

Mensch Up:
Jewish Men discuss marriage, work, fatherhood and masculinity

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Chapter I: Introduction

“Men travel side by side for years, each locked up in his own silence or exchanging those words which carry no freight... Then they stand shoulder to shoulder. They discover that they belong to the same family.

They look at one another and smile.

They are like the prisoner set free who marvels at the immensity of the sea.”

***Antoine de Saint-Exupery
Wind, Sand and Stars***

Background of the issue

For much of Jewish life and throughout much of Jewish history, we heard only men's voices in the synagogues and public sphere. Classic Jewish spirituality was men's spirituality.

Changes in the larger society have, thankfully, permeated large segments of the Jewish community. There have been changes in non-Orthodox Jewish community. It used to be that only men read from the Torah, taught the classes and interpreted the laws. It's a fact that all of the rabbis of the Talmudic period were men, as was every rabbi in history until 1972. It used to be that only men counted towards a quorum for public worship. It used to be that the synagogue was for men, while the women predominantly stayed home or behind a gender-separating barrier. Jewish feminism opened the sanctuary and synagogue board rooms to the leadership of women, and as the rabbinical and cantorial schools did the same, women rightfully took their place as clergy.

I am a rabbi at a Conservative, egalitarian synagogue, where both men and women are counted towards the quorum for public worship, where both men and women read from the

Torah, teach classes, and serve in lay and professional leadership. Yet, I have noted and observed that men are increasingly opting out of synagogue life.

When they opt out, they increase the numbers of those who identify as “nones” in surveys of religious practice or identity. A recent Pew Research Center survey (2016) of the gender gap in religion, drawn from data in 192 nations, suggests that fewer men than women show up in U.S. churches, and women are markedly more likely to pray and to hold up religion as important. In 61 of 192 countries studied, women are more likely than men to claim a religious identity. The nones — people with no self-identified religious affiliation — are more likely to be men: 55 percent to 45 percent for women. Men are opting out in other ways as well. As will be discussed in this paper, once women break the barrier, the field seems to become less interesting to men.

Men, like women, have been socialized with deeply-held beliefs and values which form the basis of how gender is constructed. When I was growing up, I was taught that “to be a man” meant to be tough, to show no pain, no emotions. That at home, men were in charge and women followed. In the Orthodox Jewish community, where women are not counted toward the quorum for public prayer and sit separately from the men, it may generally still feel that way. In liberal congregations where a majority of attendees are women, that patriarchal environment seems to have changed.

Defining the Need

We have a Men’s Club at my congregation. In my conversations with these men, I have heard the quiet voice of men who are suffering. They are juggling their careers while actualizing roles at home and within their family as spouses and fathers that are different from the roles of

their own fathers and grandfathers. They carry a burden and live with pain. I want to create an intervention in my congregation and through the Men's Club to address their needs and bring about some amelioration or understanding of their experience through a contemporary support group experience.

Men are suffering because they are experiencing a loss of power. We are living in a time of great change, and moving from a patriarchal culture to a more egalitarian culture. As they experience that loss of power it shows up in their sense of self, their sense of masculinity, their manhood, perhaps in the workplace, in family life as they relate to their wives and children.

I have found that traditional stereotypes imprison some men. The roles and responsibilities of men have changed in the workplace, in the family, and in the synagogue. What is the price of manhood in a more egalitarian society? In order to create an egalitarian community, men have had to give up power. *There is a collective unconscious loss of power among men as we create an egalitarian society. Therein lies the suffering.* Addressing it does not require undoing progress for women in the secular, religious, or private sphere. It does mean guiding men to see their roles of sharing power as sacred. Men tend to keep their struggles and challenges to themselves. I expect that by intentionally engaging Jewish men in conversations about their work, family, and faith that my interventions can impact their view of masculinity, as well as the conflict they are experiencing.

How can Jewish men redefine masculinity? For the sake of the future of the community, we had better do just that. When half of the community increasingly sits on the sidelines, the community is suffering and will continue to suffer. Men need more help than women in terms of connecting with tradition and volunteering. They may feel isolated and have few friendships

with other men. Many men in my community report having little to no interest or time for anything beyond handling the pressures of work. Men have few outlets for honest discussion. I will provide that link as the facilitator of a group. The men of my congregation may know each other superficially, but do not really “know each other”. We need to create opportunities for relationship building and encourage men to express their feelings and be vulnerable. There are too few safe places where men can speak in an honest and transparent manner.

From my observations and conversations, there is a sense that they may feel weak. *We will examine how creating space for Jewish men to come together can impact their sense of self.* How are men coping with changing desires and expectations of the work-life balance? With different roles with their spouse? How are they coping with a desire to be a more involved father while at the same time managing with their careers? How can discussions about the definitions of “success” bring about a positive change in the view of self among the men in my group?

By sharing the research on changing gender roles, by presenting a more gender-neutral language and metaphors of God, by creating opportunities for men to be vulnerable and share their struggles with other men, my intervention seeks to strengthen the sense of self of Jewish men struggling with parts of their identity and alleviate their struggles and pain by giving them a safe and supportive space while providing concrete resources to frame and create their role and identities.

The title of this project is “Mensch Up: Jewish Men discuss marriage, work, fatherhood and masculinity.” The word “mensch” is a Yiddish word that most simply means “man”, but the word conveys much more. To be a mensch is to be a person of integrity, of honor. To be a mensch is to be one who respects others, who acts with empathy and takes the initiative to

improve a situation, who helps others. As a parent myself, I want my kids to grow and be mensches. As a rabbi, I wish that for all the children in the congregation. As a pastoral counselor, I seek to create a space for men of my congregation to reflect and consider issues and principles so that they can be even more of a mensch with greater confidence and well being.

Relevance to the Wider Context

While I will be working with Jewish men, I believe that this area of focus and inquiry has relevance to a wider context. After all, it is not only Jewish men who seem to be struggling with masculinity in a post-feminist, egalitarian world, but men in general are approaching the meaning of manhood and their roles as spouses and fathers in ways unique to this generation. There are efforts to change gender stereotypes as well as studies of the changing roles around the world.

A commercial from Ariel India, a laundry company and created by the ad agency of BBDO's Mumbai, show how fathers and husbands can take small steps (like doing laundry) to create more equal homes. Most commercials about laundry detergents feature women doing the laundry. As a grandfather watches his grown daughter balance cooking dinner, answering an after-hours phone call from the office, and prepping a basket of stained kids' clothes, he's reminded of how it is as if she were still a little girl playing house, pretending to cook and clean and care for others.

"Sorry that I never stopped you, while you were playing house," the man says in the ad. "I never told you that it's not your job alone — but your husband's, too. But how could I say it when I never helped your mom, either. And what you saw, you learned."

I learned about this advertisement from Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook. Sandberg, says, “Stereotypes are passed from generation to generation. When little girls and boys play house they model their parents' behavior; this does not just impact their childhood games, it shapes their long-term dreams” (February 24, 2016). The commercial has gone viral on social media with a campaign called #SharetheLoad.

Many men of my generation grew up with male roles models who lived with the assumption that changing diapers, soothing and feeding a baby, and nurturing family life is “women’s work”. What we saw and heard from our fathers was that men were supposed to work outside the home and make money. That’s not what fathers today say they envision for themselves and their household. A Pew Research Center survey (2015) suggests that a majority of men say they would like to share making money and raising kids equally with their spouses. They *want* to share the load.

Unfortunately for some men, the struggle has had unintended and undesirable consequences. One must be mindful that for some men, the convergence of a number of factors, possibly including their struggle to be comfortable with changing gender definitions and a changing economic situation, including health and other traumas, has sometimes lead to significant depression and suicide. According to the Center for Disease Control (2016), the highest rate of suicide occurs among people between the ages of 45 and 64. Rates for men are four times higher than for women. That generation may suffer mental health problems, depression, addiction, and at rates higher than the general population.

At the same time that men are doing more in the home, they are less visible in volunteer roles in the congregation, and they are therefore raising sons who will be less involved. In order

to have homes where the workload is shared, in order for worship to be egalitarian, men have had to give up power. That is a loss which must be acknowledged. Fathers who do not just sit on the sidelines but change diapers and drive carpool have given up much of the power that belonged to their fathers and grandfathers who thought that was all “women’s work.” In creating a more egalitarian society, men have started to doubt their masculinity, once defined by providing materially for one’s family with a limited view of the impact of their role as fathers. A study by BMJ published in *Injury Prevention* (August 24, 2015) suggests that men whose image of themselves falls short of the traditional masculine gender norms, and who feel that others think this about them too, may be more prone to violence than men who feel comfortable in their own skin. Can that masculinity be redefined to match the society we wish to create? That is a question which goes beyond the Jewish community.

Over the last 40 years, there’s been a shift in gender roles for men and women, and yet most of the academic study has focused solely on its impact on women. A recent survey by the Shriver report called *An insight into the 21st Century Man* (Shriver, 2015) found that four in nine men said it was harder to be a man today than it was in their fathers’ generation, with most citing women’s economic rise as the reason. Perhaps the economic rise of women in the workplace suggest that they may be less dependent on their husbands.

Liz Mundy thinks so. In her book *The Richer Sex: How the New Majority of Female Breadwinners is Transforming Sex, Love and Family*, Mundy (2012) argues that women will soon be the primary breadwinners in the United States. In a section called “Male Flight” she describes how as women enter a specialty, men opt out. The resulting changes in “the economy and the workplace,” she writes, “will shape human behavior by challenging some of the most

primal and hard-wired ways men and women see one another, it will alter how we mate, how and when we join together, how we procreate and raise children, and to use the phrase of the founders, how we pursue happiness” (p. 7).

Re-defining masculinity is now an academic pursuit. SUNY Stony Brook recently started a master’s degree in masculine studies. Dr. Michael Kimmel is the founder and director of the Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities. In an August 2015 *New York Times* article called *A master’s degree in...masculinity?* Kimmel says, “There is a Pentagon document in which Lyndon B. Johnson is quoted as saying he didn’t want to pull out of Vietnam because he wouldn’t be viewed as manly. This is the president of the United States proving his masculinity” (Bennett, 2015). While the men I may interface with do not need to decide to withdraw troops out of a country, they will perhaps be voting based on some of these issues. How we view and define masculinity impacts how we function in our marriages, as fathers, in our relationships with other men, and in our sacred spaces of worship.

Men are reporting feeling conflicted about the way they are balancing work and family. A Pew Research (2013) survey on *Modern Parenthood* revealed that men spend almost three times the number of hours a week with their children as they did 50 years ago. And they feel conflicted about not devoting more. While 23 percent of mothers said they shortchanged their kids on time, 46 percent of fathers did.

Of course, this is deeply relevant to me. My wife and I are blessed with three children ages 9, 7, and 5. They are at a very ‘hands on’ stage, and it takes effort every day to take care of everyone and everything. Like many of the other husbands and fathers of my generation in general and in my congregation in particular, I struggle to find the balance between work and

home, and how I share home responsibilities is radically different from what my own father did in my family of origin. It is important to state at the outset that I am aware that I could as easily be a sole participant in this group and that the pastoral need that I seek to ameliorate and the struggles I see in some men in my synagogue community are one that I have faced, and to some degree, continue to struggle with today. I seek to be a full partner with my wife in household responsibilities, and play a very hands on roll in the daily lives of my children. Unlike my own father, I am intentional about sharing the load in the kitchen and I do not feel that doing so diminishes my masculinity. Additionally, my career in the rabbinate has been in egalitarian synagogues, and it feels that with each year we move further toward gender-neutral language for God. The topics I will raise with the men to create meaningful conversation and illuminate their struggles are topics of personal relevance.

My coursework, supervision, and training at HUC-JIR has prepared me to be an effective facilitator and guide to other people. In *The Minister as Diagnostician*, Pruyser (1976) write guides that “I believe that problem-laden persons who seek help from a pastor do so for very deep reasons - from the desire to look at themselves in a theological perspective” (p. 42).

The procedures I will undertake in this project are designed to help men develop a clearer and stronger sense of self. It could encourage more men to give their families a higher priority than their jobs. I want to bring my skills to the men of my congregation and I include myself among them. I hope to see an improved perception of their sense of being “good enough,” as Winocott taught (Pine, 1990, p. 104). I plan to guide them into safe conversation about a wide

variety of topics that are so vital to their lives. As a pastoral counselor, I'm working to be mindful of Sandra Buechler's advice: "be patient...love the questions" (2004, p. 25).

Prior to entering the Doctor of Ministry program at HUC-JIR, I found it hard to believe that just listening had therapeutic power. I often felt compelled to do something, or say something. Thanks to my studies at HUC-JIR, I have come to understand and value that sitting and paying attention to the suffering individual has real transformative power.

In addition, I am more aware of how transference and countertransference (terms which I will explicate more fully later in this paper) impact my role as a pastoral counselor. I have learned to notice reactive parts, identify my own feelings, and be more fully present.

It is hoped that through meaningful conversations, reflections on research and theology, we can instill confidence and competence in Jewish men about fatherly influence and their roles at home and the meaning of their work. I came to this program to better understand the intersection of psychology and religion, look inside towards my own experience and gain knowledge about my own inner protectors, and thereby strengthen my role as a counselor. I have more confidence in listening for the underlying psychological challenges and dilemmas. I have a better appreciation for my role and better understand how in doing so, I can accomplish what I have set out to do: bring hope and healing to the world.

When I first began to think about, I thought I had come up with a unique insight, something unexamined in the social sciences, mainstream religions, and certainly within the Jewish community.

As I began to survey relevant literature related to the theological and psychological impact of re-defining masculinity and changing gender roles, I found a wealth of material. There

are books, and blogs, articles and assemblies, academic affiliation and departments of men's studies, TED Talks and too many titles to fully absorb on the changing definition of masculinity. As I set forth to carry out this project, I move forward with gratitude to those engaged in the work of redefining masculinity. We offer each other solidarity and purpose.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Relevant religious principles and literature

Starting from the notion that all theology is autobiographical, I have identified biblical characters and texts that speak to and are related to the theological and psycho-social issues that I expect to encounter in the group. They are Cain & Abel, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, the holiday Sukkot and Job.

Cain & Abel , a story of rejection and responsibility

It is in the first portion in the Bible, right after the story of creation, where we read of the first act of violence. The first murder. The Torah never tells us what Cain said to his brother; the Torah never tells us the source of the conflict. But the 6th century Midrash, another set of stories, written by the Sages of the Talmudic period, attempts to fill the gap.

For reasons that are not completely clear, Cain kills his brother, Abel. We are not really sure why. The Midrash offers many different guesses as to what drove Cain to kill Abel. According to Rabbi Yehudah, the argument was over women. Actually, to be more specific, the brothers were arguing over the affection of their mother, Eve. A second commentary says that this is the classic confrontation of shepherds and farmers. Cain was a farmer; Abel a shepherd. Which brings us to a third opinion from the Midrash: said Rabbi Yehoshua of Sikhnin: "Both of them possessed land ... One said: the Temple will be built on my land. The other said: No, on my land." And Cain then killed his brother by hitting him with a rock. Talk about contemporary relevance. According to Rabbi Joshua, right at the dawn of creation the first conflict in history is the one we are living today. Blood was shed for the same reason that it is shed today - who

would own the Mount on which the Temple was to be built. Blood is still being shed for a patch of land that is considered holy to many.

I am not so much interested in the crime as I am in the punishment. The real thing that upset God was not so much the murder. The murder can be explained: perhaps Cain didn't know what he was doing. Perhaps he was emotionally wounded. Kindlon and Thompson write in *Raising Cain* that "Cain's story describes every boy's desire to please - especially to please his father - and the sequence of ill-managed emotional reactions that lead to a tragic ending." (Kindlon, 1999, p. 19).

What really offended God was Cain's answer when God confronted him. God says to him: "Where is Abel, your brother?" And Cain answers with terrible *chutzpa*. He says: "How should I know? Am I my brother's keeper?"

And for this, God sentenced him to permanent exile. God made him a wanderer. God put a mark upon his forehead. And what was that mark? It was the Hebrew letter *Vav*. Most of the time that single letter means "and", the coordinating conjunction. It looks like this:

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It is as if God said, "You had the nerve to say that you are only concerned about yourself? You had the gall to say that you do not know and that you do not need to know and that you do not care about your brother? You will be sentenced to wear the letter *Vav* on your forehead for the rest of your days so that you and all those who see you will realize and know that you are connected to others. You ARE your brother's keeper." And so is every other human being.

Abraham: Go to yourself, Genesis 12 verses 1-5

- 1. And the Lord had said to Abram, Get out from your country, and from your family, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you;*
- 2. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing:*
- 3. And I will bless those who bless you, and curse him who curses you; and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed.*
- 4. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken to him; and Lot went with him; and Abram was seventy five years old when he departed from Haran.*
- 5. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go to the land of Canaan; and to the land of Canaan they came.*

This part of the Torah deals with Abraham's journey from Ur (which today would be in Iraq) to Canaan, up the Euphrates River and down through the mountains to what today is Israel. The question to us is 'where are we going'? And that question is not about geography.

What God wanted Abraham to do was not (only) go out and find a new homeland, not to go out and find a new religion, but to go out and find Abraham. That was the challenge: to find out who you really are; to go out and try difficult things, and see what you're capable of doing. Go and try on different identities, and see which one you're comfortable with. *Lech Lecha*, go out in search of yourself and find out who you really are, in a way that you can never find out when you're a child living in your parents' home.

When have you had the opportunity to try new things? To find out who you are? What talents you have? What unique contribution you can make to your world. Abraham tries great

and complex roles. He tries making peace - among shepherds and among rival kings in his land. Abraham tries professions — He learns that he can be a soldier, but he prefers to be a shepherd. He learns to be a husband and a father.

But throughout Avraham is learning not only who he is, but what God wants of him. It is a Hasidic commentary which understands—*lekh lekha* to mean go to yourself, your roots, your people. In other words, as you accept the challenge to go out and explore the world and who you are, remember to cultivate your Jewish identity, to explore that, and to see what that means for who you are and how you live in the world. We are the beneficiaries of the religious tradition that began with Abraham.

We have 3000 years of history and heritage as a people to draw upon.

Lekh-Lekha—get going on that and on taking those values into the world. That's a challenge we all face.

Consider these questions: What were some of the challenges that Abram and Sarai faced in starting their journey?

Can you imagine the conversations that Abram and Sarai had with their family members when explaining to them that they were leaving because God told them to? (Imagine his mother's reaction when he tells her he is never coming home!)

Think about your Jewish life. What are some of the challenges that you faced when beginning your Jewish journey? When did it begin? How did it begin? Where are you now?

What can we learn about beginning Jewish journeys from Abram/Sarai?

Where do you see your Jewish future going?

When we come towards the ends of our journeys, where do we want to be? Where does our family want us to be? Where do you think that God wants us to be? In session one, we will reflect on how we define ourselves, or how we are defined by our work.

The Lives of Sarah

How many lives does a cat have? Nine. What about a person? Or more specifically, how many lives does our matriarch Sarah have?

The Torah portion of *Chaye Sarah*, proves an answer, where it is written:

*And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years;
[these were] the years of the life of Sarah. (Genesis 23:1)*

The Torah presents Sarah's age in stages. It summarizes her lifespan in an unusual way: one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years. In other words, according to the Midrash, Sarah has 3 lives, or 3 stages: 7, 20, 100.

The Midrash explains, that Sarah retained the innocence of a 7-year-old at age 20, and the beauty of a 20 year old at age 100! If only! It seems a bit much to expect or even hope for. But what is clearly true for all of us is that we experience life in stages. What do we carry with us from one stage to another?

Innocence and physical beauty are not usually constants; love, caring, and kindness can be, if we are lucky and blessed and centered in a relationship with God.

The key Hebrew word in the text is *Shenei* – meaning ‘two lives’. What would make a person feel he or she had two lives?

Perhaps marriage would. There is an idea that all transgressions are forgiven at the chuppah and the newly married couple begins with a clean, white slate.

Maybe raising a child would make someone feel like they have entered a new stage. Sarah had Isaac at 90. Like Abraham, having this child helped her to know there would be a future.

Perhaps moving from one place to another would make someone feel as if they have entered a new stage.

A trauma may make someone feel like they have more than one life: before the fire, after the fire. Someone whose been through a trauma may speak of before and after. Afterwards do people speak of starting a "new chapter". What about illness, or the death of a loved one? How about veterans who refer to time as "before the war" and "after the war"? What about organ donation or major surgery or illness?

The Hebrew word for life, "*Hayim*" is written in the plural. In Hebrew, there is no singular form for the word "life". *Hayim* is in the plural, for it is in having others, somebody to call, or a hand to hold, that enables us to begin a new chapter.

We all have the experience of *Shenei Hayei* -two lives and more. We have multiple chances to begin again. What are the chapters of your life? When have you had to begin a new chapter? I expect to hear the answers to these questions in session one as we introduce ourselves, and perhaps again in session five when we consider moments of fragility.

Isaac: The son nearly sacrificed on the alter

Abraham is “tested” by God to take his son, Isaac to the altar and sacrifice him to God. Just as Abraham is about to come down with the knife on his boy’s neck as a sacrifice, the voice of the angel comes down from on high, spares Isaac’s life and conveys that Abraham has passed the test. To me, the fascinating part is not necessarily the incident but what happens afterwards; Isaac is a changed person, who gets practically no attention in the Bible later.

A summary of the life of Isaac:

1. After his near sacrifice by his father, Isaac does not communicate again with his father in the text. According to the text, he only sees him again, when he and his estranged brother, Ishmael, come to bury Abraham.
 2. Isaac is subservient to his wife and in the time of the Bible and the era it was written, is a sign of weakness. This is demonstrated by the role Rebecca had in tricking Isaac in giving the birthright to Jacob over Esau.
 3. In the Bible only two more chapters are dedicated to Isaac’s life and times. Meanwhile countless chapters are carved out for telling the journey of Abraham and Jacob and his sons, especially Joseph.
 4. Isaac never wanders or travels or explores like Adam, Noah, Abraham Jacob, Joseph and Moses. Isaac stays still.
 5. Isaac must have had some ‘father issues’. After his father died he re-dug all of the wells that his father bore years before. Would not Freud have loved to have Isaac on a couch to talk about his parents for a while?
- In the Bible, Isaac gets the smallest role in the play. He bats last.

In the Bible when someone was afflicted with an illness, leprosy for example, they were sent to a village of sorts to begin healing. Where did we send the person with emotional differences? How were they treated? How could we have been better people then and now? No one is immune to these issues.

The Bible is an ancient text and a modern book at the same time. It might have been written thousands of years ago but it speaks to us today...if we listen to it. In session three we will reflect on fatherhood.

Jacob: a wealthy man with limited time

As Jacob enters the land of Canaan after 20 years at the home of his uncle and father-in-law Laban in PadanAram, he sends gifts of goats, sheep, camels, cattle, and donkeys to his brother Esau. And when Esau and his men arrive at Jacob's camp, they enact the ritual required by etiquette. Esau at first refuses his brother's gift: "I have a lot (*rav*), my brother, let what you have remain yours." But Jacob insists: "Please accept my gift which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have everything (*kol*)."

Jacob and Esau are both wealthy men, but one says he has a lot (*rav*) and the other says he has everything (*kol*). This is what the Hafetz Hayim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir haCohen, 1835-1933, Poland) had to say about the difference: Through these statements we see the difference in worldview between Jacob and Esau. Esau said he had a lot- even though he had a large amount, he would still want more, for whoever has a hundred wants two hundred. Jacob, however, said "I have everything," meaning, I am not missing anything at all. Esau constantly wanted more, while Jacob felt great satisfaction with what he had.

How does our work and careers impacts our time with our children and families and how we manage consumerism and the pursuit of wealth? In addition to the stories of Jacob and Esau, in session three I will share the poem *A Man Doesn't Have Time* by Yehuda Amichai, which is part of the liturgy in my synagogue's High Holy Day *Mahzor* (prayerbook), *Mahzor Lev Shalem*. Finally, I will share an excerpt from Angela Duckworth (2016, p. 781), *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* which speaks to trying again after failure.

The festival of Sukkot: a time of happiness and fragility

It is Sukkot- and only Sukkot- that is referred to as being the "*zeman simchaiteinu*"- the season of our rejoicing. Only in regard to Sukkot - and no other festival - does the Torah specifically command us to rejoice. Indeed, the very reason for this festival - the fact that it was at the time of the harvest - is a joyous one because our homes were filled with abundance.

At the same time, during the holiday of Sukkot one is to dwell in the Sukkah, a fragile, temporary dwelling, and open to the winds and storms. It is a message we would rather not hear - we live in our protected, well-sheltered edifices - but it is an inescapable message that life is fragile. Sukkot underscores our vulnerability and fragility.

Job: The symbol of suffering

I also anticipate that some men may have personally experienced more than one loss: the loss of a job, or loved one. That man may identify with the biblical character Job, the symbol of suffering and loss of power.

Job is the story of a man who lost everything—his family, his home, his possessions. His children died in a fire. He experienced terrible pain and emotional anguish. In the Bible, he is the symbol of ultimate suffering.

God left nature to operate in its own independent way and left human beings to function with free will. How we interact with nature and other people is entirely up to us—and I believe that is the source of our greatest achievements and/or our greatest failures. How do we understand suffering? Suffering comes from the failure to either anticipate natural disasters or respond to them. Suffering comes from our not yet learning how to prevent disease or cure it. Suffering comes from failure to prevent accidents or not being there to help people overcome them. Suffering also comes from our failure to create a world of justice and peace. God gives us the strength to create a better world through caring, kindness and love. But God leaves the task up to us. And when we meet one who is suffering, the best we can do is respond with love.

There is a legend about the Ari (1534-1572) based on a teaching from the Talmud (Baba Batra 14b) that Moses is responsible not only for bringing the Torah from God, but also for writing the Book of Job:

Rabbi Yizhak Luria, known as the *Ari HaKodesh* (the Holy Lion), and the greatest of Jewish mystics, spent his youth in Cairo. Every morning, at dawn, so the story goes, the Ari would stroll quietly among the reeds along the banks of the Nile. Asked why, he explained “I am trying to listen to the crying of the baby Moses who was thrown here among these reeds as a forlorn, helpless human being. Only one who can hear the cry of Moses the baby can understand the meaning of Moses the lawgiver.

In other words, if you cannot feel the suffering of a person, you cannot begin to understand the will of God.

Changes in liturgy and worship in egalitarian settings

It may seem odd to even raise for inquiry anything that has to do with men's spirituality or their struggles with masculinity in a Jewish context. For most of Jewish history study, worship, and communal leadership were roles dominated by men. A basic framework for thinking about men and women dominated Jewish legal texts for a millenia. Questions about obligation, leadership, literacy, social standing all broke down quite clearly among gendered lines. And for the most part, that system worked. It gave a sense of one's role, station, part of life, the path to which you would make a contribution. Men are obligated in classical sources and women are exempt, and for someone to fulfill the obligations in a ritual act, they themselves must be obligated. For example, the Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8 says *This is the rule: Anyone not obligated in something cannot fulfill the obligations of others [with regard to that something]*. This speaks to the Amidah (the private prayer) and the inclusion of parts of Jewish worship that require a minyan, and who counts in the minyan. In addition, Orthodox prayer books continue to include a blessing in which the male praised God "for not having made me a women."

Coming to the synagogue for a religious service used to be a time of male bonding.

Salkin writes:

"In the Jewish world, macho became the art of Torah. This is why Jewish men would pray, 'Blessed is God, Who has not made me a woman.' If one was not a woman, then one was a man - and a real man had access to Torah. The yeshivas and the synagogue were the place where intense Jewish male bonding happened... That may have been why Jewish men did not include women in the minyan. The minyan was the ultimate male bonding. To engage in a text, hearing God speaking, and to pray - speaking to God: That was man's work" (Salkin, 1999, p. 3).

Then, over time and in recent decades, things have changed: opportunities for learning, social status, and power that have become increasingly egalitarian, in the world at large in general and in the United States in particular. It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline the basis on which Conservative Movement scholars justify the equal participation of women in Jewish religious life, from leading services, reading from the Torah, or counting toward the minyan. It is, however, relevant to illustrate key questions which the egalitarian model of Jewish life raises. In an egalitarian model of Jewish life, one is deprived, on the axis of gender, of who is principal, and who is adjunct. Roles are less clear. Who is the primary actor, and who is the supporting force? How in that world does one share responsibilities? How does one avoid a situation for both genders to be equally lazy? Equally less educated? Equally less committed, because there is not a clear algorithm for how we divide things up.

As we move beyond a Jewish world that divides men and women, the paradigm shift in ritual life has left some men wrestling with new questions. Over the last few decades, egalitarian worship has become normative in non-Orthodox communities and women increasingly serve as lay leaders and as clergy. This raises questions for some men: What's my role? How do I contribute? What's expected of me? What is the impact on the feelings of a typical Jewish man given the new shared spiritual sphere? Rebecca Tuhus Dubrow (2011) writes in *Slate* that the "synagogue will be seen as a female space as boys see fewer role models, synagogue will increasingly be seen as a female space. This concern points to an unsavory reality: While women often clamor to participate in male-dominated institutions, female-dominated institutions are more likely to drive males away."

Elana Maryles Sztokman (2010) blog online in the *Jewish Daily Forward* argues that:

The theory is that women and girls have been conducting Jewish ritual and consciousness-raising in all-female spaces for a while, and boys can use some of that empowerment, too. The Jewish community needs to enable boys to explore their gender and Jewish identity in safe and educational environments with skilled and compassionate facilitators. While women have been grappling with Jewish meanings of femininity for several decades, there has been only scant attention given to meanings of masculinity. In that sense, it is a great idea to give boys — and men, for that matter — an opportunity to explore gender expectations and roles and conflicts in identity in order to help them form stable, balanced identities. Overall, I think it's time that the issue of socialization into masculinity became a central topic in Jewish educational and communal life.

My congregation changed prayer books in March, 2016. Our new prayer book, *Siddur Lev Shalem*, demasculinized God-language. Prior to the change, my congregation used the prayerbook *Siddur Sim Shalom*, which retained male-pronouns for God. Biblical and rabbinic literature is filled with male images of God: King, Lord, Master, Father, Warrior. In addition, many prayer books use male pronouns: “He”, “Him”, “His”, all of which may lead people to form a male image of God. That may lead men to the erroneous conclusion that only men are created in the image of God. This project will engage men in an examination of the metaphors we use for God and how those metaphors impact our relationship with God, with women, and how men see themselves and their roles.

The early rabbinic text *Ethics of our Ancestors* teaches in the name of Hillel,

A boor cannot fear sin. An ignorant person cannot be pious. A person prone to being ashamed cannot learn. An impatient person cannot teach. Not all who engage in a lot of business become wise. In a place where there is no man, strive to be a man. (Chapter 2, Mishna 6)

This text speaks to two relevant issues: First, that of shame, which I will raise in the context of potential clinical issues I expect to encounter among the men in my group. The prayer *Ahava Rabbah* in the weekday morning service says: *And enlighten our eyes to Your Torah, and help us to cling to Your mitzvot, and unite our hearts in love and in awe of Your name - and we will never be ashamed.* Especially for the men who are parenting with a style different from their own fathers, or in unions where both partners share in the family income, I want to offer opportunities and create a space for men to reflect on their sense of self and not feel ashamed. Second, what does it mean to “strive to be a man”? One of the most succinct descriptions of Jewish masculinity is presented by Elana Maryles Sztokman (2015):

The ‘Be a Jewish Man’ script is captivating, though not entirely understood. Aviva Cantor (1995) believes that Jewish masculinity was defined by a Diaspora reality that ingrained in Jewish men a sense of powerlessness that set them apart from their Gentile counterparts. She argues that because they were unable to prevent the rape of ‘their’ women by the powers that be, they compensated by creating power roles within their families and communities. Daniel Boyarin (1996) builds on Cantor’s analysis but contends that over generations, Jewish men in exile developed a nonviolent ‘effeminate’ persona, a frail-bodied, intellectual, and almost passive masculinity that stood in opposition to non-Jewish muscular physicality, a persona that morphed into modern secular Jewish identity in figures such as Woody Allen. Oz Almog similarly argues that the Zionist movement sought to deconstruct this image of frail masculinity by reinventing the large, fit, and combative Jewish male.

Michael Kimmel articulates an integration of fundamental Jewish ethics and morals into the conversation regarding power:

The preservation of a moral code, the commandment to live ethically, is the primary responsibility of each Jew, male or female. Like many other Jews, I grew up with the words ‘Never Again’ ringing in my ears, branded indelibly in my consciousness. For me they implied a certain moral responsibility to bear witness, to remember - to place my body, visibly, on the side of justice. This moral

responsibility inspired my participation in the anti-war movement, and my active resistance of the draft as a Jew. In the past few years, I've become aware of another war. I met and spoke with women who have been raped - raped by their lovers, husbands, and fathers, women who had been beaten by those husbands and lovers. Some were even Jewish women. And those same words - 'Never Again' - flashed across my mind like a neon meteor lighting up the darkened consciousness. Hearing that pain and that anger prompted the same moral imperative. We Jews say 'Never Again' to the systematic horror of the Holocaust, to the cruel war against the Vietnamese, to Central American death squads. And we must say it again this war waged in our society, against rape and battery. So in a sense, I see my Judaism as reminding me every day of that moral responsibility, the special ethical imperative that my life, as a Jew, gives to me. Our history indicates how we have been excluded from power, but also, as men, we have been privileged by another power. Our Judaism impels us to stand against any power that is illegitimately constituted because we know only too well the consequences of that power. Our ethical vision demands equality and justice, and its achievement is our historical vision (1987, p. 155).

Relevance beyond the Jewish community

My project and activities will be with Jewish men. But with just a bit of tweaking, including changes in theology and substituting one text for another, my project is just as relevant to any other faith tradition.

Pew Research (2016) has found that, on average, Christian congregants across the world skew about 53% female, 46% male. In the U.S., surveys show a split that's even wider: 61% women to 39% men (the gap occurs in every age category, and is thus not due to the fact that women live longer than men). In sheer numbers, what this means is that on any given Sunday in America, there are 13 million more women than men attending church.

In a few Christian churches, the ratio of women to men is close to equal; in others it's a 10 to 1. The gender disparity is greater in smaller, older, rural, and more liberal mainline

churches, and lesser in larger, urban, more conservative, and non-denominational churches, but it shows up in every country, amongst Protestants and Catholics alike, and bypasses no denomination (with the possible exception of Eastern and Greek Orthodox); only 2% of Christian congregations in the U.S. do not have a gender gap.

Men are not only less likely to attend church, they are also less likely to participate in their faith in other ways. According to Pew Research, Christian women are 7% more likely than men to say religion is important to them. And as David Murrow (2011, p. 21) records in his book, *Why Men Hate Going to Church*, research conducted by Barna and published in 2006 found that women are far more likely to be involved with their church and faith on nearly every level, to the tune of:

- 57 percent more likely to participate in adult Sunday school
- 56 percent more likely to hold a leadership position at a church (not including the role of pastor)
- 54 percent more likely to participate in a small group
- 46 percent more likely to disciple others
- 39 percent more likely to have a devotional time or quiet time
- 33 percent more likely to volunteer for a church
- 29 percent more likely to read the Bible
- 29 percent more likely to share faith with others
- 23 percent more likely to donate to a church
- 16 percent more likely to pray

Christopher Hale is executive director of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. In a blog post he posited why Pope Francis admires Joseph.

“In Joseph, Francis finds a different measure of manliness than is often presented by our culture — and sadly — by our faith community. True masculinity isn’t measured by machismo strength, but by a capacity to practice tenderness — particularly with those who suffer and are excluded. Quiet docility to God’s spirit, tenderness towards the excluded, and openness to everyone: these are the values the life Joseph of Nazareth. Traditional piety implores the faith to *ite ad Joseph* (go to Joseph) when we need God’s strength to be more faithful practitioner of his gospel. If Pope Francis’s life is any testimony, it’s a prayer that works” (Hale, 2016).

The World Council of Churches published a training manual called *Created in God’s Image: From Hegemony to Partnership* (2010). This church manual is designed to “deconstruct misconceptions about being men that seem to uphold violence and domination as “masculine” traits, and we can work towards re-socialization for just peace. The modules of this manual examine gender, masculinity, identity and the sense of self, sexuality, gender-based violence, leadership, power and partnership” (Sheerattan-Bisnauth, 2010). The manual has many practical activities to guide a church community as it re-defines, re-orders, and re-orientates itself to a new dynamic.

The preface of *Created in God’s Image: From Hegemony to Partnership* states:

A rereading of the word of God, acknowledging that human beings (male and female) are created in the Image of God, demands that we act differently. Such an acknowledgement is inconsistent with any way of life which makes a man a kind of “demigod” over women. If men have been culturally and socially conditioned to having a hegemonic self- understanding, our coming to faith in Christ calls us to begin putting off this “burden” and to begin to learn ways in which God calls men and women to partnership, in living in community as well as in engagement in God’s mission....The book has been developed with sensitivity to invite men into dialogue and critical examination of what it means to be a man in today’s society. It is neither confrontational nor prescriptive, but takes into consideration that gender

analysis needs to be contextual and must be done with gender justice perspectives. While some men who see their identity in the “macho” cultural construct may find the contents of this book challenging, many faithful Christians who are ready to be faithful to the Word of God will find this book resourceful and will see it as a valuable instrument that will strengthen their faith as they commit to the vision of partnership reflected in God’s intention for women and men (Sheerattan-Bisnauth, 2010).

As I read the World Council of Churches training manual, I wondered if that specific resource might have a place in the HUC-JIR Doctor of Ministry curriculum. In the context of cultural competency, clergy should be aware of the impact on women as a result of male violence in an effort to hold on to male authority. For example, the WCC manual points out that “in the Caribbean, a demonstration of his manhood is called a ‘sissy’, ‘anti- man’ or ‘unmanly’. To be non-violent, sensitive and caring is considered to be ‘woman-like’ which is viewed as being inferior. It is expected that a ‘real man’ flexes his muscles to show his power, which testifies to his masculinity” (Sheerattan-Bisnauth, 2010, p. 4).

Clergy of all faiths can benefit from understanding historical and cultural gender roles. Throughout history there has been an idea that men and women are completely separate creatures. That idea probably finds its source in the Bible. But while sex is a biological term, and refers to which chromosomes you have, gender is a social construct, and there is a spectrum of masculine and feminine social, cultural, and religious norms and expectations, some of which overlap. Moch explains it this way: “In some ways, we are each like some men, like all men, and like no other men” (McGoldrick, 2011, p. 61).

Clergy of all faiths have an important role to play for both men as women as the economic landscape changes and gender roles are revised. “Ministers and pastors will be called

upon to supply dispensation for women to be breadwinners, and husbands will ‘allow’ their wives to earn more than they do, thereby maintaining their God-given authority, in spirit if not in fact. These men will preserve their masculinity by designating themselves their wives’ handlers and protectors” (Mundy, 2012, p. 18). Even clergy whose theology or religious traditions are not egalitarian will be called upon to counsel parishioners as women continue to gain access to domains once believed to be limited to men-only.

My thanks to Ann Akers for recommending applying the work of Letty Mandeville Russell (1929-2007), a feminist theologian who taught at Yale Divinity School. In her book *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, she writes, “From my point of view as a feminist theologian, (feminism) represents a search for liberation from all forms of dehumanization on the part of those who advocate full human personhood for all of every race, class, sex, sexual orientation, ability, and age. This means that men can also be feminists if they are will to advocate for women” (Russell, 1993, p.22). I share this opinion and intend to share this idea with the Jewish men in my group.

Relevant clinical principles and literature

Part of what underlies this project is the idea that providing critical data to parents, particular fathers, can help them better understand their own psycho-social challenges. We continue to be in a time of transition for men in American society. In the 1950’s, men were initially the “head of the household”. By 2016, the roles of men in families are different. They are no longer the singular, dominant or ultimate authority and therefore, perhaps, see themselves as less honored.

If we look at formal educational trends, greater numbers of men were pursuing higher levels of degrees until the 1970s, but “young women are now more likely to enroll in, and graduate from, college than young men. Where historically men have been more likely to finish college, since 1991 the share of women ages 25 to 29 with a bachelor's degree or higher has exceeded the share of young men with the same credentials. And the gap has widened in recent years due to stagnation in the rate of young men earning degrees. Moreover, this phenomenon is present among all major race and ethnic groups. Women not only represent a majority of young adults enrolled as college undergraduates, but they also are now nearly three-fifths of graduate students” (Pollard, 2011).

In addition, a number of fields which are influential in the development of young men are now dominated by women. “Men earn only one in five of all master's degrees awarded in psychology, down from half in the 1970s. They account for less than 10 percent of social workers under the age of 34, according to a recent survey. And their numbers have dwindled among professional counselors — to 10 percent of the American Counseling Association's membership today from 30 percent in 1982 — and appear to be declining among marriage and family therapists” (Cary, 2011). Women thus provide the majority of treatment and education to boys.

Men are less likely to show vulnerability because they have been socialized not to from an early age. Kivel (1984, p. 83) and his colleagues describe expectations upon men. “From a very early age, boys are told to ‘Act Like a Man.’ Even though they have all the normal human feelings of love, excitement, sadness, confusion, anger, curiosity, pain, frustration, humiliation, shame, grief, resentment, loneliness, low self-worth, and self-doubt, they are taught to hide

feelings and appear to be tough and in control. They are told to be aggressive, not to back down, not to make mistakes, and to take charge, have lots of sex, make lots of money, and be responsible. Most of all, they are told not to cry.”

Arthur Reiner teaches writing, literature and cultural studies at Towson University. In his article *Teaching Men to be Emotionally Honest*, he described the opening scene from his course “Real Men Smile”:

Last semester, a student in the masculinity course I teach showed a video clip she had found online of a toddler getting what appeared to be his first vaccinations. Off camera, we hear his father’s voice. “I’ll hold your hand, O.K.?” Then, as his son becomes increasingly agitated: “Don’t cry!... Aw, big boy! High five, high five! Say you’re a man: ‘I’m a man!’ ” The video ends with the whimpering toddler screwing up his face in anger and pounding his chest. “I’m a man!” he barks through tears and gritted teeth.

The home video was right on point, illustrating the takeaway for the course: how boys are taught, sometimes with the best of intentions, to mutate their emotional suffering into anger. More immediately, it captured, in profound concision, the earliest stirrings of a male identity at war with itself. (Reiner, 2016, p. ED11)

As I consider the clinical issues I may encounter with the men in my group, I think that one of those issues is a feeling of “shame”. Shame is an internal feeling, a signal that something is wrong. Are these men who, when they were children, heard a message from their own fathers about what it means to “be a man”? In behaving or experiencing emotions differently, are they ashamed? How did hearing “be a man” impact their sense of self? Lots of people are talking about shame, as evident from Brene Brown’s (2012) TED Talk on shame which has been viewed by over 6.8 million people. She says, “Shame is an epidemic in our culture.”

What is the state of the American male in this century? Guy Garcia in his book, *The*

Decline of Men, writes:

The sorry state of the American male is a looming emergency with economic, sociological, and cultural ramifications for both men and women and generations to come. Yet most men are maintaining a business-as-usual stance, even as the status quo dissolves under their feet.... But behind this glossy media fantasy lurks a dark and disturbing reality: men are in trouble. At home and at work, in the boardroom and in the classroom, they are flailing and failing to live up to their full potential. Like an invisible epidemic with catastrophic implications, the decline of men cuts across all ages, races, and socio-economic groups. The ability of women consumers to make or break a brand is being felt in industries ranging from publishing to health care, banking and the Internet. Women are increasingly seen as the decisionmakers in housing, food, and Internet shopping, and as their buying power continues to grow, they are setting the marketing agenda. In advertising and the mass media, men are demonized, denigrated, and dismissed, routinely portrayed as clueless cavemen, lackluster lovers, or deadbeat dads. It's no coincidence that reality shows like *Ice Road Truckers* and *Deadliest Catch*, which glorify men who do dangerous, physically demanding jobs, have struck a nostalgic chord in the zeitgeist (2009, p. xii-xiii).

In order to understand how the Jewish men I will work with feel about work-life balance and their roles, I will have to explore the psychosocial needs of men as I seek to guide men in redefining their view of masculinity. I need to be mindful of the age of the men of the group and of the psychosocial issues particular to those ages.

As I thought about the potential source for stress or suffering among the men in my group, I thought about the writings of Merle Jordan, whose work was part of a class in my first semester in the Doctor of Ministry program. In *Reclaiming Your Story*, he writes "It is well known that the rules, beliefs, and scripts that children learn in their family of origin tend to

persist into adult life. Your worldview and your place in that childhood system usually become solidified in your psyche” (Jordan, 1999, p. 43).

Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development outlines eight stages of human development, and each stage focuses on a particular area of growth. Successful completion of each stage can lead to a healthy personality and the knowledge of basic virtues. A failure to successfully complete a stage leads to a diminished ability to complete the next stage and a more unhealthy sense of self and personality. Each stage has a psychosocial crisis which must be resolved between two opposing traits. The seventh stage corresponds to ages 40-64, and the crisis which must be resolved is between “Generativity vs. Stagnation” (Erikson, 1980, p. 129). Most men I expect to speak with will be in this age range.

While I begin with Erikson’s theory of human development in mind, his is not the only one to include in a survey of the literature. In his chapter “Men and the Life Cycle” published in McGoldrick, Carter and Gracia-Preto’s *The Expanded Family Life Cycle*, Mock writes that

“Societally, men are often seen and valued for their prowess or what they produce. There are now opportunities for redefinitions of men in relationships and their value in being interconnected while leading productive lives (2011, p. 60).” Many of the men I have spoken to are in ‘midlife’, beginning somewhere between ages 33 and 38 for men. According to Mock, “Men’s concerns at this time include responsibility, commitment, direction, identity, intimacy, and loss....There may be almost automatic reflections on what he has accomplished as a man, father, parent, and partner” (Mock, 2011, p. 71).

It is normal for men to reflect at midlife. I have heard men express pain, and even a bit of sadness as they share their struggles with me. Perhaps, however, there is more going on than just adjusting to work-life balance, especially when it comes to happiness in midlife. Research

indicates that happiness is more like a U-curve and that one hits the bottom of that curve in the mid-40s.

In his essay in *The Atlantic*, Rauch (December 2014, p.90) writes, “What I wish I had known in my 40s (or, even better, in my late 30s) is that happiness may be affected by age, and the hard part in middle age, whether you call it a midlife crisis or something else, is for many people a transition to something much better—something, there is reason to hope, like wisdom. I wish someone had told me what I was able to tell my worried friend: nothing was wrong with him, and he wasn’t alone.”

Blanchflower and Oswald’s (2008) study called *Is Well-Being U-Shaped over the Life Cycle* suggests that life satisfaction declines with age for the first two decades of adulthood, hitting the bottom in the mid 40s, and then increasing to levels higher than in young adulthood. The pattern came to be known as the happiness U-curve. Maybe the challenges and struggles Jewish men face are exacerbated by the happiness U-curve?

Carstensen (2011) shows quite strongly that people’s satisfaction with their life increases, on average, from their early 50s on through their 60s and 70s and even beyond. As Rauch (2014, p. 95) writes, “Just knowing that the phenomenon is common can be therapeutic.”

An overwhelming majority of our married couples in my congregation are couples with children. Smith (2009) explains that during the Great Depression when men were unable to find work, they divorced their partners or abandoned their families. With somewhat increased flexibility in ideas regarding gender, he predicts more men will take on roles as the primary caregiver for children. Rather than a revolution, he views this as an evolution that is one of the teachings arising from feminism.

Erik Erikson, a pioneer in the world of child psychology, asserts that a father's love and a mother's love are qualitatively different. Father's "love more dangerously" because their love is more "expectant, more instrumental" than a mother's love. A father brings unique contributions to the job of parenting a child that no one else can replicate. Therefore, dads bring their own unique contributions when it comes to taking care of children.

It's easy to think fathers don't have an influence, especially when the kids are newborns. Palkovitz's research (2002) shows that the value of father's involvement is determined by the quality of the interaction rather than the amount of time fathers spend with their children. His research suggests to dads: Don't just be there: get down on the floor, read books, go for a walk, talk, listen, and give them the attention they want and need. Fatherhood is not easy, but the role of dad is immensely important.

There is "a trend for fathers to take a more active parenting role than in years past," says Michael Lamb, PhD, a Cambridge University social and developmental psychology professor. Lamb and his colleagues point to psychological research "across ethnic groups suggesting that fathers' affection and their increased family involvement help promote children's social and emotional development." In turn, researchers are hoping to change the way therapists and the court system view fathers. The shift in fathers' roles began, Lamb says, around the time when more women entered the workforce. Between 1948 and 2001, the percentage of working-age women employed or looking for work nearly doubled from less than 33 percent to more than 60 percent-according to the Employment Policy Foundation's Center for Work and Family Balance. (Stambor, 2005, p.62).

In *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*, Dan Kindlon and Michael Thomson write, “Children whose fathers were both emotionally close and highly involved had greater educational attainment, and they were less likely to commit delinquent acts, such as vandalism or selling drugs” (Kindlon, 1999, p.99). There are real benefits from a father’s involvement with kids.

Part of the shift of fathers includes a willingness to display affection. Brené Brown, in her TED Talk titled *The power of vulnerability* talks at length about the limitations men face when attempting to express vulnerability in our culture. She notes the degree to which men are boxed in by cultural expectations about what a man is or is not allowed to display.

Work and Worth

In his book *How Good Do We Have To Be?* Rabbi Harold Kushner (1996, p. 147) writes, “there is a linguistic connection between the words ‘work’ and ‘worship’. Work can be a way of serving God. Whatever we do for a living, we can learn to see it not only for the money we earn, but in terms of the blessings and benefits it brings other people.”

Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin writes about a spiritual approach to work in his book *Being God’s Partner*. He tells the story of a man who works for a moving company and brings a spiritual, religious approach to his work. Moving is stressful for most people, he explains, unsure about what awaits them in a new community. The mover believes he is serving God in making his customers less fearful about the future. Can all men apply that spiritual approach to their own work?

My religious tradition views work as infused with theological meaning. The Ten Commandments states, “Six days shall you labor, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God.” From this, my tradition teaches that just as we follow God’s example of resting on the seventh day, we are also to be creative and do labor on the other days. Work, therefore, can be holy. How do we balance work and family? What does it mean to be a success? The activities I seek to do with men are designed to create an environment which will diminish the isolation of men, support them as they reconceptualize their definition of masculinity, and possibly affect how they feel about how their work and how it impacts their lives.

Building Relationships

Men can benefit from structured opportunities to be with other men. Mock writes “When men seek friendships with other men, they are often not seeking intimacy in terms of communication at a deep or emotional level but companionship; not mutual disclosure but comfort in closeness through shared activities... Encouragement of healthy, lasting male-male friendships where there is mutual trust, openness, and sharing of experiences and emotions often leads to a stronger and healthier sense of self.” (Mock, 2010, p. 72) Men have few outlets for honest discussion. They know each other but don’t “know” each other.

Why create a group

While each individual believes that only he has a particular struggle, in a group participants discover others share the same struggle and realize they are not so alone or isolated. I will keep in mind essential therapeutic group elements as defined by Yalom:

- the *instillation of hope*: recognizing others' improvement and that the group can be helpful. The group member will develop optimism, hope for his own condition
- the *universality* experienced by group members as they see themselves in others: we want the members to see they are not alone and that they share challenges, feelings

“Group therapy is unique in being the only therapy that offers clients the opportunity to be of benefit to others. It also encourages role versatility, requiring clients to shift between roles of help receivers and help providers. And, of course, clients are enormously helpful to one another in the group therapeutic process. They offer support, reassurance, suggestions, insight; they share similar problems with one another (Yalom, 2005, pp. 13-14).

Why a group for men only? Robert Garfield, has developed a model of group therapy for men called “The Friendship Labs.” He describes the potential benefit of a group for men this way:

There's something comforting about being part of a group of guys dealing with similar issues, who are there to ask for and give support to each other.

Because our groups are therapeutically oriented, rather than simply supportive or educational, men can develop the emotional skills with each other similar to those learned in therapy. We emphasize that emotional intimacy skills aren't just for women—they're a central part of healthy masculinity, and as the men in our groups discover, they take work to develop.

Men in our groups often lament the superficiality of their friendships with other men. We've found that fostering intimate male relationships can greatly help men better care for themselves and connect with each other, while deepening their relationships with their partners and children. We don't expect that all our guys will become best friends, but we do expect them to learn ways to deepen relationships with each other. Most of them do come to care for one another. Our friendship labs are particularly helpful because we collaborate with therapists who are seeing our men individually or in couples therapy (2012).

The writings, theories, and philosophy of the renowned 20th century self psychologist Heinz Kohut make clear that there is a solid basis for the power of empathy to heal the most

basic human injury to the self. He taught a psychology of self that seeks to restore fragmented selves. If self-cohesion is healthy, despite the stressors, one can be resilient. In *Grace for The Injured Self*, Cooper & Randall (2011) explain that Kohut advocates compellingly for the role of religion in maintaining self-unity and restoring injured cohesion. Kohut, who saw the church (or synagogue) as a group that functions as a self, also understood that attachment to selfobject figures provides opportunities for healing through mirroring and idealizing as well as through alter ego responses. By approaching congregants with empathy, clergy can be selfobjects, bringing comfort and healing. Empathy is an investigative tool to help understand the structure of the patient's psyche. Empathy is the access into the problems or injury. Kohut's supportive approach, rather than the classic Freudian model of interpretation, lends itself perfectly to a group setting.

In applying Kohut's theory of self-psychology, I hope to use the glue to bring healing and cohesion where there is brokenness and fragmentation. Each of us has been damaged – broken a little. Everyone has experienced injuries to the self. But it's those cracks, the brokenness we carry, that allows us to give to each other and the world in meaningful ways. In accepting our cracks, and in accepting the cracks of others, we bring wholeness to ourselves and each other.

Chapter III: Methodology

Approach and procedures

Men need more help in terms of connecting with tradition and volunteering. Jewish men need the Jewish community. Through a support group for men, I plan to create a sense of true, tightly bonded community. The activities and approach I plan to take is designed to sensitize men to maximize their emotional and spiritual inner resources.

I shared my observations about the struggles Jewish men face today with the president of our men's club. He invited me to share those observations with his leadership team. What I thought would be a 15-minute conversation turned into an hour long conversation as the men started to share their own struggles to maintain work-life balance, to be a different kind of husband and father to their spouse and children than their own fathers were. It was clear from this initial conversation that the topic is of real interest to the men in the group and resonated with them. I learned from the president of our men's club that the Federation of Jewish Men's Club (FJMC) has published guides for local chapters with the program name "Hearing Men's Voices," or as is commonly known, HMOV. I contacted the national director, Rabbi Charles Simon, who told me FJMC has not done any evaluation of any HMOV programs. My project utilizes some program titles of HMOV primarily so that the men in my congregation will recognize the brand.

I will facilitate weekly session of a men's group at Midway Jewish Center in partnership and with the support of our men's club. Sessions will be announced as a series and publicized in the synagogue bulletin (Appendix A), on our website, weekly emails to the congregation at large

and through the Men's Club to their members directly. To generate interest, the Men's Club will invite an author of a book on work-life balance to speak at a breakfast program (Appendix B). I will also reach out specifically to men with a personal invitation (Appendix C). The clinical intervention I plan seeks to create a safe space for men in my synagogue community to candidly and confidentially discuss issues of mutual concern that bear on their personal lives. I will help to create a safe, supportive environment in which men can delve into areas of mutual interest. This discussion series will focus on the many issues related to men, work, and fatherhood, with a layer of relevant religious ideas especially because, as will be discussed later in this paper, the series takes place in a synagogue with a rabbi as facilitator. By exploring themes in these areas, I hope to better understand others and ourselves. This discussion group operates on the premise that the participants will "open up" to each other about common life issues, if given the opportunity to do so in a confidential and comfortable setting.

The project activities seek to help men gain insight into the relationships they have, or did not have, with their fathers. I want to gather men to talk about their work and how it affects their lives. I will create a safe space for men to express their feelings and struggles as their work and home life becomes less patriarchal and more egalitarian and as that affects their manhood, their sense of self, and as it relates to their spouse and children. I will promote the sessions as follows:

Join Rabbi Levenson for a series of 6 sessions designed to provide a safe, supportive environment in which men can delve into areas of mutual interest. This discussion series will focus on the many issues related to men and work, and family life. By exploring themes in these areas, we hope to better understand others and ourselves.

This group is designed for men ages 30-50 who are looking for support in navigating the challenges that many men face in life: academics, professional life, friendships, and romantic relationships. There will be a focus on personal sharing and feedback between group members. The group will meet at Midway Jewish Center.

We will explore how our work defines us. We will discuss how our 'work lives' and 'non-work lives' interact and affect each other. How crucial is our work to our self-definition?

How do we balance our careers with our roles as husbands and fathers? Do earnings affect the relationship? Do we take our work home with us? How do we sort out our respective responsibilities?

Why is it so hard to find God? We'll examine what preoccupies us from reflection and what keeps men from opening up to reveal our feelings.

Methodology

As the aim of the study is concerned with exploring the impact of a group for men in a synagogue setting in which they are encouraged to explore masculinity, work, and family life, it was considered that the appropriate approach to research would be a qualitative research. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to enter the world of their participants and gain an insight into their thoughts and feelings.

There are different types of qualitative research methods. Having read about the different types of qualitative research methods, I have decided to do a phenomenological research project, which involves trying to understand the essence of a phenomenon by examining the views of people who have experienced that phenomenon. Phenomenology is interested in the individual experiences of people. This is a phenomenology qualitative study. My data, their words and feelings, will be collected through a six-session group experience. VandeCreek et al writes that

In many ways, the criteria of excellence in qualitative research are just the opposite of those of quantitative research. In terms of its objectives, the qualitative approach does not intend to test, prove, persuade, or argue a particular predetermined point... Its purpose is to discover the meaning of a human experience and to communicate this understanding to the reader” (VandeCreek, p. 77).

Qualitative research also tends to work with fewer participants or respondents. As I set out to commence the project, I anticipate that the group will consist of ten to sixteen participants, a number that is too small to be statistically significant. On the other hand, using a phenomenology qualitative research approach allows me to analyze the words of each participant and discover meaning from each session as well as from the cumulative sessions.

In an effort to promote dialog, I will prepare topics for each of the six sessions, and be prepared to share data, research, stories, book excerpts, texts from the tradition, or videos that are relevant to the primary topic. The session titles, dates, and primary questions and topics are as follows:

1. Self-Definitions

Sunday, May 15, 9:45-11:00 AM

We will explore how our work defines us. We will discuss how our ‘work lives’ and ‘non-work lives’ interact and affect each other. How crucial is our work to our self-definition?

2. Work and Home

Tuesday, June 7, 8:15- 9:30 PM

How do we balance our careers with our roles as husbands and fathers? Do earnings affect the relationship? Do we take our work home with us? How do we sort out our respective responsibilities?

3. Fatherhood

Wednesday, August 10, 8:15 – 9:30 PM

What do we want from our fathers? What do they want from us?

4. Opening the Soul for God

Sunday, September 18, 9:45-11:00 AM

Why is it so hard to find God? We'll examine what preoccupies us from reflection and what keeps men from opening up to reveal our feelings.

5. Hezekiah Fell Dangerously Ill

Thursday, October 20, 8:15 – 9:30 PM (following dinner in the Sukkah)

Exploring ways men react to crisis situations.

6. Gender & the Liturgy

Sunday, November 6, 9:45-11:00 AM

We will examine gender in the liturgy and our own relationship with God.

Methods of Assessment

I perceive a need among the men in my congregation, namely that men are under pressure, that the shift from patriarchal culture to egalitarian culture is painful and confusing for men, and that pain presents itself as stress in one's family life and married life.

I will create an intervention, a six-session group experience, whereby I will approach my analysis of the verbatim dialog using phenomenologically qualitative research for assessing whether or not the need I have identified has been ameliorated at all. After sessions I will review the transcripts and look for signs of stress in one's home life, in the workplace, and stress in moving from a patriarchal to egalitarian society. I will use the verbatims to identify the themes presented by the men in the group.

Because this is a qualitative research project, it is all the more necessary for me to recognize my biases and that I may be as much as a participant as well as the group leader.

As a rabbi, I have often counseled people suffering from depression, a lack of purpose in life, and sometimes a desire not to go on living. I have made referrals to mental health

professionals to seek other help. But sometimes I simply speak with them about finding a purpose in life.

Before people can achieve psychological well-being, their physical needs must be met. Only when people's basic physiological needs are met can we speak about greater psychological needs. The Talmud explicitly teaches this, "Without flour there can be no Torah." (Avot 3:17) People have physical needs. But they also have higher spiritual needs. This is best illustrated by a passage in the Torah: *"Man does not live by bread alone, but man may live on anything that the Lord decrees."* (Deuteronomy 8:3) Life, at least a successful life, needs more than material goods. It needs more than family, friends, and social intimacy. I have met too many people over too many years who are financially successful, have loving families, but believe that something is missing from their lives. Many try to ease the pain they feel through drinking, drugs, and other addictive behavior. Some are deeply depressed. Many turn to God and some kind of spirituality to them. But bread alone is never enough.

Locating the group in sacred space: the synagogue

I will be leading this project in the synagogue and choose to do so intentionally. We are not meeting at bar, nor in someone's living room, nor at the Jewish Community Center. The group will be meeting at the synagogue to facilitate the process of further connecting the men to the synagogue. Why is it so important for the men to come back into the synagogues? In their leaving the synagogue, men have lost the mantra of the liturgy. They have lost the reflection of the weekly Torah portion, familiarity and fluency with sacred texts. We have come to understand that our world is not based merely on going to work, or feeding one's family. That is

not to say those things are not important -- they are. But there is a greater value that comes from the opportunity and privilege to encounter the worldview as our ancestors saw it, and as they grappled with it.

In my experience, from my conversations with men in my community, if one asks “Does your work add meaning to your life?” most will say that it does not. For some of them, the synagogue is the antidote. The synagogue is the place that can provide community and therefore meaning.

In addition, the synagogue could be the central place for men to generate meaning in their lives. The *mishkan*, the portable desert tabernacle, housed the ark of the covenant, the presence of God and the locus of Israel’s ritual life. “Let them make for me a sanctuary,” instructs God, “that I may dwell amongst them.” (Exodus 25:8) God’s presence is felt among all the people and within each person, at each and every stage of the wilderness wanderings. On the High Holy Day of Yom Kippur, a bold proclamation is made that the congregation is permitted to “pray with those who have transgressed.” In the synagogue we are reminded that God’s presence dwells within sinner and saint alike. Even those who feel guilty or shame are welcome in the sanctuary.

The vehicle that the synagogue can and does employ are study of sacred texts. The person in the synagogue most prepared and trained to guide learning of those texts is the rabbi.

The rabbi is not a program director, and much more than a facilitator. Rabbis use tools such as sacred text (Biblical and rabbinic texts), and translate those texts into theological language. Rabbi Jack Bloom defines the rabbi’s mission as a “Symbolic Exemplar” who stands for something other than one’s self, specifically the totality of Jewish tradition. According to

Bloom, “It is this symbolic exemplarhood that enables the rabbi to be taken seriously in the first place and the myth that surrounds this symbolic exemplarhood provides much of the rabbinic power to touch individual lives and direct the future of the Jewish community” (2002, p. 136).

Theology is autobiography. I believe that human beings not only need food, friends, and family - they need a sense of purpose for their lives. Human beings do not live by bread alone; human beings need something more, and the synagogue can provide that, together with the rabbi. Phenomenological qualitative research is particularly appropriate as this methodology allow for the participant to make sense of his personal world and for me, the researcher, to make sense of the participant.

In my own professional and personal life, as I have struggled with maintaining a work-life balance that I am comfortable with, I have found strength by speaking to female rabbinic colleagues. Many of these female rabbinic colleagues have drawn clear boundaries and are not away from their families most evenings, which is very possible for rabbis serving a congregation. Rabbi Charles A. Kroloff writes that “Our women colleagues have taught us that the ‘Jewish family’ begins with our own families, who deserve the best that we can give them... By integrating their professional and personal needs, they have demonstrated that unless we live what we preach, we are bound to feel less than authentic” (Kroloff, 2016, p. 271).

My goal is to maintain group cohesion in this short-term, closed, theme-centered group. By short-term, I mean that I am planning a series of six (6) sessions to men in the congregation. There will be a beginning and an end. By closed, I mean that while I expect some members will may have to miss a session or two due to professional or personal conflict, I will set the expectation that attendance at all six sessions is desired and optimal.

I hope that my intervention will lead to several outcomes. First, that the men will express feelings around pressures from work and struggles at home, and that the group will be place where they will articulate challenges around negotiating the work-life balance. Second, I hope the men are comfortable expressing feelings around fatherhood, and that by understanding the research about the influence of fathers that the men better appreciate their role and impact in their families. Third, I hope that through reflecting on their sense of self, their sense of manhood and masculinity that the men will develop a stronger, more positive sense of self while articulating an appreciation of shared power with their wives at home.

Long after the official conclusion of the group, I will be watching and listening for answers to this question: Can creating a group for men in a religious setting lead to more men willing to opt in to the synagogue and community, and not opt out of it?

Recruitment of the Sample

In order to build a strong number of men who would commit to the group, I knew that I needed to cast a wide net and encourage men to be willing to make this commitment. First, my entire monthly column in the April, 2016 edition of the synagogue bulletin was dedicated to announcing the series (Appendix A). I begin by coordinating with the President of our Men's Club to invite a scholar and author to the congregation for what we called a "Kick Off Event" (Appendix B). In concert with and support of the Men's Club President, we invited Scott Behson to speak to the Men's Club. Scott is a professor of management at Fairleigh Dickinson University, a national expert in work and family issues, and was a featured speaker at the recent White House Summit on Working Families. He is the author of *The Working Dad's Survival*

Guide: How to Succeed at Work and at Home, in which he seeks to provide advice and encouragement for working fathers, helping them to achieve success in their careers while also being the involved, loving dads they always wanted to be. Scott founded and runs the popular blog, “Fathers, Work, and Family,” dedicated to helping working fathers and encouraging more supportive workplaces.

In addition to my article in synagogue bulletin and general email to all men in the Men’s Club, I reached out by email or telephone or in person to specific potential participants with a personal invitation. I explained the purpose of the group and study. To those with whom I spoke in person or on the phone, I followed up with an official invitation letter via email to potential participants (Appendix C). Those persons who chose to participate in the group were then sent a confirmation letter (Appendix D). A follow-up reminder was sent to participants prior to the first meeting (Appendix E). Each letter included the time, location, and meeting schedule. Names of all participants have been changed for this study to protect their anonymity. Additionally, to set the backdrop for this within the larger synagogue community, I invited members of the congregation to “share their stories” as the primary basis of my sermon to the congregation on Rosh Hashana in 2015, one of the High Holy Days when virtually the entire congregation comes to the synagogue. The sermon in its entirety is included as Appendix N.

Demographics

The men in this group are all formally affiliated with Midway Jewish Center, a conservative synagogue in Syosset, NY, located in eastern Nassau County on Long Island. Before commencing the group, I reviewed the *Jewish Community Study of New York: 2011*

Geographic Profile conducted by the UJA-Federation of New York which dedicates a chapter to Syosset and the neighboring towns of Plainview and Jericho.

According to that 2011 survey, the Plainview/Syosset/ Jericho Area has a total of 40,700 households, and of those, 13,200 households identify as Jewish households, or 32% of the total households; with 35,800 individual Jews, or 16% of the total population of 125,000.

With regard to financial condition:

- 26% Percent of Households Cannot Make Ends Meet or Just Managing
- 40% Have Enough
- 33% Have Extra Money or Wealthy
- 33% report income between \$100,000-\$149,000, 27% report income over \$150,000.

Program Overview

In planning the program, I developed curriculum sheets (Appendix G-L) for each of the six sessions. The audio was recorded using an iPhone. After each session I uploaded the audio to my desktop computer and deleted the file from my phone.

The participants were given a consent form (Appendix F) towards the beginning of Session 1, and when signed, our conversation began.

Chapter IV: Results

Results

Each of the six sessions were recorded using an iPhone. Following each session, I uploaded the audio file to Dropbox, and then downloaded the files to my computer. I transcribed each session, and read and re-read the transcripts.

Fifteen men between the ages of 38 and 62 participated in this group. All names have been changed in this paper to protect their anonymity. Their pseudonyms and real ages at the date of the first session are:

- | | | |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. Jack, 38 | 6. Marc, 51 | 11. Sam, 47 |
| 2. Ben, 42, | 7. Greg, 42 | 12. Bob, 48 |
| 3. Dave, 62 | 8. Kevin, 47 | 13. Harry, 43 |
| 4. Bruce, 49 | 9. Stuart, 45 | 14. Rob, 60 |
| 5. Gary, 38 | 10. Larry, 61 | 15. Mike, 44 |

In reviewing each verbatim, I noted in the margin where I saw feelings of stress or pressure from work or family, and feelings around masculinity or manhood. I noted feelings of shame, and looked for moments of support from one man to another. Each transcript was again reread within the context of the whole session to uncover essential themes.

Among the primary clinical issues I expected to see and hoped to address among the men in the group were stress or pressure from a number of sources as it impacts their sense of self. Those sources include society's moving increasingly away from the experiences of prior generations when men were the sole bread winners to sharing such responsibility with a

spouse; changing household responsibilities as men share the load; navigating the balance of time between work and family, commonly referred to as work-life balance. In addition, stress or pressure presents itself as men may struggle with work or employment.

Another clinical issue I expected to encounter and hoped to begin to ameliorate through the group is that of shame. Are these men who, when they were children, heard a message from their own fathers about what it means to “be a man”? In behaving or experiencing emotions differently, are they ashamed? How did hearing “be a man” impact their sense of self?

In *Pastoral Counseling: The Basics*, James E. Dittes writes, “In the counselee’s life, distressing outer events have transmuted into internal distress” (1999, p. 22). Session two began with Stuart sharing a challenge he is having with his son. [Following this session, I met with Stuart privately and referred him and his family to a family therapist, and both Stuart and his wife later told me they were grateful for the referral.]

I anticipated that sharing the *Happiness U-Curve* would elicit a stronger reaction of relief on the part of the men. It did not.

In the fourth session, a theological discussion around prayers in the High Holy Day liturgy led into a more personal conversation about mortality.

I set to explore the degree to which men would express feelings around pressures from work and struggles at home, and I hoped that the group would be place where they could articulate challenges around negotiating the work-life balance. I believe that my coding of the transcripts reveals that the men did express themselves and feelings comfortably. Second, I hoped the men would be comfortable expressing feelings around fatherhood, that the men would better appreciate their role and impact in their families. Third, I hoped that through reflecting on

their sense of self, their sense of manhood and masculinity that the men would develop a stronger, more positive sense of self while articulating an appreciation of shared power with their wives at home. Coding of the data revealed moments when men spoke of sharing the load at home and of greater respect for one's spouse.

Unanticipated developments

In the third session, the conversation turned to the advice received and given from fathers. Given the title and topic of the session, I should have anticipated the topic of advice given to us by our fathers, for looking back I think the men were poised to be pushed further about times and circumstances when they wanted more from their fathers. If I had, I could have shared the text from Genesis of Jacob and Esau. Jacob is described as "a plain (domestic) man, dwelling in tents"; while Esau is the "skillful hunter, a man of the field." Jacob seizes his opportunity to buy the birthright from Esau, and it is clear that Esau really was not fit to have this important responsibility in his charge, for "Esau despised the birthright." Eventually, Jacob, at his mother's instigation, obtains Esau's blessing from their father by false pretences, and, to escape his brother's wrath, is forced to run away to his Uncle Laban's country. At age forty, Esau is a man with great wealth but what he wanted more than anything is to be blessed by his father. Underlying our conversation about advice from fathers was really an attempt to verbalize something much deeper, the longing for counsel, or theologically, a blessing, from one's father.

Due to a scheduling conflict, I had to change the date of the fourth session. It was to be held on Sunday morning, September 18. As September began, we realized that our synagogue religious school's Open House for Parents was also scheduled for September 18, and most of the

men in my group have children enrolled in the religious school. We decided not to run the session at the same time as the Open House. I moved it to Sunday evening, September 25. Attendance at that session was the lowest of all six sessions with only nine men present, and I think that it's a reminder of how crucial it is that the time of sessions be planned carefully to maximize attendance and build the group.

As all of the men are members of the synagogue, I saw some members of the group in between meetings. Between life-cycle events, High Holy Days, or other Men's Club events, I was asked the question, "What's the main topic for the next session?" I was pleased that the group understood that while I would bring a main topic to begin a conversation, that as the facilitator, I was willing to let the conversation move into other directions. There were times when an individual in the group would turn to me to ask a question about Jewish beliefs or Jewish practice, and most often I tried to re-focus the conversation by replying that I would answer the question after the session. By coding the text, I could more carefully review the conversations to identify moments of stress and feelings of pressure the presenting issues related to stress and pressure. Coding revealed another emergent theme: the use of humor to help the group express itself. Ultimately, I believe that these men were looking for deeper levels of understanding to comprehend what really is the meaning of their lives, and why as Jews the texts and themes speak to and potentially support them.

These group meetings began in May, 2016 and concluded officially on November 6, 2016, just two days before Election Day. The group agreed in our first session that these sessions would not be the place for political debate. But since this was a group of men affiliated with the synagogue, I saw them outside of the group at various functions, and some men shared

their political opinions, and then reflected on how their political opinions related to what they said in the group, either about their own father or their own economic situation. It occurred to me that some of the men who lean far to the right politically, faced a real existential dilemma: It was their father who closed a store or lost the inheritance or lost the opportunity for future generations. So these men had to make a choice: do I blame my actual father for losing my inheritance, or do I take that blame and project it out more systemically to rescue him?

At the conclusion of the fourth session, I encouraged the men to invite someone in the group for lunch, beer, or a family get together. I wanted to encourage the building of relationships outside of the group, for that would ultimately strengthen their connection to the synagogue community as a whole.

I had private lunch meetings with four of the men. At some point over lunch I asked about the group: how are you feeling about being in the group? So far, are you finding it worthwhile? After the second lunch meeting I thought about whether my study should have intentionally included individual interviews with the men. I am aware that interviews are another way of doing research. In this case, I am glad I led the group because of the potential benefit for the group to create friendships between the participants, in addition to my role and influence as a pastoral counselor in shaping one's story.

Another unanticipated development was that some men reported to me that through the group experience they felt more connected and expressed a willingness to consider volunteer leadership within the congregation. Thus, the men's group unintentionally became a vehicle for leadership development.

Chapter V: Discussion and Implications

Among the religious principles that I tried to address were around fatherhood, parenting, work, and worship. The text from Torah that “Man does not live on bread alone” opens the door to conversation about breadwinning, especially as it applies to dual-career couples. In addition, each of these men are part of something bigger than themselves, that he is connected to a people, a community, to God. Work in and of itself is not sustaining, and they are looking to connect with an idea bigger. I shared with them the teaching from Ethics of our Ancestors, *In a place where there is no man, strive to be a man* and we considered what that meant to them today.

With the biblical stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on my mind, we discussed fatherhood and parenting, the challenges of raising children in an affluent society, and the legacy received from our fathers and given to our children.

The group discussed egalitarian Jewish worship, whereby women and men have equal access to religious leadership and participation; changes in the liturgy to include the matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah in the formal text of the Amidah, the private prayer); and changes in the prayerbook that reflect gender-neutral language regarding God.

My group created a space for men to reflect on these religious principles and consider their choices to formally affiliate with a conservative synagogue that is egalitarian, one in which we recently began using a prayerbook with gender-neutral language about God, and which offers the option of including the matriarchs in the Amidah, the private prayer. One of my goals of my interventions was for the men to be more comfortable in their choice to be a

part of our particular religious community, and to feel more positive about that choice, rather than to feel that the more “manly thing” to do would be to affiliate with an Orthodox congregation without egalitarian worship and the like. Boyd writes, “We need to mine our religious traditions for those prophetic visions of the common good and those supporting personal and communal spiritual disciplines that empower us in those commitments and draw us toward ways of being and acting that are more just and mutually enhancing for all beings” (1996, p. 290).

This research project considered several clinical principles. Among them: the definition of manhood for these men in this time, place, culture, and religious community. We discussed questions including: How old were you when you heard the phrase “be a man,” and what did you think it meant then? What does it mean to “be a man” to you today? How are you managing responsibilities for work, family, and community? What are you doing at home as a spouse and parent that is similar or different from what your own father did at home as a spouse and parent? Do you have clarity around the expectation of you as a husband and father? Is there shame around “sharing the load,” or shame around earning less money than one’s spouse?

My review of relevant clinical issues and literature led me to wonder the degree to which masculinity studies might find a place in the Doctor of Ministry program at HUC-JIR. At a minimum, courses on adult development and foundations of counseling could add components designed to challenge students to consider the issues members of the clergy may

face among men, and my readings lead me to strongly appreciate the value of facilitating constructive conversations in any house of worship.

With this group officially concluded, I will continue to watch and listen for answers to this question: Can creating a group for men in a religious setting lead to more men willing to opt in the synagogue, and not opt out of it?

It is my intention to continue to lead more sessions for the men of my congregation. The men individually and as a whole remain interested in continuing the group in some form. In so doing, I hope to see the men grow in their connection with and presence in the congregation, and that it will strengthen the theological foundation on which our leadership approaches their sacred work. As we continuously shape the culture and community of our synagogue, we will ask the question, “How is this budget a reflection of who we are as a *k'hillah k'dosha*, a sacred community, rather than ‘is this a balanced budget?’” These conversations with men can bring them back into the synagogue, and change the questions we ask in board meetings.

Areas of future inquiry

I have started to identify theological and clinical issues deserving of attention in a future group. Namely, discussions around sexuality using the story of Lilith; loneliness and separation using the theological term ‘exile’ and at the text of Cain and Abel; family dynamics and sibling rivalry using the story of Jacob who sits it out while his children fight; listening and communication skill building using the text of *Sh'ma Yisrael*, hear or listen Israel; risks at home or at work using the game of dreidel we play during the holiday of

Hanukkah; leadership development using stories of Moses. What follows is a way of framing these future sessions:

Lilith

Feminist theologian Judith Plaskow's "The Coming of Lilith" powerfully portrays Lilith as a woman of strength and independence, not as a demon as portrayed in texts from prior generations. Plaskow's story opens with this:

In the beginning, the Lord God formed Adam and Lilith from the dust of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. Created from the same source, both having been formed from the ground, they were equal in all ways. Adam, being a man, didn't like this situation, and he looked for ways to change it. He said, "I'll have my figs now, Lilith," ordering her to wait on him, and he tried to leave to her the daily tasks of life in the garden. But Lilith wasn't one to take any nonsense; she picked herself up, uttered God's holy name, and flew away. "Well now, Lord," complained Adam, "that uppity woman you sent me has gone and deserted me." The Lord, inclined to be sympathetic, sent his messengers after Lilith, telling her to shape up and return to Adam or face dire punishment. She, however, preferring anything to living with Adam, decided to stay where she was. And so God, after more careful consideration this time, caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam and out of one of his ribs created for him a second companion, Eve. (Plaskow, 1994, p. 324)

This text allows for a conversation around sexuality, but not only from a psychological perspective but from a theological perspective. Why did God give human beings the gift of sexuality? We can either see ourselves as not so different from two dogs on the street, or we can see our sexuality as a way of playing out our understanding of having been created in the Image of the Divine. Within Judaism, there is a religious idea that it is a man's obligation to give his wife pleasure. I would suspect that most men in my community are not familiar with that

religious obligation. Most men think they have to be macho and display power and as a result they are missing out on the divine aspects of sexuality.

The Story of Cain and Abel: The Story of Exile

While the story of Cain and Abel is about responsibility to family, friends and all of humanity, and being “your brother’s keeper,” it is also about exile. I would frame this story in the context of exile within families, couples, and God.

In my rabbinate, I have spoken to parents who do not speak to their adult children, and to adult children who do not speak to their parents.

I have also seen this within a community. A person may feel shunned or exiled for any reason -- following a divorce or actual or perceived wrongdoing. I have heard people express feeling about growing or being distant from God. This is another form of exile. I have met couples who express exile from love: the couple who lives together, but have not invested in their love for each other. We describe this psychologically as lonely, but theologically it is living in exile.

Jacob sits it out

*“Now Jacob sat in the land where his father had sojourned,
in the land of Canaan.” (Genesis 37:1)*

This verse from Genesis seems to imply that everything was very calm in Jacob’s life. *Vayeyshav Yaakov*--Jacob was sitting, relaxing, enjoying ... finally, after the conflicts with his

brother Esav, after the need to flee to Lavan, after being cheated in marriage and in business by his father-in-law, after a return to Canaan in which his brother came to meet him with 400 armed men, after the rape of his daughter, resulting in a terrible conflict with the people of Shechem. After all that ... Jacob has seemingly finally settled down to a peaceful existence. *Vayeyshv*, says the classic commentator Rashi--*Bikesh Yaakov Leysheiv Bashalva*-- Jacob wanted to just sit in security, calm, and quiet.

But it didn't actually happen. The peace he sought was shattered by contention, confrontation, and violence.

The Talmud too, focused attention on the title and first word of the parashah: "*Kol Makom Sheneemar Vayeysev, Eyno Ela Lashon Tzaar* (Sanhedrin 106a)--Wherever the word *Vayeyshv*, and he sat, occurs in the Biblical text it is an omen of conflict and tragedy." Why? What's the trouble with *Vayeyshv*? Why is that word, actually three words in English--*And He Sat*--associated with conflict, discontent, and tragedy?

In this context that one Hebrew word, *Vayeshv*, suggests that Jacob thought he could sit it out, that he didn't have to get involved anymore. He became complacent; he didn't want to intervene--not in family matters and not in matters concerning the land of his ancestors. So he ignored the bad relationships among his children, and it became worse, even violent--and Jacob lost. The brothers brought him Joseph's bloodied coat, and he thought to himself 'maybe he was attacked by an animal, maybe he was murdered by marauders.' Jacob never got up to find out! "Leave me alone," he said, "leave me alone to mourn, leave me alone to sit, leave me alone ...". He ended his life in exile and his descendants became slaves.

Vayeyshav (sitting it out) leads to increased conflict and tragedy—whether in the privacy of family affairs or in public policy, whether it is a confrontation between brothers or among peoples, Torah, tradition, and history teach us that we must be willing to stand up to our problems. Otherwise we will never be able to sit down in peace.

Can anyone relate to this father, Jacob, sitting it out while his children were fighting? Can anyone identify with a father who sat it out rather than get closer to and involved with his children?

Sh'ma Yisrael: Hear O' Israel -- Listening and communication skills

At the heart of Jewish worship is the Sh'ma and its blessings. The word “Sh'ma” means to listen, to hear. I sense a real need among the men to develop listening skills, which can help them at home and on the job. Together with listening skills, future sessions can include both active listening skills, integrated with communication skills to help the men better engage in their respective roles and express their thoughts and feelings.

The Dreidel and Gambling

Hanukkah is a story about family—a father and 5 brothers changed the course of history not only for themselves but for future generations. That is really a recurring theme in Jewish life...perhaps not on as grand a scale as the story of the Maccabees but no less meaningful.

Hanukkah is also about gambling—that's what dreidel is—a game of chance. The Maccabees bet their lives on the fight for religious freedom and continuation of Jewish tradition.

When you think about it, the most important things in life are a gamble. We bet our futures on a choice of career. We gamble on a relationship—when we marry, when we have children. When we love. We are as big as the things on which we bet our lives. We as a synagogue community hedge our bets of the future of Judaism on every young person we call as a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah. It's a calculated risk.

We may play dreidl for a few coins or some chocolate. But even those who have a strong moral objection to gambling with money, take risks all the time and gamble with much more precious stakes.

When we decide to live moral and ethical lives, we take the risk that it will make a difference. We bet on honesty to win over dishonesty, on kindness to prevail over cruelty, on justice to defeat injustice, on peace to conquer war, on humanity triumph over hatred, on faith in God to overcome cynicism and despair.

The future depends on a lot more than the spin of a dreidel. Hanukkah teaches us that there are risks to be taken for religious freedom and the Jewish way of life and all great goals. We are as big as the things on which we bet our lives. Where have you placed your bets? On your marriage? Your career? Tough choices at work? Gentlemen, let us place our bets carefully.

Moses & leadership development

Even Moses needed encouragement to lead the children of Israel. And after leading the children of Israel from slavery into freedom, even Moses needed advice from his father-in-law Yitro on delegation so he did not have to answer every question by himself. Future sessions of

the men's group may focus on reflecting on leadership skills. This could be a stepping stone to greater involvement in synagogue leadership and involvement in Judaism.

Do these activities have the potential to strengthen synagogues, men's clubs, communities and enrich the lives of participants? I believe that they do. Within my own congregation, I want to consider facilitating men's groups among more specific demographic groups within the congregation. For example, I think there is great potential in a group of men with children in the preschool, or new dads. Not only could a group for these younger dads help build relationships between the men and with the synagogue, but the content and themes have the potential to make a greater impact on their sense of self, their marriages, and their children.

I am more inclined than ever before to research and review curricula designed for Jewish middle school age boys, like Moving Tradition's Shevet Achim, which was launched in 2011. At my congregation, we guide many boys through the ritual of becoming a Bar Mitzvah at age 13. Enrollment among both boys and girls diminishes each year beginning in 8th grade. The boys are considered men for religious purposes, but the religious center can further help define masculinity and demonstrate greater relevancy to their personal lives which can help motivate them to remain connected to Jewish religious life in the years ahead.

One must listen to men's voices and hear their stories. They are feeling stress and pressure. In the synagogue, we can create space for men to be strong enough to share, to reveal one's feelings, and let each part speak, to be men of empathy and integrity who take responsibility to change the world by the way they act with their partners, as parents, by the way they live and the way they love.

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APPENDIX A

Article in the synagogue April / May 2016 Midway Jewish Center bulletin

Hearing Men's Voices

The roles and responsibilities of men have changed in the workplace, in the family, and in the synagogue. Women are now the primary breadwinners in 40 percent of all households with children under 18, according to the Pew Research Center. Men are doing some more child care: 7.3 hours per week in 2011, compared with 2.6 hours in 1985.

How are men coping with changing desires and expectations of the work-life balance? With different roles with their spouse? How are they coping with a desire to be a more involved father and their work? How do we define success?

The time has come for men to assess how they view themselves, their families. I'm excited that the Men's Club of Midway Jewish Center wants to address these questions and create opportunities for relationship building. There are too few places where men can speak in a safe manner, honestly express their feelings and get vulnerable. In general, men tend to keep their struggles and challenges to themselves.

The Men's Club will sponsor a series of programs based on the theme "Hearing Men's Voices". I am grateful to Jason Saltsberg, president of the Men's Club, and the entire executive board, for inviting me to facilitate these conversations. HMOV enables members to candidly and confidentially discuss issues of mutual concern that bear on their personal lives.

Noted author Scott Behson will "kickoff" the new series on Sunday, April 10 at 9:45 at a Men's Club breakfast. Scott is a professor of management at Fairleigh Dickinson University, a national expert in work and family issues, and was a featured speaker at the recent White House Summit on Working Families. He's the author of *The Working Dad's Survival Guide: How to Succeed at Work and at Home*, the first book of its kind to provide advice and encouragement for working fathers, helping them to achieve success in their careers while also being the involved, loving dads they always wanted to be. Scott founded and runs the popular blog, "Fathers, Work, and Family," dedicated to helping working fathers and encouraging more supportive workplaces.

Following the kickoff event I will be facilitating monthly conversations as part of the series through November. The purpose of these programs is to provide men with insights to enhance their existing relationships and to assist them in developing their awareness of and understanding about their roles as partners, sons, and husbands.

I look forward to meaningful and enriching conversations and reflections!

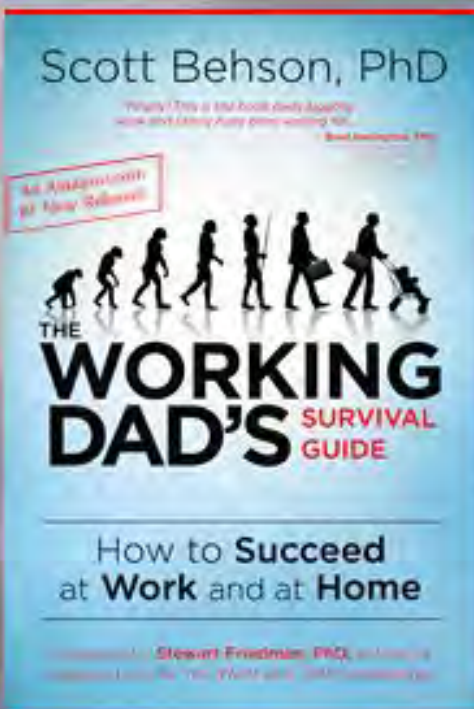
APPENDIX B

Promotional flyer distributed to all members of the Men's Club

The Men's Club would like to invite you to participate in our new series, "Hearing Men's Voices," which enables members to candidly and confidentially discuss issues of mutual concern that bear on their personal lives. Hearing Men's Voices provides a safe, supportive environment in which men can delve into areas of mutual interest. This discussion series will focus on the many issues related to men, work, and fatherhood. By exploring themes in these areas, we hope to better understand others and ourselves. This discussion group operates on the premise that we will "open up" to each other about common life issues, if given the opportunity to do so in a confidential and comfortable setting.

KICK-OFF: Sunday, April 10, 2016 at 9:45 with guest Scott Behson, the author of *The Working Dad's Survival Guide: How to Succeed at Work and at Home*

"Finally! This is the book dads juggling work and family have been waiting for."




Hey Dad! Ever felt torn between advancing in your career and spending quality time with family? *The Working Dad's Survival Guide* is for you. The first book of its kind- the advice and encouragement you need to achieve success at work while ALSO being the involved, loving dad you always wanted to be.



Written from the unique perspective of Scott Behson, a busy working dad who also happens to be a national expert in work-family issues, *The Working Dad's Survival Guide* is chock full of personal stories, relatable advice, and concrete time management strategies you can use right now.

Choose to Scott Behson for providing the 21st century working dad a roadmap for career and parenting success.

- Glen Schneider and Lance Somersfeld, Co-Founders, City Data Group.
- The stories, exercises, and concrete tips Behson offers bring clarity, focus, and motivation for readers to tackle these issues in their own lives.
- Sam Seltzer Fell, Founder & CEO of FlexJobs
- There's no magic pill that will make you the best dad you can be. But with commitment, hard work, and Scott's guidance, you're well on your way.
- Austin Boon, author of *The Expectant Father*
- I wish I had this book when I was taking host in the corporate world for being an active parent!
- Greg Mancos, PhD, author of *Surfing Your Corporate Job: Self-Help for the Chronically Overworked*

A portion of the proceeds from every sale of this book is donated to 

<http://WorkingDadsSurvivalGuide.com>
<http://amzn.to/1PWQtky>

Hearing Men's Voices continues monthly at Midway with sessions facilitated by Rabbi Joel Levenson. Topics, dates, and times as follows:

Self-Definitions

Sunday, May 15, 9:45-11:00 AM

We will explore how our work defines us. We will discuss how our 'work lives' and 'non-work lives' interact and affect each other. How crucial is our work to our self-definition?

Work and Home

Tuesday, June 7, 8:15- 9:30 PM

How do we balance our careers with our roles as husbands and fathers? Do earnings affect the relationship? Do we take our work home with us? How do we sort out our respective responsibilities?

Fatherhood

Wednesday, August 10, 8:15 – 9:30 PM

What do we want from our fathers? What do they want from us?

Opening the Soul for God

Sunday, September 18, 9:45-11:00 AM

Why is it so hard to find God? We'll examine what preoccupies us from reflection and what keeps men from opening up to reveal our feelings.

Hezekiah Fell Dangerously Ill

Thursday, October 20, 8:15 – 9:30 PM (following dinner in the Sukkah)

Exploring ways men react to crisis situations.

Gender & the Liturgy

Sunday, November 6, 9:45-11:00 AM

We will examine gender in the liturgy and our own relationship with God.

Ready to join the group? Email Rabbi Levenson at jlevenson@mjc.org.

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Email Letter

March 21, 2016

Dear _____,

I'm writing to invite you to a new, unique group at Midway Jewish Center, and it's just for men. It's a group with a specific purpose in mind, and we'll only officially meet six sessions. This discussion series will focus on the many issues related to men, work, and fatherhood. I hope that we'll create a safe, supportive environment in which men can delve into areas of mutual interest. The group will serve as Demonstration Project for my Doctor of Ministry program.

We're kicking off this group with a special event on Sunday, April 10, 2016 at 9:45 with guest Scott Behson, the author of *The Working Dad's Survival Guide: How to Succeed at Work and at Home*. Breakfast will be served. I've attached a flyer for that event.

But even if you can't make the kick-off, I hope you will seriously consider joining the group. The dates on which this group will meet are:

- Sunday, May 22, 9:45-11:00am
- Tuesday, June 14, 8:15-9:30pm
- Wednesday, August 10, 8:15-9:30pm
- Sunday, September 18, 9:45-11:00am
- Thursday, October 20, 8:15-9:30pm
- Sunday, November 6, 9:45-11:00am

I hope you'll say yes!

Joel

APPENDIX D**Confirmation Email**

May 9, 2016

Dear _____,

Thank you for accepting the invitation to participate in the demonstration project, for my Doctor of Ministry program. The purpose of the project is to create a series that will focus on the many issues related to men, work, and fatherhood. I hope that we'll create a safe, supportive environment in which men can delve into areas of mutual interest.

Our meetings will be held in the conference room at Midway Jewish Center. The conference room is downstairs and to the right. Coffee and tea will be available at each session. Please make every effort to arrive 5 minutes prior to the scheduled start time so we can begin on time.

Meeting Dates & Times:

Sunday, May 22, 9:45-11:00am

Tuesday, June 14, 8:15-9:30pm

Wednesday, August 10, 8:15-9:30pm

Sunday, September 18, 9:45-11:00am

Thursday, October 20, 8:15-9:30pm

Sunday, November 6, 9:45-11:00am

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. I can be reached at 516-938-8390 or jlevenson@mjc.org.

All the best -

Joel

APPENDIX E

Reminder Email

May 17, 2016

Dear _____,

Looking forward to seeing you this Sunday, May 20, 2016 in the conference room at Midway Jewish Center. The session will begin at 9:45am and end at 11:00am. I invite you to join us in the chapel for Sunday morning services from 9:00-9:40 before the group begins.

If you have any questions I can be reached at Midway at 516-938-8390 or jlevenson@mjc.org.

All the best,

Joel

APPENDIX F

Consent To Participate in a Research Study

Hearing Men's Voices at Midway Jewish Center

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Consent Form

Purpose

Hearing Men's Voices at MJC is a demonstration project to fulfill the Doctor of Ministry program from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. The HMV program is a closed, contemplative, self-discovery group.

Procedure

The group meets for six sessions.

Risks

This is to inform the participants that there are no reasonably foreseeable harm, discomfort, inconvenience and risks that are associated with the demonstration project.

Benefits

Participants may benefit from the group sessions although there will be no promise of direct benefit to the participants.

Confidentiality

A number rather than a name on any record sheets or work product that results from this study will identify the participants. The signed consent form and code assignment list will be kept in a separate location from the data. Audio recorded sessions will be destroyed after the completion of the demonstration project. Written work will be returned to participant or destroyed.

Costs/Compensation

There will be no cost, nor compensation to the participants.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Refuse or Withdraw

Participation in the demonstration project is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty. The subject may discontinue participation at any time.

For questions about the demonstration project please contact Rabbi Joel Levenson at
516-938-8390 or jlevenson@mjc.org.

Consent Form

Consent

By signing this document you are agreeing that you have read and understand the information listed above and that you agree to participate in this demonstration project.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Facilitator _____ Date _____

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

APPENDIX G

Hearing Men's Voices at Midway Jewish Center

Session #1: Self-Definitions

Sunday, May 22, 9:45-11:00 AM

We will explore how our work defines us. We will discuss how our 'work lives' and 'non-work lives' interact and affect each other. How crucial is our work to our self-definition?

I. Introductions. Note who included work in introduction.

We will explore how our work defines us. We will discuss how our 'work lives' and 'non-work lives' interact and affect each other. How crucial is our work to our self-definition?

- Are you the breadwinner?
- If your wife earns more, how does that affect you? Your relationship?
- Is your image of yourself as a doctor/lawyer different from your view of self as father/spouse/friend?

II. Text: *Abraham, Go to yourself*

III. Read excerpt from *The Decline of Men*, xii-xiii

"The sorry state of the American male is a looming emergency with economic, sociological, and cultural ramifications for both men and women and generations to come. Yet most men are maintaining a business-as-usual stance, even as the status quo dissolves under their feet. The media, smelling profits in denial, has done its part to keep men in a state of blissful insouciance. After all, men - at least in male-oriented ads and glossy magazine spreads - have never had it so good. They are wealthier and healthier than ever before, stay younger longer, and have an endless array of choices in the things they buy and the places they can

go. At work and at play, at the office or in the bedroom, men call the shots and always get what they want. They are focused, confident, powerful, and decisive. Armed with wi-fi laptops, GPS navigators, and rock-hard abs, these twenty-first century Marlboro men excel at their jobs and still have plenty of time and energy left to be terrific husbands, lovers, fathers, friends, and fathers. They are role models and leaders on the international stage and on their hometown turf. There is even a body spray for men that turns women into fawning nymphomaniacs. For men, the world is their oyster - and they have a six-pack of premium, low-carb beer in the fridge to help them wash it down.

But behind this glossy media fantasy lurks a dark and disturbing reality: men are in trouble. At home and at work, in the boardroom and in the classroom, they are flailing and failing to live up to their full potential. Like an invisible epidemic with catastrophic implications, the decline of men cuts across all ages, races, and socio-economic groups. It affects affluent white men in the heartland and young Mexican immigrants in the Southwest. It cripples computer nerds and football jocks, family guys and boomer retirees. It is not just eroding the ability of men to earn a living and become contributing members of society, but is also undermining the very definition of what it means to be a man.

Corporate America, once the natural habitat of the American male, has become an intimidating minefield of layoffs, foreign competitors, multicultural consumers, and better-qualified female colleagues. The ability of women consumers to make or break a brand is being felt in industries ranging from publishing to health care, banking and the Internet. Women are increasingly seen as the decisionmakers in housing, food, and Internet shopping, and as their buying power continues to grow, they are setting the marketing agenda. In advertising and the mass media, men are demonized, denigrated, and dismissed, routinely portrayed as clueless cavemen, lackluster lovers, or deadbeat dads. It's no coincidence that reality shows like *Ice Road Truckers* and *Deadliest Catch*, which glorify men who do dangerous, physically demanding jobs, have struck a nostalgic chord in the zeitgeist."

APPENDIX H

Hearing Men's Voices at Midway Jewish Center

Session #2: Work and Home

Tuesday, June 7, 8:15- 9:30 PM

How do we balance our careers with our roles as husbands and fathers? Do earnings affect the relationship? Do we take our work home with us? How do we sort out our respective responsibilities?

I. Check in

II. Questions for conversation

1. How did you come to your present job?
2. Was this the job you hoped to have when you grew up?
3. What is a typical day/week like?
4. Where do you see yourself in five/ten/twenty years? Is advancement important?
5. Speak about what is really important to you. What are your values? How do you balance values and work? Do they ever come into conflict?
6. Is your work satisfying?

III. Video from *The Good Men Project* titled [Men Agree: It's Time to Throw out our Definition of Masculinity](#)

1. We think there's this image of manhood/masculinity, and we're in a time of transition.

Hey Bro! There is No One Single Definition of What it Means to be a Man

Published on The Good Men Project, May 18, 2016 by Elwood Watson

“Masculinity is a very multi-faceted term that encompasses multiple meanings. There is no one specific or singular manner to define what manhood is.

What Tom may consider masculine, Steve may dismiss as non masculine or irrelevant to him and vice versa. As I see it, these are just some of the attributes that define masculinity:

- **Responsible** – A man is one who is dependable and meets his responsibilities without question. He does not rely or fall back on excuses or blame others for his own failures or shortcomings.
- **Progressive** – A man is one who often looks at things from an enlightened and thoughtful perspective whether it be arts, politics, education, the environment etc...
- **Health Conscious** – A man is one who is attentive to his health. He exercises regularly, eats healthy (allows himself to splurge once in awhile) gets regular physicals and does everything within his power to keep his physical and mental health in tip top shape.
- **Vulnerable** – A man is one who is not afraid to open up to others. He has no problem asking for assistance if needed. He is aware of the fact that he is not impervious but rather, that he is only human.
- **Open Minded** – A man is astute to the fact there is more than one way to look at an issue. Things are not always black and white. He does not verbally disrespect or dismiss others who do not agree with him. In short, he does not expect everyone to have his viewpoint on things.
- **Compassionate** – A man is one who demonstrates genuine concern and empathy for others. He does not dismiss or mercilessly ridicule others for what he sees as their shortcomings.

- **Altruistic** – A man is one who inhabits a humanitarian attitude. He is genuinely committed to helping and solving problems for others, especially those who, for whatever reason, are less fortunate than he and others like him.
- **Transparent** – A man is a person who is candid, (in a polite and respectful manner), principled, open and honest. He is not in the business of deceiving or misdirecting people. He walks the walk and talks the talk. He tells it like it is and keeps it real.

In essence, a man's manhood is not solely defined by his bank account, his body, his height, sexual stamina, level of education, or material possessions. Making less than a mid-six figure salary does not make you any less of a man than your more upper income counterpart. Being single does not make you any more or less of a manly than a married man with children and so on. Different strokes for different folks!"

IV. Ethics of our Ancestors (2:6): *"In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man."* **What does it mean to you to "be a man"?**

APPENDIX I

Hearing Men's Voices at Midway Jewish Center

Session #3: Fatherhood

Wednesday, August 10, 8:15 – 9:30 PM

What do we want from our fathers? What do they want from us?

- I. Check in.
- II. Who can share a moment or situation as a father from the last week in which you felt good or successful as a father?
- III. Would anyone like to share any frustrating moments as a father from the last week?
- IV. People have said: "My father never told me he loved me but I know he did because he worked so hard" What's the consequence of that?
- V. Reflect on general changing male responsibility table:

Male Responsibilities 1960	Male Responsibilities 2016
Primary provider working outside the home	Provider working inside or outside home
Limited childcare	shared childcare
Finances	Shared financial tasks
Outdoor home care	indoor and outdoor home care
Automotive care	Automotive care and driving children
	Shared shopping and cooking
	Coaching, activities, carpools
	Shared Scheduling
	Caring for aging parents

Poem by Yehuda Amichai (trans. by Chana Bloch): *A Man Doesn't Have Time*

A man doesn't have time in his life
to have time for everything.
He doesn't have seasons enough to have
a season for every purpose. Ecclesiastes
was wrong about that.

A man needs to love and to hate at the same moment,
to laugh and cry with the same eyes,
with the same hands and throw stones and to gather them,
to make love in war and war in love.

And to hate and forgive and remember and forget,
to arrange and confuse, to eat and to digest
what history
takes years and years to do.

A man doesn't have time.
When he loses he seeks, when he finds
he forgets, when he forgets he loves, when he loves
he begins to forget.

And his soul is seasoned, his soul
is very professional.
Only his body remains forever
an amateur. It tries and it misses,
gets muddled, doesn't learn a thing,
drunk and blind in its pleasures
and in its pains.

He will die as figs die in autumn,
shriveled and full of himself and sweet,
the leaves growing dry on the ground,
the bare branches already pointing to the place
where there's time for everything.

Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (p. 781)

Staying on the treadmill is one thing...But getting back on the treadmill the next day, eager to try again, is in my view even more reflective of grit. Because when you don't come back the next day— when you permanently turn your back on a commitment— your effort plummets to zero. As a consequence, your skills stop improving, and at the same time, you stop producing anything with whatever skills you have.

What does Angela Duckworth see as the greatest harm in not trying after an initial failure?

APPENDIX J

Hearing Men's Voices at Midway Jewish Center**Session #4 Opening the Soul for God***Sunday, September 25, 8:15 – 9:30 PM***Why is it so hard to find God? We'll examine what preoccupies us from reflection and what keeps men from opening up to reveal our feelings.****I. High Holiday Musaf Amidah, *Unetaneh Tokef*.***All humanity will pass before You like a flock of sheep. Like a shepherd pasturing his flock, making sheep pass under his staff, so shall You cause to pass, count, calculate, and consider the soul of all the living; and You shall apportion the destinies of all Your creatures and inscribe their verdict.**What is the guiding metaphor of this passage? What kinds of emotions do you think that metaphor is meant to evoke?***Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, "Passing Before God: The Literary Theme of *Un'taneh Tokef*," *Who By Fire, Who By Water: Un'taneh Tokef*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman, 101-102.**

In this metaphor [of humanity passing before God], the High Holy Days are about closing a gap in the connection between God and people, not about a judgment based on a checklist. The core of *Un'taneh Tokef* is actually the re-examination of our varied relationships with God on the annual judgment day. The poem's biblical allusions juxtapose images of God judging us, supporting the weak among us, and anticipating our collective redemption. Our fate is at once deserved and random. Our passing before God can be our end or our (re)birth.

Estelle Frankel, *Sacred Therapy: Jewish Spiritual Teachings on Emotional Healing and Inner Wholeness*, 29

Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano taught that, "The supernal vacuum is like a field, in which are sown ten points of light. Just as each grain of seed grows according to its fertile power, so does each of these points. And just as a seed cannot grow to perfection as long as it maintains its original form-growth coming only through decomposition-so these points could not become perfect configurations as long as they maintained their original form but only by shattering."

In a typical organization...individuals expend enormous energy protecting themselves. People hide parts of themselves, avoid conflict, unwittingly sabotage change efforts, and subtly enforce a separation between "the me at work" and the "real me." In a never-ending quest to keep ourselves safe in the workplace, we allow gaps to form between ourselves and others, between plans and actions, and even between parts of ourselves.

Questions for conversation:

- What do the authors see as the consequence of people feeling the need to hide parts of themselves from one another?
- What is an example where you felt the need to hide a piece of yourself from others? What was the consequence of that choice?
- When have you had a moment you connected with the Divine?
- What might you do during the upcoming High Holidays to have a moment to reflect, and reconnect with your own thoughts and feelings?
- How are you feeling as we enter a New Year?

APPENDIX K

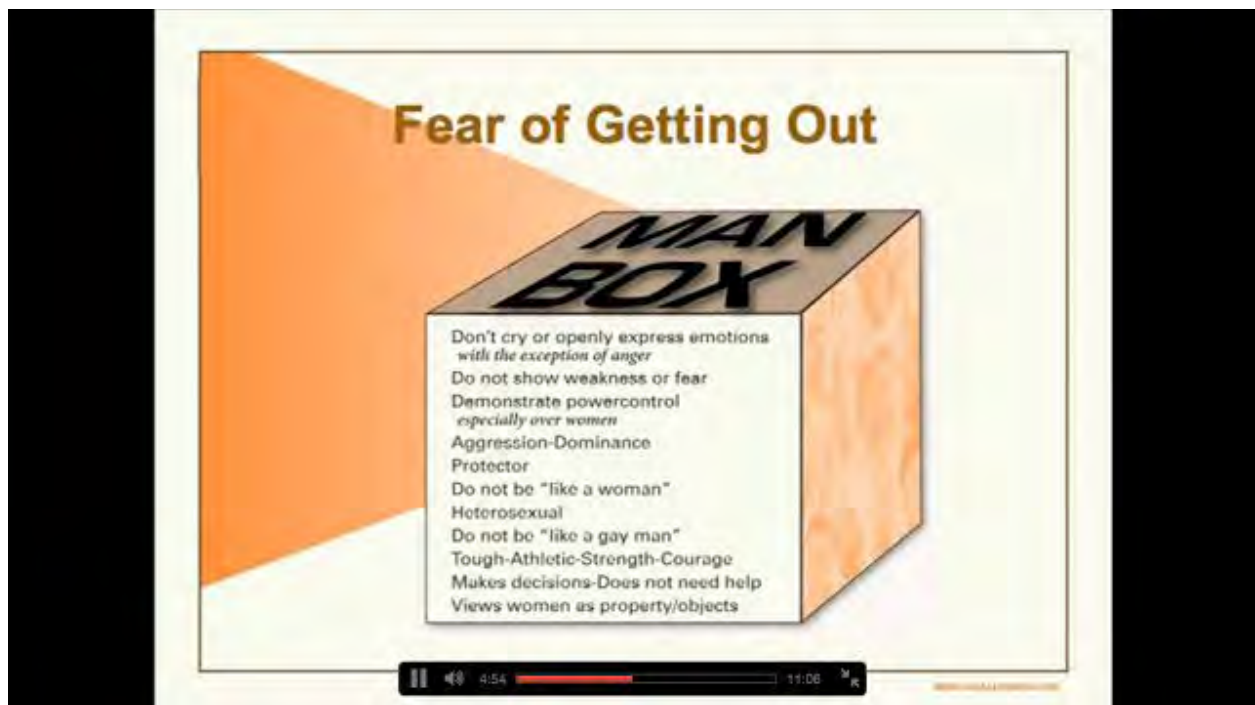
Hearing Men's Voices at Midway Jewish Center

Session #5 Hezekiah Fell Dangerously III

Thursday, October 20, 8:15 – 9:30 PM (following dinner in the Sukkah)

Exploring ways men react to crisis situations.

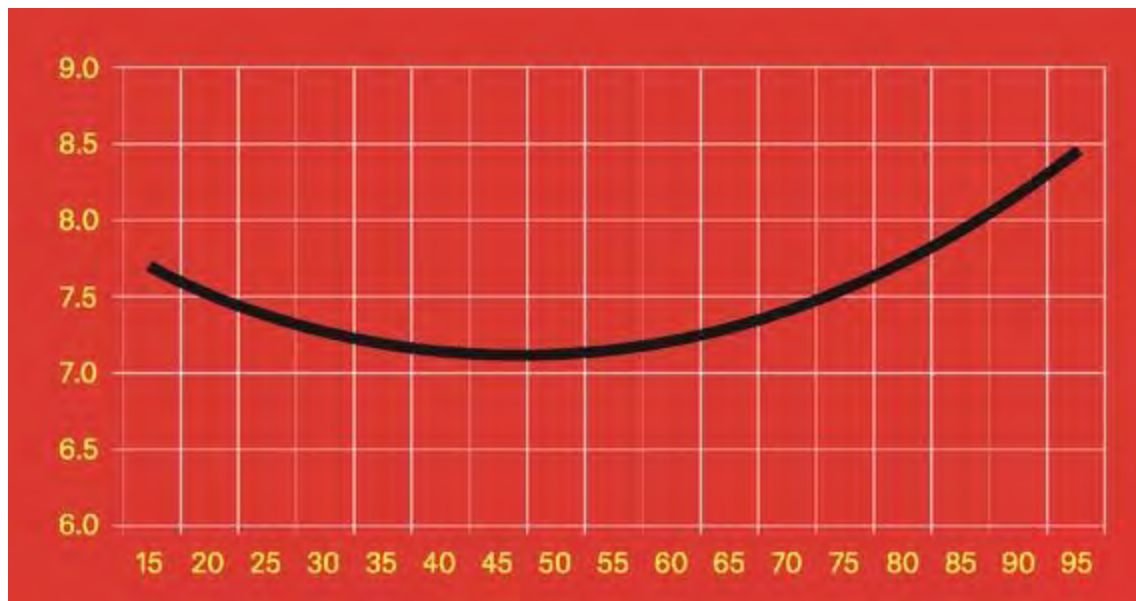
- I. Introductions. What two words describe how you are feeling right now?
- II. When did you first hear the words “Be A Man?”
- III. Look at the “Be a man” box presented by *A Call To Men*:



- IV. Sukkot reminds us of our fragility. When have you experience personal fragility?

V. The Happiness U-Curve

An analysis by the Brookings scholars Carol Graham and Milena Nikolova, drawing on Gallup polls, shows a clear relationship between age and well-being in the United States. Respondents rated their life satisfaction relative to the “best possible life” for them, with 0 being worst and 10 being best.



APPENDIX L

Hearing Men's Voices at Midway Jewish Center

Session #6 Gender & the Liturgy

Sunday, November 6, 9:45-11:00 AM

We will examine gender in the liturgy and our own relationship with God.

1. Do you feel there are rituals that should be reserved for men only?
2. What kind of impact has women's lib had on men participating in Jewish life?
3. Do you visualize God when you pray? Does God have a gender? Do terms like "He", "King", "Father", or "Lord" affect this conception?
4. How do you feel about the inclusion of the matriarchs in the Amidah?
5. What do you think about men who say they are feminist?
6. To those with daughters: how do you feel when they have, or will, lead part of the service or read from the Torah?

7. Shimon Peres, pictured with his wife, on gender equality in the Middle East:



"You know who is against democracy in the Middle East? The husbands. They got used to their way of life. Now, the traditional way of life must change...If you don't give equal rights to women, you can't progress"

– Shimon Peres
1923–2016

StandWithUs

APPENDIX M

Session #1: Self-Definitions

Theologically: diminished self-worth, needs to Lech-Lecha, go to the self; new chapters like Lives of Sarah

Stuart: I'm not sure who I am. I'm not the business owner... I was successful for the first half of our marriage, and now she's more successful.

recreates family of origin

Marc: I grew up thinking I was deprived. We known as the most orthodox and most strict family. And then later we would say to our kids who wanted this or that, "We're different. We have our family and it's not a democracy."

Theologically, religiously different from others

As your kids get older you get little pieces of validation. Brad won the Good Citizen Award at school and he told me, "You and mom taught me these values." I think we beat ourselves up a lot, too much.

"Good enough" parenting ala Winocott

critical of parents; theologically, Greg finds meaning at synagogue, makes him better

Greg: The Greatest Generation did a lot of great things, but they didn't always deal so well.

*intentional parenting; doing for his own
what his father could not do*

*fiscal pressure lessened in dual-career
households*

*felt of emotion and affection from
father, critical of father's attention,
describes criticism and what he wanted*

sharing the load

*justifying ""second shift" and
relinquishing responsibility*

Dave: I'm physical with my kids, but my father never kissed me. I remember telling him, and he couldn't do it. I always give my boys a kiss. My father never did that. Last time Ben said something about his wife earning money - I think it's great you younger guys think "we need to earn and whoever brings it in - great!" There's less pressure.

Greg: My father was career military you couldn't meet someone less interested in display of affection and more interested in gun culture.

Bruce: We're more involved. My mom did all the shopping, and we know prices today. I do like it when she tells me that barcode or sends a picture.

Ben: Men are doing more at home, but women can replace us in the workforce across the board. But I can't fully replace my wife in the home environment in terms of raising the kids. There is a maternal instinct I can't replace.

more from Dave doing differently from his father

Why is it harder for Dave to support men than women who ask for flexibility at work?

indicator of stress in marriage

Marc's wife stayed home, but his protecting part speaks for sense of self among others in the group who make different choices

Dave: That maternal thing is amazing. My kids tell my wife more emotional stuff and I'm jealous because I worked so hard all these years to be the person my father wasn't. I feel a little cheated. I'll say to my kids, "I just spoke to you yesterday and you didn't tell me that!" She did raise the kids. I have women who work for me and I'll be much more flexible and think 'she has a two-year old'. And when guys say the same thing I'll think, "Wait, you can't go to the dentist on Saturday?"

Marc: I think it's very difficult for women. They are still expected to do it all. You have to work at a marriage.

Stuart: We have friends who are dual income both working in the city, but...

Marc: I try to live by the 'don't judge other people' model. What's right for one family might not be right for another family.

Bruce: We've been married 24 years and it gets stronger.

Pressure; seems hard for Larry to say this. I wonder how hard? How did he feel? Would like to have heard more.

Larry's core story: a dragon slayer

Stuart is calling for help, and we missed it.

suffering

masculinity, manhood

sharing the load

Larry: Around 2008 I got downsized and my wife made considerably more. It did take a toll on my psyche until I got back and started my own business. Historically, that's how it is with me. We're the providers. I tell my wife, "I'll slay the dragons, you do everything else."

Marc: We had titles. She's the COO -- Chief Operating Officer. I think women let us think we're making decisions but in my house I know I don't make many decisions.

Stuart (to Ben): And if you can't contribute to the home like your wife, and then you give up as the main breadwinner, you start to wonder, 'where's my place?' I'm not sure who I am right now. I'm not the business owner... I was successful for the first half of our marriage, and now she's more successful.

Our relationship is better and I treat her better because I see she does her work, her meetings, and I see what she does. It's about the quality of what we have together. I put her on a higher pedestal than I used to.

changes in masculinity

Ben: It's not the 1950s, that the guy has to earn the money.

fiscal

Larry: That's true. There was one time I got downsized and she was making more than me. Maybe it's my generation but I always felt I had to provide for her. That's my role.

this is the second time Larry told this to the group. Maybe we were not listening well enough the first time? Why did he feel the need to repeat himself?

masculinity

Marc: She raised the kids. I wasn't there. But they turned out pretty well. I knew no matter where I was Linda was home with kids. But there is stress. We put pressure on the kids on the expectations. We live here because we want good schools. There's tremendous pressure from peers, there's pressure from the schools. And at some point you just have to shut up, because the more questions you ask, the more they'll shut up, so you drive them some place, shut up, and listen. That's why at 1 AM after the parties, I'm happy to drive.

stress

pressure

Discovering new ways as a father to support and create space for kids to share their experiences and emotions.

Session #2: Work and Home

therapy

Marc: We want the schools, and it's a tough environment.

pressure

I'm a proponent of therapy. I grew up in a tough environment and started when I was 12. I was one of the first kids on ritalin it was 1975. It saved my life. I was the worst kid in Hebrew school. The therapist gave me an outlet. I believe therapy is a gift you give to yourself, but we have to be aware of the issues. There is a lot of pressure. We're men, we're not supposed to cry or show emotion. I love my dad but he never cried, so that's how I grew up. I think there's a lot a work to do and it's changing. Our kids have lot going for them but they need to be independant.

changing masculinity

respect for his wife

breadwinner

Kevin: I have more respect for my wife since I sold my business. Before I just assumed everything got done. When I sold it, now she's the breadwinner. Not that I'm home more, but more than I used to be. Now that I'm home I'm like, "holy... how does she do all that?"

Session #3: Fatherhood

stress from son's behavior

Stuart: My son is great with everyone except his parents. He's obstinate. He think he knows how to do something, and before I can finish he says, 'that won't work'.

He's an exceptional child. We've had him tested. His teachers don't understand what we deal with at home.

*identification
stress*

Ben: If it makes you feel any better, when you said, "he's great for everyone else". I totally get that with my younger one. A lot of kids are perfect for others but not for mom and dad.

Bruce: It's their out.

Changes in parenting style

Societal changes, stress

fear, worry about "over parenting"

Hard, stress

fear, anxiety

pressure

Traditional male experience; family of origin

he wants more emotional connection and isn't getting it.

Stuart: And it's safe because if anyone will give unconditionally love, it's his parent

Bruce: It's harder as parents these days. You guys are doing an awesome job. But some of the stuff I see on TV is crazy.

Ben: I know why you're saying we're better parents but I worry if I'm over parenting. When I was a kid I came home after school, did my homework and was out the door. It got dark and you came home.

Jack: And now you can't keep a kid outside without keeping an eye on him. It's a different world.

Gary: I would love to let my kid, but there's a societal pressure. If someone saw my kids at the park down the street someone would call saying "Do you know that..?" Yes, I know.

Sam: I'm in my late 40s. Whenever I would call my father would say, "let me put your mother on." That's how they always did it.

Marc: My mother will get tactical things from me.

Sam: I have a 10 year old daughter. You ask questions, she shuts down even more. And she wants private time with my wife.

humor

jealous of time with his wife

Does not explicitly blame his father, but implies blame

Marc: And you have mother-daughter conversations and father-son conversations. This is true: I'm sitting on the porch on the day before I went to Binghamton. I'm reading the *NY Times* with my father. It was like the guy from *Home Improvement*. He looks up, "You just don't want any mistakes."

Good enough parenting

Sam: My father put everything he had into his store, and then he lost it. He didn't say anything and he didn't leave us anything. I think he tried.

M has had therapy and views sharing positively.

Marc: I think we can only do the best you can do. That's why I think a group like this is great. Men need an outlet, to share. You have people who talk, people who listen, to help each other. My wife has mahjong and they share. Men don't have that. I never told my kids not to cry.

In praise of sharing feelings in contrast to his own, hence the therapy

lack of self after work and family

Greg: There's a tension between work and kids and I'm not ashamed to admit I ask "when is my time?"

Jack: I thought that is what sleepaway is for.

Marc: The first year at sleepaway camp you put them on the bus and cry. By the third year it's 'see ya'!

masculinity, no permission for tears

Jack: We're at a funeral and Joan says, "How can you not cry?" And I said in my family men don't cry.

Struggling to communicate, but a desire to learn and grow

Sam: When Rebecca was at camp, we had more wine, but after a while you do miss them. I believe that no news is good news. Sometimes my wife probes more and asks me why I didn't ask this or that so I take the dog out for a walk and feel bad about myself, but the dog doesn't talk back and then I'm fine.

aware of family of origin, trying to be a different kind of father

That's how I work through it. I've tried to learn from past mistakes. If you ask me to describe my father - he yelled a lot. So I try to keep that in check.

Sharing the load

stress

Bruce: Our generation is doing more than our father. My father never went food shopping and I'm out doing that all the time.

so sad... but good he could say it. He decided to follow his mother's example.

Sam: It's also with spouses -- it can add stress but it's also about being supportive.

Harry: When I see little kids, I think to myself do they know how lucky they are. My father was a ghost. He never threw a ball to me, never did anything. He had his own addiction to gambling and spent more time with his bookie than his children. My mother made up for it. I tried to take that when I had children, to do good with mine, and it proved to be very well.

Bruce: When Jen went to school we told her 'make smart decisions'.

Rabbi: Harry - is that the advice you got from your father?

advice from a father

Harry: I didn't get any advice from my father. My older sister helped me register for classes. My father suffered a lot in life. My sister and I overcame it.

*suffering of own father
overcoming obstacles*

*use of humor to deflect lack of
substance*

Practical, business advice

good parenting

feeling sad for what could have been

fatherhood

protects self and father by justification

Ben: when my parents dropped me off at college, my dad gave me some advice, what his father told him: whatever you do, do your best; second, whatever you do, satisfy your partner and it'll be better for you.

Stuart: My dad gave business advice. He was on the road in sales a lot. Not as much.. He was a good dad, but an even better grandfather. Not that he wasn't good with me, but it was so good to see him with my kids.

His focus when he was a dad was putting food on the table and providing. He saw the father that I am and wanted to be there for his grandchildren. It's a generational thing. It's just different now.

positive relationship with parents

Gary: My parents say the stakes were so much higher. They're your kids! Now being grandparents - the rules are out the window. They give them back all sugar'd up and they can be more relaxed than when they are paying the bills. They don't have to worry about that. It sounds like a nice existence.

Session #4 Opening the Soul for God

Bruce: The "Priestly Blessing" is one of my favorite prayers. I really look forward to wrap the whole family under my tallis.

Rabbi: What does that feel like for you?

family first

Bruce: These are the most important people. They come first.

family illness, decisions.

Dave: When I think about the holidays, we have 14 people sleep over. It's about what's going on. It's tough this year -- not in my family but in my sister's family - so we talk about things, I think it will be more serious this year. My sister has serious back surgery coming up. So she sends me this email: "Even though we have the plots, we haven't picked the spaces we are supposed to have."

Can you all pick?" I read this I was like, ugh. We're never like that!

humor

Bruce: My father-in-law says first come, first serve.

denial?

Jack: I haven't thought about funeral plots.

scared

Dave: That's good, you're younger. You don't think about it but the last few years we've had funerals, people in their 40s. It's scary.

Humor

Bruce: My father-in-law picked this spot in Queens and he jokes that you can see the world's fair.

Supportive, feeling the suffering among friends who have lost children, and theologically powerful

Dave: When my father picked their spots, he wanted it by the road so people didn't have to walk far. We did the same thing. We were going to visit today but there was a walk for COPE in Long Beach. Unfortunately there are several families here that have had children who have died, so there's this walk for COPE and we did that instead. It amazes me we know so many people whose kids have died

And theologically, why them and not me?

values the voice of community as they stand with mourners

Praise of God in midst of loss

In praise of Jewish mourning rituals

*recognizing his wife, more learned
in Judaism than he is. She is the
expert, the knowledgeable one, not
him.*

gratitude, responsibility

Ben: In Judaism we say Kaddish for a parents, spouse, sibling, children. Sam, you said you went to Yizkor for your wife who said it for her father-in-law. The religion doesn't really give you the opportunity mourn other people. It limits it.

Gary: The superstition of walking out... My wife taught me that in the Kaddish there are parts where the congregation speaks back to the mourner and that you should stay for support even if you don't know. I like that.

Sam: I always thought Mourner's Kaddish was morbid but I think you once pointed out that it's words of praise.

Rabbi: It's all words of praise.

Bruce: I'm fortunate so I try to be supportive of others in their grief.

Dave: If you did that you'd be mourning all the time. You're supposed to mourn and then move forward and go on with your life. You don't feel guilty after you pass those stages. I remember with my mom -- I think it helped her tremendously. Sometimes you might feel guilty moving on.

Which of his friends are feeling guilty?

Dave: because you have other children who didn't pass away.

Like whom?

Jack: Unfortunately some people never get over it.

in praise of Jewish mourning rituals

Gary: A few years ago I did some research into the psychology of death and now without fail every professional says Jewish customs of mourning and burial are the healthiest - from having the funeral quickly, not having an open casket, and getting back to living.

humor to deflect

Ben: I just came back from homecoming at Cornell and I think I want to add a paragraph to my will to have a "Weekend at Bernie's" moment! One last hurrah.

Rabbi: I want to dig a little deeper here. We've been talking about funeral laws, logistics, but I want to raise a more fundamental question for consideration about our own mortality. I think the

group is avoiding talking about death.

Jack: Like mortal men?

Rabbi: Yes, I mean how much do you think about your own mortality? Are you aware, do you think about that? We joke around "Weekend at Bernies" but what's really going on here? Let's talk about what underlies this conversation: your own mortality. Do you think about it?

fear

Ben: I guess for me it's not the fear of death but the fear of what am I leaving behind. If I were to go tomorrow, I wouldn't be scared for me, but for my kids and my wife. Financially they will be fine but.. As a kid you have these stupid conversations: would you rather die from this or that? One might be more painful than the other. But everyone's number comes up at some point. We're not sticking around forever.

acknowledgement of reality

Bruce: I think it depends on where you are in life. I have a daughter who is a senior in college. I said to my wife a few months ago that if something were to happen to us she could handle it. With guidance from a few family members.

praise child's independence

It used to be others who would take care but now we're in a new stage.

"With your wife"

advice to group and self

Dave: I'm sure you've all sat with your wife and discussed what you'd do if something happen to you, who will take care of the kids. And each time you have a kid you wonder 'can they handle two kids'? And you talk about - this one or that one, you know, they already have three kids, or not them. Luckily nothing ever happened. But now we're re-writing our wills because now we have grandchildren. We are very fair with our kids but they are at different stages of their lives. We know that when we're not here -- it had better be even because if not you'll have major problems and you don't to give that as part of what you left behind, problems with what you gave them. Luckily we live in an affluent community so there are things you're passing on, we're passing on more than any other generation has, so we're in the middle of trying to do the best thing.

Bruce: Fifteen years ago I was unsettled didn't have life insurance or wills or disability or anything in place so at least I have that covered.

secrets from his wife

Dave: When my wife asks me what we talked about I really can't tell her any of this because she's so angry that I haven't made the appointment with the lawyer! I keep pushing it out.

Rabbi: It's worthwhile to think about what keeps you from making that appointment and getting paperwork in order.

mortality

Dave: Because it may be too late. In terms of my own mortality, my dad died when he was 67. I'm now 67. When it was my birthday, I said to my wife, "It's weird, I'm going to live longer than my father." She said, "Good, you should go do the doctor." It made me think so much of him. I thought of him and people around me. Now when I read in the paper of someone like 73 or 74 dying, someone I don't know, it's like - whoa. That's like around the corner! You guys probably think that's old.

advice from his wife

Bruce: My father-in-law is 91 and he'll tell you he's been the luckiest man around. But Bruce Springsteen just turned 67!

sees himself young at heart

Dave: Billy Joel and I are the exact same age!

Session #5 Hezekiah Fell Dangerously Ill*masculinity**manhood*

Gary: I remember the feeling, if not the words. Growing up I wasn't into sports. I was a story-kid. I loved superheros, anything that had a story to it. I collected action figures. I had what my grandfather would call 'dolls'. Whenever I stayed with him I had the perk of going to the toy store with him and got to pick something. So where did I go - I went to the 'doll' aisle because I wanted some 'dolls'. I remember every time he'd yank me by the arm and say 'no, that's not for you' and he'd drag me to the bats and balls or board games but anything that was soft or had fur was not allowed. "Buy anything you want" had some restrictions. I remember getting the message that that wasn't what guys did.

Mike: I played baseball, and I remember when I was 9 and the coach's kid was the pitcher. He was a cry-baby. I went over to him "Be a man, stop crying." Then the coach thanked me and said he was glad I said it.

Jack: You said that to the other kid?

gentle rebuke

Mike: Yeah.

Jack: That's a mature thing to say.

again, Dave is different from his own father; fatherhood, masculinity

Dave: Is it really a mature thing? I look at it differently. I think you were put in a box. I never said that to my own kids. I have two sons. I don't think I said that in other words. I don't remember if anyone said it to me. I think it's a little stereotyping and gender specific..

Jack: I agree!

Bruce: I haven't heard it in a long time.

Jack: I heard "be a mensch" around a 13. I remember 'act like a mensch' in the synagogue -- grow up a little, have some decorum.

protective part

Dave: I want to say to Gary-- both of my sons to this day - and they're not kids - are obsessed with action figures. And one son has a 6 year old who is obsessed, and he plays sports but I think he'd give up anything to play Star Wars figures.

We still have their collection from the original Star Wars and you're invited whenever you want! It got to a point even after their friends outgrew it they were still 15, 16 and playing downstairs for hours.

*masculinity
asserts himself*

Gary: It's a lot more acceptable now, that geek-culture of Star Wars and superheros. It was something you hid. I played little league do I just sucked something awful. My mother prayed no one hit to me! I was put in these things even though I showed no ability or interest whatsoever, because I was a boy and that's what boys did. Years later I finally said, "I don't want to do this."

masculinity

critical memory from childhood

key piece of Rob's story

Rob: This [man box] is stereotypical and may be out of 1957 and I thankfully hope that this severe box is outdated. I'm think about what Gary said. It brought up a memory. I was about 10 growing up in Queens and it shaped who I became. I wasn't the victim but I victimized someone else. I think it shaped the sensitivity that I think I have. I was a bit older than this kid, Neil. My life was stickball and anything with a ball. Neil was calling Mighty Mouse doll and he seems so proud and it was a significant thing for him.

Cain: Am I my brother's keeper? Yes.

And I was an obnoxious 10 year-old and I put him down. I said, "Boys don't play with dolls. What's wrong with you?" A couple of days later I saw him and he wasn't carrying it. I don't know how I found out but I found out that he took the doll and threw it out. And when I found out it made me aware of what one person can do to another person and the power of words. I honestly don't think of any other experience when I have victimized someone. I can't say I regret it because we are who we are based on total experience but when you, Gary, started expressing that I said to myself, "Whoa." If you come to my house you'll see Lord of the Rings. But this was major experience because no one had a Mighty Mouse doll. It really affected me. So when I see this man-box, I completely reject it completely because it's against everything I want to be.

Group trust growing

Jack: Did you ever talk to Neil?

Cain: Taking responsibility

Rob: I didn't but I did find out that Neil did great. I perpetrated this on myself.

Cain: Taking responsibility, and there is a place for you with mistakes at the synagogue

Bruce: I remember in the corporate world they used to say 'Man Up.' Now it's 'Own Up' -- own up to your mistakes.

Gary: That's better,
especially with more women in
the corporate world.

Rabbi: We're gathered here during
Sukkot. The sukkah is pretty
fragile and it reminds of the
fragility of life. It's also known
as "*Z'man Simchateunu*" the time of
our rejoicing, the time of our
happiness. I want to share with
you the Happiness U-Curve...

Rob: This is good for graphics but
I think most people's lives is more
up and down based on life
experiences, if you're 60 or 70 and
thinking of retiring. I can't
think of life as so smooth. I
would expect more jagged lines.

Rabbi: Would you say you are
happier than you were 15 years ago?

Rob: Happy? I can't recall a time
I wasn't happy. I don't even have
to smoke.

Work, family

Hopes for the future

Gary: Happiness comes in different
forms. You can be happy at your
job, then you retire and you're
happy looking back. When you have
young kids and they are so adorable
it can be so great and I can
imagine when they're adults and you
have a relationship with them on a
different level.

Rob: Dave, having a grandchild, I'm going to ask you, what else besides the grandchild affected your life?

Deflecting through humor his emotional response

masculinity

Dave: It was the growth of the family, and seeing my kids become parents.

Rob: That's what I'm talking about! Seeing my daughter become a mother, I'm going to have a Hallmark moment, but seeing that is the greatest and happiest experience of my life. The cycle of life is phenomenal. Do I miss work? Sometimes, but I don't miss the bullsh*t. But I'm so content, so happy.

Gary: The curve may be more reductive.

grateful for friendships

Bruce: My father-in-law is 91 and he took himself off the road but he'll tell you he's the happiest guy in the world, but he'll tell you he get frustrated when he can't do simple things. At that age I think it's moment to moment but he's still pretty happy. He really is lucky because he has good neighbors and us.

gearing up for life's third act

Dave: Think about people we know at Midway. I feel lucky to know them: Tess (age 92), Sy. People can't believe I call them my friends. I am going to keep working and they are so active and there is so much for them to do that it gives me a good feeling about the next chapter of my life.

Stress

Even if they've moved away, like Rhoda, it's a whole new adventure.

Rob: 91 is the new 71 and I'm promoting that!

traditional fear and shame

Bruce: My father is 76 and should use a walker but he's too proud.

requests permission from the group

Dave: So... I can tell you a funny story. For my birthday last year it was a joke to go for a pedicure with my son. We had a great time and we made a date to go with both sons and my son-in-law. It was a real bonding thing. How often you have someone rubbing your feet with rocks? I loved it.

masculinity

identification

Rob: My kids gave me a certificate for a grooming facial. I said, "Why did you do that?" And they said because we know you won't buy it for yourself.

Gary: And did you enjoy it?

Rob: I had a great time!

masculinity

Dave: And chances are none of our dads would have enjoyed it.

Rob: Probably not.

Session #6 *Gender equality in synagogue worship*

theologically, God as male

Ben: We know God doesn't have a body but because of movies and television we picture God as man with a long, white beard. Not as a woman. I like coming to services and sitting with my family. The idea that I go there and they go there, that doesn't work for me.

prefers mixed-seating

fatherhood

Jack: I agree. If I had a daughter, I'd want her to sit with me so I could show her what's going on.

defends Orthodoxy

Marc: I think I make a mistake when I judge the Orthodox. Because if you look at the numbers, the stricter you are about rules and the tradition, Halacha, the better that movement does. It's corollary, not causative. To be honest, I'd be fine if women didn't read Torah. I'm also fine if they do. But saying we're stronger because of that is probably not born out by any real data.

*protects daughters right against
mothers wish*

Ben: I know we give girls here the option of wearing a tallit at their Bat Mitzvah. To me, it's just so foreign, because I always thought that's what a man wore. My wife who grew up here wants nothing to do with a tallit. And when they started to introduce it to my daughter, my wife was kind of taken aback and she said, "No, she doesn't want to do that." And I said, "Wait, she has to make that decision."

Jack: We can now say to our daughters, "A woman can be president."

Bruce: I'm amazed that there is such a disparity of compensation between men and women in the workplace.

*contradictory theologically and
liturgically*

Ben: I'm not a fan of adding the matriarchs to the prayers because I think we shouldn't change the prayers. I think my daughters are equal but I can't include the matriarchs.

APPENDIX N

Rabbi Joel M. Levenson
Midway Jewish Center * Sermon for Rosh Hashana 5776 (2015)

The new movie *Inside Out* tells the story of a little girl, Rylie, forced to move with her parents from her beloved Minnesota to San Francisco. But the real story is what is happening in Riley's head. Various emotions shown as little humanoids run a control room where they vie to be in charge of Riley. Anger, Fear, Disgust, Sadness, and particularly Joy take turns at the controls. Through most of her life Joy has been dominant. Riley is, or at least was, a very happy little girl. But now, with the move to San Francisco, Joy is losing her grasp on Rylie.

Joy wants to keep Riley happy and works hard to keep Sadness in her place. In the end, it does not work. Joy seems to be losing Riley. But then Joy has a deep insight.

Joy realizes that in order for her to regain her primary position in Riley's mind, she needs to step aside and let Sadness take over the controls. Riley needs to feel and express the deep sadness she is experiencing upon leaving her previous home. She needed to let out her pain, be vulnerable, and tell her story.

Psychologist Dan Gottlieb, who has a radio show on NPR called "[Voices in the Family](#)," says that there are four words that can change the world for a person: **Tell Me Your Story**. As children and as parents, as lovers and as friends, we know the power of those words, and the capacity a truly empathetic listener can have to transform our lives. Tell me your story. How many of you have sat across the table from grandparents and had the stories they tell become part

of your story, shaping your identity? Indeed, those four words can change the world – with memory, and hope.

As one of your rabbis, I am honored to witness and hear your stories. As many of you know, I am in the middle of my studies towards a Doctor of Ministry Degree at Hebrew Union College in New York, a program for ordained clergy from all faith and traditions. My classes are on Mondays but the work impacts what I do every day here at Midway. I hope that the skills I am developing while in this doctoral program will enhance my abilities as a pastoral counselor to bring healing to those in pain, comfort to those who mourn, counsel to those who seek, and light where there is darkness.

It's a privilege for me to say to you, "Tell me your story." Many of you have come to me seeking counseling to handle concerns with your families or friends. Thank you for opening your hearts to me. I don't have all the answers, but together, in sacred space we can begin to address the questions.

This Machzor asks big questions: *"B'rosh Hashana yi'katayvu U'v'yom tzom Kippur y'chataymu.* On Rosh Hashana the decree is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed. Who will live and who will die. Who will achieve the measure of her time, and who will die before his time."

For me, the most powerful line of *U-N'taneh Tokef* is "*Mi Yihyeh, U-Mi Yamut—Who shall live and who shall die?*"

Who by fire, who by water? The questions are real. This year, members of this great congregation have endured house fires, floods, and endured organ transplants. The questions are real.

In a new book of commentary about the prayer *U'netaneh Tokef* called "[*Who by fire, who by water*](#)" Rabbi Ed Feinstein explains how he answers those questions. He's faced them personally. Eddie is the child of holocaust survivors.

He, himself, survived an earthquake that leveled part of his home and almost crushed him, and he is a survivor of colon cancer. Rabbi Feinstein takes the words "Who shall live and who shall die" very personally.

Listen to what he says: "I sat in shul for years reading these words before I realized the answer. The answer to each of these questions is "Me."

Who will live and who will die? I will. Who at their end and who not at their end? Me. Like every human being, when I die, it will be at the right time, and it will also be too soon. Fire, water, earthquake, plague? In my lifetime, I've been scorched and drowned, shaken and burdened, wandering and at rest, tranquil and troubled. That's been my life's journey.

Of course, I prefer to deflect this truth. I would much prefer to let the prayer talk about someone else, perhaps the fellow in the next row. It has taken a lifetime to reveal that defense is a lie. The prayer is not about someone else. It's about me. It is a frightfully succinct summary of my existence. So now I read it again, but in the first person, and it makes me shiver.

I will live and I will die, at the right time, and before my time. I will wander but I might yet find rest, I will be troubled but I may achieve tranquility."

Rabbi Feinstein comes to shul to tell God his story. He finds it in the Mahzor.

He also finds comfort, because he comes to shul with family, congregation, community, and he knows the power of prayer, repentance and deeds of kindness to make whatever life

brings more bearable and meaningful. He helps his congregation find all of that too, and that's what I try to do with you here at Midway.

With **all** of you – men and women. In particular, I have spoken to men at a moment of vulnerability. When preparing to open up, when on the verge of sharing, I've been asked if showing emotions, allowing tears and frustrations is OK, and I am constantly saying YES! We need to find more ways to help people tap into these vulnerabilities so they can heal.

Post-traumatic growth can be transformative. Jim Rendon is the author of [*Upside: The New Science of Post-Traumatic Growth*](#).

In his book he shares stories of people who despite the physical pain they suffered, the daily struggles they faced, their lives were unquestionably better today than before their traumatic experiences. Trauma sent them on a path they never would have found otherwise. Post-traumatic growth can be powerful. Studies have found that more than half of all trauma survivors [report positive change](#)—far more than report the much better-known post-traumatic stress disorder, so - what's your story? Rendon tells about one woman, a professional extreme skier, who was even thankful for a flying accident that nearly killed her and almost cost her a leg. She lost her career as an athlete but it opened up an entire part of her identity she never would have known about otherwise. She was forced to change and the change, although difficult, was overwhelmingly positive.

In [*Time Magazine*](#) this summer, Rendon says, “Growth begins with healing from trauma—it is not a free pass to avoid suffering. But, as researchers now know, people have the capacity to do far more than just heal. Given the right environment and mindset, they can

change, using the trauma, the suffering and struggle that ensues, as an opportunity to reflect, to search for meaning in their lives, to ultimately become better versions of themselves.”

Reflecting and the search for meaning requires taking risks and being vulnerable. We love to go up to Teddy Roosevelt State Park and wave at the Teddy Roosevelt Statue in Oyster Bay. In his 1910 speech “Citizenship in a Republic” Roosevelt praised those who: “at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.” Roosevelt reminds us that failing is the cost of taking important risks.

Storyteller and bestselling author [Brené Brown](#) takes that further. She gave a Ted Talk called “The Power of Vulnerability”. Brown contends that when we hear other people confess to their vulnerabilities, we find them to be courageous. When I hear you open up and confess your disappointment, frustrations, and fears, I’ll give you a hug. But when we confess to our **own** vulnerabilities, disappointments, frustrations, and fears, we feel ourselves to be weak. Brown asks us to see the capacity for vulnerability as an expression of courage and strength in ourselves. It takes such strength to reflect, search, share, and get vulnerable.

Therein lies an important lesson about the connection between joy and vulnerability. She says, “I thought vulnerability was the core of shame, fear and our struggle for worthiness. But it appears that vulnerability is also the birthplace of joy, creativity, of belonging, of love.”

Vulnerability is not just about the times we fear, the difficult conversations and challenging moments. It’s also about the times we love and crave and celebrate: knowing how good we’ve got it; going into remission; having a baby; being happy; falling in love.

It’s that same part of you that is willing to say as the volcanos did in that short film, [I lava you](#) - first. That requires vulnerability. The willingness to breath after your doctor calls after a

biopsy. That requires vulnerability. The willingness to invest in a relationship that may or may not work out. That requires vulnerability. But once we do that we may just set off triggers in our brain.

We're wired for story. [Neuroeconomist Paul Zak](#) has found that hearing a story—a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end—causes our brains to release cortisol and oxytocin. These chemicals trigger the uniquely human abilities to connect, empathize, and make meaning. Story is literally in our DNA.

What about OUR story? The story of our people. The Torah refers to this holiday of Rosh Hashana as *Yom Zikaron L'terua* – a day of remembering through sounding the shofar.

A story from the *Or Yesharim*, a Hasidic book: "After the shofar blowing was completed, the Baal Shem Tov said, 'In a king's palace there are hundreds of rooms, and on the door of each room there is a different lock that requires a special key to open it. But there is a master key which can open all the locks. That is a broken heart.

When a person sincerely breaks his heart before God, his prayers can enter through all the gates and into all the rooms of God's celestial palace'" (Or Yesharim)

Memory is complicated for human beings – so Yom HaZikaron is a necessity - not for God, but for us. What better day to deal in memory than the first day of a New Year. On Rosh Hashanah, God says—Tell me your story.

Judaism offers not only a hope but a program for protecting the future. In just a few days we will be reading from the closing portions of the Torah — the last words of Moses. Moshe Rabbaynu — Moses our teacher - who brought the tablets of laws from God on Sinai and who is

credited with conveying all of Torah - all 613 commandments — the foundation of all of Jewish tradition, makes one last appeal to our ancestors and, of course, to us.

In one of the most moving addresses he says: “*Zechor Yeymot Olam, Binu Shenot Dor v’dor*” – Remember the days of old, understand the years of generations.” Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; remember how we were liberated from Egypt. Remember our wandering in the desert, received Torah and a destiny. Remember every festival that we celebrate, every ritual we enact calls out to us - remember. “We are” - as Abraham Joshua Heschel said, “a people in whom the past endures, in whom the present is inconceivable without moments gone by.” And with memory comes hope, hope for a time when human beings will live together in peace enjoying that which unites them and that which makes them different, hope for the future.

What’s your story? I’m not about to reveal any names but I know that sitting here right now is someone who is totally consumed by the fact that her mother is dying.

And next to her is a man who came here – and he might not often come – to reinvest in his Jewish identity, which to him is cultural and not religious, and he’s not really sure how to define it, but he is here anyway. Sitting here today is someone who changed his family’s history because he took a risk and asked his parents to share their family medical history. Someone here is struggling with addiction, while someone else is struggling with how Israel fits into her story.

Tell me your story and maybe we can change the world.

What’s my story? We have a new custom on Shabbat in our home. It’s Friday night, we sit down for Shabbat dinner, we each need to answer the question: What are you working on this week? We’re all working on something. The kids may say: more patience, or less yelling. Leora

and I may say: more patience, and less yelling. I know I'm not a perfect parent, and I know that my kids aren't perfect.

Brene says on parenting: "Our job is during struggle to look at our kids and say: 'yeah, this is hard and this is tough and you're hurt, and I'm not gonna fix it, but you're not alone. And I wanna make sure you understand that this doesn't change the fact that you're worthy of love and belonging.'"

In my own life- I fall short. Forgetting, impatience, anger, when I'm too quick to judge. There is lots of work to do. The goal of non repetition. Of changing what I eat to increase my time with them. We're all working on something.

I'm just grateful. Grateful for another chance. Another chance to be a builder and lover in the world. Grateful for another year with my beautiful children, my fearless partner, family, community. Grateful that last month I took my family to Israel -- me, my wife Leora, our kids Shir, Sam, and Gideon & my mother-in-law Dee.

We went for a cousin's bar mitzvah, it was a tour of parks, playgrounds, and pools of Israel. It wasn't a relaxing week on the beach, but I'm so grateful we could do it. At the end of Yom Kippor we will say, "This year in Jerusalem." I'm ready to go back with you on a Midway Mission. I'm serious - it will change your life. You will know that Israel is safe, as you walk the streets of Tel Aviv and spend Shabbat in Jerusalem. You can go the Promenade and learn that it was on Talpiot that Abraham stood when he lifted his eyes and saw the spot called Mt. Moriah where he took Isaac and where the Temple was built. Go - it will change your story.

You will be inspired and enriched and informed and engaged, and you will wonder why you live here and not there, or why there feels like home when you were born here and you may struggle with how Israel fits into your story.

You will wish you knew more Hebrew and make sure your children learn more. Maybe you will experience a sense of miracle. Maybe Torah and prophets and prayer will speak to you in new way.

Maybe you will make sure your children go to Israel with USY or Ramah or Young Judea or a full gap year after high school with Nativ or Junior year of college, or Volunteers for Israel, or Birthright because you want them to find out they have a birthright. It will change their story.

Maybe you will sense that God wants something special for that place and people of which we are all a part—Israel, and we get to play a part in Israel's story.

Let us be willing to be vulnerable and take the risk to say, "Tell me your story." You can change the world with those four words. Let us be willing to hear, to learn, to witness for each other.

Let us be willing and open to take the risk and answer when someone asks - What's your story? At one point or another, Anger, Fear, Disgust, Sadness, or Joy take the controls. I invite you to tell me your story – together we'll uncover stories of strength and resilience and renewal, overcoming obstacles and transforming tragedy to triumph and together we'll let Sadness speak, make room for Joy to regain control, and maybe change the world.

Today, we come together at the beginning of a New Year; we stand at the threshold of the future. We stand before God. And we read these words from the Mahzor: *V'Tiftah Et Sefer*

HaZikhronot U-Meyalav Yikarey—You open the book of remembrance and it speaks for itself.

Ki Yad Kol Adam Bo—For the hand of every living being is set therein. What stories will we enter into the book in the year ahead?

On Rosh Hashanah, God says—Tell me your story...as an individual, as part of a family, as part of a congregation, community, country, as part of your people. God says: Tell me your story. And we have to decide: What is our story?