitator to be flexible. This will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Two of the remaining three couples completed the assignment. The couple not completing it offered no explanation. I suspect that the lack of intimacy they displayed with one another made this task too difficult. This will also be discussed in Chapter 5.

material. It allowed me to provide insights wherever pertinent. This was particularly important since unlike my initial conception of this project, the revised project did not include reading assignments as homework.³³ I found the teaching component most comfortable, and the couple most receptive to it, when there was a good rapport and high degree of emotional safety in the room. Thus, I did the most educative work with Couple 4 and the least amount of educative work with Couple 6.

By allowing the couples to guide the discussion, I found that they quickly zeroed in on the issue, or issues, that evoked the most anxiety for them. For each couple there were one or two issues that emerged and became the focus of our later discussions. While I did not focus on trying to solve the issue(s) for them, I did encourage them to explore it more deeply than they might otherwise. This exploration raised powerful emotional material for each of the couples.

Identifying Main Issues and Hidden Agendas

Couple 3

E and K, the first couple with whom I met did not realize the degree to which E was struggling with the deaths of all of the senior males in the family. E, the husband and father, was particularly enthusiastic about the project since he had a counseling background. It occurred to me to ask E and K to

While I did recommend reading, I was more concerned with encouraging them to be introspective. Feedback from the "test" couples led me to be concerned with overwhelming them with reading and information.

meet with me after K had a run-in with our Cantor. She had become outraged when the Cantor had suggested that one of the other children becoming B/Mitzvah with their son, J, read a paragraph of English that J had already been practicing. A K, who I have always known to be calm and agreeable, had a fight with the Cantor about this after which the Cantor acquiesced. When the Cantor reported what had happened I suspected that it was a case of an over-investment in the child's "performance". The next day E called me as a follow-up to his wife's encounter with the Cantor. He reported that he was confused by K's reaction. It struck him as atypical of her. I let him know of our decision to keep things as they were. He was appreciative. I then told him about my project. He was enthusiastic about participating.

When I met with K and E it was a month before J was to become B/Mitzvah. While J has an older sister, M, this is the first B/Mitzvah in the family. M, now sixteen, had elected not to celebrate her B/Mitzvah. I have known K and E since they joined the congregation five years ago. They were enthusiastic about participating. After some small talk, I explained the premise behind the project. As I did with each couple, I also shared the project's evolution, from highly structured sessions with homework, to the current model of entering into a genogram interview in order to shift the entire focus off of J and to look at the larger family dynamics.

In our synagogue almost all B/Mitzvah services include two or three young people becoming B/Mitzvah. If one child has a learning disability it is not uncommon for us to give that child more English so they feel an equal sense of accomplishment. This was the case here.

I spent the first session learning about their nuclear family. They were both agreeable and enthusiastic. At the end of the session K observed- "This is great, free therapy and we get to know you better before J's B/Mitzvah." It was clear from the start that, in addition to whatever learning they were doing, they were also enjoying the opportunity to speak about themselves and their connection to the B/Mitzvah.

I learned a great deal about their families of origin during the second session. I learned that E was the child of Holocaust survivors. I learned that both E and K had been married previously and that, like E, his first wife was the child of Holocaust survivors. Neither had children from their first marriage. I also learned that in a space of six years, three significant male figures had died. In 1994 E's father died. In 1995 K's father died. In 1996 K's eldest brother died at fifty-three years of age. This revelation precipitated the most powerful exchange in the sessions.

Until then, the conversation had flowed. Both E and K were relaxed, laughing and more open than I had expected. With great ease they spoke about their first marriages, E's youthful drug and alcohol use and the impact of his parents' Holocaust experience on him. E and K shared the information on the deaths of their fathers and brother in the same open and relaxed manner. I sketched a genogram and showed it to them.

D-- Wow, that's a lot of loss.

K-- Yeah, three years in a row there were deaths.

E-- All the men died. All the men older than me died. ... I guess that makes me the patriarch. I never thought about that.

D-- That's a powerful insight. It is remarkable how an event so filled with joy is also laden with so many losses. Are there ways you can help ensure that your fathers' presence is felt?

K-- We're giving the video guy pictures of them to include on the tape...

(As K continues to speak, E gets up from his seat and bolts out the door. K makes no motion to follow. I remain seated. K makes no motion to follow E.)

K-- That must really have struck a chord. He'll be back.

(A few seconds later he returns and sits right down. He doesn't volunteer to speak. I wait a few seconds.)

D-- That struck a pretty powerful chord for you.

E-- The one thing in the world I wanted for Jesse was to have both grandfathers there at his B/Mitzvah.

K-- E never had grandparents-- they were killed in the camps. So E's seeing his kids have grandparents was new to him.

E-- So that can't happen. And it is a lot of responsibility for me...

K-- I didn't know that until now...

E-- It doesn't seem like 100%...

K-- But they both had all four grandparents for a long time.

E-- I wanted him to have both sides-- the men...

K-- True, both dads died. The next Thanksgiving both men were gone. It was... bizarre.

E-- I didn't feel prepared. Here I was in my late forties and I wasn't prepared for it.

D-- What would have prepared you for it?

E-- Oh, nothing could have. It's just... at forty I wasn't ready to become the eldest male in the family. And now the B/Mitzvah is coming...

K-- I didn't know this.

D-- But it has been the subtext of this B/Mitzvah for E all along.

At the end of the third session I asked if they had learned anything substantial during our sessions. E immediately responded, "Yes, how powerful the death of our dad's are to me." When I asked what the B/Mitzvah meant to him now, E said, "I see J in a different stage now. And it is good for me--having another guy in the house. Another adult male instead of a kid." When I observed that after the deaths of three of the men in the family, J's B/Mitzvah meant the gain of a man rather than the loss of one, E smiled and said, "Yup. This is a natural transition for him. For me, it is fun to have him around the house. You know, these meetings put everything in a context. It reminds you that it happens in a larger framework. And if you don't choose to dig down through the surface layers... you miss out."

I met with them one additional time after the B/Mitzvah. I asked how E had felt not having either father there. He responded,

For me, not having our fathers there was really tough. I didn't realize how important it was until that meeting here. I needed to realize it though. Even though it was tough, that was a perfect moment that day. I feel that if we hadn't gone through that moment there would have been a gaping hole on the day of the B/Mitzvah. I got through that moment here, rather than on the actual day. Also, because we have this relationship now you were like a stand in for them. You provided me with the emotional support we needed. It really allowed us to enjoy the day fully.

Our sessions served to bring the issue of loss and transition to the surface, allowing E to address it directly. In addition, although it came as a complete shock to me, our conversations allowed E to develop a powerful positive transference to me that allowed him to compensate through a sense of attachment to me.

Couple 4

Couple 4, J and V, were struggling with the on-going challenge of trying to resolve issues resulting from the tragic death of V's sister L a year and a half earlier. The impact of L's death on the family structure was still being felt. At the same time, J and V were attempting to draw clear generational boundaries between their nuclear family and V's parents. The emotional enmeshment within V's family was not a new dynamic, but L's death had exacerbated the issue. As the following exchanges will show, their daughter's upcoming B/Mitzvah provided the opportunity for these issues to be highlighted and openly discussed. During the course of our sessions V and J began to address the issue on a more direct level.

I had first gotten to know J and V when L, the young mother of two, died tragically. While I was not the officiating rabbi at the funeral, I did meet with V a number of times for grief counseling. She had been receptive to our meetings, but fell into a deep depression in the months following the death. I had referred her to a therapist and she had followed through on the recommendation. She had also come in with her mother six months after the

funeral. Her mother's grief had increased since the funeral and V had been carrying the brunt of the family's emotions. It was clear from that conversation that V was extremely close to, and perhaps fused with, her parents. V's mother did not follow through on my recommendation for grief counseling. In recent months, V had seemed to be feeling far better. She was smiling, more relaxed and seemed to be enjoying life far more than at any time since L's death. More recently, J had asked to meet with me. During the meeting he told me that he was feeling far more spiritual and was looking for guidance in how he might proceed. He also wanted to become more involved in the synagogue. It was during the course of this discussion that I had asked if he and V might be willing to participate in the project. He was more than enthusiastic and immediately committed both himself and V to participating. I suggested that he consult with V.35 He agreed, but added that he was sure she would love the opportunity for us to meet.

The first hint that J and V were having difficulty with V's parents came during the first session. As we discussed sibling issues between A, the B/Mitzvah, and her younger sister, S, I asked if S was jealous of A.

V-- Not a bit. I think S is just excited for A. And overall, we really see this as a family celebration, especially because we are taking a family trip to celebrate the B/Mitzvah. That really makes it a family function, rather than just an A function.

- D-- When you say, "We are taking a family trip", who do you mean?
- J-- The four of us-- the immediate family.

³⁵ I always wanted to be sure that both participants were getting involved willingly.

(Knowing how close V is to her parents, I was struck by this answer and wondered how they had arrived at this decision. I decided not to pursue the issue at this point, however. The complexity of the extended family dynamic was heightened at our second meeting.)

V-- No matter what we do, this is going to be a bittersweet experience for my parents.

D-- Could you say a little more about that.

V-- Life is hard enough for me. I have a tough time going to Temple, since for the past ten years I had gone to Temple with my sister since our spouses never went. So we went together with my parents to their synagogue. Being in synagogue is sometimes hard and whenever I walked into synagogue, any synagogue, the fact that she isn't there is on my mind. There is no question that they'll miss my sister on the day but I think that the happiness of the day will push that back and allow me to celebrate.

I pointed out that being with the family, particularly for a life-cycle event, brings out powerful emotions that are usually submerged beneath the surface. I commented that this is especially true if there has been an emotionally traumatic event such as L's death. Thus, I said, while we expect life-cycle moments to be entirely joyous, they also have a tendency to highlight our losses. Shaking his head in agreement, J said,

Every family function is now bittersweet and a lot of times more bitter than sweet. When the whole family's together that's when it all comes out. And we all feel that way; that we don't really enjoy the times when we're together, and why we need these things to begin with. The whole dynamic and her families out of whack, and it still has not balanced out.

I talked about family systems theory and loss by diagramming a family in which someone dies. I pointed out that all of the family roles shift as a result

and commented, "There's no question that this has changed everyone's role in the family. The pain is there, and the unresolved issues and your difficulty in communicating about it makes it even harder to deal with the issues. It is sort of like having a white elephant in the room that no one is willing to acknowledge." They offered additional insights into the functioning of the family.

J-- That's what makes family holiday stuff so difficult. We are getting ready to eat. Everybody seems be having a good time and then my mother-in-law's eyes start to tear. She starts to cry and it just sucks the air in the event out of everybody's chests.

V-- It started before, but certainly is worse now. My nephew's B/Mitzvah is coming up in a few weeks. Because of some learning difficulties there are lots of issues and it's possible that he won't even be there to do it. If he doesn't do it my parents are going to be devastated.

D-- "Devastated" now that's a strong word. Why devastated?

V-- They would be embarrassed in front of all their friends.

D-- Boy, they really are over invested in what you all do.

J-- It is a really big deal already that we aren't having a big party. The fact that we decided that we were going to have a kids' party and take a family trip is huge. We had booked the Greenbrook Country Club where my in-laws and we belong. It would be a nice connection for us, since we were married there and the wedding was awesome. But then we decided that we didn't want to do the same old thing as everyone else. And we came to the decision... we decided to do it this way--to have a kids' party and then take a family trip. Now, every time we talk about it my mother-in-law says, "Have you come to a decision?" In every conversation she asks us that. And every time she asks, we tell her what we decided to do. But she pretends to have amnesia the very next time we talk. (They had, however, decided to have a nice, but simple, luncheon after the service. All of their parents' friends would be invited to the luncheon.)

V-- Then, when we decided not to go to Israel for the trip, then my father really didn't approve. I think they are concerned about what their

friends will think. The fact is bad enough that we're not having the traditional party where they can show off us and our daughter. Then we decided not to go to Israel. That was even worse. At least if we went to Israel they could justify it by saying, "Well they decided to go to the holy land, to Israel, instead."

D-- That's a lot of pressure for you.

V-- Oh really!! (laughing)

(I spent some time talking about grandparents and some of the reading that I had done regarding the impact of becoming the senior generation on grandparents. I pointed out that it's very difficult for people who have been influential and in control to find themselves no longer in control. When they discover that they have moved into a different realm within the family dynamics it can be awfully difficult. It was clear that this hit home and helped explain much of what they had been encountering.)

J-- My father-in-law actually called me and offered me money! He offered me money, telling me that if I couldn't afford to have the party at the country club that he would take care of it. That was pretty damn insulting. I tried to explain to him that it will be more meaningful for us to be together. The fact is, it will be more meaningful for us to be together as a nuclear family, and so I'm really comfortable with the decision we've made. The fact is, this is one area where V and I are having difficulties. Not now, but we were having a lot of difficulties when we talked about this.

D-- V, I get the sense you want to please your parents and didn't know what was right to do?

V-- Exactly. I felt awful. On the one hand, I agree with J that this is the right thing to do. I wasn't really excited about it the other way. On the other hand, making that decision meant disappointing my parents. And so I went back and forth. It was a great time for us! (laughs).

D-- Part of the issue is that choosing to do this only includes your nuclear family. While your nuclear family is the four of you, their nuclear family includes you! Yours doesn't include them. That must be a little bit difficult for them to realize for the first time.

V-- We've done a lot to appease them, but this time we decided we were going to do it our way. We just had to make it clear to them that we've made a decision and are sticking to it.

D-- I wonder if this is the first time that you made such a decision and stuck to it. (It was clear to me that everyone had a great deal of emotional investment in the day. They were using this opportunity to set boundaries between themselves and their parents.)

J-- I feel that they feel that they are being cheated. They threw us a great wedding and we are not giving them the opportunity to do it again. That's not my problem.

V-- The highlight of our wedding for my father was his reading a poem that he had written for us.

D-- Wow! That's pretty powerful. Even as he was celebrating your wedding he shifted the focus to himself. The fact you are not having a big party is keeping him from doing it again. That must be a real loss for him. He doesn't get to be the center of attention. I'm sure what you did was pretty tough and took a lot of courage. I give you a lot of credit.

J-- I hadn't looked at his reading the poem that way until just now. But it really was an issue for him that he wouldn't get to do it. That's why I love this-- it is helping us out by explaining a lot of what's going on. They're good people but we have to be able to make decisions for ourselves.

This dynamic was also the central issue in our third meeting. Before J and V could even sit down, they started updating me on the events of the past week.

V-- We had dinner with my parents after we met the last time. We told them about some of the stuff we had talked about with you. But we ended up stepping around the main issues. We talked about what you said regarding the theory of family and we hope that they would catch on and ask.³⁶

J-- We put out a lot of hints but they didn't pickup up on any of them.

V-- We even did the little thing with the diagram that you had shown us (referring to a family systems diagram showing how family positions change when there is a birth or a death) but they didn't pickup on any of it.

This is an excellent example of the way in which those who hear, and resonate to, a particular theory may become its preachers and see it as a cure-all. There is an inherent danger in such a dynamic.

V-- We decided that if they said anything again...

J-- ...we would say something. I know what my mother-in-law's answer would be if we told her about our frustrations. "Just forget it " is what she said. They're just disappointed. They're disappointed that we are not doing it their way. They want to have the party that they want. But we've made different choice and they'll have to live with it. But I know them though, they'll let this go. That is the way they work.

V-- The pressure from them though, it's just incredible.

D-- Is it more since Linda die?

V-- Absolutely! I always was that way with my father. You know, trying to do the right thing to take care of everything. To be the good daughter. But now, I find myself being even more protective of my mother and it is pretty tiring.

At first I wondered if the choice to take a trip might not be a means to avoid the pain of family functions, however, they are still planning a luncheon following the service. It is entirely possible that their dislike for overblown B/Mitzvah celebrations, a dislike that I know of from prior conversations, is driving this decision. I suspect that both are contributing factors. Regardless of the reason for the decision, however, it goes to the very heart of the family dynamic. It is clear that the emotional enmeshment between V and her parents had been heightened by V's death. From all accounts, the decision over the B/Mitzvah party is the first time in their married lives that J and V are making a choice that is diametrically opposed to what V's parents want. Having drawn a clear boundary between the generations, it is not surprising that V is in turmoil over the issue or that her parents' have attempted to pull them back into their usual patterns. Unfortunately, the actual outcome of this

issue will not be known in time for this project since the B/Mitzvah is many months away.³⁷

As we reviewed their emotional lifelines, a separate, but equally significant, dynamic emerged. As V shared her lifeline, it was clear that she had been interacting with her daughter, A, in ways so as to unconsciously compensate for her own adolescent social difficulties.

V-- Up to age 12 do you think I remember a thing? I had a quite happy childhood and did I care where I lived?? No. But when I was right about A's age I had a really tough time because I was a very good student and all my friends weren't and it wasn't cool to be smart. Between doing what came naturally to me and pretending that I was dumb, I basically went through a whole transition of friends. Because my friends... I wasn't in any of their classes. I was in all the advanced classes. And it was a very tough time. Right around A's age now. And I am very conscious of what she is going through with her friends because of that.

D-- So that has impacted your parenting.

V-- Yeah. Yeah. It was right at this time. She is in sixth grade-- and it was at the end of sixth grade.

D-- Do you find yourself reliving any of it?

V-- She just had a little episode when she had a fight with her friends. She was not wrong. And all I kept thinking in the back of my mind was "I hope this doesn't blow up with people taking sides." And it blew over and it is gone. But I am very... I mean it was... I made a completely new set of friends. And that was in sixth and seventh grade.

D-- So it is right here.

V-- That was a real low point. And then as soon as I got in with a new group of people who were in all my classes I was fine.

D-- So whether or not she is going through a big transition in her life, this period in her life is parallel to a big transition in your life.

³⁷ Chapter 5 has a discussion of this.

- V-- I am very conscious of what is going on socially in her life.
- D-- How does that impact on who she invites to the B/Mitzvah
- V-- I want her to invite anyone she wants to the party. You know, we are throwing a big enough party that I can't imagine that she is going to have more kids there than I would like her to have. She just doesn't know that many kids. It is a while away but I am figuring she's going to have fifty or sixty kids. So I've got to believe... and I told her that she should invite anyone she thinks might invite her.
- D-- What you are really saying is "I had a point where I didn't have a lot of friends so lets compensate through A."
- V-- Well maybe. (she smiles, laughs, and turns red) I didn't even...she doesn't even have...we tried to make a list now...what does she have... forty...and I said "leave your options..." Yes!! That is exactly what I am doing--I was like "leave your options open you don't know who'll your be friends with." Yes, that is exactly what I was doing. I didn't even realize I did that--but that is exactly what I did.

We revisited this later in the session. I asked V, "Where would you locate discovering yourself as a sexual being. I'm not asking when you became sexually active, but rather, when you became aware of the fact that you were a human being who was a sexual being."

- V-- Probably in ninth grade. Right around there.
- D-- Three years older than A is now.
- V-- Right, she is doing exactly what we did in sixth grade.
- D-- And you're comfortable with that?
- V-- No! Not at all! ...because you read too much about what goes on now. But I think she's susceptible to peer pressure.
- D-- More so than other kids?
- V-- I don't know about that. To me, though, it is important who she is friends with because of what they are doing she is doing.

D-- That whole friendship thing comes back in.

V-- Yeah.

Clearly, V was revisiting her own adolescence through A. By encouraging her daughter to invite as many friends to her B/Mitzvah as possible V was attempting to heal a hurt from her own childhood. Her confusion on this matter is reflected in the fact that in the same statement she commented that A knows few children but will be inviting fifty or sixty children to the party. By recognizing and naming this, V was more able to begin addressing her daughter's social issues rather than returning to her own.

Finally, our sessions provided V with the opportunity to do some further grief work. In particular, in the final session V addressed her struggle with coming to terms with the ways in which L's death has permanently changed her.

V-- It is just that it is stressful you know... and you know... this is totally unrelated but I just feel like someone I... (to J) I don't know if I ever told you this... this woman I knew she's right around my age. I grew up with her. Her sister died nine months before L. She was best friends with her. They were really close. And she came to pay a *shiva* call on me and she said to me... and I thought it was the most awful thing in the world, she said, "you will never be the same person." I thought it was horrible, meaning that I would never be happy again. But that's not what she meant. I am not the same person. I have to do different things than I used to do because of this.

D-- You are not the same person and your family is not the same family.

V-- No and never will be. So she was right.

D-- But it is reality. Because when you cut the *kriah* ribbon, that cloth will never be the same. And it is the same symbolism for what happens

in a family. The family ties are torn apart. And it was. The family is not the same again.

J-- But that's not necessarily a bad thing.

This was the first time I had heard V speak so directly regarding the ways in which L's death has impacted her. It has impacted her sense of self. And, as I discovered, it has impacted the way in which she parents her children. One result of V's death that had never been mentioned emerged during the final session. Because of her loss, and perhaps her guilt over times when she and L fought, V observed that she has become particularly sensitive to conflicts between her daughters.

V-- You know-- I still get that ... I met someone today. She went to the same high school as me. She asked me my maiden name. When I told her I got that stunned look. You know, I was just out to lunch and... when is it that those things will stop happening that put me in those places.

J-- (changing the subject) It is not that things happen but what they do to you.

D-- (ignoring the comment) Look, this experience has become part of your identity.

V-- Right.

D-- Her death is part of who you are. And it is difficult to incorporate something that painful into who you are.

V-- You know, when my kids fight I say, "Don't do that. You know, you should value the fact that you have a sister."

D-- That's a heavy burden that you are putting on those kids.

V-- I don't say it--I just think it.

The dual dynamics interwove throughout the sessions with V and J. I suspect that V's emotional enmeshment with her parents would have been an issue regardless of her sister's death. However, with L's death, this fusion was now intermingled with V's on-going struggles to come to terms with L's death and its impact on her and the entire family system. While our conversations were quite intense, the depth to which we were able to go was both remarkable and, it seemed, helpful to them both.

Couple 5

For Couple 5, L and S, the central issue that emerged from our sessions was their on-going struggle with dramatic shifts in the emotional connections with their extended family. This included cut-offs, outright animosity and a clear shift in emotional process. Throughout the discussions, their own marital issues remained an additional, but unspoken, struggle. Of all the couples, they were the least forthcoming in the conversation and the only couple who neglected to graph their emotional lifeline. S seemed angry and pained at all three sessions. While L participated in the conversation, he seemed emotionally disengaged and spent a great deal of the time, particularly when S was speaking, looking around the room or picking his teeth. Unlike the other couples with whom I had met, there was no laughing as we spoke. Their body language communicated that they were all but emotionally cut off from one another. Moreover, it became clear that the difficulties with L's extended family were paralleled within their own home,

suggesting that L's home life was the identified patient for the entire family dynamic.

L and S joined the congregation in the past year. They moved into the community two years ago and spent their first year as members of another congregation. They had a negative experience there and, as a result, joined our temple. Our lack of a history as rabbi and congregants was one of the reasons for my asking them to participate. I was curious how meeting with people who were essentially strangers might be different from my meetings with people I have known for years. They were enthusiastic about participating. As we sat down the first time, I asked if they would give me permission to record the sessions.³⁸ After a long period of silence S said, "I think I would be more comfortable if you just took notes. I will be less likely to open up with the tape going." I assured her that it was fine not to tape and I began explaining the rationale behind the project.

As we spoke, two main themes emerged that would dominate our sessions. It was not until the third session that I realized that they were intimately connected. The first issue was the emotional trauma they had endured in moving to our community two years ago. The second was L's emotional distance from his extended family and the resulting feelings of disappointment as he waited for them to reach out to him.

The sense of trauma, and the feelings of loss resulting from their move to New Jersey was far stronger for S than for L. S attributed this to L's heavy

travel schedule and her having developed a debilitating illness shortly after the move.

S-- I was a young mom but... I'm going through my... I guess it is a mid-life crisis. We moved here two years ago. We had friends and I had a career in our former home. Then we moved here. I lost my identity as a teacher and I got sick. To me it is an identity thing. The kids are even looking at me like I'm just a mom. But my identity is a lot more than that.

As S spoke, L seemed disconnected and disinterested in what she was saying. Her feelings of loneliness, as expressed through both words and silence, was palpable.

The second issue that dominated our conversations revolved around S and L's extended families. Their experiences were diametrically opposed. S, I discovered, was adopted. She had been reunited with her birth mother and was getting to know an entirely new family. L, on the other hand, had grown up in a close extended family but was now estranged from most of them. "The myth, as it turned out to be," L angrily shared, "was that we were one happy family. But it is all hypocrisy." L dealt with his hurt by blaming them for the dynamic and cutting himself off from the rest of his extended family. When he did have contact with them it was hostile. In order to maintain some degree of connection, S had been functioning in the role of "peacemaker" and "communicator." Recently, however, she had decided to extricate herself from this triangle. At one point she stated, "I am not happy being put in this role any longer. I am angry being in this position." It was clear that both L and his

³⁸ I had not recorded my prior sessions. This will be discussed further in

parents had placed her into this role. Thus, she had recently told her mother-in-law that she would no longer serve as the go-between for L and his parents. "This," she had said, "is my year of liberation." Yet in spite of her statement she was still filling this role. As she spoke L simply shrugged his shoulders. I did not respond but made a note to return to this subject at a later point in the sessions.

The B/Mitzvah had brought many of these issues to the surface. More than ever, S felt that she had been assigned the role of family mediator between L and his parents. This only added to her resentment. In one exchange, she encountered her mother-in-law's anger at their decision to limit their guest list to only include first cousins. Her mother-in-law had argued, "That is not enough." S responded, "It has to be, because that is what we decided." L's mother then informed S that a number of family members who had been invited were going to protest the decision by refusing to come. As S reported these events L sat silently. Finally he said, "Even if my parents don't know it, this is the first manifestation of the 21st century family. For them, extended family is everything. For us, it is different."

Later in the conversation, L expressed his concern that these dynamics might spill over into the celebration of the B/Mitzvah.

L-- Let's just hope everyone keeps in mind why they are here. It is J's B/Mitzvah.

D-- Are you concerned about that?

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L-- Anyone would be. And you have to be careful... For me, my focus is on my kid. It has to be a really fabulous day for her. This is the day she enters Jewish adulthood. Any issues that are going on have to be kept from her. Or in my family, if some of the stuff going on comes out it would be awful. I mean, she knows about it. She has expressed concern that she is part of a feud that she had nothing to do with.

S's frustration with her role in this triangle was clear.

S-- He will not talk to her.

L-- (Laughs but says nothing)

S-- ...and I'm pissed.

L-- They believe they are supportive of their kids and their families. But my brother and I agree it is only their fantasy. The final break with them came last year when we had a chance to go on one of my business trips together. We had been having problems and we thought this trip would help heal them. It also meant S could see my work. They were coming to the east coast anyhow for something a week later, so S called them and asked them to come a week early and stay with the kids while we went away. They said yes, but then kept putting off making arrangements and then, a week before, when we called to finalize things, my father announced that they had decided they just couldn't do it. My mother just didn't want to be bothered. Not even an hour to give my brother, who lives near by, a break, let alone us. So I went alone on the trip. I wrote a letter to my father explaining how we felt about everything. I was hoping to give him a chance to say he was sorry. Instead, he fired back and blamed S for everything.

S-- And I was the one holding it together- I just said, 'screw it'. I was the one holding it together and I was done.³⁹

In the next session I learned that S's family's dynamics were equally complicated. S was adopted as an infant. She and her adoptive mother remain close. However, she and her adoptive father are emotionally cut off and have been since adolescence. She reported that her father "loves kids"

until they are old enough to fight. He was horrible to live with and I had no qualms about arguing with him." S filed to have the seal broken on her adoption file in 1984. Shortly thereafter she was reunited with her birth mother and had spent time during the last decade getting to know her biological family. She remained dispassionate as she described her reunion. There was little, if any, enthusiasm in her voice. When she mentioned that she had two half-siblings I observed-- "It is interesting that when you were telling me about family you mentioned your other but not the two half-siblings." Her tone shifted and became harsher, "No, I said I was raised with one brother." S commented that the B/Mitzvah would be the first time that both her birth and her adoptive families would be together. When I asked if this caused her to feel anxious she replied, "Wouldn't it make you anxious?" As a considered her anxiety I recognized that it might have a variety of sources. First, S commented that this was the opportunity for both of her families to show her that she matters. I wondered if she was terrified that her biological family might reject her for a second time. Second, she had observed that while her adoptive mother had been supportive of her efforts to reunite with her birth mother, this process had been painful for her adoptive mother. Perhaps S was anxious that her adoptive mother might be hurt again or that there would be tension, or perhaps outright hostility, between the two families as the B/Mitzvah.

³⁹ It is notable that this had occurred a year ago. The on-going conflict revealed that she had been unable to follow through on her resolve to extricate herself from the triangle.

As S described her family an exchange occurred that showed the degree of overt hostility between L and S.

S-- If abortion was legal I probably wouldn't be here.

L-- (almost amused) Definitely!

S-- (enraged) Don't say that!

As we spoke it became clear that the hostilities and tensions throughout the family were severe.

During our third session the interconnectedness of these two family dynamics became clear. Much to their surprise, both S's birth family and her adoptive family were making serious efforts to attend the B/Mitzvah. Much to L's frustration and anger, his extended family was making no effort and were overwhelmingly indicating their inability to attend. This added to the gap between S and L. When they came in they seemed more distant than usual. Neither had done the homework. They offered no explanation. L's anger at his extended family came out quickly.

L-- The people who have said "no"--it has been sort of a shock. This is sort of a milestone in J's life and in our life. It is an evening of family but that won't happen without family there. You know there were givens as kids. Now we are having to create our own new givens.

D-- When you say "givens", what do you mean?

L-- I now see the hypocrisy... the transparency in the family... but I didn't then.

D-- Hypocrisy?

L-- Yeah, the big happy family that was supposed to be. We're surprised that, for the most part, people aren't willing to make the effort.

S-- Some are...

L-- Yours have been pleasant surprises... mine have been nothing but disappointments.

S-- I worked them. I made sure they knew it was important to me that they were there. And I let them know that I expected that they would make it a priority. Your aunts who said "no" probably didn't even think you really wanted them.

D-- How do you react when your aunts say "no"?

L-- I'm both angry and disappointed in the hypocrisy of the whole thing. My parents lived the lie of one big happy family. But now I know that it isn't true. It might have been better if... They always expected me to attend their functions. But when it comes to my function it isn't important.

D-- So you don't count?

L-- Yeah.

D-- And the B/Mitzvah has brought all this out.

S-- I think you should call them.

L-- I did, I called my aunt...she didn't want to hear it. It may be stuff with my parents that I don't know about...

D-- But regardless, you are the one who is getting hurt.

L-- It is not so much that I am getting hurt. I'm cool with it. I have my own family. And I am learning from it about how to be a better father. I'm disappointed for J. Because even though I understand what has happened, she doesn't and it is her day. Look at what J wrote in the Temple bulletin--"I am looking forward to being with my entire family." It is important to her. 40

S-- I wrote that.

⁴⁰ L's anger and hurt were clear, yet he was unable to admit this to himself or to me. Instead, he labeled the issue as J's problem and was angry on her behalf. This is a good example of how someone can project their own emotions onto someone else, thereby eliminating any potential to deal with the actual issue.

(Silence)

- D-- There are two powerful opposing tugs here—for one of you there is the dissolution of family. For the other there is the rebirth of family.
- S-- Very much so.
- L-- I don't want to guilt people into coming. It is all very interesting.
- D-- It is remarkable to me that you can talk about such painful stuff so calmly.
- L-- It is because I get it. I'm not upset by it.
- S-- Yes you are. You just don't admit to being hurt.
- L-- It is just that we are so isolated here. So far from everyone. This is an opportunity for me to show off my family, my kids, my house... and I won't get to do it because they won't come.
- S-- I see it differently. I just want to put my wishes and expectations out there.
- D-- So what you are saying is that you want them to reach out to you.
- S-- If you want them there, tell them
- L-- I just don't get why family won't come and friends are going out of their way to come. Even new friends who I never expected to come are saying yes. They are even saying that they are honored to be there!! Really honored!
- S-- That's just because you can pick your friends and not your relatives.
- L-- But then you hear from family that we are the ones who are perceived as being the handful. I see now ... this is really going off the subject but... I have this uncle who just didn't want to deal with the family stuff... with all the politics. So he took off. I was close to him as a kid.
- D-- So you are this generation's uncle?
- S-- Well I hope not. He has no kids, married three times to three different women who took care of him.

Clearly, the disparity between the reactions of the two families highlighted much of what was playing out in response to the B/Mitzvah. In addition, L took no responsibility for the dynamics with his extended family. At no time did he give any indication that he played a role in what was happening, nor did he offer any indication that he might have a role to play in healing the hurts. Although he had caused many of the cut-offs within his family, he consistently perceived himself as the victim.

Issues of emotional closeness and distance were most apparent with this couple. Throughout the sessions, L and S skirted around their relationship with one another. At one point S alluded to a great deal of difficulties between the two of them. But then she and L refused to discuss it further. At one point I asked what the B/Mitzvah meant to them as a couple. S retorted, "Now that's a loaded question, I feel like I'm doing it all." L neither reacted nor responded to this strong burst of emotion nor answered the initial question. Throughout the session I felt that, although a great deal was said, there was more left unsaid than with any of the other couples.

Couple 6

B and L have been members of the congregation for at least eight years. I got to know them four years ago when B was going through a difficult professional and financial period. He came to see me a number of times for counseling and then came in to see me for help with a financial issue. I did what I could to help him secure a new loan for his house while he made a

change in his career. A few months later, B's older brother died. I met with the entire family, met privately with the kids, officiated at the funeral and then led two of the shiva minyans. In short, prior to this project I already knew the family guite well. Since the majority of my contact had been with and through B, I called L to see if they might agree to participate. L was enthusiastic about becoming involved. "It sounds really interesting-- and we might learn some good stuff", she said. She then added that she would be more than happy to do it since she was working on her Master's thesis and understood how important it was for people to be cooperative. When I suggested that she speak to B before making a commitment she laughed and said, "Are you kidding, if you are asking him to do something, he would never say 'no'."41 Of all the couples with whom I met, they came into my study the first time the most comfortable. When I asked if they would mind if I recorded the sessions they laughed and said, "Do what ever you need to do." (It is for this reason that they are the only couple whose entire three-session conversation is recorded in the Appendix.)

As we went through the genogram interview, I gathered both the factual and the emotional information for the chart. For B and L, the central challenge was the struggle to celebrate the B/Mitzvah in the shadow of overwhelming loss and bereavement. For them, the B/Mitzvah became a means to compensate for a series of dramatic and traumatic losses over the

⁴¹ I knew from experience that they have a tendency to speak for one another and I did not want B to enter the sessions feeling that someone else had committed him to the process.

years. As they observed during the genogram interview, many of these losses had coincided with other life-cycle transitions, thus turning moments that should have been celebratory into periods of mourning. They were committed to compensating for these losses by holding a celebratory party for their daughter's B/Mitzvah that might help balance out their deep sense of loss. In addition, they hoped it would finally give them one celebration that was unadulterated by loss and would count for all of them. I learned that they were so invested in making this happen that they were willing to put the nuclear family at financial risk in order to throw the party. This was particularly significant since they, individually and as a couple, admitted that financial stress was one of the key issues detracting from their sense of intimacy. The need to compensate, however, was clearly more powerful than their need to be fiscally prudent or emotionally circumspect regarding this emotional "hot-button".

B-- [It was] a month and a half before [my older brother's] B/Mitzvah when dad died.

D-- Was J the eldest child?

B-- Yeah.

D-- That must have been tough.

B-- It was a rough time.

L-- I don't know. I guess it's in my mind so consciously somehow that it was, was, that the timing was just lousy.

D-- So on some level this raises those feelings again.

- L-- Absolutely.
- D-- For your family a B/Mitzvah is not just a joyous event.
- L-- (laugh) No. None of our milestones have been joyous...
- B-- My mother died right before... (talking over L)
- L-- His mother died right before we got married. (laugh)
- B-- She died in the end of August . . .
- L-- And I have to tell you all of these things happening are having a big effect of the B/Mitzvah. I mean, not just, yeah our past impacts on how we view this occasion.

We spoke about the anxiety that is now attached to all family life-cycle events. L then observed, "A lot of milestones in our life have been surrounded by negative things and we feel very strongly that we want to make this a happy occasion-- a memorable occasion." She later continued, "I mean, we're certainly not doing anything over the top but... you know we certainly really can't afford to do what we're doing. But we feel strongly that we've spent so much money on horrible things in our lives that this is something that we finally get to spend on something nice."

In the second session, the discussion of this issue continued.

L-- Well, I think what we had told you before about, you know, we, we really sat down and said what do we want to do and we felt that a lot of our milestones have been marked, unfortunately, by tragic things and we wanted this to be a really happy time. We felt like we wanted to celebrate. We have a beautiful family and we want to celebrate that. And, right? That's something that we both felt like we wanted.

B-- Now we just have to find someone to pay for it. (Referring to ongoing financial struggles that have resulted from a series of professional missteps by and disappointments for B.)

L-- Even though we really can't afford it, we felt strongly about doing that. And, you know, we discussed options with E, but E also felt strongly about having this party.

D-- Good.

L-- And having it all together, and having the family there, and seeing her achieving this milestone.

From prior contact with B and L, I knew that they had been struggling with this issue for a long time. From the way in which they spoke, it was clear that they had finally arrived at a decision as to the best way to celebrate. They had consciously made a choice that was against their better financial judgment, but filled a clear emotional need. There was no question that their decision was final and that the offer of alternative, and less expensive ways of celebrating would not be beneficial. In addition, due to on-going financial struggles, I knew that it was important to L and B to feel successful in the eyes of their peers. Were this not the case, a discussion on alternative means of celebrating would have been appropriate.

As we spoke I was struck by the number of family transitional moments that have been marred by family or national losses. Not only had B's brother's B/Mitzvah been impacted by their father's death, but B and L's own wedding had been disrupted by the death of B's mother.

L-- We had to change our whole wedding because his mother died right before our wedding. So that's why we feel strongly about celebrating.

D-- So you got married with B in mourning.

L-- Yeah, basically. (laugh)

B-- L was with her parents and . . . (talking over L)

L-- ...B walked down the aisle...B walked down the aisle with his grandmother and everyone was crying, basically. (laugh) Yeah. So I, we never look at our wedding album. We just have this... it's just a very sad time. So . . .

B-- ...poignant time.

L-- ...poignant time.

B-- It was rough. My stepfather made a, you know, his toast at the wedding... that was also very difficult.

D-- I'm sure, I'm sure.

L-- So we just wanted to have a good time and have a nice celebration.

The issues of loss manifest in this family were only exceeded by the sense of resilience they appeared to show. While they were appropriately apprehensive about approaching another family milestone in light of family history, they had consciously channeled the energy into trying to make this B/Mitzvah especially festive.

A second issues that emerged involved their struggles with their daughter's physical maturation. While they were intellectually prepared for E to become an adolescent, they were unprepared for the physical changes the last two years had brought about. We delved in this area of conversation indirectly as we spoke about L's wild youth. As she described a wide range of acting out, I observed, "And here she is approaching that age."

L-- Right, right.

B-- Well, but that, that doesn't worry me as... she... I think between us and school, I think she's been, for lack of a better word, indoctrinated,

well. You know, they have the DARE program. And, as ineffective as a lot of people say it is, that it's just an outdated bad program, E was very serious about that. You know she, and, and I think with her and her friends they're probably good about that. My issues are more with her physically.

D-- What do you mean?

B-- Her body. I mean she ...

L-- She's very developed. (talking over B)

B-- ...she's very well developed. Although her friends are starting to develop, she's been well developed for over a year. And, you know, she's got the body at ...there weren't many girls that I dated in high school who were developed like she is now. And I knew what the girls were like who I was dating. And if I had a son it wouldn't bother me so much. And as a daughter, having a daughter it does. Because I know that the guys pressure the girls.

D-- So, so, in the last year you've had to start realizing that your daughter, you've had to start seeing her as a sexual being.

B-- Oh, yeah. Yeah. I don't know if, I don't think she does. I remember when you said to her she needs to wear a bra, that was before camp last summer, she looked at L like L had two heads. She didn't see herself that way. I don't know if she does now or not.

D-- But still ...

B-- Well. I think she, she's ...

L-- She is ... (talking over B)

B-- ... kind of innocent about it.

L-- Yeah. I mean, she has no qualms at all about walking around without any clothes on. B is always saying E put on a robe. She's not ashamed of her father.

D-- This is in the house with you home.

L-- Yeah, yeah. She's not ashamed of it. I don't want to make her self-conscious.

D-- Yeah.

L-- You know, she, yeah, I made her get a bra last year. Now she's more aware of it. She says to me, you know, she's made some comments like, "You know, you think it's fun having this body and you think this is easy?" And I said "E, I know it's not, you know, I know it's very hard. But, you know that everybody has something. You happen to have a beautiful body. I would love to have your body." Some of her friends have said things that are not so nice. You know, one of her friends needed surgery on her hip. Another friend big problems with her eyes. You know, I said, "Yeah, it has its down side absolutely. But on the other hand..."

As much of the writing on adolescent development notes, the transition of a child from pre-pubescent to physically and emotionally developed adolescent is often a difficult one for both the child and the parents. This was clearly the case for L and B as they tried to help their daughter navigate the onset of these changes. In fact, as I learned later, when these changes became too overwhelming for their daughter, they immediately sought professional help for her.

Of all the couples, B and L struck me as the most resilient of the group. Perhaps the key to their emotional survival through all of their trials had been this capacity for resilience. They also, it should be noted, seemed to enjoy the sessions the most.

Meaning of B/Mitzvah

For each of the couples, the opportunity to discuss what the B/Mitzvah meant to them as individuals and as a couple seemed well spent. For most, this discussion may have been the first time they had been asked to consider

the question. It certainly was the first time they had been asked to shift the focus from their child or the service/party to themselves.

Couple 4

J and V seemed to be having their child become B/Mitzvah because it was expected of them by V's parents and the community at large. In keeping with the emotional fusion between V and her parents, V was struggling between the poles of trying to please her parents and wanting to make the choices that best fit her nuclear family. In addition, it was clear that their own B/Mitzvah experiences had a direct impact on the way in which their were approaching their daughter's day.

V-- We talked to A about what this means to her. She replied, "It means no more Hebrew School." I know it means more than that but I don't think she is aware of it yet. I think she just isn't old enough yet to get what it means to be a B/Mitzvah. She doesn't see it as her becoming an adult. In fact, there are other delineating points that are much more important to her right now--things like being able to start baby-sitting. We told her she could start baby-sitting at twelve. That is a bigger thing to her. That is a big thing for her. The bottom line is--we told her she was doing this, so she is doing it.

D-- How about for each of you?

V-- Like I told you last time, it didn't have much of a profound meaning. Did it because I did it. That's what you did and it was expected of me. But it didn't mean that much to me. It is one of those things I like because it is part of tradition. But there isn't any real religious meaning for me. It is a nice family time. A time for celebration.

J-- But why is that the case for you?

V-- Religion says that this marks the beginning of adulthood, but I don't see it that way. Our culture has changed so much and the fact is a 13-

year-old is still just 13-year-old even if she's going through some changes. Now, she is starting to break away from the family.

J-- Telling the truth, I don't think I'll come up with the answer to the question of what this means to me, until I'm standing there up on the *bimah* with her. It's just not possible for me understand everything that this means right now.

We later returned to this line of conversation.

V--To me this is important because I want to carry on the tradition.

J--Since it was meaningless for me, I think it will have much more effect on me than I realize. As a kid it meant nothing. Now, suddenly, I find myself more connected to religion, more connected to my family and more connected to a synagogue than ever thought I would be

It was clear from our discussions that V and J were seeing the B/Mitzvah in terms of others: their daughter, their nuclear family or their extended family. This may have been the first time they had focused on its meaning for them. And while they did not have any specific answers, my hope is that these sessions provided the catalyst for J and V to begin examining the meaning and impact of their daughter's B/Mitzvah on them and on their nuclear family.

Couple 5

It was clear throughout the sessions with L and S that the B/Mitzvah highlighted on-going issues with which they struggled as individuals, as a couple and as a family. For L, it marked the breakdown of the family myth of closeness and the ultimate dissolution of his family. For S, it was an opportunity for her to be reborn as a Jew. The degree to which the B/Mitzvah brought up latent family dynamics first emerged when I asked them what the B/Mitzvah means to the two of them.

L-- Here's this child of ours advancing in the Jewish lifestyle.

D-- Why is that important?

L-- I wasn't raised in a Jewishly involved household. Somehow, there was something that clicked for me. Somehow, having a kid who is committed to it early on in her life is a great affirmation of the values that I have chosen. And that is the case even though she is a daughter so even if she were to reject it later in life her kids, my grandkids, would still be Jewish.

S-- For me it is the fact that I'm not yet forty and I have a B/Mitzvah. It is awesome that as a couple we have this child. This time is a fleshing out of a lot of stuff... a lot of it unsettling, but some nice stuff too. But lots of stuff is coming to the surface now.

D-- What type of stuff?

L-- Look, I was in a normal family growing up as a child. And now, it is totally screwed up.

D-- So there is a lot of loss here.

S-- Total!

L-- Then there is S, who had no extended family growing up and a really tough dad. Me, I had a huge extended family. And she has all these people coming. My family exploded to the point that there is virtually nothing left of it. It is S's new family that is most symbolic of what a family should be.

S-- That is because I worked for it...

L-- It is fleshing out a lot of stuff though and some of it is pretty upsetting... unsettling. Some of it is really nice, but lots of stuff is coming to the surface. I was part of a normal family as a child and it is totally screwed up now. My grandparents are gone. My aunts are refusing to come...It foretells a really bleak future for my family.

Elsewhere, S reported,

I was raised Jewish. The past couple of years I was kind of questioning it all. We moved up here and I have had a terrible time. But coming to this temple, and starting to teach in the religious school last month has ignited my Jewish self again. For my daughter to become a B/Mitzvah is a sense of rebirth for me. There is also something remarkable in the

story behind this. Although my birth mother was Jewish she raised my half siblings as Christians. Had I not been given up, or had I been adopted by a different family that wasn't Jewish, there would be no B/Mitzvah now. There is some kind of fate here. Moving up here shook my identity. Finding my birth family a few years ago did too. Now I have to base my Judaism on myself. My adopted parents have contributed to it enormously, but my biological family hasn't done anything.

For S, our sessions served as one part in an over-all process that enabled her to reconnect to Judaism and the Jewish community. In addition, S was fully aware that it provided her with the opportunity to bring her two families, adoptive and birth, together for the first time and, she hoped, to feel affirmed and valued by both. She observed,

This B/Mitzvah is going to be a good thing for me. It is the first time that people have made an effort for my sake. I've made an effort for their events. That is why I have gotten to know them. I went out of my way to be there and to reconnect. But now it is their turn. And you wonderwho will be the relatives for my children--the biological ones or the adopted ones?"

It was clear that since the B/Mitzvah represents two diametrically opposed family processes for them, there is limited overlap in the meaning for them. What might otherwise be a source of joy that unites them as a couple, is instead, filled with anxiety that heightens the distance between them.

Couple 6

As noted above, for B and L the B/Mitzvah represented the opportunity to celebrate a transitional moment with joy rather than sorrow. Thus L observed, "We've spent so much money on horrible things in our lives that this is something that we finally get to spend on something nice." Yet, try as

they might to employ the B/Mitzvah to erase or, as least, to compensate for their series of painful life-cycle experiences, the specter of the past continues to hang over them. When I pointed this out to them L responded,

Well, actually, the last time we left here we were saying you know how there's always a good and a bad and I'm thinking, oh my God, what if somebody dies right before E's B/Mitzvah, again (laugh). You know, like, what if something bad happens? And, and, I hadn't really thought of it, but in context of our lives (laugh) it's, it's not out of the question...

Thus, the implicit became explicit and she could now consciously deal with it.

For B the B/Mitzvah is a chance for him to be there for his children, the way his father was unable to be there for him.

D-- How, how present are all the losses as you are thinking about the B/Mitzvah?

B-- Very. Yeah. We were talking about before about what it means to us and to E. And a lot of what it means to me is to be able to carry on with E where my father couldn't. You know where he had started, I couldn't.

D-- That's a heavy burden.

B-- Oh, I don't think of it as a burden. I mean, it's, it's just sort of picking up the next ...

L-- You know you can look at it too as it could be a burden or it could be an honor almost.

B-- Well, that's how I look... I don't look at it as a burden. I mean, on the one hand it brings into more of the present the loss of not having had it, but I do feel, you know, privileged that I'm able to do it with E

For L, the B/Mitzvah evoked her adolescent experience growing up in a Conservative synagogue in which women were not yet equals. While she

had become a B/Mitzvah, she had encountered sexual discrimination. For her, E's B/Mitzvah, therefore, represented full equality for women.

L-- We belonged to a Conservative Temple. And they felt that the girls should not be first walking down. So they made me wait until M, whose birthday is in March, I still remember, turned thirteen. And he got B/Mitzvah first and my B/Mitzvah was April 5th. Because Martin Luther King was shot the day before. There was controversy as to whether I was going to have my B/Mitzvah, because I grew up in Somerville. I was, we were living in Somerville at the time. And they were very afraid that there would be riots in Plainfield. And people were nervous about my B/Mitzvah. That maybe we shouldn't have it. Maybe it should be postponed. 'Cause he got shot on the fourth...

B-- Right. You see there's something going on here. Because, between everybody dying before one of our events and him getting shot ...(talking over L)

L-... I think. Right (talking over B) Yeah.

B-- ... and your sister being born ...

L-- Oh, the weekend Kennedy was shot.

B-- ... the week that Kennedy was shot. (laugh)

L-- So, but we went through with it. There was a lot of commotion ... should we do it? Should we not do it? People were really nervous about it. But, we did. And, I had it, it was a Friday night. Girls at that time had, had it on Friday night.

D-- Really.

L-- Yeah. It was Conservative, right. And we had it in the temple. And then Saturday night we had a party at the JCC, the Jewish Community Center in Somerville. We had a band... that was big fun. And I remember not, I remember being mad that they made me wait. You know, it's my birthday and I wanted to go first. And I don't know why, I, I just felt at the time, that that was a stupid thing that a boy had to go first. I remember being mad. But, but, it was fun. A lot of my friends did not. It was, it was, I wouldn't say it was unusual, but not a lot of girls at the time were being B/Mitzvah.

⁴² Yet another joyous event marred by tragedy!

D-- Right. Right.

L-- It was, you know, maybe a third of the girls at that time were. So, I felt, I felt good about it and I think it was the best experience for me. My father is much more religious than my mother. My father worked with me on my Haftarah. And he reads Hebrew much better than my mother. But it was nothing like it is now with the girls. You know, it was very, girls were, were second class... (laugh)

D-- So how do you feel looking at E approaching this as a full citizen?

L-- I think it's great. I think it's wonderful. Yeah, I think it's, it's really terrific. We've come a long way. And I'm proud to say that I was B/Mitzvah because when I talk to a lot of friends my age, they were not. And I'm really proud that I did go through it. And I'm proud that I can tell her, both my girls that I did. So ...

Thus, for B and L, the sessions raised a series of significant, and powerful issues. For the most part they were quite aware of the dynamics and had even made conscious choices to use the B/Mitzvah as a mechanism for compensating for them. Now they had to grapple with the reality that ultimately, plan as they might, the circumstances surrounding the B/Mitzvah were out of their control. Nevertheless, the sessions provided them with a forum to discuss them more openly and thereby, to help prepare them for the vent itself.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion and Personal Reflects

Having met with all four couples for three sessions there is no question that approaching the B/Mitzvah as a family life-cycle event has the potential to significantly benefit the couples, their children and the member of the clergy working with them. This model responds to many of the issues presented by the current status of B/Mitzvah in modern America. It shifts the focus away from external factors such as the party on to the emotional and psychospiritual issues of the individual parents and the entire family system. The seemingly simple act of performing a genogram interview and drawing a three to four generation pictorial representation of the family helps shift the focus from the individual child to the entire family. The genogram interview and subsequent discussion clearly help parents find their own place in the ritual. I was particularly struck by the way in which each family seemingly guided the conversation toward those issues with which they were struggling. Often, the degree to which a couple was having difficulty came as a surprise to them. Time and again, it was revealed that something that is culturally labeled as a joyous event, is often fraught with anxiety due to unresolved tensions. This model allows these tensions to be uncovered and, potentially, reduced.

Assessment of the Project Based Upon the Articulated Goals

This project was intended as an opportunity for Jewish parents whose eldest child is becoming B/Mitzvah to gain a better understanding of: their child, themselves, and their family. While each of these areas of discovery

was present for each of the couples, at least one of them emerged as the dominant area of learning for each of the participating couples.

A Better Understanding of Their Child

The sessions helped E and K begin considering what it means to have an adolescent.

D-- Are you ready for this. For the life changes, for J to begin a new process, for both your kids to be older?

E-- This to me is really positive. I'm not sure, though, that I will be ready when they both go away to school. We are really focused on the kids right now. I don't have many friends and I have no hobbies. My free time is with the kids. I know guys who are focused on other guy friends. Not me. And that will make this harder.

K-- You'll have me. (laughs) And I have plenty of hobbies.

(K begins to make suggestions for hobbies E might pursue. He makes it clear that he isn't interested in suggestions right now. He simply wants to express his concern and discomfort.)

While the B/Mitzvah meant gaining another adult male in the family, it was also the first time that E began to consider that within a few years both of his children will leave home. This represented a substantial loss for E and raised significant anxiety, however, by considering the implications of this now, E had already begun the process of preparing for that day. Thus, for E and K the B/Mitzvah brought their child one step closer to leaving home and marked their need to begin dealing with this.

For J and V the challenge came from their daughter's transition to adolescence.

V-- We're actually having a hard time with that now. She has some friends who aren't exactly the right crowd. From what we hear their acting out a little bit sexually and it's a little nerve racking. We had to start dealing with her as a sexual person over two years ago she got her period. Age 10, that was an uneasy adjustment for either of us (J shakes his head agreement.)

J-- We want to keep the lines of communication open, but sometimes it's hard she told us last month that she played spin the bottle. We did our best to respond calmly, and not push her away, but to tell you the truth, it was awfully, awfully hard. This is the time when she has to start making decisions for herself. I just hope we've instilled enough in her to help make the right ones.

Later, this line of discussion continued when I asked, "How do you feel about her approaching adolescence?"

V-- We're really feeling it now. She just wants to be with her friends. We have to come to grips with the fact that she's not a baby anymore. And she doesn't need us in the same way any longer.

J-- It is hard to adjust since we've always been a family oriented family. We have always spent most of our free time with each other. The fact that she wants to do her own ting most of the time isn't exactly easy.

V-- But you've got to be happy that she wants to be with the friends she has. She's picked good kids to hang out with. But our having done a good job means that she is moving away from us. It may be easy for her, but it means a loss for us. Especially since, as J said, we really like doing things together.⁴³

J-- That's why this family trip is so important.

For J and V, having an adolescent meant stretching the boundaries of their close-knit, and perhaps fused, family. The notion that their daughter was beginning to break away from them and become increasingly independent

⁴³ In reviewing these verbatims, V's on-going anxiety over her daughter's social life emerged once again when she contradicted herself by saying "she has some friends who aren't exactly the right crowd" and "she's picked good kids." Clearly V's own adolescent struggles continue to mix with her daughter's social development.

evoked tremendous anxiety in both of them. This may be further complicated by the death of V's sister and the fusion that is so much a part of V's familyof-origin.

For L and S, the issues of separation from their adolescent daughter were profound. S's own feelings of childhood loss and separation were brought to the fore by her daughter's independence. When I asked about this, L immediately referred back to S's difficulties with J's earlier forays into the world.

- L-The problem with J is that she was born 30.
- S- She has no qualms about growing up
- L- Even when she was a kid, S would take it personally that she had no separation anxiety. She went to everyone like it was nothing.

While S is notably proud of her daughter, her own feelings of loss and rejection were triggered by J's development. As S noted elsewhere in our discussions, she was looking to the presence of both her adoptive and her biological families at the B/Mitzvah as a symbolic affirmation of her worth and her place in the family. Yet as she seeks to strengthen her family's bonds, the bonds with L's family are further loosened.

For B and L, their daughter E's recent physical maturation had been a shock to all of them and had sent the family into a small crisis.

- L-- E getting her period was an extremely emotional point for me.
- D-- How so?
- L-- Extremely emotional. Being a woman, it was, for, for like a few weeks it really was very emotional for me. She was young, first of all.

So I felt bad. My initial reaction was I feel so bad for her. She's young and she was having to deal with this at such a young age. And, I felt really bad for her. I remember sitting in her room for two days, basically crying. Looking at her dolls (laugh) and saying, oh, it's like the loss of innocence. And it really struck me very hard. And I felt compelled to put it down [in writing].

D-- What were your feelings? So far you've talked about for her.44

L-- Huh?

D-- What did it mean for you?

L-- I mean, I looked at her as a child and I just didn't, I just felt like "Oh my God!", I mean this is you know, I didn't think of her as being a woman really. But was, yeah, it's, it's, I don't know it was just strange. It was unexpected. She, I mean we used to joke around that she was so tiny that she'd be in a car seat until she was B/Mitzvah. Remember?

B-- Um hum.

L-- And here, all of a sudden she started developing and boom. I mean, even the doctor, couldn't believe it. It was just very odd. And it really bothered me.

The family's difficulty with E's physical maturation resulted in E entering into a period of depression. B and L immediately responded by finding her a therapist, although it did not occur to them that she might be the focus for all their discomfort and that the entire family might benefit from such help. While E continues to see this therapist, both B and L continue to struggle with a change that is more significant than anticipated.

In fact, L had not spoken about E's reaction at all. Instead. She had spoken about her own feelings and projected them onto her daughter. During the discussion, however, I failed to catch this example of projection.

Increased Insight Into Themselves

Throughout the sessions it was clear that while their children were entering adolescence, all of the participants were undergoing their own individual transitions, as well. The clearest statement of this came from B and L.

D-- So what does having this child mean for you?

B-- Well...

L-- That you're old! (laugh)

B-- It, it, it does. I mean, I still, it, I don't know that it's changed the way I think about myself, except to realize that I'm not as young as I think. I'm, I'm in a certain category of, of age and responsibility. It made me more aware of it.

L-- When you're a woman and you turn forty-five they group you, like in your skin care groups. So when you (laugh). It's like thirty-four to forty, thirty-four to forty-four or something. And then you jump into this forty-five to eighty category. (laugh) If she were in the middle or more toward the end of her peer group in developing, we wouldn't have felt this way. But because she was the first one, it's, you know, we had no model, we had, you know, we hadn't talked to anyone about it and it was, it was very, I think that's what made it hard. What made it hard was that it happened very early and we weren't really prepared for it.

During our sessions V learned more than she expected about herself when she discovered that the way in which she was approaching her daughter's social development was directly connected to her own adolescent experience. As previously noted, V was compensating for her own social difficulties by encouraging her daughter to maintain as many social ties as possible.

S and L noted that they had been young parents. Having a child become B/Mitzvah before they had turned forty seemed strange to them. It

ushered in a new phase of life before they were ready for it. Moreover, alluding to her marital problems, S commented that she was still young enough to make "substantial changes" in her life, but that the clock "continues to tick away".

The Impact and Influence of Their Families

As discussed in the previous chapter, all four couples found themselves struggling with issues related to their family of origin. For Couples 3,4 and 6 this manifest itself in the form of loss as each couple sought to come to terms with the impact of death and the resultant role shifts that occur when a family member dies. Only by looking at the family from a systemic perspective could this become apparent. By raising this dynamic with each couple, they became better equipped to cope with the resultant stresses and changes. For V and J an additional struggle came in the form of the emotional fusion with which V had been raised. Now, after forty years of life, V was beginning to experiment with setting new and clearer boundaries with her parents. For L and S, however, the issue was one of emotional cut-offs and hostility. For each of them, the B/Mitzvah was the catalyst for on-going family dynamics to come to the surface. While S anticipates a reunion, L is anxious that the aggression and hostility he feels toward his family will emerge at the B/Mitzvah itself. Clearly, the project was an opportunity for a series of relevant issues to be raised in a safe context. What, if anything, each couples does with this information and insight depends on the couple.

It was clear in a number of cases, that although parents tried to shelter their children from difficult dynamics they were unsuccessful. This was particularly the case for Couple 5. In fact, no matter how hard parents might try to shelter their own children from the family conflicts that emerge at such times, children are often consciously or unconsciously aware of what is going on. A counseling model such as this can help parents understand this fact and can underscore the importance of parents' making sure that their children know that the issues are not of their (the children's) making.

Assessment of Project By Participants

One of the articulated means of assessment was the participant's own perception of the helpfulness of the project. In general, they reported that the time was well spent. In fact, comments, both direct and reported to me, support this assessment. E and K reported that the sessions provided them with a worthwhile opportunity to be self-reflective.

E-- I had focused for years on making money. I have realized lately my need to connect with more than that--to look at the spiritual side of life. The opportunity to do this was handed to me when you invited us to participate.

K-- It gave us a chance to fill in aspects of this B/Mitzvah that we hadn't thought about.

E-- This was handed to us. You invited us--we didn't have to seek you out.

K-- It was good timing.

E-- The B/Mitzvah was the perfect time to look at some of these issues. People who won't do it are too focused on the tasks of B/Mitzvah rather than the real stuff. This can help refocus them.

For V, the personal discovery that emerged from the sessions was not always easy, yet she seemed to enjoy the sessions and expressed this positive reaction to others, as well. She seemed shocked and uncomfortable upon recognizing that she was reacting to her daughter's social development through the lens, and hurts, of her own experience, rather than taking them on their own merits. Yet this realization may allow her to respond to current events, rather than personal history. This learning can benefit both mother and daughter. Yet despite the difficult insights that emerged, there is no question that J and V found value in the overall process.

V-- You know what, I think it is a great thing for anyone going through this to go through. It helps you understand the whole process better. For instance, when you talk about the pressure, for example, that I am feeling from my parents. Maybe it alleviates some of the stress that could come from them. It is a good thing...

J-- It is like the thing you brought up the last time about the grandparents. It is a big thing, because they are feeling older and they have less control.

J-- After you left last week I was like--that was amazing.

V-- That was a big thing about my parents' wanting to be in the spotlight and have their party. Is that what is behind this? I never thought of that.

J-- And sometime within the next couple of months it will come up and we will discuss it with them. If it comes up one more time we will discuss it. And now I am even more motivated to discuss it.

E was similarly reflective in his assessment of the project, stating,

This is a very useful process. Using the B/Mitzvah as the impetus to look at the emotional stuff. It makes it [the B/Mitzvah] a lot less shallow than it might have been.

Although our conversations struck on some challenging and difficult emotional issues, the three couples whose marriages appeared relatively stable, repeatedly commented on how much they enjoyed participating. A few times participants actually used the word "fun" in referring to the sessions. As B and L were participating, L reported that she had seen V the day before. When their conversation touched upon this project, V said, "Don't you just love it! Isn't it great?" Another person said, "It makes you want to go every day or at least start seeing a marriage counselor once a week." This coincides with my observation that, as the sessions went on, most of the participants became increasingly comfortable with our discussions. As we met, the sessions not only went into deeper emotional material, but there were also more occasions for laughter.

It must be noted, however, that without a doubt the most effective assessment takes place after the B/Mitzvah has been held. The project, as originally conceived, included a fourth session to assess the project after the service was held. Unfortunately, the change in the form and the timing of the project, along with the initial difficulty in finding participants, made this impossible. Two of the couples had children become B/Mitzvah during the course of the project, while the other two will not take place until a few months after the completion of the write-up. Therefore, the full impact of the project on some of the outcomes, as verified through my observation during the

B/Mitzvah, is not yet possible to assess. The importance of this fourth session was made particularly clear to me when I met with E and K after the B/Mitzvah and had this exchange.

D-- You must be happy the B/Mitzvah is over."

K-- Not at all. We loved every minute of it.

E-- I don't think that in our entire marriage there has been a day that was as much fun. And there has never been a time when I was as comfortable in the Temple.

K-- I think that meeting with you helped prepare us more than we realized. It made us think about stuff that we wouldn't have otherwise.

E-- When the time came for the service there were no surprises for us--we felt totally ready.

K-- You know--there's a physical preparation and there's an emotional preparation. We had done the physical preparation. That's the easy part. But these discussions helped us do the emotional preparation.

Clearly, the project had a significant, meaningful and conscious impact on their feelings about B/Mitzvah.

Increasing Connections With Judaism and The Temple

One of the stated goals of this project was to increase the couple's connection to the B/Mitzvah and to Judaism. I hoped that an increased connection to Judaism might help to heal the ever-present split between religious experience as it pertains to B/Mitzvah and the rest of their life. By doing this, the B/Mitzvah would potentially take on greater meaning and relevance in their lives. This seemed to have occurred for some of the participants, however, it is too early to know the lasting impact. One example

of this came in the final session with L and B. I asked if their daughter, A, knew about the project. They answered that she knew but was not overly interested. Her only question was whether I was nice or not. B, however, offered the following comment.

B-- You know we teased her. We said that it's great because when you're up there on the *bimah* the rabbi will be able to say, "You know E, this reminds me of having to go apple picking with your family when you said you would rather go to the mall." (laugh)

L-- "...and about that persuasive essay you wrote." So, for us, we did comment to each other how much more meaningful it will be for us during the service because you will know the cast of characters. You'll really have a background about our family. And it'll make the day much more special for us. So...

D-- And my having that information is a positive?

L-- Oh, absolutely.

B-- Yes.

L-- Absolutely. Yeah.

D-- Can you see conditions where it would be a negative for people?

L-- Well if you go up to my brother and say who the heck is the shiksa... (laugh) ...but other than that not really.

To me, this comment affirms the goal of connecting the religious component of the B/Mitzvah into the greater scope of their lives. B and L now view this ritual moment as an extension of their daily life. This was so much the case, that an issue that had been a sore-point for L and B in regard to their daughter's emerging adolescence could be referenced during the religious ceremony. Daily life could be brought into the religious ritual. In addition, B was now able to view me as more than a religious officiant. He

now perceived me as someone who knew the family dynamics and was intimately involved in their life.⁴⁵ At one point, in fact, L observed, "It will be more meaningful now, since you know everything that has gone on in the family."

For E and K the project also helped to foster a deeper sense of connection to the synagogue. They had both grown up with a feeling of distance from synagogue life and saw the synagogue as a place one goes to for special events. As a result of the project, they now view it as a place to feel safe, comfortable, and connected. In reflecting on this they said--

E-- I think people should go through some kind of preparation like this.

K-- My family never went to Temple except for lifecycle events. It was about getting stuff done--not about connecting with each other and developing relationships.

E-- I would have everyone go through this process

K-- They have nothing to lose.

E-- And everything to gain. There's no family that doesn't have its stuff. Why was I so comfortable when my son was having a major lifecycle event? Why was I so relaxed when I was going up on to the *bimah* for the first time in thirty years? Why wasn't I nervous when I should have been? It was because we had a chance to develop a relationship with you.

For V and J it was clearly successful. When they first answered the question of what the B/Mitzvah meant to them, they had little to offer. The more we spoke, however, the clearer and more powerful their answer became. They focused particular energy on the importance of their daughter

And, in fact, I did know a great deal more about the family than most others.

performing the required *mitzvah* project. Most striking in this regard was that while they were conscious of how important this project was, they did not conceive of it as a "religious" act. Rather, they saw the religious dimension as something foreign and mystical, while this was real and tangible. Throughout our sessions I attempted to help them begin to define "religion" and "religious" in a way that was broader and, perhaps, more relevant to their lives.

The Impact On the Couple's Connection to One Another

Another stated goal of this project was to deepen the couple's connection to one another. In this regard, the success of the project was dependent on the relationship that the couple brought into the room with them. Three of the couples appear to have strong and relatively close relationships. For them the sessions served as an opportunity to focus on specific issues, to have their partner listen to them, and, in a number of cases, to learn something about a partner with whom they share their life. Such learning, it is hoped, can help foster increased emotional intimacy.

While J and V have a close, inter-dependent and warm relationship, the sessions provided an opportunity to get to know one another even better. As J and V shared their emotional life-lines, J realized that he did not fully comprehend the difficulty V was having.

D-- How was the process of doing this?

V-- Interesting, you know you think about stuff you haven't thought about in years.

D-- I think that is what a life transition is all about. Thinking about stuff that we may have filed away.

J-- It was good because... I knew that we... I didn't have to see it to know that we are on different levels now. But I... I can't speak for you, but I thought you were happier than...

V-- I mean. I can go out and have fun and not think about anything. But it is like the day to day.

Later, J's understanding deepened further.

J-- I just noticed something because we didn't watch each other do these. Isn't it interesting that the biggest low in my life was her fluttering around down here but she is still down here but I'm way up here right now. Isn't that weird? I wouldn't think that I would be up here if she was down here.

D-- And you both put that event down about as low. But you are clearly in different places right now.

J-- It frustrates me.

During this process J and V learned about themselves and each other.

V-- I tend to see the glass as half empty. Whereas, nothing bothered me...

J-- We have flip-flopped. I used to worry about everything. I used to always look at the negatives. I would say, "Nah maybe we shouldn't do it..." and she would say, "Let's go and do and we'll make the best of what happens." And now I have that attitude and she's more the worrier.

D-- When did you flip flop?

J-- With L's death.

V-- The last two years. Her death made me a new person. I'm not the same. I don't look at things the same way.

J-- I was like--hey, anything can happen to anybody at any time so lets enjoy life to the fullest.

The project had a significant impact on the other couples, as well. For E and K, the process helped K gain a better understanding of the depth and meaning of a series of deaths in the family. It also offered K a window into the impact of the deaths on E, although it is unclear to me whether or not she was able to truly hear the sense of pain and loss he was feeling. Rather, her own denial continually caused her to make light of the situation or to rationalize it. I was particularly struck that she seemed to show little response when E ran from the session.

L and S, however, were an entirely different story. For them, the sessions served to heighten their feelings of disconnect from one another. They had both been focused on their daughter's B/Mitzvah. In a sense, they had triangled their daughter, and the B/Mitzvah, in order to avoid feeling the emptiness and hostility that exists between them. She, and her B/Mitzvah, had become the identified patient and functioned as the glue holding them together. They have no idea where they are in relationship to each other at this point, but they both know that their daughter is important to them. Thus, for them, triangulation is not necessarily a negative thing at this point. When I asked them to look at themselves as individuals and as a couple, however, I removed this glue. The lack of shared intimacy in their life only became clearer and the underlying dynamic in their relationship was, at best, painful.

A few days after the final session S came to see me. It was only then, in a confidential discussion, that I learned how complex the dynamics truly are. I quickly came to realize that I was ill-equipped to deal further with the

situation and I made a referral to a mental health professional. It is a notable, and unexpected outcome of this project, that S would not have had the comfort level to come and speak to me, let alone the trust to take my referral, were it not for her participation in this project.

It is also notable that a great deal of information regarding the functioning of each couple was revealed throughout our sessions. For instance, as I reviewed some of the material they had shared with me, V commented, "You know, as I think about it, I realize for the first time that I married a man who is so much like my father." Yet V's comment was not an unpleasant discovery for her. In fact, one result of her sister's death had been a role reversal for J and V that reinforced this perception. Throughout their relationship, J had been a pessimist, while V tended toward optimism. With L's death however, V was plunged into a deep depression. J, out of love and/or necessity, switched his role and became the family advocate for optimism. Thus, whatever qualities within J and V that had drawn them to one another, they now exchanged in order to return to a sense of homeostasis within their relationship. What is most striking is that the current balance in which J bolsters V's world-view is similar to the balance between V's parents.

J--The biggest thing of all was V mourning for that year, year and a half.

D-- How come?

J-- Because it was very difficult on me. Because everything I've tried to do... any other time she was sad or unhappy I was always able to fix it-but there was no fixing this. You know.

V-- And the funny thing about that is that is what I have always said about my father. And when I see him doing stuff now I think "Oh my God, that's like my father."

L and S, on the other hand, struck me as relatively hopeless. They seemed stuck in their situations and, from a later conversation with S, it is clear that the only means of relief she can comprehend at this point will achieved through flight. For L, some of the hopelessness seems to result from projecting his hurt and anger onto others. At no point in the discussion was he willing to even consider that he was responsible for some aspect of the breakdown of the family. A lack of willingness to consider one's position in the dynamic makes healing, and hope, harder to achieve. Without something to break the current balance, the result is hopelessness and depression. Both of which I saw evidence of in S.

The Impact of A Personal Relationship With The Rabbi

I was surprised by the strong role a personal relationship with the rabbi played in the process. First, when I asked why they had agreed to participate in this project, three of the four couples cited their fondness for, or sense of connection to, me as one of, if not the main, reason for agreeing. They participated because they wanted to help me with my project and felt comfortable doing so since they already had a sense of comfort and trust with me. Moreover, they assumed that if I was asking them to give up their time for this project, they could be sure that it would be time well spent. Thus, when I

asked E and K, "Why did you agree to do this in the first place?" K responded, "Because we like you- and you asked."

Two couples expressed regret that the sessions would be ending and all four asked if I was sure that I would be the rabbi officiating at the B/Mitzvah rather than my colleague. In addition, for the two couples whose child became B/Mitzvah during the course of this project, the impact of our meetings was even clearer. During both the final rehearsal and the actual service these families felt, and acted, closer to me than most families I encounter.

Moreover, they were more relaxed and comfortable than most. Their sense of trust in me and with the process in general, along with a sense of emotional preparedness for what might occur during the service, allowed the event to open up for them in new and unexpected ways. For instance, in the wrap up session with Couple 2, they commented that our meetings gave them a sense of connection with me and through me with the tradition in a way that they would not have had if they had not participated.

The Role of Transference

While this sense of warmth and connection is not necessarily transference, the extent of these emotions, point toward transference. Clearly, my prior contact with three of the four couples impacted the type and nature of the transference. It may also have had a strong impact on my expectations and responses to these couples during our sessions. The powerful role transference played in couples agreeing to participate might negatively impact

the applicability of this model by rabbis whose circumstances differ. When relationships are not as long-standing as most of these, or the transferences not as strong, rabbis attempting to employ this model might have a more difficult time finding willing participants. On the other hand, the power of these transferences, and the ability to use them for the benefit of the participants, shows the importance of a rabbi knowing how to identify transference and then utilize it in a positive manner.

Transference was not only active in motivating couples to participate. It was present, and relevant, throughout the sessions. The implicit trust many people have in the Rabbi/Congregant relationship played a key role in increasing the participants' comfort level before and during the sessions. This is a positive form of transference.⁴⁶ In addition, during the rap up for the three sessions each of the couples commented on the way in which the sessions allowed them to feel closer and more connected to me. In the post- B/Mitzvah session with Couple 3, K observed, "Yeah, we knew that we had a friend up there looking out for us." Even more striking was E's assertion that I had taken the place of this deceased father and father-in-law on the day of the B/Mitzvah. At first, this degree of transference overwhelmed me. Yet on reflection, I realized that this was, perhaps, the very best use of transference in a religious ritual. It allowed me to represent something to E that gave him the comfort and strength to enjoy and celebrate the day, rather than feel the deep sense of loss he had encountered. Similarly, K stated that during the

B/Mitzvah, "We felt like we had a friend up there." I understood this to mean that I had become a source of stability and comfort for her. Thus, my presence on the *bimah* now served to anchor them and to connect them with something from their past that gave them a sense of security and safety. I am confident that this would not have been the case if they had not participated in this project with me.

I refer to these feelings as transference because their sense of intimacy with me was the product of their inner-life, rather than the reality of our relationship. I was cautious throughout the sessions not to reveal much about myself. Often, such self-revelation is the result of counter-transference and I strove to remain vigilant against it. However, each couple still felt closer to me after the sessions. They had projected certain beliefs, feelings. attitudes and emotions on to me. All of these now became real to them, and, at least according to their words and my perception of their actions, a source of comfort. One example of this came after the sessions were completed. S came into my study and handed me an invitation to the B/Mitzvah. She said. "We want to invite you to the ceremony. We know you don't attend as the rabbi, but we are inviting you and your wife as people. And since this is now a deeper and more personal relationship, we hope you will attend." When I gently declined and explained my reasoning⁴⁷ she seemed upset and said, "Well, I though that since there was a personal relationship now…"

Since I officiate at close to one hundred B/Mitzvah a year I have chosen to

Although it raises the question of how someone might react if their transference toward clergy was overwhelmingly negative.

The Role of Countertransference

Countertransference is always present in the room when a clergy/clinician meets with a congregant/client. There is, therefore, no question that countertransference will be present in every session of this type of counseling. A powerful example of countertransference during this project occurred during my meetings with J and V. I have always been conscious of identifying with V, having had a sibling who died, although I am sure that I am not aware of the fully conscious of the extent of this dynamic with her. In addition, I was conscious of feeling a sense that I really understood her inner struggle between wanting to avoid causing her parents additional pain and wanting to make choices that pleased her, but excluded her parents.

In reviewing my notes, it is clear that I supported and encouraged their decision through my words and, I suspect, my tone and body language. I was supportive of their choice to draw boundaries between their life as a nuclear family and their relationship with V's parents. Since I have had a similar struggle in my own life, I should have been hyper-vigilant, and perhaps, sought supervision for these sessions. This was clearly a case of my own issues spilling into the room. On the other hand, it must be noted that I have always embraced the concept of parents' choosing to create a norm different than the accepted one. In this case, the choice to hold a simple luncheon followed by a family trip seems far more appropriate than the more usual

never attend receptions, unless it is one of a few close personal friends in the

celebrations, which always strike me as better suited to a wedding than a B/Mitzvah. Regardless, the presence and interference of countertransference in these sessions is real. As a result the same caution must be taken for this type of counseling as taken when seeing a client therapeutically.

Unanticipated Outcomes of the Project

The Genogram

One positive shift in moving to the abbreviated form of the project was the increased use of the genogram interview. When I first conceived of this project I had no intention of employing a genogram in our discussion. As the project developed, however, I not only added the genogram interview, but I decided that it should become the central mode for implementing this project. It is now clear that that would have been a mistake. The genogram interview served all the functions described earlier in this paper. By not only using the genogram interview to gather information, but also as a means to allow the couples to guide the conversation, each couple directed the sessions to some of the more powerful emotional dynamics surrounding the B/Mitzvah. In addition, in some cases, the genogram interview allowed them to verbalize issues that were causing them emotional pain, thereby lowering the anxiety the process held for them. At first I had planned to spend a great deal of time analyzing the genogram with the couples. Yet, as the project progressed, I discovered that the actual interview was the most valuable aspect for my

congregation.

purposes. It opened up discussions and, in conjunction with the lifeline, allowed each member of the couple to do an individual and a family lifereview. This helped the participants focus on the emotional system of the individual, the couple and the entire family.

During the course of writing up this material, I found that some of the genograms were quite complex. This was particularly the case for Couple 5 since one of the partners was adopted and reunited with her birth parents, while the other partner was in conflict with most of his family members. As a result, I found, and purchased a program that helps create genograms. As I input these genograms I gained new insights that my hastily sketched genograms had not evoked. As a result there is further information, and additional questions about the family dynamics that I would choose to ask were I still meeting with the couples. Therefore, for future projects based on this model I would urge that after the first session a detailed genogram be made and that the entire second session be spent on filling it in further.

The Need For Flexibility

Throughout the sessions I discovered the need to be extremely flexible. Often, the discussion required me to spend more or less time on an area than I might have initially thought necessary. It was clear that the effectiveness of these sessions came, in part, from my willingness to allow the participants to set the agenda. A strong command of the background research helped make it possible for me to shift gears when necessary.

The Value of Taping Sessions

In the midst of the actual project I found the need to begin recording the sessions. The thought of recording sessions evoked anxiety within me, since I had never done it before. In fact, throughout my DMin work I found myself quite able to take notes during a session and then recreate an account of relevant pieces of a conversation for a verbatim. Part of my hesitancy about recording came from my own insecurity regarding my role as counselor. My anxiety also came from my concern that the tape recorder might inhibit the participants or me from speaking freely. However, the length, depth and breadth of my initial sessions prompted me to seek a more accurate record. The third and final session with Couple 4 was recorded. 48 I hoped to record Couples 5 and 6. However, Couple 5 declined to give permission. They both felt that it would inhibit them from speaking freely. It is worth noting that they, more than any other couple, was consistently inhibited anyway. Couple 6 did allow me to record all three sessions. 49 This permanent record was extremely useful in trying to gain an understanding of what took place during the sessions. It was also useful in that it freed me from having to take notes during the session and allowed me to pay fuller attention to the tone of their voices, their facial expressions and the small movements that indicated

⁴⁸ The transcript of this session is included in Appendix 4.
⁴⁹ A complete transcript of these sessions is included as Appendix 6.

intimacy or discomfort. I would therefore recommend taping sessions to those utilizing this, or a similar, counseling model.

Ambiguity of Role

The ambiguity of my role during this project made some aspects of this project more difficult than I might have expected. First, the contract I made with them was for the completion of this project, not for marital counseling. I did my best to ensure that I honored that boundary unless I was invited to pursue deeper issues. Second, there is a limit to how much can be achieved in three one hour sessions. This is particularly true when there is already an agenda that more than fills the allotted time. Third, as rabbi, rather than therapist, I was reticent to push into areas that couples did not actively pursue themselves or were beyond my abilities. As a result I often sought out the counsel of colleagues or a trusted therapist after my sessions. They not only helped me keep my countertransference in check, but became a helpful sounding board in preparing myself for the next session. Anyone pursuing this counseling model would be well advised to be involved in a program of supervision.

On the other hand, my dual role had clear benefits for the actual service and the work I might do with families in the future. Moreover, as I wrote in the introduction to this project, while Davis was able to meet with families in the clearly defined role of a therapist, she had neither the benefit of the clergy transference, nor the healing potential of carrying the sessions

through to the actual B/Mitzvah service. In a sense, by her role as a therapist only, her approach reinforces a split between the emotional dimension of the B/Mitzvah and the religious dimension.

Throughout this project the importance of on-going supervision was repeatedly highlighted. I was continually surprised by the willingness, in fact the eagerness, of these couples to delve into painful family and personal material. Much of the time I was unsure of how deeply I could ethically and practically go with them. Ethically, they had agreed to meet with me to participate in a project, not for therapy. Moreover, I believe it is unethical to take someone into deep painful material when there are only three sessions available. Practically, I only had three sessions for the project and have neither the time nor the training for deep therapy. For instance, while I can hypothesize about some of the issues in L and S's marriage, it was clear that they were unwilling to delve into them.

Time Constraints

As previously noted, my initial conception of this project did not take into account the time-demands of such an approach. Even with the abbreviated structure, the time requirements for this project were tremendous. As I quickly discovered, the revised project still requires more time than many couples are willing to invest and prevents many couples, already pressed for time, from participating.

The time demands of such a model on the rabbi are also significant and potentially thwart any attempt to apply this model universally in a congregation where more than a few B/Mitzvah are celebrated each year. For instance, my work with these four couples took over twelve contact hours, plus a few additional hours per couple to take notes, sketch genograms and ponder the discussions. I currently serve a congregation in which 90 to 110 students become B/Mitzvah each year. Thus, it would take me over 400 hours a year to perform this project with each family. Obviously this is not a practical approach and any rabbi considering this model for counseling should be aware of the time demands it requires

Need For A More Objective Mode of Evaluation

It is now clear that the mode of evaluation for the project was far too subjective for a project in which transference plays a significant role. The reaction of the participants, or their reports during the final session were too easily distorted by their positive pre-disposition to the project in the first place. A more objective mode of assessment is necessary and might include the continued involvement of the participants in the life of the congregation, participants' continuing to turn to me as rabbi and counselor at later dates and in other settings, or the participants' becoming mentors for other couples entering the B/Mitzvah experience. Most of all, I cannot help but wonder if the project's impact on the couples is short-term, lasting until some brief time after the B/Mitzvah, or long term and enhancing their connection to Judaism

and the synagogue on a long-term basis. This would be an interesting followup project for someone.

Increased Trust and a Deepened Relationship With the Rabbi

There was one additional outcome of the project that I could never have foreseen, but was thankful for when it occurred. I was recovering from the flu at the B/Mitzvah of E and K's son, J. He had practiced his B/Mitzvah Torah portion and it was perfect. Unfortunately, I was dizzy and pointed to the wrong section in the Torah. Rather than the perfection for which he had prepared, he found himself sight-reading a new passage. While he managed to read it, he struggled in a way that was unlike anything else he did that morning. He handled it with humor and aplomb, turning to me and whispering, "I'm glad to see the biggest mistake of the day was made by the Rabbi and not me." E and K were equally good-natured about it. One commented "Especially after our meetings, the only thing that could have wrecked it for us would be if you couldn't have been here at all." I suspect that had we not met, my mistake would have been a far greater issue.

Dealing With Resistance to Engaging in the Counseling Process

The fact remains that the real resistance to this project was manifest early on. Those couples who declined my invitation to participate in the project showed that resistance can undermine the best-planned project. Thus, the resistance must be factored in during the planning stages of the

counseling so that the greatest number of families can participate. The reasons behind the refusal of various couples to participate is worth consideration, however, the reticence of these couples to share their reasons, and my discomfort in pursuing the issue vigorously (a result, in part of my aforementioned struggle with role ambiguity) makes a proper evaluation difficult.⁵⁰

Regardless of the degree to which couples might benefit by this increased insight into their family and their own lives at this juncture, there is no benefit if they are unwilling to participate. As a result of this project and its outcomes, I offer the following suggestions for future counseling models:

1) The counseling must be interwoven with educational programming of the more traditional type. This avoids the split thinking that separates the emotional development issues from the more specifically religious issues. In addition, this approach meets families where they are to a far greater degree, and thus may reduce resistance. If they are invested in helping their child prepare for his/her B/Mitzvah, then they will be motivated to participate in a program that is a required part of family education. If a discussion of the emotional system of the family is mixed in as part of a larger program of study they may be far more motivated to participate and find the discussion far less threatening.

⁵⁰ It is worth noting, however, that an existing familiarity, and positive attitude toward counseling, as existed for Couples 3 and 5, increased the participants' sense of comfort and openness in these sessions.

2) The process of creating the genogram might be done with a large group, followed by a private session to discuss the genogram. There are a number of excellent genogram programs on the market that provide a long list of questions that, when answered, automatically create a genogram. Thus, the entire family could participate in creating their family genogram as part of a daylong workshop on B/Mitzvah. Such a model would allow large numbers of families to create genograms in a timeframe that is manageable for the rabbi. The follow-up session would be private to allow for discussion regarding what the couples discovered through their genogram. The weakness in such an approach is the loss of intimacy between the partners and loss of an opportunity to develop trust between the parents and the clergy that was so powerful in the examples presented. In addition, such an approach adds the potential that couples will do even more editing than they did while engaging with a rabbi guiding the process, and thereby depict the family myth rather than reality. One of the real strengths with the genogram interviews is that the face-to-face process cuts through much of the pretty overlay many families wear for the public.

Conclusion

In summary, the following changes would improve this model:

 Recording all of the sessions in order to have the opportunity to review the entire session when necessary;

- Requiring a fourth session as a formal post-B/Mitzvah "debriefing" session;
- 3) Expanding the first session to an hour and a half, so that the entire genogram interview could be accomplished in the first session. Thus the second session could begin with a completed genogram, allowing the participants to look at their family's emotional picture;
- 4) Requiring some reading between each session. After the first session the reading would focus on adolescent development. After the second session the reading would focus on midlife issues;
- 5) Scheduling follow-up phone calls with each couple six months after the meeting, in order to truly assess the project's impact.
- 6) Seeking out on-going supervision in order to ensure the maintenance of boundaries and the insight of an experience clinician.

The most important instruction gained through this project is the need for the rabbi to address the emotional lives of parents as their eldest child approaches B/Mitzvah. Upon reviewing the work that has occurred during this project it is clear that through counseling sessions such as the ones outlined above each individual and each couple became more emotionally invested, or discovered how emotionally invested they already were, in this life-moment. Rather than being observer of their child's drama, an intervention such as this can aid parents in becoming active participants in this transformative experience. By using this "hinge" moment as an opportunity to step outside

the family system parents are better able to see themselves and the entire family more clearly. While this experience is not always easy or pain-free, it is worthwhile, allowing members of the family to encounter one another, and the family as a whole, more directly. The potential for an "I-Thou" encounter is enhanced through the open communication fostered by an intervention such as this. Moreover, not providing such an active intervention is akin to being presented with the opportunity to raise sparks of Divine light but neglecting to do so. As this project has shown, when a rabbi not only prepares a child to perform the rituals necessary for B/Mitzvah but also addresses the parents' emotional issues, a moment ripe with potential for deepening family connection and for assisting the family in the transition into adolescence is further enhanced.

Appendix 1: Guidelines For Creating A Genogram

From Gengraus: Assessment and Intervention
112 Go Hick, Gerson, Shellen beyger pp. 191-197

For the convenience of teachers and clinicians, this appendix provides summaries of some important materials and skeletal formats for doing genograms. It includes:

- 1) a summary of the symbol standardization for doing genograms;
- 2) a skeletal genogram form for clinician-use;
- 3) an outline for conducting a genogram interview;
- 4) an outline for genogram interpretation.

Part 1: Genogram Format

- A. Symbols to describe basic family membership and structure (include on genogram significant others who lived with or cared for family members—place them on the side of the genogram with a notation about who they are).
- B. Family interaction patterns. The relationship indicators are optional. The clinician may prefer to note them on a separate sheet. They are among the least precise information on the genogram, but may be key indicators of relationship patterns the clinician wants to remember.
- C. Medical history. Since the genogram is meant to be an orienting map of the family, there is room to indicate only the most important factors. Thus, list only major or chronic illnesses and problems. Include dates in parentheses where feasible or applicable. Use DSM-IV categories or recognized abbreviations where available (e.g., cancer: CA; stroke: CVA).
- D. Other family information of special importance may also be noted on the genogram:
 - 1) Ethnic background and migration date
 - 2) Religion or religious change
 - 3) Education
 - 4) Occupation or unemployment
 - 5) Military service
 - 6) Retirement

Standard Symbols for Genograms

Male: Female	: Birth Date	Age = inside symbol I	Death Date Death = 2	X Death Date 96
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	LT = living	Lm	91 .L.	T. 93
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Chi	ldren: List in birth	order beginning with th	e oldest on left	\bigcirc
71. 73. 27 25 Biological Foster Child Child	(22) D	77 79 81 81 81 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8 8	83-/ 83-\ Twins	5/85 98 Identical Pregnancy Twins
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Mbols Denoting Inter	ootional W			
The state of the s	actional Patterns b	etween People		
Close	Distant	Close-Hostile	Focused On	Sexual Abuse
Fused (Hostile	Fused-Hostile		mm
		r uscu-riosiile	Cutoff	Physical Abuse

- 7) Trouble with law
- 8) Physical or sexual abuse or incest
- 9) Obesity
- 10) Alcohol or drug abuse
- 11) Smoking
- 12) Dates when family members left home: LH '74.
- 13) Current location of family members

It is useful to have a space at the bottom of the genogram for notes on other key information: This would include critical events, changes in the family structure since the genogram was made, hypotheses and other notations of major family issues or changes. These notations should always be dated, and should be kept to a minimum, since every extra piece of information on a genogram complicates it and therefore diminishes its readability.

Part 2: Outline for a Brief Genogram Interview

I. Start with presenting problem

- Why are they coming for help now?
- When did the problem begin?
- Who noticed it?
- How does each person view it?
- How has each responded?
- What were relations like prior to the problem?
- Has the problem changed? How?
- What will happen if it continues?

II. Move to questions on household context

- Who lives in the household (name, age, gender)?
- How is each related?
- Where do other members live?
- Were there any similar problems in family before?
- What solutions were tried in the past (therapy, treatment, hospitalization, etc.)?
- What has been happening recently in the family?
- Have there been any recent changes or stressors?

III. Gather information on parents' birth families

- Number of siblings, names, dates of birth
- Place in birth order
- Parents' marriage (and separations, divorces, remarriages)

- Siblings' marriages (separations, divorces, remarriages, children)
- Cause of any deaths in the family

IV. Inquire about other generations

- Parents' parents (names, dates of birth and death, occupation, health)
- Causes of death
- Their siblings (names, dates and causes of death, occupation, health)

V. Probe ethnic/cultural variables

- Rituals within culture for handling death (attitude toward dying, body disposal, commemorative ceremonies)
- Beliefs about what happens after death
- Stigma or trauma associated with any death or loss
- Impact of ethnic-cultural variables on handling major life events, family relationships and roles, individual functioning, etc.

VI. Elicit attitudes about gender

- Impact of gender roles on household situation, on handling major life events, on individual functioning, etc.
- What are the gender rules within the family/culture regarding expressions of grief, funeral arrangements, or commemorative rituals?

VII. Ask about major life events

- Marriages
- Births
- Deaths, illnesses, disabilities
- Geographic moves
- Job changes
- Traumatic events such as natural disasters, wars How did family adapt to these changes?

VIII. Inquire about family relationships

- Cut-offs
- Alliances
- Marital patterns
- Parent-child patterns
- Dominance/submission patterns

IX. Inquire about family roles

- Caretakers? "Sick" ones? "Problem" ones?
- "Good" ones? "Bad" ones?
- "Successful" ones? "Failures"?
- "Nice" ones? "Cold, distant" ones?

X. Inquire about family strengths

- Behaviors that indicate resilience
- Family members' character strengths: loyalty, courage, hope, humor, intelligence, and so forth.
- Family resources: ability to connect with outside resources, money, love, neighborhood community, religious community, work, and so forth

XI. Include questions on individual functioning

- Work (job, changes, unemployment, satisfaction)
- School (achievements, problems)
- Medical problems
- Psychiatric problems (depression, anxieties, phobias)
- Addictions (alcohol, drugs)
- Legal problems (arrests, lost professional license, current status of litigation)

Part 3: Genogram Interpretation

I. Family Structure and Composition

A. Marital Configurations

- 1) Single-parent households due to death or divorce or choice to form a single parent family can be stressful because of the obvious loss issues as well as loneliness, economic stress, child-rearing strain, etc.
- 2) Remarried households, where one or both parents have remarried following a death or divorce, bringing a stepparent into the household. Issues typically involve custody, visitation rights, jealousy, favoritism, loyalty, stepparent conflicts, stepsibling conflicts, etc.

B. Siblings

- 1) Birth order can have relevance for one's emotional and relational role in the family. For example, the oldest is more likely to be over-responsible, conscientious, and parental; the youngest childlike and carefree. Only children tend to be socially independent, less oriented toward peer relations, more adultlike earlier, more anxious at times, and like an oldest child, often the focus of parents' attention. All children after the oldest have to find some way to carve a niche for themselves.
- 2) Timing of sibling births vis-à-vis what else was happening in the family at the time. For example, was there a birth right after a loss? (Such a situation often indicates an attempt to replace or make up for the loss, etc.)

- 3) Family's expectations or "program" for the child.
- 4) Parental attitudes and biases re gender. Are males given preferred status? Or females? Are there alliances in the family by gender?

II. Family Place in the Life Cycle

In interpreting a genogram, you will also want to look at where individuals and the family as a whole are in the life cycle. Families progress through a series of stages or transitions, including leaving the home of origin, marriage, births, child-rearing, retirement. Upon reaching each milestone, the family must reorganize itself and move on successfully to the next phase. If patterns rigidify at transition points, families can have trouble in adapting to a later phase (Carter & McGoldrick, 1998a).

The clinician should note what life cycle transitions, if any, the family is adapting to, and how they have adapted to life cycle events in the past. When ages and dates do not add up in terms of how that family progressed through various stages, possible difficulties in managing that phase of the life cycle can be explored. For example, if adult children have not left home, one would want to explore any difficulties around beginning a new phase of the life cycle. Or, if a marriage occurred quickly after a loss, this may be a clue about issues of unresolved grief.

III. Pattern Repetition Across Generations

Since family patterns can be transmitted from one generation to the next, be alert in doing a genogram to any cross-generational patterns that reveal themselves in the following areas:

A. Patterns of Functioning

Are there things about how this family functions that you see in previous generations also? These patterns could be adaptive (creativity, resilience, strengths) or maladaptive (battering, child abuse, alcoholism, suicide, etc.)

B. Patterns of Relationships

Look for patterns of closeness, distance, cut-offs, or conflicts repeating over generations. For example, a family might have a pattern of forming relational "triangles" with mother and father allied against a child.

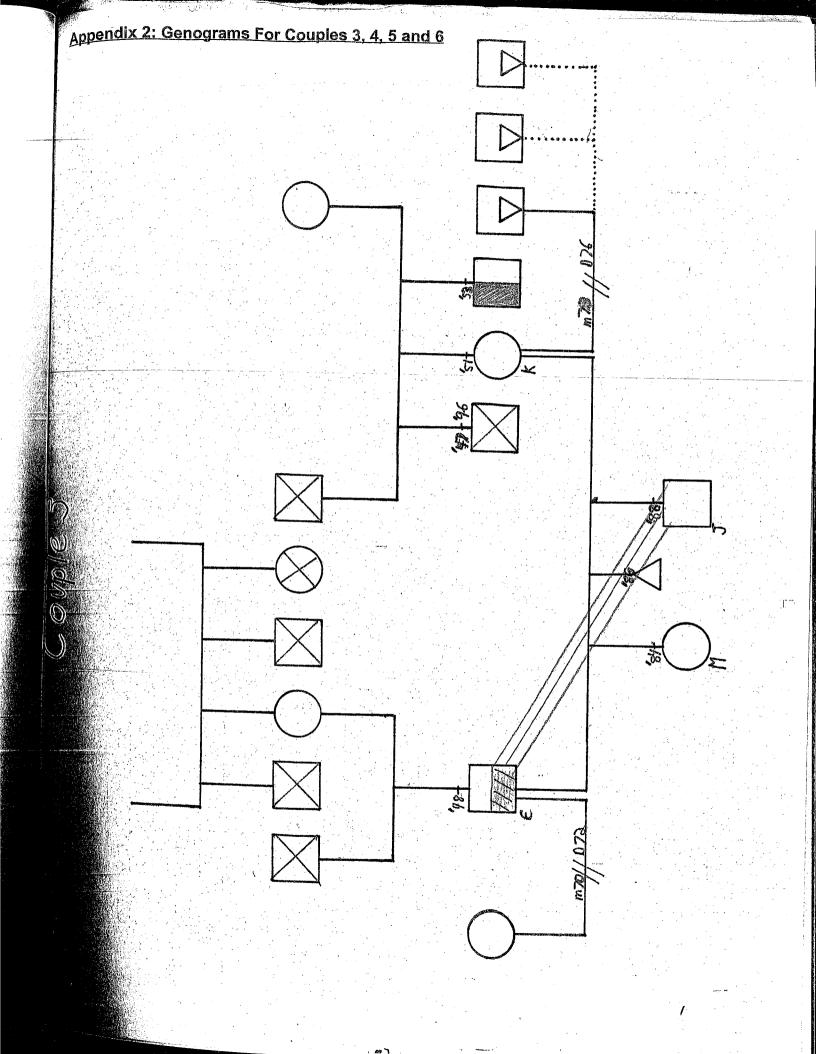
C. Patterns Related to Position in Family

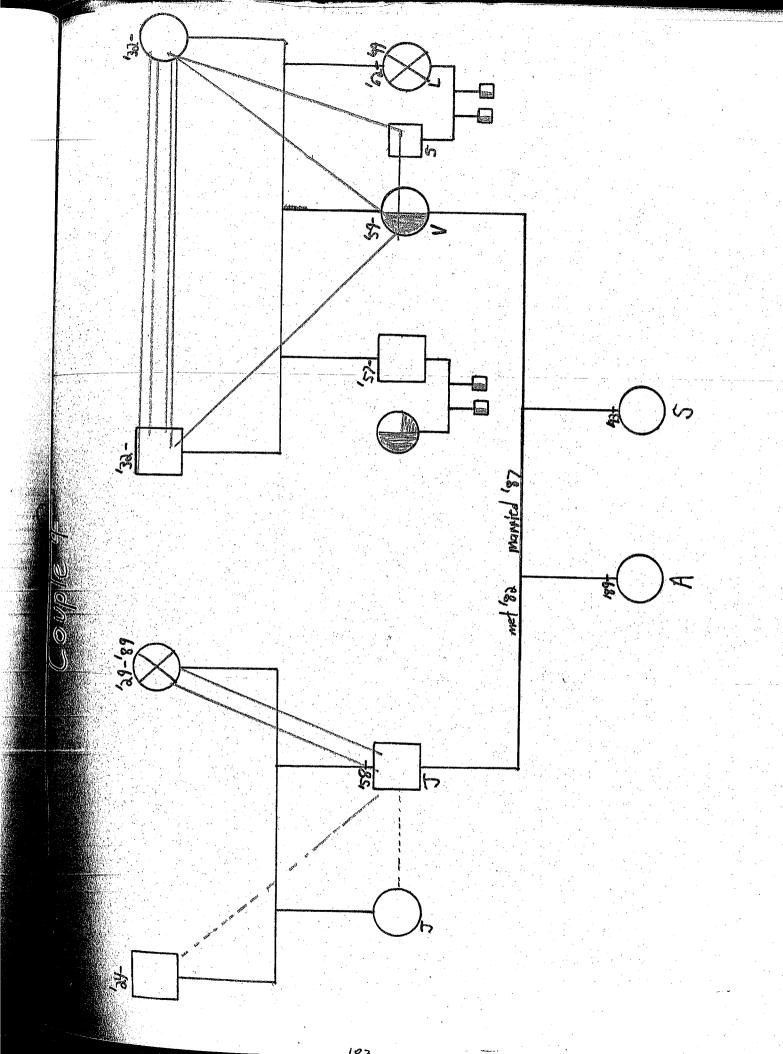
People in similar positions as a previous generation member tend to repeat the same patterns. For example, the only son of a man who spent time in prison during his twenties may pattern himself after his father and end up going to prison during his twenties. Or a person may remarry and form a similar family constellation to the one he or she grew up in (as with the Rogers family in Genogram 7.1). This factor may influence relationships with others in the same repetitive pattern.

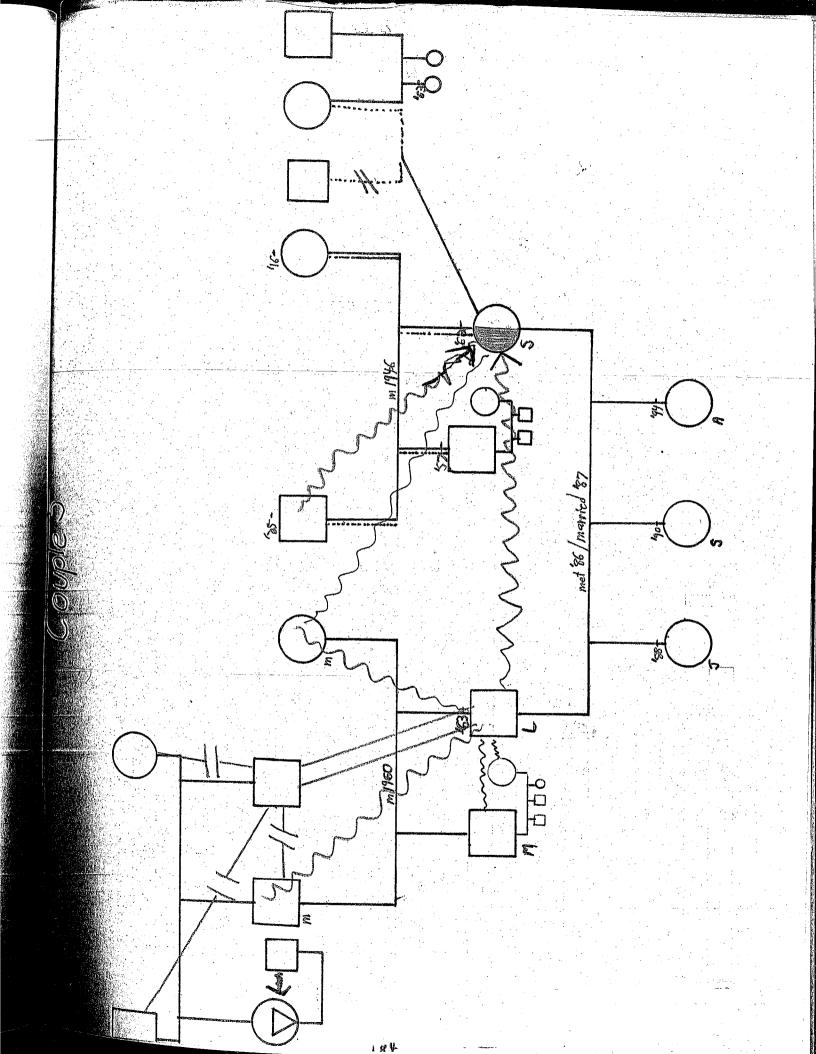
IV. Balance in Family Roles and Functioning

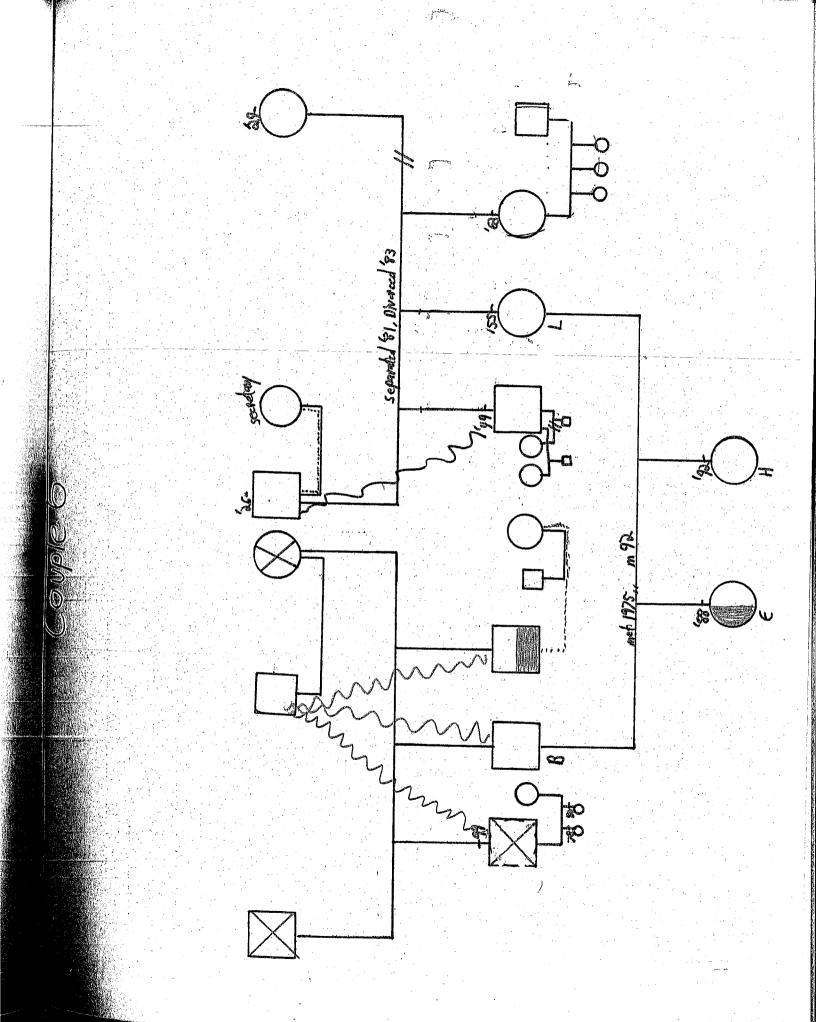
In well-functioning families, members' characteristics tend to balance out one another. For example, a gregarious, social partner is balanced out by a more home-oriented spouse; a responsible older sibling is balanced out by an easygoing younger one. The roles and personalities of one provide a complementary fit with the other.

But some genograms show an imbalance in roles, with too many people vying for the same role of "caretaker," for example, or one person being responsible for too much. An alcoholic married to a caretaker, for instance, may seem a complementary fit, but ultimately this situation puts too much of a strain on the caretaker. Families may also show an imbalance in power between husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, darker and lighter skinned family members, or for some other reason depending on class, abilities, parental preferences, family values, etc. When imbalance appears, explore how the family handles it and what the implications would be of changing it to create a more equitable balance in family relationships.

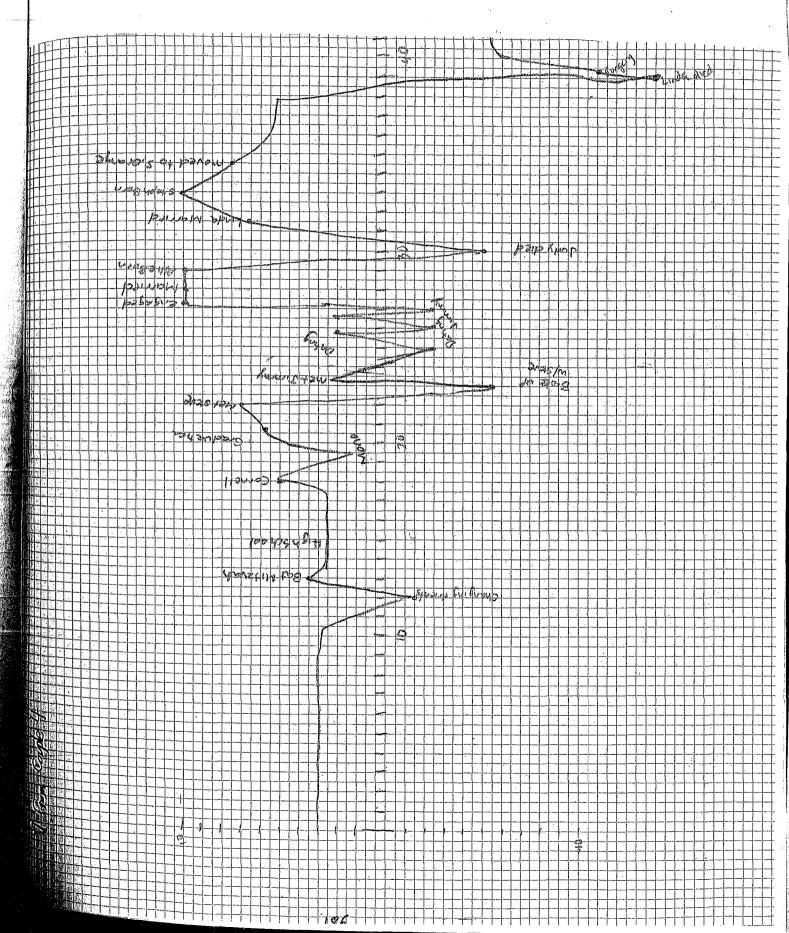








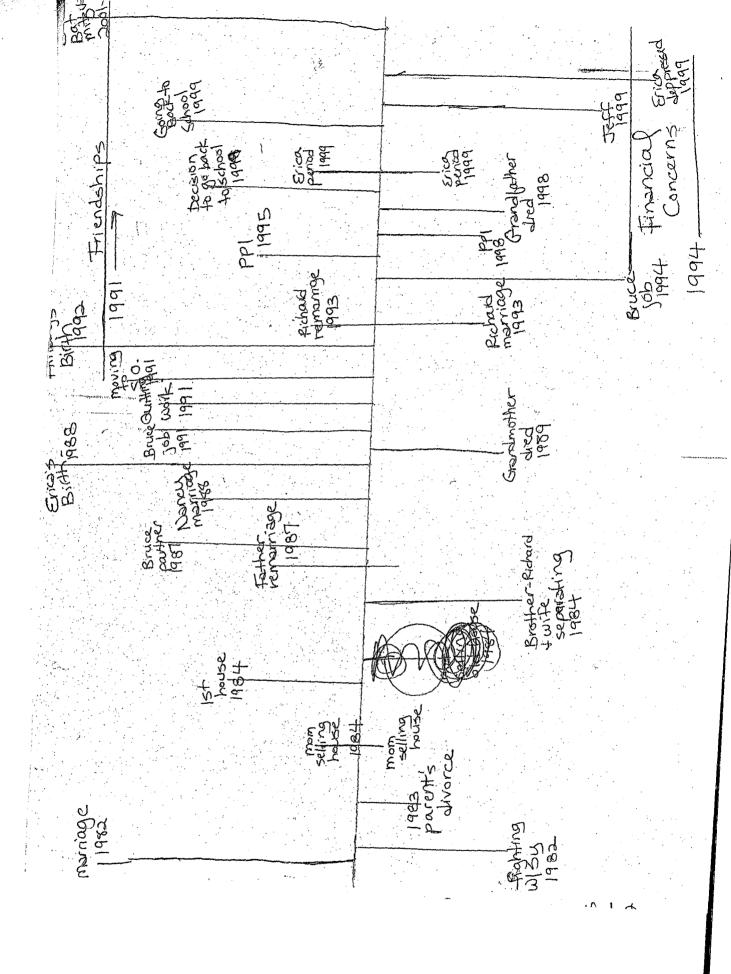
Appendix 3: Lifelines for Couples 4 and 6



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Appendix 4:Transcription of Third Session with Couple 4

V-- We had dinner with my parents after we met the last time. We told with them about some of the stuff we had talked about with you, but we ended up skating around the main issues. We talked about what you said regarding the theory and hope that they would catch on.

J-- We talked about a lot of hints, but they didn't pick up on any of them.

V-- We even did a little thing with the diagram that you had shown us, (referring to a family systems diagram showing how family positions change when there's a birth or a death) but they didn't pick up on any of it.

V-- We decided that if they said anything again...

J-- ...we would say something. I know my mother-in-law's answer. If we told her about our frustrations, it would be, "Just forget it." They're just disappointed. They're disappointed that we're not doing it their way. They want to have to party that they want but we've made different choices and they'll have to live with it. But I know they will let this go. That is the way they work.

V-- The pressure from them though, it's just incredible.

D-- Is it more since Linda die?

V-- Absolutely! I always was that way with my father. You know, trying to do the right thing to take care of everything and be the good daughter. But now I find myself being even more protective of my mother and its pretty tiring.

 $\mbox{\it J--}$ It goes the other way too. They've become overly protective of us. And it's nice that they would do anything for us.

V-- But you have to ask, it's never ever offered.

D-- I wonder what that is all about.

J-- I don't know.

V-- I think they feel they did their part when the kids were growing up and now it was their turn to enjoy life. It is just so different. The issue used to be that they would be up at their country house 25 weeks of the year. If you wanted to see them you had to go there. Now they are home way too much- and we are saying to them "Go go, if that's what makes you happy, go."

D-- So you've changed roles with them. You've become the parents.

J and V-- Yeah, Yeah!

V-- It is very (laughs) stressful.

D-- I'll bet.

J-- They try to be equal to all their kids and grandkids. If they offer to do for one they feel that they have to do it for all and so they may be little gun shy about doing things for people.

V-- This goes especially for watching the kids, My brother took advantage once when he left his sons with them for twelve days. But my sister needed money for a speech therapist for one of her sons and when she asked, they were there. You know, as I'm listening I know it sounds like there are a lot of issues with them, but there really aren't. In fact, there used to be more. It's just that things are more complicated since Linda died and I guess we're starting to realize that not all the changes have been felt or dealt with yet.

D-- There certainly have been a lot of changes. And I think you're right at all the pieces have been shifted. Things haven't found a new balance.

V-- My father is still always in control. But I'm definitely guiding my mother. Kind of like, to some degree, I'm needed for her to keep going.

D-- How does it feel?

V-- I hate it. But my father has gotten... I think he... likes the support from me. Because it is like a unified front. And you know, she is better. So its easier than it was. I mean it was really, really stressful.

J-- For like a year and a half after the accident.

D-- One of the things that come out of family therapy is the undertanding that a two-person relationship is inherently unstable. So what we tend to do is to pull third parties in. It is called a triangle.

V-- Hmmm.

D-- So it is really easy when a first child is born, because that child can stabilize the relationship. Or sometimes a couple will get a pet, and the pet stabilized things. (In fact, when J was unable to "make V feel better" after her sister had died he had bought her a dog.) So this other person will stabilize what is going on.

V-- Yeah! That's it.

J-- Because we felt like my father-in-law was ready to throw up his hands.

V-- He wanted to go on.

J-- He wanted to move on with his life. But my mother-in-law kept saying that they needed to be around all the time in case my sister's kids needed them.

V-- She's still doing it. Or she won't reveal how she really feels about it to me. I'm not sure which one it is.

D-- But you are still trying to save her.

V-- Oy!

J-- Yeah, it just came up the other day.

V-- She did all the planning for both my nephews' birthdays. She set up the party, bought the goody bags, sent out the invitations. She did everything. And she was really stressed out by it. It was really hard. And it was holiday time. So she also had to get each of them a birthday gift and Hanukah stuff. There was just a lot on her and she didn't feel like there were enough hours in the day. She was really stressed out about it. And... maybe this even goes to the B/Mitzvah thing too. I remember when... right before I got married there was a lot going on and we had a few little tiffsbecause there was a lot going on.

D-- Who is it that fought?

V-- Me and my mom. This was another same kind of thing. And it'll be that way right before the b/mitzvah, I'll bet. Will she be stressful too, I don't now or will she be supportive of me? I don't know. But in any case my brother-in-law called me the other day and said, "Is your mom okay?". I said, "I don't know. Why?" He said, "Because I saw her the other night and she looked horrible. She was completely frazzled. Why is she frazzled?" "Why is she frazzled? You really want to know why she is frazzled? Because the responsibility of planning two birthday parties within a week of each other completely frazzled her." "Why didn't she tell me that?" he asked. So I told him, "She'll never tell you that. She will continue to do whatever you ask her to do. That is why you need to be careful about what you ask her to do." "Oh I didn't know. If I had known I would never have asked her."

D-- It is interesting. You've taken a pretty stressful role in the family as the communicator.

V-- Uh Huh. I've gotten better at it.

D-- Better playing the role, or better at not allowing others to put you in the role?

V-- Better at handling being put in the role.

D-- So you aren't getting yourself out of the role?

V-- I'm not extricating myself because I feel this need to protect my mother. Therefore I deal with the stressful situation of telling my brother-in-law things because my mother comes first over him. I'll do for him when I can. But my mother is still coming first for me. She means more to me than him.

J-- Part of this is... because we are being honest about things here... jealousy on V's part that her mother is now so much more committed to taking care of his kids ... like she would never dream of staying home one weekend to see our kids but she would stay home because she hasn't seen his kids.

V-- Right. Absolutely.

D—Really!?

V-- He knows. (laughs)

D-- Were you jealous of your sister when she was alive?

V-- Not at all. She was probably jealous of me.

D- So this is a new role for you.

(They start talking over each other and completing each others sentences.)

- V-- And you know what, I guess it isn't quite jealousy. It is just a bit of scratching my head and...
- J-- Yeah jealousy may be too strong a word.
- V-- It is just wondering why... since my kids are the ones who make her so happy why isn't she doing things for them
- J-- She doesn't feel she needs to...
- V-- She doesn't need to because everything...
- J-- She doesn't have the guilt when she isn't seeing them. But she feels guilty if she isn't there for the other kids. And even when she isn't doing anything for them, she just feels good being home.
- D-- Knowing that she has sacrificed for them.
- V-- The best of all possible worlds is when we go there. Because then it is the commitment to us that she is satisfying, yet she is where she wants to be.
- J-- And she has a built-in excuse for going to the house. We got her whole number down. I mean, you know, it is very understandable. She is very guilt ridden about what happened. You know... what she tends to do now is to throw something out on the table knowing that V will spend her time looking to...she'll say "You know I don't think we should go to the house this weekend..."
- V-- She says it because she wants me to hear...
- J-- She wants V to tell her it is okay. She is looking to V for permission. And so it is really... and I think my father-in-law is kind of tired of fighting the battle.
- D-- So you inherited it. (V frowns)
- J-- I hope we didn't get off the track.
- D-- No, not at all. It is just that that was a strong facial expression.
- V-- It is just that it is stressful, you know... And you know... this is totally unrelated but I just feel like someone... I... (to J) I don't know if I ever told you this...this woman I knew she's right around my age. I grew up with her. Her sister died nine months before L. She was best friends with her. They were really close. And she came to pay a shiva call on me and she said to me... and I thought it was the most awful thing in the world, she said, "You will never be the same person." I thought it was horrible, meaning that I would never be happy again. But that's not what she meant. I am not the same person. I have to do different things than I used to do because of this.
- D-- You are not the same person and your family is not the same family.
- V-- No and never will be. So she was right.

D-- But it is reality. Because when you cut the *kriah* ribbon, that cloth will never be the same. And it is the same symbolism for what happens in a family. The family ties are torn apart. And it was. The family is not the same again.

J-- But that's not necessarily a bad thing.

D-- Let's bring this around to the b/mitzvah again- once you go through the b/mitzvah the family is different. Now, this change is not a tragedy but the family is different from that point forward, on some levels...

V-- Right and I'm curious to see...I mean we won't see it right away... but with the B/Mitzvah coming up in January, how do things change there? Because it is kind of a lead in to what we are going to have to go through. Although it is a little bit removed. But I am curious how my parents are going to celebrate. I haven't seen them at a party in two years.

D-- That would make me nervous.

 $\mbox{V--}\mbox{ I'm}$ very nervous about that. You know- is my mother going to bring everyone down? It is highly unlikely.

J-- I never thought of that,

V-- I have not seen them... I have not seen them have fun and laugh. But we haven't been at a party with them- like a family thing, in two years.

D-- So this event is pretty emotionally charged already.

V-- You know I'm hoping the fact that there are all these other people there, because as I was saying when it is just us, it is awful. So with all the other people there maybe it will be okay.

D-- Maybe it will dilute some of the emotional charge.

V-- Right.

 $\mbox{D--}$ So there are strong emotions in the family I mean very strong emotions that are not getting talked about...

V-- No.

D-- It is interesting that you hinted around it at dinner the other day but they didn't take it up

V-- I mean my mother won't talk about it

J-- You know it is not my style to hint around but I finally found that... there are a couple of times I've brought up things. Just quickly, about a year ago I was finding that, bringing her back to life was my job, so to speak. I took getting her back into living as my job. I felt like V would be taking steps to get back into life and then her mother would pull her back three steps. And I had that conversation with my father-in-law. I said, "You know every time I get V back she has a conversation with her mom and she tells her how miserable she is because she has led a miserable life. She complains and it sends V back three steps." So I will have serious conversation but it has to get to a certain point.

- V-- It is much easier to talk to my father than my mother too. She's too emotional, (laughs) like me.
- D-- It is interesting we start looking in the mirror and seeing our parents.
- V-- Oh God, and then you see it in your kids. Not something I would have wanted them to inherit
- J-- And getting back to the B/Mitzvah thing, in a way we might be lucky that ours is the second in the family. I hadn't looked at the fact that the first one might be a really emotional thing.
- D-- And then I wonder how the gender issue will play in.
- V—That, and they have a very different relationship with the two kids and the families.
- D-- This is the next emerging adult female since L died.
- J-- As you were saying last time- this is a big change of life for everyone in the family. And I don't really know what will happen.
- D-- It depends. What is clear from these discussions is that there is a lot emotionally that is spinning around already. And none of it is getting talked about. There is a lot even with the dynamic of the party and how that plays out. And the fact that, on some levels you have been put into the parental role; I mean not the parental role for your children.
- V—Right-- for my mom.
- J-- So lately that whole thing with her mother... I've been telling her to stop playing the game. If she says I should stay home I tell her, "Fine stay home."
- V-- I still think she is saying it to me so that I'll say to her... just like I brought her to see you so that you could say to her... she is asking me to say what she wants to hear.

(There is a lull in the conversation.)

- V-- Since there is a lull in the conversation... we did our little charts.
- D-- Can we look at them? Before you show me the specifics, how did the exercise strike you?
- V-- There are certain things that obviously stand out and then when you try to think about the lesser things you don't really know where they fall.
- J-- I tried to pick my very high, high and my very low lows.
- V-- Up to age 12, do you think I remember a thing? I had quite a happy childhood and did I care where I lived? No. But when I was right about A's age I had a really tough time because I was a very good student and all my friends weren't. And it wasn't cool to be smart. Between doing what came naturally to me and pretending that I was dumb, I basically went through a whole transition of friends. Because my

friends... I wasn't in any of their classes. I was in all the advanced classes. And it was a very tough time. Right around A's age now. And I am very conscious of what she is going through with her friends because of that.

D-- So that has impacted your parenting?

V-- Yeah. Yeah. It was right at this time. She is in sixth grade- and it was at the end of sixth grade.

D-- Do you find yourself reliving any of it?

V-- She just had a little episode when she had a fight with her friends. She was not wrong. And all I kept thinking in the back of my mind was "I hope this doesn't blow up with people taking sides." And it blew over and it is gone. But I am very... I mean it was... I made a completely new set of friends. And that was in sixth and seventh grade.

D-- So it is right here.

V-- That was a real low point. And then as soon as I got in with a new group of people who were in all my classes, I was fine.

D-- So whether or not she is going through a big transition in her life, this period in her life is parallel to a big transition in your life.

V-- I am very conscious of what is going on socially in her life.

D-- How does that impact on who she invites to the b/mitzvah

V-- I want her to invite anyone she wants to the party. You know, we are throwing a big enough party that I can't imagine that she is going to have more kids there than I would like her to have. She just doesn't know that many kids. It is a while away but I am figuring she's going to have fifty or sixty kids. So I've got to believe... and I told her that she should invite anyone she thinks might invite her.

D-- What you are really saying is "I had a point where I didn't have a lot of friends so lets compensate through A."

V-- Well maybe (smiles, laughs, turns red) I didn't even, she doesn't even have, we tried to make a list now... what does she have... forty...and I said "leave your options..." Yes! That is exactly what I am doing! I was like "leave your options open you don't know who you will be friends with." That is exactly what I was doing. I didn't even realize I did that-- but that is exactly what I did...

High school-- I had a great time in High School and then getting into Cornell and going to Cornell was very exciting for me. And I had mono my sophomore year. I had a very tough year because I was sick. And then graduation- I met this guy and he dumped me... it wasn't a long period of time. I didn't even bother to pout about high school and college boyfriends because they didn't mean anything. But right after I got dumped by this guy is when I met J. and then look what J did to me. (laughs) It was an emotional yo yo for a few years.

D-- You still carry any upset from that time?

V-- No.

- D-- But he really put you on a roller-coaster?
- V-- Oh my God it was horrible.
- J-- Had I known then what I know now it would have been different.
- V-- Do you really think so? (looking back at chart) Engaged, married, A born-- which was all very exciting.
- D-- What's that steep drop?
- V-- J's mother died. Which was a tough time.
- D-- How did he react?
- V-- It was tough.
- J-- When we go over mine I'll show you. I actually had a tougher time when she was first diagnosed than when she died- because there were three years to prepare for it.
- V-- He also went through four or five years where he didn't talk about it.
- D-- Was that hard on the relationship?
- V-- No. No actually. Then (looking at chart), L was married. We moved to this house. The kids started school and everything-- and then my surgery. And here we are. (While it is marked on the chart she neglects to mention L's death.)
- D-- You put yourself down that low right now though?
- V--- Yeah.
- J-- You put yourself down here, as compared to this is the even mark? You see yourself that low?
- V-- Yeah, I don't feel like I've gotten back to where I was.
- D-- If you had to venture a guess, where would you put yourself at A's Bat Mitzyah?
- V-- I would say right up at the top. It is a big deal. I'm very excited about it. But as I said, not for religious reasons.
- D-- But it also means you are set up for disappointment. The expectation now is that that is the first thing since L died that is going to be up there- above the midline.
- V-- Right. I'm very proud of her and it's a time where your child shows off.
- D-- Where would you put, development age-wise discovering yourself as a sexual being. I'm not asking when you became sexually active- but when you became aware of the fact that you were a human being who was a sexual being.
- V-- Probably in ninth grade. Right around there.
- D-- Three years older than A is now.

- V-- She is doing exactly what we did in sixth grade.
- D-- And you're comfortable with that?
- V-- NO! Not at all! Because you read too much about what goes now. But I think she's susceptible to peer pressure. More so than other kids? I don't know about that. To me, though, it is important who she is friends with because what they are doing, she is doing.
- D-- That whole friendship thing comes back in.
- V-- Yeah.
- J-- Friendship is a big thing for her.
- D-- How so?
- J-- Because a lot of her ups and down had to do with her friendships. For me it is not that way. The first thing I can remember that was a big disappointment was losing a Little League championship. I made the last out and my dad was the coach. My B/Mitzvah was here. Everything was on an even keel. The next high was when I scored a touch down. Going to college was a big high. I met a girl in college- and that was a huge high- not only because we had a good relationship but because there have only been three people who had a big impact on my life and she was one of them. You know even to this day a lot of the things that she taught me are important to me- that's why she is way up there. And then graduating college... and then I did my first triatholon that I completed was a huge high. And then I drop way down herewe went on a trip to Vale together. We were there about two days and I had a panic attack and we had to leave and come home. It was a huge low. It was like I succumbed to something.
- D-- Were you embarrassed?
- J-- No, because I never get embarrassed with her.
- V-- I was embarrassed to tell my parents why we were home.
- J-- Yeah cause you know you go out to a wonderful place and then have to leave. A was born and that was a huge high. And then my mother was diagnosed with cancer. Then we got married- which was a big high for everyone in the family A was born and she was six months old when my mother died. But as I said, I started mourning when she was diagnosed. The surgeon came out and we knew from that point that it was only a matter of time.
- D-- So you started mourning at that point.
- J-- Absolutely. Then I had a huge loss, because my father was like a lost soul for many months. And I had never seen that before. Because we work together- I was spending a lot of time with him. That was probably even a lower low than my mother dying.
- D-- That is a difficulty for both of you- of seeing your parents a human beings.
- J-- Right. Seeing them suffer was worse than the actual loss. Making VP at work was a high but not a huge one. S was born and that pushed me back up. Then my dad

got remarried and I was happy for him but it wasn't a big thing either way for me. Then here wasn't really anything until L passed away. The biggest thing of all was V mourning for that year, year and a half.

D-- How come?

J-- Because it was very difficult on me. Because everything I've tried to...any other time she was sad or unhappy, I was always able to fix it. But there was no fixing this, you know.

V-- And the funny thing about that is that is what I have always said about my father. And when I see him doing stuff now I think, "Oh my God, that's like my father."

D-- Wow.

J-- I just couldn't make her happy. So that lasted maybe six months to a year. And then we had two highs for the both of us- we went on a four-day vacation last February. We both needed it so badly. It was just a great time. And the last high for me was in June I had an awakening that I was unfulfilled with life. I wasn't feeling great about myself for the first time in a long time. It was because I had put on twenty pounds, I wasn't working out, I was just going to work and coming home. I didn't have anything I was passionate about in my life other than my family. I started riding and biking and training. And I did another triatholon in July. In September I did it. And that was a big high. I had done a lot, but this one.... I felt like I was back. I dropped twenty pounds. I was feeling passionate about life again. And I'm up here.

D-- Where do you think A's B/Mitzvah will be?

J-- I tell you...I...it is going to be a joyous occasion but I really do not know where it will impact me until I am up on the *bimah*.

V-- Our wedding... it was so phenomenal. There was just something about it. I mean, our friends, our relatives they still say "remember your wedding, that was phenomenal." And we are doing something very different. And we wonder- are we going to come out of it feeling the same? You know, there are people who have wedding ceremonies and they say "Oh it was fun". Ours was just special.

J-- I just noticed something because we didn't watch each other do these. Isn't it interesting that the biggest low in my life was her fluttering around down here but she is still down here, but I'm way up here right now. Isn't that weird? I wouldn't think that I would be up here if she was down here.

D-- And you both put that event down about as low. But you are clearly in different places right now.

J-- It frustrates me.

D--Why does it frustrate you that you can't pull V up?

J-- I'm not as frustrated as I was six months or a year ago. I guess that I feel that if you want to be happy you have to be happy with yourself first. It has to come from within. So I feel really content with myself—almost-- I'm still searching for that one other thing that I think I need to be involved in...

V-- I'm much more dependent on what other people...

- J-- Her happiness has always been about...
- V—Interpersonal.
- J-- Her circumstances, where she's at, who she is with, than who she is...and mine is totally the opposite.
- V-- He could care less what anybody else thinks and I'm very dependent on that.
- J-- That's true.
- D-- That says a lot about the family dynamics and the roles that you take.
- V-- And when I see my kids having their feeling hurt very easily I wish they had a little bit more of... you know... my kids not caring.
- J-- It is not, not caring- it is having perspective.
- D-- Did you hear that as a judgment when V said that about not caring?
- J-- No, I think she gave me too much credit.
- V-- I did mean it as a good thing- because the things he should care about he cares about.
- J-- If somebody I really cared about was upset I would care. The other difference is that I don't have a lot of friends from high school or college. It is like, you are in my life or you are out of my life.
- D-- What do you do now that you have seen this powerful divergence?
- V-- I am wondering if I go all the way up for the B/Mitzvah will I drop all the way down? I mean- this has to do with all kinds of little things. My eyes have welled up three times as we've being talking but I controlled myself from crying. I assume I'll be up here when I don't get emotional any longer like that because that really brings me down.
- D-- Do you remember what the three things were?
- V-- Talking about her.
- J-- That's what it always is. But isn't it weird that for her to get up to a high level it is not something that she is accomplishing but something that someone else does. I don't know what that means but.... I always say that if you don't feel good about yourself go out and do something. She is saying that she'll go up there for A's B/Mitzvah. But then it is over with and where will she be?
- V-- That's what I'm saying. I don't know where I'll be in a year from now. Will I have made it back up here. I still get that pit in my stomach when I drive by the hospital. Is that going to stop... ever? That is one reason why I am down there. I can't go through a day without feeling that pit in my stomach.
- J-- I guess it will all...

- V-- How long for the average person... some people never get back...some people...
- D-- Everybody has a dial—R-- that is resilience. And different people dial up resilience differently. Different people get resilience from different sources. I think, I'll tell you what, if a year from now you still see yourself as being down, except for the B/Mitzvah, that is a red flag. Even six months from now- it is a red flag. In the meantime, don't lose sight of the fact that you have already done a lot of healing. You've accomplished a lot since then. You've accomplished a lot since then. L died. Then you had the surgery. That knocked you out physically and emotionally. So you've come a long way.
- J-- And I think she could come a lot longer way if we didn't have the family stuff...
- V-- Absolutely.
- J-- Because it is always there. It makes the loss so evident.
- V-- I would just love my brother-in-law to remarry. Because that would take the pressure off my mother. And then all of a sudden I would be released from this burden.
- D-- You're hoping for a domino process.

(Wrap Up)

- D-- How was the process of doing this?
- V-- Interesting, you know you think about stuff you haven't thought about in years.
- D-- I think that is what a life transition is all about. Thinking about stuff that we may have filed away.
- J-- It was good because... I knew that we... I didn't have to see it to know that we are on different levels now. But I... I can't speak for you, but I thought you were happier than...
- V-- I mean. I can go out and have fun and not think about anything. But it is like the day to day.
- D-- There is a book by a man named David Lykken called <u>Happiness</u>. It is a book based upon real research and real science. And it said something that I found very interesting. He says that different people have different happiness "set points". Different people start out in different places. So your baseline may actually mean something very different than his.
- V-- I tend to see the glass as half empty. Whereas, nothing bothered me...
- J-- We have flip-flopped. I used to worry about everything. I used to always look at the negatives. I would say, "Nah maybe we shouldn't do it..." and she would say, "Let's go and do and we'll make the best of what happens." And now I have that attitude and she's more the worrier.
- D-- When did you flip flop?
- J-- With L's death.

- V-- The last two years. Her death made me a new person. I'm not the same. I don't look at things the same way.
- J-- I was like- hey, anything can happen to anybody at any time so lets enjoy life to the fullest.
- V-- You know- I still get that ... I met someone today...she went to the same high school as me. She asked me my maiden name. When I told her, I got that stunned look. You know, I was just out to lunch and... when is it that those things will stop happening that put me in those places?
- J-- It is not that things happen but what they do to you.
- D-- Look, this experience has become part of your identity.
- V-- Right.
- D-- Her death is part of who you are. And it is difficult to incorporate something that painful into who you are.
- J-- You know, when my kids fight, I say, "Don't do that." You know, you should value the fact that you have a sister.
- D-- That's a heavy burden that you are putting on those kids.
- V-- I don't say it- I just think it.
- D-- One of the things that may be a real challenge will be when the kids start breaking away. It may be a real challenge. I mean, you value your nuclear family a lot and from what you have said, I get the sense that you have always valued your nuclear family but even more-so now. So you are holding on tighter as the adults but A's job now is to break away.
- V-- I remember that when we were kids we always did everything as a family. I have almost no relationship with my brother now. I'm nursing him I'm doing the same thing with him. And I can't do it-- so I just pull away from him.
- J-- There's just a lot of dysfunction in that family. The kids are problems and on medication.
- D-- You know, "dysfunction" is a strong word. Families are complicated. And when there is loss or a life-cycle events approaching...
- V-- No, my brother's family is dysfunctional. The entire family is ill and medicated.
- J-- I'm not throwing that term around loosely.
- V-- The nanny that lived with them for four and a half years turns out to be my sister-in-laws half sister, but she didn't know it. Her father knew it all along and that is how she got the job. It is a soap opera.
- J-- He only came clean when he thought he was dying. But he pulled through. And they depend on us a lot.

- D-- At a certain point you'll stand up and set boundaries. The times when you have made clear statements you have done it gently but forcefully and you have done it without anger. Like you did with your brother-in-law. If you spoke to him anything like you shared with me...
- V-- That is exactly how I did it. But it took a long time to get there. That is part of the problem.
- D-- But you did it. And those boundaries are important.
- J-- I'm sorry if we have been sidetracked.
- D-- We haven't been sidetracked at all. And I would like to hear more about what s happening as it unfolds. But for this specific purpose, I would love you to look at this process and give me some feedback on your reaction to the process.
- V-- You know what, I think it is a great thing for anyone going through this to go through. It helps you understand the whole process better. For instance, when you talk about the pressure, for example, that I am feeling from my parents... Maybe it alleviates some of the stress that could come from them. It is a good thing.
- J-- It is like the thing you brought up the last time about the grandparents. It is a big thing, because they are feeling older and they have less control.
- J-- After you left last week I was like--"That was amazing."
- V-- That was a big thing about my parents wanting to be in the spotlight and have their party. Is that what is behind this? I never thought of that.
- J-- And sometime within the next couple of months it will come up and we will discuss it with them. If it comes up one more time we will discuss it. And now I am even more motivate to discuss it.
- D-- I was so struck by the fact that after we met you went out with them and tried to bring it up with them.
- J-- We wanted to get into that conversation with them but they didn't go there. And we aren't normally like that-- beating around things.
- V-- I am very curious to see, after my nephew's B/Mitzvah how things go. And to see what the comments are about ours.
- J-- Now I'm curious to see how everybody reacts to it.
- J-- When you asked us to do this, I knew from my previous meeting with you that this was going to be an eye opening experience for us. That is why I was so excited to do it. And it turned out that way.
- V-- Do other families feel... I mean obviously they do... do the bulk of the families in the Temple find this a real religious experience? Or is it a great milestone?
- D-- I think that is a great question. I think the bulk of the families in the congregation consciously don't find it... don't necessarily consider it a religious experience. Yet they know that it is substantively different than if their kids walked up on the stage at

school during a show. And so there is a deeper dimension, a more connected dimension but I don't think they have the vocabulary to talk about why.

V-- And kids, how do they feel about it?

D-- That's also a great question and it is a different project. I think for the kids they feel a great sense of accomplishment.

V-- That's what A will feel, I think.

D-- But for the parents I think there is a layer... we've done this wonderful split in our culture. There is religion over here and there is the rest of life over here. And Judaism and religion were never supposed to work like that. Judaism is about how we are in the world. How you treat each other in your relationship is religious. That means... how you deal with the dog... it means how you treat each other in bed... there are Jewish texts that talk about how a couple is supposed to make each other feel in bed. Oh my God, that's not religious, is it? There is a great text, called the Iggeret HaKodesh, and it talks about patience and allowing one partner to orgasm first. Who ever thought that that was religion. That that's religious. We make the split all the time. So I think we split off our relationship with each other from religion. I think we split off the changes in our lives from religion. Except for the peak moments when we know that we need a ritual vocabulary- wedding, funerals, births. And B/Mitzvah. But I think that B/Mitzvah is the hardest. Because we know what the transition is for birth, death and marriage but I don't think we know the transition at B/Mitzvah. We aren't fully aware of it. And it comes out with the discussions we have had with all the undercurrents with your folks. You had to struggle with each other and then finally set the boundary and have the party you wanted.

V-- You know what I find really interesting too, that living in this town... it is a very different... people in this area, one tow away, it is a one-upmanship in which people try to throw the biggest, nicest party. One tries to outdo the other. And it is so different here. You do what you want to do. If you want to have a little tiny thing, that's fine. If you want to have a black tie, that's fine. But you don't feel the sense of competition at all among A's friends. I think in other towns that is a big part of what... I remember... there was a thing in New York Magazine bout three years ago about renting out the Garden for a B/Mitzvah.

D-- When I was becoming a B/Mitzvah there was someone who rented the Orange Bowl and brought in a top Rock and Roll Band. At the meeting with our 4th grade parents last month I challenged them to be the first class of parents who work hard to out-do one another in regard to getting involved in acts of kindness, rather than the quality of the flowers. And you know, I had more people come up to me and tell me that it struck a cord. But I think people need to hear that it is okay.

V-- Exactly, people need permission. But I think this Temple and this town do it that way more so than the neighboring areas.

D-- We try to value something different. And that is part of what this project is also-saying, "Hey, what we value here is the religious experience that covers all of life." You may not have understood much of what the two of you have being talking about as being religious- but I totally do. Because it is about how you relate to each other, to the kids and to the world.

J-- That's a central theme to a lot of your sermons.

- D-- Sure it is-- we all have one sermon that we just keep giving in many ways. But I absolutely believe that it is true!! And I think it means that as we approach B/Mitzvah we need to give our relationships as much or more attention than we do getting through the Hebrew text because they are connected.
- J-- I just want to say that because we never brought it up- I might almost take as much pride and I hope she gets as much out of doing her mitzvah project as she does out of the service, because if she picks a good mitzvah project...
- V-- She loves the idea...
- J-- I'll get as much pride out of that than anything.
- D-- Doing is part of the religious experience. It is what Judaism tells us we are supposed to do. It is all of a piece- it is never split up. Listen, I want to thank you for participating in this project.

Appendix 5: Transcription of Three Sessions with Couple 6

Session 1

D-- Let me tell you how this all came about. This will be the first of three or four times that we meet. At this point I've worked with, or had contact, with close to a thousand kids who have become B/Mitzvah. And I have seen some interesting things. I see amazing shifts in the dynamics of families. I see a tremendous focus on the child or on performance readiness, or on the party. I've seen reactions sometimes that are out of kilter with the party and performance readiness or the child. And I've always wondered about that. I've noticed other things also. I've noticed a lot of shifts in families right after a B/Mitzvah -- people moving, people changing jobs -- I mean really interesting stuff. And, so I started doing some background reading on what was going on. My real interest is in family systems theory, which looks at the family as a whole. And so I started to realize that the B/Mitzvah of an eldest child corresponds with lots of changes for the whole family - including, for the parents who are going through it, lots of stuff. So how could... so the question was, how could I talk, meet with the parents, talk about what was going on for them and in the whole family? And would it enhance communication? Would it enhance the, the meaning of the B/Mitzvah? Would it allow the family to understand that this is not just a religious ritual that happens in a vacuum, but rather, it is a religious ritual that comes as part of their whole life scheme? So I've gone through different permutations of how to do it. One thing became very clear. Unless, with the original way that I was going to do the project, unless people were willing to meet with me for sessions of three hours each time, I was overly ambitious. And we only have three, maybe four times to meet. So this is what I'd like to do. There's a... do you know what a genogram is? A genogram is a...it is similar to a family tree...

L-- A family tree ... right ... that's what I was told.

D-- It is a map of the family that looks at a number of different generations. But it's different than a family tree. A family tree is interested in facts. A genogram wants the facts, but it is more interested in the emotions -- who's close to who? How is this going?

L-- We'll need ten hours for my family alone. (laugh).

D-- That's interesting. So what I'd like to do is go through and, together for the first two sessions, map out a genogram and see what learning there is. Then we'll reflect a little bit on it and see how it impacts on all of you. So, what I'd like to do, is ask you to assume that I don't know anything at all about the family. And let's start at the beginning.

B-- I just have two quick questions for you.

D-- Sure.

B-- One is, and you don't have to answer now, but, have you been finding a difference between the first B/Mitzvah and the family dynamics and subsequent ones?

D-- It's a great question. I'm only meeting with families who are having their first B/Mitzvah because I believe that it is the first child who pierces a wall of development for the whole family. And once that child has gone through it, each B/Mitzvah is emotional for everybody, but it is a first child who moves the family into adolescence. This is a new experience for ALL of you. And so I'm only working with first kids.

B-- Second question-- Is there a place to get some coffee? (laugh).

D-- Who wants to start ...B, when were you born? B-- October 25th, 1956. D-- Folks names? B--- R. H. B-- I. Y. D-- When were they born? B-- My father was born in 1932 and my mother was 1935. D-- When did they get married? B-- '54. D-- What else, anything, what's relevant in their lives? B-- My father grew up in Brooklyn. D-- Any siblings? B-- A sister. D-- Who was she? B-- My father's. D-- Do you know when she was born? B-- No. She was 12 years older than my dad. D-- So about 1930? B-- Yeah. Her name was Z. S. D-- Okay. B-- That is it for family. D-- Mom had no siblings? B-- Yes, right. D-- Okay, so small families. B-- Right, D-- How long were they, how long did they court before they wed? B-- I think high school, you know late high school. They knew each other when they were young. They must have got engaged when my father went into the army. And then they got married while he was still in the army. I don't know how long they actually courted but they knew each other for a while. They got married in May of '54 and my brother was born in April of '55. And there's exactly a year and a half between us all-- a year and a half from J to me and a year and a half from me to T.

D-- So you were born in '57?

B-- '56.

D-- And were they close?

B-- I think so. When my father died I was 11. So you don't know the dynamics as much. And also back then I don't' think people were as open as now. I think if you asked our daughter she would say we were open-- but they weren't.

D-- So dad died in 1967.

B-- Umm hmm?

D-- '67?

B-- '68.

D-- How did mom cope with his death?

B-- She was very young. She was ... how old was she 30? 30? Yeah, 30. Not even, just a month short of 33.

L-- Too young.

B-- So you know, it was difficult. And there were financial issues. My father had done very well for himself at a very young age. And leading up to his death there was no money. So it was hard. She got a job. I mean, I guess she could -- well she went out, she had never worked before. She got a job as an air traffic controller. (laugh)

D-- Wow!

L-- What was that airport?

B-- At Caldwell-- no, Teterboro. Caldwell.

L-- Caldwell. Right.

B-- Caldwell Airport. I don't what they call it now-- Essex County Airport-- I guess. And ... she dated. She was young. She dated. She had three little, three kids at home and that's it. It was tough.

L-- Beautiful woman. Beautiful. Beautiful.

B-- And then she remarried, let's see...'68, '70. 1970 - a year and a half – just over a year and a half later. That's right. Or was it '71? I mean, it was a year, to two

D-- How did you feel about that?

B-- There were other people she dated we liked better and there were people we liked less.

- D-- She got back into it pretty quickly.
- B-- Yeah. Let's see. Let's see-- he died March of '68. When did I start high school? Was that ... Was that-- right? So, yeah so, September of '70 they got married. I was okay with him--more neutral than anything else. His wife died several years earlier, before my father, from breast cancer. And he had two daughters and a son. So I was okay with it, a little neutral. T was probably better with it. T was about nine at the time. You know, and J was, you know, hated him. They hated each other. But, I mean, we all had a problem because we were moving to their town as opposed to staying where we were. That, that I think caused more of a problem than anything else.
- L-- Now this was when you went over to Springfield. So you're not talking ...
- B-- But, it's different schools, and different ... (talking over L)
- L-- A move to another state. It's different schools. Right -- different life.
- B-- And it was a different style 'cause he was ... he was a school teacher and, we still talk about it-- he doesn't teach any more, but, a school teacher and a musician, a professional musician. Money was different. We were used to a different lifestyle-- not that we knew what we were used to at that age, but we ... and I think there was always a bit of a resentment on J's part and a little bit on mine, just 'cause my mother... whatever money she did have was being utilized for the new family. And, you know, that's something that you don't understand. But, it was, you know, all right. We moved. We all, the eight of us moved into another house not their old house. We moved into their house for a month and then we all moved into another house in Mountainside. And that's right when I was starting high school. So it was a new school, new family ...
- D-- Tough.
- L-- I think that's sort of significant for him.
- B-- The B/Mitzvah was too. Let's see-- J was, yeah, a month and a half before his B/Mitzvah when dad died.
- D-- Was J the eldest child?
- B-- Yeah.
- D-- That must have been tough...
- B-- It was a rough time. (laugh).
- L-- I don't know. I guess it's in my mind so, consciously somehow that was, was, the timing was just lousy.
- D-- So on some level this raises those feelings again.
- L-- Absolutely.
- D-- For your family a B/Mitzvah is not just a joyous event.
- L-- (laugh) No. None of our milestones have been joyous

- B-- My mother died right before... (talking over L) L-- His mother died right before we got married. (laugh) D-- Really? L-- Yes. D-- What year was that? L-- We'll be here for weeks, (laugh) B-- '82. L--- '82. B-- She died in the end of August ... L-- And I have to tell you all of these things happening ... B-- ... August and we got married in that ... L-- (continues talking over B) are having a big effect of the Bat Mitzvah (talking over B). I mean, not just, yeah our past and how we view this occasion. D-- And people wonder why I wanted to do this project. (laugh). L-- Yeah. (talking over D) D-- It's true. L-- It's very significant. (talking over D). D-- So, so there's, I mean we'll talk about it a lot more, but, so am I correct to presume that there's a lot of anxiety surrounding... B-- There's both (talking over D) D-- A lot of emotions surrounding this ... L-- Yes. B—Yes, I am. There's both-- anxiety and I think also both of us feel, although, I mean L has known from the beginning, I had always wanted to do a different kind of party-- different thing. But we all, we both, I think, feel that this is sort of a replay... This is not a replacement, but this is a...
- B-- ...memorable... (talking over L)
- L-- ...occasion... memorable occasion.

strongly that we want to make this a happy...

L-- A lot of milestones in our life have been surrounded by negative things and we feel very

B-- So our, you know, you know people always talk about, a Bar, a party that might be a little over the top or whatever, and \dots

L-- I mean we're certainly not doing anything over the top but you know we certainly really can't afford to do what we're doing. But we feel strongly that we've spent so much money on horrible things in our lives, (laugh) that this is something that we finally get to spend on something nice. So, (talking over B)

D-- Wow.

L-- Yeah. So, this is about as significant to us as...

B-- And it's very significant to E. We even asked her. After plans were made, well before plans were made we asked her-- how 'bout a party or a trip to Israel? And her, that was three years ago, her answer was, if you throw in a week in Italy I'll think about it. (talking over B)

L-- We said this is not a...

B-- But, but... (laugh) (talking over L)

L-- Perillo Tours ... trip. This is a B/Mitzvah.

B-- But now (laugh) (talking over B) ... her answer was very different. We talked recently about maybe we'll change everything. It's, it's becoming a little much. Do we really need...

L-- ... since the market dropped...

B-- ...this whole thing (talking over L)

L-- Since the market has dropped a thousand...

B-- Right. (talking over L)

L-- ... points since this time... (laugh) (talking over B)

B-- You know, and we said, do we really need our friends... do we really need this big thing... what about just a nice party for you and then we'll do something else. You know, your friends, whatever. And she said "No, I, I want...

L-- her ... (talking over B)

B-- ...all my friends ... (talking over L)

L-- ... response shocked me. (talking over B)

B-- ... and relatives to see how good I do and to be proud of me and to come up to me and...

L and B-- ...pinch my cheeks..." (laugh)

L-- "...and say Mazel..."

B-- and, you know ... (talking over L)

L-- "...Tov." That's what she said. I couldn't believe it -that she said that (talking over B)

- B-- She wanted to feel good about it. L-- Which is great. D-- It is. L-- We had to change our whole wedding because his mother died before our wedding and things so... D-- Wow. L-- Yeah. So things, that's why we feel strongly about celebrating... D-- So you got married with B in mourning. L-- Yeah, basically. (laugh) D-- Wow. L-- I mean ... B-- L was with her parents and ... (talking over L) L-- B walked down the aisle, B walked down the aisle with his grandmother and everyone was crying, basically, (laugh) (talking over B) D-- Wow. L-- Yeah. So I, we never look at our wedding album. We just have this, it's just very sad time. So... B-- ...poignant time. L-- ...poignant time. B-- It was rough. My stepfather made a, you know, his toast at the wedding... that was also very difficult. D-- I'm sure, I'm sure L-- So we just wanted to have a good time and have a nice celebration. B-- So there's, I mean, there's other, you know... I don't know how much detail you want. To get back to significant things, my father was in business on his own - restaurants and food service consulting to the Army, to things like that. And then went into my grandfather's business. He sold his stuff and it was also, but it was a big cafeteria-style restaurant down in
 - D-- Wow.
- B-- So you know, those are things that had an impact on me.

restaurant in Newark and protected it from the rioters.

Newark. And then the riots came. That was significant. I mean, I remember father coming home with stitches from being hit on the head. And his workers standing outside, I mean, you know the black people he was, he was a very liberal, yeah. His people stood outside of the

- D-- I can see it in your eyes.
- B-- What else?
- L-- You want more! (laugh)
- B-- That's why I just sent in my renewal to the Southern Poverty Law Center.
- D-- Tell me about your brother's families a little bit.
- B—Well, T is single. He's dating just one woman. Her husband doesn't seem to mind. (laugh)
- D-- So he's having an affair.
- B-- Well, she has two grown kids. I think one still lives at home with a son who's either an older teenager or twenty or something like that, I don't know for sure. And T. says that she and her husband have not had a relationship for years. I don't know where this is ever going to go. She's very nice.
- L-- Yeah.
- B-- She's a ...
- L-- She's come with us to family dinners. (talking over B)
- B-- She's not ... She's harmless. That's ... that's ... and she's very nice and that's really the most that I can say about her-- very sheltered. She moved here from Brooklyn. She's, she must be T's age...forty something. And he just got her to learn to drive and take the driving test last year. So, that's T. And we're very close. We, you know, see T all the time and he, you know ... You know, our, our family history has had it's different effects on all of us. T bounces around from jobs and they're not ... He's smart. He graduated college and then he never, he owns his own Subway franchise. And then was like a manager of a Pizza Hut and stuff, but he's always, you know, he's selling furniture. He doesn't, he can't seem ...
- L-- He doesn't push himself (talking over B)
- B-- To in his mind, to push himself to commit to even, just to go back to school or whatever.
- L-- I thought that maybe when I went back to school that that would give him a little push.
- B-- I think the money issue (talking over L) You know the money is an issue, too. I think that if he knew that he could afford to support himself...he doesn't spend extravagantly, he lives in Union. And then J... (pause)
- D-- How many years ago was it?
- B-- It was two, a year, no, August 31 of 1999? No, 90-- wait what's this?
- L--- '99
- B-- Yeah, of '99. It was a year. Exactly, a year. A little less. Yeah (laugh). And J's family... J was very smart, very manipulative. J was a born salesperson. He would sell you anything. And, and while he was able to concentrate on that we was still drinking. But he did okay for the family. He got married very young. Q was18. (L talking over B)

- L-- He got married very young. He and S, B's stepfather, hated each other.
- B-- I mean physically fought.
- L-- He was hell bent on getting out of that house as soon as possible.
- B-- So he...
- L-- So he met Q and...
- B-- Barely finished High School because he hated him so much. But he did graduate.
- L-- And Q...
- B-- Right. And they got married. Q was probably 18 or 19 and J was 22 or something. They waited a few years before they had kids. But my older niece is 22?
- L-- That's right (laugh)
- B-- That's right because C is 19 or 20. R is 22 so...'78 right? She was born in '78.
- L-- And I think he felt strongly about, you know. When you feel your home situation is horrible, you're going to start your own family... (B talking over L) you want your family to be perfect.
- B-- It was like you know, these girls in Newark on welfare, who they have a baby because that's all they have for themselves.
- D-- So he was trying to compensate for the losses.
- B-- I think so. And he wanted to feel that he could be a responsible person. I think that was part of it. Q was...she didn't go to college. She may have gone to a secretarial school or something. She worked before they had kids. But then didn't work and depended on... You know, it was, it was a very traditional (except or J's problems) a very traditional... He worked. She didn't. It's the way her parents were. I think the pressures of that... J kind of also went from job to job. It contributed to his downward spiral. He fought a lot of demons. I think J started drinking in high school. Drinking and drugs. I mean more than the occasional fooling around. And so it was for a long, long time.
- D-- So you ended up being the big brother. That's a lot of responsibility.
- L-- Yeah.
- B-- Yeah.
- L-- It still is to him. My family is not as...interesting.
- D-- Can you say more for me?
- L-- Birthday, January 26, 1955. I have an older brother and I have a sister.
- D-- What are their names?
- L-- R and N. My parents are from Brooklyn. They also had been together in high school. They met at the JCC. And my mother remembers him playing basketball. She thought he was cute.

You know, one of these things. My father went into the Army. You know, a Brooklyn story. And got married. Let's see. My father is going to be 71 next week.

- B-- Maybe you'll call him.
- L-Naah! (laugh).
- D-- So you aren't close?
- L-- 1926, right. And my mother is 72. (Pause) My brother and I...
- D-- Remind me of their names?
- L-- M is my mother's name. And F is dad's.
- D-- Good marriage?
- L-- They're divorced.
- D-- They're divorced.
- L-- Yes, yes.
- D-- When did they get divorced?
- L-- They got divorced eventually, but they always had problems,
- B-- Then they should have.
- L-- Then they should have, right. They had problems throughout their marriage. And they had... my fathers fooled around, and...
- B-- Wa-wait, you're not, th-they lived on Staten Island and then moved to Cl-
- L-- We moved to Clinton in 1956, or so. I mean I was born in Staten Island and then we moved to Clinton, which might as well be moving to Mars. Because you know, if you're living in Brooklyn in the 1950's and then moved to Clinton which is so rural... my mother hated it. And so this, she said, "I can't live here, it's too..." My father is a hospital administrator. He's an accountant. And he went to Hunterdon Medical Center to run their accounting and he wound up becoming a hospital administrator. So they moved to the thriving metropolis of Somerville. Which is a little closer in and my mother could deal with that. But my father fooled around for years and my mother always--
- D-- Multiple affairs?
- L-- Umm, a few...I mean, one major one that I remember. I don't know about multiple. But he had one pretty major one. I remember my parents fighting about it. I remember me laying in bed at night and hearing the fight downstairs. But, my mother at the time wasn't, for whatever reason, did not want to get divorced. I guess at the time, for the sake of the children, you stay together.
- B-- She worked.

L-- She worked. She went back to school. She's a teacher. A special ed teacher. When my daughter, when my sister was two, she went back and got her masters. So she was always, had her own life. Intellectually, you know, she sort of did her thing.

D-- Um, hmm.

L-- So finally... My sister and my brother are three and a half years apart. And she wanted to have a third child. And my father really did not want one. She got pregnant and had a miscarriage. And she was determined to have a third child. My sister was born. My father really was reluctant about that. He was not happy with that. So, I mean, of course everything is fine. They wound up getting divorced. My sister went to college.

B-- In the 80's. In the early 80's.

L-- In '81. They separated in '81 when my sister went to college. So, they basically stayed together, my mother, stayed for the sake of the family. And as soon as my sister left to go to college, that was it.

B-- That was it. I handled the divorce. (laugh)

L-- (laugh)

D-- You handled it?

B-- Well, it was, amicable.

L-- It was very amicable. That's one thing. Although they had their issues, my mother and father are still very good friends.

D-- So they are better off not married?

B-- Oh, absolutely.

L-- Oh, absolutely. My mother says to this day, "I love your father. I could not stay married to him." And my father is very nice to my mother. And they had a very amicable divorce. Which made it much easier for us.

B-- And they still have their same differences and issues which should have had them separate years ago. But they don't have to deal with that now.

D-- And what year did the divorce go final? They separated in '81?

B-- It must have been 8-- well it was before, it must have been '83-'84.

D-- See that's what lawyers do... they string it along, so...

L-- (laugh)

B-- (laugh)

L-- So, my mother stayed in the house-- the family house. We moved to Bridgewater by then. So she stayed in the house. My father moved out. My father, at that time, was having an affair with his secretary who eventually married.

D-- Wow.

- L-- Now, my father at the time, when they got married, my father was 60 and she was 30 something. She had been married before and had no children.
- B-- She was not Jewish and converted.
- L-- Converted. I was brought up fairly conservative. My father made us go to Temple. He was one of the ones that you'd have to go to Temple. And he, we were brought up, especially for living in our area, where surrounded by a lot of Jews.
- D-- Right.
- L-- Anyway, so my father go remarried. And maybe, I don't know, maybe three years after. But he had been having, you know, had been having this affair
- D-- Uh,um. Uh,um.
- L-- My brother resented it horribly. Also because he was, because they were close in age. This women and my brother were close in age.
- B-- And you all knew her from...
- L-- Right, and we knew her. My brother was totally freaked. My sister was also very upset because T, his secretary, used to take her skiing and whatever. And now my father's married to her. I was the most acceptable of it. I was already out of the house. We were getting married. You know, what difference does it make. It happened. It's not going to change the situation. So, he would meet someone a year later and get married. It really didn't matter to me. I was pretty accepting of it. And to this day, she's nicer to us because I was very accepting of her.
- B-- I also think, it helped make your father, I don't know what the right word is...but, maybe he gave up more to your mother. You know it was sort of like, well, you get what you want, (laugh) you know.
- D-- What role do you play in the family? If B plays, in his family of origin, if seems to play the good son, (B nods) what role do you play?
- L-- Right. He is the good son- the protector. My mother has an expression for her three children which I find very interesting. My brother is her brains. My sister is her heart and I'm her mediator. My brother does everything very driven. My sister is the sweetest, nicest person in the world. Nothing bothers her, nothing phases her.
- B-- She's a little bitchy these days. (laugh)
- L-- Come on. She's sweet. And I'm very, although I give a tough exterior, I'm the one that cries every five minutes at a commercial or whatever. And I think her expression is pretty. We each have our role in the family. We're very different. I can't say I'm the enabler, like B is, or you know, the support. It's not, you know applicable.
- B-- Yeah, but you're more of, like me, you're sort of the mediator.
- L-- Yes, but I'm definitely not you. If something needs to get done--
- B-- I think with your mother, she calls you immediately—

- L-- Yes, my mother lives near me. So I have the responsibility of my mother. So I am sort of at the center of the family only because my mother and I live here. My sister lives in Long Island and my brother lives in Washington. So for every family thing we come here because my mother and I live here. And my brother and sister just had babies this month.
- B-- That's another thing.
- L-- Yes, another story.
- D-- They both had babies this month?
- L-- So my brother said, "I'm sending you the pictures because you will give them to everyone there." I'm sort of the one that does stuff. Like I'm the official one. Like if something needs to be done in the families, B and I are the ones to do it. If pictures need to be sent out, if a party needs to be planned or something, we are just sort of the ones that do that kind of stuff. So that's sort of our role. Anyway, so my brother and I... my sister was sort of an only child because there was such as age difference by the time she was born.
- D-- Right
- L-- So that was sort of an interesting thing. Anyway my father got remarried. After that, my brother really resented my father. For a few years. They had a very rough time. Spoke but very tense. And then they were fine. My sister, I think she wasn't as bad as my brother. But she resents him a little bit. But everybody is now fine. And with T, his wife... they've been married for a long time.
- B-- We are all close.
- L-- We're all close. So that has resolved itself. Ironically, my brother got married after medical school to a very nice girl. Very sweet, very nice. And went into a very high powered cardiology practice in Washington. Very driven. Worked a million hours a week. And wound up getting divorced. Not because he was having affairs.
- D-- You sure?
- L-- Yeah. He wanted to be, he wanted to be out there. He wanted to be visible, He wanted to do great things for the medical community. His wife didn't care about the money. Didn't care about the status. Was very sweet and nice. Was not that bright. And they just kind of grew apart. So my brother's life totally parallels my father in every single way.
- B-- And how old was R at the time?
- L-- Oh, and they have a child who was 3 when my brother and his wife got divorced. R was 3. He was looking for a more high power life style.
- D-- So did he remarry?
- L-- He remarried a non-Jewish women.
- B-- (laugh)
- L-- Twenty... about twenty when they got married.
- B-- Blonde

- L-- 15 years younger then he is
- B-- An aerobics instructor.
- L-- An aerobics instructor. I mean this was like...it blew our minds...that my brother, the high power cardiologist... brought home this woman.
- B-- That was because he already dated everyone else in Washington.
- L-- Yeah. Came home with this southern, beautiful, like what you call a real trophy wife. You know.
- D-- What's her name?
- L-- L
- D-- L
- B-- But she was what R wanted. Someone who would be with him.
- L-- Supportive of his career.
- B-- Supportive. Wanted to be out and be seen.
- L-- Right. She looks beautiful. Wears beautiful clothes.
- B-- And she's driven in her way.
- L-- She's very driven. Just, you know, their personalities are more alike. You know. And it's amazing to me that my brother, after not speaking to my father for a few years, basically has the same life (laugh).
- D-- And the child that was born last month is the first?
- L-- Is the first for this couple.
- B-- So they now have the oldest and the youngest...
- L-- ... grandchildren. Because my nephew is 19 now.
- B-- And L's sister had her third child-
- L-- My brother is an interesting character...my brother's an interesting guy. He's definitely an interesting guy. He's also, you know, if you talk to him, he gives the impression of being tough. But he's, he's very sentimental. He carries the most baggage about my parents getting divorced and that whole thing. He definitely has the baggage. My sister is married to a cardiologist also. They live on Long Island. And she just had her third child. So she has a 6 year old, a 3 year old, and a newborn. My sister and brother are fairly close. They are probably closer than I am to R. Only because D, N husband, is a cardiologist. They go to conferences together. You know, they have more similar life style. They travel a lot. They have more money than we do. When they get together, when the family gets together, R and D are always talking about cardiology stuff. So they, so my brother and sister have a tight relationship —

B--- It's a different relationship. They're more dependent on us. Like D would not call R to ask him to help with something...

L-- ...the computer... (laugh)

B-- ...or to do something for him, and would call me all the time

L-- Yeah.

D-- It's interesting that's a word that keeps coming up. Everyone depends on you.

L-- Yeah. Everyone calls us for everything. My friends call me for. I, I, we always kid around that I should put an ad...

B-- ...900...

L-- ...a 900 number...

B-- ...so we can...

L-- ...we're like service directors. People call us for everything. Yesterday I got two calls. Someone needed a nutritionist and someone needed an eye doctor. I mean everyone is always calling us.

D-- Interesting

L-- My mother...Now we were closer to my mother. When my father and my mother were divorced, we stayed much closer to my mother's family and we still are today. Now my father kind of washed his hands of his family and...

B-- For a little while. And moved on.

L-- Yeah. And moved to Pennsylvania, Bucks County. You know, so we got much closer to my mother's family. And my grandfather died a week before his 100th birthday. He and my mother...

B-- 2 years ago right now.

D-- I remember.

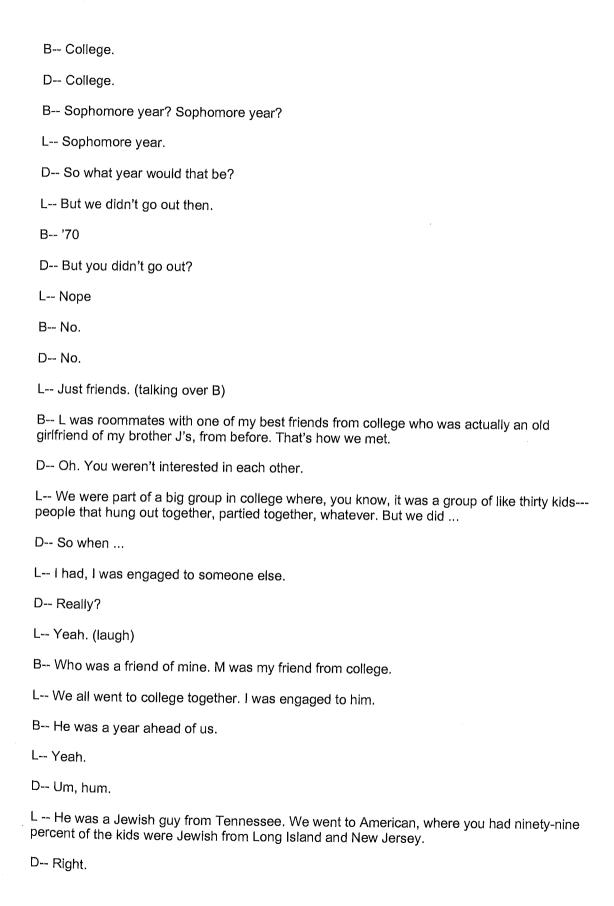
L-- Right, right. So, and we're all very close to him and my mother's parents. You know that was a big...

B-- He lived with us for a while when E was little.

D-- I see.

L-- But my family all gets along very well. We all, now T, my father's wife and my mother are very good friends. I mean we've traveled together. Any family event like the B/Mitzvah doesn't even phase them. I mean we, we all went down for my brother's 45th birthday party and my mother and I and my father and his wife stayed in the same room together. (laugh) You know, I mean, it's really not... it's, it's very okay. Which is great, which makes it much easier for us.

D-- Let's switch gears for a couple of minutes to the two of you. When did you meet?



L-- And I come home with this, you know, I always remember Catholic boys. And I said, mom I met somebody Jewish, you know from Tennessee. (laugh) Which, you know, so I was always a little renegade in that respect. But, so, I, he graduated a year ahead of me. He went down to the University of Tennessee. He went to law school. And I moved down there after college. And I got my masters in social work. And we lived together for a few years and we got engaged. And six weeks before the wedding we had a broken engagement.

B-- And there's another milestone ... (laugh)

D-- It's interesting. You just, for the first time in the conversation, used passive language.

L-- Oh really? (laugh)

D-- Who broke off the engagement?

L-- It was sort of a mutual thing. He was very politically ambitious. And he, he wanted to run, Al Gore actually came from his senate seat in Tennessee, he had just become a congressman, and B ...It was a question of where we were going to live. And I could not live in the boonies of Tennessee. I said I would live in Nashville. And that he really had these political ambitions to run from this livable base. And we really would have to live in the boonies for a while ...

B-- Where he was from (talking over L)

L-- ...if he got elected. Right. Where he was from...If he got elected to move to Nashville or Washington or wherever. And when it really came down to this is the way it was going to be, it was just not going to work.

D-- Gotcha.

L-- So I had been living in Tennessee for a few years. I moved home. That was when my parents were actually still together but were really toward the end. And that was really very much where the end was.

D-- So your engagement broke up right as your parents' marriage was finally splitting up?

L-- Uh huh

D-- Okay.

L-- Right.

B-- I had just come home from law school.

L-- Yeah. He was just in law school. But we always kept in touch 'cause I always say he really liked me. He secretly liked me. He used to call me in Tennessee all the time ... (talking over B) ...which is odd. I mean here I'm engaged to someone else. Why would somebody be calling me in Tennesse? (laugh) So I moved home in New Jersey, in Bridgewater, and you were home from school...

B-- Right-- for the summer.

L-- Right,

- B-- And it was after second year. And I had just broken up with a serious girlfriend.
- L-- And we started hanging out together 'cause I did not know people. You know, we lived, like maybe twenty minutes from each other in New Jersey and we liked to go to movies and we used to, started hanging around together.
- D-- How much after that.
- L-- Sigh. I don't know. We dated off and on and then we broke up for a little while, but, I mean, we got married in '82. So this was '79, so it is...
- B-- Right. I graduated law school in '80.
- D-- And what year was E born?
- L-- E was born in '88. We were married for six years when we moved to South Orange. I was focused on career. I was a social worker. I got my masters in social work then I, it was kind of, then I went to a nursing home that was opening and I was director of social services divisions and I kind worked my way up. And I was very into my job. I was nervous about having children. I was not willing to compromise. It was always B's idea to have children.
- D-- Really.
- L-- I was very into my career. I was very into...we traveled. I don't know, it was very ...
- B-- Some of it probably was your parents' fighting
- L-- Yeah ... (talking over B)
- B-- You know.
- L-- ...maybe. It was not an easy decision for me--- some women know that they want kids-- it was not like that for me.
- D-- Really.
- L-- Yeah. I was, I was, I was, yeah. It took me a while. You were much more ready...
- B-- Yeah. If I had unlimited funds I suppose that I would've had six, seven, eight.
- L-- Right.
- B-- I don't know who I would've had them with me, but... (laugh)
- L-- Yeah, yeah, it was not one of these things that okay we're married...boom...let's go. I did not go that way at all.
- B-- And I was young. You know, I mean, I, I, we were both young at the time so...
- D-- And now here's your baby...
- L--- Yeah.
- D-- ...standing up as a B/Mitzvah.

L-- And to this day my mother and sister and brother are shocked. I, if, if you knew me right when E was born...I was not particularly maternal at the time.

B-- Uh huh.

L-- And I have become the most patient, maternal person. I mean, my mother to this day says, "I know you have kids in your house, a hundred or so... I can't believe that you are like the den mother."

B-- L still says that if, you know, if she didn't have to deal with the kids up until their second or third birthday...

L-- Right. Yeah, I'm not ... (talking over B)

B-- She could have more. She'd be fine

L-- It's not my thing.(talking over B)

D-- Really?

L-- It's not my thing. But we laugh about it because I was not a maternal type.

D-- Gotcha.

B-- And we were both, you know through high school and the big drug thing, you know, not your, not your conservative, family-oriented... (laugh)

L-- But E was born and now it's, it's just like I can't imagine not having children. And people say, "You are so patient and such a great mother" and it is just funny because... I say, "Oh, once I thought about not having children." And then they say...God, they just can't imagine...

D-- Wow.

L-- So. It's very funny.

D-- So you had her when you were ...

L-- I was old, I was an old mother for the time. I was thirty-three.

D-- Thirty-three.

L-- Yeah, yeah. Which--- is on the older side, definitely. My daughter was... I went back to work three months after she was born I went back to work. We hired a live in nanny and I felt very strongly about that because to this day I do not like infants until the child is about two.

D-- Um hum.

L-- It's just not my thing. I, you know, I'm one of these people when someone has a baby I'll say she's adorable but don't expect me to, you know (laugh), it's just not my thing.

D-- Right.

L-- It's just, it's so. So I was very happy to go back to work.

D-- Gotcha.

- L-- And I worked full time until we had our second.
- D-- When was that?
- L-- '92.
- D-- I would like to hear more about her and but the hour is late. So let's pick it up next time. Do you have time for some homework?
- B-- Um hum.
- L-- Yes. I have no homework for school right now. I'm on break for a while.
- D-- Great. We talked a little bit about what this B/Mitzvah means. I'd like you go into a little more depth. So what I'd like you to do is first, to spend some time for yourself, thinking about what it means, not for E, but specifically for you as a human being. And after you've spent some time thinking about it sit together, talk about what it means, share what it means, as individuals but also what it means for you as a couple. And then, not all of it, but part of it, sit down with E and share some of the insights. Obviously some of it is going to be stuff that you don't share with kids, but let her in on your thoughts about what it means for you. Because from what you said, it has a lot of meaning for you but also, then talking specifically about the Bat Mitzvah, it focuses on E. Keep it focused on you. Keep focused on the good stuff, but also the more difficult stuff. And what I'd like you to do the next time we get together is talk about that. And then also talk, you know, you talk a lot. I got a little bit of the facts of the two of you. But use that to talk about you. Any questions? Great- I'll see you next week.

END OF Session 1

Session 2

- D-- How did you feel after our last session?
- L-- I felt great when I left here. It was very cathartic for me.
- D-- Was it?
- L-- Yeah...I...I... because... just... it's just... yeah... it was just a very nice thing-- to think back on your family for better or for worse and just put it into some perspective. And, I did, I left feeling wonderful. So, B, how did you feel?
- B-- Me? I think about my family all ...
- L-- Yeah. I know he does, I know. (talking over B)
- B-- ... the time and it's not the most uplifting experience.
- L-- No, see I don't.
- D-- It's hard to bring all that stuff up.
- B-- Well, yeah. It's hard to discuss it. I mean it is not something that I... look, I'm aware of it constantly anyway.

- D-- How, how present are all the losses as you are thinking about the B/Mitzvah?
- B-- Very. Yeah. We were talking about before about what it means to us and to E. And a lot of what it means to me is to be able to carry on with E where my father couldn't. You know where he had started, I couldn't.
- D-- That's a heavy burden.
- B-- Oh, I don't think of it as a burden. I mean, it's, it's just sort of picking up the next ...
- L-- You know you can look at it too as it could be burden or it could be an honor almost.
- B-- Well, that's how I look... I don't look at it as a burden. I mean, on the one hand it brings into more of the present the loss of not having had it, but I do feel, you know, privileged that I'm able to do it with E.
- D-- Nice.
- B-- My father was very involved with Jewish life. There was the Jewish Community Center in Verona. We were involved with that but we were very young, and then never continued it. I was B/Mitzvahed there and then we moved, I guess, after that.
- D-- What did you... what was your B/Mitzvah like? What do you remember?
- B-- It's funny, I, I remember the services. I don't remember much of the preparation except that I could not learn my Haftarah in Hebrew and it was very long. Maybe that's why I've always had a problem with languages. Maybe subconsciously, 'cause I can learn anything, I, and I have a problem with foreign languages. If I'm in a foreign country I can pick it up fast, but studying. And back then they gave us a, a record with your Haftarah on it ...
- L-- Yeah.
- B-- ... and I just could not learn it. And it got to the point where I scratched off the whole end of the record so that it would get to the end and then repeat, so I could leave it on at night, while I was sleeping, and it would play over and over like (laugh), like subliminal learning. And I ended up doing my Haftarah in English. Don't ever mention that to E.
- L-- Wow. I didn't even know that.
- D-- How did you, how did you feel about that?
- $\mbox{B--}\mbox{ I started}$ it in Hebrew. I said the first couple of lines so that it did appear that I worked on it and then ...
- D-- Which clearly you did. (talking over B)
- B-- I don't remember feeling any... you know embarrassment or anything like that. And then afterward the party was out our house, in Verona.
- D-- Let me just go back for a second.
- B-- Yeah.
- D-- When you, you know you kibitzed about not mentioning this to E. What did you mean?

B-- I can see E... when I say "E have you done your hour of study tonight", she'll say, "Well if I didn't learn it well so I can always do it in English too!" (laugh).

L-- That's right. She has an answer for everything. When I complain about school she'll say, "But you chose to go back to school. I have to do this, you know." So she's very quick.

D-- You don't want to give her the opening.

L & B together-- Yeah.

L-- Exactly.

D-- Gotcha.

B-- I remember working on my speech. And I told E that I still have it. My Martin Luther King speech.

L-- And your ugly suit.

D-- Have, have you heard the speech?

L-- I don't think so, no.

B-- No. You've never heard it.

D-- Has E heard the speech?

B-- No, but I want to...

L-- Now, we have to pull it out. Right. He has the time to do it. (talking over B)

B-- ... pull it out and give it a reading. Yeah. (talking over L) I think it's, it's in my high school yearbook, In the front of it. And I remember my double-breasted suit with eight buttons, Edwardian brown suit from Barney's. And the night before all the buttons came loose. I remember that. (laugh).

D-- Interesting.

B-- I never shopped at Barney's.

L-- We still don't!

B-- So that, that's all. I don't remember, it like with the same poignancy as my brother's-- my father having just died. You know, I think it was a year and a half later, to the day, a year and a half, a year and six months later. Exactly.

L-- On your birthday.

B-- On my birthday.

D-- His death or the B/Mitzvah?

B-- No, no ...

L-- The B/Mitzvah. His B/Mitzvah was on my thirteenth birthday. (talking over B)

- B-- ... my B/Mitzvah was on my thirteenth birthday. (talking over L)
- D-- Oh, wow.
- B-- That's all. I remember some of my gifts. LAUGH
- D-- Do you really?
- B-- Yeah. The Verizes gave me a hundred new dollar bills, you know, in sequence.
- L-- That's nice, that's nice.
- B-- And, and five shares of Pan Am stock. At the time it was a very nice gift. (laugh) Crashed and burned.
- D-- Right, right, right. How 'bout for you L? You, you became B/Mitzvah, right?
- L-- I was B/Mitzvah. My birthday is in January. And I was the oldest one in my class and I, they would not let me go first in the class. A boy had to lead the class.
- D-- Really?
- L-- Yes. We belonged to a Conservative Temple. And they felt that the girls should not be first walking down. So they made me wait until M, whose birthday is in March, I still remember, turned thirteen. And he got B/Mitzvah first and my B/Mitzvah was April 5th. Because Martin Luther King was shot the day before. There was controversy as to whether I was going to have my B/Mitzvah, because I grew up in Somerville. I was, we were living in Somerville at the time. And they were very afraid that there would be riots in Plainfield. And people were nervous about my B/Mitzvah, that maybe we shouldn't have it. Maybe it should be postponed. 'Cause he got shot on the fourth...
- B-- Right. You see there's something going on here. Because, between everybody dying before one of our events and him getting shot ...(talking over L)
- L-- ... I think. Right (talking over B) Yeah.
- B-- ... and you sister being born ...
- L-- Oh, the weekend Kennedy was shot.
- B-- ... the week that Kennedy was shot. (laugh)
- L-- So, but we went through with it. There was a lot of commotion ... should we do it? Should we not do it? People were really nervous about it. But, we did. And, I had it , it was a Friday night. Girls at that time had, had it on Friday night.
- D-Really?
- L-- Yeah. It was Conservative, right. And we had it in the Temple. And then Saturday night we had a party at the JCC, the Jewish Community Center in Somerville. We had a band... that was big fun. And I remember not...I remember being mad that they made me wait. You know, it's my birthday and I wanted to go first. And I don't know why, I, I just felt at the time, that that was a stupid thing that a boy had to go first. I remember being mad. But, but, it was

fun. A lot of my friends did not... it was, it was, I wouldn't say it was unusual, but not a lot of girls at the time were being B/Mitzvah.

D-- Right. Right.

L-- It was, you know, maybe a third of the girls at that time were. So, I felt, I felt good about it and I think it was the best experience for me. My father is much more religious than my mother. My father worked with me on my Haftarah. And he reads Hebrew much better than my mother. And, but it was nothing like it is now with the girls. You know, it was very, girls were, were second class... (laugh)

D-- So how do you feel looking at E approaching this as a full citizen?

L-- I think it's great. I think it's wonderful. Yeah, I think it's, it's really terrific. We've come a long way. And I'm proud to say that I was B/Mitzvah because when talk to a lot of friends my age they were not. And I'm really proud that I did go through it. And I'm proud that I can tell her, both my girls that I did. So...

B-- They can do it now. My, one of my stepsisters, P got B/Mitzvah when she was in her twenties, twenty-five, thirty. (talking over L)

L-- I know. A lot of people do that.

D-- Absolutely.

L-- Yeah. Right.

D-- Yeah. What is, what is becoming a B/Mitzvah mean to you, personally?

L-- You know, it's funny, 'cause we were talking about it. I don't know yet. I don't know. I haven't really focused on it and thought about it in a lot of depth. I feel, I mean, it's a great learning experience for her. You have a goal. You set the goal. It's something, you know, that you achieve. And I know that she'll do it beautifully because that's just the kind of child she is. I'm not worried about her performance. I'm not worried about her. I'm worried about her not speaking through it, that she'll mumble. That's what I'm worried about. I don't know. I, I think of it more in a spiritual sense than in an actual religious sense. That, just the whole feeling of her standing up there ... it's just a wonderful feeling. But I really, to be honest with you, I haven't really given it any thought. When you asked us to think about it. And B said, "So what do you think?" I said, "I don't know."

D-- That's fine.

L-- Yeah. I just don't know.

D-- That's fine.

L-- He had very definite ideas about what it meant to him and I don't.

D-- How 'bout, how 'bout for you as a, as a couple?

L-- Well, I think what we had told you before about, you know. We, we really sat down and said what do we want to do and we felt that a lot of our milestones have been marked, unfortunately, by tragic things and we wanted this to be a really happy time. We felt like we wanted to celebrate. We have a beautiful family and we want to celebrate that. And, right? That's something that we both felt like we wanted.

- B-- Now we just have to find someone to pay for it. (laugh)
- L-- Even though we really can't afford it we felt strongly about doing that. And, you know, we discussed options with E, but E also felt strongly about having this party.
- D-- Good.
- L-- And having it all together, and having the family there, and seeing her achieving this milestone. She felt the same way. And, it's, you know, exactly what I felt. So...
- D-- That's great.
- B-- And we, we did talk to her.
- D-- So how did that go?
- B-- Fine. I asked her what the whole experience meant to her--- both the celebration and the, the religious aspect of it. Part of the answer of the religious aspect was being sincere...
- L-- Before you answer that, I thought it was interesting that first you asked her what it meant to her and she said, "I have to separate it". She said "I can't think about it in terms of the religious and the party together". She said, "I need to separate it. They mean two different things to me." (talking over B)
- D-- Interesting.
- B-- Yeah.
- L-- Which, I thought that was very interesting. That is what she said.
- B-- With the celebration she said she's . .
- D-- Celebration, meaning the party?
- B-- The party. She is looking forward to people... to having fun after a lot of hard work and to, you know, friends and family seeing what a good job she did and how hard she worked. And she's looking forward to that. She wants that. And from the religious aspect, she said she, I guess it sounds like, sort of the, the standard answer, but also knows that she, she'll become a responsible, like mini-adult Jew and take on more responsibility, and, both as a person and, and as a Jewish person. And she ...
- L-- And I immediately thought of those little, little blurbs that are put in the, the Temple bulletin. (laugh)
- B-- Yeah. Right. (laugh)
- L-- How everyone says the same thing. (laugh) And I'm like, "can't you pick something...", in my mind I say, "can't you pick something different?" You know, 'cause everyone says the same thing, but it's okay. (talking over B)
- B-- But she's, I think she's sincere about it. She's looking forward to every aspect of it.
- L-- But then you said to her, you said that I think, that we think of it as assuming responsibility, to show others how to be more responsible and mature.

B-- Right, both halves, not just being responsible for yourself but you are responsible now for teaching others about the religion and about being a responsible, good person.

D-- What did she say?

B-- She said, "Sure, dad." (laugh)

L-- Yeah, you know ...

B-- She's good.

L-- Yeah, she's good. (talking over B)

B-- She's good. She's a helpful kind person with, with her friends. And they rely on her. If they have a problem, they call her. (talking over L)

L-- Right.

B-- Whether it's homework or ...

L-- ...boys. (laugh)

B-- Right. So, it's the same thing. She's having a difficult time making a decision about a mitzvah project 'cause she's interested in doing . .

L--...a lot of different things. (talking over B)

B-- ...a lot of different things. And part of it is that, we said to her, as much as we would love for her to do whatever it is she wants to, she can't do something that's just too time consuming. She just doesn't have the time. So we're, we haven't even picked something yet because she's narrowing down ...

D-- But she's taking that seriously?

B-- Very seriously.

L-- Oh yeah. First she wanted to do a huge project. She wanted to do something with the Rachel foundation and with children that were there. And I said to her that I think there might be a confidentiality issue. I don't know if you want to play with or be a mother's helper with some of these children. And I contacted them. And they said that they are starting a program like that, but not yet. And that they can't really do it until it's fully coordinated. And then she said well maybe I could help and work at the Valerie Fund and Make-A-Wish. Like she, she has this bend. She wants to be a psychologist. She wants to work with victims of different things. You know she doesn't shy away from difficult situations. So, so those are some of her options and. But now she's ...(talking over B)

B-- ...well then we did Carelink...

L-- ...on Monday. (talking over B)

D-- Um hum

B-- And so there was one project there where you color pictures, and they send them, through this program, to nursing homes. Just ...

- B-- ...kid's pictures that they, to put on your wall or refrigerator or whatever. And she thought about maybe doing a little notice about that. And sending it to all the schools in Maplewood and South Orange. And they would do pictures and send them back to her. And she would send them into the program. Something like that.
- D-- She came up with that?
- B-- Yeah, while we were sitting there, coloring for Carelink.
- D-- Really. That's impressive.
- B-- Well actually her first thing was when we went on the Million Mom March.
- L-- Oh, that was a great idea. She ...(talking over B)
- B-- And she and L went to Washington and she wanted to do...
- L-- Safe. (talking over B)
- B-- ...to start a new program called SAFE, Students Against Fire Arms Everywhere.
- L-- I thought it was a great idea. And she was going to the elementary schools and talking to kids about gun control. But then she said it would be too overwhelming, it would just be too much for her. And she didn't feel a personal connection to it. She wants to do something actually...
- B-- Right, that she ... (talking over L)
- L-- Yeah, I don't know. She was, she, just did it, you know, but she came home with this great idea and we said that's terrific.
- D-- Okay, she'll find her niche. (talking over L)
- L-- Yeah.
- D-- Has she, has she become, how do I put this, has become an adolescent yet?
- L-- Oh, yeah.
- D-- How has that been for you? What were you like as adolescents?
- L-- Worse than she was.
- D-- Worse than she was?
- L-- Yes. I was a ... (laugh)
- B-- Which she'll never know that. (laugh) (talking over L)
- L-- I was very, very hippyish. I had an older brother ...
- B-- At her age? (talking over L)
- L-- Yeah. You know, thirteen, you know fourteen, Yeah.

B-- Not at twelve?

L-- Not at, not at ...

B-- ... fourteen?

D-- You gave the family a run though?

L-- Oh absolutely. I was wild. I was very wild. My brother was straight as an arrow. And because he was three and half years older than I was, you know... a straight A student, perfect child, and I ...

B-- Like Michael J. Fox on...

L-- Right. Family Ties. (talking over L)

B-- ... Family Ties-- a young republican.

L-- Right. I mean really, right. A young republican we used to call him.

D-- And you were Mallory.

L-- Right, exactly. I was totally Hitler youth, you know, and I was the exact opposite. I was very into hippie drugs. I was really wild. And my mother, to this day, says, "You're such a wonderful girl. I can't believe how wonderful you turned out." It just boggles her mind. She said she never gave up on me. She worked day and night to straighten me out. To get me to the straight and narrow.

D-- Really?

L-- Yes. And it paid off. Yeah. So, high school I was a horrible, horrible child.

D-- With E entering into this period, any anxiety about that?

L-- Oh, yeah, definitely. I see it differently...you know drugs at the time were so different. I just can't imagine, I mean we've had these discussions before about, you know, do we talk about what we did? And I say "absolutely not" because it's different these days. You just can't, you know. B feels maybe we should. I don't know. We're still vacillating about that back and forth. You know, but I think, it makes me nervous. But E's been... E has a good head on her shoulders. She's very responsible. She hangs out with a nice group of kids. Some I don't know. Certainly that thought worries me. But, I don't know. And my mother was very involved with me. My father wasn't. But my mother was very there for me all the time.

D-- What about you?

B-- Yeah, me. Outwardly I was always the good kid. You know, I was always a good kid-good student, good kid. But, nobody knew, when I, my brother J started smoking pot at probably, let's see, he was probably in eight grade. He must have been in eighth grade because one day a friend and I were talking about it and he overheard and said, "You want some?". So I started smoking pot in seventh grade. Nobody knew. (laugh) And back then, that was early. And ninth grade, by the time I got to ninth grade and moved to Springfield, and I hung out with a bad group of kids. I mean these were kids who, I mean I was still a good student and a good kid and if it weren't for that I would've been like a juvenile delinquent. I mean-- I was hanging out with kids who, you know, the guys were like tattooing

their girlfriends' name in their arm with a hypodermic with India ink in it. (laugh). And the girls would carve their boyfriends' name into their thigh with a penknife. But, that didn't last that long. Never did that in my life. You know, we'd break into a... you saw a six-pack of beer in somebody's car parked on the street at night... we'd get into it and take it. I, I was not a good kid.

- D-- And here you are approaching that age.
- L-- Right, right.
- B-- Well, but that, that doesn't worry me as... she... I think between us and school, I think she's been, for lack of a better word, indoctrinated, well. You know, they have the DARE program. And, as ineffective as a lot of people say it is, that it's just an outdated bad program, E was very serious about that. You know she, and, and I think with her and her friends they're probably good about that. My issues are more with her physically.
- D-- What do you mean?
- B-- Her body. I mean she ...
- L-- She's very developed. (talking over B)
- B-- ...she's very well developed. Although her friends are starting to develop, she's been well developed for over a year. And, you know, she's got the body at ...there weren't many girls that I dated in high school who were developed like she is now. And I knew what the girls were like who I was dating. And if I had a son it wouldn't bother me so much. And as a daughter, having a daughter it does. Because I know that the guys pressure the girls.
- D-- So, so, in the last year you've had to start realizing that your daughter, you've had to start seeing her as a sexual being.
- B-- Oh, yeah. Yeah. I don't know if, I don't think she does. I remember when you said to her she needs to wear a bra, that was before camp last summer, she looked at L like L had two heads. She didn't see herself that way. I don't know if she does now or not.
- D-- But still ...
- B-- Well. I think she, she's ...
- L-- She is ... (talking over B)
- B-- ... kind of innocent about it.
- L-- Yeah. I mean, she has no qualms at all about walking around without any clothes on. B is always saying E put on a robe. She's not ashamed of her father.
- D-- This is in the house, with you home?
- L-- Yeah, yeah. She's not ashamed of it. I don't want to make her self-conscious.
- D-- Yeah.
- L-- You know, she, yeah, I made her get a bra last year. Now she's more aware of it. She says to me, you know, she's made some comments like, "You know, you think it's fun having this body and you think this is easy?" And I said "E, I know it's not, you know, I know it's very

hard. But, you know that everybody has something. You happen to have a beautiful body. I would love to have your body." Some of her friends have said things that are not so nice. You know, one of her friends needed surgery on her hip. Another friend had big problems with her eyes. You know, I said, "Yeah, it has its down side absolutely. But on the other hand..."

- B—There was that sexual ... (talking over L)
- L-- She's having... she had a problem in school.
- B-- ... harassment... at school last month with some kids in her class.(talking over L)
- L-- In health, (talking over B)
- B—It ended up with up with the guidance counselor and with the kids... She handled it beautifully. She didn't tell us. It was going on for about a week and a half. She went with a friend of hers to the guidance counselor, told her what was going on, and then that night came home and told us.
- D-- So you're okay that she didn't tell you in the first week? Although she dealt with it on her own first.
- B-- She took initiative.
- L-- Yes.
- B-- Yeah. You know, we would have said, go to the guidance counselor and have something done.
- L-- No we wouldn't ...
- B-Well, we would've called ...(talking over L)
- L-- We would've called ...
- B-- And I ... (talking over L)
- L-- ... and I think it's much more effective coming from E. So ... (talking over B)
- D-- Um hum
- L-- She said, I said, "When did this start?" She said, "About a week ago". And she said, "I didn't know what to do, and I discussed it with a couple of my friends and they went as a group". She went with another one of her friends to the guidance counselor and they discussed it. And she told me that night what happened. I said, E, I am so proud of you-- that you did that, I thought that was a wonderful thing. Of course, I'd rather she would have told me. But, you know what, she did it on her own. She did the appropriate thing.
- B-- I think had it been something more physically direct ...
- L-- Right, right. (talking over B)
- B-- ... or something like that, she certainly would've called us.

L-- Right. It was, yeah, it turned out not to be that big a deal, but in her mind, but it was, in her mind. And I think she did the right thing. I was very proud of her. But it's not easy. Here's a twelve year old that has to deal with this. It sucks... for her. It's terrible. So... (talking over D).

D-- Yeah.

L-- It's also different these days because kids know they have to do well in school. You know, when we were in school, yeah, unless you were like G who knew that he was destined to be a doctor when he was five, you know, you know, everybody, got, went to college. It was not a big ... but now kids have to, are, there's so much more competition.

B-- And ...

L-- Kids know it. (talking over B)

B-- ... they know it.

L-- And they know they can't screw up, like we did, and still come out okay. You know, they know they need to do well in school, they need to excel, they need ... D-- It's a lot of pressure.

L-- It's a lot of pressure. It's a lot of pressure, absolutely. So, you know they may...

B-- And E, I think rebels about it, against us, sometimes by procrastinating some with her school work. 'Cause it's like, well, I'm getting A's. And it's hard to say – doesn't matter, you can't let up.

D-- Do you have, both academically and social-- do you have a lot of strict rules with her?

B-- No. We have, we have...

L-- Academically we have...(talking over B)

B-- ...rules with her, but not a lot and we're not strict enough.

L-- Yeah.

D-- Is she allowed to date?

B-- Well we argued about it all last year. She couldn't understand why she couldn't date. She was in sixth grade.

L-- She was asked...a boy asked her at the end of sixth grade to go out and we would not let her. She's not allowed to date. She's allowed to go out in groups. She does go out with groups. She has a lot of boys that are friends and they do go out in groups and that's okay. She had started to go out at night to the movies with this group of kids and we sort of squashed that. All the parents... see what's nice about it is that we're friendly with all the parents... so all the parents got together and said, you know what, they're really too young. They can go out during the day but at night they don't have anything to look forward to. What are they going to do, in eighth grade or ninth grade or high school? So they can go out with the boys during the day. They can go into Maplewood and walk around. They can go into South Orange. But, and she's allowed to go to the movies at night with her girl friends. But, we kind of squashed the "boy's at night" thing. We thought, and the other parents were very supportive, the boy's parents, I mean everybody got together and decided this. So ...

B-- They do say ... (talking over L)

L--... it made it very easy. (talking over B)

B-- ... you know, they have, I have a boy friend. And, when you say, when you say, well what does that mean as opposed to this boy just being part of the group that you're with. It turns out it doesn't really ...

L and B together-- ... mean anything.

B-- Maybe they'll talk on the phone to them more than the other ones, but they, they're online with them all, all the time. They're all together, so, you know, she had a boy friend, then they broke up.

L-- No, they dumped ...

B-- They dumped each other. (talking over L)

L-- That's so funny. They dumped each other.

B--Then she had another one. And now a third one. But they're all in the same group. The boys are all friends. And the other girls, well now that one's her boy friend and . .

L-- But it doesn't mean anything. I go pick her up at school, they're not even standing together or talking to each other. (laugh) I don't know what it is. It's so crazy. I said, "Do you eat lunch together?" She said, "Well sometimes we do."

B-- She's a responsible person. She knows there are limits even though we've never been strict about it. I think, sometimes, you know, you can impart certain things to other people, whether it's your child or anyone else, without settings forth a, you know, black and white rule. And I think sometimes when you do that, that's where you get rebellion. E knows that there's limits and that we give her a lot of leeway and she has a lot more freedoms than a lot of her friends do about certain things—staying up late and this and that—and she realizes that other things are important. And, whether, whether we discuss it or not.

L-- We also talk a lot. We're a very open family. We talk all the time. It's not, you know, I mean, B works in town. He's around a lot. He's a very involved father. We don't, you know, we're not one of those rigid families that, you know, and I think that's why we're more relaxed about it. We are, our family just sort of goes with the flow. We're not, like, a really structured family in general.

B-- And, I think also part of it is that we didn't have structured upbringings as teens. And, we know, we turned out okay with whatever guidance we got. Maybe that is part of it.

L-- You know, if she did not do well in school that would be a whole different issue. Now she knows that we expect her to do well in school. That is a given. And I am much more strict than B is about that. I expect her to get good grades.

B-- No ...

L-- I expect her to... (laugh) (talking over B)

B-- ... you expect her to get hundreds ...

L-- ... No... (laugh) (talking over B)

- B-- ... on tests. And I tell ...
- L-- ...she tells me. (talking over B)
- B-- ... you that you can't put that pressure on her.
- L-- Right, right. I mean, I definitely am the disciplinarian when it comes to school. I am on her case that she must do well. But with that comes some freedom to do things she likes to do.
- D-- Interesting turn around from what you told me about yourself. About ...
- L-- Right, right. It's true. I mean, I was a terrible student. But I know that she's smarter than I am. And I know that she can do well. I said to her, "I will never make you...", like for some, somethings in math, she just doesn't get. And I said, "That's fine, you don't get it, that's fine."
- B-- You've studied it ...
- L-- You've studied it. (talking over B)
- B-- You've done what you can do, you've gone for extra help, and, if you don't grasp something ...
- L-- That's fine. (talking over B)
- B-- We'll work on it.
- L-- I will never be upset with you for something you don't understand. But because you didn't feel like studying or were careless, that drives me crazy. So, and she knows that too.
- D-- So the message isn't that hundreds, the message is ...
- L-- ...do the best. (talking over D)
- D-- ... seriously do your best.
- L-- Right. Seriously do your best. Right. Do the best that you can and, she knows that. I'm tough about that. I expect that, but, with that comes some freedom to do other things. And she...
- B-- But the problem is, very often you'll slip and say, "You better get a hundred on this test." (laugh) And that's \dots
- L-- I know, B gets mad at me. So, yeah, I'm definitely...
- B-- I'm a little more lax, also because I studied with her for a lot of the tests and I know that she knows it and if she doesn't know it, we studied more. So, I may know that she knows it, a chapter in her math book in five minutes or ten minutes, because there, there's only one or two concepts.
- D-- Um hum.
- B-- And then, so after ten minutes, L sees we're not doing anything and, so then, what, you know, you should be studying.

L-- You know, if she were not such a good student I don't think we would be that lax with her. But because we know that she does well, the teachers love her, she knows, not only is she a good student, but she knows everything in the world. I mean, it's, she reads and she's on the computer, but learning things. I mean, she'll sit and teach herself Spanish over a weekend. I was, I remember last year, I got so mad at her. She had a project to do for school. And of course, it's like Sunday night, and she had, but mom I taught myself Spanish this weekend. Aren't you proud of me? You know, she loves to learn, for learning sake. She knows everything in the world. And...

B-- She beat us the other night in Baby Boomer Trivial Pursuit. So our generation...

L-- She knew all the answers. I said how do you know these things. I mean, mother calls her to ask her things, she, it's incredible, the things she remembers.

D-- Wow.

L-- And the fact that she is so smart, that's why we're not that, you know...

D-- If you can think back to thirteen years ago, twelve plus years ago, you had certain hopes. You had certain dreams-- as, individuals and as a couple. And I don't even know if, you know, maybe you've shared all individual ones with each other, but has she heard those dreams?

L-- Oh absolutely.

B-- Yeah.

D-- This way, if you could have projected thirteen years ago where you'd be now, is this where you wanted to be?

L-- With her?

D-- Yeah. And,

L-- ... She does. She's just a very unusual, very mature, very wise child.

B-- And funny.

L-- And funny.

B-- And she really has it all, a lot of her person ... She gets moody, but that's from me, too.

L-- Not at all.

B-- Yeah, that's true. I don't know how her friends are.

L-- She's great. You know, yeah, she's a great kid. I really admire her as a person.

B-- She's ... (talking over L)

L-- You know when I step back and look at her not as my daughter, I think she is a really cool kid. She's just hip and she's just... she just is a really great kid.

B-- She, she knows what's happening in the world. She knows what's happening in the media. She knows what's happening in school. Her teachers, you know when, they tell you

that she's, you know, she's a leader in class discussions, when she opens her mouth and speaks up, but, it's, we couldn't have asked for more.

- L-- Yeah. I'm very proud of her. She's a good kid.
- B-- And she's great to her sister.
- L-- Yeah.
- B-- You know to have a, a pre-teen be nice almost all the time to her eight year old sister, and, and most of the time not mind when she plays with them. And she, ha, when E has a friend over, that's unusual.
- L-- The only negative I think about her, and that's just my personality, is that she, she's not forthcoming with her feelings as much as I would like her to be. She's like her father in that she internalizes everything. And sometimes I really have to draw it out of her.
- D-- Have you been able to draw that out of B or is he still...
- L-- Oh gosh...
- B-- Have you given up? (laugh) (talking over L)
- L-- (laugh) ...for eighteen years he's much better than when I met him. Much, a hundred percent better, a hundred percent better. Yes.
- B-- We work on each other. You, you don't stroke out as often with your mother.
- L-- You know ...
- B-- I've taught ... (talking over L)
- L-- ... I'm the type of person ... (Talking over B)
- B-- ... taught her to ignore it. (talking over L)
- L-- Right. Everything that comes into my head rolls out of my mouth. I just, I'm very verbal, and that's just my personality. And E, to this day, is just as verbal as I would like her to be. Just about, I mean she'll talk about school. But when I ask her how she feels about something she clams up. And that's, you know, that's B. That's the only negative thing I can think of. And she mumbles. (laugh). So, but, but I've worked on B for many years and he's much better.
- D-- You're smiling.
- B-- When I'm on the couch. You know it's...
- L-- So.
- B-- No I'm, if she, I mean I'm, if she's happy that I'm better, that's fine. I'm happy that she's happy about that.
- D-- Are things different in any way now, say than they were a year ago?
- L-- Money...

- B-- Yeah... (talking over L)
- L-- ... and that's probably it.
- B-- Well, I mean money was an issue before. We're even more cognizant about it now.
- D-- Because of the B/Mitzvah?
- B-- Because of the B/Mitzvah. And, like L said earlier, 'cause we know it's, it's something that we want to do. It's a sacrifice that's worth making for us. But it crystalizes the financial issues that we've had over the years.
- L-- Money's always been, if I could pick one bad issue-- money has been it for us. We've not had good fortune when it comes to money. We've always had financial problems since we've been married. And it puts a strain, that's, that's the stress in our marriage, is financial issues.
- D-- It ...
- L-- It's not ... (talking over D)
- D-- ... plays out between you?
- L-- Yeah.
- B-- Yeah.
- L-- Definitely. Right. It's not our personalities, it's not our likes and dislikes, it's money. It just...the strains of money are what cause our tension and our stress with each other, absolutely.
- B-- Yeah.
- L-- Please don't be mad at me.
- B-- And she won't see movies like Star Wars. (laugh) But, besides that ...
- D-- You go on your own?
- B-- Yeah. And she'll go see movies on her own.
- L-- (laugh) Chick flicks.
- B-- Too much angst in those movies.
- D-- There are certain couples who ...
- L-- Oh, right. (talking over D)
- B-- Yeah ...
- L-- We've always been like that. (talking over B)
- B-- We'll go to the movies together ... (talking over L)

- L-- ...and separate. (talking over B)
- B-- ...and... (talking over L)
- L-- ... and go to our own movie. (talking over B)
- B-- ... each go into a different theatre. It's fine.
- L-- We're very much like that. We did our own thing a lot. If I want to go see one movie, he wants to see another, he wants to do something, we never hold each other back, like that. We're very good about that. Yeah, so ... I know, people think we're crazy. Oh, like we'll go to the movie together and then we'll go into separate theatres. It's like, so what (laugh), so, yeah, we're very good that way.
- D-- I think there's a certain level of security that you have to have in order to do that.
- B-- Yeah, and, and, you know, if there's a movie I just won't want to see and L says you'll like it, I'll go. I, I, won't not go.
- D-- Um hum.
- L-- We're very independent in that way. We've always been like that. We just go about our business, doing, yeah. I know in a lot of couples they're not like that and it just ...
- B-- Or they consider that to be a defect, a problem, you know, they don't want to do everything that the other one wants to do.
- D-- Right.
- L-- I don't know. I would love to find out. I think you should do a second part of your thesis and interview the children. After talking to us for hours and then seeing the different perspective from their point of view, I think it's . .
- B-- I think that to her friends, because we've seen this. We've either overheard or seen an email, or in notes, E will, at times, I think it's probably typical of a child, that they're focused normally on the moment. So if we say, well, you've been out all weekend, you can't go our tonight, then my parents are so strict I can't stand it. You know, that would be her message to her friends.
- D-- Um hum.
- B-- But we've encountered that situation with her. We wouldn't let her do ..., oh, it was with the alcohol. Right? We made her go apple picking with us, with another family who we're friends with, who the girl's one of her best friends, and another friend wanted her to go to the mall with her. And we all went, and we had a great time. And she wrote something in school. Right? About ...
- L-- A persuasive essay. (talking over B)
- B-- She had to write a persuasive essay.
- L-- That she wouldn't let us read...
- B-- Right. And, of course we ...

L-- ...in Spanish. (talking over B)

B-- ... we, we saw it and it was about how we make her do things that she doesn't want to do, as a family, and why should she have to because we spend a lot of time as a family together already. And if there's something she wants to do, she should be able to do it. And we spoke to her after that.

D-- Were you, you were, were you upset about that?

L-- No. (laugh)

B-- No. I thought ...

L and B together-- It was funny. (laugh)

B-- But, we, we tried to make her understand that other families are really very strict. Most of her friends' families are, don't give their kids the leeway that we give E. About, as long as you do the right thing, you know, you can kind of do what you want to do, as long as we know what it is and what you're doing. And, and if it's wrong, we'll tell you. I think she realizes that and I think she would describe us, her boy friends, male friends think that we're cool. You know, most of her friends think that we're very cool.

L-- Right.

B-- And they come to our house. And they, there's, the boys think we're great because the girls are listening to In-Sync and stuff and they hear us listening to ...

L-- We listen to Nirvana.

B-- ... to Nirvana and whatever. "Oh God, your parents are so cool."

L-- E says, all the boys think you're so weird, you listen to stuff that they listen to. You know, like they, she says...

B-- Like it embarrasses her.

L-- Right. (laugh)

D-- Amazing how that happens.

B-- Yeah.

L-- Right, right. It's very funny.

D-- It's amazing that that happens. What you described with the essay is interesting. What a beautiful example of the dynamic of having an adolescent in the family.

L-- Right.

D-- The adolescent starts pulling on the fiber of the family.

L-- Right.

D-- And says, "Hold on a second, I'm gonna do my own thing."

- L-- Right.
- D-- And you say, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, this is a family time."
- L-- Right.
- D--"And we still have veto power on time when you come in with the family." And that, that tug-of-war is, is a powerful thing.
- L-- Oh, absolutely. But we give her, like we have rarely gone out this year, because she's gone out with her friends so much. And she knows that. I said, "Look, also I've been studying a lot, you know."
- D-- You haven't gone out because of the cost of it?
- B-- No, no.
- L-- No.
- B-- Because... (talking over L)
- L-- Because she wants to go out with her friends and we've got to drive them. So we will give up...
- B-- And she'll ...
- L-- ... going out to be her driver or ... (talking over B)
- B-- ... she'll babysit for H if need be. Our babysitter was R who is now away in college. I mean, she has babysat for the girls for years.
- D-- Right.
- B--So, between that circumstance and, so E then became fine with, and we became fine with leaving the two of them. But now E's got a social life.
- L-- Right.
- B-- That's a plan, it's ours.
- L-- So we have a compromise, you know, so we say, "Look, you need the money to go out so once in a while you're going to babysit for H and we're going to go out so you can make money to go out. But on the other hand we'll let you go out when you want." It's kind of, you know, like it's a two way street. Yes, so there are many weekends where we don't go out 'cause we've got to drive her. Oh, also, it's a B/Mitzvah year so we've got to drive all over.
- B-- It's it, and, and when, when the parents get invited, and that's unfortunately one of our problems. We're, a lot of people like us that, may not know us well enough, I don't know but, we're getting invited to parties that we would never have thought we'd be on the list. We figured E would get invited, but not us. And they start to add up. It's not like Livingston, where you know, kids go to thirty, forty a year, but . .
- D-- Amazing.

L-- It is. So, it's just been a kind of, a funny year, 'cause I've been very busy in school and I spend a lot of weekends studying. And we can't go out. But on the other hand E has her B/Mitzvah so she's busy any way, and then you know, it's just been like a peculiar kind of year. So, but she knows that there were some nights that we would have gone out, that she wants to go out and we let her go so, you know, it's a, so... But definitely when I read that persuasive essay I started to, myself, I started hysterical laughing, 'cause that would've been me. Because I, that was exactly me at that age, when my parents would make me do these things and I hated them. She, you know, it mean, it was just, I laugh 'cause that was definitely how I was. So

D-- Amazing.

L-- Yeah.

D-- Amazing. Homework for the next time we meet.

L-- Sure.

D-- What I'd like you to do is take some time individually, and, I don't know the technical term for it, but I'd like you draw a lifeline. Meaning, take a piece of paper, that's birth, that's today. And any way you want, you know sometimes people have a scale of, you know, even keel and then up joyous or less, but just if you can, find a way to...

B-- A timeline

D-- Yeah.

B-- Of significant ...

D-- That focuses, though, on emotional. Not, not significant ... Our society's based on, tends to function on external markers—new job, this that, you know, moving. Now moving might go onto this if it was a great opportunity or if it was traumatic, but it might not otherwise. Really look at your life, emotionally so far, and then you can either share it with each other before we meet again or we can share it here. But just to spend some time looking at it. One of the, you know, one of the aspects of, of us meeting here is for us to talk about what's going on in the family, but the other is, is to reflect, the natural tendency is to reflect on E and on the ceremony or the party or both. It is interesting that E automatically made the split. I think this is one of the challenges in liberal Judaism today. Because our tradition used to understand that everything is religious. It taught that what happens in the synagogue is only part and parcel of what happened in our lives. So, for instance, your relationship and your relationship with the kids and your doing whatever you do with extended family, that's all part of what religion is 'cause religion is how we are in the world.

L-- Right.

D-- And we've all inherited this model from the enlightenment, which says, hold on a second, there's your religious self and then there's the rest of your life. Which tends to render religion less meaningful because it's been marginalized. And one of the things, that, that I'm trying to figure out how we do with our kids, and with our parents, but our kids especially is helping them understand that the dynamics of the party is different than the dynamics on the bema—that the party's in celebration of, and in fact, what you do at the party is an expression of who you are as a person, as a religious person, 'cause it's how you are in the world.

L-- Right.

D-- So it's interesting that kids pick that up from us also. It's amazing.

L-- Well, it's interesting. We went to a B/Mitzvah a few weeks ago. And we both commented that it was an exact, that it was exact model of their family. It was beautiful, you know, everything was beautiful, perfect . .

B-- But ...

L-- ... but cold. It was, and that's how they are as a family. It was so interesting that, I mean, the room looked gorgeous, everybody was dressed beautifully. And you left, and you had like this empty feeling inside.

D-- You mean like the need for a shower?

L-- Yeah, it was just, that's how they, and that's how they are as a family. You know, and it was very interesting that we both commented on that.

D-- Yup.

L-- That it was a warm, loving, type of thing.

D-- It is all part and parcel of the same life experience, we tend to bring into every aspect. So it's an interesting challenge. Think about it, 'cause if you can think of ways that's what I think is very, I think there's something very healing when we help ourselves understand. This is just an extension of everything else that goes on in life. Anyway, as I was saying, the goal is to shift the focus and to focus on where you all are at in your lives, you know, what your hopes and dreams have been, what your hopes and dreams are going forward.

B-- Well actually, I was gonna say, there's no, I don't, there's nothing for me to draw because for me that's all one continuum. Every ...

L-- See that's very interesting.

B-- ... emotional thing that's happened is on, is, is not a separate ...

D-- No, I, oh i'm not saying there's nothing separate but it may be, maybe look like a sign wave, it may just be, how ever you want to depict it.

L-- Right.

D-- And then just the things that emotionally take down, bring up, that are emotionally significant, just mark, you mark them with a slash, however you do it. And then just write down what they are, so we can go through them, if you would. Okay?

L-Yeah.

D-- Thank you.

End of Session 2

Session 3

D-- So, before we, we got through these-- anything from the last few times that we've met?

B-- I don't think so. We were all pretty good with it.

- L-- Yeah. I'd say. It made me focus perhaps a little bit more on the process of the B/Mitzvah, the religious aspect of the whole thing.
- D-- More religious?
- L-- Right. Which I haven't gotten really gotten involved with, too much yet.
- B-- And I've been more concerned, about that aspect than the details.
- D-- Than about the details?
- B-- Yeah.
- D-- Has E asked you? Does E, E knows you've been coming and meeting with me?
- L-- I'm sure she knows.
- D-- Has she asked you about it?
- L-- You know, a little bit.
- B-- Yeah. Not much. Just, you know, when we asked her about her feedback, she asked what is the Rabbi like?
- L-- She asked, "Did you like him?" (laugh) That's what she said. But not specifics.
- B-- You know we teased her. We said that it's great because when you're up there on the bimah the rabbi will be able to say, "You know E, this reminds me of having to go apple picking with your family when you wanted to go to the mall." (laugh)
- L-- "...and about that persuasive essay you wrote." So, for us, we did comment to each other how much how much more meaningful it will be for us during the service because you will know the cast of characters. You'll really have a background about our family. And it'll make the day much more special for us. So ...
- D-- And my having that information is a positive?
- L-- Oh, absolutely.
- B-- Yes.
- L-- Absolutely. Yeah,
- D-- Can you see conditions where it would be a negative for people?
- L—Well, if you go up to my brother and say who the heck is the shiksa... (laugh) but other than that, not really.
- D-- So tell me about this, this process of, of drawing an emotional map of your years. Don't even tell me about the maps yet, but, but how was the process?
- L-- I said it was harder for me than I thought. You know, I figure, like B said last night when we talked... it took me a long time.

D-- Did it really?

L-- Yeah. It, because I've started and I, you know there are some things that obviously... that you wanted to include. And then some things, well, you wonder if you should put them in? And I actually called B a few times this morning and asked him how long his is. I was like, "Do you have a lot of stuff on it?"

B-- And I, I was a little concerned that because we weren't doing them together, I said... will I remember...

D-- You couldn't cheat?

B-- Well, no. See, L remembers everything, whether it is an emotional high or low or meaningless, it doesn't matter. She remembers everything. And I'm saying—"I'm gonna leave something out and it's gonna have to do with our marriage and L's gonna say 'I can't believe you left that out!"

L--(laugh) So that's why it'll be interesting to see what happens. It'll be fun.

D-- Would you say that, that creating it was...you said that it took longer L than you thought. Was it a, a positive longer? a negative longer? A little of both? How would you ...

L-- Definitely both (talking over D)

D-- ... characterize it if you would.

L-- Yeah. It brought out things that I haven't thought about in a long time – good and bad. And, I found it a little strange, too.

D-- So who wants to go first?

B-- I don't know. My, mine's relatively easy 'cause like I said last night, for me, it's all kind of a continuum.

D-- Right.

B-- Whether there's highs or lows it all affects everything else in your life. I think any emotional aspect of your life has to be intertwined with whatever else happens in your life. So, it's all kind of a continuum.

D-- So can you walk us...

B-- Well. Yeah. You have, I mean things above the line are positives and below the line are generally, are negatives.

D-- Okay.

L-- We both did the same. He called me this morning and said, "I just want you to know how I'm doing mine so we could at least do it the same way". I said, "Fine."

D-- Okay.

L-- So that's what we did.

D-- Okay.

B-- Although the things below the line sometimes lead to positive, you know, it, it depends, I didn't, this doesn't reflect how it may have affected me, it's just a record of emotional, you know, important things.

D-- So the things below the line...

B-- Well they're certainly emotional low points but they may have lead to, you know, been a catalyst for something positive. But that's not reflected in here.

D-- But you're aware that some of the low points created some of the positives that are on here?

B-- Yeah

D-- Okay,

B-- Yeah. So you have the beginning, the first, you know year, early childhood, which was mostly a relatively steady, happy childhood.

D-- Okay.

B-- Then my father's father died and their, their joint business started to, that's not in here, but it kinda, go to pot. Then my father died.

D-- A year after his father died?

B-- Right.

D-- Were they close?

B-- Yes. Very.

D-- Did grandpa dying have anything to do with Dad dying, do you think?

B-- I'm sure. I'm sure that, and problems with the business, all contributed to it. Those were the two things that most contributed to it. Then M died about a year and half later. That was my mother's sister's husband-- the only uncle, 'cause my father was an only child.

D-- So in a span of, in a span of three years, no, in a span of two years...

B-- ...in two and a half (talking over D)

D--...the older male figures in the family died.

B-- Right.

D-- Wow. Okay.

B-- And then, I mean, if you wanted to you could skip up to the person who sort of, kinda stepped in and was left. There was my mother and father's best friend, male friend, couple. That was uncle B, who, who died when I was in college. You know, heart attack on a plane flying home from Acapulco, died on the plane. Then you have my mother remarrying.

D-- Point to me, Where's that?

- B-- Right where your finger is.
- D-- Okay. So that was a good thing.
- B-- Yeah. Yeah. It was a good thing. It, you know provided, it, it was mixed. But it was more good. And then moving was, was a positive thing. It had its negative things associated with it-moving out of town, whatever. It became a positive thing. I made better friends and I was happier in Springfield than I was in Verona.
- D-- Okay.
- B-- Then high school's kind of a blur. It's kind of nothing in there. I wasn't there a lot.
- L-- Careful now-- the tape's on. (laugh)
- D-- I'll only use initials. No names.
- B-- I graduated high school in the, after my junior year and went on a teen tour to Israel and Europe. That's on there. So that was the summer of '73.
- D-- Okay.
- B-- A month, a month in Israel, three weeks in Europe. And then I had, I graduated, let's see, I graduated early and then was starting college back in September.
- D-- Right.
- B-- And when I came back from Israel, I went out west for two weeks with some friend. My mother wasn't happy about that, but right before college started, but that was a, a high point, definitely. Then college started. So college is the whole span from '73 to '76 ...
- D-- Which was over all a positive (talking over B)
- B-- When I graduated it was very positive. And then, yes, Uncle B died while I was in college.
- D-- Okay.
- B-- You know, let's see, college graduation. That was, that was a high point. Then there was law school. I loved law school. It was great. I mean it was boring too. My second year of law school I was bored out of my mind but I loved the whole experience. You have in here, during law school and a year after I graduated law school, you have my nieces being born. Those were high points. I can't even read some of this. During law school I had been dating somebody, who, when we broke up, that was at the time that was, at the time a low point, we were very serious and I started some counseling, which lead to good things. And then we also have, shortly after that break up, a high point, reunited with L. She had just moved back home.
- D-- After you kept in touch with her while she was engaged...
- L and B together-- Yeah. (laugh).
- B-- And she said she didn't want to live in New York. She wanted to live in Westchester.
- L-- That's right. So here I am living in New Jersey.

- B-- Right.
- L-- Isn't that funny? (laugh)
- B-- My first law firm job was a high point. That's '81. Then we have getting married.
- D-- A high point.
- B-- That was a high point. Yeah. Right before that, though, you have mom dying. So that's at the lowest point.
- D-- So, you were still able to enjoy the wedding and you getting married even though momhad just died?
- B-- Mixed emotions. Yeah, but ...one experience ...
- D-- Let me ask it differently. When you look back at this, was it the concept of the fact that you married L that was a high or was it actually the, the act of getting married at that point even though you were mourning. (talking over B)
- B-- No. The, being married to L not the physical act of, not the ...
- D-- Gotcha.
- B-- I mean the wedding itself was mixed.
- D-- Okay.
- B-- Yeah. Yeah, it had it's, it had it's points like sitting in the kitchen asking them to feed us something 'cause there is no food for us. (laugh)
- L-- Bread and water. Do you remember that? (laugh)
- B-- Bread and water.
- L-- We were, no that was before the wedding. So, because we were hungry because you get there early. And I remember ...
- B-- There was nothing...
- L-- ...sitting in the kitchen and they gave us bread and water to eat before we got married. (laugh)
- B-- Yeah, really. And at the wedding so many people showed up, people who hadn't even responded let alone said they weren't coming and then showed up. That, there were, there wasn't even a table for me. L and my brother T to sit at the bar and they had to bring out and set up another table.
- D-- Now when you think back on that, when you think back on that, what emotions are connected?
- B-- Those were funny ... (talking over B)
- L-- It was funny. (talking over D and B)

- B-- Oh, yeah. It was funny.
- L-- Yes.
- B-- I mean, I'd say we were pretty hysterical sitting there eating bread and water.
- L-- It was funny. (laugh)
- D-- Okay. Keep walking me through.
- B-- Then we have the next... let's go back to our engagement.
- L-- Yeah, it was funny only because a week after we got engaged, we were looking at places for the wedding. We were with my mother...
- B-- It was the first date we were going out... (talking over L)
- L-- ... who just kept saying (talking over B)
- B-- No, I, I didn't even want to get out of bed. It was snowing out...
- L-- Right, right (talking over B)
- B-- I, I had the worst headache I've ever had in my life. I said I'm not going.
- L-- Right.
- B-- But, you have to come. And we looked...
- L-- And every place... (talking over B)
- B-- ...and spent the day looking. (talking over L)
- L-- ...we went to B and said... (talking over B)
- B-- And they said ...(talking over L)
- L-- Ah, you're just nervous. You've just got engaged, whatever. Well two days later he was sick as a dog with hepatitis for six weeks. And ... (laugh)
- D-- Wow.
- L-- Right. So the timing of the events was very funny.
- B-- Well, then I guess we skip up to 1987. I mean, I'm sure there were a lot of things that... but we are talking about high points and low points. And I was made a partner at my law firm, after six years, I guess it was. Then the next year E was born.
- D-- Um hum.
- B-- Then leaving my law firm, where I just couldn't stand being any more-- not the people just the whole practice and...
- D-- And that was a good thing?

- B-- That was a, that was a good thing. I was starting something that should have been a very good experience-- a lot more money, more freedom, more prestige, private corporations, corporate-type thing...
- D-- Um hum.
- B- Moving to South Orange two years after that...
- D-- Okay.
- B-- ...two and a half years later. That was a good thing. Out of West Orange, no offense to West Orange. Then H being born. Then there was, then I left that private, that in-house job that I went into, and for a number of years, even continuing today, there is a fall-out from it-financial fall-out. Fall-out affecting my legal career, emotional fall-out, all sorts of fall-out. And that's sort of, I mean that's indicated on here as a single point, but it's a, it's a continuum. Then we've got another low point of the next job I went to which is just, it was just a bizarre wasted year. Then the next high point is where I am currently-- my own firm. At first it was just thought of as an interim, what am I doing after I left my last firm, but it's working out better than we expected and then that brings us up to E's B/Mitzyah.
- L-- I am more original.
- B-- That's because you hold it, it may affect me internally ...
- L-- Yes. (talking over B)
- B-- ... but you ...
- L-- That's an interesting dichotomy of our personalities-- where he will hold onto things for years-- things that affected him in childhood that are affecting him to this day. I really ...(talking over B)
- B-- But in my daily life I'll go just go on ... (talking over L)
- L-- Right. (talking over L) Where I react much more strongly when the situation happens, and then I forgot it and move on, where he carries it with him.
- B-- ...much more strongly.
- L-- Much more strongly. Right. And that's a big difference in our personalities. It's why I have like many more things on here. I don't think about them. Once they're gone they're gone. I don't think about them on a daily basis, where you do.
- B-- You just have perverse reactions to them when they're happening.
- L-- All the time. (laugh) (talking over B). Right. So, okay, let's see. I did mine this way. But I did it the same way.
- D-- Okav.
- L-- The only difference is also I put a lot of things having both highs and lows.
- D-- Interesting.

- L-- Because I felt that a lot of situations had good and bad to them-- looking back.
- B-- Right. Which, I described as them having, but didn't indicate it that way.
- D-- Um hum.
- L-- Right. So I have my birth. And a pretty normal childhood. My sister was born in 1963. And I was fat from 1963 to 1969-- very overweight.
- B-- Some of those pictures will be displayed at the B/Mitzvah (talking over L) (laugh)
- L-- No they won't!! (laugh) I consider it a high point when I did lose weight finally. My B/Mitzvah 1968. We moved right before I started high school which I would guess was mixed. Actually, I really should have put some below the line also. I had mixed feelings. I had a lot of very good friends. But it turned out to be fine. It was okay.
- D-- I mean it's the highest thing that you have marked here so far.
- L-- Yeah, isn't that interesting. Just like a whole fresh start. It was scary.
- D-- After being fat?
- L-- Yeah. Yeah. I had just lost a lot of weight. It was like a whole new beginning for me. I was like a different person.
- D-- Um hum.
- L-- I was like leaving my past. I looked different. And it was just very different. High school graduation. I went to College first, in upstate New York and then I transferred to American, which I put as both highs and lows. They had good points and bad.
- D-- Um hum.
- L-- The first school was okay, but I wasn't that happy there. That's when I decided to transfer to American. Which was good. You know, I mean, it wasn't-- both highs and lows of college. But overall I look back on it as being happy times. In 1976 we, my family went to Hawaii. And that meant a lot to me because my brother was in medical school. I was in college. And my father, it was a business trip for him, and he said, "Oh, nobody's gonna wanna go, your brother's not gonna want to leave medical school..." But we all went. We flew. I flew from Washington. I flew to Baltimore, I met my brother in Baltimore and we all flew to Hawaii. It was the last time I remember us all being together as a family, and really having a good time.
- D-- That togetherness was important?
- L-- Yeah.
- B-- And she did send me a postcard.
- L-- I did, didn't I? I was already going out with M. Yeah. That, I think back on that... I remember it as being, you know I knew my parents were having problems and it just, you know, we all went, we all made it a point to get together and go and it was really a lot of fun. So, college graduation-- high point. Starting grad school was good and bad because I was, as I said, I was going out with this guy M, who lived in Tennessee, so I had to move away from home to go to grad school. I was very excited to start that . I was apprehensive 'cause I was really moving far away for me--- pretty far away from home and a whole different culture

and everything. So, in my second year of grad school my father lost his job. Which was a low point. And although he found another job pretty quickly, it was not the same because he was the boss at his old job. And he got another job. He was a hospital administrator. And he had been, you know, in charge for a long time. And he did, he was only out of work for maybe, well, it was about six or eight months. But when he did get another job he was an assistant administrator. And that was a big blow to his ego. I think that it was, it was significant

B-- At a hospital (talking over L)

L-- Yeah. It was significant...

B-- Yeah.

L-- ...to our family dynamic. It was, I think it was significant. I graduated from grad school and I got engaged. And then, then I had my broken engagement, which was good and bad.

D-- Um hum

L-- As I said, it was sort of a mutual thing. So it wasn't all bad. And, but then I moved back home shortly after that, which was also good and bad. Okay. Then, we got engaged. We got engaged in 1981. And then you got hepatitis, which I was laughing at when I read that 'cause it was very funny. My parents separated in 1981.

D-- Um hum

L-- And then B's mother dying in 1982.

D-- I, I'm always struck by the rapid succession. You got engaged ...

L-- Um hum

D-- Your parents split

I -- Um hum

D-- B's mother dies

L-- Right.

D-- I mean, just boom, boom, boom.

L-- Yeah. There's always ...

D-- A lot of stuff (talking over L)

L-- ...been a happy and a sad... It's ...

B-- Yeah. (talking over L)

L-- ...very interesting. Yeah. A lot of stuff grouped together. Definitely. And it, and I thought of that as I was doing this. That is was very obvious...

B-- Which is why, I had, I had to add another page because I kept coming up with (talking over L)

- L-- ... when you put it on paper. (talking over B)
- D-- I can show you, you know, I'm not done with it, but I can even show you on the, this is what a genogram looks like. And you can, you see all the loses graphically.
- L-- Um hum.
- D-- And it's powerful stuff.
- L-- Yeah.
- D-- No, go ahead, please.
- L-- Okay. Our marriage, 1982. And I put this because it meant, when B and I, our first year of marriage you spent the entire year fighting with his step-father-- about family stuff, about . .
- B-- Um hum
- L-- ...about money, possessions, and your first year of marriage is supposed to be perfect and very happy. And ours was not. And I always remember . .
- B-- Fighting about my mother's estate.
- L-- Estate. And I always remember living in Montclair and would just remember that. It was stuck in my mind as being something, you know, not nice, it was no ... I didn't get involved in it at all but it affected you a lot, at the time. So, 1983 ...
- D-- And when he's, he's affected negatively? (talking over L)
- L-- Yeah.
- D-- How does it impact on you? (talking over L)
- L-- Yeah. It, it affected us definitely. You know, here we're trying to set up house and be the little happy couple and he was not there. You were really very, you know preoccupied-because his mother had just died. I mean, it was all things. It wasn't just the fighting. It was his mother dying and things. It was, you know, I thought it was significant. My parents got divorced in 1983. I purposely did not put this line as long as a separation because the separation was much harder than the actual divorce. I think the divorce was just a culmination. It was just let's finish it, let's get on with it, and that was basically it. So, my mother sold our family house in 1984, and, which is traumatic and then moved near us. We were living in Montclair at the time and she moved to West Orange. So...
- B-- Roseland.
- L-- Roseland. Right. Roseland. You didn't put we bought our first house. (laugh)
- B-- Ah, no. You know what I'm thinking of, which was more important to you than to me. I remember L would sit in our old, in our apartment crying—"We'll never have a house!" You know, we had a nice apartment. We didn't have a couch but, we had an air mattress. And, within a year, after crying, we had a house.
- D-- Did the crying come before or after mom sold the family residence?
- L-- After.

D-- After. B-- You think so? When did we move? L-- 1984. It was all around the same time. B-- Yeah. D-- So it's, it connected. L-- Yeah. I guess, maybe. D-- So she sells the house, You're ... L-- Yeah, I that's true ... (talking over D) D-- ...worried you won't have your house... L-- I never thought about that. D-- Interesting stuff. (talking over L) L-- Right, yeah. I never thought about that. D-- Okay. L-- But then I also put not selling, oh, wait, wait, wait, that's the other one, the other house, wait, I put it in the wrong... B-- No. We only had one house. L-- No, no, no, no. But I ... B-- Oh ... L-- I put this for the same ... (talking over B) B-- ... in the wrong place (talking over L) L-- ... in the wrong place. Right. B-- That, that was ...

L-- 'Cause that was very stressful. (talking over B)

B-- Yeah.

L-- That was ...

B-- 1990. (talking over L)

L-- ... when we moved to South Orange. So, okay, my brother (talking over B) and his wife separated in 1984. That was significant to me because I really liked my brother's ex-wife. We had a very close relationship. We were like sisters and the fact that they separated was very

upsetting to me.

D-- Another loss.

L-- Yes. And I hold my brother to a very high standard and I was sort of upset with him. So, my father got remarried in 1987. Which I put as, pretty much a high point, a little bit of a low point 'cause it's like, you know, mixed feelings. But, basically I consider that a happy thing. B being made a partner in 1987 was a high point. My sister getting married. E's birth. Your job at MLG. That was the good job that he went to. That worked out.

B-- Which became the nightmare.

L-- Right. (laugh) My grandmother died in 1989. I was very close to my grandmother. This is my parent, my mother's parents. I was very close to her. And so that dying impacted me. I quit my job in 1991 and I was pregnant with H. We moved to South Orange. And H was born in 1992. So that was a lot of things. You know, boom, boom, boom. And that's when we had two different houses. Right. And that's when we had two houses. We bought the house in South Orange very suddenly. And we couldn't sell our old house. (laugh) And that was so, that was also a very happy thing, but tinged with nervous anxiety because we carried two houses for about eight months. Right.

D-- Wow.

L-- So... good and bad. We always have a good and a bad. What else? H's birth, my brother got remarried, which was a really a good and a bad. In fact, it was more bad than good because I really didn't like the person that he remarried. And I had a really hard time with it. And we had a...my brother and I sort of had a words about it. Remember that? And, so, I was happy for him that he was getting settled but I didn't think he was ...

B-- She didn't have a personality.

L-- ... marrying the right person.

B-- She's better now.

L-- She's better now. I must admit.

B-- Much, better. (talking over L)

L-- She's better now and we get along much better now. (talking over B)

B-- Right. While you're looking ... I actually forgot, forgot something important. So . .

L-- I have friendships here because I was very involved in my career. And when I stopped working, and I didn't keep a lot of friends from high school or college and, and then I got very involved in my job. So, I didn't really have any good girlfriends and ...

B-- And (talking over L)

L-- ...when I stopped working B said to me, what are you, like you have no friends, what are you gonna do? So, I consider all of the friendships I have made and sustained since then...a very high point for me. I really am very happy about that.

D-- Um hum

L-- Because it's been a very positive thing for me. I have a lot of good girl friends now and just, in general, we have a lot of good friends as a couple. And that's been very special to me. On the other hand, I have the financial concerns, the same as B, which has been on-going since, like 1994. So those are my two

D-- Um hum

L-- Good and bad. I started working for PPI in 1995. That was a sales job that I started working with a friend of mine, which was good at the time. It was gonna be very flexible and it was good. But by 1998 (laugh) it was a low point 'cause I really didn't like it. I gave it a three-year try. It was not what I wanted to do. And I really went through a hard time deciding, you know, what am I going to do with the rest of my life. And that's when I made a decision to go back to grad school. My grandfather died in 1998 and, you know, who I was very close with. E getting her period was an extremely emotional point for me.

D-- How so?

- L-- Extremely emotional. Being a woman, it was, for, for like a few weeks it really was very emotional for me. She was young, first of all. So I felt bad. My initial reaction was I feel so bad for her. She's young and she was having to deal with this at such a young age. And, I felt really bad for her. I remember sitting in her room for two days, basically crying. Looking at her dolls (laugh) and saying, oh, it's like the loss of innocence. And it really struck me very hard. And I felt compelled to put it down.
- D-- Were your feelings, so far you've talked about for her ...
- L-- Um hum.
- D-- ... what'd it mean for you?
- L-- I mean, I looked at her as a child and I just didn't, I just felt like oh my god, I mean this is you know, I didn't think of her as being a woman really. But was, yeah, it's, it's, I don't know it was just strange. It was unexpected. She, I mean we used to joke around that she was so tiny that she'd be in a car seat until she was B/Mitzvah. Remember?
- B-- Um hum.
- L-- And here, all of a sudden she started developing and boom. I mean, even the doctor, I couldn't believe it. It was just very odd. And it really bothered me. She would not let me tell anyone. To this day she's not told her friends, her good friends.
- B-- Well, we don't know. (talking over D)
- L-- Yes, yes. And she's swore to me that I would not tell any of my friends. We're friendly with a lot of her friends parents, and things.
- B-- She made you swear to her ...
- L-- Right. She made me swear to her I could tell my mother and my sister and that was basically it. And it was, it was very traumatic for me.
- B-- ...but camp...
- L-- She told her camp friends. (talking over B)

- B-- Camp friends have to... (talking over L)
- L-- Her camp friends know because she lived with them. But, yeah I felt it very significant to put it down. But it was
- D-- Wow.
- L-- Yeah. It was, I don't know, good and bad. It was just, I don't know.
- D-- Well, it's the end of an era ...
- L-- Yeah. Absolutely. (talking over D)
- D-- ... for you too.
- L-- Yeah. I mean this is my, yeah, it is, it's very strange. You know, now I'm used to it and everything but it is, for a few months, it's very traumatic. And I didn't tell anyone which made it, I mean, I told my mother and my sister but none of my friends, you know it was, yeah, yeah it was very emotional.
- B-- I have to just tell you, my whole experience with E's development is very traumatic. It's not in her, it's just there all the time.
- D-- Because?
- B-- Not traumatic bad, just that I've always been younger than all my friends and everybody that we hang out with and ...
- L-- I'm older than B (talking over B)
- B-- ... although now we have some younger friends. But even with my friends who were my age, I, I was the young one always. And I still look at myself that way. I subscribe to comic books, I, I, you know, and I've got this daughter who is developed more than any girl I dated in high school. And it's, her whole, it's not just the development of her body. Her whole persona, she's, like L said, I think last time we were her, she's, she's witty, she knows everything, she's, and it's, I feel like we really do have this physically, emotionally and intellectually developed teenager who's still a little girl who sleeps with her stuffed animals every night. And it's . .
- L-- Dichotomy.
- B-- Yeah.
- D-- But you had started, with talking about the fact that you see yourself as young . .
- B-- And, and it . . (talking over D)
- D-- ... So having this child means what for you?
- B-- Well
- L-- That you're old! (laugh)
- B-- It, it, it does. I mean I still, it, I don't know that it's changed the way I think about myself except to realize that I'm not as young as I think. I'm, I'm in a certain category of, of age and

responsibility. It made me more aware of it.

L-- When you're a woman and you turn forty-five they group you, like in your skin care groups. So when you (laugh). It's like thirty-four to forty, thirty-four to forty-four or something. And then you jump into this forty-five to eighty category. (laugh) If she were in the middle or more toward the end of her peer group in developing, we wouldn't have felt this way. But because she was the first one, it's, you know, we had no model, we had, you know, we hadn't talked to anyone about it and it was, it was very, I think that's what made it hard. What made it hard was that it happened very early and we weren't really prepared for it.

- B-- But that, yeah, yeah, that that's most of it.
- L-- Right. So I have going back to school in 1999. I have your brother dying
- D-- Which, it's interesting. B, you left off.
- L-- Yes.
- B-- Did I? Wow? Because I could even deal with writing it down.
- D-- Right.
- B-- There wasn't even enough room on the paper to go down low enough.
- D-- It's all the way down there?
- L-- And below that. Even I have that E went through a period of depression, a few months later. And ...
- D-- As a result of J?
- B-- It, it was a catalyst. .
- L-- Indirectly. It was a catalyst; of her, really, questioning things. And, yeah, I think that, that was a catalyst.
- B-- I, I, I think that it was a combination of her getting her period...
- L-- Right.
- B-- I think that was part of it. And, I, maybe feeling that she was a little bit different from her friends at that point, and then this happened and...
- L-- Right. She, she had gone to sleep away camp and had a bad summer, also.
- B-- Yeah.
- L-- That, that I had a lot to do with it.
- D-- So it's rapid succession. Mom goes back to school.
- L-- Right.
- D-- She gets her period.

L Right.
D Mom is a student.
L Right.
D Uncle J dies.
L Right.
D I mean, that's a lot
L Yeah, there was a lot going on
D It's a lot of stuff. (talking over L)
L Yeah. There's no question, there was a lot going on. And, but a lot of it had to do with the summer. She, she, because she had gotten her period a lot of her friends were teasing her and she really had a horrendous time.
D Um hum.
L And she got depressed. And it was horrible for me. I mean I was just, it was really devastating for me. It, it was horrible. She's fine now. (laugh). Oh, she did go to counseling. And she still does. She sees someone on a monthly basis.
D Who suggested it?
B We, we
L We just had to (talking over B)
B We did what was necessary. (talking over L)
L It was necessary. And, it was last Christmas vacation. And I remember, yes, 'cause I remember like it was yesterday. As a matter of fact, I and I just, I went to my pediatrician in tears. I was like waiting outside the office before they opened, sitting on the floor hysterically crying. And I said. "My daughter needs someone to talk to. I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go about the whole thing." And they were great and they referred me to an office and she, you know she started going well, once every week, every
B Well at first she started going once (talking over L)
L two weeks (talking over B)
B a week (talking over L)
L Then it was every two weeks (talking over B)
B It was an urgent situation. It was, it came about very quickly and was very necessary.
L And now she goes once a month, And I think she likes going.
B Yeah.

- L-- I mean we really like this therapist and I actually, we talked about it, but I really want her to continue going, 'cause I think it's a great thing for her to have someone, for anyone to have someone, to sit and talk to once a month. You know, just to check, how you doin'? Check-in, make sure, every, everything's goin' okay. You're not talking to your mother, you're talking to a neutral person.
- D-- Um hum.
- L-- She really likes her.
- B-- And the therapist ... (talking over L)
- L-- She has a nice relationship with her. (talking over B)
- B-- ... although she maintains the confidences she will allow us to say is there any issue you want mew to explore with her?
- D-- Um hum
- B-- Which gives E an opportunity to open up about things that she may not with us. And of course, if there was something...
- L-- Pressing with us (talking over B)
- B-- ... pressing that needed to be discussed the therapist would know it an would talk to us. (talking over L)
- D-- Right. Something, something like you know ...
- L and B together-- Right.
- D-- ... There's no confidentiality with that when it comes to a kid. So, and I see where you put the B/Mitzvah.
- L-- Yes. There's the B/Mitzvah...
- D-- Right. Anything in either of yours that surprised you? In, in your partner's?
- B-- Well I have to say, with mine, I'm surprised that I... I mean, it just bothers me that I didn't go back and put in about J. Because ...
- D-- Why does it bother you?
- B-- Because I should deal with it better. I mean, I'm writing this and I'm thinking J and I'm just not putting it on the paper.
- D-- Good that you're able to talk about it now. That's pretty impressive.
- B-- Yeah, I can ...
- D-- No, no. I'm serious about that. (talking over B)
- B-- ... talk about it.
- D-- You're able to talk about that.

- L-- Right. Right. How you feel about it and not putting it in.
- D-- Um hum.
- D-- Anything that you're surprised about?
- L-- I'm surprised that I have about as much as you. I thought that I would have less than you. Because you...
- B-- You know, look, I'm sure, looking at yours I'm surprised too but knowing how you deal with it I'm not surprised that, you know, you remembered all and just you know.
- L-- But these are things, I have to tell you when I was writing. These are things that I haven't thought about for a long time. Where B, these things are probably real close to the surface to you. These are things that I had to, I worked backwards. Because it was easier for me to work backwards. And to think of these things-- like, I, I don't really think of these things.
- D-- Was it a worthwhile activity to go back and look at your lives?
- B--- I...
- L-- Yes...
- B-- I definitely think so, especially one thing that stood out with me. And I was thinking about this, and, and knowing that I ended up at E's B/Mitzvah, is that, I don't have my B/Mitzvah on here. And I thought about whether that's something, because you, you didn't ask us to just write, to put down any significant event in our lives, you...
- L-- You said specifically... emotional. (talking over B)
- B-- You said something that is emotional...
- D-- Right.
- B-- ...lasting impact. And the fact that I was B/Mitzvah is meaningful to me but the event at the time didn't it, it was an event that took place at the time.
- D-- I, I think our, our society tends to focus on external things that should be meaningful as opposed to what is meaningful. I asked you generally to mark down what is meaningful to you. With no more instructions than that.
- L-- Right.
- D-- And it doesn't jive necessarily with the rituals or not. What's interesting. And, and part of it has to do with the fact that we're here around E's B/Mitzvah. For both of you, you know, you ended up projecting where you see E's B/Mitzvah. One of the things that's very striking... there are a couple of observations I think. One is that you both have a big investment in E's B/Mitzvah being wonderful. Which you're aware of with regard to the party, but move away from the party and move into the emotional spectrum, you have a huge investment. And so... which is wonderful because it says it's meaningful, but it's also something to be aware of as you approach it.
- L-- Yes. I thought about it.

- D-- It's because you (talking over L), you've put so much.
- B-- You've put so much ... Yeah. It's also important to me... (talking over D)
- D-- Then you had thought of that?
- L--- Well actually the last time we left here we were saying you know how there's always a good and a bad and I'm thinking, oh my God, what if somebody dies right before E's B/Mitzvah, again (laugh). You know, like, what if something bad happens? And, and, I hadn't really thought of it, but in the context of our lives (laugh) it's, it's not out of the question, it's something ...
- D-- But here's ... (talking over L)
- L-- ...what happens. (laugh) (talking over D)
- D-- Here's the other thing that I, I wanted to observe here. I mean, the two of you, individually but also in your life together, have amassed a lot of losses. Now, everybody has losses in life, but you amassed a lot of losses and you've been around peak emotional times to begin with and then they added those peak emotions into it. And you're incredibly resilient.
- B-- We are.
- D-- And I, I'm ...
- B-- We are. (talking over D)
- D-- ... wondering where it comes from. Yeah.
- L-- Yeah.
- D-- Incredibly resilient. And I'm wondering where it comes from. Because it's clear you just look at this, you know immediately... First of all the ease with which you talk about it. You know, even now. You didn't put J's death down and yet when you were talking about it you were able to say it's so painful to me it would've been off the scale and so I don't put it down. I'm wondering about that. So, you're even aware of, of those things and able to talk about that, which is really quite remarkable. Where does your resilience come from?
- B-- Middle children. (laugh).
- L-- You have always had to be. He is his own person. He has always been, I think, financially independent at a young age. You've always had to be an independent person. That's one of the things that attracted me to you, was that you were totally self-sufficient. You were within yourself. You could take care of yourself. You could take care of me. You were forced to do that at a young age. With your father dying and your whole family situation. He always been like that.
- D-- So, so since the financial struggles, since one of the things that attracted you is being taken care of ...
- L-- Right.
- D-- What happens with the financial struggles?
- L-- It's definitely affected our marriage.

- D-- Has it?
- L-- There's no question it has. Yes, absolutely. So...
- B-- Like we said before, the other aspects of the marriage are fine. It's the financial problem that is the problem.
- D-- Has it been something you've struggled with together? Has it put a wedge between you?
- L-- Well both off and on, both off and on ...
- B-- It, often depends on the specific situation. (talking over L)
- L-- Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes are better than others. Sometimes are worse. Sometimes I get mad at him because of it, which, nothing has happened that's different. It just bothers me more. You know, it's just...
- B-- And in the community we live... (talking over L)
- L-- Yeah, it's just... (talking over B)
- B-- And, it makes it difficult for you, you see, you know, you go to your friends' homes and we're in a community where people tend not to flaunt what they have. It's ...
- L-- And that's why we like living there.
- B-- People who have money that they could do anything with. On the...but, that doesn't mean that you don't go into their house and see their new seventy-five thousand dollar kitchen. And they don't cook. You know, and things, like that will sometimes bring on ...
- L-- Yeah. Like I may go to someone's house ... (talking over B)
- B-- ... an issue. (talking over L)
- L-- ...and, you know, they have a beautiful new kitchen, or a beautiful home, and I'll go home go home and I'll be in a horrible mood. But I'm not gonna say to B, you know I spent the day with such and such today and saw their seventy-five thousand dollar kitchen and it really pisses me off. I won't say that to him. But I'll be, just be in a bad mood, or I'll be quiet a lot. Right?. That's is how it kind of . .
- B-- Manifests itself (talking over L)
- L-- ... manifests itself. Right. So, yeah, yeah, it's been a very big strain. Absolutely, absolutely. So, I'm sure more for, well ... (talking over B)
- B-- Well, yes, more for me. (talking over L)
- L-- More for you. (laugh)
- B-- 'Cause for me it's more on a basic level. I don't care about whether I don't have seventy-five thousand bucks to spend on a kitchen, when I'm struggling on the day-to-day finances. You know, from this whole fall out from all this other crap. (talking over L)
- L-- The things that's interesting is that we really try and shield E and H from a lot of that. And

I don't know if that's good or bad. We don't fight in front of them about, I mean, we don't even really fight about it that much, I mean, it causes tension. It's tension. It's not like we're actively fighting about it, but, it's tense. It definitely makes our relationship more tense.

D-- Tense with distance or risk to the marriage or just tense within the context of a committed marriage?

B-- It depends on the circumstances. It does. It depends sort of on the catalyst and what's going on at the time. I mean the fact that, you know, well here are we gonna get the money to make the down payment, the initial payment for the party on E's B/Mitzvah is just an issue floating out there that doesn't cause that type of marital tension.

L-- And we, you know, I mean we say to them, like E will say, well this one's going away and this one's going away and I say to her, you don't need to go away. I mean, I, whether we had the money or not I would make that clear to her-- that there are certain things that are important in life and certain things that are not. And that are nice, if you can afford them, but you don't need them to be happy. I tell her that all the time. And I would do that whether we could afford it or not. I just feel it's an important lesson to be learned. But we really don't tell them. I mean, we really don't communicate it with them.

B-- Which I don't think it is necessary for them. It's not so much their business.

L-- Right. Yeah. I mean they're not deprived, certainly not by any means. (laugh) And, you know it is... you know, we're, we don't convey that to them. We just don't. You know, if they want to go to sleep away camp, okay, we'll work it out that they go to sleep away camp. E does not want to go this summer, which is great, because we have to spend (laugh) it on her B/Mitzvah. But that was a decision that, if she wanted to go, we would find the money to send her.

D-- So, you prioritize it in a way that some people...

B-- That's right. (talking over D)

D-- ... have to less.

L-- Exactly.

B-- Right.

L-- We're always juggling, and I was prioritizing. That's right. We're so used to it now, you know, (laugh), so ...

D-- Having gone through this, is it a useful exercise? Or, would you rather have avoided it?

B-- I wouldn't say I would've wanted to avoid it, but, like L said, it's always close to the surface to me anyway. One thing useful about it for me was that realizing that my B/Mitzvah didn't have that type of impact on me. I'm more involved in my Judaism over the past five years, or whatever, than I was growing up. It is not in terms of the commitment of my belief. In terms of my involvement and wanting it to be a little more on the surface, it made me realize that I'd like, you know, thirty years later, which it is for me from my B/Mitzvah, thirty years later I would like E to feel that her B/Mitzvah was an emotional high point and that it wasn't just an event that passed like a birthday party.

L-- B is more a spiritual person than I am. I'll, I, I'm very, I'm much more practical. And this whole . .

- B-- But I'm pragmatic, I'm very ...
- L-- No, you're much more spiritual about things and I'm not. (talking over B)
- B-- Your, L's much more, I'm very. I'm an eternal optimist . .
- L-- Optimist (talking over B)
- B-- ... and L, is, is getting better, but she's very...
- L & B together-- pestimistic
- L-- It's funny. My mother (laugh) my mother's an eternal optimist and loves B's optimism. So, but he is just a more spiritual, I, I, this experience has made me think about the religious aspect of the B/Mitzvah much more. And I'm happy about that because I probably would not get as involved, and it doesn't mean as much to me.
- D-- See, and isn't it interesting that we, we haven't really talked about what our society tends to define as religion. For all the three hours we've been together we've talked about relationships, which I believe is what religion is all about.
- L-- Right,
- D-- It's about relationships and connectedness and all of that. But usually, when people go through the B/Mitzvah process they focus on ritual, not on spiritual religious ...
- B-- We, which is perfect for E's Haftorah. I read her Torah and Haftorah sections, the translations. And it's her Haftorah section I think is about the Nazarites and how she was explaining it to me. They, you know, they had to grow their, couldn't cut their hair, and Samson's birth and, and I've always talked to her about that. And it's very meaningful to me and I, I think, I'm on the same wavelength as you, that, the, the trappings of the religion and the rituals are meaningless if you don't have, the spiritual faith and relationships that define that faith. (talking over D)
- D-- On the other hand the religion, the rituals and the peak moment experience as the lifecycle moments, can actually be the vocabulary of what's going on. So it's a . .
- L-- Two way ... (talking over D)
- B-- It's a two way street exactly... (talking over L)
- L-- Exactly (talking over B)
- B-- Except for when it goes overboard. I mean, I'm very, you know, I, I have a lot of dealings with ultra-orthodox ...
- L-- There are some things, I have been thinking about, also what we talked about with the B/Mitzvah, that we'll talk about next time. Just, some things in the community that I've seen about planning B/Mitzvah and how people vary in the planning, what's important to them. It it very interesting. Sorry, but I have to run.
- D-- That's okay, that's okay. Look I appreciate your doing this folks.

End of Session 3

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