Know Me. Care About Me. Show Me I Belong:

The Experience of Divorced Women in Our Synagogues

By

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Dedication

אנו נתמוך זו בזו בכל הנוגע לצמיחה שכלית, גופנית ונפשית

We vow to support each other in intellectual, physical and spiritual pursuits.

----from our ketubah

This is probably as close as I will ever get to giving an Oscar speech…

I dedicate this project to my amazing wife Rachel Goldman

whose support and love mean the world to me.

You have more than upheld this vow of our ketubah as I have pursued my DMin.

Thank you for enabling me to travel back and forth from Boston to New York

and then travelling together as we moved west to California.

I am grateful each and every day to have you and our remarkable sons Ben, Jordan and Daniel

in my life and I love you all so very much.

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Divorce has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. As a child, it was something that made me different. As an adult, it provided me with a family of my own. Not only did I find my soul mate as a result of a divorce; but I witnessed each of my parents finding partners who truly made them happy and I am grateful for that as well.

I want to thank my classmates and teachers who accompanied me along this journey and provided the holding environment I needed as I initially mourned the loss of my father. I am so very appreciative of the trust and bond that was formed on those Mondays and I am beyond pleased that I have completed this project. Thanks as well go to my fellow chaplains at CHLA, your grace and generosity of spirit are truly gifts from God.

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I am so appreciative of each and every congregant and colleague who participated in the surveys, groups or interviews as well as those who asked me about my project and encouraged me to keep going. May God bless me and my work in such a way that I am able to bring compassion and support to the divorced Jewish community wherever I should encounter them, and may I share this message with my colleagues everywhere.

Abstract

Whether directly or indirectly, divorce touches the lives of most people in our congregations. The statistics within the American Jewish community mirror that of the general population, but divorce is still stigmatized in American society generally and in the Jewish community specifically. Divorce is a lifecycle event that impacts the family system but how can rabbis and congregations best respond to the needs of these restructuring families within our communities? Of the women who participated in the study, the vast majority were married by rabbis and yet when they divorced, their divorces were purely legal matters of the civil courts. It also overwhelmingly demonstrates how this population within our congregations is craving connection, especially at a time that is often a lonely journey. The divorced population within our congregations is a dramatically underserved population within our communities, and as we hear from the participants, have specific needs that they hope to find within their own temple communities.

The focus of this paper examines the impact that divorce has on women in our congregations, and how rabbis and the congregations we serve, can be most helpful to them and their families at this vulnerable time of their lives. The Talmud teaches, “if a man divorces his first wife, even the altar sheds tears” (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Gittin 90b).

This study is a mixed-methods approach utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Through the use of surveys, a psychoeducational group, and in-depth interviews I examined and honored the experiences of divorced women in synagogues. Their stories are poignant and emphasize the need of synagogues and clergy to destigmatize divorce and to recognize and ritualize this lifecycle event as it is no less Jewish or important to their lives than their weddings.

Chapter One: Statement of Need

When one typically thinks about the lifecycle moments that are celebrated or observed in the synagogue, divorce is rarely, if ever, mentioned. Most Jewish clergy focus ritually on moments that celebrate family by blessing beloved companions under the *chuppah* (wedding canopy); by naming Jewish children and welcoming them into the covenant; by recognizing the maturation of the children and calling them to the Torah as *B'nei Mitzvah*; and by gathering family together as a cherished loved one is eulogized. This anticipated structure often leaves out those in our communities who are divorced or divorcing. We know that nearly half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce and yet what are we doing to respond to the needs of the divorcing and divorced individuals within our congregations.

I observed that within my former congregation, there had been a noticeable increase in the number of people who were either going through a divorce or who had been divorced in recent years. For some, it has been uncomfortable to re-enter the synagogue community after this status change. Why might this be? Why might these individuals not feel comfortable in their spiritual home? Perhaps it is the very notion of home that they are questioning at this time. Perhaps just as their own homes are experiencing significant change, it is possible that this extends to their synagogues as well. It is natural that many concerns are raised at this time, especially concerning the issue of attendance at religious services or participation in programs.

Among the many questions they might consider include the following: Do I want to go to temple alone? Where should I sit? Who do I know who will be there? Can I sit with them? Will people look at me differently? Will they feel sorry for me? Will it be easier if I bring my child(ren) with me? How will I feel entering the temple alone? How is my status as a divorced person

affecting my status in the community? Will my friends be choosing sides? Will I be inundated with questions or suggestions? Will I have a chance to experience the service or program, or will I be preoccupied with who is looking at me and possibly judging me?

Put yourself in their shoes for just a moment and imagine how you might feel re-entering your community for the very first time, post separation. What could we do to make it easier for our newly single members to return to their community? This project is aimed at discovering some of the needs that our divorced community members experience and how we as clergy can be more helpful to these needs.

For most, divorce is experienced as a purely secular process. How might we as clergy respond to our responsibility to accompany our congregants through the challenging and unexpected life-cycle moments in addition to the anticipated events such as childbirth, B'nei Mitzvah, marriage, and death. Addressing the concerns of the divorced population within the synagogue membership is not only a responsibility that we ought to take seriously, but it is also an opportunity to create moments of connection that too often, we as clergy miss. We have, in the words of the High Holy Day liturgy, "missed the mark." This is not due to malice or prejudice but rather it is most likely due to the fact that many of us have not even thought about it, despite the fact that it is right there in front of us, low-hanging fruit, eager to be picked, completely within our reach.

Let us ask ourselves what are we currently doing to support the individuals and families going through divorce or experiencing the aftershocks of divorce, and what can we do to support and embrace our congregational families at these moments? What are the obligations of and opportunities for a synagogue community? How might we add holiness to hearts that have been broken?

A divorced father, in preparation for the upcoming Bat Mitzvah of his daughter, once asked me a question that was enlightening and supports my theory that there is much more that we should be doing for the members of our communities. He and his former wife had been divorced for over ten years. She was remarried, and he was not. They both remained members of the temple and were involved in their daughter's life.

As a way to honor the rite of passage known as Bar or Bat Mitzvah, the newly teen-aged child typically receives from the leadership of the congregation, a ritual item to mark the Bar or Bat Mitzvah day, which can be used at a future Sabbath or holiday time. It had long been the custom at my former congregation to give each child who becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah a *Kiddush* cup for the sacramental wine, as wine is a symbol of joy. Typically, the Kiddush cup is first used at the end of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah service as we celebrate the joy of the child being called up to the Torah for the first time.

In anticipation of his daughter's service, this father asked me if we could possibly provide his daughter with two Kiddush cups so that she could have one in each house and be able to celebrate Shabbat at both her mother's house and her father's house with a Kiddush cup of her very own. I was happy to make this arrangement but inside, I was also a bit embarrassed that we hadn't thought of offering it ourselves. This simple request for the Kiddush cup was the father's way of communicating to us that in his home too, Jewish holidays and customs are observed and that his home, is fully his daughter's home as well. I was truly appreciative of his request as it is a great example of how we can be proactively supportive of the divorced families in our community. This father opened my eyes, and I have to believe that other parents have felt similarly over the years but may have been too embarrassed or ashamed to ask. I continue to learn from him as I ask myself, what more can we do? What can we do to make our divorced families more comfortable within their spiritual home? It is incumbent upon us, as clergy, to ask

more questions of our divorced families and not assume that the custody arrangement, the family dynamics, or the level of Jewish observance in the homes of the children of one set of divorced parents will resemble that of any other family in the congregation. As community leaders, we need to provide sanctuary to those who are in need of a safe space, and we must take notice of who is in our midst and who no longer might be. Sanctuaries need to be more than worship space. Sanctuaries should enable individuals to be seen for who they are and who they aspire to become. As we provide safe holding environments for those members of our community who desire and deserve such safety, we ourselves can become living and breathing sanctuaries for others.

No two divorces are the same. We can recognize that for the individual, a divorce marks the end of one chapter and the beginning of another chapter in their lives. The congregation however must keep in mind that this is anything but a clear demarcation as each member of the family will experience the divorce differently and at distinct paces. For some, it may come as something long overdue; for others, a complete and utter surprise. In either event, we must acknowledge that the family's divorce will likely be a trope that will weave itself into this family's story for many years to come and will be especially present at important lifecycle moments like B'nei Mitzvah, graduations, weddings and funerals. The more we as clergy can be present for our members experiencing these significant rites of passage and anticipate their potential needs, the more equipped we will be to validate their experiences, support them in their times of need, and recognize the important fact that divorce is never truly final.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Historical Background

While we principally hear about divorce in the book of Deuteronomy, the text describes a reason why a man might want to divorce his wife, ritually what he should do in terms of writing her a divorce document, and simply that he should send her away. Clearly, the institution of divorce predates the writing of Deuteronomy. Netter (2002) describes divorce in Deuteronomy "as a preexisting legal remedy for the termination of marriage". The text is written as follows:

כִּי־יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה וּבְעָלָהּ וְהָיָה אִם־לֹא תִמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינָיו כִּי־מָצָא בָהּ עֶרְוַת דָּבָר

וְכָתַב לָהּ סֵפֶר כְּרִיתֻת וְנָתַן בְּיָדָהּ וְשִׁלְּחָהּ מִבֵּיתוֹ׃

"A man takes a wife and possesses her. She fails to please him because he finds something obnoxious about her, and he writes her a bill of divorcement, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house" (Deuteronomy 24:1).

This text has been problematic for generations. In fact, the rabbis of the time had their own questions and reactions to this text and as a response there is an entire tractate of the Talmud (*Gittin*) devoted to issues around the procedures of divorce and the bill of divorcement, known as the *get*. Tractate *Gittin* focuses on how divorce is handled with respect to traditional Jewish law or *halacha*. For the purpose of this project I am less concerned here about what Jewish law commands and more interested in seeing how Jewish teachings and values can bring comfort to those who are divorcing. So, how do we as rabbis of the twenty-first century, respond to this text? What are the questions that we have? What are our responsibilities? This text jumps out for a number of reasons not limited to its brevity and seemingly callous tone. Can it really be this simple? Are we willing to understand divorce strictly in the transactional way in which it is described?

Created in the Divine Image

In order to begin to answer these questions I am drawn to the words in the book of Genesis that serve as the basis of my personal theological foundation:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים ׀ אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם׃

And God created man in God's image, in the image of God, God created him;

male and female God created them (Genesis 1:27).

When we have the clarity to remember that each one of us is created in the Divine Image, we must remember that the parties involved in a divorce are at minimum, two individuals created in that same Divine Image, and we must treat them accordingly. I say at minimum two individuals, due to the fact that often the people going through a divorce are sandwiched between the children they are raising and their own sets of parents who raised them. Divorce is a powerful event in life that has been known to have ripple effects not only on one's immediate family, but on one's circles of family and friends as well. It should be no surprise then, that the synagogue community, frequently an extension of the Jewish family, is often affected significantly when either a prominent family in the congregation experiences divorce or when there is a series of divorces within the community.

Divorce is Not a Sin

It is important to state at the outset, as Rabbi Elliot Dorff reminds us, that "the Torah provides for divorce, and so from our earliest texts the Jewish tradition has not considered divorce a sin" (Dorff, 2003, p.89). Jewishly, divorce is not a sin. This is echoed by Rabbi Sanford Seltzer (2012) who writes, "divorce, while not encouraged, is not deemed sinful or forbidden, but rather a sad, occasionally necessary solution to an unhappy marital relationship." This is something that we must remember to lead with when individuals come to meet with us to share the news that they are getting divorced or even considering divorce. They often come filled with the fear that we,

their rabbis, may judge them at this sensitive juncture of their lives and before we do anything else, we must address this potentially unspoken fear and enable them to feel more comfortable in our midst and more at ease.

The Widow, the Orphan and the Stranger

Traditionally in Jewish law there are three types of people who we are taught to pay special attention to and make special arrangements for: the orphan, the widow and the stranger in our midst. It deserves noting that when the bible speaks of the orphan, it refers to anyone who is specifically fatherless. The book of Deuteronomy (16:14) makes this inclusion explicitly clear in reference to the holy festivals of Shavuot, the feast of weeks, and of Sukkot, the feast of booths, as it is written:

וְשָׂמַחְתָּ בְּחַגֶּךָ אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתֶךָ וְהַלֵּוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהַיָּתוֹם וְהָאַלְמָנָה אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ׃

You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities.

In times of rejoicing we are not just told, but commanded, to include our community members in our celebrations and observances. It is as though God is teaching us to make sure that no one is left out and that no one is denied the opportunity to observe the festivals and ultimately to give thanks to God. The prophet Isaiah teaches,

לִמְדוּ הֵיטֵב דִּרְשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט אַשְּׁרוּ חָמוֹץ שִׁפְטוּ יָתוֹם רִיבוּ אַלְמָנָה׃

“Learn to do good. Devote yourself to justice; aid the wronged.

Uphold the rights of the orphan; defend the cause of the widow” (Isaiah 1:16).

Isaiah begins his lesson globally and with each step, he concretizes his message so that there is clarity. What does it mean to learn to do good? By making it a habit of upholding the rights of

fatherless children and of single mothers, this is how we learn to do good. In the book of Exodus (22:20-23), we are taught what could happen lest we not heed Isaiah's sage advice,

וְגֵר לֹא־תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי־גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: כָּל־אַלְמָנָה וְיָתוֹם לֹא תְעַנּוּן:

אִם־עַנֵּה תְעַנֶּה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם־צָעֹק יִצְעַק אֵלַי שָׁמֹעַ אֶשְׁמַע צַעֲקָתוֹ:

וְחָרָה אַפִּי וְהָרַגְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בֶּחָרֶב וְהָיוּ נְשֵׁיכֶם אַלְמָנוֹת וּבְנֵיכֶם יְתֹמִים:

> "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan. If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me, and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans."

God makes it explicitly clear that it is imperative upon us to treat the stranger, widow, orphan well and threatens us with God's anger, which we have already seen to be fierce, if these people within our own communities are not treated as they deserve to be. Clearly God means business here.

We know God by many names, but perhaps the most appropriate or applicable name here is the one found in Psalm 68:6 as it is written,

אֲבִי יְתוֹמִים וְדַיַּן אַלְמָנוֹת אֱלֹהִים בִּמְעוֹן קָדְשׁוֹ

"the father of orphans, the champion of widows, God in His (sic) holy habitation".

As the father of orphans and the champion of widows, God is known for looking out for the disenfranchised, the less fortunate, and those who stand on the fringes of our communities.

There are also a number of instances in the Jewish bible where widow is spoken about in conjunction with the divorced woman, and this is a connection that deserves being brought to

light. The widow and divorcee are understood to be in a similar situation and both the obligations to them and the obligations of them are the same.

וְנֵדֶר אַלְמָנָה וּגְרוּשָׁה כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־אָסְרָה עַל־נַפְשָׁהּ יָקוּם עָלֶיהָ׃

The vow of a widow or of a divorced woman,

however, whatever she has imposed on herself, shall be binding upon her. (Numbers 30:10)

The Widow and the Divorcee

The connection between the widow or *almanah* and the divorced woman, known as the *gerusha,* in this text and others suggests to me that these women are often in the same proverbial boat and as such, must be treated in comparable ways. In fact, the rabbis of the Talmud would need to agree with this based on the hermeneutic principle of *binyan av*, an analogy based on conceptual similarity, which would hold that just as *x* is true for case of the widow, *x* also holds true for the case of the divorcee. We have a responsibility today, especially with the high rate of divorces, to extend care and compassion not only to the stranger, orphan and widow, but to the divorced individual as well. Additionally, as we yearn to treat men and women equitably, we have a responsibility not to assume that it is only women who are vulnerable in life, and therefore we must consider it our obligation to look out for the divorced men and the widowers as well.

The Reform Movement

Currently, while the Reform movement elsewhere in the world still requires a Jewish religious divorce in order for either partner to remarry, "the Reform movement in the United States accepts civil divorce as completely dissolving the marriage and permitting the remarriage of the divorced persons" (Washofsky, 2001, p.169). As one might expect, there remain oppositional positions regarding this decision. According to Jewish law, without a *get* a Jewish woman is still considered to be legally married to her husband. As Washofsky correctly

emphasizes, this is "especially acute in Israel, where the *halakhah* as interpreted and applied by the Orthodox rabbinate is, by act of the Knesset, the law of marriage and divorce for all Jews, Orthodox or not" (p.172).If a wedding sanctifies the union of two people, what does a divorce do? Would a religious divorce then sanctify the dissolution of a sacred partnership? In this post-modern world, we need to keep in mind that there are many reasons why a couple might get divorced, and without question there are times when a divorce has the potential to bring sanctity and sanctuary back to at least one of the parties for whom the marriage itself was intolerable or unsafe.

Alternatives to Kiddushin

Wrestling with this question, Gail Labovitz raises questions of her own. "Can *kidushin* be reformed to become an egalitarian or more egalitarian, process? Could we, from within the current halakhic structure, address and change the unilateral nature of *kidushin* and its undoing –divorce?" (Labovitz, 2017, p.91). Labovitz correctly spells out why it is that the *get* is currently the sole domain of the groom. "The inequity of Jewish divorce is a function and mirror of this imbalance. Divorce undoes what was done at *kidushin*, and so the one who binds must be the one who releases" (Labovitz, p.92). While the United States requires civil divorces to occur to legally declare a couple divorced, Israel has no civil divorce (Labovitz, p.92). Several modern and egalitarian couples have attempted to create marriage ceremonies that honor tradition and still reflect the values of today's society. Several years ago in fact, when Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg was still a rabbinic student, she created the website www.alternativestokiddushin.com, which is a collection of roughly a dozen alternatives to the traditional wedding ceremony. In the Conservative Movement of Judaism, some wedding couples opt to "make use of the Lieberman Clause in which the members of the couple agree to submit to and abide by the guidance of the movement's Joint Beit Din in case of the dissolution of the marriage" (Labovitz, p. 92). The

Lieberman Clause and other innovations frame the marriage as a conditional event that would require dissolving the marriage in a way that met the requirements of Jewish law.

Divorce in American Society

It was recently reported that "in the United States, the probability of a first marriage lasting for 20 years has decreased to about 50-50" (Foreman, 2014). "While divorce perhaps doesn't have the same stigma connected to it as it once did, the practice is still a touchy subject in many parts of America" (Hardy, 2015). In 1969, California was the first state in the United States that instituted No-Fault divorces, and other states followed suit in the 1970's. The advantage to No-Fault divorces was that No-Fault legally took the blame out of the courtroom which over the years has helped in reducing the blame and shame that often surrounds divorce. It is perhaps significant to put this in the context of the time in which this was taking place. The 1970's was a time of cultural change and upheaval in many respects. Politically, the United States was involved with the Vietnam War and the antiwar movement, the Watergate scandal, the impeachment of President Nixon, the Kent State massacre, and the gasoline crisis. The possibility of the Equal Rights Amendment challenged long-held gender roles. Title IX gave girls and women more opportunities in the realm of athletics and opportunities and the first woman rabbi was ordained in 1972. Environmentally, we began celebrating Earth Day but we also were dealing with nuclear meltdowns from Three Mile Island. A new "therapeutic culture of divorce" (Doherty, 2015) reflected the need caused by the rise of divorces in the 1970's.

Life was filled with change and it was anything but stable. This was a time when divorce was seen as liberation and with that came new opportunities and outlooks. "Therapy had been implicitly liberationist even from the time of Freud, focusing on how to live an authentic life, rather than one of imposed obligations" (Doherty, 2015). The impact of divorce in our society inspired a new modality of intervention called discernment counseling which is used to help

couples assess their options and clarify whether they will continue to work on their marriage, or they will move ahead with the divorce process. It used to be the practice of therapists to encourage people to stay married at most costs, but the freedom of the 1970's also emphasized personal expression and happiness in a way that encouraged therapists to lean into the options that couples actually have and being open to the decisions that their clients make.

Alternatives to Litigating Divorce

In more recent years there has been a shift to look at alternative legal avenues of getting divorced including collaborative law and mediation. While the practice of mediation in a variety of settings has been around practically since the beginning of time, it is believed that collaborative divorce began in 1990 and was founded by attorney Stu Webb as a way of making divorce less adversarial, more constructive, and less litigious (*History of Collaborative Divorce*, 2019).

In a typical collaborative law case, each party has legal counsel and there is at least one neutral professional at the table as well whose responsibility it is to facilitate the process and feelings around the table. The parties in a collaborative case promise not to litigate and, should litigation become necessary, the divorcing parties are mandated to hire new legal counsel. The thinking behind this is to help motivate all involved to resolve the case out of court and to preserve control of the case with the parties rather than handing the control to the court. Once a legal letter of agreement has been signed, it is only then that the parties go to court to finalize the divorce before a judge. Rabbi Lisa Greene reflects on this reality in the following excerpt as she writes,

> "Ultimately, though, the reality for many non-Orthodox Jews going through divorce is that they might never approach their rabbi or cantor for Jewish ritual in the face of their civil divorce, not knowing that there is something Jewish to do or not seeing a need or

> opportunity to Jewishly mark the end of their marriage – a (once) sacred relationship originally marked by Jewish ritual under the chuppah. Herein lies the paradox: we begin a marriage with a wedding, a Jewish ceremony, but we end it in a civil courtroom, devoid of Judaism (Greene, 2018, p226).

This sentiment is echoed in Rabbi Perry Netter's, *Divorce is a Mitzvah,* which is the primary text on Jewish divorce from a modern perspective and is a comprehensive guide to divorce for those considering or experiencing their own divorce. He writes, "Divorce has been allowed to fall solely within the purview of lawyers and courts to hammer out agreements and settlements and schedules and legal responsibilities. The inner lives of the participants, the ultimate meaning of this moment, are often ignored" (Netter, p.117). This project serves as one response to this problem of the neglected inner lives of divorced individuals. This study dives deeply into many of the issues surrounding divorce and what clergy can do to support the divorcing and divorced families in our communities.

The Role of the Rabbi

My curiosity and interest about the subject of divorce and the practical implications upon congregational life stems from the fact that very little has been written on this particular subject. Historically, what has been written about divorce from a Jewish perspective largely has to do with the legal procedural instructions regarding how to give and receive a *get*, the traditional Jewish bill of divorce. Liberally minded Jews take much pride and comfort in the egalitarian nature of their synagogues and homes, but the power within the context of Jewish divorce remains in the hands of the husband, and this presents a real problem for the modern liberal Jew. So how might we, as clergy, address the issue of divorce within our communities? What are our responsibilities? What are the opportunities? What can we do to appropriately honor this vulnerable time in the lives of our congregants?

Clergy as First Responders

To begin addressing this challenge, we need to remember that even though a rabbi is publicly seen leading the congregation in prayer, this is not the primary work of a congregational rabbi. Leading prayer and officiating at lifecycle moments are just two responsibilities of the congregational leader. Dr. Michelle Friedman (2015) describes clergy as the "first responders to the demanding human situations of everyday life" and yet she also acknowledges the reality that many are "not formally trained to deal with the pastoral component of their work" (Friedman). Friedman further states that "the core mission of religious vocation, to inspire lives of faith and meaning, demands emotional engagement between clergy and congregant" (Friedman). It is indeed a powerful mission as the potential of blurring boundaries is a constant reality and one we need to keep in mind at all times. Rabbis have a sacred responsibility when we are trusted with the secrets and fears, accomplishments and failures, struggles and doubts of our congregants. We walk a fine line between counseling and providing therapy, between listening with an open mind or allowing judgment to enter the conversation.

Pastoral Counseling

We have an obligation at all times to be aware of any potential transference headed our way as well as issues of counter transference that might arise within our own hearts and minds. We must be aware of our own triggers and hot buttons so that we have clarity and don't allow our issues to become entwined with those who may sit across from us. As Friedman and Yehuda remind us, "transference and countertransference are reactions of the patient/congregant and the therapist/rabbi, respectively, to the therapeutic or pastoral interaction" (Friedman & Yehuda, 2017, p.12). We must pay special attention to what is happening in the moment. Like an attentive driver who is able to see details on the road that others miss, so must we give our full attention and listen for what is being said as well as that which is not being said in that

moment. What might be getting in the way of such a disclosure? Do we create obstacles to trust, or do we remove potential stumbling blocks? Do the individuals have our full attention, or do we seem distracted? Perhaps the individual is afraid of being judged or feeling ashamed. Perhaps there are issues of this person's life that he or she has never articulated before.

> The more aware clergy are of their own barriers to listening, the freer their minds will be to generate helpful questions. In the context of a pastoral interview, a rabbi has two sets of questions, the ones the rabbi asks out loud and the ones the rabbi keeps to him- or herself. The rabbi's inner dialogue helps formulate questions that inform the interview. The questions the rabbi asks out loud are designed to gather more information (Friedman & Yehuda, p.11).

As rabbis in the role of pastoral counselors, we must always remain curious and open, setting aside any prejudice, assumptions or judgement. As Milgrim (2009) wrote,

> Midwifing a couple through a divorce is challenging. Often clergy are doing this for people we know, respect, and have come to care for greatly – both of them. Our task is to help two souls disentwine, to remove the *kiddushin*, the holiness, that sanctified them for each other alone. (p.69)

Further, as Rizzuto (1998) has written, "pastoral guidance attends to all internal and external attitudes that facilitate or interfere with the believer's attempts at relating to God" (p. 74).

Divorce and One's Relationship with God

Reflecting on her own divorce, Reverend Carolyne Call (2013) "found that divorce had an unexpected impact" on her own spiritual life as well as her relationship with God. She found herself asking many questions and these are questions that we as rabbis could learn to anticipate hearing from those who meet with us and confide in us. We know that faith alone can't guarantee that a marriage will endure the emotional roller coasters of our lives, but we

want to remember to address an individual's faith at the important moments of their lives. If we don't ask about their spiritual lives, who will? We must find opportunities to make inquiries about the religious and spiritual journeys of those we meet. Is God part of their journey? Is faith? As clergy we need to inquire about the individual's spiritual life just as a therapist might ask about the individual's intimate life. By avoiding these conversations intentionally or unintentionally, we may be giving the message that we are not interested in their spiritual beliefs, struggles or identities. We need to anticipate that when someone is going through a divorce or is recently divorced, there exists the potential that the divorce will impact other aspects of their lives. Call was plagued by questions about her own spirituality and her relationship with God. Did she fail God by ending this marriage? Did God fail her? She desperately wanted to know whether spiritual growth could come out of her divorce. She decided to research the role of clergy and congregations in the process of a member's divorce and asked many of the same questions that I am asking in this project.

The Complex Roles of Rabbis

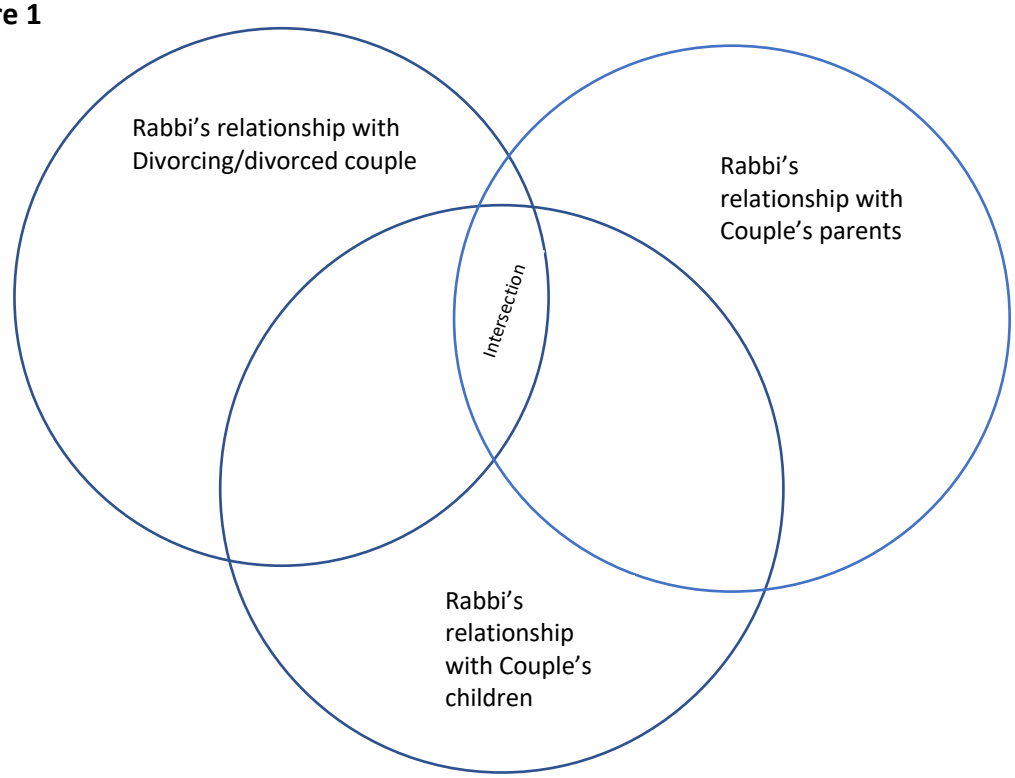
As rabbis we certainly have many roles and functions. From teacher to preacher, counselor to consoler, confidante to confidence builder, rabbis mean different things to different people. A key distinction between therapists and rabbis in a congregational setting, is that while a therapist may meet with one person in a family, the rabbi in all likelihood has relationships with each member of that family and these relationships may span the generations. For rabbis, an understanding of *family systems and dynamics* are key components of our work. As Dr. Murray Bowen (1985) wrote,

> After having spent thousands of hours sitting with families, it became increasingly impossible to see a single person without 'seeing' his total family sitting like phantoms

alongside of him. This perception of one person as a segment of the larger family system had governed the way I thought about and responded to the individual (p. 152).

When clergy in general and rabbis in particular have professional relationships with multiple generations of a family, this image of phantoms becomes not only realized, but common (See Figure 1). When we casually ask about the health of a particular family member out of respect or interest, we bring that person into the room, and without intending to do so, we may alter the safety of the environment in either positive or negative ways. The initial inquiry may add a layer of contextual depth, but if the person before us is working on individuating or wanting to do something not connected to their family, our innocent question of connection could backfire. The challenge of course, is to not let our knowledge of the larger family interfere with the pastoral session we are in at the moment.

Figure 1



Consider the following scenario: Larry and Kerri Goldberg have been members of the synagogue for twenty years. Kerri grew up at the synagogue and her parents are still members. In fact, her father is a member of the board, and his parents were founding members of the synagogue. There is a rich history here. Larry and Kerri come in to see you, the rabbi, because they have recently decided to separate. They still have young children at home and their son, Jerry, is scheduled to become a Bar Mitzvah next year. As a rabbi, you are involved with at least three generations of this family and possibly four. This larger family system will in one way or another influence the work that you do with the couple even if it never gets expressed aloud. How do we as rabbis stay in the moment? How do we care for both parties of the couple? How do we lend support to their children? How do we respond to this situation with their parents while keeping their confidentiality? These are just some of the questions and issues that arise when the rabbi is connected to multiple people and generations of a family system. It is indeed complicated but not impossible. In fact, it is more common than we might imagine. So how might we handle the Larrys and Kerris in our congregations? How do we ensure the integrity of the Bar Mitzvah service knowing of all the drama behind the scenes? When do we acknowledge the challenges that are present? How do we know how real we can or should be? And how do we help the child experience this rite of passage in a way that will be remembered in a positive way?

Complicated families have strong roots in the Bible

When reading the Biblical narratives of the Book of Genesis people are often surprised to realize just how troubled and dysfunctional our ancestors are portrayed. Take for example Genesis 37:3, “Now Israel loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic”. This text clearly states that Israel (Jacob) played favorites among his children. Could we ever imagine being so bold or so obvious? We wonder if

these are the best examples from whom to learn. But then we come to realize that it is better to learn from imperfect people with complicated family relationships than to learn from those who might appear to comprise the perfect family, with attributes that would seem unattainable.

The God of our Ancestors

The way Jews pray, is also an indication of the role of the family system. We often invoke the Holy One with the words, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, God of Rachel and God of Leah. By including the names of our forefathers and foremothers, we include ourselves in this distinguished lineage. Their God is our God. Their history is our history. Their successes and their shortcomings are ours as well.

Just as it is important to keep in mind the ailing grandparent of next week's bride and the potential impact it may have on those present, we must also be sensitive to the dynamics involved with a divorced family and the conceivable discomfort that may be present as we negotiate participation honors at an upcoming Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Like the therapist who creates a safe, holding environment for their patients, it is up to us to provide similar environments for the families and the members of each family of our communities so that they are able to experience more deeply the important moments of their lives.

In situations in which a rabbi may learn of a couple's decision to divorce early on in the process, the rabbi can serve as an important resource to the entire family. Rabbis can help families by being the referral source for good therapists, attorneys, mediators, etc. and rabbis can keep an extra eye on the children of the divorcing couples. Are they acting out in religious school? Have they recently been arriving late to class? Are they focused on their work, or do they seem to be distracted? How can we help? This is the question that must be ready to use at each and every moment. How can we help? What can we do? Author Judy Petsonk refers to rabbis as double resources "first, by suggesting immediate strategies for easing family tensions,

and second by offering long-term strategies" (Petsonk, 1990). An immediate strategy could involve how we communicate with the parents. Rather than assuming that one parent will share the information we provide with the other parent, we can make a conscious effort to send important information to each of the parents, taking the burden off one or the other. In the situation in which both parents decide to stay at the synagogue, a more long-term example could be the way we assist them by restructuring their membership and finding out from each of them what would be most helpful. It would be foolish for us to assume that what works for one family would be what another family needs. At minimum we are double resources, and my experience would tell me that we are indeed much more. In addition to offering these strategies, we are on the ground support for the members of our communities. From a psychological standpoint we create and provide the safe spaces or holding environments that Winnicott identified as being of primary importance to the parent-child relationship that is all too often lacking. For Winnicott (1960),

> the term 'holding' is used here to denote not only the actual physical holding of the infant, but also the total environmental provision prior to the concept of *living with*. In other words, it refers to a three-dimensional or space relationship with time gradually added. (para. 24)

When we as rabbis, create holding environments for those who seek our counsel, we create safe, confidential spaces in which others are able to share, unpack and explore some of the issues going on in their lives. Professor Melissa Kelley understands the role of a pastoral counselor this way:

> My role, simply put, was to feed that hope. My role was to offer as secure a base as possible as they sorted through the various losses and pains of their lives. And then, my

> role was to point to the divine as offering so much more than I or any human being could offer, to point to the divine as the ultimate secure base (2009).

In theological terms, when we are following our calls and are present for people when they truly need us, we become part of the biblical narratives. When Jacob stops en route to Haran from Beersheva, Jacob takes a stone, puts it under his head and lies down. He dreams of a ladder or stairway that reached to the sky and notices the angels of God going up and down. It is in this place that Jacob has a spiritual encounter and awakes from his dream invigorated and grateful to God for the experience and exclaims, "surely God is present in this place, and I did not know it" (Genesis 28:16). So, where are we? I believe that we as rabbis can be the stone that becomes Jacob's pillow. We can be that non-anxious presence that enables the Jacobs of this world to be most fully alive. We can be the rock upon which they can rest and trust. We help set the stage, provide the environment and create the tone in which spiritual experiences can happen. As rabbis, we can help others to see that the Holy One is indeed present in our world and in their lives. Just as God is known as *Tzur Yisrael*, Rock of Israel, so too can we, created in God's image, be rocks for those who need us.

Do Not Separate Yourself From the Community

In *Pirkei Avot, The Ethics of our Ancestors*, Hillel taught, "do not separate yourself from the community" (Mishnah Avot 2:5), and yet this is precisely what human instinct would seem to instruct those who are in the process of getting divorced. It is an example of the fight or flight response to stress that has in all likelihood been around since the time of creation but this reflexive response wasn't officially named until the 1920's by psychologist Walter Cannon. Why do we do this? Why does this happen? Scientists now understand that this acute stress response

is what happens when one's hormones prepare one's body to respond to a presumed dangerous or frightening situation.

Divorce is common

In order to understand this phenomenon more completely, we first need to acknowledge that divorce is a common occurrence in today's society, and that in fact it has been for quite some time. Even though this is a subject that is not often discussed openly in the Jewish community, it still remains a reality for us, and rather than turning our backs on those who are divorcing or divorced, we must open our hearts to them and provide them with reasons not to leave their communities. In today's society, who among us can say that they have not been touched in one way or another by the divorce of a close family member or friend?

Not only do we need to destigmatize divorce, but we must remember to see the individual for who they are and not see them exclusively as their marital status. Just as we see the man who has had multiple bouts of cancer for the full individual he is, we must regard those who are divorcing or divorced for the full beings that they are. As human beings, we all long to be seen and heard. We post on social media sites with the desire that others will not only read what we have to say; but react to it and ultimately "like it" or share it as well. When a member of a synagogue community enters the building and sees one of her rabbis, she wants to make sure that the rabbi sees her in return. For some divorcing individuals, their perception is that rather than engaging with them, their rabbis and other members of the congregation, look away or turn away, leaving them feeling like second-class citizens. Whether accurate or not, or intentional or not, the fact that some individuals have these perceptions makes it important to consider and address. In her article entitled "The Divorced-Parent Family & the Synagogue Community", Barbara K. Bundt Bond (1982) noticed that "one of the most alarming aspects of adults experiencing divorce is their newly developed negative attitudes toward the rabbi and

the synagogue" (para. 1). She suggests that "the congregant, who really is feeling guilt and shame, is unconsciously using the rabbi as a scapegoat" (Bond, para. 8).

Self-Exile

For those already connected to a synagogue, there is often the feeling that the synagogue, no matter the actual size, is no longer big enough for both parties and because of this, one or both divorcing parties choose to leave the synagogue. "Remaining in the same synagogue may not prove comfortable for one or both of them, regardless how sensitive that congregational community may be" (Mencher, 2010, para. 8). They may impose upon themselves a self-exile as the need to 'get out of Dodge' propels the divorcing individual to flee his or her community with the hope of avoiding potential judgment, criticism or contact from their social circles. "As Gregson and Ceynar (2009) learned from women who divorced, there can be a desire to move on by making changes in physical surroundings and appearance that might also result in divorced individuals changing their view of themselves and consequently their social network" (Grief and Deal, 2012). Some divorcing individuals even withdraw from Judaism itself immediately after separating as they are overcome with feelings of anger and shame. Perhaps they are angry with the rabbi or perhaps they feel that they can't deal with God right now, and thus avoid attending religious services and activities altogether. Divorce for some is nothing less than a spiritual or theological crisis, and because of this, we have an obligation to support those in our community who are experiencing such a crisis.

The High Price of Membership

We cannot overlook the fact that another reason divorcing families opt to leave the synagogue is due to financial concerns. There is often a financial panic that is associated with divorce. Barbara Bundt Bond writes, "Rare is the family that can continue to pay the same

synagogue dues. Rarer yet is the person who can ask for a dues reduction without directing anger at the synagogue" (1982, para. 10).

As Mencher writes,

> Paying synagogue dues can become very difficult to sustain. I've found the divorced women, especially, feel terrified of becoming impoverished. And then synagogues have an interesting dilemma, because asking a divorced person to submit a dues review can feel like a continuation of the humiliation of divorce negotiation and litigation…Rather than having to deal with all this, many people will just leave the synagogue? (para. 24).

We have an opportunity to reach out proactively to our divorcing families and offer them dues reductions, decreased fees or a restructured membership that better suits their needs and budgets in this time of fluctuation and volatility. Dorff writes clearly about addressing this need.

> All of us in the Jewish community, therefore, need to make special efforts to help single parents with those responsibilities, pragmatically, psychologically, and financially. This might include ensuring the availability of childcare through volunteers, a synagogue program of childcare, or financial assistance; creating support groups within the synagogue for single parents and instituting reduced membership and tuition rates, when needed. It certain includes recognizing that the family unit of a single parent with his or her children is a family – not an object of pity, but a full-fledged family, albeit one with special needs (2006, page 104).

The Fear of Contagion

Divorce to this day still carries with it a frightening fear of contagion that makes many individuals and couples increasingly uncomfortable. We begin speculating and arm-chair

quarterbacking about what it could have been that led to this decision. We look harder at ourselves in the mirror and it shakes us up. If it can happen to them, it could happen to us.

A recent article from the Pew Research Center, citing the work of The Framingham Heart Study, reported that this fear of contagion has been proven to be true. The Framingham Heart Study is a longitudinal study that began in 1948 and has collected data from thousands of people who have lived in Framingham, Massachusetts since then. What started as a study to determine risks for heart disease, became much more inclusive and extensive, and they discovered that "the divorce of a friend or close relative significantly increased the probability of divorce" (Morin, 2013). Not only this, but it was also learned through this study that "newly single people may be perceived as social threats by married friends who worry about marital poaching" (Morin).

If this is so, what can we do to prevent this "social contagion" (Morin) from becoming a widespread epidemic within our communities? What can we do to address this side-effect of divorce? How can we reduce the judgment that often surrounds divorce? Acknowledging the shifts in friendships that often occur post-separation, Greif and Deal (2012) suggest that,

> practitioners can help divorcing partners to anticipate that friendships with their individual and couple friends are likely to shift and that an increased focus on and interest in individual friends is normative and often achievable. Helping the divorcing partners to understand why couples might be withdrawing from them could make them feel less hurt by those actions (p.421-435).

Grief and Deal (2012), citing Johnston and Campbell (1988), also emphasize that "the social world of the divorcing couple is often split in two at the time of separation as common

friends either withdraw in discomfort or take sides with one partner or the other in an attempt to support and help" (p.421-435).

The Value of Support Groups

While not everyone may appreciate the value of support groups, there is often a desire to openly speak about the issues that divorcing individuals face among people who can understand these issues because they too have been there. As Jacob Maslow reminds us, physical support groups can provide in-person support, a sense of community, a sense of accountability and they enable you to meet and make friends with others in similar circumstances (Maslow, 2016). "Support groups connect you with others who really get what you are going through. Deep human connection. It is not just "Oh, I feel bad for you' but 'I actually understand'" (Sandberg & Grant, 2017, p.130). Divorce support groups exist in large part to help those in our communities who are experiencing divorce meet other people in similar situations so that they can normalize, destigmatize and feel less alone at this vulnerable juncture of their lives. "Having a non-biased, non-judgmental group to openly discuss these issues with can help you move on without feeling alone, stressed and unsure of what to do next" (Maslow, 2016).

Aloneness

Commenting about the state of aloneness and the need to address it, therapist Florence Falk (2009) writes that it "is virtually invisible as a subject of even passing concern in the social and cultural zeitgeist. Shouldn't we, as therapists, pay more attention to it?" (para. 2).
In her study of divorce within the congregational experience Jenkins (2010) makes the following observation:

> Particular religious history, family and divorce dynamics, racial/ethnic location and gender shaped individual experiences of divorce in congregations, but respondents had

> in common feelings of shame, congregational silence, and a sense of aloneness while worshipping beside others…A number interpreted congregational silence as related to a fear that discussion of divorce may make congregants take sides (pp.281-282).

Couples may erroneously believe that by sharing news of marital trouble with us, their clergy, they are afraid that we too might take sides, when in fact most of us know how to offer support to each party while remaining neutral. It is unfortunate that this fear can serve as an impediment to someone getting the religious and spiritual support that one's rabbi could potentially provide. Jenkins' (2010) research further showed that while many of the Jewish respondents in her study did go to counseling "only a few participated in any regular pastoral counseling in congregations"(p.285). Jenkins further notes (2010) that Jews typically attend support groups not in their congregations but rather in Jewish community centers or healing centers, and similar to the phenomenon of 12 step groups, these support groups "became (their) new spiritual communities and social networks" (p.284). This raises a red flag as these individuals aren't choosing to attend the JCC over their congregation, but rather they are going to the Jewish community center because their congregation does not yet offer such groups within its own walls. This phenomenon is not the exclusive domain of synagogues as churches too feel this happening within their communities as well. Mahoney, Krumrei, and Pargament (2008) remind us of a reality about our communities that I do believe deserves to be addressed. "Religious institutions offer divorcing individuals little in the way of spiritual teachings, scriptural stories or rituals that could facilitate effective spiritual coping responses with this painful transition" (p.106). We have an opportunity here to fill an overlooked void within our community. Heyman Gordon and Gordon (1984) made the following observation which still holds true today: "In no area has there been the neglect of an important social ritual

acknowledging the depth of loss, as well as ethical and moral commitments for the future, as there now is in separation and divorce" (p.288).

Synagogues as Sanctuaries

As synagogues, we need to provide sanctuary to those who are in need of a safe space. Sanctuaries need to be more than worship space. As we provide holding environments for those members of our community who desire and deserve such safety, we ourselves can become living and breathing sanctuaries for others. Mahoney et al. (2008) remind us to encourage others to "search for comfort through the love and care of congregation members and clergy." There is so much more clergy and congregations could do to support the divorced families and the divorcing couples within the community.

So how do we shift our focus? How can synagogues become more friendly and sensitive to the needs of the separated and divorced families in our communities? One path we might consider taking is looking at our congregations as being made up of distinct smaller groups. How are we addressing the particular needs of these smaller groups? What might we learn from the work we are already doing? The opposite of separating oneself from the community is actively engaging within it. We know that our congregations want to be inclusive and we also know that there are separated and divorced congregants who desire to be included but may not know how to ask for what they need. We must do more than meet them half-way.

We are living in a time when inclusion is a key concept in our world. The Ruderman Family Foundation in recent years has done significant work in helping institutions become more inclusive with respect to the disabled community. According to its website, "the Ruderman Family Foundation believes that inclusion and understanding of all people is essential to a fair and flourishing community. Guided by our Jewish values, we advocate for and advance the inclusion of people with disabilities throughout our society" (rudermanfoundation.org). Jewish

congregations around the country have worked with *Keshet*, "a national organization that works for full LGBTQ equality and inclusion in Jewish life" (keshetonline.org) with the intention of making synagogues more welcoming and accessible to members of the LGBTQ community, including those who are already part of the congregational tapestry. From this experience we are all learning more about sexual orientation, gender identity and preferred pronouns which has given us the gift of remembering not to assume, but to ask. This is certainly a concept that is applicable to our divorcing and divorced members of our communities as well. Ask. Don't presume. Isn't it time that we reach out to this population within our communities and make it explicitly clear that there is plenty of room for them within our walls?

Loneliness Kills

The former Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, recently wrote an article in the Harvard Business Review that stated, "Loneliness and weak social connections are associated with a reduction in lifespan similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day and even greater than that associated with obesity" (Schulze, 2018). We need to hear this: Loneliness kills. Loneliness is considered to be of epidemic proportions not only in the United States, but in other places around the world as well. In the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Teresa May took this crisis so seriously that in 2018 she appointed a Loneliness Minister, Tracey Crouch, to help address the needs within the UK. Shouldn't we too be more concerned with this tragic statistic? After all, we are talking about saving lives as the Mishnah reminds us, "he who saves but one life, is credited for saving an entire world (Sanhedrin 4:9).

Community Connection

For centuries, Judaism has understood the importance of community and the mandate to participate within the community, as our liturgy and religious practices demonstrate. The primary prayer formula that we recite as part of our most common blessings begins, *Baruch Ata*

Adonai, Eloheinu. Blessed are You Adonai our God. Our God. Not my God. Not your God. Our God. We are part of something larger than ourselves. We teach our young people that one of the benefits and responsibilities of becoming a *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*, a son or daughter of the commandments, is that once they achieve this status, they will now count in a minyan, a quorum of ten Jewish adults required for communal worship. Long before the creation of modern psychology, the rabbis understood that there are moments in our lives when we especially need others in our midst, that there are things we do that we should not do alone. This of course includes the recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish, the prayer recited as a way of remembering and honoring our loved ones who have predeceased us, even though there is no mention of death within the text. There is something very powerful about saying the Mourner's Kaddish and hearing others around you respond with "amen". It is an authentic affirmation that one is anything but alone, in that moment. "Being part of a network of individuals is particularly important for healthy adjustment following divorce" (Krumrei, Coit, Martin et all (2007).

In the book of Genesis, we learn,

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא־טוֹב הֱיוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ

"it is not good for the man to be alone, " (Genesis 2:18)

In the context of this second chapter of Genesis we learn that in order to prevent potential loneliness, God creates a partner for man (*adam*). If it is up to humanity to continue the work of God's creation today, then we could understand that it is here that the community, whether that be the synagogue community or larger Jewish community has an important role to play. How can we connect people together to each other? How might we foster collaborative work? How might our communities function differently if we were more inclusive? The Mishnah attributes the following teaching to Rabbi Hillel:

אִם אֵין אֲנִי לִי, מִי לִי. וּכְשֶׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי, מָה אֲנִי. וְאִם לֹא עַכְשָׁיו, אֵימָתָי

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me. If I am only for myself, what am I?

And if not now, when?" (Pirkei Avot 1:14).

A modern understanding of this teaching could render the following interpretation: I need to develop a strong enough ego strength so that I will have self-respect and that others will respect me. If I am perceived as narcissistic or egotistical, then I've gone too far. Life is short. The time to be self-aware is now. In his book, *As a Tree By the Waters*, Rabbi Reuven Bulka writes about this text in the following way:

> No individual can step out into the world with a poor self-image and expect to make important contributions to human betterment. The neglect of self makes the neglectful person a poor choice for helping others. The beginning of all responsibility and indeed the end of all responsibility, is to and for the self. (Bulka, 1980).

For Bulka, the difference between a human being and a deficient human being is simple: "A true human being gravitates toward the other; and recognizes that existence in isolation impedes the human process both for the self and for others" (1980).

There is of course, a major difference between being lonely and being alone. While the two descriptors are related, they exist independent of the other. One can be lonely whether alone or in the presence of others, just as one who is alone may or may not be lonely at all. Consider this prayer of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav:

> *Grant me the ability to be alone; may it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass - among all growing things and there may I be alone, and enter into prayer, to talk with the One to whom I belong. May I express there everything in my heart, and may all the foliage of the field - all grasses, trees, and plants - awake at my coming, to*

> *send the powers of their life into the words of my prayer so that my prayer and speech are made whole through the life and spirit of all growing things, which are made as one by their transcendent Source. May I then pour out the words of my heart before your Presence like water, O God, and lift up my hands to You in worship, on my behalf, and that of my children!* (Jewish tradition).

For Rabbi Nachman, the opportunity to be alone was a welcome one. It was in solitude that he was able to develop the practice of *Hitbodedut*, a spiritual practice of speaking out loud to the Holy One while being in the presence of oneself, without the distractions of others around. Many of us need our alone time. For introverts especially, time alone is required in order to recharge so that they can reenter and engage with the public domain once again. *Yom Kippur*, also called the Day of Atonement is the holiest day of the Jewish year. It is understood as the Sabbaths of Sabbaths. Yom Kippur is a day of reflection, fasting, and introspection and as its name suggests, we are given the opportunity for at-one-ment. Though we most often find ourselves among other Jews during the High Holy Days, we must make time for ourselves to be at one with ourselves and with our God. Some of us may choose like Rabbi Nachman to go outdoors, while others may be able to go inward even while standing among others in prayer. The challenge here is to experience being alone without being lonely and appreciating the difference between the two. Falk (2009) refers to this experience as “active solitude”. Active solitude at important junctures in our lives can create the space for perspective and clarity that potentially can be helpful as we navigate our own unchartered waters. This is not a running away or escape, but rather an internal retreat with the intention of garnering strength and wisdom.

Biblical Punishments

In contrast to this creative and active solitude, consider some of the punishments that are in the book of Genesis. After eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, both Adam and Eve are kicked out of the garden. וַיְגָרֶשׁ אֶת־הָאָדָם (Genesis 3:24). They crossed a line and God was determined to punish them because of it. While at that time there wasn't much of a community to speak of, they were kicked out of their home, and away from everything they knew. Fast forward to the next generation and Adam and Eve's sons Cain and Abel. When it was discovered that Cain had killed his brother Abel. God says to Cain, " נָע וָנָד תִּהְיֶה בָּאָרֶץ you shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth" (Genesis 4:12). Cain, like his parents before him was sent away, separated from the community. Generations later we learn about Abram and Sarai who were so desperate to have a child and continue their line, that Sarai convinces Abram to consort with her maidservant Hagar so that Sarai might have a son through Hagar. When Sarai realizes that Hagar is pregnant, it is too much for her to bear and she treats Hagar horribly, and Hagar leaves and months later God instructs Hagar to return. How is this possibly so? Reverend Debora Jackson postulates that "When the Lord told Hagar to return, however, God also made a promise to her – a promise that would sustain her in the challenges to come, a promise that would bear her up and strengthen her" (Jackson, 2016, p 158). Is this not a set up?

Once God establishes the covenant with Abram and Sarai, their names are changed to Abraham and Sarah. Sarah finally gives birth to a son of her own, and feeling protective of her son, Isaac, and his potential inheritance, Sarah convinced Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away.

וַתֹּ֣אמֶר לְאַבְרָהָ֗ם גָּרֵ֤שׁ הָאָמָה֙ הַזֹּ֣את וְאֶת־בְּנָ֔הּ

כִּ֣י לֹ֤א יִירַשׁ֙ בֶּן־הָאָמָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את עִם־בְּנִ֖י עִם־יִצְחָֽק׃

She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac” (Genesis 21:10). Hagar, הָגָר, *the stranger*, leaves the community she knows, but even more poignant than that is the word that is used for ‘cast out’ גָּרֵשׁ, *garesh,* the same word that is used with expulsion from the Garden of Eden is directly related to the word *gerush*, which is the word we use even today for “divorced”. These texts and others teach us that divorce was seen as a casting out from the community and the family. To be sent out of your community, was considered a punishment. Is it any wonder why there remains such a stigma surrounding divorce?

Attachment and Loss

In the second chapter of the book of Genesis, there is an aspirational description of the relationship between two intimate people. The text tells us: “a man leaves the house of his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife so that they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

יַעֲזָ֥ב־אִ֖ישׁ אֶת־אָבִ֑יו וְאֶת־אִמּ֗וֹ וְדָבַק֙ בְּאִשְׁתּ֔וֹ וְהָי֖וּ לְבָשָׂ֥ר אֶחָֽד׃

The Bible describes for perhaps the first time on record, the ultimate shift in attachment that is necessary for a young person to become an adult. One is obligated to transfer the attachment from one’s parents and not only entrust it to an intimate partner but become so close with the other that the two, become one. It wasn’t until the twentieth century that attachment theory was developed by John Bowlby and Mary Salter Ainsworth. According to Bowlby (1975), attachment is “the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others” (Kitson, 1982). As Chris Fraley has written, “Although Bowlby was primarily focused on

understanding the nature of the infant-caregiver relationship, he believed that attachment characterized human experience from 'the cradle to the grave' " (Fraley, 2010). Citing Hazan and Shaver (1987), "the emotional bond that develops between adult romantic partners is partly a function of the same motivational system – the attachment behavioral system – that gives rise to the emotional bond between infants and their caregivers." They further recognized that the relationship between infants and caregivers and the relationship between adult romantic partners share the following features:

- Both feel safe when the other is nearby and responsive
- Both engage in close, intimate, bodily contact
- Both feel insecure when the other is inaccessible
- Both share discoveries with one another
- Both play with one another's facial features and exhibit a mutual fascination and preoccupation with one another
- Both engage in 'baby talk'."

According to Fraley (2010), there are three important implications that result from the idea that romantic relationships are attachment relationships. If this is so, Fraley writes, "then we should observe the same kinds of individual differences in adult relationships that Ainsworth observed in infant-caregiver relationships" (Fraley, 2010).

Attachment Styles

These differences would of course include the attachment styles of secure, anxious-resistant and avoidant. We must not however overlook the fourth attachment style which was added to Ainsworth's list by Mary Main and Judith Solomon in 1986 which is referred to as disorganized or disoriented (Main and Solomon, 1986).

Adults who have secure relationships exhibit confidence that their loved ones will be there for them and they are able to be there for others in return. Adults who are anxious-resistant are less secure and tend to get upset when their needs go unmet. Those who are most

insecure, are those who are avoidant, and they typically cannot trust that others will be there for them, nor do they want others to rely upon them.

The second implication is that "the way adult relationships 'work' should be similar to the way infant-caregiver relationships work" (Fraley, 2010). In other words, just as infants respond positively when their caregivers are available and responsive to them, so do romantic partners want this availability and responsiveness from each other.

The third implication is that children who are secure as children will likely grow up to forge secure romantic relationships and "people who are secure as adults in their relationships with their parents will be more likely to forge secure relationships with new partners" (Fraley, 2010). While Bowlby doesn't directly address the application of attachment theory to divorce, an article by Gay Kitson sheds some light on this subject. It should come as no surprise that the one who is left feels more attached to the marriage than does the one who initiated the leaving, and yet in a study of men and women going through their own divorces, 86% of the participants still had some signs of attachment to their former spouse (Kitson, 1982).

The more recent attachment style, disorganized attachment, as defined by Main and Solomon (1986) acknowledges that not everyone fits neatly into the aforementioned categories and it provides a space for those whose attachment style is more complicated or nuanced.

Granqvist, Mikulincer and Shaver (2009) remind us that there is a natural connection between attachment theory and the study of religion not only because we have the ability to have personal relationships with God, but because the very word *religion* as Ferm (1945) has taught, comes from the Latin *relegere*, which means "being bound."

Attachment in the Bible

Returning to the book of Genesis, we encounter an interesting parallel in our patriarch Abraham's life. When Abram first leaves home and sets course for his journey, "God tells him:

Go forth from your home, your native land, and from your father's home and go to the land that I will [eventually] show you" (Genesis 12:1).

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֶךְ־לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ׃

Flash forward several years and once again God gives Abraham specific instructions: "Take your son, your favored one, the one whom you love, take Isaac and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will point out to you" (Genesis 22:2).

וַיֹּאמֶר קַח־נָא אֶת־בִּנְךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ אֲשֶׁר־אָהַבְתָּ אֶת־יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ־לְךָ אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה

וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה עַל אַחַד הֶהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ׃

Each of these texts uses the specific details to indicate the degree of difficulty in each of these commands. First, Abram is instructed to leave behind everything he knew and to sever his attachments to his home, his birthplace, and ultimately his family of origin in order to start anew. Later, when he is commanded to take his son Isaac on a father-son journey that inevitably would forever change their relationship, these details are given in such a way to make sure that Abraham understands God's intention, and to emphasize the special connection between Abraham and Isaac. As one might imagine, the rabbis spent time unpacking this text in a number of midrashim but there was one that caught me by surprise. In her article in the *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, psychologist Nicky Lachs (2002) includes a midrash from *Sefer HaYashar* that gives voice to Sarah's experience of this divine assignment "Don't take my son far from me and don't stay away long for my soul is strongly bound to his." While the rabbis of old may not have understood this as attachment as we know it today, it would help to explain the emotional trauma that Sarah later experienced as a result of this father-son binding experience.

Lachs writes, “it could be argued that the crisis of trust and fear of abandonment by his father that Isaac would have felt concerning the *Akedah,* would have been even more threatening in the light of this relationship with his mother” (2002). The scene at the altar was palpable. “Isaac goes up on that altar to symbolically die to his past, to leave his childhood. He has to leave his father in order for him to become the patriarch he is yet to be” (Netter, p.23). Isaac was bound on the altar, Abraham’s hand is raised and then just before he brings his hand down toward his son, Abraham sees a ram caught in the thicket that will take Isaac’s place on the altar. The angel of God then rewards Abraham for being ready to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham returns to his servants and stays in Be’ersheva.

Then, at the beginning of the next chapter, we read that Sarah’s life has come to an end. There is no recorded dialogue between Abraham and Sarah, and there is no known conversation between Sarah and her son Isaac. There are no descriptions of feelings, events or circumstances. The silence is deafening, and it leaves us with many questions. Does Sarah’s death give us a glimpse into the powerful attachment between mother and child? Does the void caused by Sarah’s death expedite Isaac’s need to find true love? It even has been suggested that “on a subconscious level, Isaac used Rebekah to replace Sarah” (Netter, p.20).

A generation or two later, the Bible would teach us, Jacob and his most beloved wife, Rachel, give birth to two sons: first Joseph and then later, Benjamin. Rachel tragically dies in childbirth with Benjamin. Prior to Joseph, Jacob had ten sons; but we soon learn that Joseph is Jacob’s favorite son. “Now Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph best of all his sons, for he was the child of his old age; and he had made him an ornamented tunic. And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him” (Genesis 37:3-4).

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת־יוֹסֵף מִכָּל־בָּנָיו כִּי־בֶן־זְקֻנִים הוּא לוֹ וְעָשָׂה לוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פַּסִּים׃

וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו כִּי־אֹתּוֹ אָהַב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אֶחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֹם׃

The tunic that Jacob/Israel gives to Joseph is laden with meaning. So much so that his brothers immediately become jealous and filled with hate. What the brothers could not see was that perhaps one of the reasons for the coat was to represent the loss of his mother that Joseph experienced after Rachel's death. For Benjamin, the loss was not as experienced because there was never any attachment to Rachel outside her womb. For Joseph however, the loss was far more significant, and perhaps on some level, Jacob realized this to be true. As Winnicott wrote, "the transitional object stands for the breast, or the object of the first relationship" (1971). Rachel was the object of Joseph's first relationship and the proof that she was a "good-enough" mother is found in how he used his ability to relate to others to move up the ranks in Pharaoh's court, so much so that he became a trusted advisor.

Clearly, the potential bond between parents and their children is tight; but how does this change when the parents are divorced? As researchers have been studying the impact of parental divorce on the adult attachment patterns, there remains much ambiguity regarding how adult children of parental divorce fare, with one exception. Fraley and Heffernan (2013) write that "parental divorce was more strongly related to insecure relationships with parents in adulthood than insecure relationships with romantic partners or friends." This study also showed that with respect to both anxiety and avoidance, children had a more secure attachment to the custodial parent, than to the non-custodial parent regardless of the parent's gender. It has also been found that "infants are more likely to have an insecure attachment to their mothers when their parents are divorced rather than married" (Emery, 2016, p.97). Why is this so? Judith Wallerstein, who dedicated her career to studying the effects of divorce, offers

this perspective, “The agenda of the divorced parent who seeks to rebuild his or her social, sexual and economic life is out of sync with the needs of the child, especially the young child, for the kind of supportive parenting that requires time, constant attention and sacrifice” (Wallerstein, 2005, p.405). Wallerstein also found that due to the absence of the second spouse, the primary parent often forms a dependence on the child. “Consciously or unconsciously, parents in crisis turn to the child as surrogate spouse, confidante, advisor, sibling, parent, caretaker, ally within the marital wars, or as extended conscience and ego control” (Wallerstein p.405).

God as the Ultimate Parent

While divorced parents may not be as available to their children as they would like to be, some children are able to turn to God, as the ultimate parent, to provide the secure base they desire from their own parents. Kelley writes, citing Bennett (1997),

> the secure base of God’s love will not take away our losses, but it can help us discover an abiding Presence that sustains us even in the midst of things that are passing away. In letting ourselves be loved by God, we form an attachment to the only One who cannot leave us” (p.59).

Our relationships with God, however we might define or understand them, are potentially very powerful attachments that help to compensate for the lack of secure attachments we might experience within our families of origin. Emphasizing this point, Kiesling (2011) writes, “ a relationship with God is often sought as a surrogate attachment figure in the effort to regulate distress.”

“From the perspective of attachment theory, individual’s images of and relational patterns with God are considerably influenced by the internalization of early attachment experiences with emotionally-significant others” (Noffke and Hall, 2007). This influence comes

from a variety of sources including religious instruction and worship attendance, as well as the spiritual practices of the parents and other care givers as well. “Yet, these externally fashioned understandings and interactions with God are reshaped according to the individual’s implicit relational representations” (Noffke and Hall, 2007).

As an extension of the attachment to God, Byrd and Boe (2001) looked at prayer as another function of attachment. They found that “avoidant believers experience a more distant, intellectualized relationship with God and remain defensively self-sufficient from Him (sic)” (Noffke & Hall, 2007, p.65). Similarly, as Kelley points out, “one who is generally secure in attachment to others will feel security in attachment to God” (2009). The desire to be in relationship with God is at times viewed as a means to achieve some semblance of self-regulation. An attachment with God can help alleviate the fear “that they are unlovable and that nurturance is not reliably available” (Noffke and Hall, 2007). Kaufman (1981) posited that “when God functions as the ultimate secure base, people may better negotiate separation and loss.” Citing Kirkpatrick (2005), Kelley reminds us that the description of God in Psalm 23 provides a perfect example of the secure base.

A Psalm of David: With God as my shepherd, I shall not want.

The Eternal makes me lie down in green pastures,

leads me beside the still waters, and restores my soul.

You lead me in right paths for the sake of Your name.

Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil for You are with me.

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies,

You have anointed my head with oil.

My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life

and I shall dwell in the house of the Eternal forever.

Reading this psalm through the lens of attachment theory does provide comfort knowing that God is with us, and that we are in God's care. Reciting this psalm at a funeral provides us with familiar language, but it reinforces our attachment to our community as well. As we pray these words our faith is activated and we are reminded that God is with us, especially in times of despair and loss.

Jewish liturgy also echoes this reminder that God not only is with us; but loves us. In our evening prayers just prior to reciting the *Shema*, the watchword of our faith, we recite *Ahavat Olam,* literally "an eternal love", and in the morning we say *Ahavah Rabbah*, a "great love". As a way of interpreting these texts, Rabbi Rami Shapiro (2015) wrote the following poem that to me speaks to the way God works through us in partnership.

Unending Love
We are loved by an unending love.

We are embraced by arms that find us
even when we are hidden from ourselves.
We are touched by fingers that soothe us
even when we are too proud for soothing.
We are counseled by voices that guide us
even when we are too embittered to hear.
We are loved by an unending love.

We are supported by hands that uplift us
even in the midst of a fall.

We are urged on by eyes that meet us
even when we are too weak for meeting.
We are loved by an unending love.

Embraced, touched, soothed, and counseled,
Ours are the arms, the fingers, the voices;
Ours are the hands, the eyes, the smiles;
We are loved by an unending love.

This concept of an unending love is beautiful, yet it can be challenging in the context of divorce, where the love of two people is no longer enough to keep them together, and often ends. This is a major difference between our love for one another and God's love of us. God's love for us can endure all trespasses and doubts. God can handle it when we leave our relationships and take time for ourselves. God can bear our burdens when we unload all that is in our hearts, When the love of two married people ends or shifts, God steadfastly loves them both.

Let us return for a moment to the text of Genesis, chapter 2:24:

יַעֲזָב־אִישׁ אֶת־אָבִיו וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד

"a man leaves the house of his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife
so that they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

What does it mean to cleave? Up until this point, we have been focusing on the primary definition as found in Merriam-Webster's dictionary which defines this verb to mean to stick, adhere, cling, and become attached to. There is a teaching regarding Torah study, to turn it and turn it because it's all in there (Pirkei Avot 5:22), and I believe this is very true in this circumstance as well.

The secondary meaning of cleave is the very opposite of attachment. It is in this second definition that we learn that to cleave can mean to tear, rip, split or separate forcibly, which in the context of this paper provides a sense of rabbinic irony. It is this definition where we get cloven hooves and cleft palates. It is there is plain sight. The Hebrew word for cleave in this verse is *davak*, and in modern Hebrew, *devek* is the word for glue. As it turns out, long before the theories of John Bowlby or Mary Ainsworth, the Torah teaches us something about attachment, and perhaps both meanings are implied here, that is to say that the marital bond is one that is deeply connected and ideally sticks it out together and yet when it is necessary to break this bond, there is bound to be a difficult separation and an experience of loss.

Categories of Loss

According to Mitchell and Anderson (1983) as cited by Kelley (2009,pp 7-8), there are potentially six categories of loss that people typically can experience: material loss, role loss, relationship loss, systemic loss, functional loss and intrapsychic loss. Material loss is the loss of physical objects, such as the family home. Role loss deals with the loss of a function or role, such as the loss of a job, or no longer picking up the children from school every day. Relationship loss reflects the shattering of the intimate bond that two people have shared over time and the resulting challenge of relating with each other in a new way. Systemic loss is experienced by a whole system or group and in the case of divorce could be experienced by the entire family as well as by the couple's mutual friends and community. Functional loss often deals with the loss of a functioning part of the body, one could imagine that a diminished libido would fall into this category. The intrapsychic loss within one's psyche relates to how one thinks about oneself. This is connected to divorce in the giving up the dream of the marriage that was envisioned at the beginning of the engagement or at the wedding ceremony.

While each individual will experience loss in their own unique ways, loss is an inevitable consequence when a divorce occurs. Each of the above-mentioned types of loss is felt to varying degrees when a family is breaking apart. What seems to be stressed most publicly, however, is, of course, the material loss that both parties feel. One party may remain in the family home, or the house is sold, and the proceeds are divided in a manner that is determined to be appropriate given all of the other marital assets and circumstances.

The emphasis on the importance of material possessions previously overlooked, comes into play as couples are dividing their assets often with the help of legal counsel, and realize just how meaningful a particular item might be. Consider if you will, just some of the objects traditionally used in a Jewish wedding ceremony: the *ketubah*, or wedding contract; the *chuppah* or marriage canopy; the *Kiddush* cups used to mark the sweetness of the relationship; the wedding rings, symbolizing the union of the couple and the hope for eternal love; the smashed glass, perhaps incorporated into a mezuzah; and the photographs taken and then used to decorate the home reminding the couple and all who see these photos of the happiness that was felt as two people pledged their love to one another. In a divorce what happens with all of these things, and how might they impact the family?

Mourning and Grief

"Psychologically, the effects of divorce parallel the trauma of losing a loved one. Divorce is a little death - or, more accurately, a series of little deaths. The psychological process of divorce, in many ways, parallels grieving the loss of a loved one, but with one fundamental difference: in divorce, the one who has died to you is usually still in your life" (Netter, 2002).

Historically, the Jewish community has been very good at responding to death. When Jews die, we tend to their deaths without delay. There are systems in place. Traditionally, we immediately guard their bodies and respectfully prepare them for burial. At the cemetery, the

community participates in the burial by offering earth onto the casket. We first do this with an overturned shovel to make this offering with some effort and we fulfill this mitzvah, this sacred commandment, because it is something for which the deceased cannot thank us, nor pay us back. As soon as the mourners return from the cemetery there is a meal of consolation that is awaiting them typically at the family home. Friends and family visit with the mourners at various points throughout the first week of mourning known as *shiva* to express condolences and to enable the mourners to speak about the deceased. In synagogues, we recite the names of those who have died in recent days and weeks as we utter the *Mourner's Kaddish*. We do this again annually on the anniversary of their deaths, and on festivals, and we remember them. Especially during the first year of mourning, there are touchpoints when we remember those who have died and who are yet still very much alive through our memories. Even the cadence of the *Mourner's Kaddish* has a comforting beat. Sometimes it is the melody of a prayer that carries the import and meaning, more than the words themselves. Jones (in Roberts, 2012, p.111) writes, "in traditions where prayers or scriptural passages are chanted, the melodic cadence and rhythm can provide a deeper connection to faith and community than can be conveyed through words alone".

We know all too well of this experience when teaching a new melody to a familiar prayer during Shabbat services. Change is hard. Especially for those sitting in our sanctuaries who have little or no comfort or familiarity with the Hebrew language, it is the "traditional" tune that must be depended upon, and a change to that, can be threatening.

What is currently being done for those in our communities who are getting divorced? How can we comfort them? How can we acknowledge those who are going through divorce and all of what they may experience along the way? "The most difficult mourning to do is what's often called 'complicated grief,' when we are highly ambivalent about someone (Mencher, para.

48). How do we navigate the complicated waters of divorce grief when the person who is "dead" is still very much alive?

Stages of Grief

Many of us are familiar with the five stages of grief made popular by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. In her final book, written with David Kessler, Kübler-Ross was determined to set the record straight about these stages. They write, "The stages have evolved since their introduction, and they have been very misunderstood over the past three decades. They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss. Our grief is as individual as our lives" (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p.7).

These are possible expressions of grief and mourning. They are not prescribed or predestined.

> Mourning is the external part of loss. It is the actions we take, the rituals and the customs. Grief is the internal part of loss, how we feel. The internal work of grief is a process, a journey. It does not end on a certain day or date. It is as individual as each of us. (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, p.115).

Though Kübler-Ross and Kessler wrote about the grief surrounding death, their theories are applicable and transferable to those grieving the loss of their marriage as well.

A major difference between death and divorce, which often complicates matters, is that oftentimes one party, the initiator, has more time to prepare oneself for loss than the other. This initiator of the divorce in all likelihood, takes time to weigh his or her decision and may often use the time leading up to the divorce dealing with anticipatory grief even though they are

the one who is initiating this relational transition as the decision to divorce is seldom done without thought or angst. “Most initiators of divorce experience a moral dilemma: whether to keep their commitment in the face of personal unhappiness, how much weight to give to the children’s needs versus their own, how hard to work before feeling justified in ending the relationship, and in recent decades, whether they have a duty to try couples therapy before making a final decision. Indeed, divorce may be the most significant moral conundrum in adult life” (Doherty, 2015).

Anger

Anger is a well-known and common response to divorce from both parties. There are certainly multiple reasons for being angry surrounding a divorce and it is truly impossible to fully understand the reality that anyone else is experiencing, no matter how hard we may try. “When there are concerns about their children’s welfare most people would be anxious and angry, especially when powerless in doing something about it” (Willen, 2015, p.356).

> Anger is a necessary stage in grieving the loss of a marriage. None of us can make the transition to a new life without it. None of us can heal from the trauma of divorce without experiencing anger. None of us can grow through the loss without anger. In this respect, anger serves as a therapeutic function that is healthy. In this respect, anger is a spiritual gift and needs to be blessed (Netter, p.92).

Netter adds that “we must learn to bless the anger as the way to control it” (p.92). While it is essential to recognize that we each have different relationships with our predispositions to anger, it is also important to acknowledge that anger can get out of control and that there is a difference between constructive and destructive angers. Just as one letter is

the difference between anger and danger, there is always the risk of anger slipping out of control and becoming dangerous.

Bowlby (1979) also held the belief that anger "is an immediate, common, and perhaps invariable response to loss"(p.65). Anger is part of the grief reaction. "Protest, including an angry demand for the person's return and reproach against him or her for deserting, is as much a part of an *adult's* response to loss, especially a sudden lost, as of a young child's" (Bowlby, p.65). "When suffering occurs that seems uncontrollable and unfair, individuals sometimes blame God and become intensely angry toward God" (Exline and Martin, 2005).

Anger is primal response. Anger is as old as creation itself and our first teacher of anger is none other than God. In the third chapter of Genesis, we read that against God's orders, Eve and Adam eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As punishment, God expels them from the Garden of Eden. From where does God's anger come? Was it simply because God's instructions were broken? Or was it something else? "And God said, 'Now that humankind has become like any of us, knowing good and bad, what if one should stretch out a hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!" (Genesis 3:23). Could it be that the expulsion or divorce from the garden was out of the anger that resulted from God's fear that humanity's innocence was lost forever? Was this God's first significant loss? God has a temper. In the story of Noah and the ark, we learn that God is so fed up with humanity that the divine solution is to flood the Earth and start over.

Elsewhere in the Torah, one of the people who demonstrates the greatest amount of anger is Moses, God's right-hand man. This is not to say that Moses gets away with his displays of anger, as we know he ultimately pays the price by not being allowed to enter the Promised Land. Moses had plenty of reasons to be angry, after all, he never wanted to accept the yoke of leadership that was essential placed upon him. When Moses ascends the mountain and

communes with God on top of the mountain to receive God's commandments, the people get restless and impatient and out of desperation they create a golden calf to worship in place of God.

וַיַּ֣רְא הָעָ֗ם כִּי־בֹשֵׁ֤שׁ מֹשֶׁה֙ לָרֶ֣דֶת מִן־הָהָ֔ר וַיִּקָּהֵ֥ל הָעָ֖ם עַל־אַהֲרֹ֑ן

וַיֹּאמְרוּ֩ אֵלָ֨יו קוּם֙ עֲשֵׂה־לָ֣נוּ אֱלֹהִ֔ים אֲשֶׁ֥ר יֵלְכ֖וּ לְפָנֵ֑ינוּ כִּֽי־זֶ֣ה מֹשֶׁ֗ה הָאִישׁ

אֲשֶׁ֨ר הֶעֱלָ֜נוּ מֵאֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרַ֗יִם לֹ֤א יָדַ֙עְנוּ֙ מֶה־הָיָ֣ה לֽוֹ׃

'When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt— we do not know what has happened to him." (Exodus 32:1).

The people needed something concrete, while God and Moses were temporarily hidden from them, they craved object permanence. God then sees what the people have done and once again is tempted to destroy the Earth and start over. Yet here, Moses intervenes and pleads with the Holy One to consider why these people were brought out of Egypt, and he reminds God of the promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all for the purpose of containing God's anger. We then read what happens as Moses begins to descend the mountain:

וַיְהִ֣י כַאֲשֶׁ֣ר קָרַ֣ב אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶ֗ה וַיַּ֙רְא֙ אֶת־הָעֵ֣גֶל וּמְחֹלֹ֔ת

וַיִּֽחַר־אַ֣ף מֹשֶׁ֔ה וַיַּשְׁלֵךְ֙ מִיָּדָ֔יו אֶת־הַלֻּחֹ֖ת וַיְשַׁבֵּ֣ר אֹתָ֑ם תַּחַ֖ת הָהָֽר׃

וַיִּקַּ֞ח אֶת־הָעֵ֣גֶל אֲשֶׁ֤ר עָשׂוּ֙ וַיִּשְׂרֹ֣ף בָּאֵ֔שׁ וַיִּטְחַ֖ן עַ֣ד אֲשֶׁר־דָּ֑ק

וַיִּזֹּר֙ עַל־פְּנֵ֣י הַמַּ֔יִם וַיַּשְׁ֖ק אֶת־בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃

"And it happened when he drew near the camp that he saw the calf and the dancing, and Moses's wrath flared, and he flung the tablets from his hand and smashed them at the bottom of the mountain. And he took the calf that they had made and burned it in fire and ground it fine and scattered it over the water and made the Israelites drink it" (Exodus 32:19-20).

This display of anger was like nothing he had ever showed before. The people's actions represented an extreme lack of faith not only in Moses as a leader, but in God as well and it was probably the combination of these two things that caused Moses to react as he did. Just as Bowlby taught above, this outburst was a form of protest, and it was a furious attempt for the people to return.

Though the reaction to the golden calf was by far Moses' most aggressive public showing of anger, it wasn't until the book of Numbers that Moses' anger causes God to punish him. Moses' punishment prevents him from entering the Promised Land, despite the years of his dedicated service and often unappreciated efforts. In Numbers, we read that after the death of Miriam, the community had no water, and the people began complaining relentlessly. Moses and Aaron humbly submit themselves to the Holy One on behalf of the people and beg for water.

קַח אֶת־הַמַּטֶּה וְהַקְהֵל אֶת־הָעֵדָה אַתָּה וְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ וְדִבַּרְתֶּם אֶל־הַסֶּלַע לְעֵינֵיהֶם

וְנָתַן מֵימָיו וְהוֹצֵאתָ לָהֶם מַיִם מִן־הַסֶּלַע וְהִשְׁקִיתָ אֶת־הָעֵדָה וְאֶת־בְּעִירָם׃

God replies, "Take the staff and assemble the community, you and Aaron your brother, and you shall speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water, and I shall bring forth water for them from the rock and give drink to the community and to its beasts" (Numbers 20:8).

Moses partially follows God's directions. He took the staff and assembled the people, but then not only did he claim that he, Moses, would provide water for them, but also rather than speaking to the rock, Moses hits the rock twice before the water freely flowed from it. It is understood that the hitting of the rock was a display of anger, but from where did this anger arise? Was it the complaining of the people that got to him? Was it the length of this arduous journey from slavery to freedom? Or might this have been due to the repressed anger of Moses who had not yet mourned the death of his sister Miriam? After all, Miriam was more than Moses' sister as she was the one who assured Moses of being able to secure any kind of attachment to their mother in his infancy. It was Miriam who provided the wet nurse, their mother, when Pharaoh's daughter found Moses floating in the Nile. Miriam ensured him sustenance and a chance at life. The death of Miriam must have been such a traumatic loss for Moses that he knew no other way to express it than through the defense mechanism of anger.

Complicated Loss

It is indeed difficult to experience a traumatic loss, whether due to death or divorce. But in the case of the latter, sharing the information that you are ending a marriage requires justification (Owens, 2006). "Why?" is the often the first question that is asked. The potential feelings of shame and guilt are so strong and even when not expressed, they are often felt by those who tell their stories of divorce and those who hear these reports as well. There tend to be public and private versions of each story, due to shame, discretion and perspective. The way people absorb the news of divorce often says more about the listener than it does of the newly separated. The defense mechanism of projection is quite commonly used by those who learn of a friend's marital separation. As Baumeister, Sommer and Dale (1998) explain projection, this involves, "perceiving others as having traits that one inaccurately believes oneself not to have" They emphasize that, "projection *can* be seen as defensive if perceiving the threatening trait in

others helps the individual in some way to avoid recognizing it in himself or herself." Certainly, it is easier to see the fault in others than it is to see the same fault in our own lives. This too, is human nature.

Lifecycle

It is fascinating that with few exceptions, most books about the Jewish lifecycle have little to no information about getting divorced from a Jewish perspective. More often than not, the chapter on marriage is followed by another about death and we all know that life isn't that simple. One recent exception is Rabbi Lisa Greene's chapter in *Navigating the Journey* which is focused on the lifecycle event of divorce from a modern perspective. She succinctly writes, "Divorce is permitted in Judaism, though it is not desired" (Greene, 2018, p.225) and she acknowledges that it is indeed a challenge for Reform Jews today to interact with the traditional Jewish legal arguments about divorce. Acknowledging the importance of offering meaningful and contemporary divorce rituals, Rabbi Goldie Milgram (2009) wrote, "souls needing to be unbound from each other experience pain of such an extreme intensity that it is equal only to the joy of their time of courting and marriage" (p.68). In a recent opinion column in the New York Times, David Brooks wrote,

> Many wise people self-consciously divide their life into chapters, and they focus on the big question of what this chapter is for. Rituals encourage you to be more intentional about life. People can understand their lives' meaning only if they step out of their immediate moment and see what came before them and what they will leave behind when they are gone (Brooks, 2019).

The omission of the discussion about divorce in Jewish lifecycle books is a loud silence that comes from the layers of shame that have been associated historically with divorce. By excluding this unanticipated yet now common lifecycle event, people going through divorce may feel unseen and resentful toward their faith. “Rituals provide comfort because they remind us, we’re not alone. Billions of people have done this before as part of the timeless passages of life. Rituals also comfort because they concretize spiritual experiences” (Brooks).

Eriksons’ Stages of Development

Studying the lifecycle in depth, Erik Erikson realized that there are concrete stages of development that many go through as we become the adults we are intended to become. For much of his career Erikson taught that there are eight distinct stages from infancy through old age, that human beings experience in our lives, but it wasn’t until he was facing the end of his own life that he realized that there was indeed a ninth stage that some of us are blessed to experience in our old age. Joan Erikson, completing her husband’s work, wrote, “Old age in one’s eighties and nineties brings with it, new demands, reevaluations, and daily difficulties. These concerns can only be adequately discussed, and confronted, but designating a new ninth stage to clarify the challenges. We must now see and understand the final life cycle stages through late-eighty- and ninety-year old eyes” (Erikson & Erikson, 1998,p.105). She further wrote,

> As I review the life cycle, and I have been doing so for a long time, I realize that the eight stages are most often presented with the syntonic quotient mentioned first, followed by the dystonic element second – e.g. trust vs. mistrust; autonomy vs. shame and doubt, etc. The syntonic supports growth and expansion, offers goals, celebrates self-respect and commitment of the very finest. Syntonic qualities sustain us as we are challenged by the more dystonic element with which life confronts us all (Erikson & Erikson, p.106).

Just as the Eriksons viewed this ninth stage as a way of revisiting the prior eight stages with the perspective of shifting from the dystonic to the syntonic, it is possible to read the experience of individuals directly impacted by divorce in this way as well. After all, as Erik Erikson taught, “Each stage becomes a crisis because incipient growth and awareness in a significant part function goes together with a shift in instinctual energy and yet causes vulnerability in that part” (Erikson, 1980, p.56).

The Eriksons’ theory about lifecycle development provides those who consider it with the opportunity to self-reflect and seriously weigh the impact and import that a life crisis such as divorce can have upon us and upon our psyches. Erikson raises an important truth, “How difficult it is to recognize and have perspective for just where one is presently in one’s own life cycle” (Erikson & Erikson, p.3). Major life cycle events in our lives have the potential of causing us to revert back to past stages of our own lives, especially to periods where unresolved conflicts have been awaiting our return.

Consider the impact of divorce on the first stage of development: *Basic Mistrust vs. Trust : Hope*. For children and adults alike, divorce potentially shatters the trust in the family unit as well as the extended family and thus the challenge is to shift from a position of mistrust to our earlier trusting selves. It is important to cultivate a sense of hope for the future, for without that trust, Erikson reminds us, “mistrust can contaminate all aspects of our lives and deprive us of love and fellowship with human beings” (Erikson & Erikson, p.107). Additionally, “the divorce process reactivates unresolved feelings about basic trust, because of the destruction of a once trusted relationship” (Smart, 1977, p.72).

The second stage of development: *Shame and Doubt vs. Autonomy : Will*, is especially poignant for divorced individuals as shame in particular has had such a long history with respect to divorce. There is often both shame and doubt for the one who initiates the divorce as well as

the newly informed spouse. Perhaps one of the necessary shifts here is worrying less about what others say, think or do and instead focusing more on taking care of oneself and owning one's power. "Aside from the possibly that shame prompts a range of maladaptive outcomes through its damaging effects on autonomy, the experience of shame may also impact negatively on well-being by obstructing satisfaction of the need for relatedness" (McLaughlin et al , 2010, p.215).

For an individual contemplating divorce, their experience of shame potentially could impede their decision to actively choose to initiate a divorce and the possibility of an autonomy not previously experienced within the marriage. "Autonomous feelings are necessary for an adult to build an identity that is separate from her/his spouse's…" (Smart, p.72) Shame is essentially the result of what happens when feelings of rage are directed inward rather than at someone else. "Shame is an emotion insufficiently studied, because in our civilization it is so early and easily absorbed by guilt" (Erikson, 1965, p.252). As Smart has written, "the divorcing person feels ashamed at being seen by society as having failed at marriage." "This stage, therefore, becomes decisive for the ratio of love and hate, cooperation and willfulness, freedom of self-expression and its suppression" (Erikson, p.254).

For someone contemplating the decision to divorce, and understanding the gravity of the decision, one could imagine the necessity of weighing one's options by creating a list of the pros and cons, the ratio of love and hate to which Erikson refers. In order to make it through this stage, "the divorcing person must therefore rework and solve the problems of shame and doubt, gain confidence in his own judgment and respect for self, and not be ashamed even if some people disapprove of the divorce" (Smart, pp 72-73).

From my pastoral experience, I have witnessed that issues of shame and doubt are even more pronounced for the partner who has just been informed that their marriage is ending in a

divorce. It may take them significant time to swallow the news of the divorce and to begin to rely upon their own independence and autonomy. While the initiator may have had time to come to the decision to divorce, ample time is needed to respond and ultimately recover from hearing such news. It is also worth noting that while the person who informs their spouse about an eventual divorce is called the initiator, there is no adequate name for the spouse who is given this news, and this I believe, supports the belief that the perceived power sits with the initiator.

Guilt vs. Initiative : Purpose is the third stage. As the Eriksons (1998) remind us, "to initiate suggests a moving out into a new direction" (p.108). Especially for those who initiate divorce, it may be necessary to get past the accompanying guilt of leaving in order to start the new chapter in their lives. It is of interest that in the context of explaining this stage, Erikson (1965) states, "the fact that human conscience remains partially infantile throughout life is the core of human tragedy" (p. 256). This is a reminder for divorcing couples that they may not always be their best selves, that there may be moments when their superegos and ids get the best of them. In adults, conflict over initiative may also be expressed in unhealthy ways such as denial or even psychosomatic illnesses (Erikson, 1950). It is during this stage that one typically looks beyond the marital home for support. For the divorcing individual who enters the dating pool, this is typically not about finding a new partner, but rather to assist as they rebuild their ego and redefine themselves. "The divorced individual often has the opportunity to discover unexplored and underdeveloped parts of himself" (Smart, 1977, p.74). It is also during this stage that social institutions including synagogues, have the potential of providing "idealizable adults" (Palumbo, 2009, p.213). This is another example of the ways in which the synagogue can be of service to the divorcing family.

The fourth stage, *Inferiority vs. Industry : Competence* can be understood with the divorce lens as owning one's own shortcomings in the marriage while cultivating and nurturing

one's gifts and strengths that will be essential in moving forward. Just as "the child must forget past hopes and wishes"(Erikson, 1965, p.258), so must the divorcing adults. It is at this stage of development that actions truly speak louder than words. It is a period of producing, of becoming more literate and capable. There is, as well, a turn to the wider society for support, approval and acceptance. This is an especially challenging time for children as they are more self-conscious about their parents' background and how their lives impact upon them socially. To overcome the possible feelings of inferiority and difference, the child of divorce may overcompensate or overachieve to shift the focus from their family life to their own individual accomplishments. For the divorcing and working adult, he "may throw himself so fully into work that no time is allowed to explore the meaning of the divorce" (Smart, p.74). To focus exclusively on work will deny the divorcing adult the possibility of working through the divorce and healing appropriately from it.

The fifth stage, *Identity Confusion vs. Identity : Fidelity,* for divorcing individuals potentially involves choosing one's own name. Does one keep the married name for the sake of one's children or career? Does one return to the name of one's youth? Might it be appropriate to pick an entirely new name altogether? The Eriksons (1998) suggest that one of the greatest challenges we face is "who we think we are vs. who others may think we are or are trying to be" (p.110).

This may especially ring true for the stay at home parent who is craving a professional identity of their own and realizes that this might just be the opportunity they were looking for. Who am I and who do I want to be? What parts of me have been put aside in my marriage and now might have the opportunity to rebloom? Just as this is a period of self-reflection and questioning for the early adolescent, this is a time of inner questioning for the divorcing adult. How does one reconcile the way they may be perceived by others and their own sense of

identity? Are there social roles that they have previously been ascribed to them that clearly no longer fit the person they are becoming or aspire to be? What types of compromises will be necessary to step back into the workforce? How does one compensate for the gaps on one's resume? For some divorcing adults, this stage emphasizes some of the more difficult consequences of divorce. "The divorced person must suddenly learn a new social role and adapt to life without a person who shared many daily experiences" (Smart, p.75). "Role confusion exists not only in relation to one's ex-spouse, but also in relation to children, in-laws, and even parents" (Smart, p.75). This is especially true in cases where one or both partners turn to their own parents for financial or emotional support as this time of transition.

The sixth stage of *Isolation vs. Intimacy : Love*, is certainly a tender stage for divorced individuals, and the impact may very well depend on what others around them are experiencing as well. To feel isolated when others are intimate creates social challenges that may be difficult to navigate at this time. There often are pressures from others to jump back into the dating pool as some people find being alone intolerable and impose these feelings upon friends and family members without consideration of what that individual needs or desires. Time alone, for some people, can bring clarity and healing that may be so needed at this period of time.

For the partner who has been left, this is in direct contrast to the young adult experiencing this stage who according to Erikson (1964), "is eager and willing to fuse his identity with that of others." For the initiator of the divorce however, there may be more alignment with the experience of the young adult as they are ready to begin in earnest new and exciting relationships and encounters.

Erikson further writes, "The counterpart of intimacy is distantiation: the readiness to isolate and, if necessary, to destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one's own, and whose 'territory' seems to encroach on the extent of one's intimate relations"

(1965). How true this often is for divorcing individuals with respect to their friends and acquaintances. Addressing this very issue, Lori Gottlieb (2019) writes the following:

> Fair or not, some friends will pry. Some will question why you made a decision that you felt was best for your family or your children or your sanity. Some will try to arbitrate a situation they can't really understand because they didn't live it themselves. And when that happens, it will help to consider that people's reactions have less to do with you or your ex-wife and what happened between you and instead almost entirely with their own circumstances—their history, experiences, current relationship, and internal anxieties and emotional makeup.

Without intending any malice or harm, sometimes friends impose their own values and beliefs upon others in ways that may feel invasive or out of line. When this happens, it becomes possible for a chasm to develop between friends which was anything but intentional.

Stagnation vs. Generativity : Care typically represents the largest stage in our lives. This is the period in our lives when ideally, we devote our energies to our jobs and our families. There is a certain intensity about this part of our lives should we choose the path of generativity. For those who for one reason or another choose to be stagnant however, there may be feelings of self-imposed isolation and self-pity. In the case of divorced individuals, one could imagine using the children as an excuse not to put effort into their own happiness for example, and that would have negative consequences. This period is one that we anticipate will be filled with accomplishments and achievements, but for some, divorce represents personal failure. Others may even refer to someone else as having a *failed marriage*, and in response to this, there are many current articles and blog posts about why it is that we should no longer use this term. There is such judgment in that term. It can be devastating when one's dreams are unable to be

fulfilled. Our society has an expectation upon parents to be role models for their children and to teach them how to survive and thrive in the world as adults. Many couples choose to stay together "for the sake of their children", they say but studies have shown that this most often backfires. "Generativity, then, is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson, 1965, p.267). This task may become challenging for divorcing parents, who as single parents, try their best to meet the needs of their children on their own. Some divorced parents may feel newfound freedoms to raise their children according to their desires. For the parent whose divorce may now result in limited access to their children, there potentially exists a great frustration and longing. For divorced adults who have not yet had children, there may also be "a sense of time running out" (Smart, p.77) which may be accompanied with desperation and stress.

"As to the institutions which safeguard and reinforce generativity, one can only say that all institutions codify the ethics of generative succession" (Erikson, 1965, p.268). Once again, here is another example of a way in which the synagogue potentially could play a most important role in helping to raise our children. The rituals, both large and small, that are annual events in the synagogue community help to bring stability and comfort to children of divorce who may not even know that this is what they are craving.

The eighth and final stage brings us to *Despair and Disgust vs. Integrity : Wisdom*. In this, the final stage of human development, there is time to reflect back on the lives we've led. There is curiosity about one's potential legacy and how one will be remembered. "We claim that wisdom rests in the capacity to see, look, and remember as well as to listen, hear, and remember. Integrity, we maintain, demands tact, contact and touch" (Eriksons, 1998, p.112). There is hope that for the divorced or previously divorced individual, that this wisdom will not have to wait until this final stage of one's life. With time, talk therapy and other modes of

healing, the divorced person could potentially realize that they are deserving of another chance at love and happiness. With the right help, divorce will not be a death sentence but an opportunity to start anew. Without it, as Erikson suggests, “despair expresses the feeling that the time is now short, too short for the attempt to start another life, and to try out alternate roads to integrity” (1964, p.269).

Talmudic Stages of Development

Exploring these stages of development, there is an echo back to the life stages suggested in the Talmud by Yehuda ben Teima in Pirkei Avot. He taught the following”

הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, בֶּן חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים לַמִּקְרָא, בֶּן עֶשֶׂר לַמִּשְׁנָה, בֶּן שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לַמִּצְוֹת, בֶּן חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לַתַּלְמוּד, בֶּן שְׁמֹנָה עֶשְׂרֵה לַחֻפָּה, בֶּן עֶשְׂרִים לִרְדֹּף, בֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים לַכֹּחַ, בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים לַבִּינָה, בֶּן חֲמִשִּׁים לָעֵצָה, בֶּן שִׁשִּׁים לַזִּקְנָה, בֶּן שִׁבְעִים לַשֵּׂיבָה, בֶּן שְׁמֹנִים לַגְּבוּרָה, בֶּן תִּשְׁעִים לָשׂוּחַ, בֶּן מֵאָה כְּאִלּוּ מֵת וְעָבַר וּבָטֵל מִן הָעוֹלָם:

He used to say: At five years of age [it was the right time to begin] the study of Scripture; At ten, the study of Mishnah; At thirteen, subject to the commandments; At fifteen, the study of Talmud; At eighteen, the bridal canopy; At twenty, for pursuit [of livelihood]; At thirty, the peak of strength; At forty, wisdom; At fifty, able to give counsel; At sixty, old age; At seventy ,fullness of years; At eighty, the age of “strength”; At ninety ,a bent body; At one hundred, as good as dead and gone completely out of the world. (Avot 5:21)

In his commentary on this Mishna, Rabbi Irving Greenberg (2016) reminds us the words of Ecclesiastes 3:1, “there is a season in life for everything, a time for every experience under heaven”. He writes,

> One must ripen into capacity. A child will get little out of Talmud study before the age of fifteen, wisdom comes only with life experience and is rarely attained before the age of forty, etc. And note that even after attaining wisdom by the age of forty, R. Yehuda b. Teima feels that one needs another decade of life experience before being qualified to offer counsel to another person" (p.290).

Both the teaching of the Talmud and Erikson's stages of development emphasize the need to go through one stage of life before entering the next one, even if at times it may feel counterintuitive. This stage by stage journey is also reminiscent of the Holy One's answer to Moses question about God's name as God said, אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, I am becoming who I am becoming (Exodus 3:14). We human beings, created in God's image, are also works in progress.

"Divorce can occur at any time during the family life cycle. Unlike expected transitions in the life cycle, divorce has a greater potential to cause disequilibrium that can result in debilitating crises" (Ahrons, 2011 p.295). While the decision to divorce may seem to surprise members of a family unit, we can be sure that it isn't a decision that one comes to lightly or without some forethought. Divorce is considered to be one of the greatest sources of stress on a family and yet for others there is also a sense of relief. "New strategies for assisting families through the divorce process that incorporate normative models, such as mediation, psychoeducational workshops, co-parenting seminars, and collaborative law are emerging and creating healthier outcomes for families" (Ahrons, p.296). These models and others help to demystify and allay some of the fears around divorce for both parents as well as for their children. It is important as well to recognize that a divorce in a family affects not only the couple who is splitting up and are likely in the same lifecycle stage, but potentially their parents and their children who are in at minimum, two additional stages of their lives.

These stages have the potential of influencing the reactions to the news of the divorce, and their ability to cope with such news. The divorce in theory could cause a "developmental challenge" (Tyson & Tyson, 1990, p.15) as the loss caused by the divorce has the potential of creating "disequilibrium, with varying degrees of mental and emotional stress" (Tyson & Tyson, p.15). Do they have a network of friends? Do they have friends who have also experienced divorce in their own families? Do they have healthy outlets such as talk therapy or physical exercise? As we consider the ripple effects of divorce upon the lifecycle of the individual and family members, these are among several of the questions that we as rabbis could be asking.

It is difficult to consider the human lifespan without giving some attention to the poem by Rabbi Alvin Fine (in Stern, C. & CCAR, 1978) that is often recited in conjunction with the *Mourner's Kaddish*. Fine's words echo the sentiment of Erikson with respect to the individual journey that each of us is on during our lifetime and additionally this poem in takes into consideration the very human tendency to revert back to previous stages, especially before moving on to the next stage.

Birth is a beginning

And death a destination.

And life is a journey:

From childhood to maturity

And youth to age;

From innocence to awareness

And ignorance to knowing;

From foolishness to discretion

And then perhaps, to wisdom;

From weakness to strength

Or strength to weakness-

And, often, back again;

From health to sickness

And back, we pray, to health again;

From offense to forgiveness

From loneliness to love

From joy to gratitude,

From pain to compassion

.And grief to understanding —

From fear to faith;

From defeat to defeat to defeat —

Until, looking backward or ahead,

We see that victory lies

Not at some high place along the way,

But in having made the journey, stage by stage.

A sacred pilgrimage.

Birth is a beginning

And death a destination

And life is a journey

A sacred pilgrimage —

To life everlasting.

Contemporary Lifecycle Literature

Divorce is a lifecycle event no less important to a family than a wedding and deserves to be treated as such, though the literature out there may tell a different story. Most Jewish lifecycle books follow the similar route from birth to naming and then onto bar and bat mitzvah, followed by marriage and ultimately death, with nothing in between marriage and death. The major exception to this is the 2018 volume edited by Rabbi Peter Knobel, which includes stops along the way such as struggling with infertility; embracing older age; and yes, divorce. An earlier exception is Rabbi Deborah Orenstein's Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages & Personal Milestones Volume 1, written in 1994. In this volume Rivka Haut writes, "Unlike any other ceremony, divorce is the acting out of the undoing, the unraveling, of another sacred ritual."

In recent books focusing on transforming our communities and helping them in the process of becoming more relational, the life-stage of divorce is also largely missing. Ron Wolfson (2013) writes that "there are six transition points on a family's Jewish journey through Jewish institutional life: (1) from institution shopper to member/affiliate; (2) from preschool to religious school or day school; (3) from Bar/Bat Mitzvah to high school; (4) from high school to college; (5) from post-college to young Jewish adulthood; and (6) from child rearing to empty nesting" (pp. 202-203). These transition points not only assume that the definition of a family includes children; but if it is assumed that divorce could be included in this last stage, one could argue that the fact that it is not named, ignores the importance of this major life transition altogether.

Ritual

The Get

Let us turn for a moment to the role of Jewish Law with respect to the subject of divorce. As Blu Greenberg (1989) teaches, just as Jews get married according to the laws of

Moses and Israel, so too should they divorce in this manner as well (p.283). *Halacha,* Jewish law*,* teaches that in order to become divorced, a man must write a bill of divorcement, called a *get,* and in front of a *beit din*, a Jewish court of law composed of at least two witnesses, drop the *get* into the palms of the hands of his soon to be ex-wife. Typically, the writing of the *get* is done by a *sofer* or scribe, who has been specifically trained in the creation of *gittin*. The *sofer* serves as the proxy for the husband, as the responsibility to write the bill of divorcement falls on his shoulders. The structure of this ritual is reminiscent of *brit milah*, the ritual of circumcision, and the role of the *mohel*, who serves as the agent of parents (traditionally the father) when it is time to circumcise one's own son. How wise it is to transfer this power to experts who typically are not personally connected to the ritual about to take place. In the case of the *get*, it is also possible that if either of the parties is not able to be present, he or she can appoint someone to serve as their agent in the giving and receiving of the *get*. Considering that these rituals were created long before there was anything called psychology, the rabbis of old were particularly sensitive and thoughtful.

The witnesses in the ritual of the *get* are active participants in the ceremony and are typically asked by one of the rabbis present, a series of questions much like a notary public might ask of witnesses who testify that a legal document is signed freely and of one's own will. There is even an opportunity for anyone present who wishes to protest the divorce to do so within this setting. We've certainly heard of similar protests occurring at (typically non-Jewish) weddings, and we have seen them played out in movies such as *The Graduate* and others. Every precaution is taken to make sure that it is clear that the receipt of the get signifies that the divorce is valid, and that the woman is free to marry any other man of her choosing.

There are occasions in which it is neither the will nor the desire of the husband to grant his wife a *get*, and this we understand to be an exercise of power. In traditional Jewish law,

while men have the "exclusive power to initiate divorce" (Washofsky, 2001, p.169), a wife may seek a divorce from her husband and if the *beit din* agrees with her, they may instruct the husband to give her a *get*. In such a case where the husband refuses to give her a divorce, the woman is considered an *agunah*, a chained woman, who legally remains married even though they most likely no longer live together as a couple. Referring to the documentary film, *Women Unchained,* Shubowitz (2012) writes of non-Orthodox women,

> You never know what community your children will find themselves in and who they will want to marry. Think of your children.' This prevalent attitude places Jewish women, young and old, religious, and secular into the hands of a male rabbinate that sanctions male-only free will. Begging for freedom reinforces enslavement. Jewish women need an Exodus (pp.34-35).

The lack of gender equality within the traditional Jewish divorce customs is often difficult to tolerate from a modern perspective.

Very little has been written about divorce as a lifecycle event that happens in the lives of Jews; but most of what has been written is a response to the antiquated ritual of the giving and receiving of the *get* or the complete dismissal of it. In his guide to contemporary Reform Jewish practice, Washofsky (2001) indicates that "divorce has never ceased to be a matter of religious concern to Reform Judaism" (p.176).

While the Reform movement does not require a *get*, the traditional *get* remains one option for couples seeking to ritualize their divorce in a religious way. Reform practice, as indicated by its inclusion in the 1988 edition of the *CCAR Rabbi's Manual*, incorporates the option of *Seder Pereidah*, a ritual of release, in which couples may participate in a religious divorce with the assistance of their rabbi. This ritual releases each member of the couple from

his and her sacred bonds of marriage and encourages each party "to treat one another with respect and trust and to refrain from acts of hostility" (p.102). In the CCAR's most recent version of the Rabbi's Manual entitled, *L'chol Z'man v'et: For Sacred Moments: The CCAR Life-Cycle Guide* of 2015, there is a *Dissolution of Kiddushin* which is essentially the same text as the 1988 *Seder Pereidah*, with the inclusion of gender neutral language respecting both the equality of women and men as well as honoring the Reform Movement's outspoken support of same-gender marriage, and when necessary, same-gender divorce. This evolution maintains the relevance of this ceremony for our lives today. As Rabbi Richard Hirsch teaches "Jewish ritual should serve the spiritual, emotional and intellectual needs of those participating in it. The traditional rituals and rubrics of Jewish divorce are a starting point, but they need to be balanced with contemporary concerns and sensibilities" (Teutsch, 2014, p.242). Greenberg (2012) wrote that "one thing is certain: in the year 5773 (corresponding to 2012, but could certainly be applied today) the principle of a man's absolute right in divorce is absolutely wrong".

New Rituals

In her latest book, *The Jewish Wedding Now*, author Anita Diamant includes a Mikveh Ceremony Following the End of a Relationship, that begins with a *kavannah* or intention, for being present in the moment and includes three immersions into the waters of the mikveh (See Appendix K). These immersions echo the three traditional immersions used when one converts to Judaism. This echo also reminds us of the importance of the number three in Jewish tradition. For Jews, our trinity is comprised of God, Torah and Israel. In the beginning of our Amidah, we acknowledge our patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In Jewish tradition, there are three festivals at which time we are taught to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Sukkot, the harvest festival; Passover, the festival of freedom; and Shavuot, festival of weeks when we celebrate

receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. During our Torah service, we affirm that the world stands on three things: Torah, prayer and acts of lovingkindness

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוֹדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים

According to the bible, three is seen as a number of completion and perfection similar to the number seven and this literary device found through most of the Christian bible as well, not only in the belief that Jesus was resurrected after three days but most notably in the belief of the holy trinity of the father, son and the Holy Spirit.

Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben writes, “Jewish rituals link the individual to the larger spiritual community of Jews around the world and help us both to feel a part of the stream of Jewish history and to connect with our collective past” (Teutsch, p. 228). The role of ritual is to transport us from one moment to another with the ability to sense the holiness of that transition. We rely on traditions of the past to guide us, and we depend upon the visionaries and dreamers of the present to enable us to see a future worth living.

On the importance of marking divorce in a Jewish way, Milgram (2009) writes, “Souls needing to be unbound from each other experience pain of such an extreme intensity that it is equal only to the joy of their time of courting and marriage” (p.68). Milgram offers some helpful texts to use in creating rituals for divorcing couples. She offers a very powerful image through the following words, “Your doorway is no longer my doorway. I no longer have the right to comment on your actions. Your well-being is now in your own hands. I do this *lishmi, lishma, u’leshem gerushin*, for my sake, for her sake, and with the intent of effecting a divorce” (p.69). The image of the doorway as a concrete limit setting boundary speaks volumes. It is acknowledging the shift of relationship, trust and intimacy and as a result, the doorway to the home symbolizes that the access once shared by the couple is no longer the same, no longer something that can be taken for granted.

Another example of a creative divorce ritual has also been included (see Appendix L). This ritual uses the traditional constructs of the *Sheva Brachot*, the seven blessings of a Jewish wedding as well as *Havdalah*, the ritual separating Shabbat from the rest of the week. By incorporating these rituals, honor is given to the necessary unbinding, as mentioned by Milgram earlier, that result from divorce and additionally provide opportunities for the individuals to start anew.

In his book, *From Beginning to End: The Rituals of Our Lives,* Robert Fulgham proposes a list of fourteen elements that are essential regarding rituals. He writes,

> "To be human is to be religious.
>
> To be religious is to be mindful.
>
> To be mindful is to pay attention.
>
> To pay attention is to sanctify existence.
>
> Rituals are one way in which attention is paid.
>
> Rituals arise from the stages and ages of life.
>
> Rituals transform the ordinary into the holy.
>
> Rituals may be public, private, or secret.
>
> Rituals may be spontaneous or arranged.
>
> Rituals are in constant evolution and reformation.
>
> Rituals create sacred time.
>
> Sacred time is the dwelling place of the Eternal.
>
> Haste and ambition are the adversaries of sacred time.
>
> Is this so?"
>
> (Fulgham, 1995, p.20).

Through this list of propositions, Fulgham adeptly points to some of the most important questions of human existence. When we ask: Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? We travel back to the book of Genesis when God asks Adam, *Ayeka* אַיֶּכָּה**,** where are you? (Genesis 3:9). Did God really not know where Adam was? Of course not. This question of *Ayeka* is not a question of location but rather of spirituality, it is an inquiry into Adam's soul. Remember who you are Adam, and that I created you. Consider what is right and what is wrong and think about why it is that I created you, and then live up to your potential. These are all religious questions to be sure and the act of taking these questions seriously points to a sense of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is a presence or state of being that uses more than just the mind, however. Fulgham (1995) writes that it means to pay attention and in Hebrew, the phrase for paying attention is *sim lev,* שִׂים לֵב*,* literally, put your heart into it*.* We put our heart into something when we give it all we have: mind, body and spirit. This is precisely the way the book of Deuteronomy teaches us to love God – בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדֶךָ "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5). We sanctify existence by transforming routine acts like eating or waking, into powerful God-given gifts which we must not take for granted, by offering blessings of thanksgiving and praise to the Holy One.

There are times when we pray in community and there are times we pray in more private spaces. These are both opportunities when we seek the attention of the Holy One. In some moments we turn to the words of our traditional texts and at others we become the psalmist ourselves.

The Healing Power of the Psalms

Included in the canon of the Hebrew bible is the book of Psalms. One hundred and fifty psalms, attributed to King David but most likely written by a number of different authors,

corresponding to our full range of emotions from the lowest of lows to the highest of highs. The opening verses of Psalm 30 speak of God's protective presence in our lives and of the hope and faith that comes once again in the morning, even after a difficult night.

אֲרוֹמִמְךָ יְהוָה כִּי דִלִּיתָנִי וְלֹא־שִׂמַּחְתָּ אֹיְבַי לִי׃

יְהוָה הֶעֱלִיתָ מִן־שְׁאוֹל נַפְשִׁי חִיִּיתַנִי מִיָּרְדִי־בוֹר׃זַמְּרוּ לַיהוָה חֲסִידָיו וְהוֹדוּ לְזֵכֶר קָדְשׁוֹ׃

כִּי רֶגַע ׀ בְּאַפּוֹ חַיִּים בִּרְצוֹנוֹ בָּעֶרֶב יָלִין בֶּכִי וְלַבֹּקֶר רִנָּה׃

"I extol You, O Lord, for You have lifted me up, and not let my enemies rejoice over me.

O Lord my God, I cried out to You and You healed me.

O Lord, You brought me up from Sheol, preserved me from going down into the Pit.

O you faithful of the Lord, sing to Him, and praise His holy name.

For He is angry but a moment, and when He is pleased there is life.

One may lie down weeping at nightfall; but at dawn there are shouts of joy"

(Psalms 30:2-5)

It would not be hard to imagine reading these words for comfort while going through the process of divorce which so often is filled with moments of sadness and reprieves of restoration. There are also times when a divorce necessitates one or both parties to move from their marital home into separate spaces, utilizing Psalm 27 as a source of strength and stability:

אַחַת ׀ שָׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־יְהוָה אוֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שִׁבְתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה כָּל־יְמֵי חַיַּי

לַחֲזוֹת בְּנֹעַם־יְהוָה וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהֵיכָלוֹ׃

"One thing I ask of the Lord, only that do I seek:

to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life…" (Psalms 27:4).

These are the very words we chant during the month of Elul, the month of preparing our souls, of forgiveness and repentance, of vulnerability and hope before the *Yamim Noraim*, the New Year and the Day of Atonement. Knowing that one could live in God's house might take the sting away from finding a new home of one's own and yet provide a sense of stability and safety. Give me security my God, remind me that I always have a home with You.

In her introduction to Psalm 41, Rabbi Rachel Cowan writes of the psalmist, "she wonders where will she find the strength and courage to face her situation" (Weintraub, 1994, p.41). Cowan suggests that to begin healing, the psalmist will need to reach out to others, and to let others reach out to her. By trusting her family and friends once again, she may be able to get out of her depression (Weintraub, pp. 44-45). In verse 13 we hear the echo of Psalm 27 as God's presence represents safety, security, comfort and home:

וַאֲנִי בְּתֻמִּי תָּמַכְתָּ בִּי וַתַּצִּיבֵנִי לְפָנֶיךָ לְעוֹלָם

"You will support me because of my integrity, You will let me abide in Your presence forever".

While there are several other psalms that would be appropriate and of potential help to someone going through a divorce, I want to draw attention to Psalm 137. Thanks in no small part to musician Bob Marley, many of us are familiar with the opening verse,

עַל נַהֲרוֹת בָּבֶל שָׁם יָשַׁבְנוּ גַּם־בָּכִינוּ בְּזָכְרֵנוּ אֶת־צִיּוֹן

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and we wept, as we remembered Zion" (Psalm 137:1). Rabbi Amy Eilberg (Weintraub, p.91) writes that "sometimes there is nothing to do but weep." This psalm does not hide the reaction to the pain and vulnerability that the psalmist is experiencing, so why is it human nature to attempt to limit the tears of someone in pain? Eilberg invites us to read this psalm through the eyes of Rabbi Nachman, "as a cry of despair and longing in my own times of pain and lostness and confusion" (Weintraub, p.91). Through Rabbi Eilberg's eyes, we are able to see that this psalm moves from despair to joy and ultimately to

power. Shedding tears and having a good cry is one of the most cathartic experiences we can have. Releasing the bound-up emotions within one's body is a sign of strength and not weakness. Crying is a God given gift to humanity that was not bestowed upon the animals.

God Cries Too

> As Netter (2002) stresses,
>
> God cries about divorce not because God is judging us as sinners, as so many people believe. God cries not because God is disappointed in our failure, as so many rabbis teach. God cries because God, like us, is in pain and cries with us. When we hurt, God hurts. God is present in God's tears. God does not abandon us when we go through difficult times" (pp.77-78).

Psalm 126 supports the importance of tears as well as the reward that often accompanies them.

שׁוּבָה יְהוָה שְׁבִיתֵנוּ כַּאֲפִיקִים בַּנֶּגֶב: הַזֹּרְעִים בְּדִמְעָה בְּרִנָּה יִקְצֹרוּ:

הָלוֹךְ יֵלֵךְ ו וּבָכֹה נֹשֵׂא מֶשֶׁךְ־הַזָּרַע בֹּא־יָבוֹא בְרִנָּה נֹשֵׂא אֲלֻמֹּתָיו:

"Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like watercourses in the Negev. They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. Though he goes along weeping, carrying the seed-bag, he shall come back with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves" (Psalms 126:4-6).

What might it be like to meet with someone going through the lowest of lows during their divorce, and give them permission to cry and simply to sit with them and their tears? Would the Divine Image within us be seen or experienced by either of us? I believe that when we truly see the person before us, when we completely suspend judgment and expectation, there is an awareness that can only be explained by the experience of God's presence. This is much like the experience of spiritual direction where the director accompanies the directee on

his/her/their own spiritual journey. While at times we may ask questions like "Where is God for you in this moment?", there are other times when silence speaks louder than words and we must trust ourselves and our own faith in God, that we can discern when to keep silent and when to speak. This is what Margaret Guenther calls holy listening. In the introduction to her book, entitled *Holy Listening*, Guenther writes, "domination and submission are not what spiritual direction is about, but 'holy listening', presence and attentiveness" (Guenther, 1992, p.1). The importance of being present has its roots in Exodus 24:12 when God prepares Moses to receive the second set of tablets, God says:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה אֵלַי הָהָרָה וֶהְיֵה־שָׁם

וְאֶתְּנָה לְךָ אֶת־לֻחֹת הָאֶבֶן וְהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוָה אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתִּי לְהוֹרֹתָם׃

"Come up to Me on the mountain and <u>be there</u> and I will give you the stone tablets with the teachings and commandments which I have inscribed to instruct them".

This teaching from Exodus is a good reminder that when we are fully present, we are more attuned and open to recognize the presence of God in our midst.

> In Roberts (2012), Chaplain Gerald L. Jones teaches that:
>
> Prayer and ritual open up opportunities to explore with patients/residents their understanding of the Divine and their relationships with others. Prayer and ritual connect patients/residents and their families to the larger community and to the understanding that they are not alone in the world or in their experiences. Prayer and ritual can also be sacred events that chaplains should feel privileged to enter into with patients/residents (p.106).

Prayer can take many forms. Prayer is both prescribed and spontaneous, ancient and newly created. Prayers are spoken and they are sung. They are from the voice of the collective

community and also from the individual. Mahoney et al. (2008) further advise: “In the case of divorce, one may pray for or with friends or family members who are affected by the divorce, and try to give them spiritual strength by being a healthy, spiritual role model and listening compassionately to their spiritual struggles.” Mahoney et al. (2008) also suggest, “one may seek out spiritually based forgiveness for wrongdoing by the ex-partner or self in the marriage. This includes using spiritual rituals and God as a resource to let go of anger, resentment or bitterness.”

Prayer helps to connect us “with the ‘other’, such as the Divine, community, or nature” (Roberts, p.106). We use many names for the Divine in our prayer and we select carefully which of the Holy names speaks to us in our time of prayer. The Rabbis introduced many new terms for God and “they were created as substitutes for the proper name of God. They were to be used in order not to take the real name of God in vain” (Sonsino and Syme, 1993, p.26).

Names of God

Just as the Book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that “there is a time for every experience under heaven” (Ecc. 3:1), there may be names of God that are more appropriate for certain moments of our lives. As an example, in the *machzor,* or high holy day prayer book, we often refer to God as *Avinu Malkenu*, Our Father Our King. Rabbi Ed Feld suggests,

> “The image of God as ‘father’ represents relatedness and closeness. The figure of God as king, or sovereign, conveys authority, particularly that of judge, and so connotes great distance. Jewish theology has always recognized this paradoxical sense of God, speaking both of God’s being close at hand, and also as distant and inscrutable—similarly of God’s kindness and caring as well as God’s punishing hand for sinful behavior” (Feld & The Rabbinical Assembly, 2010, p.92).

From a psychological standpoint, Erikson (1978) concurs that there are times when we need to see God in this way as he writes, “An adult, as he takes on some authoritative mantle, must be reinforced in the conviction that ‘I know what I’m doing’—a reassurance often bolstered on the paternal side, by seeing God the Father, above all kings, as a parent image…” (p.111). There are indeed times when we are in need of approval from a trusted parental figure, and sometimes that trusted parent is none other than God. “We can see now what rituals must accomplish: by combining and renewing the ritualizations of childhood and affirming generative sanction, they help to consolidate adult life once its commitments and investments have led to the creation of new persons and to the production of new things and ideas” (p. 112).

The institution of divorce may have its roots in our biblical texts, but this literature review demonstrates the values of reflecting on Jewish tradition, reimagining what divorce rituals might look like for the contemporary Jew in the twenty-first century, and the need for more to be written.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Surveys

This project is a mixed methods study utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Survey Monkey, an online survey development tool, was used to ask fellow members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis about the practice in their synagogues with respect to divorcing or divorced members, such as whether or not there was a divorce support group in place. My hypothesis was that little was being done for this population in most congregations. Over one hundred and fifty colleagues from all over the country responded to this survey. A few colleagues responded from Israel and Central America as well. Survey questions were multiple choice with the opportunity to expand more openly on each particular topic.

Another survey was conducted aimed at individuals who had some point been divorced. This also used Survey Monkey and was publicized through Facebook, a popular social networking platform, which enabled a snowball sampling as some participants shared the survey with their friends who had also been divorced. Ninety-nine people of a variety of religious backgrounds and practices completed this survey. The *snowball sampling*, where one participant invites or refers another person (Sensing, 2011, p.84), enabled a wider range of participants in this study.

A third study was sent to the membership of a large Reform Temple in New England reaching out specifically to those who had at some point been divorced, and fifty-four members completed this survey. The purpose of this survey was two-fold. The first was to discover how many people in the congregation had been divorced, and the second was to pique interest in the divorce group that would be starting a few weeks later.

In addition to this last survey, the divorce group was publicized through the temple's newsletter and weekly e-blasts (See Appendix C). Upon receipt of the surveys, each individual who indicated interest in the divorce group was contacted. These conversations helped to determine who would eventually participate in the group and who would not. While it was initially structured to be a mixed gender group, there were many more women who had expressed interest and certain individuals expressed a need for the group to be comprised exclusively of women. Given that this was expressed, coupled with the fact that there were not enough interested men to have a gender balanced group, the composition of the divorce group was exclusively female. Diversity was represented by age, background, duration of marriage and experience of divorce.

Temple Divorce Group

Based on the results of the surveys, an eight-session psycho-educational group was created. This divorce group held at the Temple was the second modality of the study. Tuesday evenings were chosen as the meeting time as it enabled the largest number of individuals to participate in the group. As I considered the size of the group, I took into consideration Yalom's suggestion that "the ideal size of an interactional therapy group is seven or eight members, with an acceptable range of five to ten members" (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p.292). While this was not a therapy group, the suggested group size was nonetheless beneficial as it enabled a healthy balance of participation from each member of the group.

Group Structure

This divorce group experience consisted of a series of eight weekly meetings (See Appendix G). Each meeting was ninety minutes in length. It was important to be respectful of time, especially for the members of the group who still had young children at home. The meetings took place at the synagogue with three exceptions. On one evening we met at *Mayyim*

Hayyim, the community *mikvah* (ritual bath) and twice due to space limitations at the synagogue, we met in my home. Because of the short-term nature of this group and the potentially sensitive subject matter, it was structured as a closed group in order to provide stability, continuity and safety within the group dynamic. As Yalom and Leszcz reminds us (2005, p.282), closed groups typically run for a finite number of sessions and do not add members to the group along the way.

Equity and Fairness

This program was created with the intention of being a fair and equitable experience for each participant. For the sake of the group, there were equal opportunities for each member of the group to participate. Good group dynamics were maintained by not allowing one person to dominate the conversation and by encouraging the quieter participants to lend their voices to the conversation as well. At the very first meeting, we established within the group a set of ground rules that we all we agreed to follow. Chief among these rules was confidentiality and I shared that for the purposes of my project I would use pseudonyms in order to protect their confidentiality.

I was hopeful that the participants would feel a sense of belonging and permission to speak their truths. As Øygard, Thuen & Solvang (2000) confirm, the most effective change for individuals takes place in a group process setting in which the group members can experience and analyze their interactions with others who have a shared phenomenon, such as being divorced.

Content as Structure for Sessions

What follows is a brief outline of the structure of the eight psycho-educational meetings held at a synagogue in New England as part of this project. A more complete detailed description can be found at the end of this project in Appendix G. The flow of the sessions

moved from identity and experience of the past, to opportunities of ritualistic and spiritual growth for the future. This arc enabled growth of the group's trust for one another and provided scaffolding for the group experience and allowed researcher to enter into their experience.

The first session of the group provided an opportunity for each participant to introduce herself to the rest of the group and explain her connection to the subject of divorce. Every participant read and signed a participation agreement understanding the purpose and intention of the group and the information gathered from it. As a group, ground rules for safe and productive conversations were created and ultimately followed. Both the agreement and list of ground rules may be found in the appendices of this project (See Appendix E & F).

The second session focused primarily on identifying some of the psychological and spiritual issues that arise around divorce or because of divorce, and learning from each other about personal experiences, thoughts and feelings. Session three gave the group an opportunity to look back at their weddings and marriages and the Jewish content and context that may or may not have been part of their experiences. The fourth session invited God to be part of the conversation about divorce, and questions were raised about God's role or presence at this juncture in people's lives. Additionally, it was in this session that divorce could be seen as the somewhat ignored part of the Jewish lifecycle experience, which helped to contextualize the experience for many of the participants.

Session five explored God's role in a deeper way and session six provided an opportunity to explore rituals and Jewish traditions and apply them to the context of divorce with the hope of providing some insight, spiritual healing and forgiveness along the way. The group's seventh session took place at *Mayyim Hayyim*, our community mikvah. Continuing the conversation about lifecycle rituals, what better place to visit than this? As Reverend Jim Clarke has written, "the human life cycle necessarily involves times of transition. Each of us must negotiate these

crossings. Over the centuries, cultures and societies have supported these moments through communal rituals and ceremonies" (Clarke, 2011, p. 19). For years, mikvah has been used to mark significant transitions in the lives of Jews and while this is not required for the purposes of divorce, it has been helpful for those who did in fact immerse. The eighth and concluding session of this group provided an opportunity for insights learned, new perspectives, closure and potential next steps.

Field Notes

With permission of the group, the sessions were recorded on my iPad and I took field notes as well. As Leavy (2017) reminds us, "field notes are the written or recorded notes of your observations in the field –they are the data" (p.136). After each session, I reviewed my notes to prepare for the following week's meeting. Following Leavy's understanding, I was a participant observer in the group, participating in the group's conversation and recording systematic observation of what took place within the group (Leavy,p.134). The fact that I was not an outsider to the group was beneficial as it fostered the trust, the rapport, and the value of the group to the temple community. Field notes were also taken after each interview and as Sensing (2011) reminds us, they "consist of descriptions of what is being experienced and observed, quotations from the people observed, and field-generated insights and interpretations."

In-depth Interviews

The third element of my project was a series of qualitative in-depth interviews with four divorced women. I added this third element to implement the technique known as data triangulation. Triangulation "is a means of refining, broadening, and strengthening conceptual linkages and perceptions" (Sensing, 2011, p. 72). These in-depth interviews honored the integrity of this project and enabled me to ask more open-ended questions of my subjects and

give them the time and space to answer. “An open question allows respondents to answer, without prompting, however they wish”(Vyhmeister, 2014, p.39). Miller and Rollnick (2013) write, “An open-ended question is like an open door. You do not know in advance where the person will go with it” (p.62). “During the process of inviting individuals to engage in a reflexive project, the researcher may become the catalyst for revisiting very private and/or unhappy experience” (Birch and Miller, 2000, p.189). There is a trust that needs to be formed between the interviewer and the interviewee in order for such personal memories to be shared. “While the researcher hears a personal, private narrative that may not have been previously disclosed, the interviewee may experience the action of disclosure as a revelation, prompting a new understanding of past events” (Birch and Miller, 200, p.190). In a qualitative interview setting, such an experience could be understood as mutually beneficial.

Going Deeper

The in-depth interviews empowered the participants by giving them the platform to share their experiences with me, one of their rabbis. My questions and my silences let them know that I was interested; I was engaged; I was listening; and that I was hearing and seeing them without judgment. Hearing directly from these women about their experiences and feelings generated themes that further informed my knowledge about the phenomena of divorced individuals within the community and the needs that exist within congregational life.

Interviews via the Internet

The in-depth interviews took place over Zoom, an internet-based platform for video calling. There were three primary reasons why this was the modality of our interviews. The first is that Zoom enabled us to meet privately, minimizing the potential interruptions that might have taken place during an in-person interview. The second, is that through the Zoom program, I was able to record our interview thus creating a more natural flow to the thought process. The

third reason is one of a practical matter, which is the fact that midway through this project, long after the group sessions had taken place, I moved across the country and did not have the same access to these women that I once had. As Leavy teaches, modalities such as Zoom, have many of the benefits of in-person interviews and allow you to talk to people whom you might not be able to reach in person because they are located far away (2017). Using the methodology of James Spradley (1979) I asked questions, I listened more than I spoke, I enabled my subject to be the more active participant, I expressed verbal interest in the other person, and I showed my interest in what the subjects said through eye contact and other nonverbal means.

Interview Participants

For the in-depth interviews I wanted to learn more from members of the divorce group; but I also did not want to leave out the experiences of those who did not participate in the group. Using the technique of purposeful or purposive sampling, I invited the participation of select women who I believed to have important stories to tell and data to share. Leavy citing Patton, writes that this sampling "is based on the premise that seeking out the best cases for the study produces the best data, and research results are a direct result of the cases sampled" (Leavy, 2017, p.79). In total there were four women chosen to participate in the in-depth interviews.

Data Analysis and Coding

The interviews were transcribed from the video recordings with the assistance of Temi transcription services, and then carefully analyzed and coded for specific, expressed feelings, thoughts and experiences as this was the primary source of the data. Coding was done by hand and then categorized according to seemingly related codes (Leavy, p. 152). Additionally, field notes taken during the interviews were included in the data as well. Values coding was implemented, and special attention was made to maintain certain expressions of the

participants just as they were delivered. By categorizing the codes, I was able to generate a better picture of what each of the women in my study had in common, and the patterns that were revealed. The inverse of this is true as well, as certain feelings and events were experienced by one person's experience and not by the rest of the group. In order to be thorough, several types of triangulation were implemented in this project. The very nature of this mixed-methods research design project employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. Investigator triangulation (Leavy, p.153) was executed in order to have another set of eyes on this invaluable material. Having an impartial reader helped me to provide clarity and continuity throughout the transcribed notes. Theoretical triangulation, which uses different lenses to look at the data (Leavy, p.153), was used as the primary foci or lenses were of a psychological and a theological perspective. Data triangulation was also used, as surveys were taken, a psycho-educational group was run, and in-depth interviews were held. Citing an earlier piece of her own work, Leavy writes, "qualitative research allows us to unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events, people, or artifacts, build a depth of understanding about some dimension of social life, or to study the meanings embedding in texts" (p. 159).

Chapter Four: Results

Surveys

CCAR Survey

The first survey conducted for this project was directed at members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Over one hundred and fifty Reform rabbis responded to this survey. The largest response, 31%, came from rabbis representing Reform congregations with memberships of 100-300 units. Congregational members self-define "unit" to be either a single individual or a family membership. The next largest response, 19%, came from rabbis at congregations with 301-500 membership units. As these two categories comprise one half of all respondents the other half was represented in the following way: under 100 member units, 14%; 500-750 units, 15%; 751-999 units, 10%; and there was an additional 11% that represented the largest congregations with over 1000 member units.

59% of the rabbis surveyed were the only rabbi in their congregation. Another 21 % of the rabbis served congregations with two rabbis; 9% of the congregations had three rabbis; and an additional 4% of the rabbis were at congregations that supported the work of four or more rabbis. The remaining rabbis who responded to this survey identified as being retired and not connected to a synagogue of any particular size.

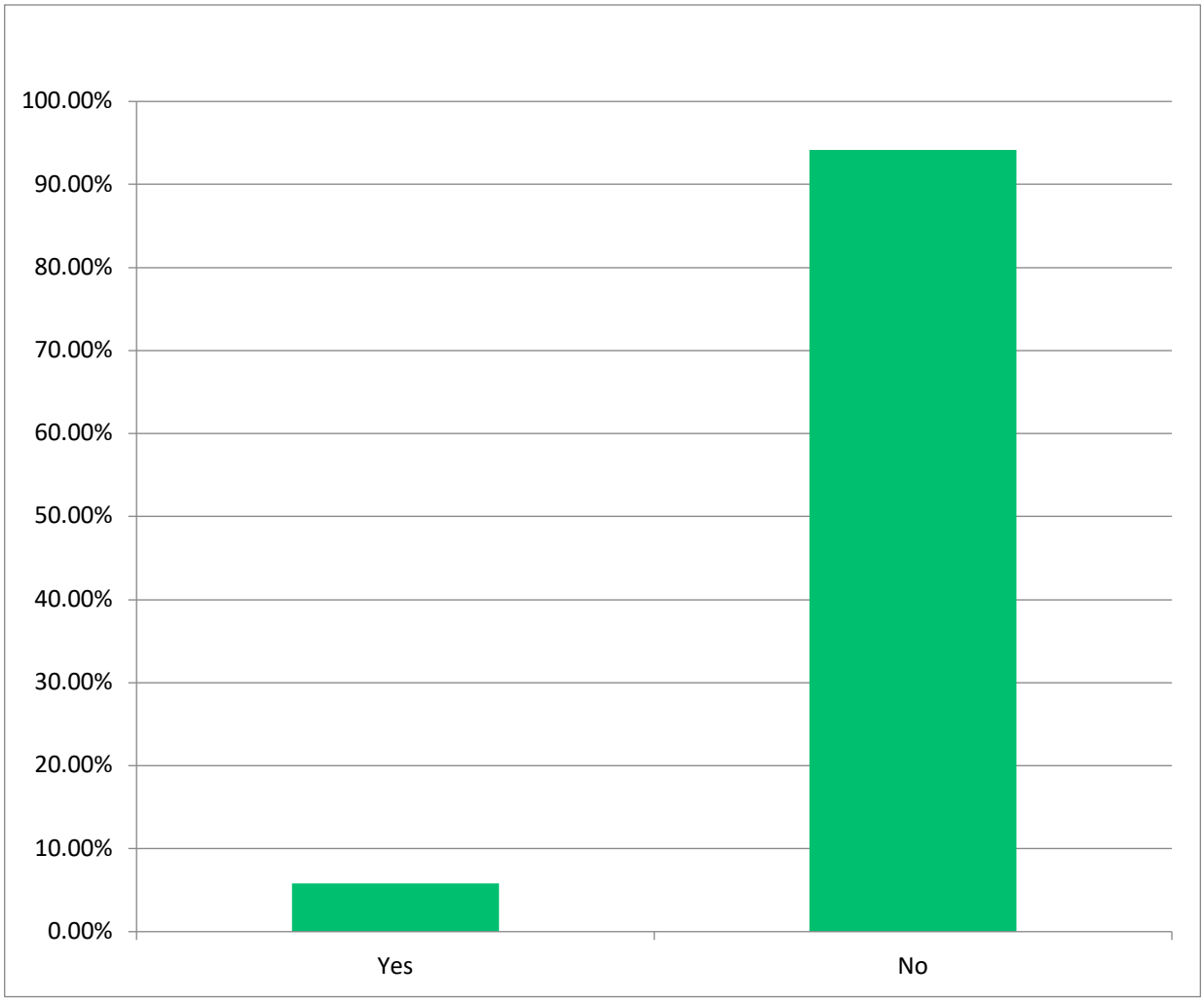
The responding rabbis came predominantly from all across the United States and additionally, approximately 7% of the rabbis, represented congregations in Israel, Canada and South America. The vast majority, 73%, of the rabbis who responded to the survey, had never been divorced, while 27% were either divorced at the time of the survey or had been divorced earlier in their lives.

The result that was truly the most telling, was that of the rabbis surveyed, only 6% offered support groups for those going through divorce. (See Figure 2). It should be noted that

7% of the congregations reported offering something special for divorced members of their congregations ranging from pastoral support to financial assistance. One colleague shared that at this particular synagogue they do offer a ”single parent” membership category and added, “I haven’t seen any other synagogues in our area with that same category.”

Figure 2

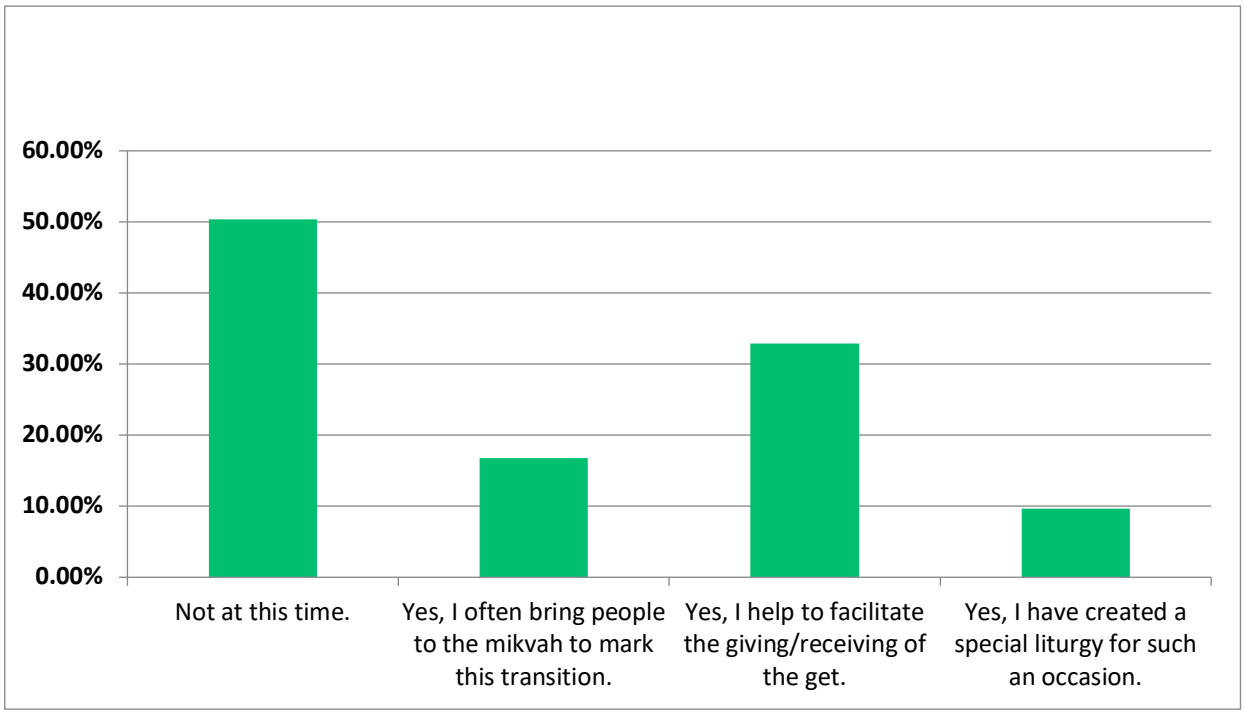
Do You Offer Support Groups?



The results of the survey (See Figure 3 and Appendix A) indicate that especially in the larger metropolitan areas such as Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver and the Bay Area there are efforts being made to reach out to the divorcing and divorced in our congregations. One colleague suggested that "it [the community] was too close to be open in support group." Another colleague mentioned that she provides "personal reach-out and on-going checking in." Further, she makes referrals to other local support groups as needed and she offers to connect divorcing individuals within her congregation to others in similar circumstances. Another colleague shared, "periodically we have a group for divorced and divorcing parents going through Bar or Bat Mitzvah with a child". He added, "a member of the congregation who is an attorney and mediator, helps with this, as well as families who have been through this."

Figure 3

Do You Offer any Rituals or Blessings for People Getting Divorced?

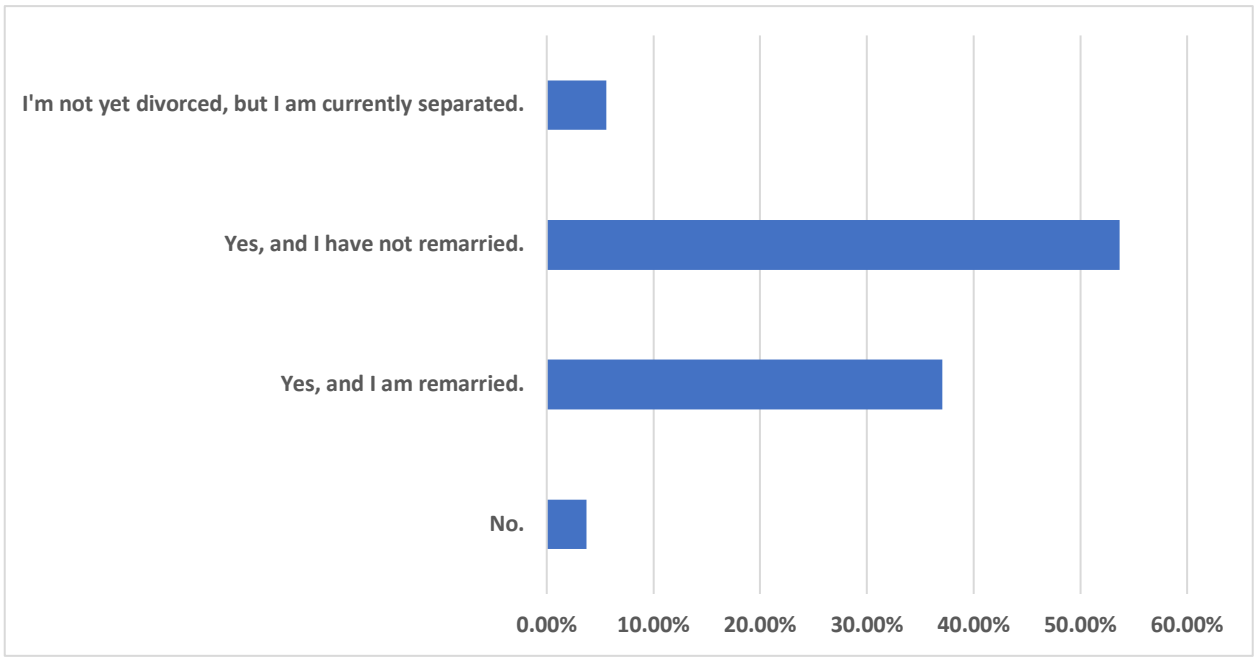


Congregational Survey

The second survey (See Figure 4 and Appendix B)was specific to one Reform Jewish congregation in New England. The primary purposes of this survey were to get a better understanding of the unspoken demographics of the congregation, and to determine interest in the psychoeducational group that I was preparing to run within the congregation as a component of this project. Fifty-four individuals responded to this survey. Two individuals who were married, began the survey, but then skipped the remainder of the survey as the questions were not relevant for their experiences. One half of the respondents had been separated or divorced for under ten years, and one fifth of the respondents had been divorced for more than twenty-five years.

Figure 4

Are You Now or Have You Ever Been Divorced?

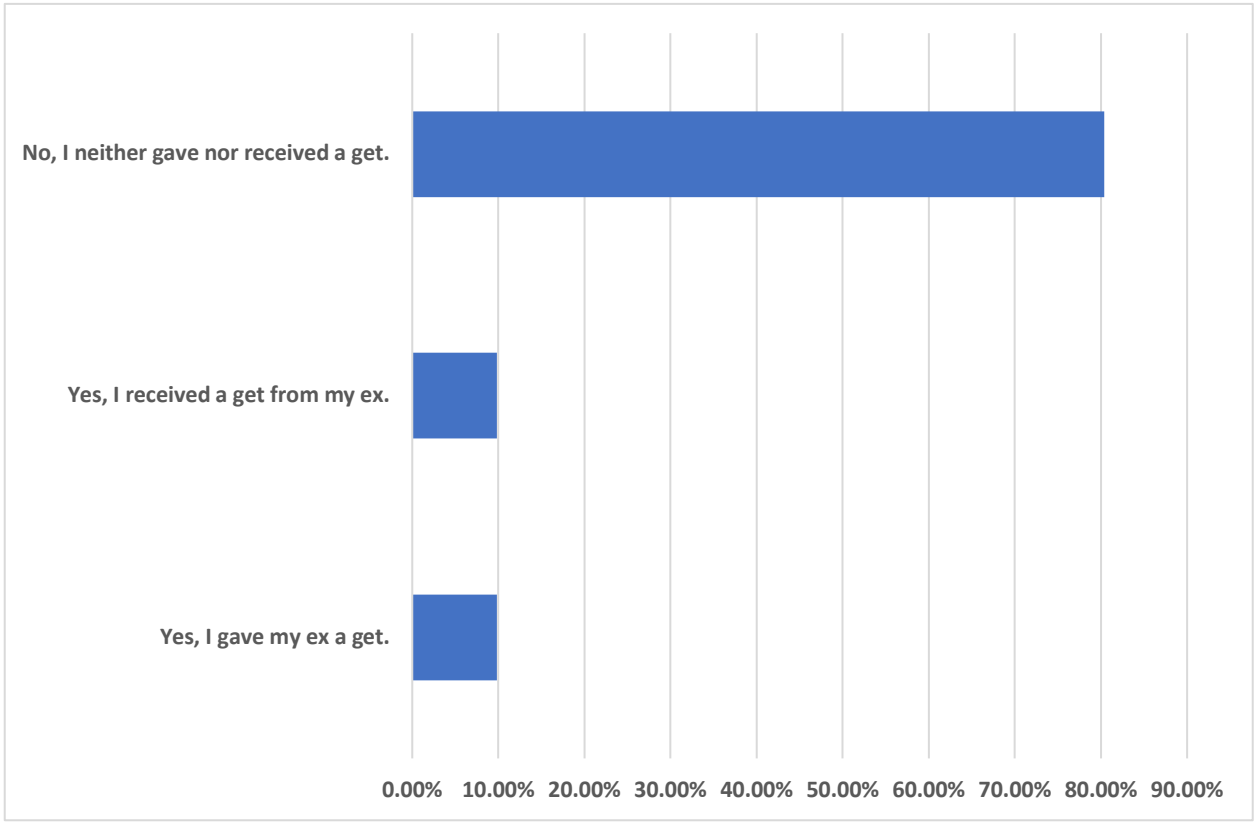


The largest population of those who answered the survey were women between the ages of 46 and 59, as they made up 37% of the responses received. Women ranging between 60 and 70 years of age, comprised the next largest grouping at 20%, and the third largest group of contributors was made up of men between the ages of 46 and 59.

When asked about who officiated at their weddings, 88% of the participants indicated that a rabbi officiated at their wedding ceremony. With such a high proportion of rabbinic officiation, it was somewhat surprising to learn that 80% of the survey's population neither gave nor received a "get", a Jewish divorce document when their marriages ended. (See Figure 5)

Figure 5

When you divorced, did you give or receive a get?



When asked about current synagogue affiliation, it was revealed that only 21% of those who are divorced within this synagogue have ex-spouses who are also currently members of the temple. When asked about their potential interest in participating in a divorce group at the synagogue, 8% answered “absolutely”; 29% answered “I think so, but would like to learn more about this”; 25% responded that they were not sure; and the remainder of the population expressed that they were not interested in participating in the group. I was told by a number of the people that their lack of interest in participating in the group was not a lack of interest in the subject, but due to the fact that their divorce was “ancient history”.

These results revealed histories of congregants that were previous unknown to many members of our community including staff and clergy. It is not that this information was insignificant at all, but rather that no one previously had asked the questions.

Divorce Group Field Notes

As mentioned above in the Methods section, a psychoeducational group was run over the course of eight-weeks. The participants of the group were exclusively female even though there were men who also expressed interest in the group. This decision was made at the request of a few of the women who were among the first to commit to the group. The ages of the women ranged from the mid-forties to the late seventies. The median length of their collective marriages was seventeen years. They had been divorced for as few as three years to as many as thirty-three years. Two of the participants had parents who also divorced during their childhoods.

Each of these women had children with their ex-husbands. Most of these children are now living on their own and out of the house, and three of these mothers still have minor children living at home. The group had many questions they wanted to explore, and we addressed most, if not all, of these questions over the course of the meetings.

It was important for the group to process the difference between being divorced and being widowed within the temple community. Several members of the group commented that it is easier to be widowed, because there can be support given from the entire community without worry of taking sides, showing favoritism, or placing blame. There was excitement about being in a group with other women who had also experienced divorce, learning about each other and from each other. They asked questions including but not limited to: "What should I do about my son's Bar Mitzvah?"; "What should I do with my *ketubah*, now that we're divorced?"; and "What does the temple do when they learn that someone is getting a divorce?"

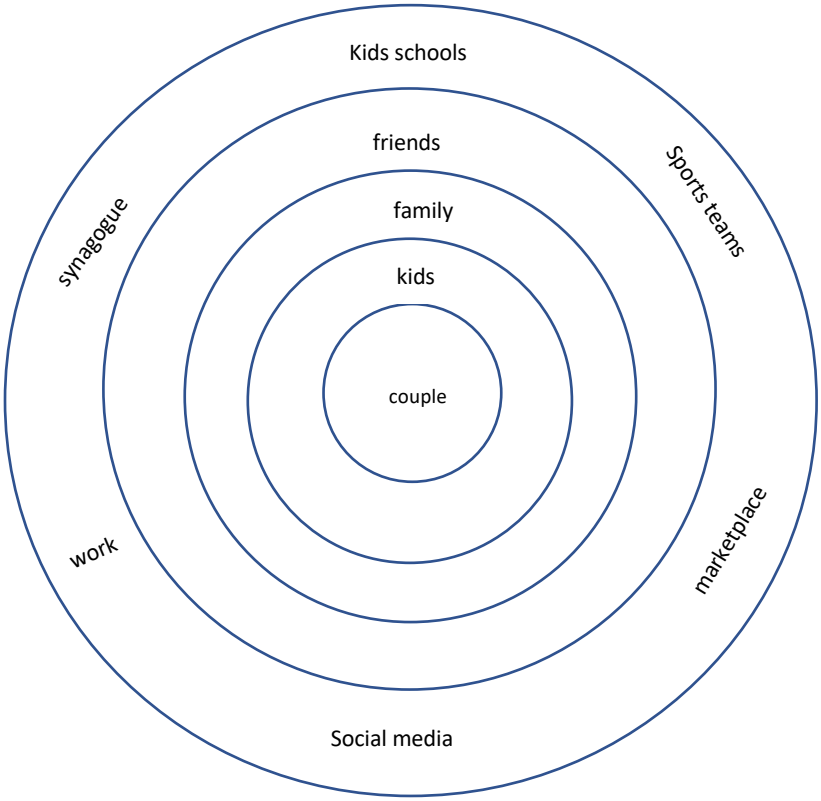
Several of the group's members mentioned that it would be helpful if the temple could proactively offer financial assistance to those divorcing as each of them worry about providing enough for their children. For the mothers in this group, their children's long-term mental health and their ability to form loving relationships of their own were among the chief concerns.

The group creatively brainstormed opportunities to mark important dates related to their divorces including "un-anniversary" days, meant to acknowledge their wedding anniversary dates not in a celebratory spirit but one that is more poignant and reflective. One participant asked if a rabbi could meet with families going through divorce to explain how the family is changing just as rabbis routinely meet with families in order to prepare for a funeral.

Questions were raised about how parents react when their adult child divorces and the impact on family and friends. Without question, the entire group agreed that divorce has rippling effects that extend far beyond the nuclear family. (See Figure 6) Beginning with the couple, divorce can impact the children; the parents of the adult children getting divorced; the larger family; their network of friends; their circles of community ranging from the synagogue and children's schools to their sports teams and beyond.

Figure 6

Circles of Social Relationships Impacted by Divorce



About halfway through the sessions, and the group had formed a trust, the subject of God was raised. For some the question was "Where was God?" and "Is there a difference between not feeling God's presence and feeling God's absence?" One member of the group who had a very different experience of God during her divorce shared "God made me strong enough to go through all I was going through." Most of the group could agree that no one went into their marriage expecting to get divorced, and in fact, many of them did not want to get divorced but felt that there was no choice given the particular circumstances of their relationship.

An interesting conversation was had about why or why not to change one's last name following separation or divorce. Many opinions were voiced regarding this issue. One woman

said that she always kept her professional name, and she wasn't going to change it now. Another offered that she had no attachment to her married name. Those who chose to keep their married name mentioned that they "wanted to have the same last name of their children" or that they had built up an identity with that name and did not want to change it at this stage in their life.

The importance of ritual was not at all lost on this group of divorced women. In fact, as they reflected on their divorces, they remembered some of the most interesting affirming actions that they took along the way. While several members of the group remembered when it was that they stopped wearing their wedding ring, one mentioned the freedom she experienced when she moved her bed to a different position in the room and she painted the bedroom walls a different color. Another participant shared buying new bedsheets. 71% of the group moved out of the marital home and started fresh in a home of their own.

In-depth interviews

The subjects of the in-depth interviews ranged from age 53 to 76. Two of these women were members of the psycho-educational divorce group. One woman was a former member of this temple ; and the other was a member of another synagogue formerly served by the researcher. There was some shared history that the researcher had with each of these women, largely but not exclusively surrounding Bar or Bat Mitzvah preparations for their children. This is an important detail as each of these contributors had trust in the researcher.

The median length of these women's marriages was just over 27 years, and they had been divorced between four and thirteen years. As it turned out, each of these women shared that the divorce was a response to an event surrounding her ex-husband ranging from the mishandling of marital assets to having an extra-marital affair. 3 out of the 4 women separated when at least one child was a teenager. Half of the women had at least one child in college at

the time of separation. One woman, for whom this can be considered a *gray divorce*, or a divorce after the age of 50, was in a different stage of her life as her children were in their thirties with children of their own. Half of these women currently live in their marital home. (See Figure 7)

Figure 7

Demographics of In-depth Interview Participants

Participants	**CD**	**TL**	**SJ**	**RB**
Age	53	55	66	76
Years Married	23	20	28	40
Years Divorced	5	4	6	13
Currently lives in Marital Home	No	Yes	No	Yes
Ages of children at separation	Teenager & Twenties	Teenagers	Teenager and Twenties	Thirties
Member of the psycho-educational group	Yes	No	Yes	No

Our interviews were semi-structured and each participant was asked a series of ten open-ended questions (See Appendix I). It was up to the individual to decide how much she wanted to expound on a particular topic as the researcher left room for moments of silence and quiet reflection. After the first interview, questions were tightened and the order of some of the questions changed as well. An example of that is the following question: “What role, if any, has God played in your journey?” This researcher wanted to put God in the center of the interview lest it seem that God’s role was an afterthought that was added at the end of the interview.

Non-verbal and visual data were collected during the in-depth interviews. As an example, this researcher was struck by how different the visual frames were in each interview. The first participant “RB” set up her computer on her deck surrounded by lush trees and foliage. Throughout the interview, she was as peaceful and calm as the backdrop around her. In stark contrast to that, my interview with “SJ” was quite telling as her face was often out of the frame of the camera, and it was necessary at times to let her know that she could not be seen and that the laptop needed to be adjusted. Somewhere in the middle of those interviews were the sessions with the other two women. At the start of my interview with “CD” she apologized for not wearing any make-up and when we began my session with “TL”, she was prepared on her sofa and ready to go.

Each interview was transcribed and read several times for the purposes of coding and categorizing. While each of these women had certain experiences in common, their psycho-spiritual expressions and descriptions of their experiences varied greatly. Each woman’s perspective was analyzed, organized and can be found in figures 8-12.

The first figure (Figure 8) is a composite of all four participants and the categories that received the most attention among them. Percentage values were not assigned to the pie charts as these were qualitative interviews; but the weighted pieces of the pie reflect the attention each category received. The three smallest categories that are not labeled are “shock”; “sickness”; and “Jewish identity”. It is worth noting especially around the category of “sickness”, that two out of four of the participants were diagnosed with breast cancer shortly after they and their husbands separated, and thus had to go through treatment on their own.

Figure 8

The Phenomenon of Divorce Through the Eyes of Participants 1-4

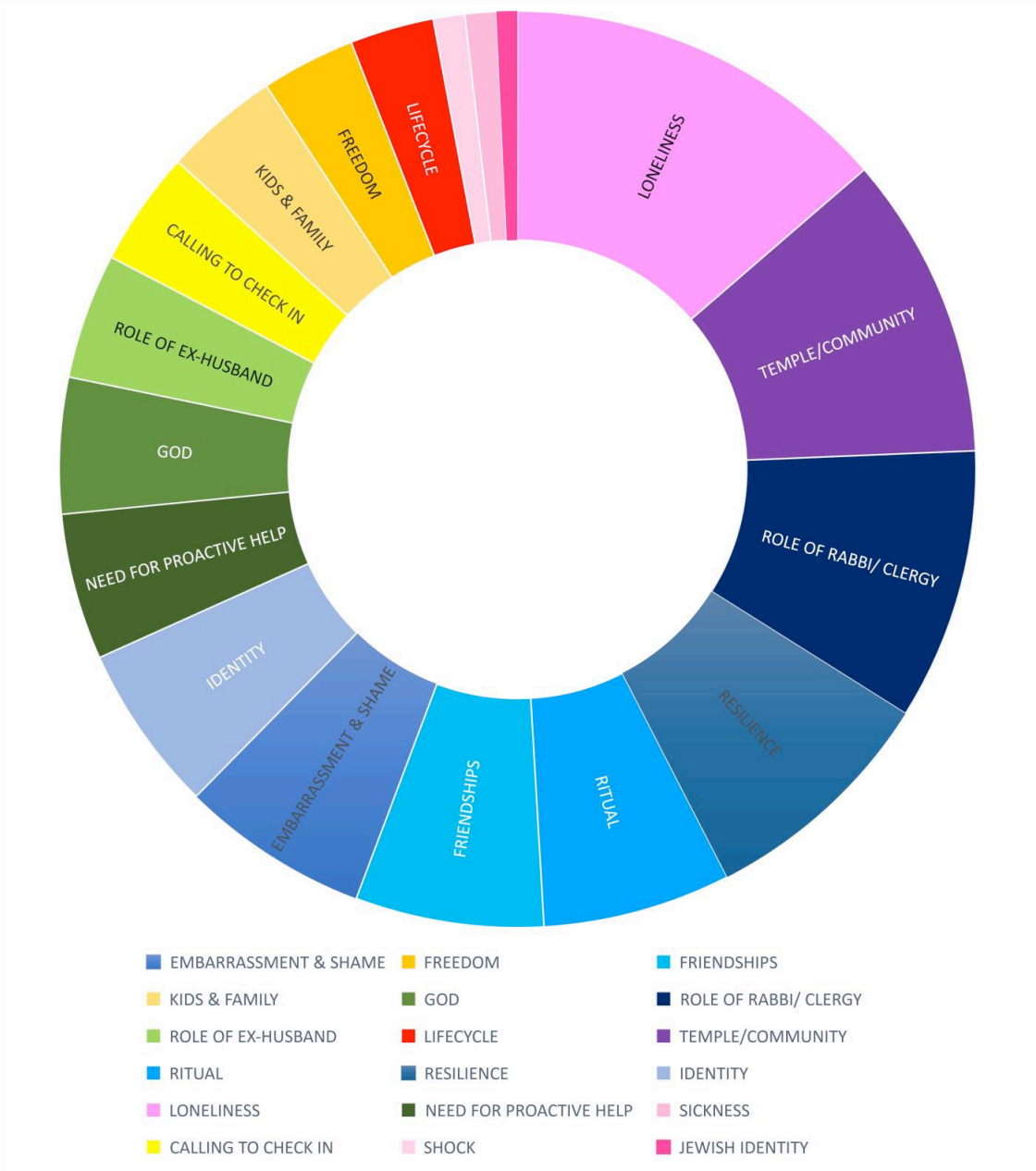
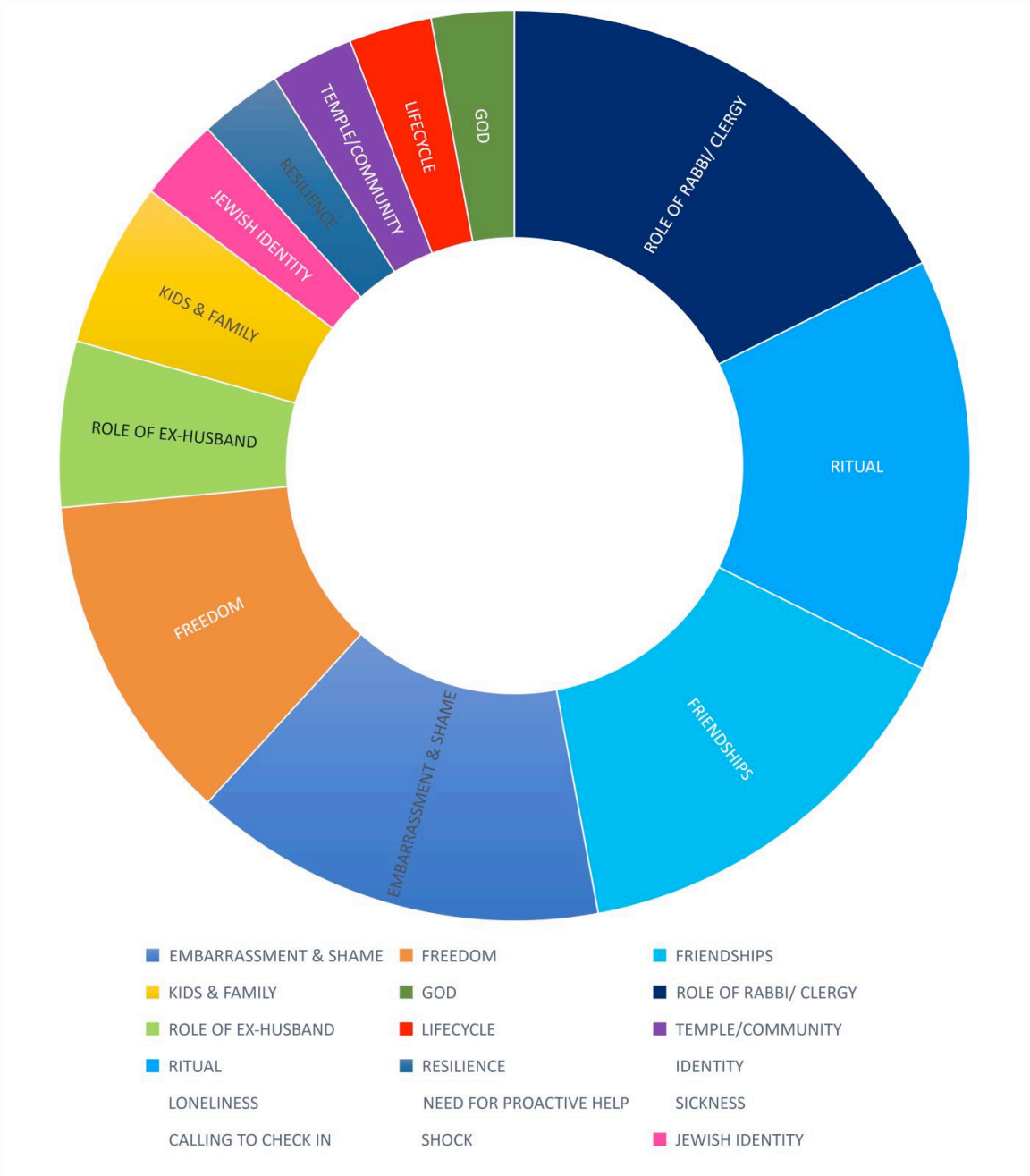


Figure 9

The Phenomenon of Divorce Through the Eyes of Participant #1, "CD"



For “CD”, the major foci of our conversation centered around the issues of “friendships”; “the role of rabbi/clergy”; “embarrassment and shame”; and “ritual”. (See Figure 9). On the topic of friendships, she commented, “You never know who your friends are going to be when you get divorced.” For her, this was an eye-opening experience as some of her friendships became stronger and yet others could not withstand the impact of her divorce. She reflected back and realized “As I become stronger and happier independently, I’ve been able to be a better friend.”

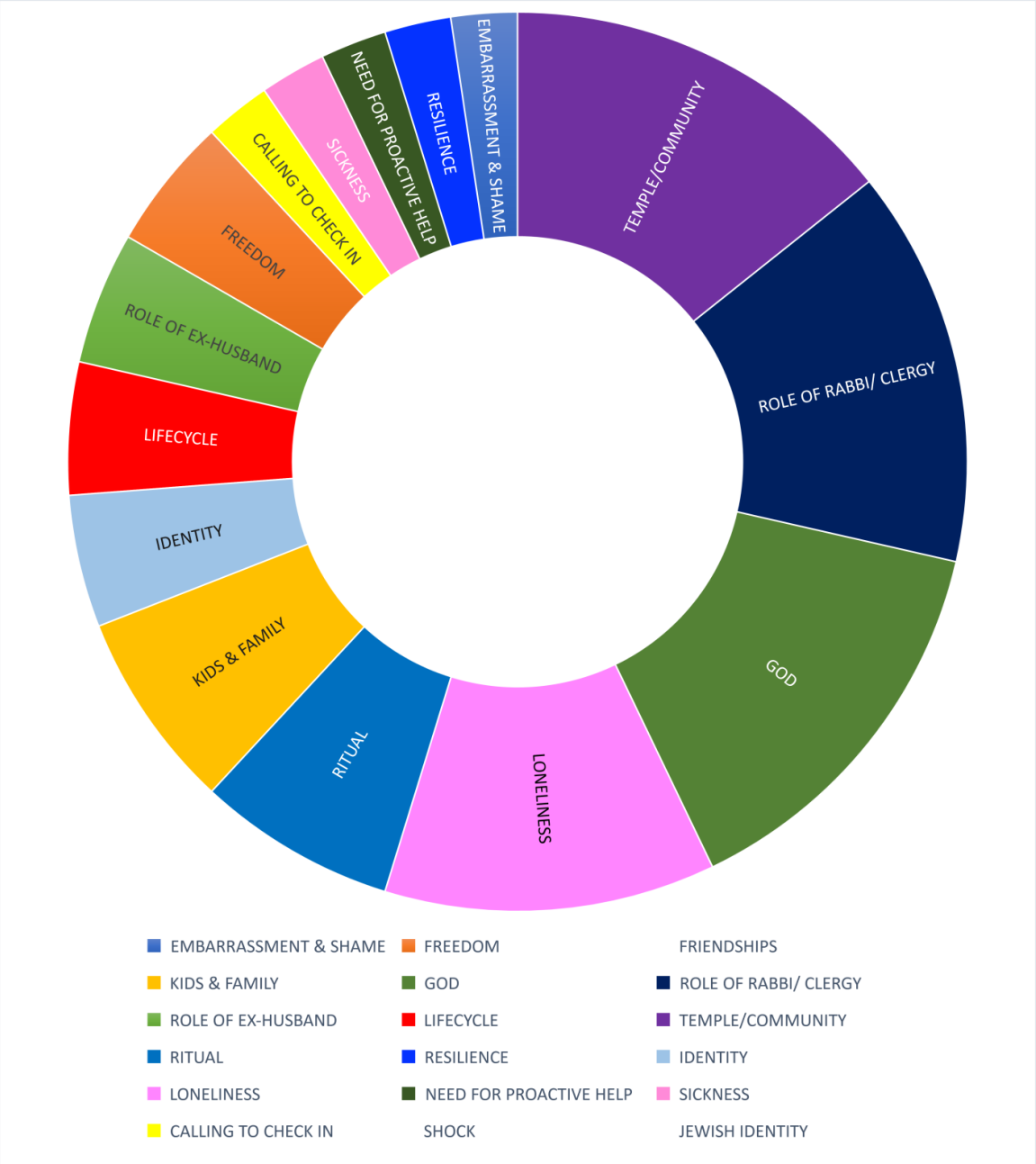
With respect to the role of the rabbi/clergy, she admitted that she “could have used the rabbis being proactive rather than reactive” and that she wished that the rabbis could reach out to her kids, to see if there was anything they could do to help them mourn the loss of their parents’ marriage.

For “CD” another primary issue was the embarrassment and shame that she felt during the latter years of her marriage and for a period after her separation. She lamented, “my energy was spent dealing with the stress and the secrets that we were living with.” She felt embarrassed that she didn’t have a successful marriage as she admitted, “It was a lot easier to say that I was having problems with a teenage daughter because everyone has problems with their teenage daughter.” Her divorce ultimately freed her from the shame and embarrassment she was experiencing, and she reported that “once that was lifted, I was able to shine as a person”.

Ritually, “CD” intentionally marked her divorce by purchasing new sheets and a comforter, and on her wedding anniversary she notes that “I buy myself something to symbolize that I’m not married anymore and thus free to do what I want to do.” She was exuberant when she spoke of purchasing her own house; and having complete freedom to make this house her home.

Figure 10

The Phenomenon of Divorce Through the Eyes of Participant #2, "TL"



The experience of “TL” was quite different. The four major categories for her included: “temple/community”; “role of rabbi/clergy”; “God”; and “loneliness”. (See Figure 10). “TL” currently finds herself between two congregations. The first congregation she is preparing to leave, but one of her children is still connected to the religious school and for her sake, they remain members.

About this congregation “TL” admits, “Nothing here makes me feel like I’m a part of this community.” In contrast, she lights up when she speaks about the congregation that she will be regularly attending in the near future. “I don’t even know if praying has a lot of meaning for me; but the joining and the community that becomes one, has power for me.” She also credits a program that this synagogue runs called “*Wine, Dine and Be Divine*”, where a member of the group makes a reservation at a moderately priced restaurant, and people go to dinner together before attending Shabbat services. She adds, “ I find when I go to synagogue here, there is power in community.”

The role of clergy remains an important one for “TL”. She lamented that she originally joined the first congregation because the rabbi had worked at camp with members of her family, but a year or two after they joined, the rabbi retired and that was a loss for her. To add insult to injury, she found herself getting close to the congregation’s cantor and then the cantor died, and her loss was compounded and her connection to the temple was diminished. She shared, “I lost that thread of connection.” When the new rabbi came on board, she had what she called a “one and done” experience with him and there was never any follow up. She was craving to receive a call from the rabbi simply saying, “Hey, how are you doing? Is there anything we can do for you?”

“God was not part of my divorce”. “TL” added, “I really had to close God off, because I couldn’t make sense of things. I had to close God off, because I couldn’t believe or have room

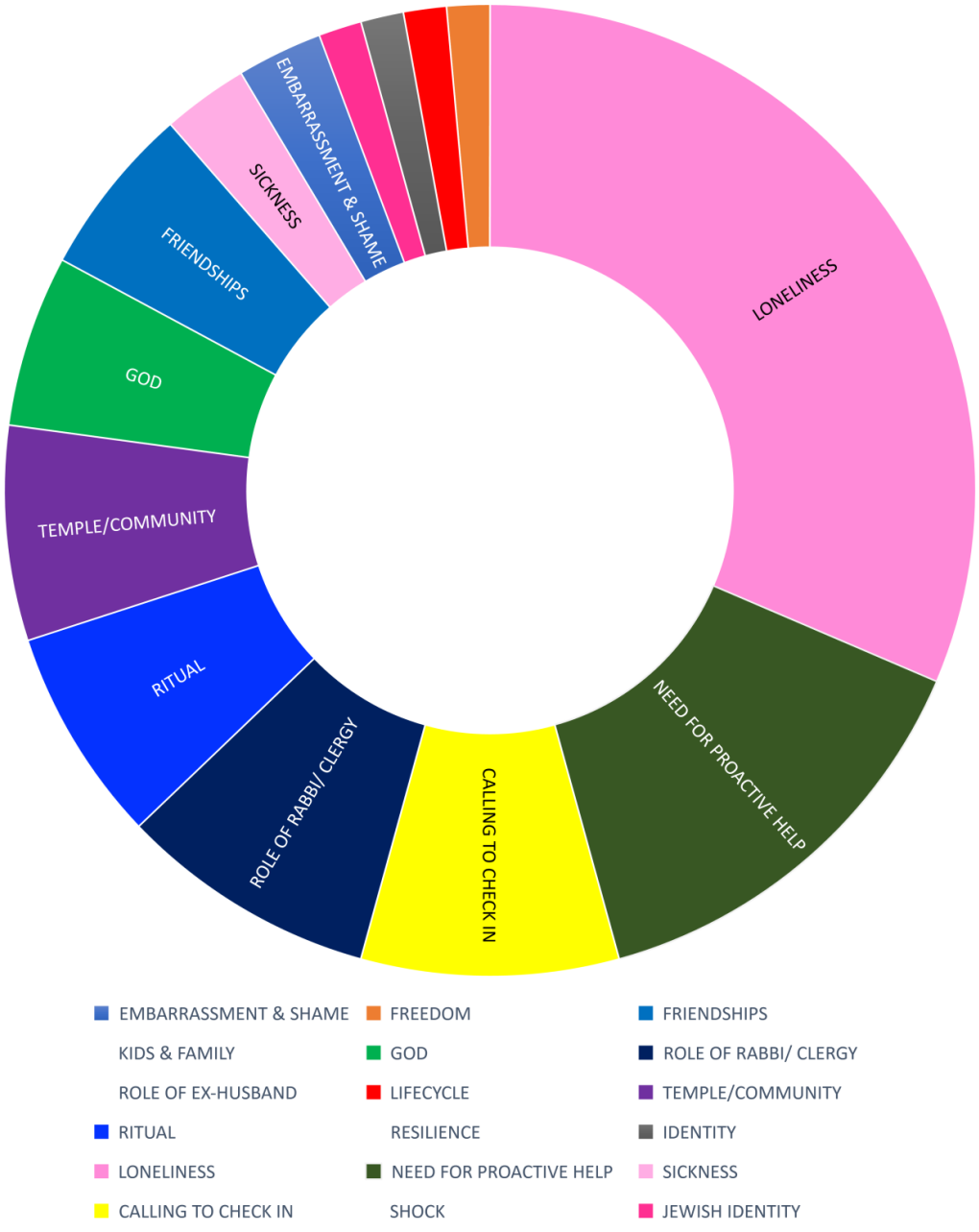
for where a Higher Power fit into the sh**storm. I just couldn't." Later, speaking about the anger she experienced while she was going through the process of getting divorced, she shared "I was so angry at God, and I'm just finding the permission again to enter a synagogue with intention for myself." In speaking with her, it was clear to me that God was in her anger and in her grief about her marriage ending.

Without her husband, without God and without family nearby, "TL" was experiencing a great deal of loneliness as a result of her divorce. "I think it's isolating", she said. Though she is busy raising her teenage children, she acknowledged, "I'm very busy but I still feel lonely. Sometimes I just want to have a conversation with somebody who has a prefrontal cortex!" At least she didn't lose her sense of humor in the divorce. Referring back to the social dining program at the new temple, she disclosed, "it might be the only time I eat a meal with somebody during the week."

Though God may not have been one of her largest categories, the impact was tremendous as she attested, "God gave me strength that I didn't know I had, and God gave me the choice that I didn't know I had. The fact that I could do this, was monumental. So, I would say that was God's influence."

Figure 11

The Phenomenon of Divorce Through the Eyes of Participant #3, "SJ"



For my third participant there was one issue that overwhelmingly was on her heart and that was the issue of loneliness. (See Figure 11). She recounted that post-divorce, " I'm not invited to the same things that I used to be invited to and it feels like a commentary on my worth." She felt alone, ashamed, and lonely, and these feelings continue to be true today. Postulating on what could have been different, she asked, "I wonder if I got a call from the rabbi inviting me to light Shabbat candles at temple, if that would have made all the difference in the world."

As a result of her divorce, "SJ" felt very much othered as she noted, "there didn't seem to be many divorced families or individuals in our congregation." Without question, and without taking into consideration the results of the Temple divorce survey, the perception is that most everyone is married, predominately in heteronormative relationships, and it can be challenging for single women to feel like they fit within the community. For "SJ", over 31% of her comments during the interview focused on this issue of loneliness.

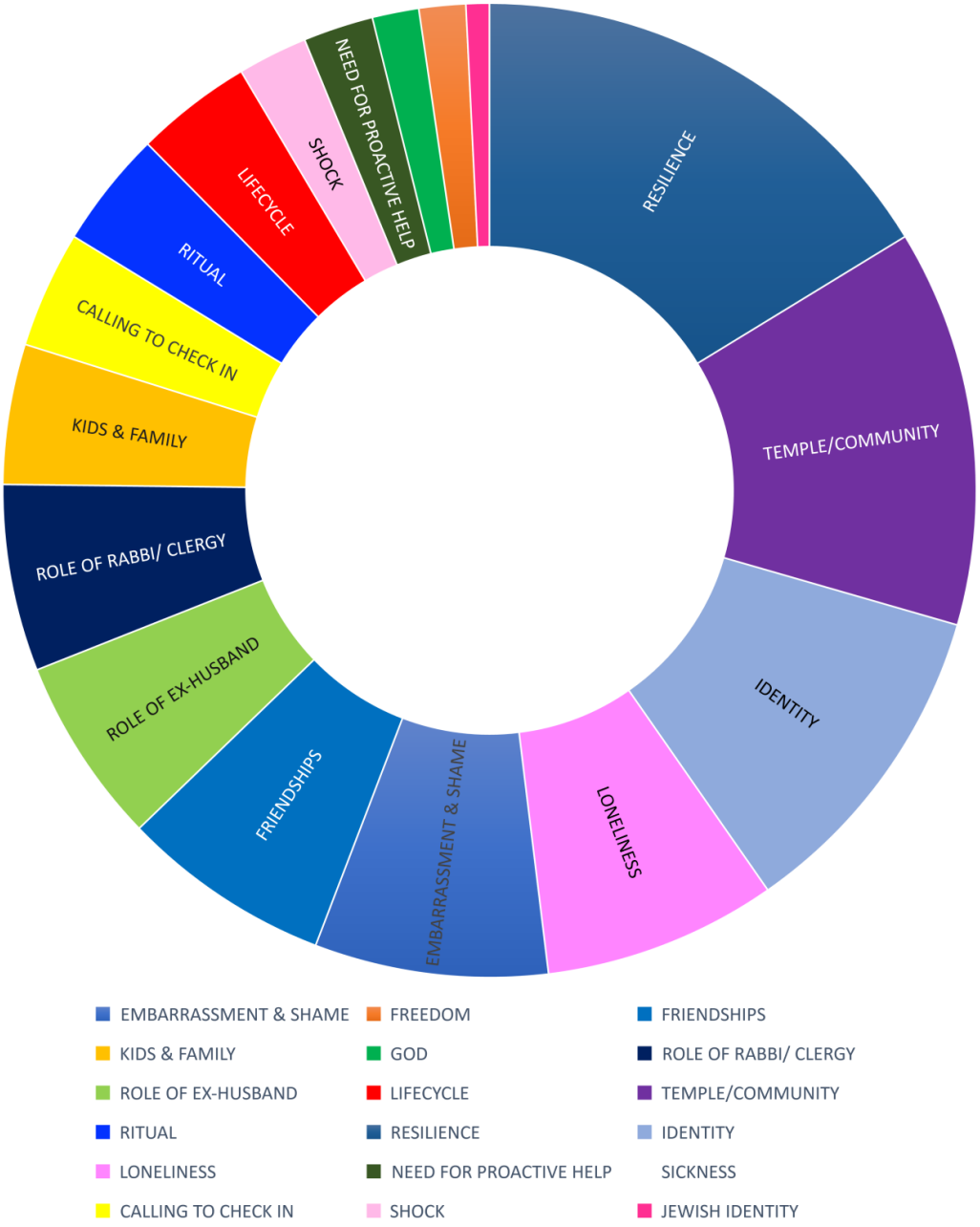
Given this importance, it should be no surprise that her three next largest categories of conversation were: "need for proactive help"; "calling to check in"; and "the role of the rabbi/clergy". She shared that in an ideal world, "I wish that someone from the clergy had gathered some of my friends and come to my house and held services here. I wish that they had brought it to me as a way of embracing me, and telling me, that I matter." She said, "I was desperate for the message that I mattered and that they wanted me to be with them, but nobody reached out." "I would have felt important if someone reached out to me", she disclosed. "SJ" was truly distressed by the lack of outreach to her. She added, while "I never expected to have every single member of the clergy in my back pocket, I felt like no one knew what to say to me and were uncomfortable being around me."

Regarding her relationship to God, “SJ” announced, “God was nowhere during my divorce and that was sad for me.” She said, “I would have loved the message that I was still loved and respected and that I had a place at the temple.” She continued, “had I felt more connected to the congregation, I probably would have felt God’s presence as well. For me, I need to have community to have God.”

On Figure 11, there are four categories that appear to be unnamed and and due to their small size the labels cannot be seen, other than in the key below. In order from left to right we find the issues of “Jewish identity”; “identity”; “lifecycle”; and “freedom” receiving very little attention from “SJ”.

Figure 12

The Phenomenon of Divorce Through the Eyes of Participant #4 "RB"



The final participant was “RB”. In contrast to her counterparts, the categories receiving the most attention from her were: “resilience”; “temple/community”; “identity”; and a tie between “loneliness” and “embarrassment and shame.” (See Figure 11). As she first described her divorce, “RB” proclaimed, “I was so humiliated that I could not even walk into the temple.” She continued, “I asked the cantor not to say anything to anyone” as she just couldn’t bear it. Describing the moment, she learned about her husband’s infidelity, she said, “when my ex told me what happened, I lost myself. Divorce for me was like shame rippling down like a waterfall. No, it wasn’t rippling, it was crashing down on my head.”

With respect to loneliness and isolation, “RB” shared that “the hardest thing for me was not having anybody in my universe who was divorced, who I could look to for important conversation.” She continued, “ I did not have one friend who was divorced because in my generation, we didn’t get divorced.” She further emphasized that point by saying, “for me, divorce equaled failure, and so for me, I never expected to get divorced. I married forever.” At the time of her separation she asked her cantor if she knew of a divorce support group that she could attend, but at that time, not only was nothing offered at her synagogue, but her cantor had no place that she could recommend. There were times that she felt so alone, but perhaps none more than at the annual temple gala. She disclosed that “one of the things that also becomes hard when you all of a sudden become a single person is attending Shabbat dinners, annual dinners or the gala. It’s too hard to figure out how to show up; and who do you sit with?

Identity was very important to “RB”; so much so that she couldn’t get rid of her last name fast enough and return to using her maiden name. She no longer wanted to be associated with her ex-husband who violated their marriage, so professionally she began inserting her maiden name in front of her married name with the intention of rebranding herself. “It was about me, claiming who I had become,” she reported. She said that her attitude at the time was,

"I will work hard to have a good reputation with my maiden name." She was able to hold her head up high as she said, "I felt I knew who I was, and I felt I knew my values and I knew that I never ever was unkind."

Describing her relationship with her temple community, "RB" said that before her divorce, "the temple was always the place I would for introspection, for solace, for joy and for community; and since the divorce, it was no longer a place I felt welcomed or comfortable in." Everything was hard. "I could not be in the temple without crying." She further stated, "I felt a loss in the Jewish community, and I felt heartbroken all of the time." As she chose to keep her private life, private "RB" denied herself the possibility have getting support from the community she had loved. "It was so deeply kneading my soul to go to temple, but nobody there knew [that I was divorced]." Reflecting on her past experience with the temple community, she said, "We were part of a *chavurah*, or small group, when the kids were younger, and I remember how important the chavurah was to me." While it took some time "for people at temple to understand that we were no longer married," once they did know, it was incredible "to have people at temple come over and give me a hug."

One of the reasons that "RB" wanted so few people to know early on that she and her husband were separated was because as she said, "I really thought we could put things back together." That is to say, that despite the hurt and embarrassment that her husband had caused her, "RB" still had hope. At first, the hope was that she could somehow fix her marriage; but over time her hope was what helped her get through the divorce journey and the healing process. It is part of what made her so resilient. She expressed the following attitude, "when you're alive, there is always hope and you really can write your own history." This positive and can-do attitude has been a true blessing throughout this experience and has enabled "RB" to be

grateful each day. As she said, “Every morning I would get up and I would ask for the strength to do the best I could with the day I was given, and when I went to sleep at night, I said thank you.”

As for her perspective on God’s role in her divorce, “RB” revealed, “I know that there is a power bigger and I have relied on the presence of someone holding me up and not letting me slip through to the darkest places. I talk to God a lot and he/she takes different forms and I find this God in the sunsets ,and I find it in the smile of someone I love, and somebody who I don’t know walking down the street because I always try to make eye connection with as many human beings as I can, especially in these days. I think I’ve become much more deeply religious.”

Chapter Five: Discussion

One is the Loneliest Number

There were women in both the psycho-educational group and the in-depth interviews, who shared that when they separated from their husbands, it signified the first time in their lives that they had lived alone as adults. This reality was more difficult than they had ever anticipated. As Sakraida's study mentions, there are new identities and roles that are associated with divorce, such as divorcee, ex-spouse, and single parent. Additionally, specific roles of home mechanic and manager of finances were identified as significant to the adjustment to life alone" (Sakraida, 2005, p.79). One participant of both studies had a strong reaction to the word "divorcee" and made it abundantly clear that she does not want anyone ever calling her a divorcée. For her, this was as an antiquated term that did not resonate with her at all.

The group regularly compared themselves to widows and noted that temples often have support groups for widows and widowers, but not for those who go through divorce. They emphasized that with widows, "you don't want to lose the spouse, but ex-husbands are always there." For this group of women, being divorced was much more difficult than what they imagined being widowed might be like. Death has finality. When one has children or grandchildren in the picture, divorce never transcends to finality. With death, people ask what they can do. With divorce, people ask what did you do? Time may heal all wounds, but it doesn't erase the inner scar that divorce leaves behind. Judaism has a wonderfully helpful scaffolding that helps to support the mourners, but as of yet, that protective framework is missing for those in our communities who are experiencing the journey of divorce.

The feeling of loneliness is pervasive for many divorced women. Consider this response from one of the women who participated in both the group and the in-depth interview. "When I moved out of my marital home, I was displaced; and it was during the same time that the

temple was under construction, and the temple community was also displaced. I think this contributed to my feeling that I had no place to go. I was out of two homes at the same time." Another interviewee, reflecting on her newly found status as a single parent lamented that she "liked having a companion and misses that." While she has always been careful not to criticize her ex-husband in front of her children, she admitted with sadness that "he wanted no part in giving a party in honor of our son's high school graduation." "You can be busy and still feel lonely" she said.

It was certainly the experience of some of the study participants that their social lives were deeply impacted by their divorces. Some people limited their own social schedules because they didn't feel comfortable attending events alone. Reflecting on that, one group member said, "it felt really good to have my son at High Holy Day services with me. I'm used to going to everything by myself". One of the group members confessed that her divorce and her utter sense of loneliness led her to become an alcoholic as she said, "the wine was a really good friend". Another woman said, "my friends Ben and Jerry have really come through for me!"

Several of the participants shared that it is often hard to come to temple alone. One said, "I asked my sister to pick me up because I didn't want to walk into temple alone. She said it was out of her way. In contrast to my sister, a friend invited me to dinner first and we went to temple together." Attending Shabbat services is hard enough, but when it comes time for the Temple Gala, or other receptions requiring a seating chart, the study participants across the board expressed concern about details such as "Where would I sit? Or, who could I go with?" One of the women I interviewed shared that traveling with the temple was especially difficult because the group was comprised predominantly of couples. She said, "the most successful trip was the women's trip because it was all women, no one was partnered with each other and we had so much more fun, and everyone was so inclusive."

This researcher learned that for the divorcing or divorced individual, one might not even get invited to the same events that one had been invited to while married. It was the sentiment of several women in the group that with divorce, “you find out who your real friends are.” It is a vicious cycle in many respects. The lonely divorcée of this study frequently found herself craving the company of peers especially when she found herself uninvited to congregational functions. This only deepens the sadness and the experience of her solitude. As Lori Gottlieb (2019) has written, “reasonably or not, many couples prefer socializing with other couples and choose not to invite the lone single person to certain gatherings.”

In a situation such as this, when there is a desire to emerge from the pit of loneliness and despair, there is a need for a “tragic optimism” (Frankl, 1992, p.139). The challenge is to turn the negative aspects of one’s life into something constructive and this is not easily done. As one of the women said, “I have choices now, that I didn’t have when we were married.” It was inspirational to witness her describe this inner shift and outlook. “The best is yet to come”, she said.

One of the obstacles that could present a challenge however is that the individual may not be aware of how he or she comes across to others. A particularly interesting example of the phenomenon of not being aware of how one comes across to others was experienced by the researcher during one of our Zoom interviews. The platform of the video call enabled us to see one another, our body language, and ideally ourselves as well. This made it possible for the researcher to notice details during the interview that surely would have been lost had the interview happened on the telephone. It was during this interview that the researcher noticed that there were moments when the woman being interviewed was virtually absent from the screen and the researcher needed to let her know to reposition either herself or the laptop so

that we could resume a face to face conversation. This left the researcher wondering if this lack of awareness was due to her loneliness, or simply a sign of discomfort using this technology.

Shame on Who?

No one goes into a marriage expecting it to fail, and yet when a marriage ends it often feels like a failure or is viewed by others as such. One of the participants shared that she felt that one of the reasons she left her job was because people could no longer bear her sadness. Related to the fear of contagion mentioned in Chapter Two, there are those "who feel insecure in their marriage and worry that spending time with a divorced person will plant the idea of divorce in their partner's mind" (Gottlieb). According to Konstam et al.(2016), *public stigma* is that which occurs when the discomfort of an outsider is expressed toward a divorcing or divorced individual. When a similar bias or sense of shame originates from the divorcing person however, this would be referred to as *self-stigma*. Both those who experience public stigma as well as those who self-stigmatize are susceptible to experience something that this researcher would call "divorce-a-phobia." Largely, this divorce-related fear is that of the unknown, and without question it is human nature to fear and be uncomfortable with the unknown, and yet there is something about divorce that is humbling and eye-opening and filled with many firsts. Those experiencing divorce, especially those with children at home, face their fears about being divorced each and every day.

Each participant from the in-depth interviews commented about this issue. "TL" participant shared that "people at temple did not know that we were getting a divorce." "SJ" shared that she often tried to put up a brave front; and would say that she was fine, even when she wasn't. "CD" commented that she "was trying to hide the fact that her marriage wasn't successful and "RB" sighed that she "never thought that this would happen to us". "Despite its

commonality, divorce in general remains a stigmatized life transition" (Coontz, as cited in Allen & Goldberg, 2019).

The power of shame, the impulse to keep up appearances and the fear of being talked about in the community have strong impacts upon those divorcing in our congregations. Shame also exists in part when there is a realization that there are subjects that are deemed by some, to be inappropriate to discuss in the public arena. As a result of these experiences, shame often goes underground.

With a divorce, everyone's financial circumstances are different. Just as financial matters are an issue in settling a divorce case, it often continues to be an issue for divorcing parties. Money was a topic that came up in our group discussion. Members had meaning for these group members. Money is loaded. Money is power. Money is triggering. Money is stressful, and money is a huge concern. One woman shared, "as a new member, I didn't even know that financial assistance was available". The financial impact of divorce is real for both parties. Members of the divorce group widely validated this sentiment and one person offered the following thought, "wouldn't it be nice if rather than having to ask for a lower membership rate, or reduced fees, someone from the temple proactively asked you, if you needed help?"

It is important to add that this desire for proactivity can come from one or both parties in a divorce. The one receiving financial support may feel like they often are asking others for help, which can feel infantilizing or at times humiliating. Whereas the one who is in the position of giving the financial support may feel that money is constantly being taken from them, and they have nothing left to give. Synagogues that proactively offer financial assistance, could not only take off some of the financial burden; but it could also alleviate some of the shame that accompanies asking for dues relief, and potentially could retain more of their membership.

Participants Learned from the Experiences of Their Children

Those who were interviewed for this project were pleasantly surprised with how well their children handled the transitions within their families. One woman said, “Both of my kids have exhibited maturity, caring and empathy through this whole process. I think the bottom line for these kids, is that they just want to see happy parents.” One mother in the group shared the following observation about her children, “They know that if they need something, that they go to Mom, because Dad can’t afford it. Mom too may not be able to afford it; but sacrifices so that they can have what they need.” She continued, “Part of me wishes that the kids knew the truth about their father, but I don’t want to take their father away from them.” Each of the mothers was intentional about avoiding saying anything bad against their former husbands to their children regardless of the child’s age. And yet, another mother shared, “when I realize how well the kids know me, I realize that they must know their father too.” This realization brought both sadness and a sense of gratification to the group that one day, the kids would have a better understanding of why it was their parents ultimately divorced.

There was a desire expressed from the mothers of sons in particular that their children have positive male role models in their lives. They largely felt protective of their children and hope that they know that they are doing their best. One mother shared her determination as she said, “I’m not going to let the kids pay the price for the fact that we’re no longer a two-income family.” She went on the state that “it has been important to me to see things through with real consistency and not a lot of changes.” On a very practical level, there was a request for members of the group to provide one of the moms with suggested wording for her son’s upcoming Bar Mitzvah invitation, acknowledging the fact that this is not always so easy to do for divorced families, the other members happily contributed their ideas. On the topic of Bar and Bat Mitzvah, one mother shared that a year after her daughter’s Bat Mitzvah, she and her

former husband separated. And at that time the father left their daughter a note saying, “aren’t you glad I waited until after your Bat Mitzvah?”

Divorce in the Synagogue

It is precisely this intentional look at divorce in the synagogue which distinguishes this paper from other studies on the subject of divorce. The divorce group held at the Temple was the first time a group like this had been offered at this synagogue. “Had there been something like this at temple when I was getting divorced, I would have participated”, said one group member. The women interviewed were more than happy to add their voices, their experiences and their opinions to this study and shared on numerous occasions that they, like the group members would be more than happy to lend their support to others in the congregation who too are navigating the waters of divorce, and single parenthood.

While it was true for some people, that the synagogue is too closely knit to attend a support group; others were just waiting for it to be offered. The group voiced the desire for there to be a special interest group at the temple focusing on the needs of the temple’s divorced members, and they also suggested creating *chavurot,* or small groups of divorced families that could celebrate Shabbat and other holidays together. One woman agreed that such a support system could be helpful at the holidays. She said, “Thanksgiving is a really tough time. The years without my kids, is so incredibly hard. I’m filled with grief.”

> A spiritual or religious community can offer a physical and emotional infrastructure for scenarios of daily life. Indeed, the role of church, temple, or synagogue as social network has assumed increasing importance as nuclear and extended families have lost dominance as centers of communal life (Griffith & Griffith, 2003, p.199).

My Temple, My Sanctuary

The survey of the Reform rabbis yielded one of the most eye-opening statistics of this project, which showed that 94% of our congregations do not offer divorce support groups. When the women of this project were getting divorced, there were no such groups offered in any of the local synagogues. One woman said, "I really didn't know if there were any resources available." Most of the women had been craving programs or other indications from the temple leadership that it is acceptable to be divorced within our congregation, that there is a place for them. One participant said, "I don't think there is a protocol in place to reach out to divorcing families. It would be helpful if there were *divorce tutors* to serve as resources, especially around lifecycle issues."

As we spoke about this, the group agreed that a natural way to integrate their passion and the needs of the temple could be through the *Chesed* or *Caring Community* arm of the temple. Knowing how well received this group has been throughout the community, the members of the group expressed their desire to help others in similar situations as they told me, "Please let the Chesed committee know that we want to help." Chesed and caring committees are created so that there is a structure within the community to take of each other. Typically help families out at times of mourning and sickness. From providing meals to watching a house while the family in mourning is at the funeral, this is a time when one's congregational community can step up and fully be there. Divorce too is a time of mourning, even for the one initiating the divorce. As one mother put it, "I can't tell you the number of times I could have used a meal for me and the kids ready when I got home from work, and if the Chesed committee could do something like that, it would be incredibly helpful."

Another important finding from the Congregational survey was realizing that our congregations have many more people who had ever been divorced than could have been

imagined. Our membership forms don't typically ask that question. This is truly an untapped population within our congregations and one that could provide the congregational leadership with a helpful perspective. One participant said, "I wished there had been an easier way for me to come back to temple after I left." This is precisely the message that Wolfson (2013) addressed as he has written, "it is worth some effort to reengage those who were once involved in the organization" (p.205).

> Community is above all else about belonging. It is about belonging to a neighborhood, family, clan tribe, or the fluid postmodern substitute for all of these –a social network. Being in or out of community with those with whom one belongs is the fundamental distinction upon which the notion of community exists (Griffith & Griffith, p.192).

In God We Trust?

The intimate relationship with God for some, was also tenuous during the divorce journey, especially for those who tend to experience God in community and felt like they needed to take a step back from the community. One woman I interviewed was not at all shy about her feelings about God during her divorce. She said, "I was so pissed at God. And I'm just finding permission now to enter a synagogue with intention and for myself again."

One of the group's members said, "God wasn't active in my divorce and neither was my temple." When we consider that a synagogue is often referred to as God's house, it makes sense why it could be hard to enter the building when the relationship is strained. For those individuals who take a step back, there can exist the anxiety and fear of the unknown that perhaps Jacob felt when preparing to see Esau again in Genesis 33. They wonder, "will my return to the synagogue be met with an embrace and a kiss, or will I get bit on my neck?"

Others had completely different experiences with God during their divorces and mentioned that their faith was strengthened and that God had become for them, the partner

that they could in fact trust. Likewise, another woman mentioned that the reminder that she too was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), gave her strength. This echoes the advice of Joseph Telushkin (2004) who reminds us, “Be kind to yourself, you are a child of God” (p.59).

Oh Rabbi, My Rabbi

For some women in this study, clergy are viewed as representing God, and the concern was expressed, “if my rabbi isn’t interested in what I’m going through, perhaps God isn’t so interested either.” Someone else added, “if a rabbi is judgmental of me, does that mean that God is too?” For others, rabbis are seen as the gatekeepers to God, so “Rabbi put in a good word for me.” “Rabbi, please don’t make me feel unwanted any more than I already do.” These are indeed powerful statements that serve to remind us how we are often seen by others.

Speaking about her rabbi, one woman said, “He didn’t know what to say. He seemed uncomfortable. I don’t remember if he ever reached out to me again or not.” In both the interviews and in the group, there was expressed a desire for the rabbis to have a much more active role on the divorce journey of their members. When one woman in the group said, “I could have used my rabbi being proactive rather than reactive”, the others in the room were clearly nodding in agreement. Another participant said, “I can’t take another person leaving me.” This perceived abandonment by clergy and the temple community also feels like an abandonment by God. Sometimes, they said, “the rabbi or the synagogue can feel like a marital asset to be divided.” Such was the experience of one group member who shared, “I didn’t tell the rabbis about our divorce, my ex-husband did and the rabbis never reached out to me.” Another woman shared, “The rabbi never came near me. I felt like he avoided me, and he didn’t want to know how I was doing.”

Interestingly enough, in the survey conducted of the Reform rabbis regarding what they offer for the divorced members of their congregations, a high number of the responses were

from rabbis who shared that they would be happy to create something if it was requested of them. One colleague wrote, “when someone requests it, our Caring Community forms a team to call, visit and include the member and children in activities.” A colleague from the Bay Area of California contributed a new idea by saying, “periodically, we have a group for divorced or divorcing parents going through Bar or Bat Mitzvah with a child. A member of the congregation who is an attorney and mediator helps with this, as do families who have also had such an experience.”

A rabbi from the Greater Denver area mentioned that during Yom Kippur afternoon, there is a healing service offered that is inclusive of life cycle issues beyond death such as divorce, illness and mental health that is held at the synagogue. In the Chicago area, a rabbi shared that at the High Holy Days they offered “to connect any members of our community with someone to sit with at services – thinking about those who might be divorced or who have lost a loved one through death – and who might not feel comfortable coming in alone.” In the previous two cases, divorce has been grouped with other life cycle moments such as illness and death. While that might lead some to believe that it dilutes divorce, this researcher believes that the opposite is true. When rabbis and congregations include divorce with other lifecycle struggles, it validates that divorce as a lifecycle event worthy of attention and prayer. This is one way that we are able to chip away at the stigma that has been associated with divorce for far too long.

The Power of Ritual to Declare and Create Change

“Life-cycle rituals ease our passage through life. They shape our relationships, help to heal our losses, express our deepest beliefs, and celebrate our existence. They announce change and create change” (Imber-Black, 1998, p.289). While Judaism has historically made divorce possible, the surveys conducted as part of this study show that the traditional rituals

surrounding divorce are not resonating with most Reform Jews today. There is a great need to create rituals that reflect our experiences today and the creation of new rituals, has its roots in our tradition. Elliot Cosgrove, a Conservative rabbi, writes, "Jewish tradition is a dynamic reaffirmation of itself: it is never static, and its goals and needs change with each generation that accepts and interprets it" (Cosgrove, 2013, p.178). This permission to envision change was echoed by David Hartman, a modern Orthodox rabbi committed to pluralism, who said, "Being anchored to a tradition that predates modernity, such as Judaism, gives one access to an alternative vision of human possibilities" (2002, p.3). Reflecting on the role of Reform Judaism's potential to respond to divorce, Mark Washofsky (2010) writes,

> Today, we might argue that divorce ,no less than marriage, warrants a religious response that a union that originated in a religious ceremony demands some form of religious closure at the time of its dissolution; and that for Judaism to respond with mere "sorrow and silence" to such a fateful experience in the lives of couples and their children is an abdication of its religious responsibility (p. 283).

The divorce group in this study, in addition to those interviewed and surveyed, expressed a real openness to creating meaningful, modern-day rituals to mark their divorces and the variety of stopping places along the way as divorce isn't simply an event but a series of events signifying the end of a marital relationship. "We are hungry for rituals because they give our lives a sense of drama and grandeur. They transform mundane routines into sacred encounters…" (Levy, 1998). Rabbi Naomi Levy accurately notes,

> Rituals of mourning are the most carefully observed rituals of all. People want to receive the comfort that these rituals provide; they have a need to reach out to God when they are feeling empty and alone. They long for structure and predictability when their lives

> have been shattered and thirst for meaning when all meaning has been lost. They yearn for the company of a community that will lighten their burden (1998, p.239).

While Levy may have been writing about the rituals of mourning a death of a loved one, for many, divorce is akin to mourning the death of a relationship, mourning the vows spoken at the time of marriage, or mourning the loss of the family system. As such, those experiencing divorce often have similar needs to those who grieve after the death of a loved one and the opportunity to address these needs is filled with potential.

Rabbis are viewed as ritual experts, and as such are resources to those in their communities who may be interested in ritualizing aspects of their divorces. Divorce rituals, especially when led by rabbis, help others to view divorce as a legitimate part of the lifecycle experience and affirm to the community that divorce is not to be ashamed of anymore. Members of the divorce group expressed specific interest in ritualizing moments such as taking off one's wedding ring; taking the ketubah off the wall; and for moving on. Rabbi Richard Hirsch of the Reconstructionist movement, writes that personal or private rituals involving just one member of the couple divorcing, "may help to provide a container for emotions and memories and may help to move the individual through milestone moments" (Teutch). Giving emphasis to this point, "rituals are cairns marking the path behind us and ahead of us. Without them we lose our way" (Fulgham, p.25). Many people going through divorce, would deeply benefit from these rituals and there will be moments when they will directly ask their rabbi to officiate at such a moment, and there will be other times when people need their rabbis to initiate the conversation about ritualizing this stage of their lives. Rabbis, congregations, and fellow members can only respond and be present to the divorcing members of their congregations when they are made aware directly or indirectly that these needs exist.

Asking for Help; This is What We Need: Recommendations Going Forward

What follows are examples of some of the needs that might exist within your own community, as expressed by the participants of this research project and as seen through their eyes. (For more information, see Appendix Q). Sometimes it is really hard to ask for help. It can be humbling and humiliating and as such it is really important to us all that our rabbis and our congregations are there for us during our times of need. You are more important to us than you can even imagine, especially now.

Please don't wait for us to tell you that we're getting divorced. If you have suspicions or have heard a rumor, please invite us in to talk. We need to know that we matter. Offer to share your resources with us: therapists, support groups, lawyers, others in the congregation who could serve as "divorce tutors". We might use these resources or we might not, but knowing that you are offering, means the world to us. Invite us to participate in anything at the temple. This sends the message to us that we belong here and that there is still a place for us here.

When you hear that we, members of your congregation are getting divorced, please look out for our children. Make sure their teachers know that they are experiencing a hard time at home and might need some extra attention or patience. Whatever you do, don't blame our kids for showing up late or forgetting homework. It's not their fault, it's ours. Don't put our kids in the middle and please don't make them messengers. Please speak to us directly.

We want you to reach out to us, and we need you to follow up with us from time to time. Show us that you really care about us. We don't expect that you will take sides, even though there may be times when we might like you to do just that. We want to do what is right for our families even when it might not look that way, so ask us the questions you have for us. Be curious and remind us that we matter to you.

It would really help us if from time to time you could mention divorce in a sermon or bulletin article. We don't need you to talk about us specifically, heavens no! But we want to feel included in the demographics of our congregation. We don't want to feel ashamed or embarrassed. Divorce happens. We didn't all want it to happen to us, but it did.

If we've taken a step back from the congregation, know that many of us want to step back in, but may be feeling scared, judged, or overwhelmed with feelings of memory and loss. As a first step, it might help us if we could meet you for coffee at the local coffeehouse rather than at the temple. We are used to entering that space as a family, and it is not easy to pass through the doors alone.

You have been with us at times of sorrow, and we rely on you for that. It is an amazing feeling to know that your community and your rabbi are present for you at such moments. You helped us say goodbye to our parents and grandparents. You brought our families together and you asked us to share with you memories of our beloved one. You helped us grieve and find opportunities to laugh as well. We held *shivah minyanim* at home, and the community showed up for us. We may need this type of response during the divorce journey as well. We are grieving once again. Invite our family to come in to talk about our feelings and memories. Show our children that the temple can be a safe space for them. Help us model for them that prayer happens not only in the temple's sanctuary but in our homes as well, and that when we need a minyan, our congregation is there for us, just as we plan to be there for others.

Asked for Help; This is How Rabbis Respond

Power of Prayer

Jews are often called the "People of the Book," and sometimes we take this too literally. We rely on the texts of our tradition to provide comfort to those in our care. My experience in chaplaincy has challenged me to use my knowledge of the texts and get inspired by them. It

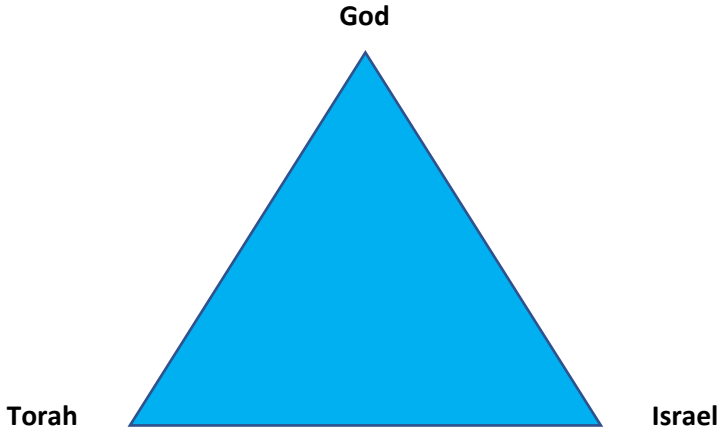
would be amazing if we could to tap into our personal faith and listen to what our hearts are telling us. It would behoove us as Jews, and all the more so as Jewish clergy, to learn from our Christian colleagues and embrace the practice of offering spontaneous or extemporaneous prayer. What an opportunity that stands before us.

What might it look like to ask someone if they would like a blessing, or would like their rabbi to offer a prayer? Especially for those for whom the sanctuary might be a place of vulnerability, offering the divorcing or divorced individual a private prayer could be simultaneously safe and empowering. Before offering a prayer, we could take just a moment and discover what name of God, what source of blessing speaks to the individual. By taking this time, hearing from the other, and in turn speaking in a language that means most to them, the prayers spoken from our hearts will indeed enter their hearts.

Essential Triangles of Judaism

Within Judaism our identity as Jews is wrapped up in the understanding that there is a relationship between God (the Higher Power), Torah (learning and knowledge), and Israel (the Jewish people). (See Figure number 13) While some individuals may not ascribe to this belief, it is a helpful frame to examine specific aspects of Jewish life, religiously, culturally or secularly.

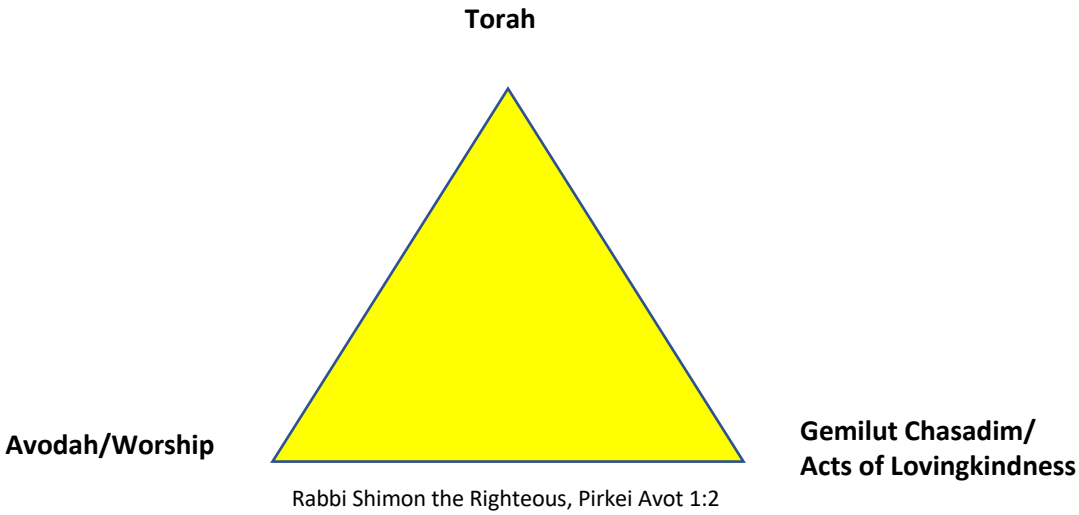
Figure 13



Judaism: a relationship of three parts

In the Mishnah, there is a part referred to as *Pirkei Avot*, the Ethics of our Ancestors. In this section, not only is there room for several opinions, but sometimes differing opinions can come from the same person. This is in itself an important lesson for all of us. Different opinions can come from the same person, and both opinions can in fact be true. Rabbi Shimon the Righteous for example taught in Pirkei Avot 1:2, that the world stands upon three things: Torah; Worship; and Acts of Lovingkindness (See figure 14).

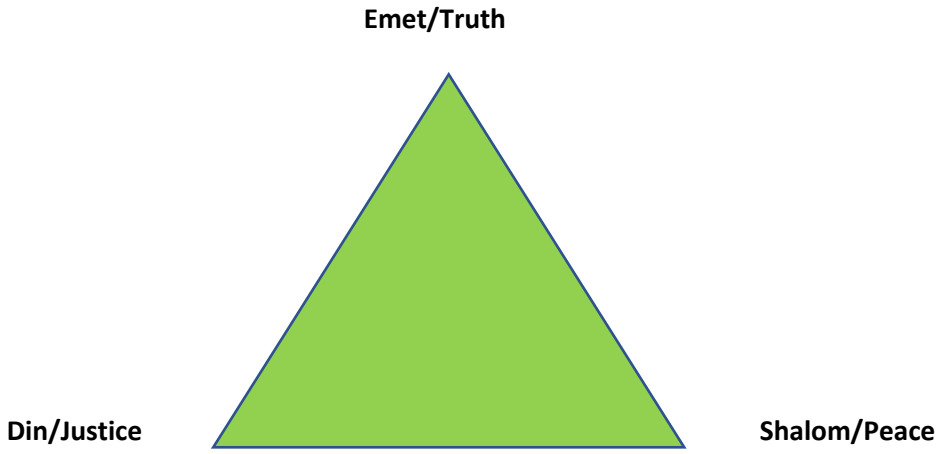
Figure 14



Rabbi Shimon the Righteous, Pirkei Avot 1:2

And yet later in the same section, we learn that Rabbi Shimon said in 1:18, that the world stands on the following three things: Truth, Justice and Peace. (See Figure 15). The power not only of the triad, but of the interrelated triangle is of interest to this researcher because it is indeed related to the theory of emotional triangles that exist, that became the key teaching of Edwin Friedman over the course of his rabbinate. He taught, "the relationship of any two members of such a triangle is kept in balance by the way a third member relates either to each of them or to their relationship" (Friedman, 1981).

Figure 15



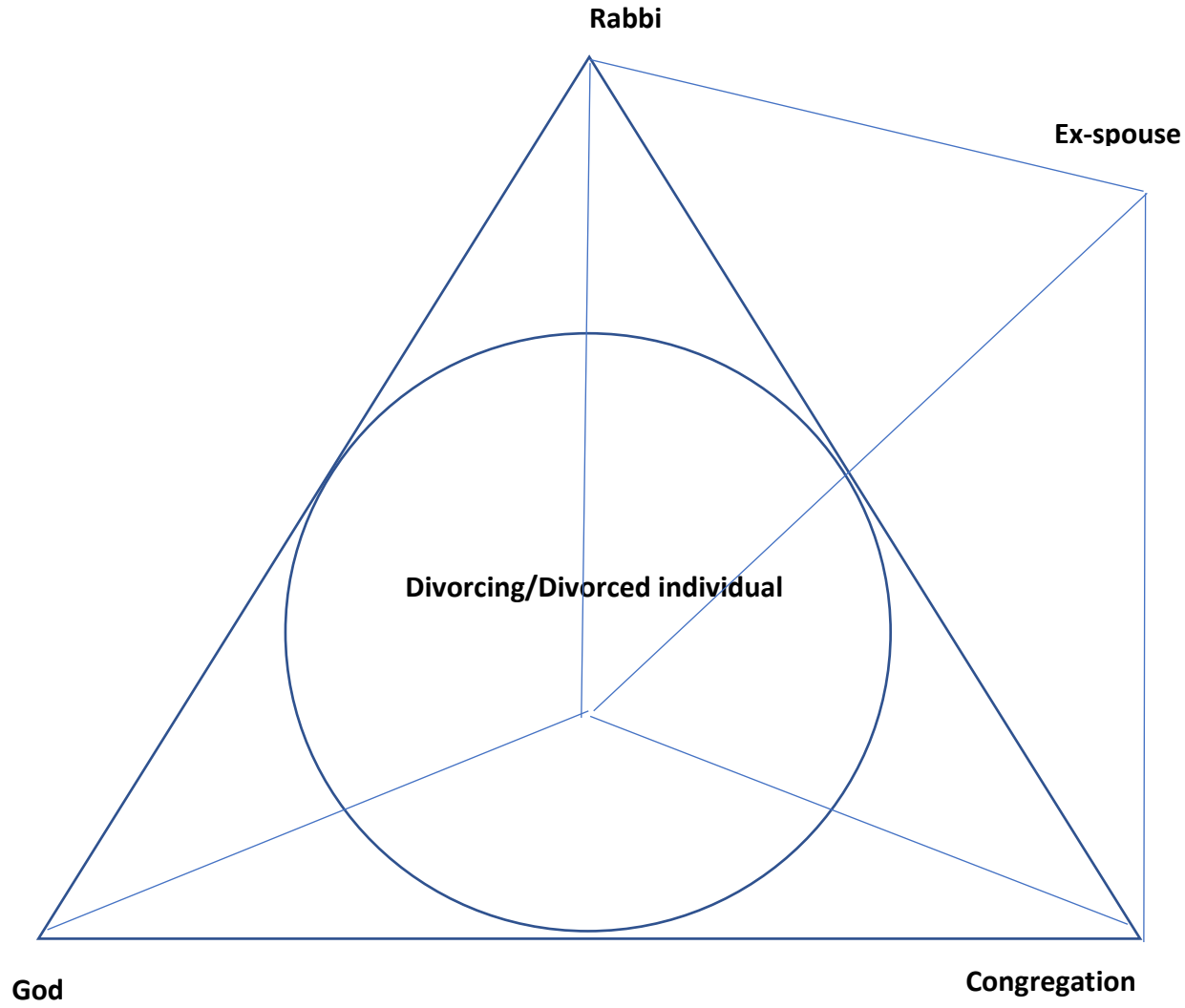
Rabbi Shimon the Righteous, Pirkei Avot 1:18

The theory of the emotional triangles is quite helpful when dealing with families in crisis. Friedman (1981) asks:

> How are the clergy to come up with suggestions that are equitable, leave no hard feelings with either parent (which may really mean either side of the family), avoid creating a ricochet effect from the resolution of the immediate problem that would bounce back later in congregational infighting on some 'innocent' issue, all the while doing what is best for the child?

Becoming aware of the multiple triangles in any given situation is a skill that would benefit any of us, but this is especially true for clergy. Take for an example the multiple triangles that exist between any divorced congregant, God, the congregation, the rabbi and the ex-spouse. (See Figure 16).

Figure 16



This figure only begins to show the multiple triangles that can exist for each divorced or divorcing member of a congregation. Because of the interwoven connections that these triangles create, it is easier to understand why it is that some women in the group held onto the resentment of their rabbi, congregation, or ex-husband for such a long time. By understanding the congregation as a family system, we see that there exists a lack of safe space within the system to be honest about disappointment, anger, resentment, or hurt regarding one member of the community without affecting or involving others in the community. Friedman (1981)

reminds us that it is important for members of the clergy “to stay in touch, but to stay unhooked.”

Limitations of this Study

This study was narrow in its focus as the participants of both the in-depth interviews, as well as the divorce group were all White, middle to upper class Jewish women. All but one, were born to Jewish families and the one outlier of the group chose to join the Jewish people just a few years ago. Had there been more time, it is imaginable that more people would have been interviewed, and other perspectives would have been included. Another limitation of this study is that I left my position after beginning this project and moved across the country, limiting my access to my group members and my possibilities for future areas of study within this population. Had I continued at this congregation, there could have been more opportunities to put into practice the lessons I learned from my participants. Additionally, I most likely would have created a questionnaire before starting the psychoeducational group that would have been followed up with a similar survey after the group had ended, to identify what may have changed for the women of the group by participating and meeting other women in similar situations.

Areas of focus worthy of more study:

This project focused on the experience of divorced women in their temple communities. Without a doubt, there are people in our congregations with stories to tell and experiences to share. There are people who want to help others and turn their own challenges into helpful advice to others in need, but they need to be asked or they at least need to be put in touch with one another so that connections can be made.

This researcher would be curious to learn how the experiences of divorced men might differ from the women’s experiences. It would also be interesting to learn how divorces of gay

and lesbian couples resemble or differ from divorces in the straight community. Additionally, research has shown that the recent divorce rates among Americans aged 50 and older actually doubled between 1990 and 2010 (Raley and Sweeney, 2020) and this trend continues to be seen today. Shim (2007) adds that "pastoral counselors are in a particularly favorable position to reach and counsel older adults" (p.356). Due to the phenomenon of these divorces, it would be of interest to study these gray divorces and explore the impact that they have on the family system and upon the community as well. As it stands this baby boomer generation is a population that is craving connections within our synagogue communities. This is an untapped population that is deserving of our attention.

One could also foresee a study on the impact of divorce on one's physical well-being. While this project noted that two out of four of the in-depth interview subjects were diagnosed with breast cancer shortly after they divorced, the sample size is far too small and the study was not designed to determine if there was cause or effect. A much broader study however would have the potential of shedding light on that. Additionally, one member of the group shared that she became an alcoholic during her divorce journey and further study might explore the relationship between the two. Another possible study could examine the relationship between sadness, depression and divorce. Without question, divorce raises many issues that are worthy of discussion and further study.

This project elucidated for me that divorce is a lifecycle event no less important to a family than a wedding and deserves to be treated as such, though the literature out there may tell a different story. Most Jewish lifecycle books follow the similar route from birth to naming and then onto bar and bat mitzvah, followed by marriage and ultimately death, with nothing in between marriage and death. The major exception to this is the 2018 volume edited by Peter Knobel, which includes stops along the way such as struggling with infertility; embracing older

age; and yes, divorce. An earlier exception is Deborah Orenstein's *Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages & Personal Milestones Volume 1,* written in 1994. In this volume Rivka Haut writes, "Unlike any other ceremony, divorce is the acting out of the undoing, the unraveling, of another sacred ritual."

In recent books focusing on transforming our communities and helping them in the process of becoming more relational, the life-stage of divorce is also largely missing. Ron Wolfson (2013) writes that "there are six transition points on a family's Jewish journey through Jewish institutional life: (1) from institution shopper to member/affiliate; (2) from preschool to religious school or day school; (3) from Bar/Bat Mitzvah to high school; (4) from high school to college; (5) from post-college to young Jewish adulthood; and (6) from child rearing to empty nesting." (pp. 202-203) These transition points not only assume that the definition of a family includes children but if it is assumed that divorce could be included in this last stage, one could argue that the fact that it is not named ignores the importance of this major life transition altogether.

Not only do we know that people are living longer than they have lived in the past, but it is clear that there is much that happens in the lifetime of a Jew between marriage and one's death that is worthy of lifting up and honoring. Referring to the additional years that we tend to be living, Seigel and Geller (2019) write, "These are decades now tacked on to midlife, a whole life stage our parents and grandparents never experienced."

Returning to the subject of divorce and the synagogue, it is apparent to this researcher that rabbis would benefit tremendously from more training, support and psychoeducation. A closer study in this realm could examine the impact of factors such as (a) the age of the rabbi; (b) the gender of the rabbi; (c) whether or not a rabbi's parents were divorced; (d) and whether or not the rabbi had ever been divorced. These factors and more lead us to an even deeper

question regarding when and how do our members lose their faith? What are the most vulnerable moments in our lives when our faith is truly tested, and what can we do to help our members keep their faith?

Impact on the Researcher

I am grateful to the women who participated in the psychoeducational group and the in-depth interviews, and I'm indebted to my colleagues who responded so thoughtfully to the survey. Learning from each of them has been humbling and rewarding. It has shown me how important it is to follow one's curiosity and intuition and ask good questions. It has revealed how important it is to demonstrate one's curiosity about another person's life by going deeper and creating meaningful connections, that people are craving, especially in this era of virtual relationships. While technology is certainly helpful for many aspects of our lives, there is nothing that can fully replace the connection of looking at another person face to face. This project has been a labor of love and I have no doubt that it will continue to inform my rabbinate in the years to come. It has, without question, opened my mind and my heart to the experiences of the individuals before me. This project challenges us to respond to the needs of those in our community who are experiencing divorce.

Upon hearing about a separation or divorce we as rabbis can seek out opportunities to reach out to each spouse and to communicate to them our personal concern; the support the temple community can offer; and our desire for their continued involvement in temple life. But before we do any of that, we must truly ready ourselves for this sacred encounter. This might include prayer, meditation, or another spiritual practice. it is then up to us to ask the questions and prepare ourselves to sit in silence as we wait for the answers. Our initial agenda should simply be, to be with them.

Chapter 6: Summary

The issue of divorce within the Jewish community generally and within our congregations more specifically, is a topic about which not enough has been written. Due in large part to the increasing number of people who have been touched by divorce, divorce should be viewed as a possible lifecycle event in the life of a Jew. As such, divorce needs to be included in books about the Jewish lifecycle experience, and more rituals need to be created to reflect the needs of those experiencing the divorce journey.

Rabbis and congregational leadership have the power and ability to drastically decrease the amount of shame and stigma that often is associated with divorce in their congregations. A rabbi's support of someone going through the divorce process by no means minimizes the value of being married in a loving partnership, but rather recognizes that there are times in which the partnership of marriage ceases to exist in a functional or healthy way for one or more parties. Caring communities within our congregations can be of immense help to our restructuring families in need of extra support. Let us remember the teachings of the Torah regarding the widow, orphan, and the stranger within our gates and reach out to this population of our communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: CCAR Divorce Survey Results

Appendix B: Temple Divorce Survey Results

Appendix C: Example of Project Announcement sent to the Temple community

Appendix D: Email sent to Group Participants

Appendix E: Divorce Group Participant Agreement

Appendix F: Group Rules

Appendix G: Divorce Group Schedule

Appendix H: Outline of Psychoeducational Group Sessions

Appendix I: Questions for Qualitative In-depth Interviews

Appendix J: Coding Category Results

Appendix K: Mayyim Hayyim's After Finalizing a Divorce immersion ceremony

Appendix L: Beit Rachamim Divorce Ritual

Appendix M: Resources for Jewish Divorce Groups

Appendix N: Stages of Divorce Recovery from the National Center of Jewish Healing

Appendix O: Marriage and Divorce Rates in the U.S. 2000-2015

Appendix P: AP-NORC Center Poll

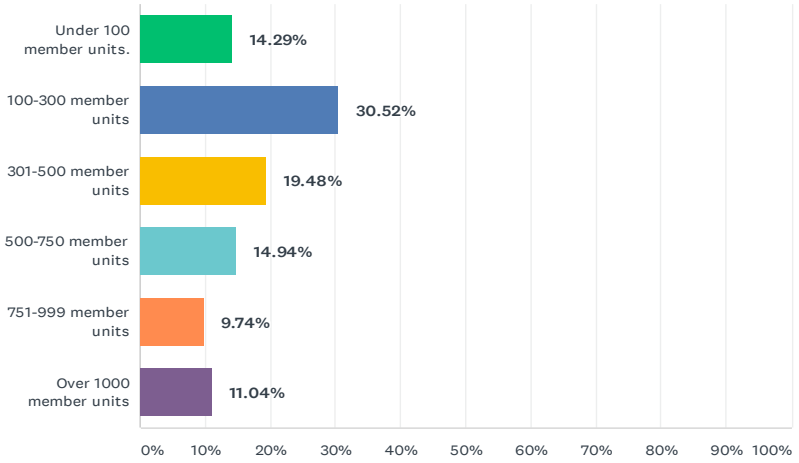
Appendix Q: Ten Suggestions for Clergy and Temple Leadership

Appendix A
Survey of the Central Conference of American Rabbis

CCAR Rabbis & Divorce SurveyMonkey

Q1 What is the approximate size of your congregation?

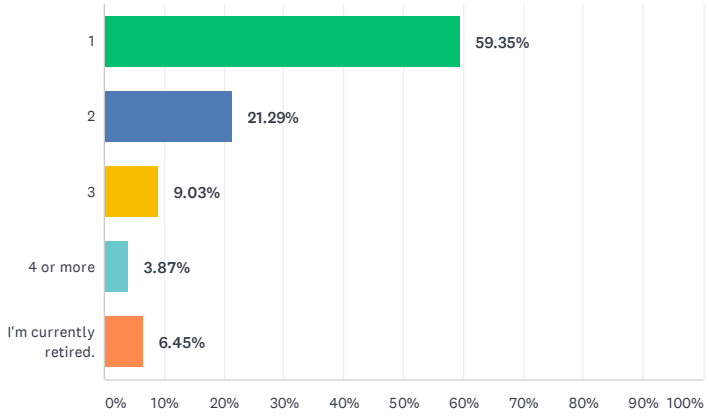
Answered: 154 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 100 member units.	14.29%	22
100-300 member units	30.52%	47
301-500 member units	19.48%	30
500-750 member units	14.94%	23
751-999 member units	9.74%	15
Over 1000 member units	11.04%	17
TOTAL		154

Q2 Including yourself, how many rabbis are on your staff?

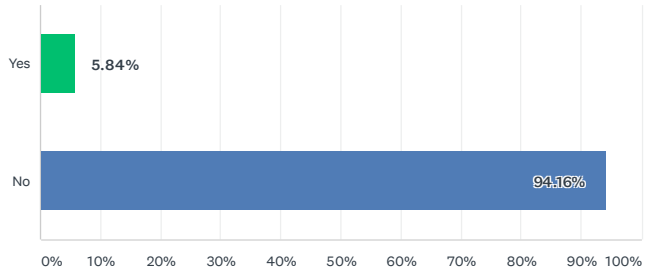
Answered: 155 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1	59.35%	92
2	21.29%	33
3	9.03%	14
4 or more	3.87%	6
I'm currently retired.	6.45%	10
TOTAL		155

Q3 Do you offer support groups for those going through divorce?

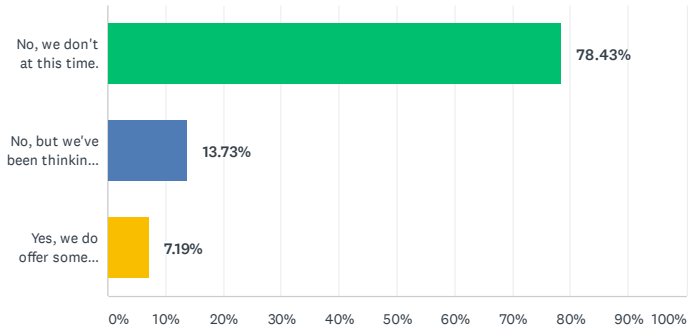
Answered: 154 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	5.84%	9
No	94.16%	145
TOTAL		154

Q4 At your synagogue, do you offer anything special for members who are divorced?

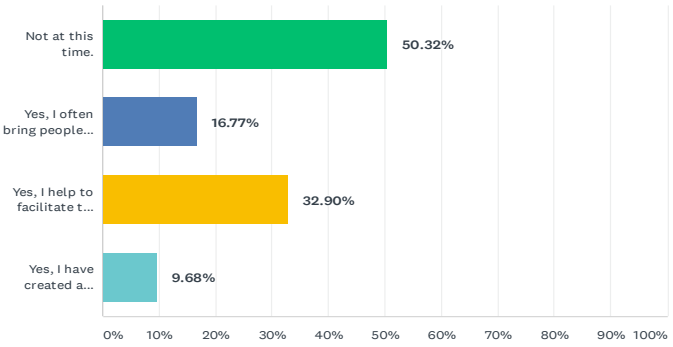
Answered: 153 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No, we don't at this time.	78.43%	120
No, but we've been thinking about it.	13.73%	21
Yes, we do offer some special opportunities for those who are divorced.	7.19%	11
TOTAL		153

Q5 Do you offer any rituals or blessings for people getting divorced?

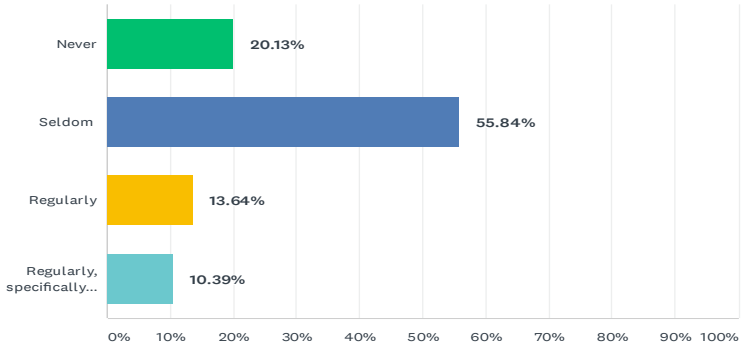
Answered: 155 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Not at this time.	50.32%	78
Yes, I often bring people to the mikvah to mark this transition.	16.77%	26
Yes, I help to facilitate the giving/receiving of the get.	32.90%	51
Yes, I have created a special liturgy for such an occasion.	9.68%	15
Total Respondents: 155		

Q6 How often are you asked to address issues related to divorce in your congregation?

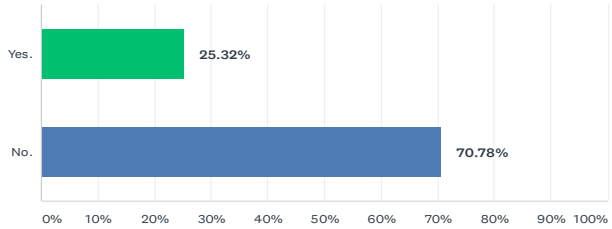
Answered: 154 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Never	20.13%	31
Seldom	55.84%	86
Regularly	13.64%	21
Regularly, specifically related to Bar/Bat Mitzvah	10.39%	16
TOTAL		154

Q7 Do you believe your congregation provides the necessary support for families going through divorce?

Answered: 154 Skipped: 3



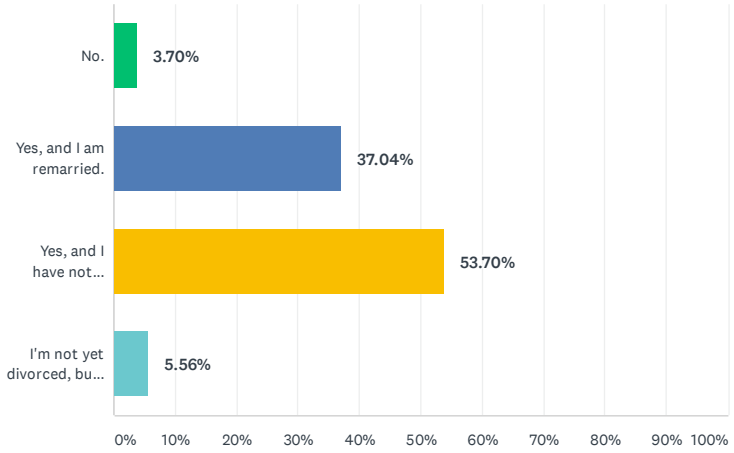
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes.	25.32%	39
No.	70.78%	109
TOTAL		154

Temple Divorce Survey

Divorce Study SurveyMonkey

Q1 Have you ever been divorced?

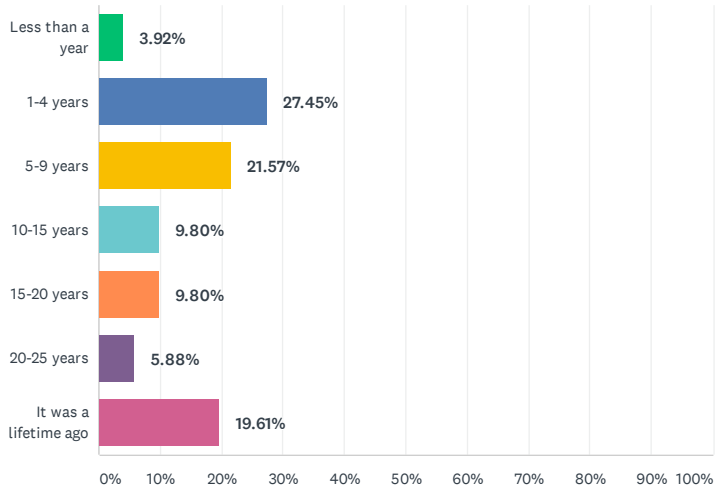
Answered: 54 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No.	3.70%	2
Yes, and I am remarried.	37.04%	20
Yes, and I have not remarried.	53.70%	29
I'm not yet divorced, but I am currently separated.	5.56%	3
TOTAL		54

Q2 For how long have you been separated or divorced?

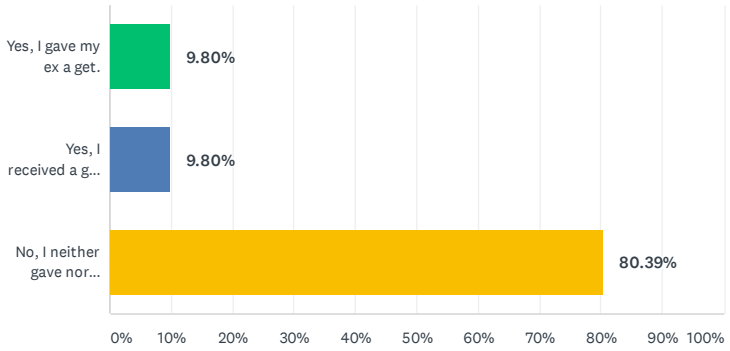
Answered: 51 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than a year	3.92%	2
1-4 years	27.45%	14
5-9 years	21.57%	11
10-15 years	9.80%	5
15-20 years	9.80%	5
20-25 years	5.88%	3
It was a lifetime ago	19.61%	10
TOTAL		51

Q3 Did you give or receive a get as part of your divorce?

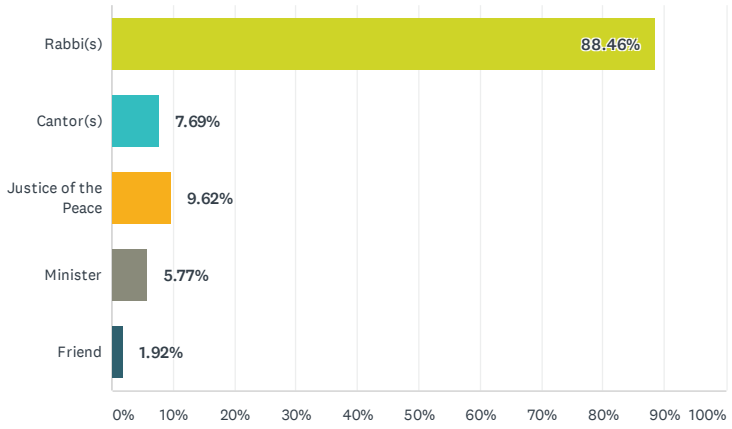
Answered: 51 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, I gave my ex a get.	9.80%	5
Yes, I received a get from my ex.	9.80%	5
No, I neither gave nor received a get.	80.39%	41
TOTAL		51

Q4 Who officiated at your wedding ceremony?

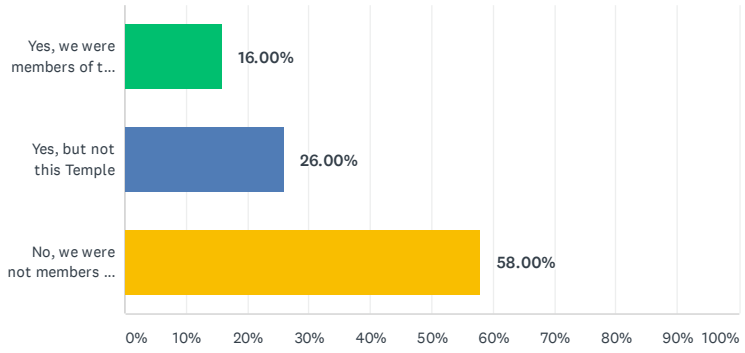
Answered: 52 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Rabbi(s)	88.46%	46
Cantor(s)	7.69%	4
Justice of the Peace	9.62%	5
Minister	5.77%	3
Friend	1.92%	1
Total Respondents: 52		

Q5 When you were married, were you members of a synagogue?

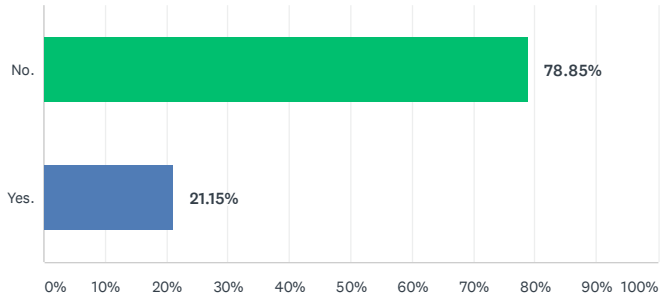
Answered: 50 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, we were members of this Temple	16.00%	8
Yes, but not this Temple	26.00%	13
No, we were not members of a synagogue.	58.00%	29
TOTAL		50

Q6 Are you and your ex-spouse currently both members of the Temple?

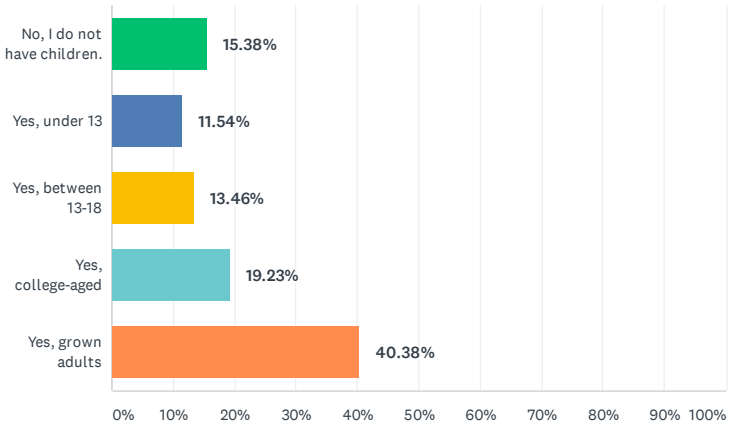
Answered: 52 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No.	78.85%	41
Yes.	21.15%	11
TOTAL		52

Q7 Do you have children from this marriage? If so, what are their ages?

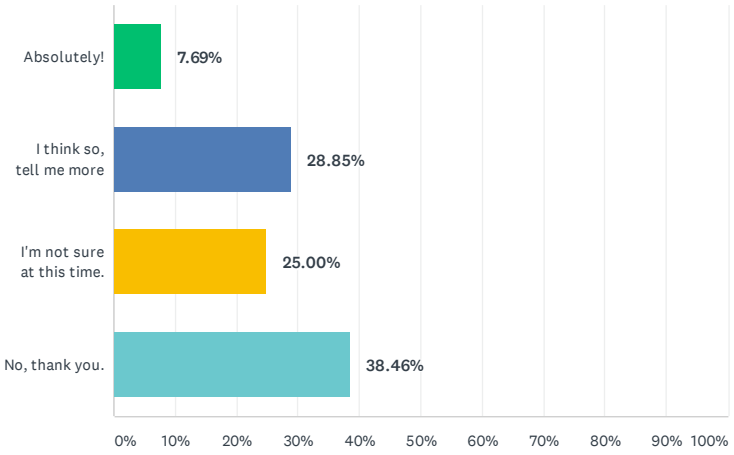
Answered: 52 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No, I do not have children.	15.38%	8
Yes, under 13	11.54%	6
Yes, between 13-18	13.46%	7
Yes, college-aged	19.23%	10
Yes, grown adults	40.38%	21
TOTAL		52

Q8 Would you be interested in participating in a group, should you meet the criteria?

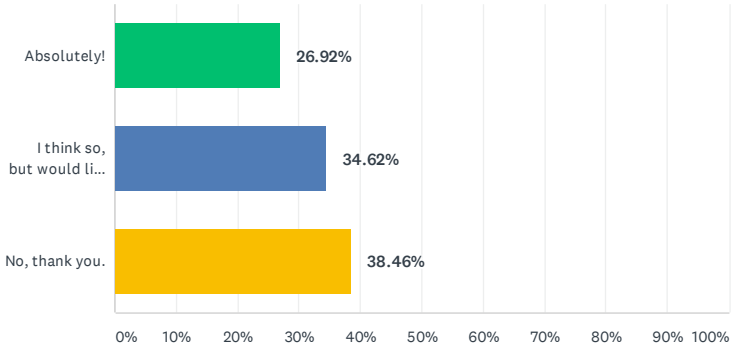
Answered: 52 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Absolutely!	7.69%	4
I think so, tell me more	28.85%	15
I'm not sure at this time.	25.00%	13
No, thank you.	38.46%	20
TOTAL		52

Q9 Would you be interested in speaking to Rabbi Lenke privately about your experience?

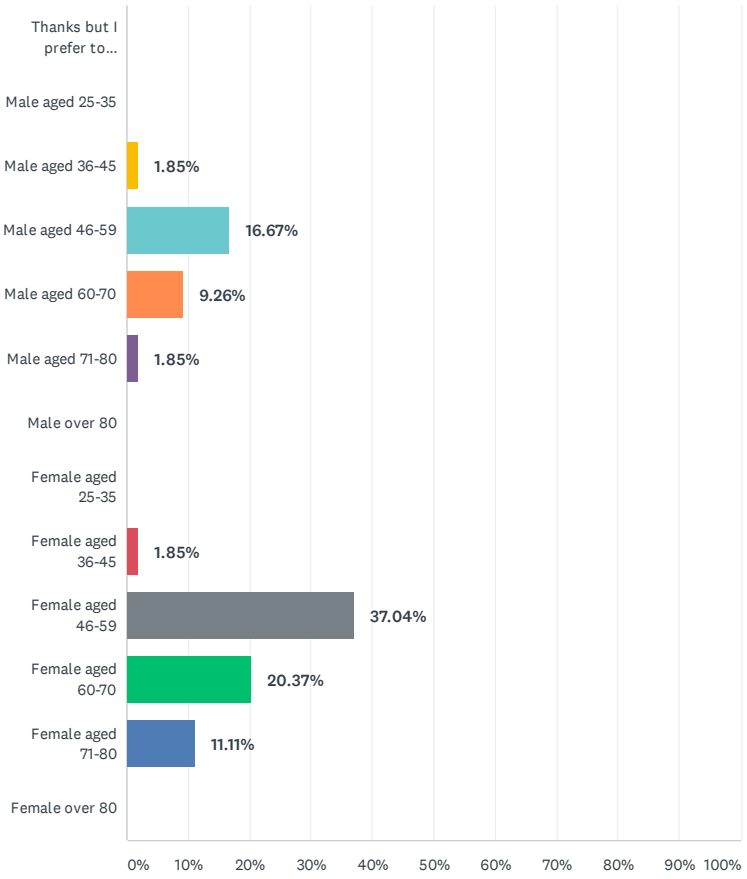
Answered: 52 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Absolutely!	26.92%	14
I think so, but would like to learn more about this.	34.62%	18
No, thank you.	38.46%	20
TOTAL		52

Q10 Please tell me just a little bit about you.

Answered: 54 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Thanks but I prefer to remain anonymous, and don't wish to participate further.	0.00%	0
Male aged 25-35	0.00%	0
Male aged 36-45	1.85%	1
Male aged 46-59	16.67%	9
Male aged 60-70	9.26%	5
Male aged 71-80	1.85%	1
Male over 80	0.00%	0
Female aged 25-35	0.00%	0
Female aged 36-45	1.85%	1
Female aged 46-59	37.04%	20
Female aged 60-70	20.37%	11
Female aged 71-80	11.11%	6
Female over 80	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 54		

Appendix C

An example of an announcement that was sent to the Temple community in the weekly e-newsletter

Study on Divorce

Rabbi Lenke needs your help! As part of her Doctor of Ministry program, she is studying the subject of divorce and the Jewish community, especially as it involves synagogues. If you have EVER been divorced, please take a few minutes to fill out this survey today. Feel free to share it with others in the community. If you have any questions, please contact Rabbi Lenke. Thanks so very much!

Click here to participate in the study.

Appendix D

Rabbi Michele Lenke

Hi everyone!

In order to accommodate the largest number of people (don't worry, we'll still be a small enough group) I am proposing that we begin on **Tuesday September 12th at 7:00pm** concluding by 8:30pm. I believe we will be in one of the conference rooms at the Temple. As I know more information, I will certainly pass it along to you.

Thanks for your cooperation!

Michele

Appendix E

Rabbi Michele Lenke

Divorce Group Participation Agreement

Thank you for considering participation in this group. My name is Rabbi Michele Lenke and I will be facilitating this group as part of my demonstration project. As many of you know, I am currently a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Ministry at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion's Interfaith Clinical Education for Pastoral Ministry Program. The organization and facilitation of this group, run in cooperation with Temple _____ in _____, is under the supervision and support of the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City.

Focus: The focus of this group is to explore the experiences of divorcing and divorced members of Temple _____ and the specific needs of this underserved population.

Structure: The structure of the group will consist of eight weekly meetings, seven at Temple _____ and one at Mayyim Hayyim. Each session will be 90 minutes long.

Commitments to the Group and Each Other:

Attendance-

As a participant in this group, you make it a priority to attend each session as your presence is important to the group. Especially because this is a short-term group, the sense of trust within the group will be built more successfully with consistent attendance and participation. If you are faced with an emergency and need to miss a session, please email Rabbi Lenke (rabbilenke@gmail.com) prior to the start of that session. The group will run on Tuesday evenings from 7:00pm to 8:30pm. Please make every effort to arrive a little early so that the group may start on time. Your time is valued and your participation is appreciated.

Confidentiality and Safety-

There will be much said in this group that is of a personal and private nature. As a member of this group, you agree to respect the confidentiality of each member of the group. Group participants are bound by honor to keep what is said in the group and not share it outside of the group. Together we will create a list of rules that will help to guide us as we create a safe environment. All sessions will be recorded solely for Rabbi Lenke to evaluate the group process. These recordings will not be shared with anyone else and will be erased after the conclusion of the project. Please note: By law – there are some exceptions to confidentiality such as any statements that involve expressing a sincere intent to harm yourself our others. These must be addressed by the facilitator in private consultation with you and may also include consulting other professionals if necessary.

Respect/Kavod-

There are certain rules and guidelines for the manner in which the Group will interact to best promote trust, openness and free communication which are necessary for a successful group experience. Among these rules are listening in a non-judgmental way, witnessing with an open heart and being respectful of everyone in the room.

I agree to participate in the Rabbi Lenke's Divorce Group in accordance with this agreement.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____Date:_____

Appendix F
Group Rules

1. **Make every effort to attend each session.**
2. **Turn phones to silent and avoid distractions.**
3. **One person speaks at a time. Please don't interrupt.**
4. **Keep the confidences of the group. What happens in the group, stays in the group.**
5. **Give everyone the opportunity to participate.**
6. **We will add more rules should we need them.**

Appendix G

Rabbi Michele Lenke

Divorce Group Schedule

Session One:	**Tuesday, September 12, 2017 @ 7:00-8:30 pm**
Session Two:	**Tuesday, September 19, 2017 @ 7:00-8:30 pm**
Session Three:	**Tuesday, September 26, 2017 @ 7:00-8:30 pm**
Session Four:	**Tuesday, October 3, 2017 @ 7:00-8:30 pm at Rabbi Lenke's house**
Session Five:	**Tuesday, October 10, 2017 @ 7:00-8:30 pm**
Session Six:	**Tuesday, October 17, 2017 @ 7:00-8:30 pm**
Session Seven:	**Tuesday, October 24, 2017 @ 7:00-8:30 pm at Mayyim Hayyim**
Session Eight:	**Tuesday, November 7*, 2017 @ 7:00-8:30 pm at Rabbi Lenke's house**

Feel free to contact me at rabbilenke@gmail.com

Appendix H

An Outline of the Psychoeducational Group Sessions

Session #1 **Introductions. *Mi Ani*, "Who am I?"**

Before anything else is said I will thank people for coming and remind them that this is a confidential group and that what is said in the group must remain within the group. I asked each person to read and sign a participation agreement indicating that they knew that this group is part of my DMin project and that I would be recording sessions and taking notes for the benefit of this project and the information recorded will not be shared in any other way. I enabled each participant to introduce herself to the rest of group. Included in this introduction was the individual's name, ages of children [if applicable] and status of divorce (i.e. separated, recently divorced, how many years divorced, etc.). I introduced my project and my personal connection to the subject. Together we established ground rules for safe and productive conversations. I created a poster of ground rules that served to guide our sessions and provided a sense of ownership among the participants in the group. Goals for the first meeting included getting to know one another, establishing safety within the group, and understanding purpose of the project, which is to reach out to those who are divorced in our community and help them find new opportunities for engagement within our temple community and better understanding the experience of what it means to be a divorced member of our community.

Session #2 **Issues of Identity and Loss. *Ayekah*, "Where are you"?**

In this session, we began to look at some of the psychological issues of divorce as well as a number of questions that come up around the issue of divorce. The goals here included naming the issues that arise around divorce and realizing that others in the group experience similar feelings, thoughts and circumstances.

Session #3 **Marriage and Divorce/Kiddushin u'Gerushin.**

This session dealt with a look back on how people in the group married and how they divorced. What were your weddings like? Did a rabbi or cantor officiate at your wedding? Was it a civil ceremony? What do you remember as being important Jewish elements of your wedding? Do you have a ketubah? What were some of the vows you had made when you married? What was your process of divorce like? Did you consult with your rabbi? Did you do anything ritually to mark your transition from being married to being separated or divorced?The goals of this session were to compare how we prepare to start our married lives to how we prepare to mark the end of them.

Session #4 **Where is God? What can Judaism teach me? How can Judaism support me? *Adonai Al Tirchak*,** "God do not be far from me" (Psalm 22:20).

This session will explore Jewish teachings and texts about divorce and invite responses from the group. The goal of this session was to see divorce as part of the Jewish lifecycle, to understand how divorce is understood Jewishly, and to explore God's possible roles in a divorce.

Session #5 **From *l'vado* to *b'yado***. From feeling alone to realizing that we are never truly alone because God is holding our hand through this journey. Beginning to understand the depth and breadth of experiences and resources that exist within our tradition and community. The goal here would be to invite God back into the conversation and journey. If God is not something that is accessible, potentially the community could also serve in that capacity with respect to support and love.

Session #6 **Forgiveness & Pardoning**. ***Selicha u'M'chilah***
This sixth session explored ways how we might use ritual and Jewish tradition to assist in the spiritual healing or closure that is often overlooked in cases of divorce.

Session #7 **Fieldtrip**. ***Mayyim Hayyim***, **"life giving waters".**
This session took place at *Mayyim Hayyim*, the community mikveh in Newton, Massachusetts. A *mikveh*, or ritual bath, is traditionally used for ritual immersions marking transitions in the life of Jewish people. The goal of this session was to introduce the participants to this ancient practice of immersing in the *mikveh,* and the ability to use immersion in new and contemporary ways.

Session #8 **Conclusion**. ***V'Ga'alti Etchem Bizroa N'tuyah*** "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm" (Ex 6:6). This was an opportunity to wrap-up and reflect on some of what we learned together.

Appendix I
Questions for Qualitative In-depth Interviews

Questions for the Qualitative in-depth interviews:

1) What has it been like for you to be divorced within the Jewish community?
2) Tell me about the impact of your divorce upon your social interactions?
   a) How did your friends at synagogue react to the news of your divorce?
3) Tell me about your experience with the rabbi(s)?
   a) At what point of the process did your rabbi know that you and your husband were getting divorced?
4) How did you mark or ritualize your divorce? Or did you?
5) What role, if any, has God played in your journey?
6) What if anything could you have used from the temple community as you were divorcing?
7) As you look back upon your experience do you find that there is unfinished business with your temple community?
8) Tell me how your divorced has impacted life cycle moments of your family.
9) If a genie could grant you three wishes for how the synagogue could have served you while you went through the divorce and even after, what would they be?
10) What has surprised you about being divorced?

Appendix J
Category Coding Results

CATEGORIES	CD	SJ	TL	RB
EMBARRASSMENT & SHAME	X	X	X	X
FREEDOM	X	X	X	X
FRIENDSHIPS	X	X		X
KIDS & FAMILY	X		X	X
GOD	X	X	X	X
ROLE OF RABBI & CANTOR	X	X	X	X
ROLE OF EX-HUSBAND	X		X	X
LIFECYCLE MOMENTS	X		X	X
TEMPLE/COMMUNITY	X	X	X	X
RITUAL	X	X	X	X
RESILIENCE	X	X	X	X
IDENTITY			X	X
LONELINESS		X	X	X
NEED FOR PROACTIVE HELP		X	X	X
SICKNESS		X	x	
CALLING TO CHECK IN IMPORTANT		X	x	X
COPING STRATEGIES	X			X
SHOCK				X
JEWISH IDENTITY		X		X

Appendix K
Mayyim Hayyim Divorce Immersion Ritual

After Finalizing a Divorce

AN IMMERSION CEREMONY

Intention

כוונה KAVANAH

To be read before preparing for immersion:

I stand here, having completed our people's traditional way of unbinding a marital relationship.
I stand here with dignity and with strength. I stand alone, a whole and complete person,
no longer bound by Jewish law as a spouse, companion and partner.

Immersion

טבילה T'VILAH

FIRST IMMERSION

Take a moment to reflect on what you have left behind.

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

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּטְבִילָה בְּמַיִם חַיִּים.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech ha'olam
asher kidshanu bi-t'vilah b'mayyim hayyim.

Blessed are You, God, Majestic Spirit of the Universe
who makes us holy by embracing us in living waters.[1]

SECOND IMMERSION

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

May I turn toward the light.
May I turn toward hope.
May I turn toward new possibilities.

THIRD IMMERSION

Take a moment for personal reflection...

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

I emerge from these living waters open and refreshed,
strengthened to move forward.
May I have the courage to accept what this journey will bring.
Amen.

ATTRIBUTIONS

This ceremony was created by Matia Rania Angelou, Deborah Issokson and Judith D. Kummer for Mayyim Hayyim Living Waters.

1 Created by Mayyim Hayyim Ritual Creation Team, 2004

Mayyim Hayyim
LIVING WATERS COMMUNITY MIKVEH
PAULA BRODY & FAMILY EDUCATION CENTER

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Appendix L

Beit Rachamim & Mikvah Ritual
By Rabbi Michele Lenke

Welcome:

Tradition teaches us that the Holy One uses a scale of justice that has judgment on one side and compassion on the other. While it is traditional that a get is delivered before a beit din, today we come together as a beit rachamim not to witness the delivery of a get, but rather to witness, comfort, and support our friend, _____, as he/she honors the transitions of her/his life.

Source of Life, Compassionate One, the holy bonds of matrimony have been broken. The loss of love between _____ and _____ bring sadness and disappointment into our lives. Their nurturing each other in a union of common purpose has reached its end. May understanding hearts lead each one to learn the process of healing. May each one have the wisdom to help heal and be healed by others affected by this separation of home life and mutual sharing of family and friends. As they walk away from each other may they each take the opportunity for a more positive and purposeful living. May each one feel Your protecting love as a guiding light to open up new visions for what can be. May each have compassion upon the other and upon themselves, and especially upon their children, _____.
May this ritual today help to begin a new chapter of _____'s journey.
And let us say, amen.

Reading:
A Psalm for Shedding Pretenses by M.T. Winter

Happy are we when we can be ourselves
And be thoroughly accepted
When our identity and personality
Are appreciated and affirmed.

Happy are we who need not mask
The feelings that flow within us and through us
And out into the world around us.

Help us, O God, to
Drop the lifelong defenses that prevent us from
Revealing to any at all
The self we would wish to be.

Just as the Sheva Berachot were recited at your wedding _____ years ago, today we offer a different seven blessings reminding ourselves of some of the ways that God can be present for us even in the most challenging of times.

Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who heals the broken-hearted and comforts the lonely.

Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who comforts those who sow in tears and lifts up the weak from the dust.

Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who strives to bless the People Israel with peace.

Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who in Your goodness, renews the acts of creation each day.

Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who renews our days as of old.

Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and has commanded us to sanctify life.

Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time.

While Havdalah is traditionally celebrated on Saturday nights, one may make Havdalah as late as Tuesday night. Today we make Havdalah not to distinguish between Shabbat and the rest of the week; but rather to distinguish between _____'s married life to _____,
and all that lies ahead in his/her life. Both pieces are holy. Both will be filled with wonderful memories. Both will help _____ become who he/she will ultimately be. As we celebrate this day of transition with _____, we affirm our presence in his/her life and our support of the journey ahead.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.
Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who creates the fruit of the vine.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִינֵי בְשָׂמִים.
Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who creates the sweet-smelling spices.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מְאוֹרֵי הָאֵשׁ.
Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who creates the lights of the fire.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמַּבדִיל בין קֹדֶשׁ לקֹדֶשׁ
Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who distinguishes the holy moments of our lives.

Talmudic Blessing:

May you live to see your world fulfilled,
may your destiny be for worlds still to come,
and may you trust in generations past and yet to be.
May your heart be filled with intuition
and your words be filled with your insight.
May songs of praise ever be upon your tongue
and your vision be on a straight path before you.
May your eyes shine with the light of holy words,
and your face reflect the brightness of the heavens.
May your lips ever speak wisdom,
and your fulfillment be in righteousness
even as you ever yearn to hear the words
of the Holy Ancient One of Old.

Talmud, Berachot 17a

Priestly Benediction:

יְבָרֶכְךָ יי וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ

יָאֵר יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וִיחֻנֶּךָּ

יִשָּׂא יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיָשֵׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם

May God bless you and protect you.

May God's presence shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May God's presence be with you and give you peace.

Immersion:

After each immersion offer one of these blessings…

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם המבדיל בין קדש לקדש

Blessed are You, Soul of the world, who distinguishes the holy moments of our lives.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם שפטרני מן הקדושין שלי

Blessed are You, Soul of the world,
who has liberated me of the responsibilities concerning my marriage.

בידו אפקיד רוחי בעת אישן ואעירה

ועם רוחי גויתי יהוה לי ולא אירא

I place my spirit in God's care; my body too can feel God near,
when I sleep, as when I wake, God is with me, I have no fear.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם

שהחינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

Blessed are You, Soul of the world,
who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this very moment.

Appendix M
Resources for Jewish Divorce Groups

Sister to Sister Network www.sistertosisternetwork.org
The organization founded solely to offer support and a sense of community to Jewish divorced women and their children. Sister to Sister is a comprehensive resource and support network for Jewish divorced women. We focus especially on the needs of single mothers and young divorcees. Sister to Sister's trained staff and extensive network of volunteers are keenly attuned to the needs of Jewish Orthodox single mothers and their children. Our mission is to help single mothers regain their footing and becoming independent, confident women and mothers. Sister to Sister serves a broad spectrum of single mothers in communities across the United States and Canada. If you want to be part of this special community, we're eager to hear from you.

Frum Divorce www.frumdivorce.org
Divorce can be the most traumatic life-altering experience one may ever go through. Other than the passing of a loved one, there is little in life that can be compared to the pain and upheaval of divorce.

For a Frum Jew, divorce can be even more traumatic since it represents the breakup of a cornerstone of Jewish life. Many religious divorcees and their children often feel an acute social stigma and a helpless isolation from their communities.

The feelings most often experienced at the onset of divorce are panic and uncertainty. How will I cope? How will my children deal with our break-up? What about securing a Get and a Civil Divorce? How will I survive financially? To whom can I turn?

Frum Divorce was formed to help ease these burdens and provide support, education and community services to divorcees and their children.

Through the tireless work and dedication of our staff and volunteers, Frum Divorce offers community-wide lectures, special events, support groups, referrals and more in order to strengthen both children and parents in their time of need.

Jewish Family Service of Greenwich http://jfsgreenwich.org
In this group for individuals going through separation and divorce, we discuss issues such as mourning the loss of your relationship, rebuilding your self-esteem, navigating complex family situations and dating again. Using discussion, literature, and by sharing experiences, you will begin the process of emotional healing. Gain support, strength and friendship from this ongoing group of people who can relate to what you are going through. Women and men are welcome.

Appendix N
Stages of Divorce Recovery

Stages of Divorce Recovery
from the National Center of Jewish Healing.

https://jewishboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/oa_2004_01_spring.pdf
DENIAL Something is wrong. I know he loves me but he is being so distant.
Often he comes home late but I am sure he has work to do.

SHOCK This can't be happening to me.
It came out of nowhere. We have a good marriage. Divorce happens to other people.

DEPRESSION I cannot sleep or eat. I have even thought of ending my life.
Life will be worthless without her. I pray she will come back to me

SHAME She loves someone else. I am humiliated. I am nothing.

TERROR No one will ever love me again and I cannot be alone.
How will I support and take care of myself?

RAGE Who is this man? He is a monster. I want to hurt him or even kill him.
I played no part in this. He is evil.

REVENGE I hate him. If I have anything to say about it, he will never see the children again.

GRIEF I know it's over now. It's the death of a dream; the loss of my life;
my future as I imagined it is over.

LONELINESS My friends don't understand. Many have rejected me. My family won't listen anymore. I am a burden. My home feels empty and my heart is hollow.

REFLECTION I am thinking of some of the signs I missed. How could I be so stupid? Is it possible that I wasn't as happy as I thought? Was my head in the sand?

REASSESSMENT The marriage really wasn't good, and it wasn't good for me. I felt badly about myself and didn't even know it. I am so proud of the things I am able to do on my own. I am not ready to date but I am making new friends and building a life. I feel okay.

FORGIVENESS It wasn't just her. I know I played a part. I think this will help me in future relationships. We had wonderful children together and once, a very long time ago, we did love each other.

MOVING FORWARD I would never have believed I'd be able to say this, but now I am ready to imagine a future and put the past behind.

Appendix O
Marriage and Divorce Rates in the United States 2000-2015

Provisional number of marriages and marriage rate: United States, 2000-2015

Year	Marriages	Population	Rate per 1,000 total population
2015	2,221,579	321,418,820	6.9
2014/1	2,140,272	308,759,713	6.9
2013/1	2,081,301	306,136,672	6.8
2012	2,131,000	313,914,040	6.8
2011	2,118,000	311,591,917	6.8
2010	2,096,000	308,745,538	6.8
2009	2,080,000	306,771,529	6.8
2008	2,157,000	304,093,966	7.1
2007	2,197,000	301,231,207	7.3
2006/2	2,193,000	294,077,247	7.5
2005	2,249,000	295,516,599	7.6
2004	2,279,000	292,805,298	7.8
2003	2,245,000	290,107,933	7.7
2002	2,290,000	287,625,193	8.0
2001	2,326,000	284,968,955	8.2
2000	2,315,000	281,421,906	8.2

1/Excludes data for Georgia.
2/Excludes data for Louisiana.
Note: Rates for 2001-2009 have been revised and are based on intercensal population estimates from the 2000 and 2010 censuses. Populations for 2010 rates are based on the 2010 census.
Source: CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics System.

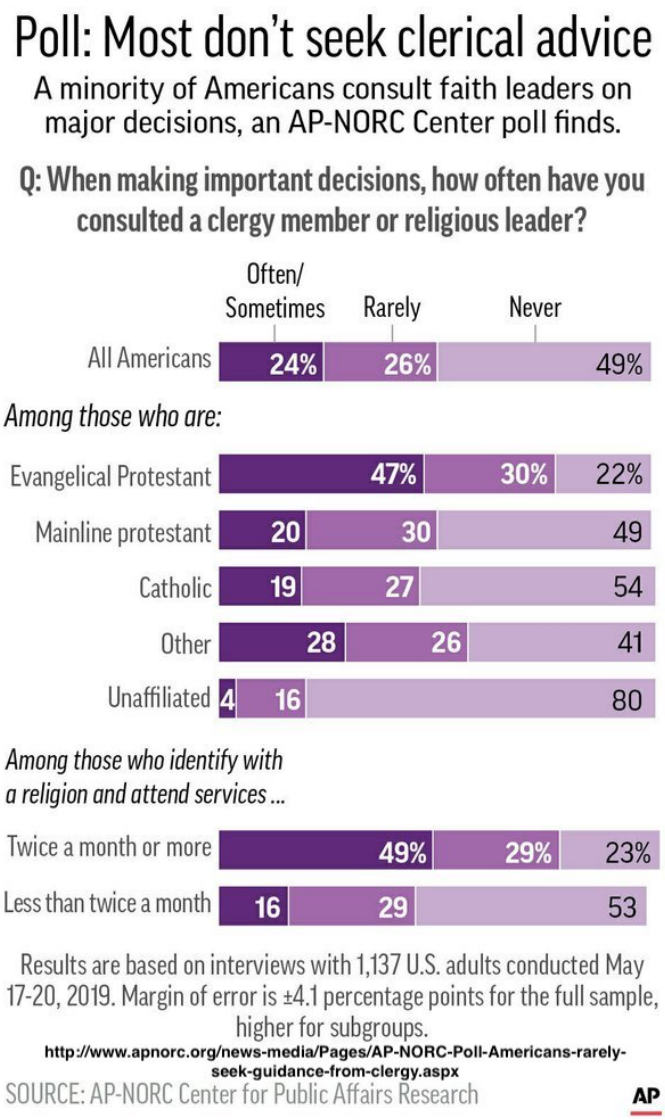
Provisional number of divorces and annulments and rate: United States, 2000-2015

Year	Divorces & annulments	Population	Rate per 1,000 total population
2015/1	800,909	258,518,265	3.1
2014/1	813,862	256,483,624	3.2
2013/1	832,157	254,408,815	3.3
2012/2	851,000	248,041,986	3.4
2011/2	877,000	246,273,366	3.6
2010/2	872,000	244,122,529	3.6
2009/2	840,000	242,610,561	3.5
2008/2	844,000	240,545,163	3.5
2007/2	856,000	238,352,850	3.6
2006/2	872,000	236,094,277	3.7
2005/2	847,000	233,495,163	3.6
2004/3	879,000	236,402,656	3.7
2003/4	927,000	243,902,090	3.8
2002/5	955,000	243,108,303	3.9
2001/6	940,000	236,416,762	4.0
2000/6	944,000	233,550,143	4.0

1/Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, and Minnesota.
2/Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Louisiana, and Minnesota.
3/Excludes data for California, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, and Louisiana.
4/Excludes data for California, Hawaii, Indiana, and Oklahoma.
5/Excludes data for California, Indiana, and Oklahoma.
6/Excludes data for California, Indiana, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.
Note: Rates for 2001-2009 have been revised and are based on intercensal population estimates from the 2000 and 2010 censuses. Populations for 2010 rates are based on the 2010 census.
Source: CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics System.

Spreadsheet version available from:
ftp://ftp.cdc.gov/pub/Health_Statistics/NCHS/nvss/marriage-divorce/National_Marriage_Divorce_Rates_00-15.xlsx

Appendix P
AP-NORC Center poll



Appendix Q

Rabbi Michele Lenke

Ten Suggestions for Clergy and Temple Leadership to Help Divorcing Families

1. Offer two Kiddush cups at Bar/Bat Mitzvah.
2. Call or send periodic texts or emails to check in with them. They want to know that you care and are there for them.
3. Offer concrete rituals based on where they are and what their needs might be at key moments along the journey.
4. Invite families (not just divorcing families) in to meet with you as a way of in-reach and updating your records. Update membership forms of the entire congregation periodically to check if there are noticeable changes in families, and respond accordingly.
5. Offer to pray with them or invite God into your conversation. Our tradition has many gifts to share.
6. Offer to connect them with others in the congregation who are divorced, or create a divorce group or chavurah at the synagogue.
7. Look out for their children and give them extra support as needed. Reach out to teachers and Education Directors on their behalf.
8. Hold a minyan of support at their home after finalizing their divorce. Use Jewish traditions that are familiar in new ways.
9. Include divorce, as well as divorced families in programming and in any appropriate written materials.
10. Be open to listening without judgment. They are feeling enough of that from others. Just listen empathically and actively and show them that you're there.