THE ROLE AND FUNCTION OF LAMENT WITHIN THE NON-ORTHODOX, AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This qualitative study's goal is to explore if there is a pastoral and psychological role for lament within the non-Orthodox American Jewish community. The study subjects were six rabbis, three men and three women, who studied lamentation at Hebrew Union College and have counseled people who suffered significant losses. The study examines Christian and Jewish writing on the psalms of lamentation, e.g., Walter Brueggeman and Marcia Glazer, and Jewish writers on the *Book of Lamentations*, e.g., Adele Berlin, Rachel Adler and Jo Hirschmann. It examines the relevance of psychologists Donald Winnicott, Daniel Stern, and Richard Schwartz to lament.

The study found that the participants believed lament had a strong role to play in helping congregants cope with suffering. The participants described encountering two kinds of lament. The first was a disordered or unresolved response to a traumatic event. The second was in response to significant but not traumatic events. This was often characterized as brokenness. There was a observed difference in how the genders described responses to lament. The rabbi subjects were comfortable with the expression of lament in lifecycle and pastoral counseling settings but struggled with welcoming it into joyful situations. The study participants elicited lament through funeral and shiva customs and through innovative programs of text study, the arts, and new rituals. Further research is needed to understand the concept of brokenness and how it might be better integrated into the life of the synagogue. Limitations: This is a small study and does not survey by race, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Key Words: Judaism, Lament, *Lamentations*, Brueggemann, Psalms, Brokenness, Gender, COVID, Jewish Healing Movement, Object Psychology

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Statement of the Problem

The proposal for this project was submitted on the Memorial Day holiday weekend, nine weeks into the New York State stay at home order (March 22, 2020). The proposal predated the COVID-19 crisis, but the research took place during it, from June 24 to October 14, 2020.

What is the Suffering?

The classic response in Jewish tradition to extreme suffering is lament, or in Hebrew, *kinah.* In both Hebrew and English, lament is a noun as well as a verb (Webster's, 2018). A lament can be a passionate expression of grief or sorrow and can also take a literary or musical form. However, in Jewish-American society, where there is a premium on control and order, expressing lament in response to suffering can be very hard for many individuals (Brueggemann, 1984; Marx, 2015). The value of lament is that when one is in the throes of great suffering, often the only comfort lies in being understood. Add to this that in the first hours of suffering there is often little coherence to one's speech (Hirschmann, 2010), being listened to without the expectation that what one has to say should be coherent and well-structured, can be a source of great solace. These are powerful ways of accompanying the suffering and are some of the central insights of pastoral counseling (Kidd, 2016, Klotz, 2001). A reluctance on the part of the sufferer to lament, either intensely in the moment, or to express a sense of suffering that endures over time, can be its own kind of suffering. Jewishly, this expresses itself as a reluctance to bring this suffering to God or to other members of the Jewish community, whether family and friends, or Jewish professionals who are in a caring role.

What is the Need?

I would posit that there is value in having the organized Jewish community engender lament by way of holding it out as something to be valued and respected. Lament is a powerful and effective way of beginning to communicate our sense of grief, loss, or trauma, a way of connecting with others from within our pain. However, lament has been largely excised from modern, non-Orthodox, Jewish culture (Adler, 2014). This is a striking contrast with how Judaism has historically regarded lament, though how it has expressed this has varied in different historical periods and cultures.

Sacred text is always the starting point for understanding Jewish tradition and theology (Borowitz, 1998) and one begins by turning to the Hebrew biblical text, or the *Tanakh* as it is called in Jewish tradition. While lament can be found in many places in the thirty-nine books of the *Tanakh*, the three central texts of lamentation are found in the section of the Hebrew Bible known as Writings: The *Book of Psalms,* the *Book of Job*, and the *Book of Lamentations*. In this study I will be focused on the psalms of lamentation in the *Book of Psalms* because I wish to explore if the psalms of lamentation, and the discussion around them, are an effective way of reflecting on how lamentation might be engendered within the Jewish community.

The language the psalms of lament used to express suffering is direct and to the point, and often embodies a strong emotional response by the sufferer to a God whom they have understood to be loving, merciful, and just. In their suffering, this God seems to have abandoned them. The psalmists address the pain directly to God, holding the deity to account and their tone can be any of anger, impatience, hurt, and bafflement. This response seems appropriate, for example, for someone who is ill and a cure seems

impossibly far away, or whose condition is chronic or fatal. Which is not to say the psalms are without problem for many non-Orthodox American Jews.[1] Many rank and file American Jews find the God language of the psalms, about a deity who controls every aspect of one's life, to be challenging, even alienating.

The other great need that I see in the non-Orthodox Jewish world, to borrow a sports expression, is "not playing beyond the game." Much of the modern Jewish writing on suffering posits that out of one's suffering comes a new and more profound understanding of the source(s) of meaning in one's life (e.g., Klotz, 2001; Wolpe, 1990). They contend that people emerge from suffering by generating a new narrative that enables them to understand their life. Over time, I began to struggle with this approach because I saw that when people were in the depths of despair they were, understandably, unable to feel anything but suffering and it was often unclear to them if it would ever end. It seemed that the Jewish writing on suffering failed to focus on accessible resources within Jewish tradition for people who are in the depth of despair. The writers were focused on meaning, which was of secondary importance while suffering was in progress.

A story: As a rabbi, I had finished my monthly lunch with the president of our congregation and as we were leaving the restaurant a Tim McGraw song came on and the lyrics were,

[1] The American Jewish community has many different denominations, such as Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative and Orthodox. However, sociologically and theologically, non-Orthodox Jews have a great deal in common with each other and much less with Orthodox Jews (Borowitz, 1973; Eisen, 1997; Liebman, 1990; Neusner, 1981; Wertheimer, 2018). Non-Orthodox Jews, overwhelmingly, do not follow formal Jewish law (*halakhah*). They do not regularly go to religious services, keep the dietary laws, send their children to day schools, or follow family purity laws. They also are highly acculturated. This distinguishes them from Orthodox Jews. For this reason, I have chosen to speak about non-Orthodox Jews rather than a specific denomination.

He said
"I was in my early forties
With a lot of life before me
And a moment came that stopped me on a dime
I spent most of the next days
Looking at the x-rays
Talkin' 'bout the options
And talkin' 'bout sweet time"
I asked him
"When it sank in
That this might really be the real end
How's it hit you
When you get that kind of news?
Man, what'd you do?"
He said
"I went skydiving
I went Rocky Mountain climbing
I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fumanchu
And I loved deeper
And I spoke sweeter
And I gave forgiveness I'd been denying"
And he said
"Someday I hope you get the chance
To live like you were dying"

Songwriters: Craig Michael Wiseman / James Timothy Nichols

Hearing it, he turned to me and suggested, “you ought to give a sermon on that song.” He was a delightfully upbeat person, and it was clear he was inspired by the song’s theme of “when we face death, we live life with gusto.” I thanked him for the suggestion, and we returned to work.

I was already aware of the song, partly because it had rubbed me the wrong way when I first heard it playing overhead in a department store. As I noted earlier, my experience has been just the opposite of the song’s narrative. When people get really bad news, they tend to enter the realm of despair rather than running the table on a mythical bucket list.

There was another song that had come out around the same time, written by Warren Zevon, after he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Its title was *Disorder in the House*,

> Disorder in the house
> The tub runneth over
> Plaster's falling down in pieces by the couch of pain
> Disorder in the house
> Time to duck and cover
> Helicopters hover over rough terrain
> Disorder in the house
> Reptile wisdom
> Zombies on the lawn staggering around…
>
> Disorder in the house
> All bets are off
> I'm sprawled across the davenport of despair
> Disorder in the house
> I'll live with the losses
> And watch the sundown through the portiere
>
> Songwriters: Warren William Zevon / Jorge A. Calderon

This is a song of lament and much closer to the experience I see people have. I gave the sermon, but it was the opposite of what the president had envisioned. I couldn't have named it at the time, but it was about the value of lament. In a sense, this demonstration project is about further exploring what I began in that sermon.

To be sure, pastorally, one always wants to provide a path out of despair, but the irony is that this is often accomplished by not addressing it directly. When someone is deep in despair, their comfort lies in being understood and my work as a chaplain in hospital and skilled nursing home settings has reinforced my sense of this. I am curious about whether holding lamentation up as a Jewish cultural and religious value is a way of enabling people to lament more freely. That is, to treat it not as a way station on the road

to renewed meaning, but as a central element of the human story and the Jewish story. Lament has universal and particular importance.

What is Being Studied?

This study focuses on two issues. The first is whether lament has an important role to play in helping people cope with their suffering. The second is how a Jewish community might enable its members to become more comfortable expressing lament.

There is little written by contemporary rabbis about lamentation. I have only located three articles by rabbis about lamentation and its role in modern Jewish life (Adler, 2013, 2014; Hirschmann, 2010) and two rabbinic theses (Enger, 2001; Marks 2015). The question of lamentation and its place in Jewish pastoral work has not been a major focus of Jewish professionals. However, one group of rabbis who are likely to have considered the place of lamentation in the life of their congregants, or patients/residents, are those who have taken the course on the *Book of Lamentation* and *Lamentations Rabbah* when they were students at the New York campus of Hebrew Union College (HUC-JIR)[2]. Hence, this qualitative study is based on interviews with six HUC-JIR rabbinic alumni who have taken the course. The purpose of these interviews is to find out their perspectives about the place of lament in the life of today's non-Orthodox Jews, and the ways these rabbis understand lament to be, or not be, significant for the non-Orthodox Jewish community.

[2] This course was first offered at HUC-JIR in 2010. It is an ongoing course.

What is the Relevance of This Project to the Ministry in a Wider Context?

If the research does not point to the relevance for lament in the lives of their congregants and residents/patients, then it will be apparent that there is little purpose in developing a Jewish pathway that builds upon current Jewish scholarship on lament. Also, there will be little need for Jewish professionals to study the more extensive Christian scholarship on the topic, of the last 30 plus years. However, if lament is relevant to the lives of their congregants, then this study may provide insight into the role lament could play in helping Jews cope with suffering, and into specific ways their Jewish communities and clergy can support and even engender it.

Literature Review

What is the Background or History of the Issue?

In the Mishnah, the first major collection of rabbinic laws and practices, we find this description of *kinah* (lamentation),

> What is meant by wailing? When all wail in unison. What is meant by a lament (*kinah*)? When one speaks and all respond after her, as it is said: "And teach your daughters wailing and one another [each] lamentation." (Jeremiah 9:19) (*Mishnah*, Moed Katan. 3:9)

Nancy Lee (2010) observes that rigid religious rituals will retreat in times of tragedy and catastrophe "as the spontaneous creation of lyrics of lament anguish forth" (p. 11). Virtually all traditional cultures have forms of lament, but they are no longer sung in modern western cultures except for some groups, such as the African American church, which has retained a traditional process of call and response. Lament can also present as silence, especially after established religious rituals, such as a funeral, have been completed. This might be reflected in the Jewish custom that when greeting a mourner, one is to be silent until they have spoken.

People can experience many situations as tragic or catastrophic. Major illnesses are often experienced this way and hospital chaplains work to provide an opportunity for patients to share their suffering, however they wish. But many people struggle to do this even in the presence of a compassionate and skilled chaplain. Rabbi Rachel Marks, in her rabbinic thesis on lamentation (2015), tells about visiting a Jewish patient and, when asked about how he is doing, replies, "Well to tell you the truth, I'm in pain. And, I'm pretty upset that this had to happen to me. But I'd rather not talk about me." Marks

comments, "…the Jewish patients whom I encountered, were, in general, much more likely to prefer to talk about anything other than their experiences of pain and suffering in spiritual terms" (p. 4). Essentially, they are unable to emote, let alone lament.

How might we approach understanding lament in a Jewish context? Marks (2015) notes that Jewish tradition teaches, "…God is revealed to us through our sacred texts" (p. 5). She quotes our teacher, Eugene Borowitz z"l[3], who writes that, "…no means of personally encountering God has been more widely practiced and honored among us than studying text" (1998). As we have seen in our citing of the *Mishnah*, sacred texts are the starting point for understanding Jews and Judaism, even when it comes to understanding the spontaneous outpouring of grief and suffering.

Lament in the Hebrew Bible

We first meet lament in the Hebrew Bible in the form of personal, spontaneous, outpourings of emotional pain. Rebecca cries out in distress during her difficult pregnancy (*Gen*. 25:22). We do not hear Leah's cry out as she goes unloved by her husband Jacob, but God responds to it (*Gen*. 29:31). Hannah cries out for a child as she is tormented by Eli's other wife (*1 Sam*. 1:10-11). David writes a dirge lamenting the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (*2 Sam*. 1:17-27) and we hear his cri de coeur when his son Absalom is killed in a rebellion that he leads against his father (*2 Sam*. 18:33). But it is only in the *Book of Psalms* and *Lamentations* that we encounter literary forms centered on lamentation.

[3] This stands for *zichron l'vrachah*, "may his memory be for a blessing" and is an honorific for someone who has died.

Formal biblical laments can be communal in nature, mourning a tragic event that has befallen the community or nation, especially a military or court disaster. They can also be laments by individuals marking the loss of power, social standing, or personal calamity. By most estimates, a third of the psalms are individual laments (Westermann, 1981; Brueggemann, 1984; Lee, 2010). These will be the focus of this study because they are personal in nature and are the sacred literature that Jews and Christians have turned to in moments of personal distress.

Full throated, deeply emotional lament is everywhere in the *Book of Psalms*, for example,

> "But I am a worm and no man, a disgrace among men, by the people reviled. All who see me do mock me" (Ps. 22: 7). [4]

But within these psalms one also hears affirmations of trust and outright praise,

> "The Lord hears my plea, the Lord will take my prayer (Ps. 6:10).
>
> "My seed will serve him. It will be told to generations to come. They will proclaim His bounty to a people aborning, for He has done (Ps. 22: 31-2).

Within a psalm, praise often overwhelms the lament. Adele Berlin (2003) holds that this is because praise is the quintessential nature of psalms (p. 1283). Praise is everywhere in the psalms. It may come after the psalmist has prayed for help from sickness or enemies and the prayer has been answered. As part of the petition, a promise is usually made to praise God when the psalmist is delivered from trouble. From the

[4] Psalm translations are by Robert Alter (2007) unless otherwise noted.

perspective of the psalms, the main religious function of human beings is to offer praise to God and proclaim his greatness throughout the world. The *Book of Psalms* also assumes that prayer has the potential to be effective, "God is called upon to hear prayers and to respond" (p. 1284). It is a terrible thing when God "hides his face" and ignores the petitioner, "because this puts into question the efficacy of prayer" (p. 1284).

According to Robert Alter (1985), psalms have a shared or conventional form that relies on the familiar, in imagery, sequence of ideas, and structure of the poem. He thinks this is quite understandable because, "…for a text that is to be…recited by someone recovered from grave illness you want…traditional ways of ordering those materials in a certain sequence" (p. 112). It is rare for a psalm to end without either a praise of thanksgiving or an affirmation of faith in God's goodness, which can be very disconcerting for the modern reader when the lament is filled with dread, anguish, or bottomless pain. This is a notable contrast with what is found in the *Book of Lamentations*.

The *Book of Lamentations* is a lament for the destruction of the first great Israelite temple in Jerusalem, in 586 B.C.E., the sack of Jerusalem, and the subsequent exile of the Judeans to Babylon. Berlin (2002) describes it as "an expression of the suffering and grief associated with the calamity of destruction, but even more, it is a memorialization of that suffering and grief" (p. 1). This is a departure from the lamentations in the *Book of Psalms*. Even when the psalmist has not been delivered from trouble there is a hope, even an expectation, that deliverance will happen. Praise is not offered, but in its stead, there is the promise of praise once they are delivered,

> As you surfeited me with great and dire distress, You will once more give me life, and from earth's depths once more bring me up.
>
> You will multiply my greatness and turn round and comfort me.
>
> And so I shall acclaim You with the lute (Ps. 71:20-21).

The final verses of *Lamentations* are a marked contrast:

> "Take us back, Lord, to yourself; O let us come back. Make us again as we were before. But instead you reject us completely, you are angry with us, so very much" (5:21-2, Berlin, 2002) .

Berlin (2002) is making the case that this lament is like a snapshot, freezing in time the sensibilities of the Judeans as they experienced the war, devastation, and exile. But precisely because of this, it has the feel of a lament unbound by religious constraints. Todd Linafelt (2008) reiterates this and contends that the book of Lamentations is a literature more about the expression of suffering than the meaning behind it (p. 62). Berlin also sees the literary structure of this lament, which is as an acrostic, providing form, and hence voice, to unbounded grief:

> It is perhaps a sublime literary touch that the poems of this book, which express the inexpressible, use such a formal and rigid style, whose controlling structural device is the very letters that signify and give shape to language. (p.4)

Here we can see many of the tensions that are a part of biblical lamentation. The writers are very aware of spontaneous, unstructured lamentation, which can be the first words following what Elizabeth Scarry (1985) describes as, "a state anterior to language,

to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (p. 4). It is unlikely that praise is a part of them, as we see in this snapshot of grief from *Lamentations*, but praise of God is elemental to the psalms and rarely do they present lament without it.[5]

Psalms of Lamentation in Jewish Tradition

The term *kinah* would evolve over time. In the biblical period, it only refers to a funeral dirge, the way we saw it used in our opening Mishnaic passage, but no *kinah* from that period survives. In rabbinic literature, beginning with the *Mishnah* (200 C.E.), a *kinah* began to have a broader designation. The rabbis[6] called the *Book of Lamentations* S*efer Kinot* and applied the term *kinot,* not only to *Lamentations* but also to Psalms 3 and 79. A *kinah* becomes understood as "wailing" (see above, p. 13) "an outpouring of grief for a loss that has already occurred, with no expectation of reversing that loss" (Berlin, 2002, p. 24), as we saw in the *Book of Lamentations*.

A variety of *kinot* entered Jewish liturgical tradition. The *Book of Lamentations* was chanted on Tisha B'Av[7], which commemorates the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. *Piyyutim*, which are free poetic compositions based on religious teachings, began to be written about communal pogroms that were suffered by the Jews of the Rhine valley during the Crusades and Black Death and these were called *kinot* (Elbogen, 1993,

[5] Ps. 88 is one of the rare exceptions (Brueggeman, 1986).
[6] The term, "the rabbis" refers to the religious scholars and authorities who wrote the post-biblical, Jewish sacred texts, such as the *Mishnah*, *Talmud*, Midrashim, Responsa, and legal codes.
[7] Tisha B'Av (trans. The ninth of the month of Av) is a Jewish fast day that falls during the summer and is a holiday of penitential prayer and complete fasting. It commemorates the destruction of the Great Temples in Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E and 70 C.E.

p. 5). *Kinot* were also written about the destruction of the Temple, and calamities that occurred at the time of the priesthood, and the sacrificial cult. They were communal in nature and had the feel of both a prophetic rebuke, holding the Jewish people responsible for bringing the calamities upon themselves due to sin, but also praising God's mercy and promise of eventual redemption and a return to the land of Israel. They were communal in nature and never personal.

Psalms are used extensively in synagogue liturgy, but psalms of lament were rarely chosen for liturgical purpose. When they do appear, they tend to be communal rather than individual in nature (e.g., Ps. 90, 123, 125, 126, 129). Psalm 6, an individual psalm of lament, is focused on physical suffering and is read during *tachanum*, a penitential section of the daily service (Klein, 1979). Psalm 27, which is more focused on the pain of one's soul, is read daily during Elul, the month before the arrival of the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) and Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). On Shabbat afternoon, during the rainy season, the psalms of ascent are read, and they include Psalms 120 and 130, which are written in the first person but are not among the most intense individual laments. It is important to note that very few non-Orthodox Jews attend daily services, or those on Shabbat afternoon, so they rarely encounter these psalms. Where non-Orthodox Jews do come across the full range of psalms is in illness and death.

When a rabbi visits someone who is in an institutional setting, such as a hospital or prison, they usually bring the *Book of Psalms* with them and, very often, leave their copy behind for the ill person to read in private. Nahum Sarna (1993), in his book on the power of psalms to inspire, tells the following story: Anatoly Sharansky, a famous Jewish *refusenik* in the Soviet Union, was imprisoned for nine years and said that it was the copy

of the *Book of Psalms* he had in his cell that sustained his spirit and helped him endure. When he was released and went to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, he was seen clasping his beloved *Book of Psalms* (p. 5).

The psalms have often been used in Judaism as a kind of "written amulet" that serve as protection against harm. They are read at the bedside of an infant boy before his ritual circumcision. When someone dies, Orthodox Jews have someone sit with the body, reading psalms until the funeral. Historically, Jewish tradition has held that the reading of psalms has a power in and of itself. There is a volume entitled "*Shimush Theillim* (the [Magical] Use of Psalms), which works off the principle that the Hebrew Bible is composed of the names of God, so the *Book of Psalms* contains the power to save and protect people (Polish, 2000, p. 18). In this volume, different psalms have specific purposes, such as curing epidemics, eye disease, or fever. Often the purpose has no connection to the plain sense of the text.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810), a Chasidic rabbi known for his compassion and love of nature, identified ten psalms as having special healing power for body and spirit. He designated these as *Tikkun HaKlali*, the complete remedy (Weintraub, 1994, p. 19). He based his work on a midrash[8] from the Talmud which speaks about the psalms being composed out of 10 expressions of praise. Rabbi Nachman believed that the 10 psalms he identified, collectively, contained all these kinds of praise and thus embodied the concentrated power of the entire *Book of Psalms*.[9] He was a mystic and held that human song is a "reflected light" through which we "mirror" this light back by

[8]A *midrash* (literally "expounding" or "probing") is a Hebrew term for a Jewish sacred legend or story.
[9] Ps. 16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137, and 150.

fulfilling God's will. He saw the reading of psalms as being the most effective way to do this (p. 19).

In Rabbi Nachman's *Tikkun HaKlali* psalm cycle, we have a bridge from the recitation of psalms as an oral amulet or talisman, like in *Shimush Theillim*, to psalms as a source of healing which emerges out of a textual-study tradition. This is not to dismiss the rote recitation of psalms at bedside, or by the dead body, read in Hebrew, a language only a minority of American Jews understand. There is a comfort that comes from performing a well-known ritual in a sacred language, even with little insight into its meaning. What is often true for Jews, might also be for Catholics raised on the Latin rite, and Muslims who pray in Arabic. One English source for the spiritual discipline of studying the *Book of Psalms*, is Weintraub's book, *Healing of soul, healing of body* (1994). It is part of a modern genre of Jewish guides to the psalms, whose subtitles tell a story; *Spiritual leaders unfold the strength & solace in psalms* (Weintraub, 1994), *How to understand and use the book of psalms* (Polish, 2000), and [psalms] *A guide to their beauty, power, and meaning* (Glazer, 2009). All the authors of these books believe the psalms can enrich our lives in a very practical way, but that most Jews need a guide to access them.

Lament does not lie at the heart of Rabbi Nachman's cycle, instead it is driven by a variety of attributes of the psalms themselves, such as victory, melody, song, prayer, thanksgiving, and praise of God. Weintraub (1994) invited ten rabbis to examine the spiritual possibilities of each psalm. A very expansive set of themes emerged, among them: trust, gratitude, God's near presence, self-examination, thanks for the possibility of healing, yearning for God, hope for deliverance, anguish and abandonment after long

exile, grief and despair as the proverbial darkness that comes before the light, and a musical symphony of praises (p. 21). The book is a rich and demanding meditation on the possibilities of the *Tikkun HaKali* but it also illustrates that while full-throated lament is very present in many psalms, at their heart they are about God's presence in our lives and what each individual needs to do to enter into this relationship.

David Polish's book, *Bringing the psalms to life* (2000) ranges across the breadth of the psalms. His central message is that the *Book of Psalms* illustrates how God is very present to us and that we have human and divine company in our suffering (e.g., Ps. 6 and 38). Psalms are performative – the act of reading them brings us into God's presence (p. 15) and enables us to relate to God in a way, "that makes it possible for us to enlist God in our struggle" (p. 91). However, there is in Polish's presentation a softening of the challenges the psalms present, in that he focuses on the most accessible aspects of them and doesn't address the foreignness of the literature, with its intense insistence on praise and trust in God, the absolute sovereignty of God, and its near obsession with the threat of enemies.

Like Weintraub's work, Marcia Glazer's book, *Psalms of the Jewish liturgy* (2009) has a specific take on the psalms. She skillfully ties questions of loss and heartbreak to the psalms, "The God depicted in the psalms can open us up to the hidden or unarticulated nooks and crannies of our own being…psalms offer us a language to express the brokenness of our own hearts and to name the longing within us" (p. 5). She raises the question of where, as modern people, we feel a discomfort with the text. As citizens raised in the republican tradition of sovereignty residing within 'the people,' the idea of a sovereign is foreign to us. She counsels us to think of God's sovereignty in

terms of "a transcendent spirit of loving kindness, justice, and holiness." To embrace the psalms' perspective that despite human suffering, "it is because *Adonai*[10] reigns that we can trust that justice and goodness will triumph in the end" (p. 6). Even though Glazer's book is about liturgy, she has us consider the possibility of personal devotional practice using the psalms, such as a *keri'ah kedosha*, a private reading or meditation on a psalm's meaning (p. 13).

Glazer (2009) also addresses the question of how much of the concern of the psalmists is directed to worrying about enemies, delighting in the thought of their demise, and God's role in this. In Christian literature on the psalms this is referred to as an imprecation and is often found to be deeply disturbing. She counsels us to think about it metaphorically. The enemies in the psalms are things such as a barrage of anxiety and inner voices of self-doubt and fear. They can also be external enemies, and this reminds us, "that we can't ignore the life-destroying forces that have plagued and plague our world" (p. 7).

Personal lamentation is integral to Jewish textual tradition, to mourning rituals and to attending illness. But personal lamentation is far less so to Jewish liturgical tradition and the way non-Orthodox Jews live out their faith. The modern literature on how to use psalms as a source for solace in suffering is sensitive and of interest, but one must seek it out to be schooled in it. There is little in non-Orthodox, American Jewish life, that would bring most Jews into contact with the lament of the psalms, let alone have them wrestle with its strengths and weaknesses as an entrée to personal lament.

[10] God

Modern Christian Scholars on Psalms of Lament

Christian scholars on the psalms have focused more directly on the importance of lament in the psalms. They have come out of the form-critical school of biblical scholarship.[11] Neither Alter (1985) nor Berlin (2003) are drawn to this school of study and, instead, favor a literary approach. Alter describes the advantages in these terms; "poetry…is an instrument for conveying densely patterned meanings, and sometimes contradictory meanings, that are not readily conveyable through other kinds of discourse" (p. 113). But the form-critical approach, especially the work of Claus Westermann and Walter Brueggeman, has produced a rich body of writing which has focused on engendering lamentation among engaged Christians and has been of interest to Jewish scholars, among them, Adler (2014), Hirschmann (2010), and Marder (2011).

In a 1984 article entitled, *The costly loss of lament*, Brueggeman wrote about "…the loss of life and faith incurred when the lament Psalms are no longer used for their specific social function" (p. 53). Specifically, he was concerned that the failure to bring these psalms into the life of the church created a sense that the disordered parts of life, terror, raggedness, and hurt, do not fit with religious sensibility. However, the lament psalms illustrate that "Yahweh[12] is expected and presumed to receive the fullness of Israel's speech.

[11] Form-criticism examines the structure of a biblical work in order to understand the forms of expression and recurring patterns that are found within it.

[12] Jewish scholars often shy away from using this term for the tetragrammaton (the four-letter name of God in the Hebrew Bible) because Jewish tradition forbids it to be said aloud or written except in established sacred texts. However, the tetragrammaton will be used when it is part of a quotation. An aside: My professor of bible at HUC-JIR, the late Harry Orlinsky z"l, who was lead translator for the Torah section of the 1965 JPS translation, when asked by a student how the tetragrammaton was pronounced, launched into an excurses that established the pronunciation as "Yoo-hoo."

As was mentioned earlier, it is hard to overstate the depth of anguish that is found in the psalms and the examples are manifold:

> "I am weary in my sighing. I make my bed swim every night, with my tears I water my couch" Ps. 6: 7
>
> "For my innards are filled with burning and there's no whole place in my flesh. I grow numb and utterly crushed" Ps. 38: 8-9.
>
> "Over me Your rage has passed, Your horrors destroy me. They surround me like water all day long, they encircle me completely. You distanced lover and neighbor from me. My friends – utter darkness" P*s*. 88: 17-19.

But just as strikingly, almost all these psalms contain an "assurance of having been heard" (Westermann, 2010).

> "Turn from me, all you wrongdoers, for the Lord hears the sound of my weeping. The Lord hears my plea, the Lord will take my prayer" Ps. 6: 9-10.
>
> "For in You, O Lord, I have hoped. You will answer, O Master, my God" Ps. 38: 16.

What is the significance of this literature that is filled with such full-throated laments and an unremitting sense of having been heard, and even rescued, by God? To answer this, Brueggemann (1986) turns to the work of the great form-critical scholars of the psalms (p.17). Form-criticism examines the structure of a biblical work to understand the forms of expression and recurring patterns that are found within it. It also examines the language and social patterns in the work to see how they reflect recurring life situations

and liturgical practices. The pioneering work on this, with respect to the psalms, was done by Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), but Brueggemann is most interested in the subsequent work of Claus Westermann (1909-2000).

Westermann (1981) held that there are eight parts to an individual psalm of lament (p. 64). They are:

1. An address to God
2. A lament
3. A confession of trust
4. A petition or request
5. An assurance of being heard
6. A wish that God will intervene against an enemy and for the petitioner
7. A vow of praise
8. Praise of God

Not every psalm of lament has all eight parts and subsequent scholars often modify the number of parts and their description (Brueggemann, 1986; Lee, 2010).

As was alluded to earlier, the transition from the lament (2) to an assurance of being heard (5) can be so startling that it begs the question of whether some event has taken place. Joachim Begrich postulated that in some instances an oracle of salvation (a response from God conveyed by a religious authority) was given during the psalm and the rejoinder of the petitioner was also included (Westermann, 1981, p. 65). Gunkel did not see this as a sufficient explanation of these psalms. He held that a real change must

have happened for the one speaking and that these oracles came from God to the one petitioning and lamenting (Westermann, p. 70).

Westermann (1981) moves away from these explanations. For him, the psalms were the poetry of a people for whom praise of God had the same place faith in God "does for us" (p. 155). In ancient Israel "it was a fundamental of existence that God was and…the clearest expression of the relationship to God was the act of praising God." The connecting of a petition to a vow of praise meant that for the petitioner the "problem remained but God has heard and inclined himself to the one praying; God has had mercy on him" (p. 78). But even in this move toward praise it is essential to note that lamentation remains as much a part of man's being as is praise (p. 267). "The lament is the language of suffering; in it suffering is given the dignity of language" (p. 272). Lament leads the sufferer to bring their need to God who can address it. "We can say lament as such is a movement toward God." (p. 273).

Brueggeman (1986) was concerned that scholarship has a way of taming the psalms (p. 31). He appreciated the disciplined form-criticism that Gunkel and Westermann describe "…has been an essential means to understand the Psalter under the restraints of social convention." However, this approach can lead us to miss that, "…the Psalms practice speech in ways that keep pushing the envelope beyond the already known to that which cannot be known until it is uttered". The psalms of lament, "leads us into dangerous acknowledgement of how life really is…they cause us to think unthinkable thoughts and utter unutterable words. Perhaps worst, they lead us away from the comfortable religious claims of 'modernity' in which everything is managed and controlled" (p. 53). The psalms,

> move the awareness and imagination of the speaker away from life well-ordered into an arena of terror, raggedness, and hurt. In some sense this speech is a visceral release of the realities and imagination that have been censored, denied, or held in check by the dominant claims of society. For that reason, it does not surprise us that these psalms tend to hyperbole, vivid imagery, and statements that offend "proper" and civil religious sensitivities. They are a means of *expressing* that tries to match *experience*, that also does not fit with religious sensitivity. That is, in "proper" religion the expression should not be expressed. But it is also the case that *these experiences should not be experienced*. They are speech "at the limit," speaking about experience "at the limit." (p. 53. Italics are the author's)

"Limit expression" is a concept of Paul Ricoeur's, about words and phrases that push one to the extreme of human experience (Brueggeman, 2005, p. 33). Brueggeman argues that limit expression in writing moves us beyond ideas that enable us to merely manage our world and into eruptions of the unheard and of unusual significance. "With limit expression we will always return to an utterance to learn again" (p. 33). Limit expression can be about the positive and negative and move us to "those dimensions of lived reality that defy our habitual settlements…unless we have rhetoric for it, we cannot fully experience our experience." They are the deep recesses where genuine humanness resides. He holds that the Psalter is the best collage of limit expression in the history of humanity (p. 34).

Brueggeman (1986) builds on Westermann's idea that in the psalms, communicating lament to God is as important as expressing praise. "Whatever must be said about the human situation must be said directly to Yahweh…Yahweh does not have

protected sensitivities. Yahweh is expected and presumed to receive the fullness of Israel's speech" (p. 53). But it is also significant that even though this is speech at the limit, it comes in rather consistent and rigorous forms,

> The speech itself imposes a kind of recurring order in the disorientation, so that it has an orderliness of its own that is known and recognized in the community. The speech thus serves in a remarkable way, both to speak about the collapse of all oriented forms, and yet to assure that even in the chaos of the moment there is a Yahweh-directed order. (p. 54)

It is a means of leading the speaker into, but also through and out of, the darkness. "As the speech has form, so it is discerned that the experience has form too."

One cannot overstate how central Brueggeman is to the current literature on religion and lament. We saw that he is widely cited by Jewish scholars and even more so with Christian ones; Cottrill (2008), Lee (2010), Linaflet (2008), Seerveld (2012), Villanueva (2008), and even Westermann (1998). His work has directly or indirectly led to a cottage industry of publications about Lament; *Forgotten songs: Reclaiming the psalms for Christian worship* (Wells, 2012), *Performing the Psalms* (Bland, 2005), and *Lament: Reclaiming practices in pulpit, pew, and public square* (Brown, 2005). These works all pick up on his idea that church worship has become too worried about offending congregants' belief in an ordered world and that expressing anger, pain, and despair in the sanctuary is seen as a betrayal of faith.

Amy Cottrill (2008) is interested in the question of how the psalms of lament provide agency to the "I" in the psalm. She cites Erhard Gerstenberger for a theory of how the psalms may have come to be written. He posits that someone suffering from a

terrible personal threat, illness, or danger, would approach a local ritual specialist who would design a prayer to intercede (p. 33). Cottrill believes this theory is most able to account for,

> the complexity of these texts as traditional, communal prayers that also addressed the personal and private needs of suffering individuals in a way that would powerfully shape the individual's sense of who he or she was in relation to the community and to God. (p. 7)

These prayers have the potential to have a powerful dramatic impact on formation of individuals because they have the authority of speech to God (p. 7). They are often cited in other texts, which suggests they were memorized and became internalized and integral to how individuals viewed situations and responded to them (p.8).

Many of our scholars observe that being able to praise God is a key source of power for the psalmist who is otherwise debilitated, whether by illness or enemies (Berlin, 2002; Brueggeman, 1986; Linafelt, 2008; Polish, 2000; Westermann, 1981). The connection of God's power and reputation to the condition of the psalmist's body, and God's ability to protect that body, give the psalmist power despite the reality that the body in the laments is profoundly, and unavoidably, vulnerable to unmaking through pain (Cottrill, 2008, p. 38).

Like many of our scholars (Adler, 2014; Hirschmann, 2010), Cottrill (2008) is struck by Scarry's description of how the relationship between pain and language brings the sufferer back to pre-verbal state. She outlines how the psalmist illustrates physical suffering where he is reduced to this inarticulateness (p. 44). The word *anachah,* groaning, is used in Ps. 6:7, 31:11, 102:6. In Psalm 38:9-10, we read, "I grow numb and

am utterly crushed. I roar from my heart's churning. O Master, before You is all my desire and my sighs are not hidden from you."

In these verses the psalmist notes their numbness and then descends into groaning and sighing, a "depiction of ultimate, absolute, and agency-robbing pain" (p. 46). Cottrill's concern is agency; articulating pain provides a means of containing and providing boundaries for that suffering. So too, "in the laments, the idiom of distress affords agency and is part of the overall rhetorical intent of the prayer" (p.52). In Ps. 6:6, the psalmist steps up their agency, reminding God that their death will diminish God, "For death holds no mention of You. In Sheol[13] who can acclaim You."

As we have seen, praise of God is a central tenet in the psalms. Effectively, "the psalmist employs the rhetoric of bodily powerlessness in a bid for some degree of relational power. In order for God to maintain God's position, praise is required from the embodied living" (p. 53). Cottrill see this mode of address to God as a potential path to healing, "for wounded individuals and recuperation of selfhood in a situation of dehumanizing distress" (p. 160). Lament is not just a cry of pain and angst, but a first step on a path back towards life.

Frederico Villanueva in his book, *The Uncertainty of a hearing* (2008), revisits the question of the sudden mood change in the psalms of lament. He believes that both Westermann and Brueggeman have overstated the case that a cry to God is always underway from supplication to praise. Villanueva makes the case that in several psalms (21, 31, and 35) there is a return to lament after there has been praise (p. 250). "We not only have the 'certainty of a hearing' in the Psalter; we also have the '*un*certainty of a

[13] The realm in the bible where the dead reside.

hearing'" (p. 251). If lament is always understood to be heading towards praise, then it does not represent the actual experience of suffering.

Calvin Seerveld (2012) is a liturgist and walks us through an exercise of what bringing lament into the church service might look like. He speaks about psalms of lament as "God's wonderful provision for crying in church (p. 140). He echoes Cottrill's sense of the potential for psalms to be deeply familiar and so both woven into our vocabulary and formative. "Having psalms live in your heart," is a way to prepare for terrible, hard times (p. 140). He asks,

> What do you do when tragedy strikes your communion? Gossip about the sinner in jail? Feel sorry for the bereft? Could we not sing about such matters in faith together to the Lord? I wonder, should we not lament the mess on our hands as the psalmists do?" (p. 144).

Taken collectively, the work of these scholars gives us a variety of ways of thinking on the value of lament in the life of a religious community. Both Westermann and Brueggeman believe the psalms of lament remind us that God welcomes our full range of speech, whether anguished or joyful. Given the public role of the psalms, they also serve to counsel us that lament belongs as much in the life of the church as does praise. The psalms also enable us to articulate those moments when we are anguished because our life has become disordered. They may function to help keep our personalities integrated at moments when life overwhelms us, by giving voice to our pain when that seems to be impossible. Cottrill makes the case for psalms being formative, giving us ways to lament when tragedy strikes, and as a source of agency in moments when God seems to be absent. Villanueva argues that we should not assume the faithful are, or are

not, moving to a stance of praise or trust, but should instead let their lament simply stand. Lastly, Seerveld presents a model of how the psalms of lament might be present in a congregational setting. Taken together, their perspectives present a lively discussion of psalms as a literature that has the potential to school a religious community in making a place for lament in the public life of the faith, which in turn can school its members in making space for personal lament during life's darkest moments.

What are the Religious Principles Pertinent to the Project?

Rachel Marks introduced us to the phenomenon of American Jewish patients being reluctant to engage in lament. This occurrence had caught my eye early on in my rabbinate and was informed by my undergraduate study of end-of-life customs in different religious traditions. The curriculum I studied was deeply informed by Ernst Becker's 1973 book, *The Denial of Death* and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' 1969 publication, *On Death and Dying*. Both writers undertook to counter the tendency of mid-century American culture to shy away from any discussion of death, either as an integral part of the human journey, or as a reality for people who believed, or knew, that they were approaching death or were in the process of dying. However, despite the preaching and writing I did within my congregation about the need to respond to the elderly and infirmed when they wanted to talk about death, this profound denial still seemed to dominate. It did not correspond to the somewhat romantic vision I had been schooled in of how dying people wished to be supported as death approached. They were supposed to talk about what their lives had meant and to tie up loose ends, mend fences, and resolve past hurts and losses – essentially to engage in meaning-making. Instead, what I found, especially among people who were very ill and seemed to be approaching death, was a language of chaos. They didn't talk about much, save for how miserable they were. As for their family members, theirs was a classic language of either endeavoring to 'beat' an illness or to reverse the course of decline. What seemed to be missing was a language that reflected what was really happening, either with respect to the raw pain and decline on the part of those who were directly suffering, or the anticipatory loss that the family was

experiencing. What seemed to be called for was a language of loss and pain – a language of lament.

Jewish Writers on Lament

As we have seen, there is no shortage of sacred language of pain and suffering in Judaism. The psalms are filled with personal anguish,

> How long, O Lord, will You forget me always?
>
> How long hide Your face from me? (Ps. 13:1)

The entire Book of Lamentations is an outpouring of anguish and anger,

> Is there any agony like mine,
>
> Which was dealt out to me
>
> When the LORD, afflicted me
>
> On His day of wrath? (NJPS, Lam. 1:12)

This language continues beyond the bible and into the rabbinic tradition, notably in the midrashic collection, *Lamentations Rabbah*. It shows up in the afternoon service on Yom Kippur in the form of an extensive martyrology, essentially, a march through Jewish suffering over the ages.[14] The liturgy opens with this exclamation, "These I will remember, and I will pour out my soul's grief for them. Evil doers have consumed us as the fire consumes a forgotten cake in the oven" (Levy, 1985, p. 406). Some of this language is personal, some collective, but all of it marks an outpouring of anguish and pain as being welcome within sacred spaces, be they worship or study.

[14] As was mentioned in the last section, the martyrology focuses on the massacres of Jewish communities in the Rhine Valley during the First Crusade and those that occurred during the Black Death. The Holocaust is often also included.

American Jewish culture, especially that of Reform Jews, who constitute a major constituency of U.S. Jews, has largely eliminated public outcries of lament. Adler writes, "The anger at God in lament texts and the penitential themes, which were thought to demean human dignity, were removed from Reform [Jewish] liturgy early on" (2014, p. 90). It is not surprising then that there is little modern Jewish scholarship about the place of lament within American Jewish life. As was referenced in the statement of the problem, only two authors have published on it, Rabbis Rachel Adler and Jo Hirschmann, and, interestingly, they are both graduates of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC- JIR).

Adler is a professor of modern Jewish thought and feminist studies at HUC in Los Angeles and she first addressed the question in a 2006 lecture entitled, "For These I Weep: A Theology of Lament." The challenge in defining lament is that it is an essentially inarticulate form.

> Lament is a nonlinear, chaotic genre in which questioning, reproach, self-blame, repeated vignettes of horrors, moments of hopefulness, and moments of bitterness gush out. (2013, p. 170)

> In laments, human beings bewail all that hurts about being human: having bodies that hurt, being mortal, suffering brutality at the hands of others, losing control over our lives, losing kin…feeling abandoned by an indifferent or actively punitive God. (2014, p.76)

A theme that we have met before is that the emotions that undergird the act of lament offend modern sensibilities, especially those of the professional class for whom one of the most valued skills is exercising control over one's life, be it in determining

meaning or in mastering one's world (Brueggeman, 1984). The extreme and disordered pain that gives rise to lament, be it physical or psychological, is perceived to threaten both. On numerous occasions as a chaplain, I have had Jewish family members of someone who was very ill state that they were feeling great emotional pain and then declare that they were not going to talk about it because they did not want to lose control by becoming emotional.

Hirschmann, who also taught at HUC- JIR before moving on to being a chaplain and director of the Clinical Pastoral Education program at Mount Sinai – Beth Israel Hospital in Manhattan, wrote an article entitled, "How Can I Be Your Witness: Lament and Storytelling in Lamentations, Lamentations Rabbah, and Contemporary Pastoral Care." She builds on Adler's definition of lament and examines personal lament in the shadow of communal man-made and natural disasters. Hirschmann (2010) cites this passage from Adler, "In lament, the boundary between the made and unmade universe is thinnest, for it is the cultural form closest to the preverbal howl of pain…its content is dangerously dark and disordered, and its meaning may be nonexistent, rejected, or found wanting" (p. 111). To this Hirschmann (2010) adds,

> Laments describe the experience of loss, mourning, and suffering. The Book of Lamentations…was a vehicle through which those who witnessed and survived the destruction of 587 B.C.E.[15] gave voice to the previously unimaginable scale of their loss. Thus the "howl of pain" is driven by the need to express suffering, without necessarily analyzing or deriving meaning from it. (p. 111)

[15] The disaster being referred to here is the destruction of the Great Temple in Jerusalem, which was a catastrophe of the first order for the Israelites.

Hirschmann's work (2010) is striking in two ways. The first is that she is working in the most disordered of the sacred texts of lamentation, the *Book of Lamentations*. The *Book of Psalms* has many psalms that reflect great anguish and distress but there is a particular order to how these are constructed that, arguably, constrains them.[16] By contrast, "…Lamentations is a graphic description of suffering in which the world is turned upside down and ordinary life is rendered unrecognizable" (p. 111). The degree of anguish in *Lamentations* is very striking, "...God, rather than the Babylonians, is described as the architect of the people's suffering" (p 112). God devours Jacob's pastures without mercy (Lam. 2:1) and God consumes Israel and her citadels (Lam. 2:5). Jerusalem itself becomes a character in the book and addresses God in this profoundly arresting passage,

> Look, God, and see
> to whom you have done this,
> That women should eat their fruit,
> the children that they dandle
> That priests and prophets should be killed
> in God's sanctuary. (Lam. 2:20, translation Hirschmann, p. 112)

However, as she points out, God is silent. "With regard to the lamenters, the fact that Lamentations is preserved in the bible's canon must mean there is some value and power in speaking to God, even when we are not sure if our voices are heard" (p. 114). The degree of distress is absolute, "the lamenters are in the midst of a crisis from which there is no apparent way home to safety and comfort" (p.114). Following the biblical scholar,

[16] They go from complaint to a statement of guilt, to a request for God's favor, to a petition against enemies, and then a sudden turn to hope and trust in God (Adler, 2014, p. 76).

Adele Berlin, Hirschmann writes that "…since providing comfort means mourning alongside mourners, we the listeners/readers fill this empty role" (p. 114).

Further on in her article, Hirschmann (2010) presents fieldwork that she did, interviewing Jewish chaplains who provided counseling in the wake of large-scale disasters. Specifically, at the 9/11 site during the clean-up, with families who lost someone in the collapse of the towers, and among survivors of Hurricane Katrina. Her research on this provided evidence that the rawness of the lament in *Lamentations* was echoed in the lack of narrative coherence in the testimony of survivors. The chaplains found that, "lament is chaotic, disordered, and punctuated with howls of silence" (p. 120). This is a critical finding because, "As painful as it is to hear these cries and protestations, these stories and laments, this is precisely the purpose of sitting with those who have survived unspeakable pain" (p. 123). Hirschmann is making the case for personal lament being central to people's recovery from profound suffering.

As we saw earlier, Brueggeman (1986) leans heavily on the biblical scholar Claus Westermann's work on Psalms (1981). Westermann holds that the formula of psalms, lament to thanksgiving to praise, is really about lament having been heard and responded to, leading to formulaic thanksgiving and unfettered praise. Brueggman sums it up as, "Israel moves from *articulation* of hurt and anger to *submission* of them to God and finally *relinquishment*. Only when there is such relinquishment [verbal articulation and the faithful submission to God] can there be praise and acts of generosity" (p. 58).

Brueggemann (1986) argues that this faith, "that permits and requires this form of prayer…shifts the calculus and *redresses the redistribution of power*…so that the petitionary party is taken seriously" (p. 58). This means that "the petitioner

is…legitimately granted power in the relation," and so "the speech of the petitioner is heard, valued, and transmitted as serious speech" (p. 59). For Brueggeman this is about power relations, one aspect of which involves social justice but a second one is what he terms "covenant interaction." "Where lament is absent, covenant comes into being only as a celebration of joy and well-being" (p. 60). True covenant, in this case a relationship between God and person, can only come into being if the interaction between them reflects the true reality each of them is experiencing. For people this must include language that captures the disorientation that is experienced during life's inevitable tragedies and losses; lament.

Interestingly, Brueggemann (1986) then launches into a rift on object-relations theory, drawing an analogy between Winnicott's good mother/true self parenting and the role of lament in developing the parallel ego strength necessary for "responsible" faith. "Where there is lament, the believer is able to take initiative with God and so develop over against God the ego strength that is necessary for responsible faith...where the capacity to initiate lament is absent, one is left only with praise and doxology" (p.61). The lament psalms are a complaint that "things are not right in the present arrangement…life isn't right. It is now noticed and voiced that life is not as it was promised to be" (p. 62). "A God who must always be praised and never assaulted[17] correlates with a development of 'false self', and an uncritical status quo" (p. 65). However, a God who welcomes lament correlates with the emergence of true self and the development of an authentic covenantal relationship.

[17] Complained against or protested to

Lament as Theological Encounter

Brueggemann (1986) also makes the case that the church itself is invested in covering over the deep disorientation that is a part of life, and that psalms of lament affirm disorientation as being a part of our experience (p. 51,).[18] By disorientation, he means the part of human life that, "consists in anguished seasons of hurt, alienation, suffering and death" (1986, p. 19). Both modern, secular culture, and the church, participate in "the wishful optimism of our culture" (p. 51), what we met earlier as the dynamic in a modern society to manage and control everything. "In our modern experience…it is believed that enough power and knowledge can tame and eliminate the darkness" (p. 53). For Brueggeman, the frank language of a psalm of disorientation, "…may penetrate the deception and say, 'no, this is how it really is.' In such a case, "language leads experience" (p. 53). In other words, when a faith highlights texts that embody lament it can enable the participants in a faith to recognize their own hidden pain and suffering.

We have already met Adler by way of her definitions of lament and have seen the care she has taken to ensure that we understand the raw, non-verbal, sensibility that underpins lament. She is particularly interested in the liturgical and ritual forms that lament has taken within Jewish life. Citing a range of biblical texts that express lament she writes, "Listen and you hear a mighty symphony of the broken and bereft…I have called this a symphony rather than a cacophony because these explosions of poignant, bitter, even accusatory utterances are contained in literary forms" (2014, p. 76). She holds

[18] As we saw earlier, Adler also notes that this has been a part of Reform Jewish culture.

that, “imposing form and structure on lament constrains its wildness and socializes it so that the lament can engage a community as witnesses and as participants” (p. 76).

Adler notes that because ancient Jewish lament was a women’s medium it was primarily an oral form. However, there is a rare, written example consisting of fragments, that was recorded in the *Talmud* (Mo-eid Katan 28b). This form of lament for the dead was a social performance, led by experts, the lament-making women, but with open participation. “In this performance, language, weeping, breast–beating, clapping, stamping, and ripped clothing, all express and respond to a world disordered. All must lament before comforters can begin to console” (p. 82).

This form of lament song disappeared among medieval, European Jews, in the middle ages, but the service for the holiday of Tisha B’Av, which commemorates the destruction of the two great temples that stood in Jerusalem, ritually embraces this sense of disorder. “The liturgical performance of Lamentations is the centerpiece of mimesis of unmaking and remaking” (p.86). The synagogue is deliberately disordered; the ark is shrouded like a corpse; the chairs on the alter are overturned and fasting worshipers sit on the ground. The following Shabbat the community rises to re-contract the covenant as the Ten Commandments are read. “The liturgical performances that frame Lamentations both present and overcome the terrifying possibilities of cosmic disorder and covenantal rupture” (p. 86).

It is notable that Reform Judaism has only recently begun to mark Tisha B’Av and I would venture to say few congregations overturn chairs on the alter or shroud the ark where the Torah scrolls reside. Adler (2014) notes that with the Jewish healing movement’s revelation that many congregants are ill or suffering, “Reform [Judaism] is

accustoming itself to public acknowledgments of brokenness" (p. 90). However, "lament with its tears, illogic, poignancy, and shadow of death is still an explosive topic" (p. 90). She argues that we need laments at funerals and for people who are in so many states of brokenness, as well as for their families. "The history of lament can help us by reminding us how poetry and music open the heart to its pain and give sorrow a voice" (p. 90). "How can the broken reenter the realm of language and speak the unspeakable? The doorway, I would maintain is lament" (p. 75).

What lessons might we draw about lament from our three scholars? Hirschmann's take on lament is that of the chaplain trained in clinical pastoral education – it's all about listening. A major aspect of a chaplain's job is to elicit lament. At times that can be about, essentially, opening up someone's emotional spigot by sitting together, signaling to them that you're really hearing what they're saying and, otherwise, being silent. I referred to the family member who indicates to the chaplain that they want to remain emotionally controlled and not enter the realm of emotions. A skilled chaplain can explore with them if that's what they really mean or if what they're really saying is that they would love to talk about their pain but only with someone who is prepared to listen. The chaplain then takes up this invitation, journeying with them as they move into this land of feeling. Here there is little need for either of Adler's poetry or music.

But, mostly, there is not a chaplain to walk with someone. Instead, the person who is suffering turns to any of family, friends, and community. This is the realm that Adler, Brueggemann, and Hirschmann write about, how lament was once welcomed and given form within Judaism and Christianity. We have seen Adler (2014) make the case for lament as the sufferer's doorway back to life, one that is a, "*petach tikvah*, a doorway of

hope" (p. 75). Brueggeman (1986) holds that lament is a corrective to a kind of idolatry of modern life, where we hold that the work of our hands, and our power and knowledge, can excise the pain that has been a part of humanity's daily experience. Hirschmann (2010) holds up sacred writing on lamentation as an indicator that it is a sacred thing to voice personal grief and sorrow, and even anger and protest. But Adler and Brueggeman have also made the case that the synagogue and church, at least ones that practice a kind of modernist acculturation, have excised lament and we have paid very dearly for this.

What are the Psychological Principles Pertinent to the Project?

It is probably not surprising that the current theological writing about lament radiates out from the work of a leading scholar of psalms, Walter Brueggemann. Poems of lament are elemental to the *Book of Psalms* and biblical scholars estimate they make up a third of the collection (Collins, 2012, p. 25). Brueggemann sees these statements of sorrow and despair, not as "*acts of unfaith and failure*" (1984, p. 51) on the way to an unquestioning devotion and happy outcome, but as a vital expression to God that life can be "savagely marked by disequilibrium, incoherence, and unrelieved asymmetry" (p. 50). If a person believes that their voice to God can only express praise and thanksgiving, even if they are filled with angst and suffering, "the believer is nothing, and can uncritically praise or accept guilt where life with God does not function properly" (1986, p. 61). God then becomes akin to the omnipotent mother who, to quote Winnicott, "substitutes her own gesture which is to be given compliance by the infant" (as cited in Brueggemann, 1986, p. 61). The outcome in both cases is the development of the "false self" and religiously this means that the person does not grow "into a responsible, mature covenant partner who can enter into serious communion and conversation" (p. 61).

But Brueggemann's writing (1986) on object relations and its relationship to lament is brief, barely a page and a half long, and it only touches on the work of a single pediatrician and psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott, and just a couple of aspects of his work, "ego-strength" and the "true self" (p. 60). However, Brueggemann's work is rich and often points towards threads of thought that are waiting to be explored. One can easily substitute "psychological angst" for his term "disorientation" to explain what is taking place in the lament psalms. These psalms invite us to examine them through a

psychodynamic lens to get a sense of what underlies the person's suffering and how they are processing their experience. We shall begin by examining some psalms through the lens of other object-relations theorists and, especially, their focus on the self.

The Self and Lamentation

One of the striking things that we see within the psalms is the expression of both anger and faith towards God. In Psalm 6, our poet is in anguish and exclaims, "Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am wretched...And my life is hard stricken" (Ps. 6:3-4) and he experiences God as punitive, "Lord, do not chastise me in Your wrath" (Ps. 6:2). Yet towards the end of the piece God is praised, "The Lord hears my plea, the lord will take my prayer" (Ps. 6:10). Psalm 13 has a similar dynamic, with a sense of anguish at the beginning, "How long, O Lord; will You forget me always? (Ps. 13:2) and then a sense of faithfulness as the psalm concludes, "my heart exults in Your rescue" (Ps. 13:6). Melanie Klein's (1975b) paranoid-schizoid position and depressive position provide a good description of the mechanisms behind this deep ambivalence towards God and the struggle to return to a secure, reassuring faith as "each of us struggles with the deep terrors of annihilation (paranoid anxiety) and utter abandonment (depressive anxiety)" (Mitchell, 2016, p. 88; Klein, 1975a).

Klein's positions take place within an age span and occur sequentially, but she believed they would endure through a lifetime, setting patterns that emerge from their early relationship with their caregiver (Klein, 1975; Mitchell, 2016; Palombo, 2010). A person who is in deep pain by way of loss or trauma may retreat to a paranoid-schizoid position, a primitive way of functioning. A psalm may enable them to move through this position without fragmenting as it expresses and embraces the paranoid-schizoid position

and then guides them into the more integrated, depressive one. A closer look at these positions will help us understand the psychological mechanisms that underpin this.

The earliest object relationships "involve infants phantasizing[19] danger or attack coming from the outside," which is the paranoid aspect of this position (Palombo, p. 134). This happens when babies experience frustration from their mothers. However, a baby also experiences the primary caretaker as gratifying and loving and this encounter with them as both good and bad leads to using the defense of "splitting," or a framing of these encounters as unrelated. (Klein, 1975b; Palombo). This is the "schizoid" position, which is very apparent in these psalms. For the psalmist, God functions as the primary object and is experienced as both punitive and caring and there is little effort on the part of the psalmist to integrate these feelings. It is precisely the rawness of these feelings, the refusal to clean them up and put them in a socially acceptable form, which gives these psalms their power.

For Klein, the integration of these feelings in a single object, or within a whole person, happens in the "depressive position." Here the child discovers it can harm an object it loves, usually the mother, and feels remorse. In Psalm 42 our author writes, "My tears have been my food day and night; I am ever taunted with, "where is your God?"" (Ps. 42:4). In this verse the author's tears have the power to bring shame and dishonor to the deity. As the child understands that the bad object is the same as the good one, they begin to fear the loss of the loved object. Our psalmist writes, "I say to God, my rock, "Why have You forgotten me, why must I walk in gloom, oppressed by my enemy?""

[19] Phantasies for Klein are the unconscious thoughts that are associated with instincts (Klein, 1923).

(Ps. 42:10). For Klein, this integration of the whole object is integral to emerging as a whole person, even as it is accompanied by sadness and guilt (Klein, 1975b; Palombo, p. 136). By the end of the psalm the poet labors to emerge from this depressive state by restoring their love for the object and gaining a sense of inner security (Mitchell, 2016, p. 95), which is central for becoming a well-developed personality. He writes, "Why so downcast, my soul, why disquieted within me? Have Hope in God; I will yet praise Him, my ever-present help, my God" (Ps 42:11-12). The lament psalms reflect the struggles of people going through crisis and how different phases of the crisis are coped with by drawing upon these various positions.

In his article, "*The costly loss of lament*," Brueggemann turns to D.W. Winnicott as a way of making the case that lament psalms engender personal authenticity in one's relationship with God, amid suffering, and enable the person experiencing disorientation to cultivate healthy ego strength and so evolve into religious maturity. It is a curiously muscular use of Winnicott who is more often drawn upon in religious writing for the supportive sensibility contained within his concepts such as "good-enough mother" and "a holding environment." But again, Brueggemann is on to something.

For Winnicott (1971) the path to healthy emotional development for an infant begins, quite literally, with the mother holding the child (p. 111), hence the idea of a holding environment, which is a total, supportive setting. The good-enough mother is the primary caretaker who "makes active adaptation to the infant's needs" (p. 10). The mother integrates the feelings and emotions that the child feels but cannot yet successfully manage (Haupt, 2017, p. 72). At first, this adaptation is total but as the child grows the mother lets her try things on her own and thus experience frustration. It is the

mother's modulation of this, allowing only small frustrations at first, but letting the baby experience more of this over time, that leads to an autonomous self. If the good-enough mother largely reinforces the infant's early shaping of the world a "true self" will emerge, which is "a capacity to have a central, isolated core, and a capacity for creative interaction between self and others (Tuber, 2008, p. 50). If the infant learns that it must bend to the mother's emotional needs, it will learn to primarily please her and instead develop a "false self." (Winnicott, 1965).

A good-enough mother invites the whole infant into the holding environment, not just the part of the child that is sweet and pleasing. Brueggemann emphasizes that the *Book of Psalms* is filled with songs of lament, protest, and complaint (1984, p. 52). This is in direct contrast to today's church which has "by and large, continued to sing songs of orientation in a world increasingly experienced as disoriented" (p. 51). Brueggemann sees psalms of disorientation as incorporating a key aspect of the true self while a diet of only "happy songs" is akin to bringing one's false self before God. He also notes that psalms of disorientation have a paradoxical function. These psalms "tend to hyperbole, vivid imagery, and statements that offend "proper and civil religious sensitivities"" (p. 53). Drawing upon the thought of theologian Paul Ricoeur, Brueggemann contends that "they are speech "at the limit," speaking about experience at the limit." But even as this speech is "liberated and expansive" it is expressed in "consistent and rigorous forms" (p. 54). Here the psalms are functioning in a similar way to the good-enough mother who manages or "holds" their infant's emotions. Both Greenspan (2005) and van der Kolk (2014) contend that language can be helpful and problematic for coping with loss and

trauma. The challenge for religious communities is to engage ritual, liturgy, and sacred texts, in a way that is cognizant of this dynamic.

Transitional Space Through the Arts and Liturgy

Winnicott (1971) originates the concept of 'transitional objects' which he defines as "the intermediate area of experience between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been introjected." (p. 2). The classic example would be a soft item such as a blanket or stuffed animal that is both a reality and a palliate on which a child can play out their world of positive and negative feelings. But Winnicott also frames it in ways that resonate in adult life, defining a transitional space as,

> An intermediate area of *experiencing* to which inner reality and external life both contribute a resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated. (p. 2)

As we grow up,

> This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work. (p. 14)

Winnicott's language about adult transitional space has a positive feel to it, almost akin to a celebration of high culture. But art and religion are also about giving voice to the anguish of one's soul and imagination figures into this realm as well. The psalms of lament can be highly inventive, full of drama and rich imagery. Psalm 42 opens with a

metaphor from nature, “As a deer yearns for streams of water, so I yearn for you, O God” (Ps. 42:2). It then looks back to when the author celebrated holidays at the now destroyed Great Temple in Jerusalem, “when I would step in the procession…with the sound of glad song of the celebrant throng” (42:5). Sadness then overcomes the poet, “my being is bent for my plight” (42:7) and he invokes imagery from nature to convey how overwhelmed he is, “Deep unto deep calls out at the sound of Your channels. All Your breakers and waves have surged over me” (42: 8). Our author ends with what is perhaps a song of hope or, arguably, even a psychological splitting, “How bent, my being, how you moan for me! Hope in God, for yet will I acclaim Him, His rescuing presence and my God” (42:12). This song of despair is rich in the play of language and imagination, working between the poles of reality (the destruction of the Temple) and the psalmist’s subjective inner life, with the poem itself working in the realm of transitional space.

Kalsched (2013) references Winnicott’s transitional space, and following John Keats, speaks of an idea,

> that we all carry in our inner most selves a sacred core of potential wholeness or liveness or creativity and that this radiant center wants to unfold and realize itself through the particularities of our unique individual lives. (p. 78)

Keats spoke of “intelligences” that are slowly “schooled” by reality and become human souls. The place of interchange between this imaginative self and reality is akin to Winnicott’s transitional space. In his work, Kalsched has found that trauma interrupts this unfolding of the personality by foreclosing the transitional space through which the vital spark is actualized. In suffering trauma “we see in dreams that the child has gone into exile – we would say into the unconscious” (p. 78).

Kalsched (2013) follows C.J. Jung in seeing dreams as the central entree point to transitional space. Jung found that in his dreams he had "met a child that he recognized as an image of his own soul" (p. 54) and that this archetype of a "divine child" is a symbol for that paradoxical unity or wholeness that is found in each person, "between the subject and the inaccessible depths of the unconscious" **(**Jung, 1976, p. 251).

Lastly, I would like to look at Winnicott's concept of "the capacity to be alone," which is somewhat counter intuitive. Essentially, if as an infant one has a strong sense of ego support from one's mother, then a person will become able to be alone "without frequent reference to the mother or mother symbol" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 32). The significance of this is that Winnicott believed that "the individual who has developed the capacity to be alone is constantly able to rediscover the personal impulse" (p. 33), which is akin to one's own sense of experience (Tuber, p. 77). For Winnicott, there is an essential need to not communicate because silence enables the maintenance of the alone state which allows new, deeply felt sensations to be experienced in a reciprocal, expanding manner. It is an idea that seems tailor-made for understanding religious experience. We will also see echoes of this in van der Kolk (2014), not in a religious sense, but in the power of internal reflection, by way of writing to oneself.

Earlier we saw Brueggemann capture the paradox of using consistent and rigorous literary forms to express the most passionate and dramatic of feelings. The language of the psalmists manifests the paradox that inhabits "the capacity to be alone." Our poets are very often feeling alone and adrift. In Psalm 13:1 the author declares, "How long will you hide your face from me?" and in Psalm 41:9 we hear, "My ally in whom I trusted…has been utterly false to me." Yet psalms also work as an intimate spiritual discipline where

God is felt to be near, “Yet you drew me from the womb; made me secure at my mother’s breast” (Ps. 22:9). Notably, public Abrahamic worship is built upon the capacity to be alone with God even as the community functions as an object akin to the good-enough mother.

Language and Trauma

Early object relations theory was developed by clinicians like Klein and Margret Mahler who worked directly with children and observed that interpersonal relationship was central to the child’s development. However, their developmental theories cleaved to Freudian drive theory (Palombo, p. 246). Daniel Stern’s research was also based on directly observing infants in laboratory settings, but he was deeply schooled in the first wave of object relations theorists, including not only Klein and Mahler, but Winnicott, Kohut, and Sullivan. Stern feels no obligation to make his work conform to classic Freudian drive theory and instead begins from the perspective that we are born with a sense of self. He describes his work, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant (*1985) as, “a working hypothesis about infants’ subjective experience of their own social life (p. 4). Stern holds that there are four different senses of the self, “each one defining a different domain of self-experience and social relatedness” (p. 11). Domains emerge during a specific period of a child’s life but remain fully functional throughout the life span (Stern, 1985). The two that I believe are most germane to lament are the subjective self and verbal self. What has drawn me to Stern is that he has framed these two domains in terms of communication, and lament is first and foremost about communication.

Stern (1985) argues that between the seventh and ninth month of life babies learn that they can share their “inner subjective experiences” with someone else who has their

own inner subjective experience (p. 124). Babies are, of course, pre-verbal at this age so the domain of the subjective self is marked by pre-verbal interactions. Stern terms this sharing of states between the baby and their primary caretakers "intersubjective relatedness" (p. 138). "Interaffectivity is mainly what is meant when clinicians speak of parental "mirroring" and "empathic responsiveness"" (p. 138). As we saw in Hirschmann's record of the chaplain's observations of the 9/11 family members and first responders, their initial interpersonal responses are essentially pre-verbal. We see this, too, in the most effective responses of people who come to comfort the mourners, especially if the loss is unexpected or tragic. Skilled comforters use mirroring, touch, and empathetic listening, with no goal in mind except communicating that they are accurately taking in the grief or shock that is being conveyed, often by way of tears, sobs, and incoherent speech. For Stern, this intersubjective relatedness is key to inclusion "in the human group" and our psychic state is,

> At one end…[a] sense of cosmic psychic isolation, alienation, and aloneness (the last person left on earth), and at the other end is the feeling of total psychic transparency, in which no single corner of potentially shareable experience can be kept private. (p. 136)

The ideal is to have this encounter be somewhere in the middle, for there to be an integration of one's self. This is different from Winnicott's concept of transitional space but still invokes a sense that lamentation is key to opening a place of encounter that enables the person to navigate the psychic states they inhabit.

Non-verbal attunement is very present in the psalms of lament and is felt either through metaphor or action. In Psalm 31 we read, "Into your hand I commend my

spirit…You saw my affliction" (Ps. 31:6&8). Psalm 42 is also rich in this language, "As a deer yearns for streams of water, so I yearn for You…My whole being thirsts for God" (Ps. 42:2-3). There is a sense here that God and the psalmist are communicating even before their words have formed. In Psalm 22:9 the pre-verbal relationship is explicit, "For You drew me out from the womb, made me safe at my mother's beasts."

Ritualized lament, whether by way of the lost historic traditions of professional wailers or the more currently present rituals of music, poetry, and scripture, correspond to the pre-verbal attunement that supports the subjective sense of self. Before the person who has experienced the kind of loss or trauma that brings them back to a pre-verbal state can move on to the next stage, what Stern calls the verbal sense of self, they need to be embraced by these forms of attunement.

What is central for us in Stern's (1985) verbal sense of self is that the infant "must have two versions of the same reality available: the representation of the original act…and their own actual execution of the act" (p. 164). They must also have "some representation of self as an objective entity that can be seen from the outside as well as felt subjectively from the inside." This is more easily said than done for the person who has suffered a profound sense of disorientation. They may well feel a profound break between who they are now and what they were before the event that has occurred. The return for them of a verbal sensibility may be akin to the infant's original navigating of these waters and their construction of a sense of self from which language emerges. Stern will make the case that the real importance of this is for creating the ability "to narrate one's own life story" (p. 174). Getting a handle on the language of agency and oneself as objective entity is the essential prelude to this.

One can feel this relationship in the psalms between the poet's representation of the act and their execution or experience of it. Psalm 88 has particularly good examples of this, perhaps because it is the most anguished of all the psalms and the author's sense of disorientation is particularly striking. In verses 4-6 we read,

For I am sated with evils…

I was counted among those who go down to the Pit;

I became like a man without strength,

among the dead cast away…

whom You no more recall,

and they are cut off by Your hand.

So too in Psalm 142:5,

Look at the right and see –

There is no one who knows me.

Escape is gone for me,

no one inquires for me

In both, the sad, subjective self, corresponds to a sad, objective reality.

Stern (1985) notes that the child's newly gained language capacity does not guarantee that what is communicated is identical to the feeling of the subjective experience. "The piece [of experience] that language takes hold of is transformed by the process of language-making and becomes an experience separate from the original global experience" (p. 175). The child gains entree to a broader world "but at the risk of losing the force and wholeness of the original experience" (p. 177). It is precisely this shortfall

that poetry can make up for and certain works of art "are designed to evoke experiences defying verbal categorization" such as "the symbolist poets" (p. 176).

Stanley Greenspan's (2005) work also emerged from directly observing children. He was a child psychologist, centered on drive-based theory, but came to believe that emotions, not cognitive stimulation are the central architects of the mind (p. 340). For Greenspan, our capacity for language is central to the regulation of our emotions and evolving "an integrated image, what is sometimes called "a personal narrative"…[but] it is merely the surface representation of deep behavioral, emotional, and symbolic patterns" (p. 347). He borrowed Piaget's term, "structures" and held that there are 17 of these and that they form a developmental scheme that spans a lifetime (Greenspan, 2004).

Greenspan (2005) speaks very positively about the role of language in the development of our personalities. Language enables us to employ "shared meanings…to elaborate wishes and feelings and to categorize meanings and solve problems" but "affective interactions actually lead the way" in driving our development (p. 340). Emotions begin as actions, and as the child develops, they become transformed into signals that are used for communication, negotiation, and regulation (p. 354). But primitive responses, like fight or flight reactions, or massive avoidance, often remain with us. Defense patterns of passivity, aggression, and compulsive rituals also reflect primitive defenses. "At representational levels, we can observe affects being used as internal signals to mobilize defenses that alter internal experience" (p. 355). Language can help with regulation, but it also can be employed as a defense. Without addressing the emotions that are central to a person, language can be a hindrance rather than an aid,

> Reconstructive work with older children and adults must deal with both the reality of the early object relationship and the rage, humiliation, fear, and conflict, and the primitive strategies employed at the time and subsequently repeated. (p. 349)

He does not address what the role of lamentation might be in this process, but it begs the question of whether it can be a part of a process of attending to structures that may re-emerge in the shadow of a loss or trauma. We might ask if the psalms of lamentation, with their highly emotive opening verses, provide an opportunity to delve into these structures and in doing so contain a tendency to fragmentation.

Bessel van der Kolk (2014) specializes in trauma therapy and his research has focused on neurological elements of trauma and exploring forms of treatment that are based on these findings. He holds that we have two selves, one that keeps track of the self across time and another that registers the self in the present moment (p. 238). The self across time is about having a coherent story, which is rooted in language. The other self, which registers moment to moment self-awareness, is based on physical sensations. If we feel safe and not rushed "we can find words to communicate that experience as well."

Van der Kolk (2014) argues that these two ways of knowing are localized in different parts of the brain that are largely disconnected from each other. Only the system devoted to self-awareness (the self across time) which is based in the medial prefrontal cortex, can change the emotional brain. However, this system is focused on stories for public consumption which often conform more to society or interpersonal expectations than to what the self has experienced. The other system registers a different truth: how we experience the situation deep inside. "It is this second system that needs to be accessed,

befriended, and reconciled" (p. 238). The challenge is to have public story and inner experience meet and the body is the bridge to this.

The stories people tell of their trauma are valuable because they lessen the isolation of trauma and help others (e.g., a therapist) provide resources. "But stories also obscure a more important issue, namely, that trauma radically changes people: that in fact they no longer are "themselves"" (p. 239). Language is useful in sharing things but not to communicate our inner feelings. We can get past the "slipperiness of words" by way of observing ourselves through our sensations, tone of voice, and body tensions. "When you activate your gut feelings and listen to your heartbreak – when you follow the interoceptive pathways to your innermost recesses –things begin to change" (p. 240).

Van der Kolk (2014) has found that writing to oneself is an effective means of accessing one's inner world of feelings because you don't have to worry about other people's judgment. This approach "seems to channel whatever bubbles up from inside." People often change their tone of voice and speaking style. "The capacity of art, music, and dance to circumvent the speechlessness that comes with terror may be one reason they are used as trauma treatments in cultures around the world," but he cautions these results have not been replicated in studies (p. 245). It does, however, raise the question of whether lamentation, in the sense of full out wailing, is a way that people have historically accessed this process.

Language itself has challenges. Specifically, trauma can cause the language area of the brain to shut down and trauma victims can become literally speechless (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 246). Victims can also be so overwhelmed that they can barely speak, or so panicked they can't clearly articulate what happened and, "their testimony is often

dismissed as being too chaotic, confused, and fragmented to be credible." They also may speak in ways that prevent themselves from self-triggering and obscure what they are really feeling. Van der Kolk and associates have found success in an approach they call "pendulate." He describes this as "letting the person dip one toe in the water and then take it out." The goal is to have them discover "islands of safety" within the body and,

> they begin to "get" that they can create body sensations to counterbalance feeling out of control. This sets the stage for trauma resolution: pendulating between states of exploration and safety, between language and body, between remembering the past and feeling alive in the present. (p. 247)

Despite these challenges, language remains a central means of addressing loss and trauma. Stern (1985) speaks of a fifth sense of self which is narrative. He writes, "The advent of language ultimately brings about the ability to narrate one's own life story with all the potential that holds for changing how one views oneself" (p. 174). Stern (2000) posits that stories are elemental to being human and that the child creates their identity by narrating an autobiographical story (p. xxiv). Central to my interest in lament is that this drive to narrative is also central in both pastoral and theological writing about loss and trauma. One can feel this sense of striving towards narrative in the lament psalms and their sudden turn to an ending that is drenched in hope and affirmation. We see this in Psalm 6, a psalm we have already met, where the author is enormously vexed, "I am weary in my sighing, I make my bed swim every night" (Ps. 6:7) but ends with a statement about how God is going to deliver him, "The Lord hears my plea…Let all my enemies be shamed and hard stricken" (Ps. 6:10&11).

In Brueggemann's categorization of the psalms we can sense this human drive towards narrative. His third category is reorientation, which essentially means a reformulated and positive narrative. Stern (1985) writes,

> The domain of verbal relatedness might, in fact, be best subdivided into a sense of a categorical self that objectifies and labels, and of a narrated self that weaves into a story element from other sense of the self (agency, intentions, causes, goals, and so on). (p. 174)

The recovery of narrative is a wonderful thing, but it is often hard fought for and only takes place after a long journey of non-linear and often inarticulate exploration that is akin to Stern's categorical self that objectifies and labels. I would argue that the psalms are a model for enabling people who are suffering to re-inhabit their verbal self when it has been lost. Narrative is wonderful but when we lose sight of lament and its place in the life of the verbal self, we veer off the path that many people need to be on if they are to develop a new narrative.

Conclusion

Over time I have been more and more drawn to the psalms and to the role of lament. It seems the psalms represent a critical aspect of how we process grief, trauma and loss. Klein, Stern, and Winnicott all provide an understanding into why that is. Klein's positions help us understand why the rawness of psalms is so effective. Stern shows how psalms tie into both our non-verbal and verbal selves and why we need to lean into these before moving on to our narrative self. Winnicott helps us understand the importance of creating transitional space and why the capacity to be alone is so central to lament and is, paradoxically, both solitary and communal in nature. Lastly, Greenspan

and van der Kolk help us understand how language can help us process loss and trauma, but also the ways it limits us. Lamentation may be an effective way of navigating this paradox and better enabling us to cope with grief and loss.

Methodology

Qualitative

The goal of this study was to explore whether there was a pastoral and psychological role for lament within the non-Orthodox American Jewish community, and, if so, what form(s) it might have taken. There has been a limited discussion of the theological role of lament within this community (Adler, 2014) and only one study that explored ways that lament was present in people's lives (Hirschmann, 2010). Participants in this study were all Reform rabbis who had studied the concept of lament in rabbinical school and whose work involved pastoral care.

Dalye Friedman (2001) provides this definition of pastoral care,

> In pastoral care, a helper meets an individual who is in a challenging situation; the person may not feel that he or she has a problem, yet help is needed to respond to the situation. The modality of the help offered in pastoral care is relationship. Pastoral care rests on the assumption that being in caring connection can transform suffering because relationship shatters isolation and provides an opportunity for reflecting on one's experience (p. xii).

My goal was to explore the ways lament was or was not present in their work, both with respect to its place in the lives of the people they served, and in how they conducted their care. Where applicable, the focus of the study was on their pastoral, liturgical, and lifecycle work. This was a qualitative study. Qualitative research is particularly suited to the initial research on a subject because it seeks to understand lived human experience, as nearly as possible to how the participants feel or live it (Sensing,

2011; Ely, 1991). Before we can know if there is a role for lament within the Jewish community, we need to understand how lament is, or is not, experienced.

Phenomenology

As we have seen, lament has been very present in Jewish tradition. It can be seen in its sacred literature (the *Book of Psalms,* the *Book of Lamentations,* and *Lamentations Rabbah*), in its liturgy (the martyrology on Yom Kippur and the service for Tisha B'Av). It has also been present in mourning rituals (Adler 2014). However, especially in Reform Judaism, these sources of lament have been either eliminated or diminished. Brueggeman has also noted a similar phenomenon occurring within the church (1986). However, there has been a renewal of interest within the non-Orthodox Jewish community in lamentation and the constructive role it might play. This has emerged from several sources: the growth of CPE training among Jewish clergy (Friedman, 2001), the now thirty-year-old Jewish Healing Movement (Adler), and a body of writing within the Christian world spurred by Brueggeman's writing[20]. There has also been a course on the *Book of Lamentations* and *Lamentations Rabbah* at the New York campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion[21](HUC-JIR).

The phenomenon I sought to explore was the role of lament in the professional lives of rabbis who had taken the course on lamentation at HUC-JIR and were working in a professional capacity with people who had suffered major, and even traumatic, losses. Although Jewish tradition and the literature cited here would hold that there is a substantial role for lament in people's lives, it is an open question about whether this is

[20] Brueggeman is also cited in the work of both Adler and Hirschmann.
[21] HUC-JIR is a Reform Jewish seminary

the case for many American Jews. If it is, how is it present in the lives of non-Orthodox Jews? Also, how did these Jewish professionals regard their role with respect to lament and how might this have changed during their rabbinate? Lastly, how did they experience working with people for whom lament was present, or for that matter, when it would seem to have been called for, yet was absent? As with any qualitative study, the phenomenon may have had different contours from the ones implied in these questions.

Interviewees

I interviewed rabbis who took the course on Lamentation at HUC-JIR, had graduated, and had a counseling component to their work, which may have been formal (e.g., a scheduled counseling session) or informal in nature (e.g., working with families at lifecycle events such as funerals). Six interviews were conducted, with three men and three women, in keeping with the scale of the demonstration project. The findings of this study reflect only the phenomenological perspective of these six participants.

Procedure

The sole intervention in this research project was a set of in-depth interviews with Reform rabbis. They were conducted one on one, by video, over Zoom.us[22]. The interviews were recorded digitally, and by video, and then transcribed using Rev.com, and were an hour to an hour and a half in length. The interviews were conducted according to current research standards. Qualitative interviews strive to be open-ended with the researcher following the lead of the person being interviewed (Ely, 1991; Leavy,

[22]Zoom.us was the predominant video conferencing system used in the United States in 2020. During the COVID-19 crisis, when much of the country had highly restricted in-person encounters and most white-collar work and education was conducted from home, people spent a huge amount of time meeting over Zoom.

2017; Sensing, 2011). Preparation and flexibility were guiding principles and the ideal was to "allow the interviewee to take you on a journey" (Sensing, p. 106), to have them be your co-inquirer (p. 59). I prepared a set of possible questions that enabled me to delve into the aspects of lament that the interviewee touched on (Barbo, 1992). This thorough preparation enabled me to have a series of prompts on themes that were of interest to me. They were used selectively and in a way that built on how the interviewee understood lament to be operative (or not) within their work (cf. Appendix B).

Data Analysis

The goal of this project was to gain insight into how a specific set of Jewish professionals understood lament to function in their professional lives and those of the people they counseled. With respect to data analysis, I also strived to conduct the interviews according to current research standards. The primary goal of this was to better understand the phenomenon. Ely (1991) contends this means letting go and trusting the process (p. 32),

> …letting go, in the best sense, means that a qualitative researcher is more able intensely to 'be with' what is happening and to respond to that instead of worrying about what should or could be happening. (p. 35)

This requires that one let themselves enter, "…continuous circles within circles of action, reflection, feeling, and meaning-making" (p. 7).

After each interview was transcribed, the data was coded, categories created, and the results analyzed. These were revised and refined as the research progressed, as was how the subsequent interviews were conducted. Ely (1991), Leavy (2017), and Sensing

(2011), all provide detailed approaches to analyzing the data, but at their heart lies an understanding that the researcher continually revises their work and insights.

With respect to whether one begins with coding or categories, recalls the Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock's description of a rider heading, "madly off in all directions." One is both coding and generating categories at the same time, echoing Ely's (1991) idea of continuous circles within circles of action. Leavy (2017) breaks down the process of analyzing one's data into these five categories (p. 151),

1. Data preparation and organization
2. Initial immersion
3. Coding
4. Categorizing and theming
5. Interpretation

The data preparation begins two ways, by transcribing the interview but also by making notes during the interview, which serves as a log for recording the non-verbal elements of the interview (e.g., body language and facial expression). It is also essential to make notes immediately after the interview to record the researcher's thoughts and impressions of the session as well as adding further observations (Ely, 1991; Sensing, 2011).

All three authors put an emphasis on reviewing one's data at regular intervals. The data for this research project was reviewed as soon as the transcript was finished, following the interview. Ely (1991) and Leavy (2011) both contend that as the researcher reads and rereads the data, in a recursive manner, it is important to record whatever ideas

and impressions come to mind. Sensing (2017) frames this as pondering what is the underlying meaning of the data. The line between coding and categorizing is a fine one and might better be described as a kind of dance where categories develop from the codes that the researcher identifies, which when applied to the material help organize it, which further refines and develops the categories (Ely's circles within circles).

Coding "is the process of assigning a word or phrase to segments of data" (Leavy, 2011, p. 151). Sensing (2017) cautions the researcher to "watch for the meanings of the words in a specific context" (p. 203). As categories and themes begin to emerge (see below) there is a need to revisit and refine one's coding system, so any system one uses needs to allow for the material to be revised.

Categorization "is the process of grouping similar or seemingly related codes together" (Leavy, 2011, p. 152). Sensing (2017) notes that an outsider should be able to read a category and gain some sense of its nature and that everything in the category should be conceptually congruent and it should reflect the same level abstraction (p. 198). Categories should reflect the purpose of the research, be mutually exclusive, be congruent with the data, and conceptually congruent. Themes emerge out of categories and should reflect the larger meaning that underlies a category or related categories.

Interpretation is the most multi-faceted of these five categories and the one where the terminology used by our authors begins to diverge. At its heart, good interpretation depends on effective triangulation and trustworthiness. Triangulation refers to data that appears repeatedly within the investigation (Ely, 1991; Leavy, 2011; and Sensing, 2017). In this research, that meant that some aspect of one Jewish professional's perspective on

lament appeared in that of another. Triangulation is the fundamental building block of qualitative research. The more codes and, perhaps, even categories and themes that line up between research subjects, the more trustworthy the research becomes. Of course, it may not line up in a way that supports the suppositions of the researcher, indeed, it might even be a negative case (e.g., perhaps the congregational rabbis in the research found that congregants did not find any use for lament as they processed loss, trauma, or grief). Both Ely and Sensing emphasize this. Ely counsels us to keep in mind that triangulation can have three outcomes, convergence, inconsistency, and contradiction (p. 98). Sensing writes about themes/patterns (overlaps), slippage (disagreements), and silences (realities not represented) (p. 197). Also, research results are stronger if an outside reader is brought in to review the codes and what triangulation they are or are not able to identify (Ely, Leavy, and Sensing). This was a pilot study and my advisor acted as an outside reader to help check my initial materials.

Triangulation is a subset of trustworthiness. Essentially, trustworthiness is about whether a reader of the research study feels that it has been designed well, conducted creditably, and presented in a way that engenders confidence in the results. Transparency and competency lie at the heart of trustworthiness. Of our authors, Sensing (2017) is most systematic in his description of trustworthiness. He notes that besides the use of triangulation, a strong piece of research must demonstrate dependability. This means that the findings need to be consistent with the data that is used (p. 219). The better the researcher provides a detailed analysis, including the data that underlies this, the better the reader can follow what has led to the study's conclusions. Sensing calls this a 'thick' description (p. 272), while Leavy refers to it as 'vividness' (p. 154).

Conclusion

This methodology strived to follow a classic approach to qualitative research. The interview was designed to follow the lead of the person being interviewed. Secondly, the categorization and evaluation of the data was designed to reflect the phenomena revealed by way of the interviewee's understanding and description of their work. Finally, the interpretation of the data was intended to embody effective triangulation and trustworthiness.

The Results

Categories

In this chapter I will be presenting results from my interviews. These are comprised of the categories that emerged out of the interviews with the study subjects and were developed by coding the transcripts of the interviews and grouping the related codes. Categories provide a granular sense of the experiences described by the study subjects. In turn, the categories are the building blocks for the themes that will be described and explored in the next section of this study, the Discussion.

Our Subjects

There were six study subjects who were interviewed for this study. They were all ordained rabbis who, as rabbinical students, had taken Rabbi Bernard Mehlman's course at HUC-JIR, NY, on *Lamentations* and *Lamentations Rabbah* [Table continued on the next page].

Subject[23]	Age, Gender	Family Status	Position	Description of Workplace	Time in Field
Robert	Late 30's. Male	Married, with young children	Congregational rabbi, solo position	Synagogue of 300 units, located in a resort area	Over 8 years
Jessica	Late 30's. Female	Married, with no children	Congregational rabbi, outreach position in a multi-rabbi synagogue	Synagogue of over 1,000 units, located in a major metro area	Over 8 years
Stephanie	Late 30's. Female	Unknown	Chaplain	400 bed community hospital, located in a diverse community	Recent graduate, second career
Wendy	Early 50's. Female	Widowed, with an adult child	Congregational rabbi, solo position	Synagogue of under 100 units, located in a resort/university area	Over 8 years, second career, psychologist
Jacob	Late 30's. Male	Married, with young children	Congregational associate rabbi, in a multi-rabbi synagogue	Synagogue of 600 units, located in a major metro area	Over 8 years
Jonathan	Late 30's. Male	Married	Congregational rabbi, solo position	Synagogue of 200+ units, located in a resort community	Over 8 years

The interviews were conducted over Zoom.us and were an hour to an hour and a half in length and took place from June 24, 2020 to October 14, 2020.

The *Book of Lamentations*

Historical Elements and the *Book of Lamentations*

For our "study subjects" the *Book of Lamentations* and the event it encompasses, the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem, and the siege and devastation of

[23] All names are aliases.

Jerusalem in 586 BCE, was vivid and resonant. For some this resonance had a historical flavor. Robert referenced "the loss of the Temple itself, the amazing period of creativity that emerged out of that loss." Stephanie spoke about "observing so much mourning" on Tisha B'Av at the Kotel (the Western Wall). Jacob taught from *Eichah (*the *Book of Lamentations)* and gleaned "something from looking at the darker moments of our history." This language of loss, mourning, and gleaning captured a sense of the book and its events having been very present for these rabbi subjects.

The emotion of the book and its events was also resonant for them. Wendy framed it as being akin to a movie,

> the idea of seeing that movie Rashomon…that sees something from different perspectives…there's something about paying attention to the shift in who's speaking…when I read *Lamentations*, it makes it seem very alive and real to me.

Stephanie was struck by how the text reflected the disordered and fragmented nature of grief, "it's not coherent because grief is not coherent, it's disordered and all over the place and fragmented." Jessica was drawn to the book's focus on grief, "well, I like grief…I am grieving." Jonathan noted *Lamentations'* contrast between "the glorious city of Jerusalem and the bitter and utter [sic] destroyed Jerusalem and the streets...being filled with widows and orphans and mothers eating their children." The words they used were thick with feeling and event; real, disordered, grieving, and destroyed.

Our study subjects referenced different aspects of the *Book of Lamentations*. Three of them, Stephanie, Wendy, and Jacob, noted that the book featured different speakers and perspectives. Grief, despair, lamentation, and God's anger and absence were

experienced in a variety of ways. This was illustrative of the fact that "different people experience things in different ways" and affirmed it was "okay in terms of how we experience something horrible" (Stephanie).

The *Book of Lamentations*: Theodicy

Much of the power of the *Book of Lamentations* grows out of it describing the suffering taking place in Jerusalem and addressing larger questions of meaning, including theodicy. Theodicy deals with questions of God and justice, for example, if there is a single, good and all-powerful God, why is there evil? Stephanie and Jacob both explored this issue in the *Book of Lamentations* and the midrash collection *Lamentations Rabbah.* Jacob contended that,

> It's more of a book of how do you make meaning from crisis? The midrash extends that idea…what was the nature of theodicy in this world. And what do the rabbi subjects believe about the nature of good and evil? Living in a crisis right now I feel like it gives us perspective on a part of our history that's really dark. I'd much rather be able to explain that you've gone through all the suffering and here's what we learned.

Jacob found a hopeful element in the *Book of Lamentation* because of its possibility for making meaning. Stephanie also saw an element of hope in the ways Jewish tradition wrestled with the question of theodicy across a vast expanse of time. "They were active then and…they are active now. So that was really interesting. This is a different historical context, but these questions remain."

Lamentations 5:21

Our study subjects did not cite many verses from *Lamentations*. The only passage that was directly referenced was the second to last verse of the book, "Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself, And let us come back; Renew our days as of old!" (5:21). Stephanie, Wendy, and Jonathan employed it to make three different points. Stephanie cited it as a source of hope but wondered, "What am I saying, to go back to an earlier time? Like returning to my most authentic self? I return to God?" Wendy and Jonathan picked up on the tradition that after the final and very dark verse of *Lamentations*, "For truly, You have rejected us, bitterly raged against us" (5:22), the reader was to repeat verse 21 again, which gives a hopeful rather than despairing finish to the book. Wendy cited the modern scholarship that argued this was tacked on, "this sort of happy ending," and wondered if it diminished the power of lament for what can never come back. Jonathan noted, "return us to God so we can be returned" as an example of the Jewish tradition of always ending a prophetic text with a *nechemtah*, a word of comfort. The three rabbi subjects agreed that this verse was central to understanding *Lamentations* and lament, but each had their own interpretation of it.

God, Language and Spiritual Dimensions

God Language

This paper's initial focus on the psalms of lament brings God to the center of its inquiry. As we will see, except for Stephanie, our rabbi subjects rarely spoke explicitly about God. Robert mentioned God once, Jessica twice, Wendy not at all, Jacob four times (always in response to b'nai mitzvah students asking after God), and Jonathan three times. Only Stephanie touched on lament and a personal relationship with God. The

absence of strong God language among the congregational study subjects was a marked contrast with the God language of the psalms.

However, one needs to be careful in interpreting what this means, and a quotation of Robert's illustrates this. Here he talked about having or not having a language of lament,

> This is where the Jewish community falls down in good language. I grew up in the South and I grew up around a lot of Southern Baptists and evangelical Christians. And I'm envious of the language and the comfort that they have with talking about faith and talking about their connection.

His use of the phrase, "faith…and their connection," is a good example of how Reform rabbis can employ language that does not name God but leaves room for God.

God and Sacred Text

For many of our study subjects God is referred to in the context of employing a sacred text. Jonathan spoke about his use of Psalm 130, in which the psalmist cries out to God and waits for God. God is very present as comforter in the central text that Jacob cited, *Lamenations Rabbah* 1:26. He also quoted a Talmudic passage, *Megilah* 29a in which the *Shekhinah* (God's feminine presence) goes into exile with the Jewish people. Both Jessica and Stephanie referred to a midrash in which God weeps with the suffering (*LamR* Proem 24). These are examples of how spiritual encounters in Judaism are often found in the interaction with sacred text, whether as teacher or student.

God and Presence

As was mentioned, unlike with the other study participants, God was very present in Stephanie's interview. "I think there's a lot of comfort for me in feeling that God is present with us and our peers." She spoke about Psalm 23 as a model of how "God is present in the world, God is near to us and loves us," and about the idea of God being present "in joyous times and also in …difficult times…[as] something that I…grew into." Stephanie also noted that

> there's tremendous space for someone to say I'm culturally Jewish but not practicing and I believe that when we die, we go into the ground and that's…a very personal and present God and everything in between.

The Spiritual

Three of our study subjects, Jessica, Robert, and Jonathan, also employed the term spiritual, which is a good example of speaking in terms that leave room for God. Jessica spoke of people seeking "spiritual substance," Robert, "a spiritual walk and quest," and Jonathan about "a spiritual dimension."

Dimensions of Lament

Formal Definitions of Lament

One of the most variable elements in our interviews was the definition and use of the word lament. Four of our study subjects gave partial definitions of what it meant to lament, and each described a different aspect. Roberts's was both personal and collective:

> It's …similar to the way that we talk about *k'riah*[24], about something in the fabric of a family has been torn. It feels that way on a communal level. That's what comes up for me around the word lamination. We have a personal connection with something that was lost within the congregation, or community [that] has been torn.

Jessica defined lamentation as a "response to destruction in response to brokenness and grief." Wendy spoke of lamenting as regretting "what could have been done and wasn't done," akin to the rabbis[25] accounting the destruction of Jerusalem to *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred. Jonathan gave two descriptions. The first was that a lament was, "a creative expression of pain that we're experiencing and giving it a particular creative voice." He also said, "every lament has to…capture something that life was like in the past. Something that's drastically different." Loss loomed large in these definitions of lament and there was a sense that the lament reflected life having been irreversibly transformed.

A Disordered or Unresolved Response to a Traumatic Event

Both scholars and theologians, Brueggeman and Adler, wrote about lament that is in response to a devastating event and could evoke disordered and fragmented speech or behavior. Four of our study subjects spoke to this kind of event (Robert, Jessica, Wendy, and Stephanie) and two did not (Jacob and Jonathan.) Robert, Jessica, and Wendy all described specific events. Stephanie spoke about the response of hospital patients to devastating news.

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[24] *K'riah* is the mourning ritual of tearing one's clothes or a black ribbon as a sign of grief.

[25] The term, "the rabbis" referrers to the religious scholars and authorities who wrote the post-biblical, Jewish sacred texts, such as the *Mishnah*, *Talmud*, Midrashim, Responsa, and legal codes.

Robert told the story of a woman whose response to her husband's death was to keep asking, "what am I going to do with the jewelry?" He came to understand, "her saying…'I haven't prepared for this. I don't know what our plan is.'" The defining event of Jessica's life was her aunt's suicide, which took place when she was a girl. "I'm still trying to resolve my aunt's life…and that's distinctive to…a traumatic or tragic death." Wendy's husband died suddenly, from an acute cardiac event when he was running. She was fairly young at the time, with a school-aged son. "I never understood grief until my husband died…it was just the loss of my whole future really."

Stephanie gave this description of what happened to some Jewish families when they experienced a traumatic event,

> I've had quite a few experiences of where something happens, a patient dies, or they receive a diagnosis that is horrible. And it's like, "what am I supposed to do now? What am I supposed to do now?" There's a tendency to focus on ritual, and I don't always know what they're asking. It's like, are you asking this from a *Halakah*[26] perspective? Or are you asking, "am I supposed to call someone or do something?" I'm not sure, but I feel like that question is kind of a broader existential. It's like, I'm lost, I'm unmoored, I'm adrift.

Wendy drew on the descriptive power of the *Book of Lamentations* to capture the feeling of a devastating loss,

> the devastating loss that people experience in *Eicha* (*Lamentations*), loss of their life style…their stature, loss of their sustenance, loss of life, or there was just all

[26] Jewish Law

> the different types of loss that people experience at (sic) *Lamentations* categorizes a lot of those losses.

For her, *Eichah* captured a sense that such a loss happening to Jerusalem was "impossible." More personally, the "idea of Jerusalem as a widow" spoke to Wendy, as did the book's sense that it, "just feels like everything has gone."

Stephanie spoke directly to a religious response by some patients who were receiving a new diagnosis. She did not specifically say if these patients were Jewish. This news could bring on "an existential theological crisis and they would 'outright ask me, why has God forsaken me?'"

Our study subjects' descriptions of people's response to or feeling from these events testifies to the depth of pain and disorientation that people experienced: repetitive, unresolved, lost, adrift, forsaken, and without a plan or future.

Factors in the Response to a Traumatic Event

Stephanie and Wendy reflected at length about the variety of ways people responded to a tragic event, whether dire medical news or the death of someone close to them. Stephanie noted that "religious tradition, but also cultural differences, also within a family, an individual personality…influenced the ways in which people grieve." Even in our era, lament could convey a sense of loud wailing over a tragic event, but "other families can be very reserved…the silence can be very loud also." Wendy, who is a psychologist as well as a rabbi, also remarked on the varied ways people responded. She noted that their philosophical outlook or faith could give them "a certain bit of resilience…to still feel hopeful, to move forward from a loss." There were also people who "feel so affronted by the loss that all they can do is lament, like how could this have

happened?" In these accounts an individual's response to a tragic event moved along the axis of personality, family, and culture, as well as the occurrence itself.

Other Significant Experiences of Lament

Our study subjects applied the concept of lament to events that had not caused a fragmented or disordered response. This sense of lament dominated their interviews, except for Wendy, and was depicted in terms of powerful emotions. Here is Stephanie describing the 7 pm, communal, thank you, in Manhattan for health workers during the early days of the COVID lockdown,

> I feel like there was a release of emotion that was a lot deeper than just thank you…and so I wonder if that was a form of lament…it kind of came out as a sort of expression of gratitude for the healthcare workers at the shift change, but it was an expression of deep emotion.

Robert described a profound alteration in the makeup of a family,

> when we talk about lament, we're talking about loss, we're talking about grief, but we're talking about beyond just the loss of a loved one…something in the fabric of a family has been torn.

Jessica had this description of regret,

> so in the pandemic and I would say in my work with young adults in general, there's always lament, which I would say is like regret or FOMO, fear of missing out.

She also talked about depression,

> I do think lament is in everything …we only allow it probably in times of grief…why do people not talk about postpartum depression as much? Cause you just had a new child, what is there to be sad about?

Jacob spoke about despair,

> I have received a lot of emails that accurately reflect despair…after RBG [Ruth Bader Ginsburg] passing on that Friday night [of Rosh Hashanah]...and these reflections, "I didn't know how I was going to wake up the next morning and have Rosh Hashanah."

Here, Jonathan described loss and grief,

> As you probably know, it's not all that much to an unveiling. The question is why are people so drawn … towards this ritual that really is thin in terms of traditional substance? And I would say people realize that it offers them an opportunity to come together…to lament or reflect … about how the year has passed and how you've gotten through it.

This list was not exhaustive, but reflected the kinds of profound emotions, such as disorientation, regret, depression, despair, loss, and grief, that our study subjects found to have prompted lament.

Lament and Brokenness

Jessica, Stephanie, and Wendy all used the term "broken" or "brokenness" in conjunction with lament. Jessica held that everyone's life incorporates some element of brokenness and that lament was the response to this reality. "I haven't found anyone yet that doesn't actually have a layer of lament in their life." Stephanie stated that,

> *Tikun Olam* (repair of the world) is such a central value in liberal Judaism and in order to want to heal the world and repair the world, it also acknowledges that there's so much brokenness in the world.

Wendy believed that to lament one had to have come to an "acceptance of the broken state of things." It should be noted that all the women in our study spoke about brokenness and none of the men did. This association of brokenness and lament will be taken up at length in the discussion chapter.

Gender

The striking difference in how brokenness was, and was not, invoked by the men and women of this study, was indicative of a major divide between the genders in the interviews, especially Jessica and Wendy, and Jacob and Jonathan. The women were much more prone to speak in first person terms about the people they pastored to and the men in general or institutional terms. The interviews were also notably different in length, with all three of the men's interviews ending after an hour, and the women's interviews lasting ninety minutes. The men's conversations were more formal and the women's more conversational.

Here are examples for Jessica and Wendy,

> (Jessica) We were checking in and she was like, "I just can't see the future anymore."
>
> (Wendy) In terms of *Eicha* and Jerusalem, that there was some feeling that Jerusalem was, it was impossible. That such terrible thing could happen. And I

> think some, some people relate to loss in that way that, "how could this happen to me? How could, my husband or my child [die]."

By contrast, when asked about how the people they work with expressed or didn't express lament, both Jonathan and Jacob gave answers that were global in nature. When Jonathan was asked, "where have you seen people successfully express lament and where have you seen people struggle with that?" he answered,

> I guess, one of the places I see it is in eulogies. There's two ways I do eulogies with families who have lost someone, one is I would have them write something and I could hear it in the way that they write and express it. Sometimes…eulogies are essentially about the person who lived. But the words don't always express the tone… we speak about people's lives and the tone and the emotion in which it's delivered, they express significant lament, so I see that in a lot of the ways that people craft eulogies.

When Jacob was asked, "when people encountered a personal loss, or a moment [of] grief or trauma, my question is what do you hear people lament?" he answered,

> because I do think there is [something] to say about putting words to our feelings and being able to describe them… I definitely think there's a lesson here from the text that says journal, write poetry…before moving on…like the author of *Eichah*…I think there are people who do brush it off or don't put words to it…because we're supposed to be strong...I'm just thinking more

> generally…Congregation Shammai[27] is a place that has …tried to be a place to create an American Judaism for the 21st century.

There are additional times in the interviews with Jonathan and Jacob, where they were asked about how the people they work with lament or don't lament, and they responded with global, not individual examples. One should not mistake this for a lack of pastoral interest on the part of the men, who repeatedly spoke about their pastoral work, but it was a notable difference in language.

Robert and Stephanie were harder to categorize. Robert used many anecdotes in his answers, but they were often connected to the institutional health of the synagogue. Stephanie used first person examples but less often than Jessica and Wendy.

Jessica gave this extended reflection on rabbis, gender, and whether their focus was on the global, framed here as ideas, or the personal, described here as stories,

> I was a Baum fellow and Professor Mandelbaum, who I love, his thing right now is Judaism is about ideas. Which is fine. And so, all the boys are like, Judaism is about ideas. What's your newest idea? And then they talk for a while and I'm like, what are you talking about? What does that mean*?* What do you want me to do with your idea? Okay, that's interesting. I do find that [it] is gender based. And then all the girls are, so, there's a story of this person…like, person-centered. I find that so much more compelling.

[27] Congregational Shammai is a fictional synagogue name.

The study subjects aligned along gender lines in category after category. Jessica's description of men being focused on ideas and women on person-centered stories was a striking way of capturing this dynamic.

Lament and the COVID-19 Crisis

The COVID Crisis: Emotional Responses

The COVID crisis loomed large through the interviews. Robert used *Lamentations* to frame the COVID pandemic,

> Re COVID, what's the text that I can use to sort of frame that message to the congregation to let them know…the whole destruction of the temple, it's kind of a big lamentation.

For him, the text matched the scale and nature of people's loss during the COVID pandemic,

> the loss of income, loss of loved ones who've died from the virus…it's this global grief that then brings you, what's the urtext[28] on that out of the Jewish tradition, that's where you end up back at *Eichah*.

Jonathan concurred that there was resonance between the scale on which the dynamic of Jewish life was changed by the events in *Lamentations* and what COVID was doing to "our relationships, our familial makeup…the way we do Judaism. Now our sanctuary wasn't destroyed, but it's unusable" He also posited that a societal "crisis isn't measured by trauma and loss but the level of anxiety, fear, and trauma that it causes collectively." The COVID crisis was marked by the "very real potential to affect each

[28] An urtext is the earliest or most fundamental document.

and every one of us…the fear that we're going to be agents of spreading it unintentionally." Jessica had seen that through the crisis there was "a change of language on social media...a lot crying out in these profound memes."

Our study subjects described an intense personal response of distress to the COVID crisis by the members of their congregations, as well as by their congregations.

The COVID Crisis: Loss and Suffering

The suffering that our study subjects described people experiencing in the COVID crisis varied. Jessica characterized the anxiety in terms of, "the sounds of the earth have quieted. Like there's this stopping of, like, what next?" She did outreach to young adults and professionals, and heard laments from working parents with children underfoot, who were struggling to work from home. Women lamented about how the crisis would impact their careers and a young person told her, "I just can't see the future anymore." Many of the study participants, who except for Wendy, were in their late 30's or early 40's, shared their own sense of lament. Robert and Jacob spoke about a similar experience to the parents Jessica worked with. Jacob noted,

> And it feels every day [it's] not sustainable. How are we going to continue this? And then, you know, we get through the day.

Robert referred to the loss of daycare.

Jessica, who was married during the crisis, lamented, "I don't think about it that much, but my parents weren't at my wedding." Stephanie talked about the grief she felt as a chaplain when people couldn't be at the funeral with their loved one. Jonathan commented that,

> I think one of the biggest problems that we see…it's people are focused on describing the wrong things in their conversations. It's helpful to talk about the virus and the numbers. And it's more helpful to talk about what it is that you're feeling. And maybe that's what differentiates lament from, how do I put it? Lament from documentation of crisis.

These descriptions of loss and suffering from the COVID crisis varied significantly, but they were rich with a sense of disorientation and distress from the open-ended nature of the crisis.

The COVID Crisis: Action Responses

Our rabbi subjects were all deeply involved in crafting responses to the COVID crisis. Stephanie spoke about joining in on a daily ritual to thank the healthcare workers. At 7pm, shift change, people would go to their windows and make as much noise as they could. She described it as "a release of emotion that was a lot deeper than just thank you…so I wonder if that was a form of lament…an expression of deep emotion." Jonathan responded to the presence of COVID among his congregants with a sermon about the efficacy of prayer, a healing of the soul, "which I think, in turn, does in fact [heal] the body." He finished the interview by citing Lam. 5:21, with its theme of restoration, "…that's everybody's lament and everybody's nechemtah (comfort) right now." Jacob spoke about his congregation implementing a 15-minute Zoom study and reflection session during the Counting of the Omer[29] in the Spring and again during the

[29] The Counting of the Omar is the daily act of counting between the second day of Passover and the start of Shavuot, to commemorate the offering of the early harvest in the Temple in Jerusalem. Reflective study is encouraged during this period.

month of Elul, proceeding the High Holidays. He described it as being something that, "you would never have understood you could do until this pandemic."

Jacob found that this engagement with congregants often evoked laments from them, especially in the form of emails. This interplay between positive engagement and providing comfort, and creating spaces for lament, was one that came up repeatedly in the interviews with our study subjects.

Our study subjects testified to the current COVID crisis being a shared event in which there was widespread suffering. They described it as being both a communal and personal crisis, which was also the case for suffering they cite from the *Book of Lamentations*. Our study subjects described laments that covered a wide range of feelings and situations, and they responded with a series of creative responses for attending to the suffering they were encountering.

Nechemtah, Comfort

Funerals and Shiva[30] as the Model of Comfort.

Funerals and Shiva as Forums for Comfort

As much as the rabbi subjects were open to, or even interested in, encouraging people who were suffering to express lament, they were far more focused on providing them with comfort, and nowhere did they see these two goals coming more together than through the rituals of the Jewish funeral. Stephanie noted that lament was a part of shiva,

[30] *Shiva* is a seven-day mourning observance that takes place in the mourner's home. Ideally, when approaching the mourner, the visitor should let the mourner initiate the conversation or even remain silent.

"they can talk about their loved one, who they lost for as long as they want." However, shiva was also about comforting the mourners

> being physically present for the mourner … being surrounded by community. You're not expected to express any specific emotions…you're to be cared for.

Funerals: Seeking Correct Practices

For Robert, Jonathan, and Wendy, the primary location of the pastoral encounters that they spoke about in the interviews was in the preparation for, and conducting of, funerals. In Wendy's words, "my most intense kind of contact with the family is around preparing for the funeral."

We saw earlier that as a chaplain, Stephanie encountered Jewish families that were focused on what were the proper procedures for the funeral, as did Robert. Wendy also found that people came to her about guidance on mourning customs and one needed to be careful not to be centered on information rather than "listening for the person." Robert, whose pulpit is in a popular resort area, regularly officiated for people who were, effectively, planning "a destination funeral." They did not have ties to the synagogue, or the Jewish community and he found that their grief was accentuated because,

> there's a thinness around death and dying…and they don't have the communal structure around them. I feel sorry for their loss … of their loved one, but also of the richness of the communal life that they've missed out on… I think there's this dynamic tension between what the individual needs in grief, versus what comes out and emerges in the community.

Even as our study subjects spoke about different elements of the Jewish grieving process, they agreed that being familiar with the mourning process, and a part of a congregation, could bring comfort and provide a place to grieve and lament.

Funeral: Eulogy and Emotional Process

Jonathan believed the process of gathering material for a eulogy, and even delivering it, was a great opportunity to express lament. When people craft eulogies for people they love,

> they express significant lament in saying how much they're going to miss them; about how broken they feel about how they're not going to be able to move on without this particular person in their lives.

In gathering material from the family for a eulogy he was to deliver, he moved them through a range of states. The first, "starts from a very objective place" and was a listing of the facts of their loved one's life. It then, "moves into adjectives, ways that you would describe them…begins to get a little bit deeper."

> But then when I asked them to share about memories, memories that really illustrate who they were as a person, they begin to start narrating things that happened in the past that are evoking peak emotion. You might say this is just the eulogy, or maybe it's just a memory, but I think every lament has to do [with] or capture something that life was like in the past. Something that's drastically different. That is not the same as it is today.

According to Jonathan this was where the lament came out most strongly and it often came out even more if they delivered the eulogy.

Shiva and Emotional Process

Our study subjects spoke to the emotional processing that mourners engaged at a shiva. Stephanie and Wendy both spoke to the ways the presence of people at a shiva comforted the mourners. Wendy believed that having friends and family coming to comfort you could evoke a sense of gratitude and love and "definitely soften the grief." Stephanie noted the importance of being surrounded and cared for by a community. Jonathan, Wendy, and Stephanie noted the way a properly done shiva created a space for silence, reflection, and expressing feeling. Stephanie believed the structure of a traditional shiva, where the mourner's needs were provided for and, "the mourner is not hosting you and they are under no obligation to speak to you," was of enormous comfort to the mourners.

Jonathan and Wendy were concerned that something had been lost in the way most non-Orthodox Jews shorten shiva. Jonathan stated, "It's not that they lament better" over 7 days, but being in the period longer, "I think you really do experience much more profoundly the reflective process of being able to think about what you're feeling and express it to the people who come to see you." Wendy believed that the corollary to this was that the rabbi should keep in touch with the mourner as they went through cycles of Jewish mourning, *shloshim* (the first 30 days after burial), around holidays, and through the first *yartzeit* (anniversary.) This would make for a much more substantial process of rabbinic support.

Our study subjects believed that the rituals and observances of the Jewish funeral and shiva were a model of how to engender lament and grieving within a structured format.

Comfort and Chaplaincy

Our study subjects referred to the chaplaincy work, or pastoral care training, they went through and the lessons they drew from it. Jonathan spoke about what lay at the heart of pastoral care: “People don't always know what it is they're feeling until they've said it out loud” and he connected it to lament, “one of the things that lamenting does is help us say what it is that we're feeling out loud.” Robert, Jessica, Jacob, Jonathan, and Wendy all referenced the importance of pastoral work in their rabbinates (Stephanie is a chaplain.) I note this because they referred to pastoral care often as they spoke about what it was to “be present with those who are suffering…and to not turn my face away from it” (Stephanie).

Stephanie found that when she was working with a Jewish patient or family, familiar Jewish touchstones could cut through the sense of isolation and disconnection they were feeling,

> I’ve had very powerful moments of prayer where we all prayed the *Shema*[31] and everyone’s crying and it’s so powerful to be able to do that together. So, I think it’s the familiarity and that the ritual is an entrance point into some of the deeper questions that people have.

This was notable because, traditionally, in Judaism, it is the psalms, rather than the *Shema,* that are used at the bedside of someone who is sick. For our rabbi subjects, chaplaincy skills were a resource unto themselves.

[31] The *Shema* is a prayer stating God’s unity. It is recited in both public and private prayer and is the best-known prayer among Jews.

Comfort Through New Ritual

A category that emerged among four of our six study subjects was using new Jewish rituals to provide comfort. The rituals were varied, responses to a specific event or an individual's need. Stephanie cited Judaism's "long tradition…of creating new ritual," suggesting that congregational rabbis should observe modern moments of significant loss or change, either as an individual or communal experience. She suggested three examples, divorce, perinatal loss, and retirement.[32]

Wendy cited two new rituals, one that was observed and the other theoretical. She was moved by a memorial service her *Lamentations* professor organized when there had been a spate of suicides at his congregation and how meaningful this was to the families.[33] She also imagined that it would be meaningful to have an event based on the Sukkot tradition of inviting biblical ancestors (*ushpazim*) into the *sukkah,*[34] for people who had suffered losses such as death or divorce. "To come together in the sukkah to be able to talk about the people who aren't there anymore in their lives…the idea of the ancestors welcoming the ancestors into this."

Many of the new rituals our study subjects outlined were in response to needs of the COVID outbreak. Stephanie's congregation incorporated a prayer for health workers into their service. People would be invited to say the names of people they knew who

[32] This is similar to a suggestion that Adler makes in her 2014 article. Stephanie approvingly cites the article in the interview, though she does not specifically mention Adler in this context.
[33] Traditionally in Judaism, someone who commits suicide is buried at the edge of a cemetery. There are rabbinic interpretations that allow for this effective humiliation to be suspended, but a named, public, memorial service for suicides is a notable innovation.
[34] A *sukkah* is an outdoor, temporary hut or shelter, used for ritual purposes on the holiday of *Sukkot*, especially, eating. In Hebrew, the spiritual guests are called *ushpazim*. Traditionally, they are major religious figures from the Bible.

were working at the hospital and then they would read Rabbi Ayelet Cohen's "really beautiful prayer." At Jessica's Zoom wedding, she and her partner wrapped themselves in a family tallit and their parents were invited to say the priestly benediction. "They probably wouldn't have done that if they were present." Jonathan's congregation held their Rosh Hashanah evening service on a nearby beach. It was the fulfillment of a long-time dream of his. "We have never done anything like that…COVID or not COVID, this is one of the most profound services that most people experienced."

New rituals were widely and effectively used among our rabbi subjects to provide comfort, and, in turn, often evoked lament from their participants.

Comfort Through Study

In Jewish tradition study and prayer are equivalent in holiness, and study can be as significant as prayer in the life of a congregation. Three of our study subjects spoke about study sessions they did in response to the COVID crisis that evoked moments of lament among the participants, or were based on the *Book of Lamentations* or *Lamentations Rabbah*. Jessica spoke about two different study sessions. One was Torah study for young adults, which had a shift in language after the COVID crisis began. Wilderness is an ongoing theme in Torah, but Jessica said it was suddenly, "refracted through this COVID lens." The other was *Musar* study, which was intended to cultivate ethical discipline. "We have ground rules…it's not therapy…but there's definitely an air of lament that comes up." Wendy taught the *Book of Lamentations* on Tisha B'Av and "sometimes you talk about it from a personal perspective."

As was cited earlier, Jacob's congregation did a brief, nightly study event during the counting of the Omer, and the month of Elul, and some congregants attended

regularly through the week, even every day. It was created in response to the COVID crisis. During our interview, Jacob pulled up a selection of texts he taught regularly based around the *Book of Lamentations* and, especially, *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:26. They were intended to embrace despair but, "despair has to have some sort of life beyond despair".

We can see in these examples that study was an integral part of the life of congregations of our study subjects and was employed to emotionally engage people in a variety of ways.

Comfort Through Artistic Expression[35]

Our rabbi subjects often spoke about the arts and the ways they could provide comfort to people who were suffering. Jonathan and Jacob spoke about *Lamentations* being written in poetry rather than prose, "…as a creative expression of the writer to share their anguish, to share their pain" (Jonathan). Four of our participants cited examples of how music, poetry, or fine art could enable people to express grief and lament. It is significant to note how most of these examples were Jewishly themed and focused on loss. Jessica cited Rabbi Irwin Kula's application of the chanting melodies from the *Book of Lamentations* to some of the last phone calls made on 9/11, which she found to be emotionally "devastating." Wendy and Jacob both spoke about the value of writing. Wendy described a time when she was in Israel for a rabbinic conference and participants were encouraged to use prompts from *Lamentations*. One was of Jerusalem as a widow, and it enabled her to express feeling "in a personal way." Jacob saw the

[35] In conversation, Rabbi Seth Bernstein observed that this kind of artistic expression may also be an effective way of challenging constraints and boundaries on lament. It is striking to read this section after reviewing the segment entitled "Challenging the Constraints on Lamentation" on p. x

author of *Lamentations* as modeling journaling and poetry as important things to do when suffering a devastating event. “I definitely think there's a lesson here from the text that says, journal, write poetry…before moving on.” The value of this was in “putting words to our feelings.”

Jonathan was particularly interested in the “artistic expression of grief and mourning lament.” He was deeply moved by a potter he knew who made a *chawan* (a Japanese tea bowl) a day, for a year after his son died. The artist found himself unable to recite kaddish and entitled the work, “My Son’s Kaddish.” Jonathan said that “the artistic expression of his emotions…was much more powerful than anything he could have written.” He also spoke about a Hebrew poem of lament he wrote about 9/11 for Rabbi Mehlman’s class, as well as a digital art piece he did which was also about 9/11. Jonathan stated that art has the power “to understand the emotion, to really connect with the experience that people went through.”

This combination of new rituals, study, and the arts, were employed by our study subjects as effective resources for enabling people to voice lament.

When Lament, Sadness, and Grief Take Center Stage

Therapeutic and Other Referrals

Although our rabbi subjects were drawn to providing comfort, they also spoke at length about when providing counseling, or formally inviting lament, or the expression of sadness and grief, was their central focus. The congregational rabbis spoke about the need to refer out for counseling or their own limits as counselors. Robert joked that, “the thing about the Jewish community is either we’re therapist or we’ve all got therapists.” His point was that this is a community where many people (though not all) are at ease

with counseling. Robert, Jessica, and Wendy spoke about referring out. Jessica stated that, “my training has limitations and I think you need to find a therapist, you need to go to a grief group, or you need to go to whatever it may be, I'll help you find it.” Wendy spoke to situations where someone needed a highly trained therapist, such as complex trauma (e.g., a suicide), or to address “the history of the family.”

Jacob did not directly address referring out, however with respect to a rabbi’s role he said, “everything is pastoral, but we tried to be a congregation that is not a self-help organization and…we’re not social workers.” Jonathan described an upcoming discussion group about emotional wellness, where he was going to partner with a psychologist or psychotherapist. This illustrated the clear boundary on where he was willing to go with respect to emotional health.

The congregational rabbi subjects strongly noted the limits of their therapeutic skills and their willingness to refer out to more highly trained counselors.

Challenging the Constraints on Lament

Wendy, Jessica, and Stephanie expressed concern about the boundaries our society puts on the expression of intense sadness and grief and, at least partially, framed this in terms of lament. Jessica noted that another name for Rosh Hashanah is *Yom Vateyabeiv*, which means the Day of Wailing, and is taken from the midrash that connects the sound of the shofar to a Canaanite mother who wailed for a son killed in battle (*Rosh Hashanah* 33a). For Jessica, this taught that however joyous we may be on Rosh Hashanah, the creation of the world is messy, “lament is in everything… it's just that we only allow it probably in times of grief, like Sisera's mom being sad that her son died.”

Stephanie wondered if American culture, by being so focused on healing and moving forward has, “almost a distaste for dwelling in a dark place too long.” She told the story of a Jewish woman in mourning who wondered why she had to stop saying kaddish for her father after 11 months. Stephanie suggested that perhaps, by introducing some of the lamentation prayers from Jewish tradition into our work, it would allow people to say of grief and loss, “oh, this is here.”

Wendy made the case that when suffering an intense grief, encountering a similar story could be helpful. Joyce Carol Oates memoir, *A Widow’s Tale*, fulfilled this role for her. Oates wrote it following her husband’s sudden and perhaps unnecessary death from pneumonia and it was a “very messy, intense grief…and the whole book really is a lament…[on] what she lost…I appreciated that book much more than many of the bereavement handbooks.”

Again, we see that the women in our study spoke about the importance of lament having a valued and welcomed place in American, and, especially, Jewish American culture.

The Place of Strong Emotion in Synagogue Life

Synagogues: A Space for Brokenness

Our study subjects were interested in the place of lament and joy in synagogue life and the various forces that supported and constrained them. Stephanie and Wendy noted that many people recoil in the face of dire illness, sadness, or grief. Jessica, Wendy, Jacob, and Robert commented on how synagogues they had been involved with had a culture that focused on joy and being positive. In Jessica’s words how, “everyone’s lives looked, how well their garden was manicured.” Jessica and Wendy saw this as creating

an unwelcoming atmosphere for many people. However, in Jessica's words, "I think my generation is pushing through that perfect valence of perfection." She turned to Henri Nouwen's concept of the wounded healer, the pastor as broken symbol, as a way of responding to this. "The wounded healer, the wounded storyteller…I guess that's who I am…and I think that's compelling to people. It's exhausting to try to be perfect and unbroken."

Wendy spoke at length about what many people are looking for in a congregation to feel welcome,

> People are looking to belong, to be accepted, kind of loved and cared for. And I think that, you know, building a community where you can come with your brokenness.

She saw this reflected in Jewish tradition in prayers such as the *U'ne Tanneh Tokef*, with its theme of being mortal and living in the world. "Of course, you want hopefulness but it's a different sort of worldview...an acceptance that bad things happen and how do we move on from there?"

Synagogues: A Space for Joy

Creating a space for joy was also a central concern of our rabbi subjects. Jacob outlined the approach that his congregation took to balancing lament and joy. "On a personal level, we need to do a better job continuing to hold onto the despair part…and really understanding, like, how do you put words to this?" However, institutionally, his synagogue saw its mission as advancing an American Judaism for the 21st century, in contrast to the despair that came out of the pervasive focus on the Holocaust in

synagogue life and Jewish education. Healing services, the *misheberach l'cholim* (prayer for healing), dirge like music, music in a minor key, and *kaddish* (the memorial prayer) created "a morose sort of dead feeling." Nevertheless, he expressed concern for someone who comes to services and found, "everything is happy clappy." Robert commented, "How do you talk about lamentation when people really want to be talking about joy?" Wendy and Jessica also noted that the synagogue needed to be a place one could come and be joyous.

Creating Space for Lament Through Program

Synagogue programs came up repeatedly as a focus of synagogue life and where lament was often, unexpectedly, engendered. Wendy described the reality that the pastoral encounters rabbis have are often limited and prosaic. She acknowledged that it would be useful if people could turn to the rabbi in a sustained way after suffering a loss, but said, "I do find I am turned to more around the ritual…the immediate events." Rabbis can struggle to be available for sustained counseling because they "sometimes get lost in so many other things, and this is difficult and painful, that it's sort of easier to shy away from it or outsource it." Considering this, it was striking to read Jacob's description of how programs at his congregation had evoked lament.

Jacob described two programmatic events at his congregation that created a platform for expressing or processing despair and lament[36]. The first we have met, which were the short, nightly, seasonal, teaching sessions. He spoke about the purpose

[36]Jacob uses despair and lament interchangeably.

undergirding another set of gatherings that were planned for after the presidential election,

> I think…Congregation Shammai does what it does is because I don't think people necessarily need a space to come and grieve as much as they need a space to come. I think Congregation Shammai attempts to be a space where you can both hold the despair in one hand, but also hold the hope.

The second program was an interchange between the b'nai mitzvah candidates and the congregation's rabbis. The bar/bat mitzvah would ask the rabbi a question and they responded in the form of a sermon on the day of the bar/bat mitzvah. "We'd love any question 'cause it's just [to] spark curiosity." He said that,

> at least in the last three years…and especially in the last eight months, there's been some version of, "where is God during the pandemic, how do you find hope in dark times." This past week was, "did God create us wrong?"

This process of interchange enabled the students to voice lament.

Holding Joy and Sorrow

Several of our study subjects were interested in the question of how to keep a healthy tension between the place of joy and lament in synagogue life. Three of our study subjects named the need to hold, express, or join sorrow and joy. They used different words, sorrow, lament, and despair for the melancholy feeling; joy, hope, and re-interpretation for the positive one. But their language was resonant with each other.

Jessica remarked,

> We really do hold both all the time, sorrow and joy. I got married in the middle of a pandemic and my parents weren't there. The human condition is one of suffering and lament and joy…like sorrow and joy, clasp hands.

She continued,

> So…people often say the question mark is the ultimate symbol of Judaism…but I actually think it's the ampersand…because we're always trying to hold both, how *Lamentations* doesn't really resolve."

Jacob noted that,

> not only do we need to embrace despair, …but also we have to let despair…have some sort of life beyond despair...maybe that's why I liked *Eichah Rabbah* (*Lamentations Rabbah*) …because it just moves past the despair or is able hold the despair in one hand, but then also the re-interpretation of it in the other. I think Congregation Shammai attempts to be a space where you can both hold the despair in one hand, but also hold the hope and, or what's next in the other.

Stephanie stated that, "before I can express hope, I need to be able to express the lament that is present, or maybe those things happen all at once."

It is notable that nowhere in these statements did any of our study subjects presume to have a formula for how to keep joy and lament in a healthy tension with each other.

Other Categories

Text and Theology: The *Psalms* Plus One

Our study subjects drew from texts beyond the *Book of Lamentations* and *Lamentations Rabbah.* Stephanie spoke at length about Psalm 88, which is a psalm of

lament she described as "the darkest…like I'm counted in the pit with the dead, among the dead already." She was introduced to it by a minister who was supervising her in CPE who modeled it as something to read with AIDS patients.

> I was kind of horrified…it gives voice to people in a modern context, that are suffering from a long and terminal illness, in a way that is really raw and unfiltered. It caused me to think about it, but would I bring that as a reading? No!

Jessica drew on a midrash from *Midrash Tanchumah*, which is about Joseph returning to the pit where his brothers cast him before he was sold into slavery. It is a passage about his reconciliation with a dark place in his life. She cited it as the symbol of one's brokenness and the importance of this for making meaning in our lives. Stephanie and Jonathan both cited psalms that they used to provide comfort. Stephanie drew from Psalm 147 in which God binds our wounds and knows each of us by name, as God knows the stars by name. "It informs the work I do in the sense that God is present with the suffering." Jonathan often used Psalm 130, which speaks of God calling to you out of the depths and ends with waiting for the watchman until the morning. "The idea of waiting, anticipation, hope at a time where things are really bad. Hope is a nechemtah in and of itself."

It is striking that in our study subjects' use of texts other than *Lamentations* and *Lamentations Rabbah*, comfort was at the fore.

Containment

Stephanie talked about the need to express lament and do it in a format that was contained. She employed a Talmudic midrash that we saw earlier, where God weeps but

does so privately, in a secret chamber (*LamR* Proem 24). “I think in many ways the containment makes it a safe place for that... powerful emotion to be expressed and to be present for.” She cited a funeral as being the kind of experience, “that allows for the transcendent experience.” On more than one occasion, Stephanie followed a statement about the value of lament with a cautionary statement that it needed to be done “in a very contained way.”

The Value of Reflecting on the Place of Lamentation

Three of our study subjects, Robert, Jessica, and Jacob were very explicit about how valuable they found participating in the interview. Robert talked about the value of taking a step back and reflecting “on what we do.” Jessica commented that when she considers about how much *Lamentations* shows up in her work, “it’s interesting that it doesn’t that often and yet [lamentation is] so prevalent…now maybe I’ll start using it.” Jacob welcomed the opportunity to review both the place of *Lamentations* in his work and lament itself, and that, “I think better processing out loud...it’s helpful for me to think about this this way.” Stephanie, Wendy, and Jonathan were not as effusive but all of them found the conversation to be of value. Stephanie remarked, “that it’s been an interesting conversation for me,” Wendy said, “this was really wonderful,” and Jonathan, “it’s really a pleasure.”

I note this not as a tip of the hat to the researcher but rather to mark that all our study subjects found revisiting their studies with Rabbi Mehlman and reflecting on the place of lament in their work, to be of significant value.

Summary of Results

Our study subjects drew regularly from their study of the *Book of Lamentations* and *Lamentations Rabbah*. They spoke about the destruction and trauma of *Lamentations* and the questions of theodicy that it engaged.

The absence of strong God language among the congregational rabbi subjects was a marked contrast with the God language of the psalms. Our study subjects rarely spoke about God and when they did it was primarily in the context of referencing a sacred text. Several of our study subjects did reference spirituality.

Our study subjects gave examples of experiences that led people to voice lament. They cited traumatic events and events that were significant but would not be categorized as traumatic. The dominant form of lament they encountered was in response to significant, but non-traumatic events. The women in the study associated these with people's sense of "brokenness." Gender was a significant category in our study and many of the results were divided along gender lines.

Our study subjects talked at length about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. They spoke about deep emotional responses to the crisis by congregants and patients, as well as themselves. They described a strong sense of disorientation and distress among their congregants and patients. The rabbi subjects outlined many creative ways they had responded to the crisis.

Providing comfort to people who were suffering, or in distress, was a major concern of our study subjects. They cited funerals and shivas as models for evoking lament and providing comfort. They also spoke about how they drew on new rituals,

study, and the arts to provide comfort, and how effective these were for engaging congregants and evoking lament.

The study subjects also spoke about the place of voicing lament and sadness within the life of the congregation, as well as its relationship to the expression of joy. The women were concerned with how people's brokenness was and was not welcomed within Jewish life. Many of the participants were concerned that synagogues be a place where joy was present, and if lament were unconstrained it could crowd out joy. As well, they talked about the relationship between lament and joy and the spiritual value of this tension. They were frank about how they struggled to find a balance between them.

Lastly, our rabbi subjects talked about the value they found in reflecting upon the place of lament in their rabbinates.

Discussion

This Discussion section is organized around the themes that emerged from the categories developed in the Results chapter and reflects the larger meaning underlying them. The goal of this chapter is to use these findings to develop themes that help us understand the phenomenological[37] experiences of lament in the work and communities of our study subjects and to investigate how these themes illuminate our study subjects' encounters with lament. It is important to note that these findings reflect only the experiences of our six study subjects.

Initially, this study was undertaken to consider whether holding lamentation up as a Jewish cultural and religious value could be a way of enabling people to lament more freely, to treat lamentation, not as a way station on the road to renewed meaning, but as a central element of the human, and in this case, Jewish journey. Two questions were posed: The first was whether lament might have an important role to play in helping people cope with their suffering. The second was whether there are ways within Jewish community life to enable its members to become more willing to express lament. The results affirm that from the individual perspectives of our six study subjects, the answer to these questions is yes. But there have been some surprises along the way.

As was mentioned earlier, there are only two articles about Judaism and lament, both by Reform rabbis. Consequently, I reviewed the growing contemporary Christian literature which is largely a response to Walter Brueggemann's 1984 article "The costly loss of lament." The literature is focused on the psalms of lament, which are very God

[37] Phenomenology is the study of a person's encounter with and understanding of a phenomenon, which in this study is lament.

centered, but as we have seen, most of our study subjects make little mention of God and even less of the psalms. Instead, they were focused on *kehillah* (religious community), and innovative, interactive, and personal rituals and activities. It was also striking that the interviews were often a journey of discovery for the rabbinic subjects of the study. Although they had studied *Lamentations* and *Lamentations Rabbah* they had rarely reflected on the role of lament in their rabbinate. Most of them were explicit about how exciting they found the opportunity to reflect on this, especially in light of their earlier studies.

This discussion section will consider several elements. It will examine the place of lament in the work of these study participants and their understanding of its efficacy. It will look at the striking differences between how the men and women in the study framed lament. It will explore the innovative rituals and programs that they saw as engendering lament. Lastly, it will assess the importance of having lament voiced in the synagogue and the challenge to doing this. All the rabbis in this study spoke about the holiness of enabling people who are suffering to voice lament. The most important outcome of this study is that it gives voice to their work and struggles, illuminating further avenues for understanding this sacred work.

Lament: An Emotional Encounter

These interviews took place during a dramatic time in American life, the first summer and fall of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the opening minutes of the interviews over Zoom (its own emotional topic), several study subjects spoke about their experiences of lament, which signaled an emotional engagement with its place in their work and lives. All of them lit up when asked about their course with Professor

Mehlman, who was remembered with affection and respect. However, few of them had reflected about how lament fit into their rabbinate and the interviews sparked a strong curiosity about this. Their answers were often extended reflections on the relationship of lament to the central themes of their work.

This engagement was reflected in the vividness of their descriptions: "I witnessed so much mourning," "the fabric of the family is torn," and "people speak in terms of 'I'm unmoored, adrift.'" The study subjects' language was also rich in feeling when speaking about concepts: "the darker moments of our history," "grief is disordered…fragmented," and "accurately reflecting despair." The interviews flew by, with the questions very often touching something they felt deeply, which they welcomed the opportunity to reflect on. Their engagement aligned with the intensity of concern in the literature about the presence and non-presence of lament in congregations.

Much of the lament described by the religious literature cited by this paper, or in response to traumatic events, is dramatic, disordered speech, silence, or dramatic wailing and crying. A number of our study subjects spoke about their encounters with this intensity of lament. They described how a person or family had reacted to a tragic or unexpected death by being almost obsessively focused or having a sense of losing everything and being robbed of their future. But more often, the lament they encountered was to significant events but not traumatic ones. It may have been a reaction to a variety of things, such as the political situation, a death in the family, postpartum depression, or a sense one's life is not on track. This is the kind of lament they primarily referred to when discussing their lifecycle, program, or counseling work. This was not usually the focus of

the psychological literature we presented, but the theologians did reference it. Adler (2014) writes,

> human beings bewail all that hurts about being human: having bodies that hurt, being mortal, suffering brutality at the hands of others, losing control over our lives, losing kin. (p. 76)

It is not a trivial list and our participants found it important and challenging to welcome this less intense, but more prevalent lament into the synagogue. It is a category of lament that is worthy of more focus in the theological literature.

Our theologians are particularly concerned that lament is acknowledged, valued, and welcomed in modern religious settings. Brueggemann (1984) speaks about surrendering the hubris that our minds and power alone can excise pain, to hide from "this is how it really is" (p. 53). Hirschmann (2010) reminds us that our texts establish that it is a sacred thing to voice personal grief and sorrow, and even anger and protest. Adler (2014) sees lament as way for the broken to "reenter the realm of language and speak the unspeakable" (p. 75). This found resonance among our study subjects who recognized the value of lament in their work and in the lives of their congregants, even as this consideration of its place was a journey of discovery for them. It suggests the possibility that Reform rabbis value engendering lament and would welcome opportunities for workshops on this subject.

Lament and Healing: The Therapeutic Voice of CPE[38]

Early on in our interviews, when our study subjects were asked about the role of lament in their work, the men answered, "as we all learned in CPE." They referenced, "the importance of expressing feelings" in the pastoral process and framed it in terms of lament. Several of them were particularly enthusiastic about congregants doing this through journaling or other creative expression. Both the men and women spoke about the need for people to communicate feelings, particularly in the context of questions about lamentation and the COVID crisis, and that it was important not just to document the event but to "express deep emotion and what you're feeling."

Both the religious and psychological literature is strongly supportive of this approach. The foundation of CPE is skilled listening, and one cannot engender lament without it (Ashley, 2016, p. 128). To take Stern (1985) as an example, the verbal self is supported by having someone who responds to one's most basic elements of verbal communication. Lament can be an efficient way to move through Stern's domains of the self, but to be effective it needs someone who is listening and responding. Van der Kolk (2014) sees journaling as particularly good way of accessing one's inner word of feeling, which he argues is central to the process of healing from trauma. Rabbi Jo Hirschmann (2010), a chaplain, reminds us that for lament to be effective it needs a listener (p. 114).

The study participants also spoke to the importance of being able to voice lament without sensing there was a timetable for when it should end. One subject spoke about how reading a memoir of pure lament was more helpful to her than the bereavement

[38] CPE stands for Clinical Pastoral Education. It is dominant form of pastoral counseling for American clergy. All of our subjects did at least one CPE clinical rotation, in a hospital, as a part of their rabbinical training.

handbooks she had read, with their implied agendas of overcoming grief, which felt like putting boundaries on lament. So too, all the women in the study mentioned the importance of welcoming people into the synagogue who feel some element of brokenness and for them to be able to express lament. "Before I can express hope, I need to be able to express the lament that is present" (Stephanie).

This connects to a central question I wished to explore which was whether rabbis in the field were sensitive to the question of "playing beyond the game," by which I meant moving on to making meaning or recasting a narrative before lament was fully voiced. A number of study subjects were concerned with this. Both Rabbis Jo Hirschmann and Rachel Adler focus on this in their articles on lament. Hirschmann (2010) writes that meaning may be entirely absent from a lament and this is precisely its importance. Adler (2014) speaks specifically to people's brokenness and the importance of congregations accustoming themselves to it.

Shiva: Silence is a Form of Lament

Both the literature we presented, and our study subjects' description points to shiva as a model of psychological process and consolation. They spoke about a strong connection between individuals voicing lament and being part of a Jewish community. The space for mourners to experience extended periods of silence during shiva parallels Winnicott's (1958) capacity to be alone, with its possibilities for experiencing deeply felt sensations. The full seven-day shiva leaves mourners free to settle into silence, reflect upon it, and then express it to the people around them. This also resonates with the therapeutic value that both Greenspan (2005) and van der Kolk (2014) find for patients in experiencing emotional and physical sensation, and as a counterweight to the potential

language has for distorting these (Greenspan). The world of touch, empathetic listening, and being cared for that is a part of shiva, is akin to Stern's (1985) intersubjective relatedness. It is also akin to the holding environment that Winnicott (1971) describes as the good enough mother. The movement from silence to speech that a full seven-day shiva provides for is like moving from this sense of self to what Stern terms a verbal one.

Not only is shiva a model for engendering lament, but our study subjects were most at ease with lament when they were talking about shiva. They spoke to a strong connection between individuals voicing lament and being part of a Jewish community. Robert captured this in his description that, "there's a thinness around death and dying [without] a communal structure." Shiva reflects the strengths of ritual forms; it is familiar, and the rules, practices, and roles are clear; and it is contained, both in place (the mourner's house) and time (lasting at most a week). We shall see in our discussion under "Lament and Joy" that our study subjects were far more equivocal about lament being voiced in the synagogue.

Lament and Gender: Men are Ideas, Women are Stories

Jessica's soliloquy set the tone for this theme. She described male colleagues as being idea-centered, but I would modify that to being focused on solutions. Jacob's responses to the researcher's questions were often programmatic. Jonathan's were about how to carry out pastoral functions that would engender feeling. Robert was concerned about how lament connected to the institutional health of the synagogue. All three were action oriented and even their interviews reflected this difference. They were shorter, more goal oriented, and the study subjects ended them strictly on the hour. The women's

interviews lasted at least ninety minutes, had a more informal flow, and were ended by the interviewer.

Jessica's phrase, 'person-centered' captured how the women were generally oriented. All of them spoke about brokenness, which is about an enduring pain or trauma that lies at the heart of someone's life. Wendy and Jessica spoke in terms of person-centered stories, often their own.

One needs to be careful about how much one generalizes, especially when writing about gendered responses. Stephanie and Robert fell into a middle ground. They told many anecdotes about people, but Stephanie also displayed a theological bent and, as we saw, Robert an institutional one. So too, our male study participants were not only cognizant of their pastoral role, but their descriptions of their pastoral or programmatic functions testified to how attentive and successful they were at them. Jessica's stories were rich in programmatic detail and Wendy's in attending to the programmatic and liturgical life of her congregation. But time and time again, one could feel a difference in how the men and women approached their rabbinates. Jacob and Robert were crafting a synagogue for the Twenty-First Century. Our women spoke about synagogues where people emotionally connected with loved ones they had lost or were held by rituals that attended to personal losses.

It is notable that the historical enactment of lament, a wailing at funerals, was done by women[39]. Adler (2014) writes that these rituals endured among European Jews

[39] This tradition survived into the modern age among Yemenite women in Israel, but the practice is not being embraced by the younger, Israeli born, Yemeni generation (Gamliel, 2015).

until the establishment of burial societies, the *chevrah kedisah*, which were organized and operated by men. So too, many of the innovative rituals and programs that were documented in our findings have their origin in the Jewish Healing Movement, which was founded by women. One of its founders, the late Rachel Cowan, described how central this was to the movement,

> I believe that it took a group of women – including rabbis – to break through the Jewish cultural barrier that saw medical treatment as the only response to illness. We understood that even though illness might not be curable, there were many ways to relieve the suffering. Rituals could restore a sense of calm and order to the emotional and physical chaos of the experience of illness. We knew that relationships and community were the key to healing. So we devised healing services, wrote prayers for patients and doctors alike, created *mikveh* (ritual bath) rituals, and ran support groups. We helped revitalize synagogue *bikkur holim* (visiting the sick) groups. (Jewish Women's Archives)

Rabbi Sandy Sasso also spoke about how this transformation was driven by women, "Women rabbis not only help create new ritual, they also reshape its performance, from something acted out upon us to something we enact" (Cooper, 2018). Deborah Tannen (2001), a professor of linguistics at Georgetown University, reiterates Jessica's focus on women being person centered,

> I was approaching the world as many women do: as an individual in a network of connections…conversations are negotiations for closeness in which people try and seek and give confirmation and support. (p. 25)

The difference in how the men and women approached lament will come up repeatedly in our discussion. It should also be noted how small a sample this was and that other elements of gender, such as sexual orientation and gender orientation, were not part of the study.

Lament and Religious Innovation

Scholars of religion make a powerful case for drawing upon the psalms to engender lament. Robert Alter (1985) writes about poetry as an instrument for "conveying deeply patterned meanings" that are difficult to communicate (p.113). Marcia Glazer (2009), states that *Psalms* "offer us a language to express the brokenness of our own hearts" (p. 5). Brueggemann (1984) believes they can be employed in congregations to affirm that the disordered parts of life and our emotional pain are welcome before God. However, as we have seen, with one exception, the rabbis in our study rarely speak of the psalms or give any sign that they regularly turn to them.

Glazer (2009) lists reasons for this. The language of the psalms that fixes on enemies, stridently affirms God's sovereignty, and is thick with God's praise, is problematic for non-Orthodox Jews. It is also notable that our study subjects did not cite fixed prayer as part of their 'toolkit' for addressing lament. Brueggemann's vision for employing psalms in a liturgical setting, to affirm the place of lament in the life of the church, does not align with the ways our study subjects effectively engaged the emotional life of their congregants. None of them were centered on engagement with God through lament and praise. The examples they gave where lament was voiced, happened in study, program, and lifecycle settings rather than liturgical ones. It was a strikingly broad and creative set of programs and practices, often highly participatory and interactive, set in

community and relationship, which was also where Rabbis Cowan and Sasso centered the Jewish Healing Movement.

We've seen that our participants had their most intense pastoral engagement through funerals and shiva, but they also witnessed congregants voicing lament in other settings. Some of these happened privately (journaling), some in lifecycle settings (families mourning suicide), and others happened in congregational programs (musar[40] study).

The events and programs they described were not centered on evoking emotion or having a therapeutic component. A b'nai mitzvah program that was designed to stimulate curiosity and rabbinic/student interchange evoked strong lament during the COVID crisis. Young adult study programs focused on ethical disciplines (musar) prompted lament. These were often part of the ongoing life of a congregation, and lament was voiced because of the opportunity for personal expression, or through the presence of a sensitive interchange between clergy and participants.

The arts also came up as a way of voicing lament, sometimes in an innovative way, such as setting the names of 9/11 victims to the unique trope of *Lamentations*, sometimes as liturgical poetry in response to COVID deaths, and, especially, as journaling. Repeatedly, the *Book of Lamentations* was cited by our study subjects as a model for journaling, which they considered to be an important component of spiritual exploration. Our rabbinic subjects also gave examples from the formal, religious life of Judaism. Some were aspirational (Wendy hoping to have people welcome family

[40] *Musar* is study of sacred Jewish texts in order to cultivate ethical practices.

ancestors into the *sukkah*), while others were realized (a memorial service for people who lost family to suicide). The goal of these events was to provide comfort or dynamic Jewish engagement, rather than specifically to evoke lament.

This locates voicing lament in strikingly different settings and ways from much of the discussion in our religious literature section. The memorial service for families who suffered a suicide in the family, and the 9/11 chant, resonate with Adler's (2014) call for laments "for people who are in so many states of brokenness" (p. 90). By contrast, the other events do not set out to evoke lament but touch people in a variety of ways. There is a spiritual engagement with important values in people lives (musar study), an invitation to self-reflect (journaling), and community sharing on a sacred day (ushpazim in the sukkah). What connects them is their location in community, even if it happens in different ways, and the invitation it provides for the participant(s) to bring themselves into the space. These are sacred settings but not ones where petition to, or praise of, God lies at their center or is even involved. They are also rich settings for psychodynamic process.

Winnicott (1971) argues that religions have great potential for providing transitional spaces where people can engage "in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated" (p.2). The world our rabbinic subjects describe abounds with possibilities for this; welcoming loved ones into the sukkah, the nightly rabbinic reflections which create a daily space of inspiration and reflection, and the journaling. These are places that have great possibility for joy but are also ones that provide an opportunity to lament. It may be a touch ironic, but because one can be silent and undisturbed in many of these settings, they are also places where one can engage

with the emotional journey that reflects Winnicott's (1958) concept of the capacity to be alone.

Winnicott (1958) writes that the basis of the capacity to be alone, "is a paradox; it is the experience of being alone while someone else is present" (p. 417). Gradually, the ego supportive environment is introjected and "built into the individual's personality," so the person develops the capacity to be alone (p. 420). Winnicott holds that the infant's mother fulfills this role, but a congregation may also be able to step into this role, especially at moments when the individual is vulnerable, yet seeks out moments of solitude. Shiva is particularly well suited to this, providing for the mourner to be surrounded by people who love and care for them, but are at ease with the mourner being self-contained. But one senses that many of the other synagogue programs and events we have documented are rich holding environments for this.

These are also locales where Stern's (1985) different senses of the self can be engaged. Music and poetry can prompt non-verbal attunement. Study, with its rich poetic and allegorical material, and sitting in a sukkah remembering family and friends, are opportunities to engage the verbal sense of self. Journaling and study are excellent forums for working at incorporating loss into a new narrative self. So too, journaling can be employed in service of van der Kolk's approach to treating trauma by means of accessing one's inner world of feeling.

We need to be modest in the conclusions we draw for how any of study, lifecycle, and the arts serve lament. Our study has not examined any of them in depth, nor have we heard from the congregants who participated in these to find out if they had a sense that they had voiced lament during these, and if this was of solace, or had meaning for them.

Even our study subjects seemed surprised by how these various events connected to lament, but it would be valuable to have a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

Lament and Joy: Everyone is a Little Bit Broken

We keep returning to Brueggemann's idea that today's church silences the disordered parts of life that offend proper sensitivities and modern society is offended by suffering that violates the wishful optimism of our culture. These can align in congregations, whether Christian or Jewish, to silence the pain that is voiced through lament. Adler (2014) and Glazer (2009) name these as brokenness, a term used by the women in our study. We have also seen how Brueggemann (1984) employs Donald Winnicott's concept of the true self and false self to describe the psychological impact of this silencing.

Winnicott (1965) holds that if the good-enough mother largely reinforces the infant's early shaping of the world a true self will emerge, which is "a capacity to have a central, isolated core, and a capacity for creative interaction between self and others" (Tuber, 2008, p. 50). If the infant learns that it must bend to the mother's emotional needs, it will learn to primarily please her and instead develop a false self (Winnicott, 1965). We've also seen Brueggemann (1984) make the case that if the church does not welcome people's pain, they will bring their false self to their faith and will not engage the world as it really is, disordered and hurting. He does not use the term brokenness, but brokenness captures what he means by people's hidden pain and suffering.

We have also seen how the women in our study also spoke about the importance of people being welcomed to the synagogue with their brokenness, by which they meant conditions and feelings such as depression, grief, and regret. There was a rich texture to

their descriptions: “everyone has an element of brokenness,” “coming with your brokenness,” and “how much brokenness there is in the world.” This brokenness is always present even though there is often an effort in synagogue life to pretend otherwise. Jessica stated that synagogue members cover up brokenness by shifting their focus to, “how well their [own] garden was manicured.” She had a flair for framing this; “It’s exhausting to try to be perfect and unbroken.” Jessica captured a longing for the synagogue to be a place “where you can come with your brokenness.” But the implication of this is that synagogues are often places that do not welcome brokenness and that people feel this and come either with their “false self,” or do not come at all. The corollary to this is that a synagogue that does not welcome one’s true self will not be welcoming of lament.

The contrast with the men in the study was striking. As we have seen, they valued having congregants express lament, but they framed it in a less global way. They spoke to lament as an appropriate response to the COVID crisis in a congregational setting, but this was a defined, even sanctioned, situation. None of them named brokenness or described a way of being that matched the women’s use of it. It would be wrong to conclude that the men did not welcome brokenness into the synagogue, especially given that the term is used in a more informal than formal way and there is not an established definition for it. But this contrast also seems to point towards a struggle that synagogues face in welcoming people who are in pain or suffering. Our next three themes, Joy and Sustaining the Synagogue, Containment, and Nechemtah; Does it Limit Lament, thicken the description of this struggle.

Joy and Sustaining the Synagogue

As we saw, most of our study participants spoke about the need for joy to be present in synagogue life. Some mentioned it because they were frustrated that it limited lament from being voiced. Others saw joy as something people come to synagogue for and should be supported in, even if it hampered the voicing of lament. One subject worried about how present lament was at Shabbat services and that this hindered the voicing of joy. These reflected a perception by our study subjects that however valuable it may be for congregants to voice lament, the need to encourage a synagogue culture of joy, or to at least not discourage it, may have limited the voicing of lament.

Containment: Enough *Kvetching*[41] Already

In this study, both scholars and study participants were concerned with containing the voicing of lament in formal religious settings. Adler (2014) argues that, "imposing form and structure on lament constrains its wildness and socializes it so that the lament can engage a community as witnesses and as participants" (p. 76). Brueggemann (1986) sees the consistent and rigorous form of the psalms as enabling people to move into, though, and out of the darkness (p. 54).

Our study participants spoke about maintaining boundaries on lament, limiting its presence in the synagogue, and the need for caution about how people with significant personality disorders functioned in the synagogue. It is Adler's socializing of lament made manifest, but this deepens the question of how to balance brokenness and the joyful life of the congregation.

[41] *Kvetching* is Yiddish for whining.

Nechemtah[42]: Does it Limit Lament?

This project grew out of the researcher's sense that the societal emphasis on making meaning out of suffering, illustrated by the Tim McGraw's song "Live Like You Were Dying," could stifle lament. It was striking that many times in these interviews our study subjects turned their focus from the question of lament, to how they provided nechemtah, comfort. A number of them pointed out Jewish tradition's approach to the final verse of *Lamentations* (5:22) as an illustration of this. Instead of ending with this verse of despair[43], it repeats the previous verse (5:21)[44], with its message of hope. The study subjects then split; one cited this to illustrate how Judaism always has a message of hope, one saw it as an example of how we pull back from lament, and one wondered if this left us with any kind of meaning. Our study subjects were also divided about the role of nechemtah.

Nechemtah is laced through our findings. As we saw, lament is often engendered by rituals, arts and study programs, and activities that are employed to provide comfort. It is a living exercise of the last verses of *Lamentations*. Does repeating verse 22 after verse 21, provide comfort or nullify one's lament? It is striking that the two rabbinic subjects who are most focused on the example of nechemtah in Jewish tradition, Jacob and Jonathan, did not speak about brokenness. It is also notable that the two rabbinic subjects who were most resolute about not leading with nechemtah, Jessica and Wendy, were focused on brokenness. Rachel Adler's (2014) comment on the tension in how the end

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[42] *Nechemtah* translates as comfort

[43] 5:22 For truly, You have rejected us, Bitterly raged against us.

[44] 5:21 Take us back, O Lord, to Yourself, And let us come back; Renew our days as of old!

verses of *Lamentations* are presented, heightens the struggle in this debate and provides the ideal segue into the next section,

> If I orchestrated a performance of *Lamentations*, I might draft a powerful soprano to sing that last verse over the congregation's repetition of "take us back/renew our days" in order to restore the textual tension that forbids easy recuperation." (p. 89)

Lament & Joy: The Ampersand is the Most Jewish of Symbols

Only Jessica explicitly stated the need to keep lament and joy in tension, but all our study subjects described or reflected the need to keep lament in tension with something positive, if not joy, then hope or comfort. The way they expressed this could be strikingly beautiful and at the risk of repeating results, these three quotations captured the poetry of the ampersand:

> We really do hold both all the time, sorrow and joy…the human condition is one of suffering and lament and joy…like sorrow and joy, clasp hands. (Jessica)

> Not only do we need to embrace despair, …we have to let despair…have some sort of life beyond despair... [to] hold the despair in one hand…then the re-interpretation in the other. (Jacob)

> Before I can express hope, I need to be able to express the lament that is present, or maybe those things happen all at once. (Stephanie)

Our study subjects did not move seamlessly through their embrace of lament and joy. The women were passionate about the need for lament to be openly expressed in the synagogue. They acknowledged it cannot dominate the mood there, but to silence it would be to bar the door to many people. Our men valued lament, but they imagined its

presence in a contained way. However much our study subjects valued lament, most of them were drawn to providing comfort more than they were to engendering lament. To return to the songs cited in the introduction, it is hard to stay with Warren Zevon "on the davenport of despair" rather than counseling congregants to join Tim McGraw and "spend 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fumanchu." But a synagogue that aspires to welcome its congregant's true selves needs to be able to stay with Zevon, as much as party with McGraw. The study subjects who advocated for brokenness would state it more powerfully: If we cannot do this, joy is only artifice. This may be why all of them grappled with keeping joy, hope, or comfort, in tension with lament.

As we saw with Adler and Brueggemann, sacred texts and rituals constrain lament as much as they engender its expression and many of our study subjects spoke about the need to have constraints on it. In our study, we even saw a polarization within individuals between controlling lament by focusing on joy or by employing textual and institutional constraints. Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS) can help us understand the significance of this polarization.

There are five elements of IFS theory that we will be drawing upon here: "parts," the "self," the "internal family," "exiles," and "managers" (Schwartz, 1995, p. 34). People often speak in terms of parts, e.g., "there is a part of me that wants to and a part that doesn't." A part is a subpersonality, "a discrete and autonomous mental system that has an idiosyncratic range of emotion, style of expression, set of abilities, desires, and view of the world" (p. 34). The self is the seat of consciousness and is both observer and potential leader (p. 36**)**. In IFS Therapy, there are 8 qualities present, the "8 C's," when

"self-leadership" is being exercised[45]. A person's, or family's, or institution's, "internal family[46]" is made up of all their parts (p. 42). It is important to note that in Schwartz's model, IFS can be applied to institutions as well as individuals (Schwartz, 2020, p. 240). Some members (parts), of this system are more valued than others. Wounded, sad, and traumatized parts are often not valued or welcomed (p. 42). The term brokenness reflects these parts. Exiles are the parts that are hurting and are often pushed out of awareness (p. 47). Like children who are hurt and then rejected because they are hurt, exiles are "closeted away and enshrouded with burdens of unlovability, shame, or guilt" (p. 47). Managers are a group of parts within the system that live in fear that the exiles will escape. The managers' main strategy is to preempt the activation of exiles by keeping the person in control or out of danger (p. 49).

In IFS Therapy, whenever there is polarization in a system, whether the system is a person, family, or organization, it is because there is a part in pain, and at least two of the managers differ in how to manage the part so the system does not feel its pain or trauma. In this study, the polarization in the synagogue's internal family system may be between one manager employing joy and another using constraint, to keep the part in exile. The manager employing joy may strive to achieve this by making joy to be the dominant emotion voiced in the synagogue, so everything is "happy clappy." The

[45] In IFS Therapy, there are 8 qualities of self-leadership, which are referred to as the 8 C's. They are: Curiosity, Calm, Confidence, Compassion, Clarity, Creativity, Courage, and Connectedness (Schwartz, 2020, p. 50).

[46] A system can exist among individuals, in a family, and within a social system like a synagogue.

manager who employs constraint, may keep the part in exile by employing sacred texts and ritual forms that permit a limited and socially sanctioned form of lament to be voiced.

In IFS Therapy the goal is to have the system be in a state of self-leadership that enables the qualities of self (the 8 C's) to emerge and be with its complex inner reality in a compassionate and curious way (Schwartz, 2020, p. 45). Our polarized mangers may see themselves as protecting the system and do this without guile. Self-leadership requires an understanding by the self of the purpose the managers bring to system, about what is the protection they are providing (Schwartz, 1995, p. 40). The better the self understands and relates to the managers in the system, the more able it will be to bear witness to the exile's pain. The self is in a position to exercise a calm, curious, and compassionate leadership (i.e., self-leadership.) The mangers begin to trust that the qualities of the self and its relationship to the exile will help the exile heal. When it does this, the managers no longer feel called into action to contain the hurting exile when there is a perceived threat. In the synagogue's internal family system, the rabbi can be in the role of the self. The question is, what have we learned in this study about the nature of the pain that the exiled part holds; the trauma, rejection, or loss that a person has experienced? What our study subjects refer to as brokenness or the feeling that needs to be voiced before healing can occur.

Our study subjects spoke about many kinds of emotional pain they encountered among congregants and patients. The most prominent one was the death of a close family member or friend. There were various kinds of pain that arouse out of the COVID crisis: the pain of being shut in, of working from home and taking care of children, and of not being able to be by a dying family member's bedside, or at their funeral. Our study

subjects spoke about many other kinds of emotional pain: people's worry about recent American political life; the feeling that they were inadequate; or that they could not excise the pain from a long past event. The study participants worried about their changing congregations and American Judaism being stuck in modalities of lament that reflected a long past Eastern European Jewish experience, and not the vibrant Jewish life of the United States.

Our study participants spoke about how well synagogues welcomed some kinds of emotional pain and enabled people to voice their lament. They especially felt that the mourning process of funerals and shiva were effective. So too, there was little polarity around the emotional responses to the COVID crisis. But long-standing emotional pain, whether from a death, or illness, or less ritually embraced losses (e.g., miscarriage, post-partum depression, perceived professional failures) brought out polarities.

It is important to be circumspect in the conclusions we draw from this list of emotional pains that congregants and patients suffer. The mourning rituals around death are well established and our study subjects had confidence in them and described many ways that these rituals engendered strong community support, and a healthy psychodynamic process for the mourners. So too, when speaking about the response of individuals and the synagogue community during the COVID crisis, our study subjects described a strong process of emotional sharing and support, perhaps because the pain was sanctioned and approved by the community. However, when the emotional pain reflected events that were more individually based, unresolved, or had little ritual support, polarities emerged within our study subjects and within the synagogue community. This describes the pain that the women in our study called brokenness and

the men talked about as the pain that needs to be voiced before healing can occur. Our participant subjects were concerned about this pain but their managers (and those of the synagogue) endeavored to keep the suffering part in exile.

It is tempting to locate this pain in the great communal pain of the Jewish community, in the poverty and pogroms of Russia, the anti-Semitism that raged in American up until the 1950's, in the Holocaust that touched many American-Jewish families, and the sense that Israel has lived with the sword of Damocles hanging over it (Schwartz, 2020, p. 240). But the pain of these events is regularly discussed in the synagogue and the institutional resources for celebrating and supporting Israel, and mourning and memorializing the Holocaust, are well developed. However, when people in the synagogue voice the pain that they turn to therapy for, others look away and the room becomes uneasy. This is the pain we have met repeatedly, what Brueggemann (1986) calls the disordered parts of life that offend proper sensitivities and Adler (2014) details as; people in persistent vegetative states, profoundly demented, divorces, miscarriages, abortions, diseases, and mutilations (p. 90). The Jewish Healing Movement has worked to bring this pain into the synagogue, but the polarization of our study subjects testifies to the reality that there is a way to go yet.

How might rabbis step into the role of self-leadership and enable the exiled parts to have voice? Our participant subjects were certainly longing to do this. During our interviews we could see evidence of them exercising at least three elements of the eight C's of self-leadership: curiosity, compassion, and creativity (Schwartz, 2020, p. 50). During these interviews, they demonstrated curiosity in the effective voicing of lament. Their compassion for the emotional pain congregants felt was evident again and again.

Their creativity in lifecycle, study, the arts, and ritual was striking. There was a hunger on their part to step more deeply into the self-leadership role with respect to lamentation. Their resourcefulness in expanding the parameters of where lament can be voiced gives hope to welcoming brokenness into the parts of synagogue life that will always be less structured, such as the social hour after a Shabbat service and the informal discussions that are an integral part of congregational life. So too, the welcome extended to the person who radiates brokenness. But there is a need to name these challenges and provide support for rabbis who venture into courage and connectedness by welcoming brokenness – who make the ampersand a vital part of synagogue life.

Perhaps the final word from a psychological standpoint should go to Melanie Klein. Klein (1975b) is concerned with movement from the paranoid-schizophrenic position to the depressive position, from a stance where one's mother is either gratifying or a source of danger and attack, to one that integrates these feelings into a single object. Just as developing a well-integrated personality is a lifetime journey, having a synagogue cultivate a culture that engenders the expression of lament and joy is also an ongoing journey. The synagogue can be a place that is marked by psychodynamic richness, especially around issues of grief and loss. But this is an ongoing pursuit, an ideal to grow towards rather than a place one arrives.

Summary: Strengths and Limitations, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Action Items and Further Study

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this study is in its study subjects. It is hard to imagine a more articulate, insightful, and engaged set of participants. The beauty of their answers grew

with every reading of the transcripts. The study subjects and I are all graduates of the same rabbinical school, work in deeply interconnected networks, and speak a shared religious and professional language. It was simple to understand and be understood. The topic itself invited an easy intimacy – we all strive and struggle to serve people in pain and this prompts a deep respect and trust among us.

But that same interconnected network made it harder to achieve objectivity and independence from the study subjects. I knew many of the study subjects' supervisors and mentors. I had worked as a peer with one study subject, had a child who had worked for another, and one was the adult child of a close family member's friend.

Furthermore, we are certain to run into each other in professional settings. Preserving their anonymity within the Reform Jewish world is also not easy. A good practitioner of "Jewish geography"[47] could crack some of the codes, and this made certain kinds of analysis uncomfortable. The more psychologically revealing moments may have been left on the cutting room floor and this project errs to the institutional side rather than the individual one.

Another limitation of this study is its size and composition. It is a small study and does not survey for sexual orientation, gender orientation, or race. Selection was limited, with study subjects being drawn from class lists provided by the instructor, Rabbi Bernard H. Mehlman.

There is also a dissonance in the study, in that the literature review undertaken is mainly about the psalms of lamentation, while our study subjects were selected from a

[47] Exploring which Jewish people you know in common with a Jewish person you've just met.

course on the *Book of Lamentations*. This was done partly out of an awareness of the course, The *Book of Lamentations* and *Lamentations Rabbah*, but also because its central focus was on suffering and lament. A course on the *Book of Psalms* would cover the many themes of the psalms, which range far beyond lamentation. Our study participants did not dismiss the psalms, but they rarely mentioned them. It certainly would be of value to do a study of non-Orthodox rabbis who have studied the psalms of lamentation, if such a cohort exists, to see how lament figures into their work and how they view the psalms of lamentation.

The study subjects made limited mention of God, but I should note that I deliberately did not ask about God during the interview. Many non-Orthodox American Jews are uncomfortable with God language, and because of how central this language is to the psalms of lament, I was curious to see if the study participants brought up "God talk" while reflecting on congregants and lament. But the lack of a direct question about the way in which God figured into this lament may have been a factor in the limited amount of God talk that came up during the interviews.

Conclusions

Study and Reflection

There are many reasons for me to be pleased with the findings of this demonstration project. Not only did the study subjects believe that lament had a strong role to play among non-Orthodox Jews in helping them cope with suffering, but they were particularly interested in reflecting on the most effective ways they had been doing this and how they could continue to improve. This suggests that the study of lament during rabbinical school is of significant value and that rabbis who have graduated from

such courses would welcome opportunities to reflect upon the concept of lament, and its place in their rabbinate (e.g., through a workshop). It should be noted that the course, Lamentations and Lamentations Rabbah, is about *Tanakh* (Bible) and *midrash,* not pastoral counseling. But as our study shows, this combination of study and reflection is very fruitful.

The Synagogue as a Space for Spiritual and Psychological Process

Our study subjects were able to elicit lament not only through classic Jewish rituals and traditions like funerals and shiva, but also through innovative programs, study, the arts, and rituals. This suggests that such activities may create rich spaces for psychological and spiritual process. They show promise for providing a holding environment where "transitional space" can be established and "the capacity to be alone" supported. For example, journaling might be an effective way of accessing one's inner world of feeling. In addition, there may be rituals and activities that enable "the different senses of the self" to be engaged.

Welcoming Brokenness: Opportunity and Challenge

The rabbis in the study acquired a professional knowledge of the therapeutic value of voicing pain and suffering, and perhaps, the value of lament, through their Clinical Pastoral Education training. They focused on lament that reflected significant but not traumatic events in people's lives; events that left an impact. The women in the study characterized this as brokenness. Our rabbi subjects were comfortable with the expression of lament in lifecycle and pastoral counseling settings. However, they struggled with welcoming lament into less structured settings in the synagogue, and not excluding it from moments which were meant to elicit joy. They acknowledged this tension and even

saw it as a positive thing, but getting the balance right, or being flummoxed about how to do this was a source of concern for all the study subjects.

The women in the study had a strong sense that not welcoming brokenness into the synagogue encouraged people to put on a "happy face," or to feel unwelcome. This parallel's Winnicott's (1965) concept that without a proper holding environment people will present a false self rather than their true self. Many of our study subjects were eager to go beyond specific, structured, rituals and programs, to create a conducive environment in the synagogue, but they struggled with how to do this. IFS therapy may offer a framework for understanding this challenge in a positive way, as a conflict among managers who wish to protect the synagogue. A deeper understanding of this by congregational rabbis, may enable them to function as the self-leader for the synagogue and enable the congregation to be more at ease with the expression of the lament that grows out of brokenness, alongside the expression of joy.

Brokenness. It is a central concept in these findings, but I was unable to find any studies about it, or a more formal definition of it. It is, in part, about pain and suffering that feels ever present. A corollary to this is what I have termed, "lament in response to significant events but not traumatic ones." Adler (2014) writes, "Lament with its tears, illogic, poignancy, and shadow of death is still an explosive topic" (p. 90). This certainly resonates with our study, and the struggle to welcome the brokenness that underlies lament into the synagogue may be the study's most significant finding. Further research about the concept of brokenness and how brokenness might be more successfully integrated into the life of the synagogue, would be worthwhile. I would also note that

giving lament its due, what I referred to as "not playing beyond the game," seems to be connected to a recognition of, and ease with, brokenness.

Gender

Gender had a major presence in our study. Given how central the concept of brokenness was for the women and how absent it was for the men, it is tempting to suggest that male rabbinic students should receive training about it. But it may be more significant to simply bring to consciousness how differently the genders speak about – and approach – pain and suffering. Jessica's phrase, "Women are stories and men are ideas," has a poetic quality that frames these differences in creative terms and leaves open the possibility of a collaborative approach to addressing the challenges presented by gender in pastoral work. It should also be noted that ritual lamentation was historically done by women. Perhaps the underlying dynamics of this phenomenon still resonate[48] and it would be fruitful to study this. A limitation to this study that has been noted before is that the sample size is small and therefore it is important to be cautious about the conclusions that are made with respect to gender. There is also no identified LGBTQ representation in the study, which is another limitation.

Congregants

There are many kinds of research that would be of value in deepening our understanding of the role lament has to play in the lives of non-Orthodox Jews and how rabbis and congregations might grow in their skill in welcoming lament and enabling people to voice their lament. We have heard from rabbis but not congregants. It would be

[48] My thanks to Rabbi Seth Bernstein for this insight.

of value to research how effective they have found the rabbis' work that is meant to enable them to voice and share their laments. Do they feel it enables them to voice lament? Which actions or activities do they find to be the most effective in eliciting lamentation?

The Curious Case of the Jewish Healing Movement

Lastly, there is the curious case of the Jewish Healing Movement. As Rabbis Cowan and Sasso's (Cooper, 2018) comments indicate, one of its central goals was to welcome brokenness and lament into the synagogue. On the anecdotal level, bringing lament into the synagogue has been transformative, but there is little scholarly literature about it and the rabbis in our study made few references to it. Adler (2014) writes about "the healing movement" and credits it with it helping to make people in Reform synagogues aware "many congregants are ill or suffering" (p. 90). But without further investigation, its impact and the lessons from its work remain anecdotal and even hidden. Effective research on brokenness and lament in the synagogue will have to include further investigation on the work of the Jewish Healing Movement.

In drafts of this study, I sometimes used language that implied the findings applied beyond the six study participants. I have labored to excise such assertions and if any sweeping statements remain, they are incorrect. The findings of this study apply only to these participants.

A Personal Reflection on this Study

This demonstration project has been an adventure for me because my previous study was in the humanities rather than the social sciences. I was used to trying to prove a theory (e.g., lament is a central idea in Jewish thought) rather than gather data and then

study it to see how it illuminates the question at hand (e.g., what will we learn about lament in modern Jewish life if we interview six rabbis?). Simply put, I am in thrall of what these six interviews have revealed about the place of lament in the lives of non-Orthodox American Jews. The results of this study have demonstrated to me the ways a qualitative study can give us insight into the challenges of modern Jewish life. But, of course, there are ways I would approach it differently if I were starting over.

Given how little has been written about the issue of modern Jews and lament, I would have worked to know more about the material my study subjects had studied about lamentation. I now recognize how central the world of the study subjects is to a qualitative study. I would have focused less on the psalms of lament and more on the *Book of Lamentations* and the contemporary literature around it, even though it seemed to me less relevant to personal lament. It also would have been worthwhile to directly contact central figures in the Jewish Healing Movement for their recommendations about relevant literature.

Certainly, it would be of value to have more qualitative studies about non-Orthodox American Jews and their relationship to lament. But quantitative studies may also be important, especially ones about the impact of the Jewish Healing Movement on the effective expression of lament. This movement is well known in contemporary American Judaism and a quantitative study may be an effective way of gaining insight into this question.

Summary of Recommendations for Action and Further Study

Action Items

- Establish workshops for rabbis in the field who have studied lament, so they may reflect upon the place of lament in their rabbinate.
- Encourage non-Orthodox rabbis to share the innovative programs they have developed that enable congregants to voice lament; study, fine arts and writing programs, and new rituals. These programs and rituals create rich spaces for psychological and spiritual process.
- IFS therapy may offer a conceptual framework for rabbis to function as the "self-leader" for their synagogues, enabling congregations to be more at ease with the expression of the lament that grows out of brokenness, alongside the expression of joy.

Further Study

- Study is needed to find out what, if anything, congregants find to be effective in helping them voice lament in a synagogue setting, and what they might value of this and why.
- Study is needed about the concept of brokenness, to understand it better, and how it can successfully be welcomed into the life of the synagogue.
- Study is needed about how all the different genders approach lament. The concept that "Women are stories and men are ideas" frames these differences in creative terms and leaves open the possibility of a collaborative approach to addressing the challenges of this pastoral work.

- Study is needed on communal events that may have evoked significant lament in rabbis and the communities they serve. Our study participants referenced 9/11 and the COVID pandemic, as well as the Tree of Life killings in Pittsburgh.[49] The Tree of Life massacre was among the most lamentable events in American Jewish history. Its study may be central to understanding the place of lament in the life of the United States Jewish community.
- Formal research is needed about the impact the Jewish Healing Movement has had on welcoming brokenness and the voicing of lament into non-Orthodox, American synagogues.

[49] October 28, 2018

Appendix A

Consent Form

This is an interview being conducted by the researcher, Rabbi Dan Danson. The information you provide may contribute to a better understanding of effective ways to provide pastoral counseling to people experiencing great loss, grief, and/or trauma, and on the role of liturgy in the lives of these people.

You will be interviewed by Rabbi Danson and the interview will be done in person[50], or by video, and will be recorded. There will be one interview, which will last between 60 and 90 minutes and will not go longer than 90 minutes. You are free to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in the interview at any time. You can decline to answer any question you don't wish to answer. If you withdraw from the interview, your information will be discarded.

All information obtained from this study will be kept strictly confidential. The taped interview will be conducted in a private setting in which the only other person present is the interviewer. The interview will be done on Zoom.us and recorded to their server. The transcription will be made on Rev.com. Both accounts are password protected and the files will be destroyed after 5 years. You will not be identified in the study, nor will any quote of yours that may be used be attributed to you. Every effort will be made to preserve anonymity by making any statements about the subject's place

[50] This was written before the COVID-19 pandemic began.

of work, or the place where they live, very broad ones (e.g., a Northeast hospital, a synagogue in the Midwest.)

This study is a requirement for the degree of Doctor of Ministry and is done under the supervision of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Doctor of Ministry Program. The researcher, Dan Danson, can be reached at 715-218-3335 or at dan.danson@huc.edu . If there are any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Rabbi Danson. The final results of the study will be made available to participants upon their request.

Statement of Consent:

By signing the consent form, I understand my involvement in the study and agree to participate.

Name_____

Signature_____

Date_____

Signature of Researcher_____

Date_____

Appendix B

Sample Questions

3 Key Elements

Please tell me about your perspective on lament and how you use it in your work?

Could you speak about the how your congregants/counselee/residents/patients experience lament?

If there's any sign on their part of bringing lament into the public life of their institution, probe for how they do this and what they would like to develop.

PLUS ONE: How do you feel…what do you experience…how have you grown/changed/developed…

*Possible Questions**:***

Could you speak to what drew you to Rabbi Mehlman's course on Lamentation?

What did you take away from the course?

Can you tell me a bit (more) about your perspective on lament? (How do you define it? Could you speak to its importance for American Jews? Have you revised your thinking about it now that you're in the field? If so, how?)

Could you please tell me how you approach working with people who have suffered any of loss or trauma? [listen for how lament fits or does not fit into this and ask/probe for this] What feelings do you have when you're working with them?

How have your congregants/patients/students/residents experienced lament? [be sure to follow this up with other probing questions about it].

How do you feel when you're working with someone who is expressing or experiencing lament?

The course touches on classic Jewish literature and liturgy on lament. How have these figured or not figured into your work in the (congregation, hospital, college…)?

If you could wave a wand, how would you wish lament to be present in people's lives, whether as sufferer or as comforter?

How has your work with lament affected you? (probe for its impact on their spirituality, their relationships, how they process their own grief and loss, if they are open to speaking about this).

If they:

Express interest in working with classic texts/liturgy, either in a pastoral setting or congregational/institutional setting, ask after what they use, how they find it to be effective. Ask them to speak about its pastoral function? Ask if they have a sense of which are the most effective texts/prayers and why?

If they like to draw on the modern arts, poetry, prose, art/crafts, music, or movement, or some other approach, as tools for engaging lament, ask how they approach this and to speak to those they find to be of help (listen for hands on arts, writing, composing, creating, engaging with nature…)

If they work with meditation/breathing, ask after these and tell me more about the ones they are drawn to using and how they use them.

Glossary

Eichah – The *Book of Lamentations*

K'riah - The mourning ritual of tearing one's clothes or a black ribbon as a sign of grief.

Kvetching - Yiddish for whining.

Midrash - Literally "expounding" or "probing," is a Hebrew term for a Jewish sacred legend or story.

Musar – The study of sacred Jewish texts in order to cultivate ethical practices.

Nechemtah – Hebrew for comfort

The rabbis – This term refers to the religious scholars and authorities who wrote the post-biblical, Jewish sacred texts, such as the *Mishnah*, *Talmud*, Midrashim, Responsa, and legal codes.

The *Shema* - A prayer stating God's unity. It is recited in both public and private prayer and is the best-known prayer among Jews.

Shiva – A seven-day mourning observance that takes place in the mourner's home. Ideally, when approaching the mourner, the visitor should let the mourner initiate the conversation or even remain silent.

Sukkah - An outdoor, temporary hut or shelter used for ritual purposes during the holiday of *Sukkot* especially, eating.

Tisha B'Av - The ninth of the month of Av, it is a Jewish fast day that falls during the summer and is a holiday of penitential prayer and complete fasting.

Ushpazim - Spiritual guests who are invited into the sukkah. Traditionally, they are major religious figures from the Bible.

Zichron l'vrachah - "May his memory be for a blessing" is an honorific for someone who has died.

Zoom.us – This was the predominant video conferencing system used in the United States in 2020. During the COVID-19 crisis, when much of the country had highly restricted in-person encounters and most white-collar work and education was being conducted from home, people spent a huge amount of time meeting over Zoom.

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