Impact of Bereavement on
The Spiritual and Emotional Identity of Jews by Choice

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This work is dedicated in memory of
my beloved friend Ann Ballinger and my mother Delle Gershenson.

From each of them I learned the true measure of love and how to live that love
with every fiber of my being in every moment of my life.

This work is offered in gratitude for my beloved friend and cousin, Barry Gershenson whose support and confidence nurtured strength. And this work is offered in gratitude for deep friendships that can begin and grow even after children are grown and have left home, and even while serving in public life, my dear friend Carolyn Abramson.

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Praise God for His goodness His steadfast love is eternal. (*Psalms* 118:1)

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Chapter I – The Problem or Issues Addressed by this Project

A. Background

The scope of this project is focused on a narrow population of Jews within the Conservative Movement. The Conservative Movement is presently looking at the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, focusing on intermarried couples. A concerted effort is being made to bring into the fold those who are intermarried who have not converted but, nonetheless, have become integral to our congregations, our communal life, and our social and religious endeavors. Some have married Jews; some stay on the periphery; some seem eager to join; others do not. If we are to reach out to this population in a sensitive way which will welcome them and their families, we have much to learn from those who already have converted to Judaism. We can learn about what attracted them, what involves them still, what they experienced as barriers to involvement, the history and shaping of their religious identity. Centering on bereavement issues, specifically, will provide not only a well-defined focus and will assist in finding language to communicate the experience.

B. The specific needs for ministry

Identify the challenges, coping mechanisms, and adjustments made by the convert and his/her family which manifest themselves at various times. Communal and familial responses build up or tear down relationships not only within family but to the greater Jewish community as well. Rabbi Maurice Lamm in Becoming a Jew writes,

> The problems of conversion are not solely or even primarily those that concern the conversion protocol. The most poignant problems, and often the most agonizing, deal with the human relationships recast by the decision to become a Jew. It changes attitudes, emotional investments, even the content of discourse among friends and relatives. The convert must learn to deal with the guilt, frustration and stupefaction of incredulous relatives who ask themselves how such a thing [conversion] could happen. (Lamm 1991, 235)

Lamm's words are filled with wisdom. They point to the kinds of thinking and unspoken words that rarely are acknowledged. What are the myriad of messages overt and covert sent by the family of origin and from the extended family? Does the convert experience the Jewish community as embracing or distancing? Is the community welcoming? When crisis befalls the convert, is he/she treated as a Jew by birth would be or as "other"? There is a reluctance that I have to overcome in the research and writing of this project and paper. When a person converts to Judaism, he/she is Jewish. Reference to the past is as if to create a barrier for the person. It would belie his/her present reality. However, the assumption of this paper is that by understanding the mechanics of social behavior with regard to the Jew by choice (convert), we can become more open to their reality and with this knowledge be more welcoming.

C. Relevance of this Project to Conservative Judaism

I met with Rabbi Jerome Epstein, Executive Director of The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, which is the lay organization for the Conservative Movement.

This organization works in tandem with the Rabbinical Assembly, the Cantor's Assembly, Women's League, Men's Club, the Jewish Educators Assembly, and Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA) representatives. Each of these represents a constituency within the Conservative Movement. Rabbi Epstein and I explored a variety of ideas about how my Doctor of Ministry Project could further the Movement's understanding of and response to Jews by choice. *Keruv* is a high priority at this time – *keruv* is the term used to welcome into the community the non-Jewish spouse in a Jewishly-identified home. Rabbi Epstein thought that my suggestion of focusing on people who have already converted would help us more fully understand the needs of this population.

I have also spoken with colleagues who serve in congregations. They think that the result of this research could provide us with some intellectual and practical tools for ministry.

D. Anticipated Outcome

The goal of this project is to measure change based on the impact of participating in small group sessions. If the change is based on group experience or what is learned in the group, it may indicate future trends for setting goals and priorities in Jewish communities. This project is based upon the assumption that Jewish leadership desires to create welcoming, inclusive communities. Questions pertaining to Jews by choice might lead to insights of how to attract Jews by birth who are also in our communities but remain marginal. Among of the questions to be considered are: Why does a person convert? How do those reasons impact or reflect the person's inner life? How does

bereavement impact or reflect spiritual life? How does it reflect or impact spiritual struggle?

I hope to find that communities which are energized around social justice issues will have a high responsiveness to the needs of individuals within the community. My hypothesis is that a community which is sensitive to the needs of people outside the community will also be sensitive to the needs of people within the community. It will be important to learn whether the level of Judaic knowledge indicates correspondence to the person's reaching for help within community at the time of bereavement or during the crisis leading to bereavement. My focus is on bereavement because it is a period of time charged with intense emotions during which people often regress in their emotional or behavioral habits. Why is this so and what are the dynamics during such regressions? How can we best respond?

According to psychology and bereavement studies early childhood experiences often emerge at such times. Often the earliest experience of separation will surface with painful intensity. The unique lens through which religion, psychology, medicine, sociology, and anthropology focus each contributes to understanding the universal human phenomenon of grief and mourning. Has community been supportive? Did it lead to healthy outcomes? If the mourner has not been affirmed in his or her grieving, what results? One question has been asked not only by scholars and theologians, but most especially by mourners throughout the centuries. In anguish the cry is: if everything dies, what is living worth? What is it about death that makes humans human? Beverly Raphael in Anatomy of Bereavement looks at grief through the evolutionary context,

> The pain of grief makes separation from the group or individual extremely stressful and this reinforces the social group. Where loss does occur the grief has to run its "biological" course. Charles Darwin's description of the expression of emotional grief and the response that these evoke in others would support such a model. Darwin (1872) concluded that the facial expressions typical of adult grief are composed of tendencies to scream like an abandoned child trying to attract its mother and of an inhibition of such screaming. Thus the bereaved brings others to him. This drawing together reaffirms the social group, and the ongoing life of the species.
>
> That grief, mourning, and the bereavement reaction evolved together as a distinct biopsychosocial behavioral system to ensure the survival of the human group and the human species is an attractive concept, perhaps chiefly because it gives the pain of death and loss a purpose and an immortality. (Raphael, 73)

Soloveitchik would say that the beast of the field is not aware of its own death (*xix*). It does not face death and consider how to change its ways to make life more meaningful. The human being has capacity to recognize that each of us is but a tiny speck on a grand landscape; but that we exist brings us to an overwhelming sense of awe and gratitude for the gifts of life, love and companionship and the awareness of past, present, and future. How can we use such awareness in ministering to bereaved people?

Chapter II – Principles that Guide and Inform

A. Religious principles pertinent to this Project, including relevant literature that clarifies and supports these principles.

Part A of Chapter II is divided into the following subsections: 1) Jewish Law (Halakhah) vis-à-vis mourning obligations and practices, 2) Definition of who is a Jew, and 3) Complications of mourning and grief vis-à-vis Jews by choice, converts, *gerim*. In the course of this paper people who are converts will be referred to in any of the following ways: Jews by choice, converts, or *gerim*. A household where one spouse/partner is Jewish and the other is not is referred to as intermarried or intermarriage. Each subject is explored broadly in order to stay focused on the bereavement process.

Dying, Death, and Mourning in Jewish Practice

Reference will be made throughout this section to Halakhah, Jewish Law. Literally this derives from the Hebrew verb "to walk, to go." Halakhah provides a pathway "to go" as we encounter our daily experiences throughout our lives. There are two extremes: the grandiose experiences and the mundane. Halakhah connects community to God. Halakhah defines the behaviors God desires for the people of Israel. The Jew lives in two spheres of reality. One is in relationship to the world, and the other is in relationship to God. God is concerned about how we treat the earth and all its inhabitants. Our love for God is reflected in how we relate to the earth and all that depend upon her. Our prayers and promises (or bargains) to God are incomplete if our

relationships here on earth are broken. Halakhah is ethical to its core. It is taught that God is concerned about how people conduct themselves here on earth?

For most people death is viewed as defeat. Almost anything will be tried to deny death its victory over life. Yet, in Judaism death is not a defeat; it is part of the continuum of life – life eternal. Observant Jews are guided by Halakhah which literally presents us with the path to take. Halakhah transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. This is especially true with regard to mourning.

Having worked in hospice and hospitals, I have witnessed people's suffering as they faced impaired health or their own demise. The emotional pain is excruciating. It is life altering and we are challenged to rethink our basic assumptions. [Such as] I believe that the rabbis who designed the laws of mourning understood human nature and human responses to loss. I think they had keen insight and these laws were designed in response to the existential reality. Codifying reality gives affirmation to the individual person's experience and language and behavior. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in his essay "Essential Nature of Mourning," defines what the emotions are at the core of the tasks of mourning. The term *kiyyum avelut* is the name he gives to this task:

> ... Halakhic mourning is not simply an assortment of duties, it is rather a positive halakhic undertaking that the mourner is called to fulfill, ... [it is] ...*kiyyum*. The specific laws of the mourning regimen are but the particulars of the larger, essential halakhic task of *kiyyum*. (*xxi*, 61ff)

> ...this *kiyyum* ... the thrust of the Rav's thesis – fulfilled primarily within the human heart, through grief and broken-heartedness. The

> obligatory observances are but an instrument toward, and expression of, the personal experience that is the essential fulfillment of halakhic mourning. Both elements are normative, but it is the experiential aspect which subtly underlies halakhic discussions of mourning practice.... (*xxii*, 61ff)

The laws of mourning acknowledge both time and place. The human is a social being and does not live in a vacuum. When loss occurs, it is a communal experience. The community reaches out to the individual who experiences the loss. The individual receives communal and Halakhic support. There are phases and stages that Halakhah identifies. The community is obligated to bring comfort and the individual is obligated to remember and to mourn. The greatest source of comfort is when we give the mourner freedom to express his/her grief and to mourn. This can be accomplished by listening to stories about the deceased. Often these stories are told over and over. One does not stifle the mourner's cries or the anguish. The comforter is a witness to the range of emotions. This is what it takes to give comfort. To do otherwise would invite pathology. (See Chapter II.B.)

Halakhah recognizes that individual mourning is a process. In the beginning it is intense, and over the course of time it becomes less painful. There are two stages that the mourner goes through. They are *aninut* and *avelut*. First is the state of shock, of utter despair and revulsion at the death of a loved one. This is a time when the person can hardly talk, let alone think clearly. Upon hearing of a death we cry out, *baruch dayan ha-emet* – God is the righteous judge! At this stage it is the only utterance that could be said. Nonetheless, these words could be very difficult to say or hear and eventually accept.

Halakhically the mourner is in a state of *aninut*. The mourner is exempt from all positive commandments (*mitzvoth aseh*) and is to be occupied only with tasks leading to burial. The Judaic value is: *kibud hamet* – honor of the deceased. From the moment burial is completed, the mourner's status changes to *avelut*. The turning point is when the mourner recites the *kaddish* prayer for the first time since the death took place. Within an instant his status has changed from one who was exempt of mitzvoth to a person who now is obligated to mitzvoth. Furthermore, the community changes its focus as well. The community turns its attention to the mourner by bringing comfort *niḥum avelim*. (Soloveitchik, *xix*)

Halakhah reminds us of our humanity at a time when our emotions betray our dignity. We praise God as creator of life and death. When our world is crashing in on us, we are mindful that the world is going about its business in spite of our loss. We are part of creation, not the center of creation. (Lamm 2003, 93) The *kaddish* prayer will be recited throughout mourning, on the anniversary of death (*yarhzeit*), and at all memorial services (*yizkor*). At first we will feel strange, removed from ourselves and distant from community while reciting it. Mourning is a time to go inward, to reflect on the purpose and meaning of life. Curiosity leads one to look at the translation of these Aramaic words which were the lingua franca of the Jewish people 1500 years ago. There is no mention of death. "This prayer is a praise of God, an awareness that, far from being insignificant like the beasts of the field, man is important enough for God Himself to be concerned with his praise. Saying *Kaddish*, then, is a defiance of death, a statement not only about the greatness of God, but about the greatness of man." (Soloveitchik, *xix*)

For whom is the *Kaddish* said? Halakhah recognizes that people may have many relationships that will inspire grief when that person or those persons die. Yet Halakhah obligates only the closest relatives. These are: father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, or a spouse. (Lamm 1969, 22)

What are we to do with our emotions? What are we to do in the face of suffering? Halakhah calls us to act. We are called "to do." How we act will change over the course of time. Halakhah responds by dividing the tasks between mourner and community and distinguishes segments of time. Mourning is distinguished in time measured from the moment of death. *Aninut*, above, is from the time of death through interment. This is when "*meto muttal lefanav*" when his dead lies before him" (Soloveitchik, 13). *Avelut* is divided into: *Shivah* which extends to *Sheloshim* and The 12 months (Soloveitchik, 13). Shivah commences with the first recitation of the *kaddish* and lasts seven days. Shabbat is counted among the days of *shivah*. *Sheloshim* also begins at interment and has two connotations. One is, the 30 days between burial and the 30th day which is the end point of those 30 days. It is also the identification of the 30th day. People will ask, "When is *sheloshim*?" which means "When are the 30 days?" The reason for this distinction is that this completes the formal, public mourning for all relatives except for parents. "Mourning for those bereaved of their parents terminates at the end of 12 Hebrew months." (Lamm 1969, 144)

Each of these stages has its own distinguishing features. In *aninut* the details of burial take precedence. The Hebrew Burial Society – *chevre kaddishah* – prepares the body for burial. In reverence for the deceased – *kavod hamet* – men will prepare a man's body and women will prepare a woman's body. In hushed silence the only sounds are

prayer and movement of washing and then the purification ritual (*taharah*). The body is dressed in simple linen shrouds (*tachrichin*). This is how s/he will be dressed when facing the *Kaddosh Baruch Hu* (The Holy One of All Being). This is reminiscent of how the High Priest was dressed on Yom Kippur when he entered the Holy of Holies to plead on behalf of community. The body has not been left alone, since the dying process began (*goses*), and in death a *shomer* (guardian) sits with the body reading the *Book of Psalms* until the funeral begins.

Interment is a reminder of the end to which we all will come. The community gathers to accompany (*leviat ha-met*) the deceased to his/her final resting place. There are seven pauses until reaching the open grave. Those pauses give us extra time to reflect on deeper questions that emerge in each of us. We are all gathered at that grave because of the person whose death brought us together. Some of us will be strangers to one another. Each of us will be flooded with emotions, thoughts, reactions. Perhaps we will be numbed by the intensity. We are like isolates, yet we are in a community. A striking blow reverberates through us as the first thud of earth hits the coffin (a plain pine box – there is no ostentation). Death is real. We cannot hide. We cannot run from it. "From dust you came, to dust you shall return." "The Lord gives and the Lord takes. Praised be the Lord." The whole community is invited to help bury the dead by shoveling earth onto the coffin.

The interment is completed by the Hebrew prayer *E-l male raḥamim* an ancient affirmation that unto eternity we all must go. The *kaddish* is recited. Those who are gathered create a path for the mourners to walk through as the mourners prepare to leave the cemetery. As the mourners walk between the assembled groups, a Hebrew formula is

recited. This is the same formula which will be said at the *shivah* home when comforters speak to the mourner and it will be said at the synagogue Friday evening of the shivah week as the mourners enter the sanctuary before the Psalm for Shabbat will be recited. The phrase is: *ha-Makom yenachem eitchem b'toch sh'ar avelei Zion v'Yerushalaim* – המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים – "May God comfort you together with all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. When said at the cemetery it is a symbolic transition or shift from focus on the deceased to the mourners." (Harlow, 265)

Beginning with *avelut* the mourner will experience many changes throughout the 7-days of *shivah*. One cannot help but be struck by the similarities *shivah* has to Yom Kippur the Day of Atonement. In both cases all participants are aware of life's fragility. Inner examination will bring new insights and perhaps *teshuvah* – repentance. The customs and practices strip away our social amenities, forcing us to examine our lives and our behaviors. Among the practices that are forbidden is the wearing of leather shoes, bathing (except for hygiene), anointing oneself, washing of clothes, or conjugal relations. On Yom Kippur there is fasting. In the *shivah* home the meal of condolence (*seudat havra'ah*) is brought by friends and community. When onlookers do not know what to do, they have the job of comforting the mourner. The meal of condolence is meant only for the closest family and friends. Food that comes into a *shivah* home is supposed to take care of the family; it is not intended for partying. In our awkwardness we do not know what to say or what to do.

Halakhah says, "Say nothing." We let the mourner guide us. We are told not to offer words of comfort the first three days. The mourner's emotional state is too raw for him/her to hear anything but the voices within that can be either numbing or yearning the

deceased's presence. After that if s/he wants to talk, we listen. We might ask about the deceased, Soloveitchik offers the following insight.

We go about our lives often ignoring opportunities to get to know people whom we encounter along the way. Death happens, and we realize how little we know about the person. We want to know more, and yet why did we not take the time while the person was alive? This is a period of time of introspection. For Soloveitchik it is likened to Yom Kippur in that our introspection has us pondering not only the meaning of life, but also our own life's purpose. We question ourselves – the mourner and the comforters experience this process. The questions we ask ourselves may bring us to new realizations and potential for our own transformation. Death happens to all. The question before each of us: How do we respond? Choice is in our hands.

Mirrors are covered. There are many explanations but it is Soloveitchik's that I am most drawn to (29-30). The Talmud says that upon learning of the death, the mourner turns the bed upside down. In our world today that seems strange. But what does it signify? The bed is identified as the place of looking to the future – new life is created in that bed. This is a time not to look to the future, but to look back and learn from the past. Mirrors are a place for primping. They are the locus for self-absorption and preening. Just the opposite of what the need calls for during *shivah*.

The mourner does not leave the house. The community comes to the mourner. The prayer service (*minyan*) comes to the mourner's home daily. However, the mourner will attend Shabbat services at synagogue. During this week the mourner will sit on a low stool separating her/him from pleasures. In body language, it shows how low in spirit

he's come. He will not even engage in study. At the end of the week the mourner walks around the block. This symbolizes the difficult task of reentry into ordinary daily life.

Avelut is complete yet the mourner is not back to normal. *Sheloshim* is the 30-day period of grieving for all relationships except for parents. Our mourning for parents lasts 12 Hebrew months. During *sheloshim* one still does not buy new clothes, cut hair, or attend festive gatherings. We accept that this person may conclude *sheloshim* physically, but the memory of the loved one will remain with him/her always. Memory could be stirred by a fragrance, a food, a calendar date, anything that connects to the deceased. There is the empty chair at holidays. There are the life cycle events and other events this person will not be physically part of and we will yearn for their counsel, their presence. Four *yizkor* services (memorial services) are held each year. At the completion of each of the three Festivals and on Yom Kippur a *yizkor* service cushions us and enabling us to remember. The tradition sets in motion opportunities that enable us to go forward.

The question of afterlife is inevitably asked. For many Jews this is anathema. Yes, we live in the present. We do not ignore the present in the hopes that a better tomorrow awaits us. Judaism is an activist tradition. We live in the present; we are called to make a difference in the world. We are called to action. Abraham Joshua Heschel said of death,

> The greatest problem is not how to continue but how to exalt our existence. The cry for a life beyond the grave is presumptuous, if there is no cry for eternal life prior to our descending to the grave. Eternity is not perpetual future but perpetual presence. He has planted in us the

> seed of eternal life. The world to come is not only a hereafter but also a *herenow*.
>
> Our greatest problem is not how to continue but how to return. "How can I repay unto the Lord all his bountiful dealings with me?" (*Psalms* 116:12) When life is an answer, death is a home-coming. (Dresner, 71-72)

There are many ways our lives continue. Genetically we are implanted within our children and our children's children. In the many ways we have interacted with the world, we have etched our presence on those whom we have encountered. Endowments assure that our values survive our deaths and impact the lives of others for generations. A quote from Wernher von Braun supports this conclusion (Lamm 2003, 161).

> Science has a real surprise for the skeptics. Science, for instance, tell us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace. Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation. Now if God applies this fundamental principle to the most minute and insignificant parts of His universe, doesn't it make sense to assume He applies it also to the human soul? I think it does. And everything science has taught me and continues to teach me strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without a trace.

Who is a Jew?

Religious questions originate from rabbis at the local level such as a synagogue or communal organization. The question is submitted to The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS) of the Rabbinical Assembly (RA). The question is termed: *She'elah* – question. The response from the CJLS is called: *teshuvah* – responsa. Jewish communities throughout the centuries have written to the religious authorities seeking guidance on local matters of Halakhah. The CJLS is a committee of the Rabbinical Assembly. It consists of 25 members. Fifteen are appointed by the President of the Rabbinical Assembly, five by the Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA), and five by the President of The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ). All appointees are approved by the Executive Council.

Rabbis in the Conservative movement are held to well-defined Standards. In 1986 "A Standard of Rabbinic Practice Regarding Determination of Jewish Identity" was adopted. There are issues of Halakhah which are affected by status. Because there has been a rise in the number of intermarriages (marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew), there is a need to define Jewish identity. A person is a Jew either by being born to a Jewish mother (matrilineal descent) or through conversion. This has been the normative practice for more than a thousand years. Conversion is predicated upon the individual's completion of a course of study, approval by a religious court (of three religiously knowledgeable Jews) and immersion (*tevilah*) in a ritual bath (*mikvah*) for both men and women and circumcision for men. There are no exceptions to these rules. Once converted, there is no question that the person is Jewish and accountable to all Jewish laws and practices just as any person who was born to Jewish parents.

Though the prospective convert is turned away three times to test his or her seriousness, tradition tells us that the convert is precious in the eyes of God. On page 440 of Klein's Guide to Jewish Religious Practicé he brings a Midrash (religious text which expands upon a theme):

> "Dearer to God is the proselyte who has come of his own accord than all the crowds of Israelites who stood before Mount Sinai. For had the Israelites not witnessed the thunder, lightning, quaking mountains, and sounding of trumpets, they would not have accepted the Torah. But the proselyte, who saw not one of these things, came and surrendered himself to the Holy One, blessed be He, and took the yoke of heaven upon himself. Can anyone be dearer to God than this man [person]?" (*Tanhuma*, ed. Buber, *Lekh Lekhah* 6 f., 32a).

Impact of Bereavement on Jews by Choice

Yet there is ambivalence. There are times that the community is cautious of the reasons for conversion. If it is only for the purpose of marriage, how will this endure? This question is especially pertinent in today's milieu with such a high divorce rate. What will happen if the couple divorces? What will the impact be on their children? Will the conversion be sustained? For the sake of communal stability conversion is not taken lightly. Judaism holds high standards for those born into the faith all the more so for those who choose to join the faith. There are occasions in the course of a lifetime that will test the mettle of religious affection. Life cycle events are among those occasions. Exposure to death and bereavement will do this not only for Jews by birth but also for those who have chosen to become Jewish. Rabbi Marion Shulevitz explores this.

Rabbi Marion Shulevitz noted in her summer 1991 article "Straining the Seams: The Impact of Death and Mourning on Converts, Intermarried Couples and their Children" which appeared in the journal *Conservative Judaism* (CJ), there are numerous questions attendant to the probing driving concerns in her article. Shulevitz studies the impact of death on these individuals and their families. As a hospital chaplain, she is particularly aware of the nuanced issues and the impact of welcome as well as hesitation from the community upon these individuals. She writes,

> Coping with grief is hard enough for a committed Jew, comfortable with his or her religious rituals. But for the convert torn between two traditions, for the child of an intermarriage who has only the memory of a tradition, or for a surviving spouse of a different religion who must deal with an alien, unknown or rejected tradition, this trauma is far more difficult to handle. (56)

She considers various angles of the dilemma. She factors in the number of years since conversion took place, the developed Jewish identity, and level of familiarity with Jewish practices. She probes the support derived from Jewish mourning practices and how they compare to the Christian rituals and practices in the home of origin. The role of afterlife might or might not be a concern. Was this person's belief system supported or not? How well prepared was the person for dealing with end-of-life decision-making regarding practices and rituals?

There will be other questions and concerns for other members of the immediate and the extended family. For this paper the focus will be only on Jews by choice – those who have converted to Judaism. Among those whom she interviewed, she found that

"Most Conservative rabbis encourage Jews by choice in their congregations to use the appropriate Jewish rituals of mourning, even though Halakhah does not oblige a convert to mourn his or her non-Jewish parents" (57). She cited Orthodox "Rabbi Maurice Lamm's view, that a convert should not observe Shivah or say Kaddish for a non-Jewish parent, [as] the most restrictive position" (Lamm, 1969, 82, 83). "Rabbi Mayer Rabinowitz expresses the official Conservative view: though we do not encourage a convert to observe Shivah, there is no halakhic objection since 'The purpose of the ritual is to help the living rather than for the benefit of the dead. Since the living is a Jew, we would not object.'" (CJ, 58)

"One of the most important issues for all converts dealing with bereavement is the response of their Jewish community and the role of their rabbi."(58) If they feel embraced, nurtured, and supported it will likely solidify their relationship to Judaism and to their community. If the response is the opposite, this could create a crisis to which the converted Jew could turn away from the community and the Jewish religion. Therefore there was a need to clarify ways in which our communities could support the converted Jew. The question was submitted to the CJLS: How should converts to Judaism mourn the death of close relatives who are not Jewish?

Seven years after the above article was published, Rabbi Joel E. Rembaum submitted the responsa which was approved by the CJLS 1998. There are some interesting assumptions that Halakhah makes. For instance, the person who converts is like a new-born infant with no ties to their non-Jewish parents or family. The Hebrew reads *ger sh'nitgayyer* - גד שנתגייר כקטן שנולד דמי. Which Jewish practices should the

converted Jew participate in with regard to mourning and grieving a non-Jewish relative? Should s/he recite Kaddish, sit shivah?

Rabbi Rembaum concludes his *Teshuvah*:

> How should converts to Judaism mourn the death of close relatives who are not Jewish? should be: converts to Judaism are required to follow regular Jewish bereavement practices when mourning the death of non-Jewish parents and close relatives, just as born Jews would for Jewish family members. To do less would be to deny *gerim* the full benefit of the structured Jewish mourning procedures and would leave converts with the sense that Judaism establishes a double standard in evaluating people's feelings of grief. To do less would encourage *gerim* to supplement their mourning rituals with customs derived from other religious traditions. Seeing *gerim* observing modified mourning rituals would reinforce the tendency in born Jews to do less than what is required in grieving over the death of Jewish relatives and the inclination in certain Jews to view *gerim* as being not fully Jewish. *Gerim* are fully Jewish, and as Jews they should express and manage grief in a full, complete Jewish way, regardless of the religious beliefs of the deceased. In this way *gerim* will know that Judaism has provided them with the means of showing honor to loved ones and has provided them with the vehicle for finding comfort and reinforcement from community, friends, family and God.

The convert's, *ger*, feelings of grief are taken into consideration just as would be the case with the Jew by birth. The universal experience of bereavement is to be shaken to the core by questions of faith, relationship to God, the meaning of life, the value of the deceased's life and one's own life. Will there be an afterlife? How will the community respond to the *ger*? Will his/her grief be acknowledged as legitimate? Or is his/hers a disenfranchised grief (Doka, 2002). There are nuanced reactions to death that psychology, thanatology and Judaism understand. First, let us explore Judaism's relationship to the end of life. In the next section of this paper the study of dying, death, and grief will be examined through the psychological lens.

Chapter II – Principles that Guide and Inform

B. Clinical principles pertinent to the Project, including relevant literature that clarifies and supports these principles.

The brief history of psychological theories defining healthy and pathological bereavement begins with Sigmund Freud. According to recent thanatology scholars Freud emphasized the need to cut ties with the deceased in order to proceed with new, healthy life-choices. This has become a point of contention and a point of departure in the bereavement field. To understand the influence of contemporary theories, one must first learn the terms and the context within which these are situated. Following will be a brief survey of the impact of Kübler-Ross, Freud, Lindemann and Bowlby whose works shape contemporary discussions.

Definitions and Terms:

Bereavement studies look at the individual in the context not only of what is happening within the bereaved person but also the confluence of factors that surround and influence the particular person. Once death has occurred, the bereaved will experience phases to one degree of intensity or another and for varying lengths of time. These phases are universal. What will determine the pathological vs. the healthy response to the death of a loved one will be determined by the individual's ability to experience these phases and to move forward rather than being fixed on the past. The phases are: avoidance, confrontation and accommodation (Rando, 33). As the individual "tries to maintain psychological equilibrium by alternately avoiding and approaching [the reality of the loss] he attempts to process it and work it through." (Rando, 35)

The individual will experience psychological, behavioral, social, and physical changes in response to the death of a loved one. Each of these will affect the way he or she will be experienced by others. The ebb and flow of these impacts will contribute to the quality of bereavement and the ability to move forward.

Terms which will be used throughout this paper are: loss, bereavement, grief, and mourning. Loss is a synonym for death. However, as Therese Rando informs that there are two kinds of loss, each of which is grieved. These losses are physical loss, which is tangible, and psychosocial or symbolic loss which is intangible (19). There are secondary losses as well (20). With each kind of loss the experience of loss and reaction to it will vary depending upon the individual experience. (Rando):

1. Bereavement is the state of having suffered a loss. Any type of change necessarily involves loss, at the very least, loss of the status quo. There are three types of change that constitute loss: 1) developmental loss, 2) loss resulting from normal change and growth, and 3) competency-based loss. Secondary loss whether physical or psychosocial coincides with or develops as a consequence of the initial loss (20).
2. Grief is the process of experiencing the psychological, behavioral, social, and physical reactions to the perception of loss. Grief is experienced in four ways: psychologically, behaviorally, socially, and physically. Grief is a continuing development – there are many changes. It is a natural, expectable reaction. Its absence is

abnormal (emphasis added). It is a reaction to all types of loss and is dependent upon the individual's unique perception of loss. (22)

3. Mourning is intrapsychic, including adaptive behaviors. It promotes three operations with regard to the undoing of bonds. 1) Related to the deceased: undoing psychosocial ties binding the mourner to the loved one; with the eventual facilitation for development of new ties. 2) Related to the self: mourning helps the survivor adapt to the loss. 3) Related to the world: mourning helps the mourner learn how to live in a healthy way in the new world without the deceased. Thus it provides and 'external focus' for the mourner. (23)

Psychology and Thanatology: Study of Dying, Death, and Mourning

In 1969 Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross published her landmark book On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own families. She advanced public awareness of the emotions dying people experience. She broke ground, inviting future studies of emotions of bystanders and loved ones as they face the death of loved ones and their grief in their absence.

Medicine has advanced life in numerous ways. In the past a person might die from epidemic, accident or disease. Today life is extended. What would have been considered a terminal sentence just a few decades ago today condemns the person to chronic illness. Thus death is delayed. Often death takes place in a hospital, nursing home, or some other clinical setting. It is often removed from the careful gaze of family and friends. So, the agonies of the dying process have been distanced from the patient,

the family and friends. Since doctors are able to prolong life through wonder drugs, it is often perceived that life and deaths are in the hands of the doctor. I personally have witnessed a doctor performing heroic measures even though the patient was actively dying. I have heard doctors or loved ones say, "Well, now it is in God's hands." My response usually is, "It has always been in God's hands."

This statement reminds those who are present that we are participants in a drama that is far greater than we can comprehend. We are part of a universe created by the ultimate artist. We have the privilege to be witness to the "awesome presence". We are like Moses who was hidden in the cleft of the rock. God covered Moses' eyes so that he could not see God's face, but Moses could see God's back after God had passed by that place. We are witnesses to God's greatness by witnessing God's creation. The doctors are merely part of the glove God wears when touching our lives (Paula Garrett z"l). Medicine can prolong life but it cannot create ex-nihilo. Doctors are partners in the Divine Plan. When we too see that, we will become partners with them. However, when we relinquish authority to doctors we give up our autonomy. Our autonomy enables us to care for the holy vessel God created as a container for our souls. When we give credence to our sacredness, then we become aware of our potential. Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross was able to witness the human experience in her patients' health and in their dying.

She practiced medicine when patients often placed themselves into the care of a doctor and would not question what was considered divine wisdom. Patients were not treated as holy vessels but as "this" or "that" which the doctor and medical staff operated on. You were the "liver" or the "appendectomy" or the "heart patient" but you were not Mr. or Ms. So and So. You were not a human being. Rather than a tabla rosa to be acted

upon, she experienced people as they faced their own demise. She experienced their shock and denial and named it such. She watched as this phase of their life inspired most to go inward and become isolated from others. Isolation by loved ones also happened and was often in response to the realization that death would soon be taking place. But, the patient often would go inward to explore deeper questions of the meaning of his/her life and the contribution s/he may have made to the world. Other emotions would ebb and flow. Anger would be expressed at God, at the world, at the self who may have ignored the precious gift of life, at anything and everything as a response to the verdict.

The dance with reality, physical and emotional, often resulted in an attempt to bargain with God or whatever the perceived powers were. "Just a little more time! Please God, a little more time until ...." Perhaps a miracle like the splitting of the sea could take place. When the hoped-for miracle did not materialize, the person's mood often gave way to depression. Depression was an acknowledgment that bargaining won't help. That anger was useless. That denial might delay realization but won't change reality. Finally, in acceptance of the verdict the person might reach out toward others. There might be the good-byes that needed to be said, or confessions of forgiveness and request for forgiveness might take place. Or the person might stay hidden within him/herself where it felt safe. Kübler-Ross' great achievement was to remove anonymity from the dying person and to define the experience of dying as normative. She brought people's humanity to the fore.

She described stages that a person would go through: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. For a number of years her work became the bible to understand death and dying. If a person did not navigate those stages in their proper

order, it was considered that they were not doing it right. Or perhaps the witnesses were not recognizing what was happening. In the bereavement field today it is recognized that people die and face dying in their own unique, idiosyncratic ways. There is no one way to face dying. In fact there are as many ways to face dying as there are human beings on the planet.

Kübler-Ross' breakthrough created a foundational tier in the scaffolding of Thanatology studies that exists today, more than 40 years later. Psychiatry and medicine had focused on individual responses to bereavement experience before this. A combination of circumstances eventually led to a field of Thanatology, study of death and dying. Psychiatrist such as Freud had noted the influence of grief and mourning on patients, but it was not until 1917 that Freud focused specifically on this area. He published "Mourning and Melancholia" in which he discussed the taxonomy of healthy mourning and the pathological melancholia (understood today as chronic depression). He described mourning as "a longing for something lost" and he commented that "uncoupling associations is always painful" (Rando 1993, 80). Freud expanded his views throughout his lifetime and was affected deeply by deaths in his own family. His personal experience of the struggle to relinquish attachments to his deceased loved ones heightened his awareness of the painful affect of "letting go."

"Psychodynamic aspects – Psychodynamic explanations of mourning rather than of the whole bereavement process rely heavily on the work of Freud in his classic paper 'Mourning and Melancholia'" (1917) (Raphael, 20). But, he came to this seminal work after having worked with patients whose pathologies contained within them some referent to bereavement. Originally he thought that when a person responded to the death

of a loved one by absorbing aspects of the deceased's personality, Freud understood this as an aberration. His term was *identification*. Other clinicians will call it *introjection*. It was only after studying the mechanics of the bereavement process that he began to see this behavior as normative.

For Freud the term "mourning" indicated a healthy process of adjustment to the death of a loved one. "Melancholia" described the pathological response. In today's terminology, melancholia would mean clinical depression. Rather than the person being able to move forward and make a life, this person became blocked or stuck and could not move forward with life. He saw how painful it was for his patients to detach from the deceased. When considering how "cathexis" or attachments evolve over the course of hundreds and thousands of experiences, then to detach or "hypercathect" requires a slow painful process. To be able to move forward, one would have to hypercathect. Over the course of a lifetime and in response to his own experience of grief and mourning he came to understand that one does not "get over it" completely. There will always be lingering attachments, but those attachments would not prevent the mourner from moving forward with life. Margaret Stroebe,

> Freud conceptualized love as the attachment (cathexis) of libidinal energy to the mental representation of the loved person (the object). When the loved person dies, the libidinal energy remains attached to thoughts and memories of the deceased. Because the pool of energy is limited, the cathexis to the lost object has to be withdrawn in order for the person to regain these energy resources. The ties to the loved object are severed by a process of energy detachment that Freud termed

> *hypercathexis*. Freud saw the psychological function of grief as freeing the individual of his or her ties to the deceased, achieving gradual detachment by means of reviewing the past and dwelling on memories of the deceased. This process is complete when most of the energy is withdrawn from the lost object and transferred to a new one. Those who fail to hypercathect remain emotionally stunted. (Klass, 33)

Schools of clinical thought and clinical practice evolved around Freud's writing. The challenge in the field of Thanatology has been to undo some of the practices and thinking that resulted from a strict reading of Freud in his early years without taking into consideration the evolution of his theories. For instance, many clinicians practiced with patients and taught in academies. They imposed on generations of people that one must let go completely in order to go on with life. They labeled "holding on" as unhealthy. Even when confronted with the reality of how people cling to memories of their deceased loved ones, people were pushed to conform to the standards of what was healthy.

> Erich Lindemann's 1944 study "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief" is a classic which influenced the field of grief.
>
> Lindemann identified three tasks which he called "grief work". They are: emancipation, readjustment, and formation (Rando, 90). The bereaved emancipates himself or herself from the shackles of that bind one to the deceased. Readjustment is the phase of rethinking one's life in the absence of the deceased. Formation is the steps one takes to face a future

without the deceased – this is a matter of facing forward and going forward.

> Lindemann delineates five points that are pathognomonic for grief: somatic distress, preoccupation with the image of the deceased, guilt, hostile reactions, and loss of patterns of conduct. He notes that a sixth characteristic, quite striking but not as conspicuous as the other five, is often shown by individuals bordering on pathological reactions. This is the appearance in the bereaved's behavior of traits belonging to the deceased, especially symptoms of the deceased's final illness behavior that may have been shown at the time of the tragedy. Lindemann theorizes that normal preoccupation with the deceased witnessed in acute grief is transformed into a preoccupation with the deceased's symptoms or personality traits and is then displaced to the bereaved's own body through the process of identification. (Rando, 89)

A landmark book was published in 1996. Continuing Bonds is the result of clinicians looking at the facts that were presented to them by their patients and not blinding themselves by rigid theory. Dennis Klass, Phyllis Silverman and Steven Nickman were hailed by their colleagues and in the academies for recognizing the "healthy" holding on that enables mourners to go forward with their lives and to make new relationships.

What is remarkable about this is that by looking at just one religious tradition, Judaism, it is clear that holding on can indeed be not only healthy but also sacred. In a liturgical year – a full year of cyclical religious events – memory is called forward.

There will be historical events that are remembered, but that is not the focus of this paper. At each celebration of an historical event, will also be the synagogue and home rituals that accompany that event. For instance, there are three pilgrimage festivals celebrated ritually in the synagogue and at home through festive meals.

These are occasions for gathering together. Since the pilgrimages connect to the throngs of pilgrims who historically made their way from wherever they lived to Jerusalem, there is a sense of shared history and shared purpose. The very people who gather together from year to year build a lifetime of memories. They share stories about what happened during the year and also memories of past celebrations, years before. As the gatherings expand because of marriage and new life, the shared memories expand. How does one cope with diminishment at the family table? Does the family ignore the absence of Uncle Sol or Aunt Minnie? Does the family just cut the tie and say get on with life? Not in Judaism. The "empty chair" is remembered in the heart, in the home and in the synagogue.

There is a memorial service, *yizkor*, which is celebrated on the last day of each of the festivals and on Yom Kippur the Day of Atonement. The word *yizkor* derives from the Hebrew root which means to remember. In Judaism the community is called upon to remember, not just communal events, but especially the human ties that make a people a people. Our attachments to one another are reinforced with each shared experience.

John Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1980) explains how these bonds function psychologically. These bonds are instinctually repeated in relationships throughout the individual's life. The healthy development of attachments begins with the infant-parent dyad. Basically, when the child is responded to, Bowlby (230),

"During the course of healthy development, attachment behavior leads to the development of affectional bonds or attachments, at first between child and parent and later between adult and adult. This attachment behavior is instinctive and mediated through homeostatic behavioral systems.

The infant's sense of self is developed from the earliest days. When parenting is nurturing, the child will feel secure and loved. When the parenting is unresponsive the child will feel that the world is not safe and others are uncaring. Regardless of the relationship this is the only way of being that the infant knows. This relationship will be played out throughout life. When adult relationships trigger early responses, the adult will react instinctively based on this early pairing. The infant is totally dependent upon the parent. The infant's greatest fear is of abandonment; the infant's survival depends upon this relationship. Bowlby says that many of the most intense emotions arise in "the formation, the maintenance, the disruption and the renewal of attachment relationships." (Bowlby 230)

Death of a loved one triggers these early instinctual responses. One of the reasons the pain of adult bereavement is so intense is that it is tapping into the adult's preverbal, subconscious memories. It is as all consuming as is the infant's experience of being unattended. Just as the infant will try anything to attract the parent's attention the mourner too cries out for the deceased, dreams of the deceased, introjects aspects of the deceased's personality just to keep the deceased "alive" within.

In the infant the only way to assuage the pangs is for the parent to arrive and respond to the infant's needs. When death has occurred, the system of relating will have

been permanently altered. A new system will develop. It may be healthy or it may be maladaptive. Bowlby (230), emphasis added:

> The bond formed by attachment behavior endures of itself, and the attachment behavioral systems are activated by conditions such as strangeness, fatigue, separation from or unresponsivity of the attachment figure (p. 203).
>
> When the attachment bond is endangered by separation, powerful attachment behaviors such as clinging, crying, and angry coercion and protest are activated and there is acute physiological stress and emotional distress. If the protest and behavior are successful in reestablishing the bond, then they cease, and the states of stress and distress disappear. When the effort to restore the bond fails, then behaviors may fade, only to return when cues activate them such as reminders of the lost person or unmet needs.
>
> The behavior remains..."constantly primed" and may become reactivated. This leads to chronic stress and distress. Eventually these behaviors become extinguished, and new attachment bonds are formed, or it may be that in some instances the relationship persists in altered form in fantasy (Bowlby, p. 98), and this for some may be the preferred solution. In others it may be that the chronic stress or distress persists, leading to ill health.

Continuing Bonds, though hailed as a breakthrough (p. 13 above), was also met with resistance. Any new theory has to win colleagues' confidence and prove practical.

An individual who writes a great deal and lectures about grief is Therese Rando. She has written textbooks and has lectured extensively. She expands upon the foundations of those who came before her and gives credit to the influential work of Beverly Raphael. Rando's ambivalence is reflected on page 14 of Continuing Bonds,

> In Rando's 1991 presidential address to the Association for Death Education and Counseling (1992), we see the cognitive difficulty of attempts to expand the dominant model of grief to accommodate to the idea of an ongoing bond. She said that 'developing a new relationship with the deceased' was part of moving 'adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old' (Rando, p. 45). Yet three lines later, she defined pathology as the attempt to maintain relationships to the deceased:
>
> In all forms of complicated mourning, there are attempts to do two things: (1) to deny, repress or avoid aspects of the loss, its pain and the full realization of its implications for the mourner; and (2) to hold onto, and avoid relinquishing, the lost loved one. (p. 45)

Klass et. al, claim that "to be involved in more than one relationship at a time, is part of the human condition whether the other people in the relationship are present, absent, or dead. ... Separateness predominates in modern Western cultures." (15) Klass, Silverman, and Nickman came to their theory by examining the methods that science employs. They engage in the qualitative vs. quantitative argument (20).

If grief is about construction and reconstruction of a world of our relationships with significant others, what research methods are appropriate to investigate it?

It seems to us that the link between these findings and the method of study was no accident. Empirical research methods in the social sciences have their roots in the modern world view that focuses on individualism and separateness. The idea of individual autonomy is fundamental to the philosophy of logical positivism as espoused by John Stuart Mill and the English school of empiricism. This school of thought has dominated Western thinking and psychological research in this century. Kuhn (1962) pointed out that science is not value free. Rather, it reflects and is often designed to support the view of the world held by the dominant group in the society. Science is influenced by the culture in which it is embedded (Valsinaar & Winegar, 1992). In the positivist model of science, detachment and independence were attitudes valued both in the scientist and in the world that the scientist defined. Especially important was the separation of the researcher from the subjects, for "objectivity" demanded noninvolvement. In the positivist view, the physical and the social world are seen as an object to be mastered and thus controlled.

Consciousness and meaning-making are not observable, but behavior is. Behavior is reduced to discrete, observable acts that can be verified in controlled conditions. This reductionism loses sight of the

> complex social and historical context in which human behavior takes place. (21)
>
> ...most of the chapters in this book describe research that uses a nonpositivist research paradigm. ... Researchers applying qualitative methods do not set out to verify a hypothesis or to prove preconceived theory. They are instead reporting on what people experience and the way people make meaning out of their experience. (22) ....

They are developing not only a new investigative approach but also a new model that pulsates with possibilities not restricted by a method that focuses in a one-dimensional plane:

> We are developing a model of grieving that focuses on the complexity of human relationships and the ways in which people remain connected to each other in life and in death. In so doing, we need to shift our paradigm not only about the nature of the resolution of grief, but also about how to conduct research on grief. (22)

Mourning involves a complex process. A standard had to be developed to distinguish between pathological and healthy mourning. Therese Rando delineates three phases that a mourner will go through and six processes in "healthy" or uncomplicated mourning. Being stuck in any one of these will involve what she terms complicated mourning. There are several factors affecting complicated mourning. Factors such as the type of death: whether it was sudden, unexpected, from a very long illness, loss of a child, and the mourner's perceptions that the death was preventable. (Rando, 7) Other factors that affect the mourning: the quality of relationship with the deceased. It could

complicate the mourning process if the deceased and the mourner were not on good terms. This could result in ambivalence toward the deceased on the part of the mourner. There are a host of other complicating factors which will not be addressed at this time. Regardless of the variety of factors, there are common responses to major loss.

Common responses to major loss over time are identified by the phases mourners go through, they are: avoidance, confrontation, and accommodation. The 6 R's, or six processes are: 1) Recognition of the loss, 2) Reacting to the separation, 3) Recollection and re-experiencing the deceased, 4) Relinquish old attachments, 5) Readjust and 6) Reinvest. Rando,

> ...these three phases are not discrete. The mourner will probably move back and forth among them depending upon (a) the precise issue at hand ... (b) how that issue stands with regard to other pertinent issues with which the mourner must contend, (c) where the individual is in the mourning process, and (d) the interaction of factors circumscribing this particular loss for this specific mourner. Not all mourners will experience all of the reactions described. Which ones are experienced depends on the specific factors associated with the mourner's loss. (30)

Rando does not speak in terms of "resolution" (40),

> Other theorists have used the term *resolution* to refer to this phase. However, the type of once-and-for-all closure implied by this term does not actually occur after the death of a much-loved person. Certain aspects of the loss will remain until the mourner's own death...the mourner will likely experience subsequent temporary upsurges of grief.

Rather, in the accommodation phase the mourner can look to the future,

> Indices of successful accommodation do not suggest that one must discard all connection with the deceased loved one or forget that person. Rather, they suggest that accommodation centers on learning to live with the fact of the loved one's absence and moving forward in the new world despite the fact that the psychic scar caused by the loss will remain and, on occasion bring pain. (42)

The table which appears below delineates Rando's 6 "R" Processes of mourning in relation to the three phases of grief and mourning (45):

Table 1 –
6 "R" Processes of mourning in relation to the three phases of grief and mourning

Phase	Six "R" Processes			
Avoidance Phase	Recognition	Acknowledge the death	Understand the death	
Confrontation Phase	Reaction to the separation	Experience the pain	Feel, Identify, accept & express to all the psychological reactions to loss	Identify & mourn secondary losses
	Recollect and reexperience the deceased & the relationship	Review & remember realistically	Revive & reexperience the feelings	
	Relinquish the old attachments to the deceased and the old assumptive world			
Accommodation Phase	Readjust to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old	Revise the assumptive world	Develop a new relationship with the deceased	Adopt new ways of being in the world Form a new identity
	Reinvest			

There are certain assumptions to be made with regard to loss. First of all loss is inevitable. Each person will respond to loss in a unique way. There is no one way of dying as Kübler-Ross demonstrated and there is no one way to mourn. Loss is not experienced in a vacuum. More people than the mourner experience the particular loss. Loss is communal as well as individual. Uncomplicated mourning is more along the lines of normative grieving. Complicated mourning is usually a factor either of the kind of death and dying experience of the loved one or as a factor of the mourner's coping capacity. Loss which is responded to in an affirming way, which respects the unique way each person mourns, most likely will result in closer ties to the living and the person's ability to look to the future. There will always be regressions, but they will most likely be short lived.

The study of complicated mourning will be helpful to a study which focuses on the convert's bereavement process in relationship to a loved-one from the family of origin. Factors such as: 1) relationship (psychosocial as well as familial), 2) guilt re conversion (Was the conversion accepted or rejected by close and extended family members?) 3) previous mourning experiences and how they surfaced in the present bereavement, 4) Jewish community's response to the mourner, 5) how close associates, family and friends, respond to the mourner (especially with regard to Jewish practice), and 6) internal compatibilities or conflicts with Jewish practice.

Two examples: 1) Carole, a well-supported mourner, 2) Bob, a mourner treated with what felt to him as indifference. Carole was raised in a practicing Catholic household and converted to Judaism out of conviction and identification with the values and beliefs of Conservative Jewish life. The impetus to her study was the man she was

dating in college. Being an independent thinker, she could not consider conversion had she not felt the compatibility within herself. Her parents were supportive and welcoming of the process. When the woman converted her parents respected the differences and even served only dairy or vegetarian meals when she visited. The parents' honored her Jewish life even to the extent that her children were sent birthday and Hanukkah gifts. When this woman's mother died, her rabbi reached out to her. He guided her in how she could go through the Catholic burial and remain loyal to her Jewish identity. The rabbi called her to check-in with her when she was still with her father and siblings. She returned to her home community in time to be able to sit the last two days of Shivah.

She felt affirmed in her Judaism, loved by her community, guilt-free because she honored her mother and father, and she felt close and loyal ties to her rabbi who stood by her side both symbolically and in deed. The other case is not so accepting: the man called his rabbi to ask what he should do. His Presbyterian father died hours earlier and the man would be traveling to join his mother and siblings. He had converted for the purpose of marriage and had come to love the traditions. He even managed to keep kosher-style away from home and found the traditions cumbersome at times, but mostly enjoyable. His parents were disappointed in his conversion. They took it as a rejection of their beliefs and values. In recent years they seemed to tolerate his life style. They regretted that Christmas gifts were not acceptable, but they made the necessary adjustments for the sake of "peace."

When he called his rabbi on the phone, there was a terribly long pause. The rabbi recited that the man as a convert and that the Jewish law viewed him as "a newborn" from the moment of conversion. Sarah and Abraham were his new mother and father. He

was not required to mourn. "No, you're not required to say *kaddish*!" "No, you're not obligated in any of the mourning rites accorded to Jews since your father was not Jewish."

This response was experienced as deeply hurtful, though technically it was within a valid interpretation of Jewish law that this particular rabbi cited. Ken Doka, Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice, defines disenfranchised grief: "lack of recognition of the relationship, lack of acknowledgment of the loss, and exclusion of the griever, circumstances of the death and ways individuals grieve." (*viii*) He elaborates that in Western society, acknowledgement of grief as legitimate is usually based upon "kin relationships." He brings examples from Folta and Deck (1976),

> While all of these studies tell us that grief is a normal phenomenon, the intensity of which corresponds to the closeness of the relationship, they fail to take this (i.e., friendship) into account. The underlying assumption is that closeness of relationships exists only among spouses and/or immediate kin (p.239).

There are relationships which are publicly accepted but in bereavement are not publicly acknowledged as legitimate loss. These are roles such as: "lovers, friends, neighbors, foster parents and stepchildren, caregivers, counselors, coworkers, and roommates (e.g., in nursing homes) may be long lasting and intensely interactive." (10) Rather than being given support, "they might be expected to support and assist family members." (10) There are relationships that may not be publicly recognized or socially sanctioned such as an ex-spouse or ex-in-law. Doka points out that "The death of the

significant other can still cause a grief reaction because it brings finality to the earlier loss, ending any remaining contact or fantasy of reconciliation or reinvolvement. (12)

If this is the case for the relationships that are defined above, what is the expected outcome regarding Bob? How will he relate to Judaism? How will he feel about his rabbi? How does this affect his relationship to the rabbi, to the community, to his wife and her family? What will he tell his children about Judaism? Does the rabbi's response present a loving or a punishing God to Bob? Since leadership in the Conservative Movement has expressed a desire to reach out to intermarried couples, specifically the non-Jewish partner, it will have to address this issue.

What can the Jewish community learn from the bereavement studies with regard to Jews by Choice? It may sound simplistic, but human beings are human beings! Though cultures may be different, the differences are in how human reality is responded to, experienced and expressed. Death is universal. However, there are religious and cultural differences in how the deceased and mourner are treated. Each person who joins the Jewish people brings with him/her a culture outlook and foundation of many experiences that affect who that person is today. There is much to learn if we are wise enough to listen to the Jew by choice and the Jew by birth's experiences with one another and to their community of choice. There are many options from which to select. The manner in which we respond to laity can make a big difference in how they will relate to community. Chaplain George W. Bowman in his article, "The Value and Utilization of Religious Resources" offers guidance in the important work of accompanying the bereaved,

> As our society becomes more and more pluralistic in outlook, indications are that taking a person's feelings seriously, whatever be his religious orientation and at whatever point he may be spiritually, can open doors to significant future experiences in ministry. To take a person seriously at his own point of development or lack of it results in an effective witness. Since grief is of a long duration, it is important to relate to the person from his point if our ministry is to have enduring value. (Richards, 110)

Tables Two and Three:

Two tables are found below. These tables combine Rando's 6 "R" Process with an adaptation to Jewish practices. The phases and processes which Rando delineates identify the normative experience of bereavement, uncomplicated mourning. Rando defines Complicated Mourning as "a generic term indicating that, given the amount of time since the death, there is some compromise, distortion, or failure of one or more of the 'R' processes of mourning'" (12).

Jewish tradition acknowledges the same phases and experiences but has a different set of organizing principles in which to place these experiences. First there is the individual in relationship to community and secondly, there is the principle of honoring the dead balanced by comforting the living. They are not in tension to one another but are in relation to one another striving for balance. The mourner will have his/her own experience; and the community will respond by offering comfort in so doing will create a communal experience and shared memory within the context of community.

For Jews who practice the observances within the calendar cycle, the worldview is always "in relation to" and the notion of one-dimensional answers is nonexistent. To be in relation means to take into consideration nuances and contributing factors which influence one another. Bowlby's attachment theory explains what is understood as essential to Jewish relationships. Bowlby's contribution is that he explains the mechanics. The contribution of Klass et. al, is a principle of basic assumptions to Judaism, that the discovery made by Klass, Silverman, and Nickman is an affirmation of the wisdom of the rabbis who crafted Jewish mourning practices. It is difficult to force Rando's phases and processes precisely into a Jewish context because Judaism does not consider the individual in any capacity but in relationship to others.

Rando's focus is specifically on the individual's experience and the impact that others have on the individual's mourning process. This distinction is subtle, but contributes to the discussion. Jews in America for the most part, are affected by the host culture. Boundaries between cultures are not fixed and impermeable, as if they ever were. Even the Orthodox community has members who enter American commerce, industry, and the professions who bring those influences back to the communities where they live and pray. A humorous and playful example can be found in the varieties of lighting fixtures that decorate *succahs* in Israel and in America even in the Orthodox and ultra Orthodox neighborhoods. A succah is a fragile temporary booth which is an essential component of *sukkot* the autumn harvest festival. These lighting fixtures are copies of Christmas decorations which saturate the American landscape annually from November through January.

The question to consider, for the purpose of this paper, is how do these shared experiences in the popular culture influence the Jew by choice especially with regard to the mourning process? Again, recognizing that the experience of loss, grief and mourning is universal, we ask: how does this experience within a Jewish context challenge and or comfort the mourner who is a Jew by choice? How does the community's involvement or non-involvement impact the convert's spiritual and religious identity? How will the mourner's experience within the Jewish context, in the manner that the community practices, contribute to uncomplicated or complicated mourning? The answers to these questions will guide us in setting the Jewish agenda for the next generation in America.

Table 2 – Rando's Phases and 6 "R" Process and Jewish Practice

PHASE*	PROCESSES 6 R's*	EXPERIENCE*	STATUS	TIME FRAME	RITUAL	PRACTICE
Avoidance	Recognition	Acknowledge the death Understand the death	*Aninut* Exempt from positive *mitzvot*	From moment of death through burial	Community attends to the mourner's needs *Keriah* – tear clothing Funeral service Burial at cemetery	Hearing of a death: *baruch dayyan ha-emet* Occupied with details of burial and shivah Eulogy Open grave – put earth on coffin; fill grave
Confrontation	Reaction to the separation	Experience the pain Revive & reexperience feelings Identify & mourn secondary losses	*Avelut Shivah* For all relatives Obligated to all *mitzvot*	*Shivah* – 7 days from burial *Shabbat* included Festivals – there are exceptions	*Kaddish* at grave *Shivah* *Seudat Havraha*	Hand washing w/o blessing *Shivah* candle *Minyan* at home Cover mirrors Sit on low seats/stools
	Recollect and Reexperience the deceased and the old assumptive world	Review and remember realistically	Mourner For all relatives	*Yizkor* – 3 Festivals & *Yom Kippur*	Visits to cemetery	Not attend celebrations, amusements, nor music No conjugal relations No anointing, perfume Walk around block 7th day
	Relinquish the old attachments to the deceased and the old assumptive world		Mourner For all relatives	*Sheloshim* – 30 days 1) 30th Day 2) begins immediately after burial	*Kever Avot* *Yizkor* *Yahrzeit* Anniversary Birthday Special occasions Visits to cemetery	Not cut hair Not buy new clothes Change seat at synagogue Order monument
	Readjust to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old	Revise the assumptive world Develop new relationship with deceased	Mourning For parent	Complete 12 months *Yahrzeit*	Unveiling Memorbook (Yizkor – Yom Kippur) Visits to cemetery *Yizkor* – 3 Festivals	The empty chair Photographs Memorabilia Naming a baby Story telling Endowment(s)
Accommodation	Reinvest	Adopt new ways of being in the world Form a new identity		Beyond the year *Yizkor* – 3 Festivals & *Yom Kippur*	Create a ritual – bring together torn or shattered pieces	Resume social practices as before the death New ventures [w/o deceased] Remarry, reengage life

* Based on Therese Rando, PhD processes of uncomplicated mourning (Rando, 1993, p. 45ff.)

Table 3 – Halakhic Principles applied to Rando's Uncomplicated Mourning

HALAKHIC PRINCIPLE	STATUS	TIME FRAME	PLACE OR LOCATION	RITUAL	PRACTICE	LITURGICAL CALENDAR	6 "R" PROCESS RANDO
Kavod ha-met Honor the dead כבוד המת	*Aninut* אנינות	From moment of death through interment	In the home At the ceremony	Funeral preparations *Keriah* Funeral service Cemetery service	Rend in the heart Community accompanies the deceased to the grave – *leviat ha-met* לויית המת		Recognition
Kavod ha-met	*Aninut*	Interment is completed	Cemetery	*Kaddish* recited	Obligation for: parents, siblings, child, spouse		Reaction to the Separation
Nihum avel ניחום אבלים	*Avelut* אבלות	Shivah: 7 days	In the home	*Shivah* *Shivah* candle is lit	Comforters come to home of *avelim* *Minyan*		Recollect and Re-experience the deceased and the old assumptive world
		Completion of shivah	From the home, transition into community	Walk around the block Extinguish candle			
		Sheloshim שלושים 30 days, 30th day Ends mourning for all but parents	Acknowledge at synagogue & or in setting	Prayers, ceremony, set-up endowments, Distinguish the day		3 Festivals and *Yizkor services* Rosh Hashana *Yom Kippur* & *Yizkor* Life cycle events	Relinquish the old Attachments to the deceased & the old assumptive world Readjust to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old
		12 months י"ב חודש Complete mourning for parents				*Yahrzeit* Unveiling of the monument	Reinvest

Chapter III: Method of Carrying out the Project

A. Approach and procedure utilized in executing the Project

Colleagues were called on the telephone, and then were sent email postings describing the project and population studied. Three colleagues responded affirmatively. They invited congregants to participate. The criteria for participation were: being a member of a Conservative synagogue, having converted to Judaism any number of years earlier, and having suffered bereavement within the last two years. The death could have been from the family of origin though not limited to family of origin. The group sessions would take place at the synagogue where the participants are members.

At the first session, participants will be asked to introduce themselves and to speak 2-5 minutes giving their Hebrew names. They should express their expectations of these sessions and this study, and give some family history, relationships with family and synagogue. I would also want to learn about the reaction to conversion by the family of origin. These sessions will be tape recorded, with permission of the group.

The purpose of these sessions is to elicit social, spiritual and educational growth. Two methods will be employed. First we will use familiar Jewish symbols and familiar Jewish rituals. Secondly we will use Jewish text study as a vehicle to learn from the tradition and to create an opportunity for discussion and exploration. Each group session will begin with an opening ritual and will then end with a closing ritual. Text study will take about 30 to 45 minutes. Active discussion will be encouraged. This discussion will be in response to the content of the text and what feelings it evokes in each group member. At the conclusion, participants will be invited to provide feedback about the content and/or structure of the session.

This model could function as a pedagogic example. First of all, the group experience builds relationships that can be transferred from the small group to the larger setting within the synagogue, thus enriching social contacts. Often a person who is experiencing grief and mourning finds it to be isolating. The grieving person sees that life is going on as usual for everyone else, and that the experience of mourning tends to separate him/her from others. Bowman points out that "To be joined in community helps to ease the pain of isolation that the sufferer so deeply feels." (p. 112) This kind of group encounter can facilitate also as a spiritual intervention,

> The general purpose of religious and spiritual interventions is to facilitate and promote clients' religious and spiritual coping, growth, and well-being. We believe that clients who are growing in spiritually healthy ways are more likely to function effectively in other areas of their lives. (Richards, P.S., 230)

The rituals which are used in this group setting draw upon religious symbols that are familiar equally to Jews by birth as to Jews by choice. The power of ritual is that it often gives voice and an address to symbolic meaning. Rando speaks of ritual, "a specific behavior or activity which gives symbolic expression to certain feelings and thoughts of the actor(s) individually or as a group. It may be a habitually repetitive behavior or a one-time occurrence." (313) The more observant of liturgical events throughout the calendar year and of life cycle events the person is, the more familiar he/she will be with these symbols. The beginning ritual utilizes a lit candle. The closing ritual involves washing hands.

The candle is not a *Shabbat* candle, nor is it a *yarhzeit* candle. It is a small candle within a transparent glass. The flame and candle are small. The connections to shared experiences and previous experiences will elicit emotional and cognitive insights. In *Proverbs* 20:27, we read נשמת אדם נר ה' - *nishmat adam ner adonai* – the human spirit is the light of God. Kindling of lights is practiced throughout the year. Every week Shabbat is welcomed with at a minimum two candles burning. Shabbat is concluded with a braided torch made up of multiple wicks. It is the *havdalah* candle. Each of the festivals and *Hanukkah* are greeted with candle lighting. The *brit milah* (circumcision) and *simchat bat* (naming of a newborn daughter) are also accompanied by a lit candle.

A *yarhzeit* candle is lit on the anniversary of a death and the eve of the last night of each of the festivals. Coming from the cemetery to the *shivah* home, the mourner lights a candle which will continue to burn for seven full days, including Shabbat. In The Jewish Way in Death and Dying, Lamm describes the mystical interpretation of the wick and flame as symbolic of the human body and soul and the bond between them. Just as the flame strives upward, and brings light to the darkness, (Lamm4, 101-102) the memory of our beloved lightens our darkness. Flame connects Jews throughout history and within the family's history. Repeating this ritual at each group session is intended to evoke patterned response, similar to the liturgical use of these symbols throughout the year. Just as psychology demonstrated how the trauma of bereavement stimulates a person's earliest experiences of abandonment, so too the kindling of lights could elicit earlier memories. This is intended to help till the emotional soil to enable an inspired discussion of the text study.

The washing of hands is intended to invoke the memory of the *shivah* home and to distinguish the group experience from the *shivah* experience. Hand washing is symbolic of the ancient custom to wash after coming in contact with the dead. It emphasizes the Jewish concern to keep contact with life, to not dwell upon death (Lamm 67). Upon leaving the cemetery a Jew washes, as well as upon entering a *shivah* home. The ritual is prescribed in a specific manner. A cup is used. Hold the cup in the right hand and pour water over the left hand. Then place the cup in the left hand and pour over the right hand. A blessing is not said. We do not hand the cup to anyone. The cup is placed down. The next person will pour and perform this rite him/herself. (Lamm, 98) It is an ancient custom.

Lamm (98) brings three reasons for this washing ritual. First, Judaism gives emphasis on life and the value of living. As he says, Jews do not dwell on death. The second reason dates to Torah where an unclaimed body is attended to by the Elders of community. They washed their hands and proclaimed on behalf of the city residents that no citizen caused this death either directly or indirectly. Thirdly, the act of washing hands after a funeral gives testimony that these individuals buried the dead, rather than shrink from responsibility.

But, in the context of the group experience memories of washing from an encounter with death will be balanced by other washing rituals. Before eating a meal where bread is to be consumed, the blessing over bread is preceded by a ritual hand washing. The sacred moment is reminiscent of the ancient sacrifices. The Shabbat table symbolically is the priestly table. The Shabbat meal is sanctified within the company of family as well as friends joining together to observe the Sabbath day. The washing

symbol at this group meeting is meant to elicit memories of transition, of movement from one spiritual state to another. The expectation is that the experience will be revisited between group sessions.

The continuity of rituals mirrors repeated liturgical events throughout the year. Because these sessions are so few in number, the use of these particular rituals is expected to stimulate active memory as well as subconscious memory.

B. Methods used for assessing outcomes

The purpose of the survey is to measure change that results from the experience of being in this group. I am looking for "change" in the following areas: the individual's thinking, Jewish identity, religious thinking, relationship to Jewish community, relationship to rabbi, relationship to family and friends. How has thinking changed? What was the stimulus for change? What is strengthened? What is weakened? Why?

The questionnaire on the following page will be given at the beginning of the first meeting, at the end of the second meeting, and again at the end of the last meeting. Results will be tabulated and written up in Chapter IV of this Project. I will also study the information gleaned at the group sessions and will report on that. The scale goes from lowest to highest number reflecting closeness of relationship. People will be requested to explain as fully as possible including on the back of the paper or on another sheet of paper.

Questionnaire/Survey

Name: _____

1. **The extent to which I want to become knowledgeable about Jewish practices**
   (Minimal) 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ (Extensive)

   Explain: _____

2. **My relationship to Jewish community**
   (Minimal) 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ (Extensive)

   Explain: _____

3. **My desire for my family of origin to attend Jewish life cycle events**
   (Weak) 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ (Strong)

   Explain: _____

4. **My desire for my family of origin to participate in Jewish calendar events**
   (Minimal) 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ (Strong)

   Explain: _____

5. **My relationship to my Jewish family today**
   (N/A) 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ (Strong)

   Explain: _____

6. **My desired relationship to Jewish community**
   (Nominal) 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ (Very good)

   Explain: _____

7. **My desired relationship with clergy**
   (Marginal) 1 ___ 2 ___ 3 ___ 4 ___ 5 ___ 6 ___ 7 ___ (Extensive)

   Explain: _____

What is your impression of this questionnaire? Does it prompt you to explore further? Please explain your answers on the back of this paper. Thank you.

Group Session - One

1. Opening ritual - candle lighting

   The Light of God (Rank, E-3)

   Proverbs 20:27, "The human spirit is the light of God." Within each of us, God implants a divine spark. Each of us has the obligation to tend this spark and fan it into a flame that will light up one's own life and the lives of others.

   A lit candle can be snuffed out, or it can burn out, or it can kindle other candles. When the flame is passed on to others, the flame will continue to burn long after the original candle has been extinguished.

2. Text and discussion

   Holding On and Letting Go (Rabbi Harold Shulweis, p. 112)

   Hold on and let go.
   On the surface of things contradictory counsel.
   But one does not negate the other.
   The two are complementary, dialectical
   two sides of one coin.

   Hold on - death is not the final word
   The grave no oblivion.
   Hold on in *Kaddish, yarhzeit, Yizkor.*
   No gesture, no kindness, no smile
   evaporates -
   Every kindness, every embrace
   has its afterlife
   in our minds, our hearts, our hands.

   Hold on and let go.
   Sever the fringes of the *tallit* of the deceased
   the knot that binds us to the past.

   Hold on

Not enslaving memory that sells the future
to the past
nor recollection that makes us passive,
listless, resigned.
But memory that releases us
for new life.

Lower the casket, the closure meant
to open again the world
of new possibilities.

Return the dust to the earth
not to bury hope
but to resurrect the will to live.

Artists, aerialists
on a swinging trapeze
letting go one ring to catch another
to climb to a higher heights.

Hold on and let go
a courageous duality
that endows our life
with meaning.

Neither denying the past
nor forclosing the future.

The flow of life
the divine process
gives and takes
retains and creates.

Old and new, yesterday and tomorrow
both in one embrace.

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh
Blessed be the name of the Lord.

3. Review and Wrap-up

4. Closing ritual - hand washing

   Symbolism of water, transformation, earth's creation, our creation renewed.

Leader's discussion notes:

1. Reflect on the words, any reactions?
2. Holding On and Letting Go
3. Death is not the final word
4. Afterlife
5. Tallit
6. Memory
7. Lower the casket - closure meant to open again the world of new possibilities
8. Return to the dust - not bury hope
9. Resurrect the will to live
10. Neither denying the past nor foreclosing the future
11. Old and new, yesterday and tomorrow both in one embrace
12. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh

Group Session – Two

(continue discussion from previous session)

1. Opening ritual - candle lighting

   The Light of God (Rank, E-3)

   Proverbs 20:27, "The human spirit is the light of God." Within each of us, God implants a divine spark. Each of us has the obligation to tend this spark and fan it into a flame that will light up one's own life and the lives of others.

   A lit candle can be snuffed out, or it can burn out, or it can kindle other candles. When the flame is passed on to others, the flame will continue to burn long after the original candle has been extinguished.

2. Text and discussion

   Holding On and Letting Go (Rabbi Harold Shulweis, p. 112)

   Hold on and let go.
   On the surface of things contradictory counsel.
   But one does not negate the other.
   The two are complementary, dialectical
   two sides of one coin.

   Hold on - death is not the final word
   The grave no oblivion.
   Hold on in *Kaddish, yarhzeit, Yizkor.*
   No gesture, no kindness, no smile
   evaporates -
   Every kindness, every embrace
   has its afterlife
   in our minds, our hearts, our hands.

   Hold on and let go.
   Sever the fringes of the *tallit* of the deceased
   the knot that binds us to the past.

Hold on
Not enslaving memory that sells the future
to the past
nor recollection that makes us passive,
listless, resigned.
But memory that releases us
for new life.

Lower the casket, the closure meant
to open again the world
of new possibilities.

Return the dust to the earth
not to bury hope
but to resurrect the will to live.

Artists, aerialists
on a swinging trapeze
letting go one ring to catch another
to climb to a higher heights.

Hold on and let go
a courageous duality
that endows our life
with meaning.

Neither denying the past
nor forclosing the future.

The flow of life
the divine process
gives and takes
retains and creates.

Old and new, yesterday and tomorrow
both in one embrace.

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh
Blessed be the name of the Lord.

a. Review and Wrap-up

b. Closing ritual - hand washing

Symbolism of water, transformation, earth's creation, our creation renewed.

Leader's discussion notes:

3. Reflect on the words, any reactions?
4. Holding On and Letting Go
5. Death is not the final word
6. Afterlife
7. Tallit
8. Memory
9. Lower the casket - closure meant to open again the world of new possibilities
10. Return to the dust - not bury hope
11. Resurrect the will to live
12. Neither denying the past nor foreclosing the future
13. Old and new, yesterday and tomorrow both in one embrace
14. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh

Group Session - Three

1. Opening ritual - candle lighting

   The Light of God (Rank, E-3)

   Proverbs 20:27, "The human spirit is the light of God." Within each of us, God implants a divine spark. Each of us has the obligation to tend this spark and fan it into a flame that will light up one's own life and the lives of others.

   A lit candle can be snuffed out, or it can burn out, or it can kindle other candles. When the flame is passed on to others, the flame will continue to burn long after the original candle has been extinguished.

2. Text and discussion Psalm 121 - A Song of Ascents

   I turn my eyes to the mountains;
   from where will my help come?
   My help comes from the Lord,
   maker of heaven and earth.
   He will not let your foot give way;
   your guardian will not slumber;
   See, the guardian of Israel
   neither slumbers nor sleeps!
   The Lord is your guardian,
   the Lord is your protection
   at your right hand.
   By day the sun will not strike you,
   nor the moon by night.
   The Lord will guard you from all harm;
   He will guard your life.
   The Lord will guard your going and coming
   now and forever.

3. Review and Wrap-up

4. Closing ritual - hand washing

Symbolism of water, transformation, earth's creation, our creation renewed.

Discussion:

1. Reflect upon the words, any reactions?
2. God images
3. How comforting is this *Psalm*?
4. How and when do you feel God's Presence?
5. From where does your help come?
6. How safe is the world?
7. Beliefs about afterlife
8. The sound of the Hebrew language - how do you respond?

Group Session - Four

1. Opening ritual - candle lighting

The Light of God (Rank, E-3)

Proverbs 20:27, "The human spirit is the light of God." Within each of us, God implants a divine spark. Each of us has the obligation to tend this spark and fan it into a flame that will light up one's own life and the lives of others.

A lit candle can be snuffed out, or it can burn out, or it can kindle other candles. When the flame is passed on to others, the flame will continue to burn long after the original candle has been extinguished.

2. Text and discussion: Wernher von Braun quote,

Wernher von Braun says,

Science has a real surprise for the skeptics. Science, for instance, tells us that nothing in nature, not even the tiniest particle, can disappear without a trace. Nature does not know extinction. All it knows is transformation. Now if God applies this fundamental principle to the most

> minute and insignificant part of His universe, doesn't it make sense to assume He applies it also to the human soul? I think it does. And everything science has taught me and continues to teach me strengthens my belief in the continuity of our spiritual existence after death. Nothing disappears without a trace.

Lamm adds a Jewish response to von Werner,

> If the soul is immortal, then death cannot be considered the final act. If the life of the soul is to be continued, then death, however bitter, is deprived of its treacherous power of casting mourners into a lifetime of agonizing hopelessness over an irretrievable loss. Terrible though it is, death is clearly a threshold to a new world, the world to come.

3. Review and Wrap-up
4. Closing ritual - hand washing

   Symbolism of water, transformation, earth's creation, our creation renewed.

Discussion:

1. Reflect upon the words, any reactions?
2. God images
3. How does this challenge or confirm your understanding of Jewish thought?
4. How and when do you feel God's Presence?
5. How safe is the world?
6. Beliefs about afterlife

Personal Interview will follow-up the group sessions. The purpose will be to learn about the impact of group sessions, to follow-up and provide referral where advisable.

Chapter IV: Results

A. Outcomes assessed according to the methods specified in the Proposal and Chapter III section B (above).

The criteria for participation were: being a member of a Conservative synagogue, having converted to Judaism any number of years earlier, and having suffered bereavement within the last two years. The death could have been from the family of origin though not limited to family of origin. The group sessions were to take place at the synagogue where the participants were members.

Of the eight participants, three were men and five were women. All were married. One woman was the only person in her family to be Jewish; for her the challenge was to live Jewishly within a non-Jewish environment. The remaining seven were married to Jews. One person was in a second marriage; both partners had children from a previous marriage. Each was a member of a synagogue and participated in the religious and social life of the synagogue. Four sent their children to Solomon Schechter Day School. Three were very active in synagogue and day school. One helped to create a new day school so that there would be more choices within the greater community. One is on track to become president of the synagogue.

All of the participants were involved in continuing Jewish education. One attends the Melton program, Jewish Theological Seminary courses, and various synagogue adult education programs. The others attend classes on an informal basis and manage to fit their studies into their busy lives. The first person mentioned structures days and weeks around formal study. Except for the one person, the others converted after having met the person they eventually married. Five said they had always been interested in religion

but had not found a place where they felt comfortable. For them the "fit" had not been comfortable until they began learning about Judaism. What attracted them to Judaism, beyond the person they were dating, was: the freedom and expectation that asking questions was encouraged, the emphasis on community and each individual's responsibility to help build community, the personal responsibility for one's actions, the intellectual challenges provided in study and learning, the fact that when you are Jewish you are never alone. The only person who converted out of personal conviction without enticement of marriage had grown up in a large and active Jewish neighborhood. The Jewish life, music, foods, celebrations, family and community were part of this person's formative years. As a child feeling like a bystander, there had always been a desire to be part of the Jewish people.

Regarding their relationship to Israel, five have traveled to Israel, one will soon be making *aliyah* (moving to Israel) with the spouse; their young-adult children will make their decisions independently. All contribute money to Israel and have active interest in Masorti for Conservative Judaism in Israel. Six keep kosher in the home and make compromise outside the home but do not eat meat outside the home. The other two adhere to kosher style which they defined as not eating any forbidden foods, not mixing dairy and meat at the same meal or in the same dish, but the amount of time between dairy and meat is flexible and dining at any restaurant but eating vegetarian or fish. All participants are synagogue attendees. Five are Shabbat and Festival regulars; the others vary between three Shabbatot (plural for Sabbath) and two a month. They are all involved in Jewish causes, though not the same causes. There is some overlap such as support for Masorti (the Conservative Movement in Israel).

Results of Survey/Questionnaires:

The methods for measuring change were delineated in section III.B above, in the section titled: "Methods used for assessing outcomes" The details read as follows,

> The purpose of the survey is to measure change that results from the experience of being in this group. I am looking for "change" in the following areas: the individual's thinking, Jewish identity, religious thinking, relationship to Jewish community, relationship to rabbi, relationship to family and friends. How has thinking changed? What was the stimulus for change? What is strengthened? What is weakened? Why?
>
> The questionnaire on the following page will be given at the beginning of the first meeting, at the end of the second meeting, and again at the end of the last meeting. Results will be tabulated and written up in Chapter IV of this Project. I will also study the information gleaned at the group sessions and will report on that. The scale goes from lowest to highest number reflecting closeness of relationship. People will be requested to explain as fully as possible including on the back of the paper or on another sheet of paper. (Page 52)

How did the study and focus on bereavement impact these individuals' spiritual and emotional life? The group was made up of four people who did not know each other before this study took place. Three were from one synagogue and the fourth person was from a synagogue in a neighboring community. What resulted was sharing at a depth that felt sacred. According to each of the participants, the opening ritual broke through any barriers that accompanied them to the sessions. The opening ritual, in which candle light

was symbolic and the words were recited in unison, penetrated people's hearts and thoughts. They said that a new relationship to the texts of Jewish tradition began to emerge because of the texts which were used and because of the discussions that took place. People expressed that there was a serious reframing and rethinking of previous commitments and practices; the change in thought was attributed to the group discussions and the group experience. A new understanding was unfolding with regard to relationship to community as well.

The group experience provided an opportunity for people to hear each other. New insights for one person inspired new insights for others. The deep probing affected each participant. There was honesty in the group sessions that profoundly affected each of the participants. Any additional effects from the time together will be investigated in one month through a follow-up session.

The sessions with interviewees yielded a different result. The interviews were with people who have a strong commitment to Judaism. But, the affects were flat compared to the dynamics of the group experience. A one-on-one interview based on pre-written questions that had to be restricted to a predefined format did not yield comfortably to open, spontaneous insight. The project leader was less involved in the conversation in the group sessions and had to be more involved in the interviewing. This was the same experience with regard to the text study with interviewees. However, there was change for interviewees as well. The opening ritual was used in the one-on-one interview and it had an impact. The candle's flame and chanting of the words opened the interviewees to thoughts that had not been considered prior to the session. The subject matter stimulated conversation and new insights. As a result of the interviews one

interviewee said that it became clear, to this individual that now was the time to call family-of-origin together to discuss end-of-life decisions in general and also specifically the Jewish focus. This individual was able to reframe a personal decision to convert to Judaism and to now see it within the context of Jewish family and family-of-origin. For this person continued relationship with the children from a previous marriage was very important. Contact was maintained and this parent now realized that Jewish values that were held in esteem needed to be explained to the adult children so that they would not be alienated at the time Jewish rituals were called for.

The rabbinic notion of *chevruta*-style study which is two people studying together is preferable over the interview technique. In chevruta each of the students explores the text going beneath what appears on the surface. It is known as *pardes*. P is for *peshat* the literal meaning of the text. R is for *remez* a hint or a hidden meaning. D is for *derash* the investigation or probing that results in insight and learning. S is for *sod* the mystical or secret meaning. *Pardes* is an orchard. The fruit trees have been planted, they mature, they bud, they bear fruit, and they seed new trees and new fruit. The fruit nurtures those who eat it. To be able to harvest one has to tend the ground, till it, feed it nutrients, protect it from extremes of weather and prune the trees. The required care is representative of our interdependence with nature and with human beings. The interview was too static an experience to allow for the kind of insight that could result in a counseling session or what was found in our group sessions. Nonetheless, the interviews yielded insight and personal growth for most of the interviewees.

The hypothesis was that a group setting would provide a holding environment (Winnicott) that would enable people to open themselves to deeper personal meaning and

to finding that the Jewish markers along the life-cycle path could serve in such a capacity. Discovery that the Jewish markers, such as mourning rituals and memorial services, affirm the personal need to stay connected to deceased loved ones (Continuing Bonds). The premise is, that to get on with the rest of one's life and to go forward requires making meaning of the relationships that impacted the mourner (Nadeau). Sometimes making meaning is to find solace; sometimes it requires reframing for the mourner to forge a new path. The group experience proved to be nurturing and safe. Such safety came easily in the interview process where the interviewer knew the individuals and a trusted relationship had already been developed. One factor in this process had a profound impact – the opening ritual.

This ritual was repeated at the beginning of each group session and at the beginning of each interview. It profoundly impacted each individual and helped to break down whatever defenses or barriers the participants brought to the session with them. The fragile, flickering flame and the words that were repeated also provided a bridge from week to week and from person to person. For all the reasons enumerated in Chapter III (above) this ritual worked to enhance the sessions. On the other hand, the hand washing ritual was not as significant. It actually felt like a let down to most of the participants. One might posit that after the deeply-moving opening ritual and discussion that had taken place, the hand-washing ritual needed either to have more impacting words or be replaced by a different closing ritual.. By the time the sessions ended, everyone was ready to leave and unwind and think about the experience.

Who benefited most from this experience? One person in the group expressed early on a sense of looking for purpose in bereavement. This person was most open to

exploration and through this person's openness helped others to become more open. One person was very guarded and did not appear to be moved by the experience – this was both in the survey and in the personal reflections. Yet this person expressed awe at the openness and responses from the other participants. The other two were open and were ready to experience new insights. The three grew the most. They credited this to: the group experience, the topic of bereavement being one they had not permitted themselves to delve into before, learning how other people cope with their losses and struggle with purpose and meaning, and learning about the Jewish ways of death and mourning opened them to the wisdom of the rabbis who designed this process. Their desire to not cut the bonds with the deceased reinforces the premise of Continuing Bonds.

The people who were interviewed reflected similar dynamics. One was completely opposed to writing the survey. After almost 30 years of being a Jew, there was resentment for being asked to do such a thing. Of course the option was presented that participating in this process was not a requirement and if desired the interview could be stopped. The individual wanted to continue and yielded important insights. The family of origin was initially resentful of this conversion (Disenfranchised Grief). At present the family is more open – even to the extent that kosher food is provided for this family whenever they participate in non-Jewish family events. The meals are sealed and presented to the Jewish members, demonstrating respect and a desire for their inclusion in family events. This has helped the offspring of the Jewish household to develop a Jewish identity independent of the day school and household experience. This person is active at all levels of Jewish experience: study, leadership, and ritual.

As in the above example, Doka's Disenfranchised Grief explores the many ways a person's grief is either invalidated or not discernable because their role in the grieving process has not been validated. Just as in the adjustment phase of entering Jewish communal life some of the interviewees had experienced resistance which was overt others reported instances which were more subtle. An interviewee is active in synagogue but has felt resistance from Jews by birth and also from family of origin (Lamm). This person said,

> "It's interesting to realize that now, like many born Jews, I often feel my Jewishness most in the company of non-Jews. Within a few minutes, I have to work in some clear reference to my religion, some bit of self-assertion and loyalty and pride. Very occasionally, when I haven't done this fast enough, I've had to sense the sort of in-group prejudice that blossoms into anti-Semitism. I feel the constant responsibility to confront this.
>
> "But the attitude of non-Jews is not really my topic here. What do I want from other Jews? Acceptance. Nothing more, nothing less. I want to be treated as an ordinary, regular Jew. It makes me extremely uncomfortable when I'm being Welcomed (capital W) or congratulated or expected to be more religiously well-informed or observant than anyone else.

To the question, "How has the Jewish community received you?" Another interviewee said,

"For the most part openly. And, kindly. Sometimes people will ask about my family. I'll explain about my children...my daughter is not Jewish. So, she does not participate. A few people know that I'm a convert and say things. I brought into a study group an old bible of my husband's; the person was surprised that I brought a Christian bible. It was the *Tanach*! It was an older edition of the JPS Hebrew Bible. I do not understand why people say the things they do. It wasn't something the person was used to seeing. It felt hurtful at the time. Have things like that happened in other settings? The same person did it a number of times. This other woman sometimes picks on me just because I converted and talks to me in an attitude. At first it is hurtful, and then I think about it, could I do something differently? No. I will continue."

I asked, "How had the teacher responded?" This person said,

"We passed my bible around. The teacher usually tries to massage things. She tries to soften it. She wants to help the class understand that there are other viewpoints."

One of the group members has been told that the now deceased father never approved of the conversion and was disappointed in the child's decision. One of the other siblings in this family converted as well. In both cases they married Jewish people and found an attraction in the Jewish practice and philosophy. Participation was stilted in the family-of-origin's funeral and memorial rites and this person grappled with "fitting-in" in the Jewish community, too (Doka). This "unease" persists today though this person is

involved in many Jewish organizations and at the synagogue. However connection to family remains important.

One group member was supported by family. Upon her deathbed the mother requested that Jewish practices be included in her burial. To honor this request this child asked that the coffin be lowered into the ground after the funeral service had been completed and that all the siblings and anyone else who wished to participate could place earth upon the coffin in the grave. This was arranged before the funeral and shovels were provided by the cemetery. In retrospect and because of our group sessions, this loving child sees not only the wisdom of the Jewish tradition but also a mother's wisdom in wanting her children to be united even in her death. She created a bridge for them to communicate. Repeatedly this child spoke of the mother being a deeply devout Christian who was respectful of her children's choices. This person is respectful of others and is deeply involved in Jewish life. Because of our sessions this person is reframing the experience to understand how to include spouse and children in mourning practices at home and in the synagogue. The discussion around one of Rabbi Harold Shulweiss' texts, opened this person to explore how children perceive a parent as the parent is participating in ritual. The insight that we are building our children's connection to tradition and community when we include them in these rituals was helpful to this participant.

With regard to family life the answers in the survey were not reflective of the discussion. This is one of the examples of the tension between quantitative and qualitative research. Except for the one person who is the only Jew in the family, all spoke of their Jewish family life as being strong. The person who is the only Jew in the

family has broadened the definition of family to include friends acquired through study and synagogue life. This person is respected and admired for personal contributions to the quality of life to each of the environments in which this person participates. As a result of the group discussions, this person will speak with family members to inform them of Jewish burial practices and of end-of-life decisions that will reflect Jewish practices. Discussion about the place of burial will be a challenge to this couple. This person is in a loving, 35-year marriage. How will the spouses react to not being buried next to each other? How will the thinking be affected if the spouse predeceases this person? These are not light decisions. It was recommended that this person speak with the rabbi of this person's synagogue to seek guidance and perhaps counsel.

Another person had placed family life as very strong on the survey – there is a spouse and three young children under the age of 12. The perceived challenge was how to make it stronger. Upon reflecting about the *yizkor* candle this person began to realize to do this privately is very different from lighting the candle in the presence of spouse and children. The comment was, "I think I need to light the *yizkor* and *yarhzeit* candles in front of my children. They need to begin to see that death is part of life. They need to see that Judaism affirms life which is what we do when we light these candles." Until the group session in which we talked about lighting the *yizkor* candle, the person's awkwardness about "Am I Jewish enough; am I doing it right" restricted how family would be included. Today this individual sees each of us as a thread linking generations and educating the next generation through practices at home and synagogue.

With regard to community life the participants moved toward greater participation and relationship with community. They saw that Judaism is most effective within the

frame of reference of community. They saw that Jewish learning enabled them to be more effective in Jewish community. It was upon reflection about Jewish burial and mourning practices that they spoke of "never being alone." Jewish community cradled them. Jewish community enabled them to feel safe at a vulnerable time.

One person felt estranged from family of origin in the parent's burial. A memorial service was held close to the time of death and a cremation took place 30 days later. This person returned to the Jewish community in time to sit Shivah. Within the embrace of Jewish communal response, this person was nurtured and comforted. Jewish practice provided a way to grieve and to mourn. Jewish practice gave this individual something to do that helped to go forward with life. It was community and Jewish family that cradled this person as well.

One person attended a parent's Catholic burial and customs. Not knowing quite how to mourn, "Do I do it like my siblings? Do I do it like my Jewish family?" A phone call came from the rabbi. A satisfying conversation gave clarity to loyalties to family of origin while remaining connected to Jewish community. The rabbi affirmed loving choices. This person returned home to the Jewish community in time to complete Shivah. The community, both from synagogue and from the day school, was equipped to support this mourner's needs. The synagogue holds an evening and morning minyan every day of the year; this person was able to recite kaddish in a *minyan* (quorum of 10 Jews). There is a complication with regard to this person's bereavement.

Several miscarriages caused a spiritual crisis for this person. Thoughts of being punished for leaving Catholicism plagued a sensitive and loving heart and mind. It was a lonely time – it was a darkened time of the soul. Conservative Judaism did not seem to

respond well to these needs, and there was no closeness with the rabbis at this time. Whenever the ark was opened tears flooded this person. The *shema* was off-putting (these words affirm that God is one and there is only one God over all of Creation). "I'd cry. I'd run from the sanctuary. I withdrew from community. There was no Jewish ritual to help me at the time. I drove home separately from my spouse. I was feeling very alone." The organized Jewish community was not responsive but the *havurah* (study group that this couple participated in monthly for 12 years) was very supportive. They brought meals; they sat nearby to listen while tears were shed. They companioned the couple.

What was the reluctance to call the clergy for help?

> The rabbis were not personal friends. I had felt that I could call the rabbis only when the situation was really serious. In a smaller shul I might have felt differently. When I was growing up the priest was ever present in our home. In moments of crisis it is difficult to pick up that phone.

With regard to Jewish rituals this person said,

> Jewish mourning rituals are vastly better for me than the Catholic. She was never alone before she died; I was the only one to sit with her while the others were eating in the kitchen. She died while I was holding her in my arms. "My tradition teaches me to not leave her alone." They cremated her; that was difficult for me. The family members were talking about going to the site of cremation and participating in this ritual. I could not participate in that. They respected my needs.

The group sessions reflected changes regarding desired relationship to Jewish community and desired relationship with clergy. There is a tension between privately observing Judaism and public displays of Jewish ritual and participation for one of the participants. Most participants expressed awkwardness especially when a person is not yet confident in religious knowledge and or practices. That shows itself in the tension between private and public religious expression. A strong desire to travel to Israel, to walk the Holy Land is expressed by one who has not yet been there. For this person, travel to Israel will be the embodiment of relating to the community. One individual found the ties to friends and neighbors grew in importance as the sessions progressed, and throughout did not feel the need to have closer bonds with clergy. Clergy who can be available when needed and not be intrusive was desired by one. Clergy are an essential source of Jewish learning and increased Jewish knowledge for one member. Another remained silent on the issue of clergy. It is noted that with this particular participant it seems that little change occurred. This is the person who expressed that community was more available to offer comfort after burying a non-Jewish parent. At the time, the rabbi thought that this person did not need to observe mourning rituals because the parent was not Jewish. Since that time a new rabbi has joined the community and is a person that has proven to be more sensitive and welcoming to the needs of Jews-by-choice.

With regard to the questionnaire the main critique was that it was not clear. Questions were fashioned that were thought to be open-ended and yet limited. Asking for people's impression to the questionnaire resulted in the following answers:

Questionnaire #1:

a. Somewhat restrictive in wording of questions – does not provide for convert.
b. Yes, I am in the early stage of building my Jewish identity and finding a place in the Jewish community as a whole and a specific place in community (Temple) in particular. The questionnaire statements seem to cover the state of my sense

Questionnaire #2:

c. Yes, it helps to give affirmation to my intense longing.
d. Why is the survey repeated in the same format?

Questionnaire #3:

a. The questionnaire does not address the content of the specific session that we have had.
b. Yes, oddly enough it has forced me to redefine my whole idea of "family" and "community". Accepting my place in the world has always been difficult because I could not understand it and value it. I have always labored hard to transform who I thought I was into what I thought I wanted to be. I am now faced with finally value in who I am – the soul endowed by God a purpose and place in the world not of my making. Surrender control to the Eternal One and living the life for what I was intended – a hard thing for a person for whom abandonment has been a constant factor. I have committed so much energy to transforming and to serving – too little to just being.

c. I don't think anything changed for me on the questionnaire from the beginning. If it did, it may well be meaningless. The sessions, however, were very powerful. I'm not sure what thesis you were testing, but one thing this has proved to me is the value of small groups like this discussing the issues. I would think they would be very helpful perhaps to people in the latter half of the year of mourning, or in the second year after a death

d. I believe that the death of my mother and my following in traditional Jewish bereavement practices has drawn me closer to my own family, and to the Jewish community and to Judaism in general.

B. Development not anticipated and has significantly shaped execution and final outcome.

When the project started, only one group was involved. The original group of four individuals came from one synagogue. Since a population of four would render limited results, it was recommended to lead two or three groups in order to garner results over a larger population. The desired number of people to participate in this study was from 8 to 12. Three colleagues had accepted to invite participants from their synagogues to take part in group sessions. However, when it was time to begin this study, difficulties arose.

Of the original group of four, three individuals remained from the one synagogue and participated fully in the study. One individual joined the group from a neighboring community. In the remaining two synagogues only one or two individuals could be found who fit the requirements for the study. This was not a large enough population to

conduct a group in one setting. It was then reconsidered and there was an attempt to bring people together from the different synagogues. Finding a date, time and location that worked for each of them became a challenge. This did not work. What remained were two populations. One would be a group and the others who were interested in participating but would or could not make up a group. Therefore it was necessary to interview four people from the different synagogues and to conduct the group session that had already been put into place. The interviewees came from three synagogues. Two who did not know each other were from one synagogue and the other two were members of Conservative congregations in different communities.

Furthermore, it was necessary to expand the criteria regarding bereavement. The criterion was changed from 24 months to 36 months. Therefore, it was decided to conduct interviews and to study the texts and fill-in the questionnaire before and after study. When the interviews began, participants requested one text study in addition to the additional time of getting together for the interview. The questionnaire was completed before the interview and again after the text study. Thus there was a population of eight. Four participated in the group and four who were interviewed. Another change was the setting. A living room was used rather than the synagogue. Light refreshments were served and each session lasted 90 minutes from the start of the session.

With regard to the group sessions, the subject of death and bereavement was powerful even and especially for people who had some distance from the event of the death itself. Even the person who parent died 15 months ago experienced the power of missing this parent after have not thought about her because of all the distractions that come with daily life. At the first group session the tape recorder was forgotten which meant losing

forever some of the most powerful sharing that had taken place. The second session when it was brought, the interviewer was asked to not use it. The difficulty that resulted from this was the inability to write notes afterward of what was discussed with clarity. It was not until the fourth session that a recording was made thus enabling more thorough transcripts to be transcribed of that session. There were also simple things that were unanticipated.

The content of discussion brought men and women to tears. Not having tissues available became a distraction, for the leader, while people were sharing. When the group began to read silently it was a good time to bring a box of Kleenex to the table. This was acknowledged and appreciated by the group. At each of the following sessions and at the interviews, tissues were present and visible.

At the completion of the first group session people took the handout home with them. It had been planned to continue discussing the first text at the next session. Perhaps they planned to share the content with family members. If so it might have been helpful both to gain family support and to broaden the learning into an extended group of people. This necessitated having a new text to study for the next group session.

Each of the participants took valuable time and interrupted very busy lives to participate in this project. Even before experiencing the powerful sharing that took place, something compelled each of them to want to participate. This is deeply appreciated by the interviewer.

When asked why they accepted to participate, each had a different reason. What united them was the thought that they could help other Jews by sharing their thoughts and feelings in this setting. Each expressed gratitude for the life he or she has come to live

and thinks of this as a "thank you" to their communities. Individual answers included the following and are direct quotes:

- This rabbi was in the hospital with my mother and me.
- I had no compass, no satisfying way to process my grief. I thought that this might help.
- A trusted member of the shul asked if I would participate. Anything she asks me to participate in I will do.
- I wanted to help Rabbi Matsa because this will help other Jews.
- I think about some of the barriers I have had to overcome, I thought that this is my opportunity to try to make a difference for a better welcoming for others.
- My relationship with the rabbi.
- I know this rabbi and trust that what I say will be used to help build a stronger community. I can make a difference.
- I don't usually participate in things like this but thought that I could add another view.

Chapter V: Discussion

A. Implication of results, both anticipated and not anticipated, reported in Chapter IV

In the course of a lifetime we endure many kinds of losses, anything from inanimate objects to precious loved ones. Coping with loss begins in infancy as the literature in Chapter II, above, demonstrates. A person's resiliency to bounce back from loss is shaped in the formative years and is reinforced through a lifetime. Complications from multiple bereavements and kinds of bereavements will create, in essence, a scaffolding of responses. Bereavement needs to be dealt with; it cannot be swept under the carpet, lest that create further complications. The field of Thanatology is replete with research that will support this. See Chapter II section B.

The rabbis of the Talmud understood this message and created structures to assist Jews through the process from grief, through mourning and bereavement. This project supports the wisdom of the rabbis and serves as a wake-up call to modern rabbis and the organized Jewish community. Response to the needs of individuals in community needs to be sensitive, swift, and caring. The traditional practices have it right – at least according to Thanatologists. America in the twentieth and at the beginning of the twenty-first centuries is still death phobic. Jews may have imbibed much of the secular culture; this is one area that it does not serve the interests of Jewish community nor the individuals within the Jewish community to imitate the patterns of society. To ignore grief and bereavement is to invite pathology.

This message is all the more pressing in an age of terrorism, school shootings, terrible violence that is reported daily in our media but not discussed in religious institutions or in our homes. Often children are shielded from discussion but not from

the reality. To not discuss this openly is tantamount to not equip our children with the vital resources for living. (Linda Goldman, expert on Children and Grief) The Jewish community cannot afford to participate in delusion that to not talk about what is happening is equal to protecting the innocent. To do so is death affirming not life affirming which would be equal to turning Jewish practice upside down.

B. Contribution of Project

1. Religious principles, discussed Chapter II

To live Jewishly is to celebrate life, even in the face of death. The rituals that accompany each of the "markers" along the path of Jewish grief through bereavement affirm life and acknowledge the continuing bonds between our forebears and the present. The tearing of fabric and shovelfuls of earth onto the casket are critical reminders that the separation from the deceased is real and permanent. From the moment of death, the survivors have to reframe living on this earth in the absence of the deceased. How the memory of the deceased will be incorporated into this reweaving of the fabric of meaningful life will depend upon how the mourner is responded to by community as well as friends and family (Soloveitchik, Rando).

Jewish rituals surrounding death and bereavement were fashioned as a response to the crisis of loss. These were not arbitrary rituals. There is tremendous power toward repairing a broken soul in these rituals. New rituals can be developed to augment what the rabbis designed. But caution is called for when developing new rituals, they need to honor the fact that death separates the living from the deceased. These new rituals cannot

and should not hide the reality of death from the living. That would be a disservice to the living and to the wisdom of the Jewish tradition.

- The first lesson gleaned is to not ignore the Jewish practices surround illness, end-of-life, death, grief or mourning.
- The second lesson is to use the rituals with the respect and honor with which they were designed. In our materialistic, disposable, American society, ritual is not venerated. Lessons from the past are glossed over readily. Ritual can be a powerful way to bond with the past and the present and can serve as a bridge to the future and for future generations. Ritual can build family and communal bonds.
- Lesson three is caution to not throw away our rituals.
- Lesson four: engage Jewish community so that it can do its job of offering companioning and comfort. Interdependence is an essential element in Jewish identity. We are not automatons; we cannot live and thrive in a vacuum. This is reflected throughout Jewish law, custom and practice. It is contrary to Western societal values and to the American way of life with its rugged individualism.

2. Clinical principles, discussed Chapter II

Much of the current Thanatological literature points to the necessity of giving mourners the opportunity to grieve in their unique ways. Some are intuitive and will need to talk a lot. They will repeat over and over again the events surrounding the death of a loved one. This is one of the ways a person can make sense of the loss. (Janice Nadeau, Families Making Sense of Death) Others will get into action and begin "doing."

This person might write, possibly build, and maybe go back to work just to keep busy. Some of the "busy-ness" will be productive and help a mourner in the grieving process. But, some "busy-ness" will be a way of running from the terrible pain of grief and mourning (Doka).

Community cannot support running away and must develop mechanisms for helping the mourner. Freud's initial writing, before he experienced a lifetime of losses and finally the loss of his beloved daughter, spoke of getting past the grief so that a person could reinvest in new relationships. Though he had written to his friend (Chapter II, B) about the permanence of relatedness to the deceased, he did not manage to commit this new understanding to writing. Thus generations of therapists following Freud were misguided as they worked diligently to force their own reality of missing the deceased into the Freudian mold that labeled this as pathology. This has created a tyranny that has probably been the source of much malady and pathology. Dr. Simon Shimshon Rubin of Jerusalem, Israel, conducted research that is described in the Conference booklet from the 27th Annual Conference of the Association for Death Education and Counseling March 30-April 3, 2005, p.5:

> He is best known for the Two Track Model of Bereavement: a multidimensional model of the grieving process introduced in 1981 and comprehensively reviewed in 1999. This unique model suggested two independent dimensions for viewing bereavement outcome. Track I considered the overall approach to life that is affected in loss while Track II focused upon the ongoing relationship to the memories and experiences with the deceased. Dr. Rubin has utilized both quantitative and qualitative

methodologies to test the validity of the model. He has published studies on the persisting experience of loss; the significance of the relationship to the decease; continuing bonds across the lifespan; how laypersons perceive loss; and cross-cultural responses to loss.

It is not unreasonable that a researcher steeped in Jewish living would find the validity of continuing bonds rather than Freud's "cutoff." Judaism honors the continuing bonds of one generation to another in holiday practice and in rituals of remembering which are practiced throughout the liturgical year, every year not just for the year of mourning. "*Yizkor*" – he will be remembered. And thus from year to year the mourner who has been changed by life experience will come to reframe the relationship to the deceased as he or she lights the memorial candle and participates in the memorial serve.

The bond is continued, honored venerated and reframed. This is a reality Freud came to understand but denied future generations from learning by not writing down his insight. In their acclaimed classic Continuing Bonds, which was influenced by Rubin, Dennis Klass, Phyllis R. Silverman, and Steven L. Nickman broke new ground in contemporary Thanatology studies. They focused on the mourners who struggled to hold onto the memories of the deceased. They did not dismiss this reality but saw it as a necessity for study. They overcame the challenges the prevailing scientific research methods which rely only on quantitative methodology which they found does not allow for nuance. Qualitative research fills in the gaps. This Doctor of Ministry Project is further example of the limitations harvested by relying only on quantitative research. Though the population is limited to eight participants, much more is gathered in wisdom by looking at the discussions that took place both in the groups and in the interviews.

C. Contributions of this Project to ministry in a wider context

For all the above reasons, this Project will open Jewish community to potential ways of engaging congregants. The tried and true methods that have been practiced throughout the last century have lost to the fold religious commitment, a desire to study and learn Jewish studies, and have marginalized many Jews due to the superficial practices which do not speak to the heart of people living in a society of isolates. Living as hermits, living as isolates is not Jewish. Jewish living is in relationship and with acknowledgement of our interdependence not only on each other but on the earth as well. In recent years the emphasis has been rekindled to ignite Jewish participants through education. This has worked like a lightning rod. This needs to be continued.

D. Implications for future ministry

The results of this study will be disseminated among Jewish clergy and Jewish laity. By looking at the issues raised by this study in the face of contemporary Thanatology and psychology, Jewish community could benefit and thus be a light unto the nations. Leadership will be called upon to speak about these issues in public discourse from the pulpit to community education. In preparation to High Holy Days and the Festivals, a course could be taught: Preparing for Yizkor. Leadership will be called to create *Hesed* committees (societies of loving kindness that will be trained to respond to critical needs of individuals within community). This has already been started in large synagogue communities, but

smaller communities might join together with other synagogues and Temples to respond to this need.

Leadership needs to overcome embarrassment of using rituals the way that they were designed. This begins on the pulpit and works its way through life-cycle and calendar events. Ritual is one way of connecting to people's inner life. The sensory experience can ignite a desire to participate in Jewish life. By not utilizing this path, we risk pushing more Jews to the margins as they will find contemporary Jewish life irrelevant to their core needs. Once ignited in the heart, the intellectual experience can be attended to through adult education. Our teens and younger children also will respond positively to sensitive use of ritual. They might be engaged in helping to shape new rituals.

One of the participants in this study asked for refresher courses to the Introduction to Judaism which is taught to potential converts. Many congregants would benefit from additional courses in basic Judaism to augment the wonderful assortment of advanced classes that already take place. Again, where a particular synagogue cannot sustain the full load they can follow the example of the White Plains, New York community which shares the teaching load as a way of being able to offer greater variety not only in subject matter but diversity of theological input. Temple Israel Center of White Plains is a model to follow as is the Adath Jeshurun Congregation, Minnetonka, Minnesota.

Much has changed regarding Conservative Judaism's response to miscarriage, stillbirths, SIDs and other perinatal losses. This needs to be publicized. A pamphlet could be written under the auspices of the Jewish

community to the parents who agonize over these losses. Newly formed rituals could be included. These parents need not be marginalized by a community that does not know how to respond to their needs.

A course could be taught on the preparation of an Ethical Will, a living will, and healthcare proxies. Often physicians feel the tension between trying to heal and letting death take its course. We can fill a vital need by working with Jewish physicians to help them understand that cure is for the body, but a *refuah shelmah* complete healing involves the spirit. Death is natural. It is not the physician's defeat.

The convert often does not know how to handle bereavement or does not know where to turn. Often clergy is the last place considered. Get the word out in the newsletter, from the pulpit, in adult education, through public speaking, at the hospital ethics committee, any public venue possible so that Jews and the non-Jews who might be providing services will be aware of Jewish practice. They will know where to turn when looking for support for their Jewish constituency.

A pamphlet could be written that can inform the Jew by choice of the variety of possibilities that Conservative Judaism provides when burying a non-Jewish relative. Though the burial practices would honor the non-Jewish practices of the deceased, the mourner who is Jewish would benefit from a caring and sensitively-worded document to step him or her through the process.

Another suggestion is to rethink the division of labor in larger communities and also larger synagogues. Many have relied solely upon the expertise and skill of Boards of Jewish Family and Children's services to provide

support for the variety of psycho-social needs of Jews within community. These may be under the auspices of Jewish Boards but they often are driven by secular models. Thus the benefit of spiritual and religious response is not available on the level that could be utilized.

The Jewish institutions which train rabbis are also encouraging rabbis to take Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) courses. The Doctor of Ministry Program takes the CPE to a higher level through the emphasis on counseling culminating on Spiritual Guidance. Rabbis are constantly responding to the calls for life-cycle, pulpit teaching, classroom teaching, communal demands and emergencies.

No one person can be an expert in all these areas. Yet congregants who interview rabbis to serve their pulpits often demand such widespread skills. It is unrealistic to do so and does not serve the community well. To hire a rabbi who has expertise in the CPE or D. Min. skills would mean being able to provide spiritual counseling that would be responsive to specific needs in the context of the American society. A senior rabbi could focus on his or her special issues and could build a viable community by being able to offer this vital resource not at the expense of a defined agenda but in addition to it as a way of augmenting it. Bereavement, divorce, perinatal concerns are among the areas that could be addressed by this additional rabbi. This individual could offer not only counseling but could teach courses that would educate and inform. Thus a holding environment would be offered within the larger context of synagogue life.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century we can respond with traditional practices to Jewish communities throughout the United States. The needs are centuries old; we can answer the call today.

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