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**THE FORMATION OF A GROUP OF JEWISH ADULT HOME RESIDENTS
TO SHARE JEWISH FAMILY AND INDIVIDUAL LIFE REMINISCENCES**

RABBI STEVEN A. MOSS

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Doctor of Ministry Degree**

**Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Studies Program
New York, New York**

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This Project is dedicated to my grandparents.
The stories of their lives
are my stories. Thank you!

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CHAPTER I

Background of Project

While I was a second year rabbinical student at the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, I served as a student chaplain to the Jewish Home and Hospital for the Aged and the Florence Nightingale Nursing Home, both of which were located in Manhattan. I conducted weekly Sabbath services in the former and monthly pre-Sabbath services in the latter. In addition to providing these services, I visited the residents in their rooms, both routinely on the floors and upon request. I also counseled these residents, whose average age was 85.

During the years of my service as a student chaplain to these institutions, I spent many hours listening to the residents relate their concerns and needs, which they mostly did by telling me stories from their pasts. They would relate the changes that had occurred in their lives by comparing their present lives in the nursing home with the way their lives "used to be". They would constantly reminisce about earlier experiences in their lives, either individually or with family members or friends. Often these reminiscences would be about special moments of success, either personally or professionally. This retelling of past events in their lives would be accompanied with a smile and a twinkle to their eyes. I enjoyed listening to them and seeing their joy at having someone see them as they used to be. I was also touched when they relived a sad or upsetting experience in their lives through the retelling of the story. I was never concerned about the factuality of their stories, because it seemed to me that there was simply something special just in the telling of the story.

Quite often a story was related to a family or individual celebration or event; a birth, Bar or Bat Mitzvah, a wedding, or a death. These reminiscences came from a remembrance of the celebratory moments, as well as the experiences of tragedy and difficulty, in their Jewish lives. At times, something that happened during the religious

service would be the inspiration for the reminiscences. Rituals also sparked the telling of a story. For example, a Kiddush recitation (the blessing of the wine) inspired one man to stand up before the congregation and relate how he used to sing the Kiddush on Friday nights in front of the whole congregation in Brooklyn. One woman related her recipe for home made gefillte fish, when "jarred" fish was served at a communal Passover celebration. And sometimes, they just told me these recollections with no prior connection to the conversation we had been having or to the discussion that was going on at the time.

At other times, the stories that they told me were a reflection on past angers or hurts. Painful events with family members were told and retold, each time accompanied by an anger which would also give me the impression that the hurt had only happened the day before, and not 30, 40, or even 50 years earlier. Reminiscences of unresolved conflicts and arguments were often retold. Names were shouted out and blame offered, or sometimes accepted. Sometimes the persons mentioned were still alive, but all too often these persons had died years ago. Most often, all I could do was listen to these stories. Sometimes, however, I was able to offer suggestions to some kind of closure for the hurts that seemed unresolvable.

Finally, there were the stories of the changes and the losses they had suffered in their lives. They would tell of the relatives and friends who had died. Frequently, the stories were of changes in their lives regarding the places they had lived and the homes they had to give up in order to come into the institutionalized "home". These stories were told through detailed descriptions of the old neighborhoods in which they had grown up and the neighborhoods in which they had raised their families. These neighborhoods, and the people who had lived in them, were almost always described in glowing terms. The comparative words, "things (and/or people) are not the way they used to be," would take

on an expressive meaning as if to say, "today things are not good, but in the old days they were."

As they related stories of their youthful physical abilities, residents would describe the changes in their self-image or their bodily functions. Often these stories were embodied in a description of the accident (such as breaking a hip), or illness (i.e., stroke or cancer) which had negatively changed their physical abilities and which, all too often was the cause of their placement, voluntarily or involuntarily, in the adult or nursing home. They would describe their physical aches or pains and the difficulties they were having in just accomplishing their daily activities and chores.

During my earlier years, as I listened to these reminiscences, I had asked myself, "Why are the elderly so concerned with their pasts? Why do they dwell on memories of their youth?"

At times, I reacted in a way similar to that described by Robert Butler in his seminal article, "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged", when he wrote:

The prevailing tendency is to identify reminiscence in the aged with psychological dysfunction.... reminiscence becomes a preparative, suggestive preoccupation, musing, aimless wandering of the mind. In a word, reminiscence is fatuous.¹

I was not sure that the telling of stories was anything more than the ramblings of the elderly, who had little else to do with their time.

I have discovered in my research for this project that my initial reaction to these stories of the older person was not peculiar to me, but has been shared by many others. Harry R. Moody in his article, "Reminiscence and the Recovery of the Public World", wrote:

¹ Robert N. Butler, "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged." *Psychiatry* 26 (1963): 65, 66.

Interestingly, the negative view of reminiscence is shared by many... who work with the elderly. Their dismissal of reminiscence has much in common with contemporary attitudes that regard the contributions of old people with amused disdain: reminiscence is a tiresome self-indulgence, a preoccupation with forgotten events or people best left forgotten. Above all, it is boring. Reminiscence looks backward and inward. It is best to get on with the business of living'²

Dr. Theodore Lidz, in his respected text, *The Person: His Development Throughout the Life Cycle*, saw reminiscing as a regressive defect on the part of the elderly. As he wrote:

Elderly people, as is well known, spend an increasing amount of time talking and thinking about the past. It seems natural that as they feel out of the run of things, they should turn back to the days when life was more rewarding and enjoyable, and when events had a deeper impact on them. When the future holds little, and thinking about it arouses thoughts of death, interest will turn regressively to earlier years. Still, in most persons who become very old, the defect is more profound.³

I also experienced the boredom described by Lapsley⁴, especially when the story was repeated to me over and over again. Whether it was because sometimes the stories just lacked interest for me, or whether it was out of counter transference or projection on my part, and therefore a reaction within me to the anxiety produced by the story, I can only question.

This project grew out of a feeling that has evolved in me from over 25 years of visiting residents in institutional settings and in my congregational community. I came to feel that these reminiscences represented something vitally important to these older persons. I began to have the sense that there was a deeper function to the reminiscing I was hearing. I came to understand that the elderly reminisce because there is a real need

² Harry R. Moody, "Reminiscence and the Recovery of the Public World," in *The Uses of Reminiscence: New Ways of Working with Older Adults*, ed. Marc Kaminsky (New York: Haworth Press, 1984), 157.

³ Marc Kaminsky, "The Uses of Reminiscence: A Discussion of the Formative Literature," *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* vol. 7, numbers 1/2 (1984): 139.

⁴ James Lapsley, "Pastoral Care and Counseling of the Aging," in *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling*, vol. 1, ed. Robert J. Wicks, Richard D. Parsons and Donald Capps (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1993), 264.

to do so, as it often helps them to feel better about themselves, as well as helping them to resolve conflicts from their past. Stories of the past are retold in a way as to bolster the ego-integrity of the narrator, which is why the version of the story is based on who is narrating and not necessarily on the facts. This also explains why there is often a repetitive aspect to the telling. Once the story is told in a way that affirms the narrator's feelings about himself or herself, the story is told and retold because of the good feelings which are engendered by the telling and the need for those positive feelings to be reinforced.

These reminiscences seemed to provide a very significant personal fulfillment. There was this sense in their reminiscing that was, as Erikson described it, this "last crisis" between despair and integrity.⁵ This crisis arises for

...old people can and need to maintain a grand-generative function. For there can be little doubt that today the discontinuity of family life as a result of dis-location contributes greatly to the lack in old age of that minimum of vital involvement that is necessary for staying really alive.⁶

In balance of this despair, reminiscence, in the view of Dr. Robert Butler, "is the psychological process by which the central life task of old age may be accomplished. Through reminiscence, an old person may review his life, achieve integrity, and face death."⁷

As James Lapsley related in his article, "Pastoral Care and Counseling of the Aging", there are issues that the aging express, and which were expressed to me through the stories I heard. According to Lapsley, there are the issues of (1) illness as it related to suffering and pain, removal from a familiar home environment, fear of permanent disabilities and loss of bodily functioning, as well as approaching loneliness and further isolation from family and friends, the approach of death, and finally the concerns of

⁵ Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), 61.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷ Kaminsky, 143.

health costs and the concern regarding the fear of being a burden upon one's family members; and (2) wisdom and the need to recover it and its accompanying dignity. Regarding this second issue, Lapsley discusses losses of old age, the unfinished business that is felt, and the need to have help in making decisions for their lives.⁸

Erik Erikson, in his books *Childhood and Society* and *The Last Completed Stage*, described a concept of eight stages of a person's life, the last being what he called in *Childhood and Society*, "Ego Integrity vs. Despair"⁹. He saw this last stage as being integrative of all the previous stages, if it is to be successful. At this stage there is attained "the acceptance of one's one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions."¹⁰ When this integrative task is not successful, there is despair and a lack of acceptance not only of death, but also of one's life itself. The process of reminiscence aids this task as it enables the older person to carry out the process of integration of the previous seven stages of life.

As described by Butler:

In 1961, [I] postulated that reminiscence in the aged was part of a normal life review process brought about by realization of approaching dissolution and death. It is characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences and particularly the resurgence of unresolved conflicts, which can be looked at again and reintegrated. If the reintegration is successful, it can give new significance and meaning to one's life, and prepare one for death, mitigating fear and anxiety.¹¹

It was the self-affirmative value of reintegration of self that could be heard through the stories that were told to me by the residents of these nursing and adult homes. They just felt good about telling these stories, which is why they told them. I also noticed that the telling of the stories occurred both in personal meetings with me, as well as in the

⁸ Lapsley, 259-262.

⁹ Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), 268.

¹⁰ Kaminsky, 147.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

group setting. In the group setting, the stories took on a special function as there was the feedback given by the others in the group. There would also be the sharing of similar stories by group participants, which added a very dynamic element to their telling of the narratives. The stories became the foundation for the formation of community amongst those in the group.

The telling is selective, which was why Mordechai Rotenberg called this re-biographing. Its purpose is to create a sense of personal significance for the teller, which could be affirmed in the group setting. The person told the story, and the feelings expressed in the story were reflected back onto the person by the reaction and the sharing by the other group members.

When Kaminsky wrote:

The capacity to remember events of the distant past with great clarity may be a source of pride and satisfaction, as well as an affirmation of the old person's 'biological' achievement: he has survived the accumulating years, with their harsh adversities, to achieve longevity. In this respect, he may view himself, and be viewed by others, as strong and superior, and as possessing extraordinary powers of memory¹².

he described a process by which the way the person views himself or herself is shared in the group, and then re-affirmed by the group's other participants. This is a very powerful process.

It became evident that this process of reminiscing, which represents an affirmation of one person's life and its value, occurred most powerfully in a social context, that is, a group setting. Just as there is a teller, there needs to be a listener of the story. Storytellers enjoy having an audience and the receptivity of the audience is also important. This can be a professional, such as myself, or it can be a group of peers, such as the group that we have at religious services in adult and nursing homes.

¹² Kaminsky, 145.

I also believe that in such community there is a sense of holiness, which comes from an affirmation of the individual. This holiness is reinforced by the shared stories from each person's past, and a capturing of the themes of these stories in a shared ritual experience. True community occurs, and is experienced, when there is a mutuality of involvement by each participant, affirming individualities by the telling of each person's story without judgement and confirming the oneness of their combined experience by reflecting on the traditions all the participants share. This organic group process leads to the positive feelings experienced by each group member. As it extends into a wider context in their lives beyond the group setting, this community also achieves a sense of God's Presence because something greater than each individual is experienced through the oneness of the entire group. As I have experienced it over the years, I believe that this spiritual process, as part of the group process, is why group reminiscing seems to have been such a powerful experience for its participants.

Needs to be Addressed

For this project, I will form a group comprised of Jewish residents living in an adult home setting. These residents will come together to specifically share Jewish family and individual life reminiscences. The project will meet the need in the older person to reminisce, in order to achieve the eighth stage of life, integration, as described by Erikson, as well as to allow the aging person to maintain a sense of self-esteem by gratifying narcissistic aspirations. These aspirations favor the "reinvestment of libido in an ideal image of the self in the past"¹³ because all too often the present does not hold many positive self-images. As themes relating to the "wish to be loved and appreciated, the wish to be strong and superior, and the wish to be good and loving tend to reappear as

¹³ Ibid., 144.

recurring themes in many of the stories they tell about their pasts",¹⁴ it can be seen that reminiscing helps to meet these narcissistic needs in the older person.

Self-esteem building goals will be achieved by those reminiscences which describe individual or family events that bolster a positive image of the narrator. As the reminiscences will be of a Jewish nature only, most of these stories will be reminiscences of celebratory moments in the individual's or the family's life, but they will also express the entire gamut of a person's life experiences. These moments will allow the teller to integrate positive experiences from the past into the present, as they come from a time in the past when the teller felt good about himself or herself, and positive about his or her life and family. These stories from their Jewish pasts will also provide a common ground upon which all the group's members can share. This will be the cohesive bond of the group, as these stories share similar verbal/visual symbols, rituals, and ceremonies.

The project will also meet a need to form a community, in the true sense of the word, which will be created by the group and its members' participation. The individuals will benefit from the social contact that develops as a part of the group process. There will be an affirmation of ego integrity by the process of empathic listening by the members of the group. The teller will find that his or her dignity or self-worth "is greatly enhanced by her (sic) feeling that she (sic) is contributing in the present to the life of those in the nursing home."¹⁵ In other words, by just having others listen, the storyteller will feel "good". This will affect, in a positive way, the lives of those listeners and will therefore make himself or herself also "feel better".

If the "capacity to remember remote events is pleasurable in itself"¹⁶, then it must also be pleasurable to do this in a receptive group setting. The affirmation of ego integrity will be achieved in the group by mirroring transference in which the person will

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Lapsley, 257.

¹⁶ Kaminsky, 144.

feel good about himself or herself because others will see him or her in a good light by the story that person shares. There can also be an affirmation of the narrator's feelings (even when they are negative) as he or she hears the feedback of the other group members as each one shares his or her own story in response.

The group process itself will meet the need for community, both from a psychological, as well as a religious, context of significance. The need for affirmation in the group context arises out of the community, which is developed by the selection process of group members, their participation in the group, and the interaction between the group members. As this sense of community is established in this group and meets the associated need, the importance of this project for its participants will be demonstrated.

The reminiscences will meet the individual's need to resolve conflicts from the past through the re-telling of the story in such a way that the past is re-written, in a process called re-biographing. The need in the elderly to accept one's past, and who one has been, is essential in the process of integration of the stages of life before death. This can be accomplished by a

legitimate historical rehabilitation method in which those failing parts in a person's history are *contracted* while the reinterpreted reconstructed parts are expanded to create a more congruent life story dialogue between the future-oriented present new 'I' and the past 'thou'.¹⁷

Rotenberg further described this process and its importance for the teller of the story particularly in the group setting:

To be sure, it is not that past failures must be reinterpreted as achievements, but that they may be recounted and socially accepted as meaningful and even 'adventurous' life stories. For example, we often observe how in certain cultural groups people enjoy telling and even dramatizing their personal miseries and how they succeed to elicit reinforcing sympathy from their attentive audiences.¹⁸

¹⁷ Mordechai Rotenberg, *Re-Biographing and Deviance* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 65.

¹⁸ Ibid., 67.

This project will allow the teller to retell past conflicts or trying moments in life when their self-image was attacked. By this retelling, there is a positive affirmation of the self through the reinterpreted event or events.

The project will meet the need in the elderly to deal with the losses, and particularly the deaths, of family members and friends. As people will be recalled in the stories, for the teller they will become reintegrated into the present. As selfobjects, they will be internalized through the telling of the stories. By remembrance, for the teller of the story, the dead are kept alive as internal objects, to be cherished and appreciated. Even when these memories are painful, they can be re-integrated by the process of re-biographing, in which the person's faults are minimized and the person's plusses maximized.

The telling of the stories of loved ones will allow for the expression of all of the feelings associated with mourning, both finished and unresolved, which include anger, guilt, thankfulness, and integration of that person into one's life. All of these stories from the past and past relationships contribute to the quality of the present life of the teller, as Lapsley wrote:

But many... use memories to try to live in the present. Memories remind the person of who she (sic) has been, both in mourning and celebration, and thus of her (sic) present identity as a person with these particular links through the past to the present world.¹⁹

This project will also meet the need in human beings for ritual, and the process of making rituals which is called "ritualization". Tom Driver in his book, *The Magic of Ritual*, begins by stating that "Human longing for ritual is deep...."²⁰ He sees ritual as being a very part of our animal need for stability and for communication. "Ritualization", he writes, "is a way, an experimental way, of going from the inchoate to the expressive.

¹⁹ Lapsley, 251.

²⁰ Tom F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 3.

from the sheerly pragmatic to the communicative."²¹ As "man... is born with the need for such regular and mutual affirmation and certification..."²², and according to Erikson ritualization meets that need, then it is my intention that these rituals will result in "a sense of *separateness transcended*, and yet also of individual *distinctiveness* confirmed."²³ As rituals "give individuals and families possibilities to be the makers and interpreters of their lives in a number of ways"²⁴, I will help each group participant and the group itself to develop a ritual or rituals which will meet the need for ritualization.

Rituals will be created which celebrate and recognize the themes in the stories. These rituals will also allow the basic needs, expressed through the stories, to find their form through prayers and ceremonies, and their words or actions. I expect that the rituals will be familiar to these older persons, since all the rituals will be couched in a Jewish context from their Jewish past. By sharing these rituals in the group setting, a further affirmation of the initial need for reminiscing will occur. The sharing of rituals in a Jewish context will help in the development of a community, which at its core will be a sharing of Jewish experiences. It will create a shared context, which will allow for the affirmation of each participant in an accepting environment.

Relevancy of Project

The relevancy of this project will lie in its usefulness for professionals in the field of gerontology, and for aging individuals who are striving to find self-affirmation in the face of life's transitions and death itself.

The project will demonstrate the importance of specific religiously contextualized reminiscences and reminiscence groups in affirming the ego integrity and dignity of the

²¹ Ibid., 31.

²² Erik H. Erikson, Joan M. Erikson, and Helen Q. Kivnick, *Vital Involvement in Old Age* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986), 47.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 6.

older person. This will be important to those who care for the elderly, either as family members, friends, or as professionals in an institutionalized setting. It will inspire these persons caring for the elderly to encourage their patients to tell stories from their past, both individually and in a group setting, because they will know the personal value attained from the telling of such stories. The project might also lead to a research project whose goal would be to study if the effects of religiously contexted reminiscences have a different, and even more beneficial, effect upon the narrators, and the listeners of these stories, than other kinds of reminiscences.

The project will be of value to those who do not understand why the elderly reminisce as much as they do; it will help them appreciate these stories from the past. This will be of benefit to both family members and professionals who often find it difficult to listen to these stories, particularly when they are repeated over and over again. The project will give them a better understanding of the value of reminiscing.

The relevancy of this project will also lie in the fact that it broadens the understanding of an important activity of seniors. As this segment of our population is growing in size each day, it is important that society, and particularly families and professional caregivers, comes to a better understanding of why seniors do the things that they do. This understanding will allow caregivers to be more effective and of more benefit both to seniors, as well as to themselves.

The project will demonstrate the importance of ritual in people's lives when those rituals are connected to important themes in those people's lives. This has great significance for the religious community of today, which is searching for ways to capture the spirit of people's lives. A setting which supports the telling of people's individual stories, sharing those stories, and then creatively expressing those stories through shared rituals/ceremonies can be most important for a community in need of relevant rituals. The principles of this project, although applied specifically to the dynamics present in the

elderly, can be applied to people of all ages. The project will demonstrate the validity of linking ritual observance to people's lives as remembered from the past, lived in the present and anticipated for the future.

The project will demonstrate the importance of community in affirming the worth of a person. This occurs when that community is established along principles that support the person both through his or her past, as well as that individual's participation in the present experience of the group. This has relevance not only upon small groups such as the one in this project, but also upon larger groups in other settings. A group, in which all its members are in a dialogical relationship, achieves a level of holiness which support the oneness of the group, while at the same time supporting and affirming each individual's part in that group. Finally, the positive effect on the quality of the lives of the participants, beyond the group should also be seen as an important effect of this group.

CHAPTER II

Religious Principles

The principles found in the Jewish tradition of the inherent value of the individual, and of the individual in community, are the foundations of this project.

The principle of the sacredness and self-worth of the individual is, in Jewish tradition, highly valued. In this project it will be expressed in the selection process and during the group process, in which each person will be treated with a sacredness of respect and dignity. Each individual will be seen as an equal participant in the whole of the group. No individual will be seen as being more important for the group process, even though certain individual or individuals may take on a leadership position in the group. Every person will be seen as having value to the group process by telling stories from the past, and of offering his or her own comments and reflections on the stories of others. A confirmation of the stories each one tells and the themes of his or her life, which will be expressed, will affirm the self-worth of each participant.

This principle of sacredness of the individual finds its first expression in the Genesis narrative where it is stated: "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." (Gen. 1:27) The human being was given a special place in God's creative process, as it states in Psalm VIII: "O Lord... Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour." As such, this sanctity of the person was carefully protected by the tradition.

In *Avot De Rabbi Nathan*, it states that the world was created by ten sayings:

To teach you that him who fulfills one command, or keeps one Sabbath, or preserves one human life, the Scripture regards as if he had preserved the whole world. And him who commits one sin, desecrates one Sabbath, and destroys one

human life; the Scripture regards as if he had destroyed the whole world'... (*Avot De Rabbi Nathan* (verse. 1), xxxi, 45b, 46a.²⁵

There is, therefore, a value placed upon the importance of the individual's life, and the need by society to preserve one's existence. This emphasis upon the individual is also found in Talmud, Yoma 38b, where it is written: "Even for the sake of one righteous man the world would have been created, and for the sake of one righteous man it will continue."²⁶

Regarding the importance of the individual in the Divine scheme, Abraham Heschel wrote, "Our life is not our own property but a possession of God.... *God is in need of man*... Authentic vital needs of man's body and soul are a divine concern. This is why human life is holy."²⁷ God needs the individual as a partner in "His enterprise, 'a partner in the work of creation'."²⁸

The sanctity of the individual, as a value, is recognized in the Jewish tradition both for the individual alone and for the individual in community, that is the person in relationship with others. This is stressed in the following rabbinic comment by R. Isaac found in Talmud Sotah 40a, where it is written:

Let respect for the community always be with you, for you will note that [when blessing the worshippers], the priests' faces were turned toward the people and their backs were toward the Presence. R. Nahman derived this rule from "Then David the king stood up upon his feet and said: 'Hear me, my brethren, and my people'. (I Chronicles 28:2)²⁹

²⁵C.G. Montefiore and H. Loew, eds., *A Rabbinic Anthology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 182.

²⁶Ibid., 231.

²⁷Abraham H. Heschel, *Between God and Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1959), 140.

²⁸Ibid., 141.

²⁹Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds., *The Book of Legends Sefer Ha-Aggadah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 722.

The implication in this citation is that although it is liturgically forbidden to turn one's back on the Divine Presence, when blessing the people, however, they and not God are faced, because of respect for the people overrides the respect due to God. The emphasis is on the divinity that resides in the people, because it is a community of individuals.

This value of the sacredness of the individual within community has its foundation in the Genesis narrative where it is stated: "And the Lord God said: 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.'" (Gen. II: 18) This "help meet" was Eve. It is interesting that the Hebrew for this translation, "a help meet for him", *k'negdo*, can be understood as "either 'at his side', i.e. fit to associate with; or 'as over against him,' i.e. corresponding to him."³⁰ Both of these alternative translations relate to the concept of relationship, as does the comment by the biblical commentator Ibn Ezer, "two are better than one"³¹, and the comment by Samson Raphael Hirsch, "That is why it is '*eshah*', a 'feminine man', who stands, not with him, but *next* to him, '*nedgo*', who works at another point in the same time, so that each one of them fills a separate position, and they mutually complement each other."³² The value, understood in this reading of the Genesis passage, is that the ideal state for individual persons is in the relationship between persons. In this state of relationship, each partner complements the other to form an integrated whole, which becomes the basis for community.

³⁰ Dr. J.H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London: Soncino Press, 1978), 9.

³¹ *Mikrot Gedolot* (New York: Pardes Publishing House, 1951), Bereshit, ch. 2, vs. 18.

³² Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch, Genesis* (Gateshead, England: Judaica Press, 1982), 65,66.

The value of community is also a principle in Jewish tradition. The word *kehillah*, meaning "community", refers "to the organized communal units of Jewish existence."³³ This can be a group assembled for "a specific purpose" (ibid.), 'an organized body or congregation' (ibid.) as well as 'mishpaha (clan or family), bet av (the father's house), and am (people)'"³⁴ Community can be defined as "a community of kinsmen with a common ancestor."³⁵ Community also includes the coming together of small group units or individuals "by virtue of joining, living together, and coming to share common characteristics. Thus the foundation is laid for the inclusion of others, for the development of a community whose basis of unity transcends the biological."³⁶

The theologian Martin Buber defined community as "an organic unity which has grown out of common possessions, work, morals, or belief."³⁷ Buber saw the relationship between persons as a living entity created "in the village and city community, in the workers' fellowship, in comradeship, in religious unity."³⁸ The reminiscing group created for this project, will, by this definition, be a community. There will be a shared common cultural/religious tradition among the participants, which is their Judaism that binds them together. They also represent a sub-community in the midst of a greater community in the adult home, which is their shared living environment.

For Buber, there was community, and what he termed "true community". In this "true community" more intense human needs are met, which I believe will be met in the community formed by this project. Dr. Harold G. Koenig describes these needs in his book, *Aging and God*. He lists fourteen spiritual needs of the elderly, which include:

³³ Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, 81.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 82.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber The Life of Dialogue* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 45.

³⁸ Ibid., 46.

(1) "A Need for Meaning, Purpose, and Hope"; (2) "A Need to Transcend Circumstances"; (3) "A Need for Support in Dealing and Loss"; (4) "A Need for Continuity"; (5) "A Need for Validation and Support of Religious Behaviors"; (6) "A Need to Engage in Religious Behaviors"; (7) "A Need for Personal Dignity and Sense of Worthiness"; (8) "A Need for Unconditional Love"; (9) "A Need to Express Anger and Doubt"; (10) "A Need to Feel that God Is on Their Side"; (11) "A Need to Love and Serve Others"; (12) "A Need to be Thankful"; (13) "A Need to Forgive and Be Forgiven"; and (14) "A Need to Prepare for Death and Dying".³⁹

In the course of Jewish history, community arose out of the need for companionship and partnership, which initially saw its fulfillment in the family and tribal units, and later in the larger unit of the people. As Judaism developed, it then found its strongest form in the development of the *kehillah*, an organic or organized Jewish community. The *kehillah* met the social, political, cultural, and religious needs of the people by creating an environment of partnership in which there is a relation of one individual to another in the "sense of oneness and mutual responsibility."⁴⁰

This sense of *kehillah*, in more modern times, sees itself in the creation and sustaining of the synagogue, but also in small fellowship groups, *havurot*. In all of these organic or organized units of individual partnership, the individual is invested by the tradition with sanctity and divine importance, and the community, made of these individuals, creates a "real community... precisely because they are comrades, have mutual access to one another...."⁴¹ In its essence, the reminiscing group formed in this

³⁹ Dr. Harold G. Koenig, *Aging and God Spiritual Pathways to Mental Health in Midlife and Later Years* (New York: The Haworth Pastoral Press, 1994), 284-294.

⁴⁰ Emanuel S. Goldsmith and Mel Scult, editors, *Dynamic Judaism The Essential Writings of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), 56.

⁴¹ Friedman, 217.

project is a *havurah* group, that is a small *kehillah*, where there is a meeting of the needs of "true community".

Friedman, in his book entitled *Martin Buber the Life of Dialogue*, stated Buber's belief that a "true" community of dialogue "ought to be established on any level of human interaction."⁴² This project will create such a unit of human interaction, a reminiscing group. Community will be formed and sustained, as the group's environment, which affirms open dialogue between the participants, becomes one in which individuals are "open to one another, communicate with one another, and help one another."⁴³ This dynamic integration of individual and community, through the mutuality of reminiscing, wherein the community supports the importance of the individual by the sharing of stories and their accompanying reflective feelings, has been an important principle in the development of Jewish life and Jewish community. It will also be an important part of the process for this project's group, thereby establishing the intimacy that can exist in community between its individuals.

This project's group will create a community out of a shared Jewish experience, because all the participants will be Jewish. It must be a group that is formed not "through exclusion but only by inclusion; a true community must be without barrier, for faith and love can know no barriers."⁴⁴ Although certain criteria must be met regarding mental functioning, and there must be a limit to the number of participants, there will be no other barriers to inclusion in the group. Each participant will be given the opportunity to share his or her reminiscences within a time equal to that of the other presenters. Each individual will be given the opportunity to offer his or her reflections on the presenter's story or stories. By this sharing of stories, there will develop an open dialogue in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The members of the group will each be seen on a basis

⁴² Ibid., 43.

⁴³ Moore, 158.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

equal to all others vis a vis their presence and their contribution. All of these aspects of the group dynamics will allow for true community, as defined by Buber, to be established and sustained:

Participants will not be chosen due to the cliques or friendship groups that are in the home, or even where they reside in the home; that is either in the hotel or in the assisted living part. This group will become a community as it transcends all smaller groups, and becomes a common ground in which:

... people no longer recognize privileged membership or secret alliances as the source of union, but rather see in openness and responsibility and love before the Divine Presence the real bond of the community of believers.⁴⁵

Participation in the community will also enhance the sense of true community as it will "include a boundary to membership so that no group or person can hinder one's being."⁴⁶ Each participant's stories, the interpretations of the stories offered by others, and the expressions of feeling and observations will be accepted unconditionally by all group members.

The community formed for this project will also be what Buber called a "living community"⁴⁷ in that there will be a shared tradition through the remembrances that are presented. Buber wrote often of the community as a place in which sacred literature and history would be shared. As the participants tell of their Jewish reminiscences, there will be a sharing, through the stories that relate to Jewish ceremonies and celebrations as experienced in their past, of the sacred literature and of the history of the Jewish people. This will further assist in the formation of community and will affirm the social bonds of the group's individuals.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Friedman, 94.

⁴⁷Moore, 226.

Yosef Yerushalmi took note of this relationship between remembering and community when he wrote that "collective memory is not a metaphor but a social reality transmitted and sustained through the conscious efforts and institutions of the group."⁴⁸ A group's experience in the present is very much shaped by their ability to remember and relive the past. As memory fuses past and present, it is "no longer recollection, which still preserves a sense of distance, but reactualization."⁴⁹ When these stories of the Jewish people will be re-told in a group, a social bond by shared symbols, both implicit and explicit, will bring the past into the present in a very real way for the group in its here-and-now experience. What was in the unconscious, or even collective unconscious, of the individuals in the group will become immediately manifest and re-experienced by the participants now as members.

This process of remembering is a function of social interaction, not only when the remembrances focus on the collective stories of a people's history, in this case the Jewish people, but also when the stories are of an individual's life experiences, as they will be expressed in the project's reminiscing group. If "individual memory is structured through social frameworks"⁵⁰, then the framework of this community structures the individual and personal memories in such a way as to inspire their recollection, their recitation, their sharing, their interpretation, and their affirmation in the group. The group affirmation which will occur, both by others in the group telling their stories, as well as by the process of listening, will give value and importance to the "elder's life story, and enhance the integration and acceptance of past experiences, i.e., provide validation and affirmation."⁵¹ Mutual validation and affirmation of the individual, accomplished in this

⁴⁸ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), xxxiv.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁰ Ibid., xxxiv.

⁵¹ Koenig, 314.

group, by its very process of reminiscing and reflection, are the foundations of any "living" community.

The oral tradition of the Jewish people, and the reliving of Jewish history through liturgy and ritual, have become the Jewish acts of remembering. These elements of remembrance will be a basic part of this project. The recitation of the stories and the sharing of stories related to rituals, ceremonies, celebrations, and symbols, of an individual, as well as from a familial history, will become the actualization of the participant's past into the present experience of the group and its individuals. What this reminiscing group will be doing, its very act, will be an act of Jewish remembrance. The verbal remembering and sharing of stories from the past will integrate the tradition's sanctity of the individual into the context of the "true" community.

The acknowledgement of the individual's relation to the "eternal Thou" within the group/communal unit will be essential for the formation and sustenance of this project's group. This is why each session will begin with a prayer, and also why there will be a religious service that will observe the conclusion of the reminiscing group. This acknowledgement of the Divine is in response to what Buber stated in his lectures on "Religion as Presence", when he said, "*The true human community is possible only in God.*"⁵² This realization of Divine Presence is achieved not "within individual persons, but between persons and is 'consummated only in the life of true community'."⁵³

The group, that will be formed for this project, will have this focus on God in its midst, as the persons chosen for the group will be a part of the religious community of the adult home. All participants will be chosen from the group of residents who attend my monthly worship services. As they have told me in the early preliminary interviews, prayer and God have always been a part of their lives, both during their earlier years and

⁵² Moore, 259.

⁵³ Ibid.

now during the senior years. This sense of God will be acknowledged during each session, as the themes that are presented in the reminiscences will become the basis for the rituals and ceremonies, which will become part the closure ceremony. These rituals will be of a religious and spiritual nature, sharing the symbols of Jewish life both individually and communally.

This acknowledgement of the Divine in the individual, as a participant in a community, will help the elderly who participate in the group to confront this time of transition in his or her life. The elderly person is facing a multitude of traumatic changes in the biological, intellectual, emotional and spiritual spheres of life. These changes bring to their conscious and unconscious lives, needs, which are a "consequence of an inherent human impulse to relate to God, and also reflect God's influence on and desire to relate to humanity."⁵⁴ This group, by its religious and clinical dynamics, will attempt to meet these needs, embodying the words of Martin Buber:

It is not the community that comes first, but the radii, our individual relations to the eternal Thou. 'This alone guarantees the authentic existence of community.' True community comes about, first, through persons 'taking their stand in living mutual relation with a living Centre, and second, their being in living mutual relation with one another....'⁵⁵

In this reminiscing group of Jewish residents in an adult home setting, it is the relationships formed between the individual members in community that are the very essence of this project.

Clinical Principles

One of the clinical principles pertinent to this project is that of reminiscing. Reminiscing (which for the purposes of this project will be used synonymously with life review, re-biographing, and auto-biographing), as a universal adaptive process naturally occurring in the elderly, was first identified by Butler in 1963, when he wrote:

⁵⁴ Koenig, 283.

⁵⁵ Moore, 258-259.

I conceive of the life review as a naturally occurring, universal mental process characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and, particularly, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts; simultaneously, and normally, these revived experiences and conflicts can be surveyed and reintegrated."⁵⁶

Havighurst and Glasser gave a definition of reminiscence when they wrote:

All of us from time to time look back over our lives, recalling people and events, thoughts, and feelings. Sometimes, such recall comes unbidden, as idle thoughts or daydreams. Sometimes we purposely think back, trying to remember and reconstruct. Such retrospection, both purposive and spontaneous, may be called reminiscence.⁵⁷

A definition of reminiscence, particularly useful for this project because of its existential developmental emphasis, was offered by Webster and Young who described it as "a developmental process in which individuals reintegrate the past in terms of their present. The process of reintegration can be seen to have three process variables: (1) recall, (2) evaluation, and (3) synthesis."⁵⁸

The clinical principle behind reminiscing is described by Erik Erikson as the last and final developmental stage of life wherein the "task of the elderly is to develop ego integrity, a sense of satisfaction with life and its meaning and a belief that life is fulfilling and successful."⁵⁹ This task can be facilitated through reminiscing, which along with "Clinical case studies...autobiographical experiences, life histories, and multiple other forms of reminiscing have all been placed under the banner of life review"⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Robert N. Butler, "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged," *Psychiatry* 26 (1963): 66.

⁵⁷ James L. Poulton and Donald S. Strassberg, "The Therapeutic Use of Reminiscence," *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 36 (3) (1986): 382.

⁵⁸ Irene Burnside, "Reminiscence Group Therapy," *Working with Older Adults, Group Process and Techniques* (Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1994), 164.

⁵⁹ Joan M. Lappe, "Reminiscing: The Life Review Therapy," *Journal of Gerontological Nursing* vol. 13, no. 4, (1987): 12.

⁶⁰ Barbara K. Haight, "The Therapeutic Role of a Structured Life Review Process in Homebound Elderly Subjects," *Journal of Gerontology* vol. 43, no. 2 (1988): 40.

In 1974, Butler proposed that "reminiscing contributes to successful adaptation to old age by maintaining self-esteem, reaffirming a sense of identity, and working through personal losses."⁶¹ As stated above, Erikson saw reminiscing as a life review to be an essential part of a successful eighth stage of life, as it affirms "integrity vs. despair". Butler "postulated the process whereby the old person either accomplishes his task of achieving ego integrity or succumbs to despair."⁶² McMahon and Rhudick saw reminiscence as operating under the control of the ego by which the older person disengages from external reality in order to preserve and create a sense of personal significance.⁶³ As described by Kaminsky:

The increased narcissism which fosters the resurgence of memories that embody a positive or ideal image of the self in the past must also be seen as part of the process of continuing identity formation. If the past is sufficiently charged with experiences that have realistically gratified normative narcissistic aspirations, then it can legitimately provide rich materials for the task which awaits the ego in old age, and the 'ideal image' which the ego constructs out of its past may be, in effect, a crystallization of the positive capacities and experiences actually possessed by the old person.⁶⁴

This process is also accomplished by the connection between reminiscence and a person's relationship with internal objects, "i.e. to self and object representations, with the need to maintain contact with them and find validation for them in external reality."⁶⁵ Reminiscence is one of the means by which a person, in the face of physical decline or changes, of losses and unresolved conflicts, of stressful changes in personal circumstances or social context deals with the aging process. It allows the person to maintain ego identity by allowing that person to hold onto previously internalized or

⁶¹ Lappe, 12.

⁶² Kaminsky, 147.

⁶³ Ibid., 148.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 149.

⁶⁵ Pietro Castelnuovo-Tedesco, "'The Mind as a Stage'. Some Comments on Reminiscence and Internal Objects," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* vol. 59, no. 19 (1978): 22.

integrated object representations. Reminiscence "provides consolation by serving as buffer against loss and depression. It confirms that *something actually* took place; what remains has enough substance to comfort and reassure."⁶⁶

This is an explanation according to object-relations theory as to why the elderly reminisce so often. It is a significant way by which there is a validation of internal representations, now a part of external reality, by the telling of the story from past experience. The telling of the story from one's past brings that story into the present. The story, with its symbolic and psychic meanings, is then not lost, but rather kept alive for the benefit of ego strengthening.

As a person ages, relationships that were once important are often modified or actually lost. "Youthfulness depends on the capacity to internalize new relationships and update old ones. However, with time this process begins to slip and the aging person then is likely to turn inward and appear more self-absorbed."⁶⁷ McMahon and Rhudick described this process of reminiscence as a positive working through of personal losses which allows the ego to disconnect libido from past and irretrievable objects, as these inner objects are brought into external reality by the act of remembrance.⁶⁸ They also wrote that reminiscing is the process which allows the ego to identify with lost "love objects", thereby completing the mourning process. As they wrote:

The satisfying qualities of the early object relationship become an essential part of the memories of the interaction, providing incentive for and giving a satisfying quality to subsequent identifications and eventually providing a sense of identity and continuity which can exist independently of the object. True reminiscing appears to have this quality and function and is both a manifestation and reaffirmation of the experience of continuity...⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 22,23.

⁶⁸ Christie M. Carlson, "Reminiscing: Toward Achieving Ego Integrity in Old Age," *Social Casework: The Journal of Contemporary Social Work* (1984): 83.

⁶⁹ Kaminsky, 155.

This aspect of reminiscing is particularly important for the aging as they reach the end of life and strive for integration, or what has been called, "getting one's house in order". Finishing the mourning process, even mourning from decades before, would certainly be of benefit to the elderly. Reminiscing helps to achieve this benefit.

"Reminiscing is intended to liberate the bereaved from emotional claims of the past in order to think hopefully about the future."⁷⁰ It does so by creating:

reliable images (which) link the bereaved person to their continuous past in such a way that the bereaved is attached to the deceased through love and not anger, which, in turn, permits the person to live 'out of' their future.⁷¹

Mitchell and Anderson, and Melges wrote of the power of recalling, reliving, and regrieving past losses in order to help one "reconstruct his identity into the future."⁷²

These psychological processes allow for the release of anger, guilt, and other emotions, which have hindered grieving, regardless of how many years ago the death occurred.

Reminiscence will be used in this project as a part of grief therapy since it is "the major therapeutic tool for the bereaved."⁷³

Researchers have identified 29 types of reminiscence.⁷⁴ To help me understand the process of reminiscence for this project, however, I found the six types described by Watt and Wong to be the most insightful in interpreting the stories I heard from the group's participants. They describe the following types of reminiscences: (1) Integrative, which

⁷⁰ Coval B. MacDonald, "Loss and Bereavement," in *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling*, vol. 1, Robert J. Wicks, Richard D. Parsons, and Donald Capps, eds. (New York: Integration Books, 1985), 547.

⁷¹ Ibid., 552.

⁷² Ibid., 551.

⁷³ Ibid., 547.

⁷⁴ Burnside, 165.

functions to give "meaning, coherence, and reconciliation with regard to one's past"⁷⁵; (2) Instrumental, which "involves drawing on past experiences to help solve a present problem, and recalling past efforts in coping with difficult situations."⁷⁶; (3) Transmissive, which functions as a means of imparting values and teachings from one generation to the next⁷⁷; (4) Narrative, which functions as a source of pleasure for the teller who biographically accounts past events to his audience⁷⁸; (5) Escapist, which functions to exaggerate past glories and to devalue the present⁷⁹; and Obsessive, which indicates the "individual's failure to integrate certain problematic past experiences"⁸⁰ leading to depression and agitation. The knowledge of these types gave me paradigms of reminiscences so that I would be able to listen more to the content of the story being told than to just its form. This taxonomy defined the form and function of reminiscing for me.

Another clinical principle operative for this project will be the social function of story telling. As stated by Rotenberg, "As a story-telling activity it also functions, however, on the interpersonal level of space, because, after all, we tell stories to other people."⁸¹ Research indicates that reminiscence in a group is more effective as it provides support, encouragement and stimulation.⁸² Reminiscing in a group allows the teller to

⁷⁵ Lisa M Watt and Paul T. P. Wong, "A Taxonomy of Reminiscence and Therapeutic Implications," *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* vol. 16 (1/2) (1991): 44.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 48, 49.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁸¹ Rotenberg, 140.

⁸² James E. Birren and Donna E. Deutchman, "Guided Autobiography Groups," in *Working with Older Adults, Group Process and Techniques*, Irene Burnside and Mary Gwynne Schmidt, eds. (Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Publishers: 1994), 183.

bolster his or her ego strength as that person receives approval for his or her past from the listening group. There is also a benefit to having other group members confirm the experiences of the storyteller by sharing similar stories from their own lives. As stressed by Yalom, interpersonal learning and group cohesiveness are essential for the therapeutic power of the group process.⁸³ Both of these criteria will be a part of this reminiscing group.

Other clinical principles, which will be particularly helpful for this project, are related to the six basics clinical approaches to pastoral care of the aging which Lapsley described as being "characteristics of aging that are particularly relevant to pastoral care."⁸⁴ The first is the need on the part of the pastoral caregiver for empathy. This will be vital to the project's group reminiscing process, if it is to be successful. This success will be predicated upon the feelings by the participants that each one has an empathic listener, "enabling the person to continue to recount events in the past, some of which may have been, or may still be, painful, since she knows that she is being heard, and to some extent understood."⁸⁵

Empathy, the first approach to the pastoral care of the aging is also confirmed in the group process. According to Yalom, the therapist is most effective when he or she is there as a caring presence. As he wrote:

⁸³ Irvin D. Yalom, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* (New York: Harper Books, 1995), 101.

⁸⁴ Lapsley, 247.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 250.

You do by being, by being there with the patient. Presence is the hidden agent of help in all forms of therapy. Patients looking back on their therapy rarely remember a single interpretation you made but they always remember your presence, that you were there with them.⁸⁶

When a trusting relationship is established between therapist (group facilitator-leader) and group, a safe environment is created. This environment enhances "trust, risk taking, self-disclosure, feedback, constructive conflict, working through problems centering around intimacy, and so on."⁸⁷ Such an environment must be established quickly when a group is of a short duration as will be the one for this project.

The second approach into pastoral care of the aging, as suggested by Lapsley, is the recognition by the pastoral care person of the importance of memories as giving identity and self worth. There is also the understanding that these memories, both sad and joyous, aid in reminding the person as to who he or she was, as they remind the person "of her (sic) present identity as a person with these particular links through the past to the present world."⁸⁸

The third basic approach into the pastoral care of the aging is to offer to the participant or participants in the group a sense of structure and purpose, and a sharing, by the care giver, of his identity and personhood as well. This is important to the older person whose life has lost so much of its previous structure, and for whom, too often, people do not share their self-identity. Others do not see the self-identity of the older person as being vital or worthy of affirmation by the revelation of identity by the caregiver. My sharing of my own Jewish experiences and myself with the participants, in the same way that they will share of themselves and their Jewish experiences with me, will be my basic approach. If I can, by my self-disclosure, "remove the obstacles that block the process of growth...creating an ideal therapeutic atmosphere in the therapy

⁸⁶ Yalom, 96.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Lapsley, 251.

group"⁸⁹, then my doing so will become important. I will be a role model to the participants.

The fourth basic approach into this caring is a recognition by the pastoral care giver that the aged person has a future and concerns about that future, which must be acknowledged and taken seriously. This project will be a validation of each participant's future because it, by virtue of its goals, will say to the group members. "This group is being formed to help you to feel better about yourselves, by having each of you look into your pasts to help you with today as well as with tomorrow."

The fifth basic approach focuses on spiritual needs and religious resources. Lapsley saw this as relating to the intensity and direction of human life as reflected toward other persons, toward self, and toward a vocation or purpose in living.⁹⁰ The project will allow for this basic insight into pastoral care. It will offer self-worth to those telling their stories, and give purpose to the participants, as by their sharing in the group process they will help others in the group.

The sixth and final basic approach to the aging by the pastoral care giver is called "reritualization". Lapsley used this term as understood by Erik Erikson as "a certain kind of informal and yet prescribed interplay between persons who repeat it at meaningful intervals and in recurring contexts."⁹¹ This interplay is awakened by the pastoral caregiver as he motivates the participants "in such patterns of relationships and helps the aging to make the necessary connections."⁹² These connections occur both with their peers, their children, and their community members.

The approach of "ritualization" will be used in this project by the rituals created from the themes of the reminiscences, and will then be made into part of the final group

⁸⁹ Yalom, 55.

⁹⁰ Lapsley, 256.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 257-258.

experience. These rituals will also allow for the celebration of positive self images by the taking of the past event or ideal and bringing it into the present. These rituals will allow for the resolution of unresolved mourning to take place. They will connect the participant's past, as reflected through the ritual, with the others in the group and with the family members who will be invited to the group ritual experience. These rituals, by the shared experience, will culminate the group experience of the entire project and will bring all the stories into the present, shared, here-and-now moment. They will allow, through the patterns of celebration, confession, and mourning to find an important attachment to Jewish tradition and its symbols, traditions that are also important to the self-integrity of the Jewish participants.

By reflecting on what Lapsley called the basics motifs or approaches of the pastoral care of the aging, I will be able to see how all the above clinical principles will be integral parts of this project. This project will meet these principles and allow for needs to be met by both the participants as well as by me, the pastoral caregiver. With the understanding and application of these principles, the value and the usage of this project by others in this field will become significant.

CHAPTER III

Project Methodology

Since I already conduct Sabbath and holiday services, and do individual counseling at the Islandia Home for Adults, I will begin by contacting the administration for permission to conduct my project with the residents there. Then I will schedule a meeting with the recreation director, who has been my contact person with the residents. After explaining my project to her, I will elicit her help in identifying the approximately ten residents who would be most appropriate for the project. I plan to choose residents from both the hotel and the assisted living areas of the facility. Those in the hotel section are more independent, and function at a higher level both intellectually and physically. They also are more socially involved than those residents in the assisted living area. I will also try to choose residents with whom I already have some degree of relationship.

By helping me in the selection process, the recreation director will screen out those residents who are suffering from dementia, and will include in the group those residents who have demonstrated, by their participation in other activities in the home, an enjoyment of sharing in a group process.

The project will consist of: (1) meeting with each participant individually to do an intake questionnaire; (2) holding five or six one-hour group sessions; (3) conducting a final session to reflect on the previous sessions, and to create a closing ceremony; (4) holding a concluding ceremony, inviting family members, and residents and staff from the adult home; and (5) meeting separately again with each participant and asking each one to reflect on the value of our reminiscence group, the value of the concluding ceremony, and the group's effect on the quality of his or her life as a resident in the Islandia Home for Adults. I will re-administer the Geriatric Depression Scale to selected participants based upon their previous results. I will also ask for a subjective evaluation of the group's participants by the recreation director. I will ask her whether she saw any

changes, positive or negative, in those who participated in the group. The recreation director will also meet with each participant to fill out a project evaluation questionnaire (see Appendix B). It is important that she, rather than I, meet with each person to eliminate any influence I might have on their evaluation.

Prior to the first session, I will meet with each selected participant and interview him or her using a questionnaire (see appendix A) which I developed with the help of my advisor Dr. Alan Steinberg. The purpose of the questionnaire will be to give me background information on the resident, which will allow me to better facilitate the group. I will explain the project and its goals to each participant, give each resident the schedule of sessions, and encourage each one to think about which reminiscences he or she will want to share with the group. I will mention that props can be brought to the session (i.e., old pictures, Jewish ritual items etc.), if these will be helpful in the reminiscing.

I plan to administer a Mini-Mental Test and Geriatric Depression Scale. The former will verify that there is no or only minimal dementia present. If the resident's responses fall within the scale for dementia, I will need, in an appropriate and sensitive manner, to ask that person not to be a participant. The purpose of the Geriatric Depression Scale will be to help me to better know the emotional state of the participant. If a person's responses fall within the depressive range, I will listen for more depressive themes in his or her reminiscences. I will also want to re-test that participant after the group is concluded to see if the group helped improve the level of his or her depression; this will serve as an evaluation of the group's effect on the emotional state of the participant.

I also intend to tell each resident that the sessions will be audio taped, and that the project will be on file at the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, although all participants' full names will remain anonymous.

At the beginning of each session, I will welcome the participants, and re-state the project and its goals as well as the theme for that day's reminiscences. I will begin by sharing an inspirational poem or a reading that reflects on the values of reminiscing, community, and the sharing of stories and cultural/religious symbols. Each session will also begin with a prayer acknowledging the holiness of the group and the project.

Each session will have a theme for the group's reminiscences. The themes will include the following: stories relating to rituals and ritual items; stories about religious ceremonies and observances in one's life and in the life of his or her family; stories about Jewish communal and congregational experiences; stories about family members and interactions with family members; and stories about losses in a person's life. Although there will be a theme for each week's session, the theme need not be strictly adhered to by the participants; the group will remain flexible and open to individual needs. It might also be that in the course of a given week's sessions, other themes for presentation will become evident. At the end of each session, I will inform the group of the theme for the next week, and certain participants, based on their interview or what was said in a group session, will be asked to specifically prepare stories for sharing. The group members will be encouraged to bring ritual items and photographs associated with their stories.

My role in the group will be one of rabbi, facilitator and counselor. I will take an active directive approach, as this will be helpful for the group process. This technique was recommended in *Working with Older Adults Group Process and Techniques* where it was written, "The therapist must be active and draw the members out, set realistic goals, find the appropriate pace, and anticipate that there will be variable performances by the same member."⁹³ I will ask questions, when appropriate, to help the participant to tell his

⁹³ Irene Burnside, "Reminiscence Group Therapy," in *Working with Older Adults, Group Process and Techniques*, Irene Burnside and Mary Gwynne Schmidt, eds. (Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Publishers: 1994), 171.

or her story. The asking of additional questions and sharing of related stories and comments by group members will be encouraged.

The reflection and evaluation on the each day's presentation will be used in my own assessment of the session. This will be done along with a review of the audiotapes, as well as my session notes. I will evaluate the group process, and my interaction with the group, insuring that I am facilitating the process and not hindering it. I also intend to keep a journal of the group sessions for my own reflection and assessment.

The closing ceremony will enable the participants to express, through ritual and ceremony, their feelings about the group and the group process. It will be an acknowledgement of our community and the Divine Presence in the group and in its process. The ceremony will offer the residents the opportunity to share some of their stories with the larger community of the home. It will also give them the opportunity to publicly show appreciation for the presence of loved ones and friends in their lives. The participants, with my advice and direction, will create this ceremony.

Assessment of Project

My assessment of the effects of the group will come from my evaluation of each session, as well as from the questionnaire and interview I will conduct after the group ritual experience. Although I will try to make appropriate adjustments after each session, I will use all the participants' assessments and reflections, and particularly those offered after the last session, as a means of determining the following: the value of this specific type of reminiscing process; the specific value of having a reminiscing group sharing religious/cultural reminiscences from the group's mutual traditions; the value of taking the reminiscences and expressing them through rituals and ceremony; and the value of community in affirming the benefits of reminiscing.

I hope that this reminiscence group will be of benefit to the participants in terms of self-esteem and ego integrity. I will be curious to see if this group process will have a

positive effect on the participants while in the group, will affect group interactions, and will change relationships outside of the group. I will want to see if participation in this group gives a greater sense of dignity to these older persons as each faces this transitional time in his or her life.

I will also use a comparison of both the initial and the final Geriatric Depression Scale results, in order to see if there is any significant change in the status, particularly for those participants who scored "very depressed" on the initial test.

Finally, I will view the project as a success if the participants enjoy attending the sessions, and happily anticipate the next session. Success of the project will also be measured through the participants' evaluation of the sessions. If he or she feels that the sharing of the stories was personally meaningful, enabling that person to feel better about himself or herself, then I will find the project a success. I also will want to know if he or she finds both the telling of the story and the concluding ceremony as having personal significance. I will look for an expression or description of this significance. I want to know if any unresolved issues or feelings found their reconciliation through the storytelling. I will listen for any statements that present a feeling that this group process made a difference in the participant's daily life at the adult home. I will also look for positive statements regarding the role that rituals, and particularly Jewish rituals, will now play in each participant's life, and if these rituals have taken on a greater meaning because of the group and its shared experience.

I hope that this project and its results will be of help to professionals and, particularly pastoral caregivers, who are involved in caring for the elderly. As it demonstrates the importance of sharing reminiscences from a specific religious tradition, it will be a valuable group experience to be brought into adult and nursing home populations. It will enable clergy of all religious denominations, who serve such

institutions, to enhance the dignity of the aging residents. Its usage of religious rituals, as a reflection of life experiences, will demonstrate the creative usage of ritualization.

Storytelling itself is a healing ritual. As seen by this project, the underlying themes of the reminiscences, when expressed through rituals created from the themes of the stories, can also become a part of this healing process. This project and its results will also give to the clergy, caring for the elderly, a powerful tool which can enhance the connection of the elderly with his religious traditions, even as that person is institutionalized and often feels an ever increasing isolation from that tradition and from his or her community. This isolation will be overcome because of the formation of a community which, in the context of Jewish life, will be shaped by mutual sharing of traditions, stories, and expressed care for each individual within the community, because that individual becomes an essential part of that community.

CHAPTER IV:

Results: Interviews and Group Selection

In the interviews, I obtained appropriate and helpful answers to the questionnaire. (Appendix A). The interviews enabled there to be a baseline of personal information, which proved to be useful during the sessions. Placing a limit of 1/2 hour upon each interview turned out to be too constraining. Responses to questions such as, "Synagogue(s) during growing up years", "Religious Education", and "Anecdotal Family Jewish History", evoked lengthy responses from a few of the interviews. As a number of residents began telling their stories during the interview, it was necessary to ask them to wait until the group sessions. One resident even brought a Kiddush cup to the interview to share the story associated with this ritual object. In leading a reminiscing group in the future, I would leave more time for each interview.

I deselected one participant, Sol B., because of his score on the Mini-Mental Test. His score of 10 indicated severe dementia. As I knew of his difficulties in communicating with other residents from my monthly visits to the home, I decided not to include him in the group. I made this decision keeping in mind the words of Irving Yalom:

Good group therapy begins with good patient selection. Patients improperly assigned to a therapy group are unlikely to benefit from their therapy experience. Furthermore, an improperly composed group may die stillborn, never having developed into a viable treatment mode for any of its members.⁹⁴

I decided to select Florence for the group, even though she scored 12 on the Mini-Mental Test. I had observed Florence in her interactions with other residents and she was well liked by the others in the home, and had their respect. As she could share her thoughts and feelings, with directed facilitation, I thought she would be a valuable participant in the group. She also scored 13 on the Geriatric Depression Scale, which

⁹⁴ Yalom, 219.

indicated mild depression and I was curious to see if the group would have any effect upon this mood state.

Lena self-deselected from the group because she did not want to share her reminiscences. Florence S. also self-deselected because she had recently had a fight with Sara, who had been selected for the group, and therefore, Florence refused to be in the same room with Sara. I believe that this was unfortunate because Florence S. would have been good for the group because of her very articulate way of speaking and sharing her thoughts and feelings as evidenced from her other interactions in the home. Recalling Yalom's advice, however, that deselection before the group begins forestalls the "discomfort of dropping out of the group"⁹⁵, I decided not to attempt to urge her into the group after her self-deselection.

The interaction among group members began by the decision as to where, in the building, the sessions would be held. The more ambulatory residents lived on the East Side of the facility. This side had a better room for the meetings, in that it was located in a less trafficked area of the facility. These residents, however, opted to have the sessions on the West Side because it was physically easier for them to go to this side, than for the less ambulatory residents to travel to the East Side. The group made this decision even before I arrived at the first session.

I told the participants we would begin each session with a prayer. I began the first session by saying the "*she-he-che-ya-nu*" prayer, offering in the translation our thanks for the beginning of this group. I then left it to the participants to volunteer their prayers at subsequent sessions. Some of the participants either were not comfortable or were not able to say any prayers. Others participants offered prayers which, in a simple tone, expressed a thankfulness for being in the group or for life itself. Sarah said: "I thank God

⁹⁵ Ibid., 239.

for being included in this group and for being here. This makes me so happy.” At the third session Elaine offered a prayer for the health of all the participants. Joe offered a prayer giving thanks to God for his awakening each morning to enjoy life. Dan offered the prayer: “Thank you God for this day. Please give us strength, courage, faith, health, and happiness. Please God be with us on the good days and the bad days. In every way I’m getting better and better. Amen.”

It proved to be more difficult than I had thought to motivate the participants to express, through their own words of prayer, their feelings about the group. I felt, however, it was important for them to express their feelings in this way, as it would bear witness to the Divine Presence in the group through their words, not mine. I used the beginning of each session to talk about prayer as an expression of the feelings a person or group is experiencing and to teach how a person can express himself or herself through prayer. Members of the group did tell me how important these prayers were to them and the group’s experience. As Joe said, “It let me know God is here in our group.”

The Sessions

The first session began with each participant offering his or her own biography. The equal participation by all group members telling his or her story began with this session. The interaction between group members was experienced as each time a story would spark a story from someone else, an emotional reaction (both tears and smiles), or a question regarding the story that was being told.

Although I set the theme for the sessions’ reminiscences, I facilitated the group in a way that the theme of the day could be placed aside if a theme arose spontaneously from the group. I saw the need to be as flexible as possible regarding the theme for the session’s stories after reviewing both the audiotape and my journal notes. I came to understand that the free-flow of interaction among the group participants allowed for the sense of community to be established.

An example of this occurred in the fourth session. As Joe began to talk about his Jewish life experiences, he spoke about his experiences as a gunnery sergeant in the Scottish brigade during World War II. As he mentioned, just in passing, the anti-Semitism he had experienced while in France, a sharing of anti-Semitic stories by all the other group participants was inspired and this theme became the focus of the stories for the remainder of that session. It was this unanticipated reminiscence regarding anti-Semitism that sparked the most interesting stories from the group.

At the end of the first session, I set the theme of the next session to be a sharing of remembrances which centered on rituals and ritual items in a person's individual or family Jewish life. I saw evidence of preparation for this session when some of the group members brought ritual items with them to the group meeting. During the week, Belle had called her children to bring her some of her personal family ritual items. Dan brought the Kiddush cup his father had given to him when he was only fourteen years old. He told us that when his father had given it to him, he had said, "As I give this to you, I ask that you follow in my footsteps." This became the theme of Dan's life, to do good for others the same way his father had done. Morris talked about his Bar Mitzvah ring, which he had been wearing for 75 years, and Sarah brought a *yahrzeit* memorial light.

Others had no ritual items, but prepared for the session in other ways. Morris read from hand written notes. Other participants shared their well-thought out stories, which related to the session's theme.

Sometimes the theme of one session spilled over into another. At the third session, Belle continued the theme from the prior one with two special items. She brought her older sister's baby cup, which had been given to Belle in 1909 after her sister died, and she also brought her parents' 25th anniversary celebration plate.

The fourth and fifth sessions' theme was devoted to holiday celebrations. Many emotionally moving reminiscences revolving around the Jewish holidays celebrated with

family and community were shared. Not all stories that were shared portrayed positive emotional experiences. As each session was reviewed, notice was taken that the depth of feelings expressed was becoming more intense with each passing week. The group members became less inhibited in their stories and related feelings, both positive and negative, with the group. I encouraged sharing these feelings within the group in my comments or questions directed to the person telling the story, as well as those interacting with the storyteller.

At the fifth session, Anna, who had been quiet in comparison to the other group members, began describing Jewish holidays in Brooklyn. She remembered seeing everyone dressed in his or her holiday finest. "It was a beautiful sight," she stated. She then shared with the group that unlike their fond memories, she hated the holidays, as they were filled with "all kinds of bad stuff" for her and her family. She described the many losses she, her father, and her husband had suffered in their lives, which had prevented her from enjoying these family times. She discussed how this has affected her to this very day in regards to her inability to enjoy holidays with her son and his family. She was not happy with her attitude toward the holidays, but, as she stated, she "simply cannot help it." She spoke about her disappointment in her son marrying a non-Jewish woman, and how he and her family constantly made holiday "demands" upon her. Other group members and I offered suggestions to Anna as to how she might better deal with the holidays, in order to improve her relationship with her son, which suffered particularly at times such as Chanukah and Thanksgiving. There was a genuine concern by the group for Anna and her distress at the holidays.

As Anna had also mentioned Passover in her home as a young child, which was her last positive family holiday memory, Belle, Elaine, Pearl, Joe, Danny and then Florence also shared their reminiscences about Passover celebrations. The following is

my interaction with Florence as she spoke about her Passover memories, and then about her father.

Rabbi: Florence, you are quiet today.

Florence: I'm at a loss for words.

R: Oh. Do you remember anything about Seders at home?

F: Yes.

R: Did you enjoy them?

R: Yes. I think so.

F: You have a sense that you enjoyed them right?

R: Yes. At least you told me I have a sense. (Laughter)

R: You had two, three brothers?

F: Yes.

R: You had a pretty big family?

F: Yes.... I came from a very wonderful family.

R: Wonderful in what way?

F: My mother... was a wonderful cook and she made the "*Chally*" every Friday.

R: Kneading the dough in the special way?

F: Yes.

R: What was your mom's name?

F: Betsy.

R: She was the "*Ba-al-a-busta*"?

F: Oh very much so.

R: What was her best dish?

F: They were all good.

R: She was a nice mother?

F: Yes. And she was always cheerful (Florence's face lights up)

R: Like you. Maybe you are always cheerful because you got that trait from her.

F: Whatever I did was good.

R: In other words, what you did you could do no wrong.

F: That's right.

R: And your dad?

F: He was from lower Manhattan. He had a business there. He was a ragman; they called him Mr. Rag Man. I was very embarrassed for him.

R: Why?

F: Well he was the ragman. It wasn't very pleasant for me.

R: You mean, when people asked you what did your dad do, you were embarrassed!

F: Yep.

R: You wanted him to do something different?

F: Yes, something more concrete.

R: Something you would be more proud of?

F: Yes.

R: That bothered you?
 F: I think so!
 R: Did you ever tell him that?
 F: No! (Said emphatically!)

R: You just had feelings you kept in side of you! I'm sure that wasn't easy for you as you were growing up! And how was he as a father?
 F: Wonderful
 R: That's nice! Did he make a decent living? (She shook her head in the negative)
 F: Not really.
 R: You wish then that you had more money in the family to have better things?
 F: Right
 R: You were kind of poor?
 F: I think so. I was embarrassed and ashamed many times.
 (After a few seconds of silence)
 R: I'm glad you could share this with us. This was very special!
 F: I am too.
 R: Did you ever say this before to any one?
 F: No. Thanks to you I can. You've been a big help to me.
 R: I helped you to come out of yourself and to express yourself.
 F: Yes, and I thank you very much. (I am sitting next to her, and she bends over and gives me a kiss.)

Florence then described the other members of her family, focusing on her brother Harry. When she mentioned that her brother Harry had played the clarinet, the other group members who played instruments shared their stories regarding their musical abilities and experiences.

Before the beginning of the sixth session, Morris asked to speak. He expressed his disappointment with the Chanukah party I had conducted earlier in the week. He questioned me as to why I had spent more time singing Chanukah songs than talking about the meaning of the holiday. I said to him that I was pleased he could say this to me in front of the group. Belle, who has known me longer than Morris has, became highly incensed at Morris' comments, as she wanted to come to my rescue and defend my actions.

We were scheduled to hold only seven sessions as a group. Therefore, at the sixth session, I began by giving the participants the opportunity to begin summarizing their

reminiscences. I went around the table asking each participant to share any particular stories, which they still had not shared with the group. Some of the participants offered a remembrance, which had been previously omitted, while others repeated or expanded their prior stories. At the close of this session, Artie said, "After hearing all of these stories, I feel so unreligious in comparison to every one else here in this room." Immediately, a few of the participants responded by affirming Artie's Jewish feelings and religious commitment, telling him that he was not being fair to himself.

Thinking everyone was finished, I began to wrap up the discussion. I, however, was reprimanded by the group for inadvertently leaving out two group members who had not had their final chance to share their reminiscences. I thanked the group's members for speaking up and then I allowed Anna and Belle to then share their final stories.

After the session, I met with Artie to assess his reactions to the session. He acknowledged that now "he feels more Jewish than before because of the group." As he reflected, "I used to have such low self-esteem, but now, I realize I can contribute to others and their lives. I can appreciate myself more now than before. I am something. I can have hope."

The seventh session began with a discussion of the termination of the group. The participants began reflecting on how much the group had meant to them, and they hoped that there would be other groups in the future. Each person offered their assessment of the group with positive remarks for the process and the group's positive meaning for them. They expressed regret and sadness that the group had come to an end, but they hoped that others would be planned.

As a conclusion to the group and its process of reminiscing, I asked each person to tell the group who was the most influential person in his or her Jewish life, and why they chose this person. This sharing allowed me to enter into a discussion of our group's celebration and ritual of conclusion. Aware of group process, I tried to elicit from the

group a celebration and ritual of conclusion which would be meaningful to each of them. The group agreed on the necessity of saying the memorial Kaddish prayer for the people in the participants' lives who had been a part of the stories they had shared. I wrote down the names of their deceased loved ones so I could read them at the service.

As the group's stories, for the most part, focused on the participants' Jewish lives, they decided that the ritual of closure should also be a celebration of their continued commitment to Judaism. After I described the Confirmation service held in the Reform tradition at the holiday of Shavuot, the group decided that they would like to have a service of confirmation of their devotion to their Judaism. Each group member wanted to be called before the Torah to recite the blessings before and after the Torah reading. I planned to read the section containing the Ten Commandments from Exodus chapter 20. Each participant would be given the opportunity to say what their Judaism, their Jewish life, and this reminiscing group meant to him or her before I bestowed a blessing and issued a certificate marking the occasion.

As the discussion of the ritual of conclusion continued, some of the group members stated that they had never been Bar or Bat Mitzvah. They expressed the hope that this concluding ceremony could also be the opportunity when they could fulfill this life-long dream. After I agreed to meet their request, the faces of those to be Bar/Bat Mitzvah were shining with joy. Anna said that her father would be truly proud of her for doing this. As she stated, "After the death of my two sisters, he, who was such a religious man, threw away his Tefillin and never set foot into a synagogue again. I believe that by what I am doing, he would come back."

This discussion regarding the concluding service, led to a discussion of the frustration these residents were having with the abridged prayer book they were using for Friday Sabbath services. They wanted a service that was more meaningful to them. So it was decided that the group would continue as a ritual committee for the home to do

something to improve that prayer book. Therefore, this new committee, with my help, will try to create a new prayer book and service, with more insightful prayers for their special needs as older persons.

As this last session drew to its conclusion, I asked that all of the participants hold each other's hands. All of us shared in a blessing of thanksgiving to God for the group and for all that it has meant for their lives.

Concluding Ceremony

The service of celebration and remembrance was a very moving experience for everyone. Many family members were present to witness this special event in the lives of their parents, in-laws, and grandparents. All group participants confirmed their commitment to their Jewish heritage, as each one came before the Torah and recited the appropriate blessings. Those group members who had not been Bar or Bat Mitzvah received a certificate marking this significant moment of accomplishment in his or her life.

Those participants who wanted to speak were given the opportunity to address the gathering. Anna repeated her words, spoken in the group's session, describing the pride her father would have had in her Bat Mitzvah. Pearl expressed great joy over this special moment in her life. Danny, whose female friend in the home bought him a "Bar Mitzvah" Tallit for this occasion, expressed his satisfaction in knowing that he finally can say that he is a Bar Mitzvah. Belle offered the following words:

I was asked by Rabbi Moss to say a few words regarding 'What is a good Jew!' In my heart believing in God is foremost. Having some religion is also important and how one prays and practices the laws of religion are, of course, personal and up to the individual. Learning and education help one to decide.

Goodness, kindness, honesty, consideration and respect for one another also are the answers to this question and certainly being able to give charity when needed makes one a 'good' Jew.

As a 'good' Jew welcoming the Sabbath and remembering all the Holy Days, joining in the services at the Temple are all a part of being the 'good' Jew.

After I mentioned the names of all the participants' loved ones that had passed away, we then recited the memorial Kaddish prayer. The service of celebration and remembrance concluded with all the participants and their family members holding hands as the cantor sang a prayer for God's blessings as we left this ceremony. A collation hosted by the home was provided.

Follow-up to Group Sessions

As a follow-up to the group, and in assessing each individual's experience in the group, I asked the recreation director to meet with each participant and to fill out an evaluation questionnaire (Appendix B), which I then analyzed. I also re-administered the Geriatric Depression Scale Test to Arthur and Florence, and I interviewed the recreation director for her observations and assessment of the group and its effect upon the residents.

Florence had scored 13 out of 15 on the first test, which had indicated severe depression. She had felt her life was hopeless, helpless, and empty. Her answers to the questions had been stated in a most emphatic tone of voice. When, however, the test was administered after the group's last session, although Florence's score remained the same, she wavered in her answers saying, "Maybe yes, maybe no. I'm not sure" to six of the questions ("Are you afraid something bad is going to happen to you?" "Do you feel happy most of the time?" "Do you feel helpless?" "Do you think it's wonderful to be alive now?" "Do you feel pretty worthless the way you are now?" and "Do you feel your situation is hopeless?").

Although Artie had not tested on the depressive side on either the first or second test, I re-tested him because he was on medication for depression. As with all such tests, how the respondent responds to the questions is as important as the answers themselves. On his re-test, Artie was much more verbal and animated. To question number 14, "Do you feel that your situation is hopeless?" he responded, "Not any more, because of this group. It has shown me that I have a beautiful Jewish heritage and can be proud of it. I am also able to share it with others. I never knew I could do this."

Participant Evaluations

I then reviewed the group's responses to the questionnaire (Appendix B). To questions one through four (1: "How did you feel about our Reminiscence Group?"; 2: "How did you feel when you told your stories?"; 3: "How did you find telling your stories personally helpful, not helpful, no comment?"; 4: "How did you feel when hearing the stories of the other participants?"), all but one person responded in the positive. This person responded to questions 1 and 3, "half and half", and to question 4, "no comment". All respondents said that they would want to participate in any group held in the future.

Whereas four respondents said that the group had no affect on the way he or she saw herself or himself, responding to question 5, ("Did this group affect the way you see yourself?") others said: "Yes, but I can't explain." "I learned that we're all in the same boat suffering in the same way. I'm happy when people meet me half way." "Yes, very good." "Yes, it brought up the past." "Yes, it brought back memories. The group made me feel good about myself."

Whereas three respondents had no response to question six ("Did this group affect the way you interact with other residents in the group and in Islandia?"), others responded, "It brought me closer to other member of the group." "Yes, because it brought up reactions to personal situations in the past and let us learn from each other." "Half and half." "Yes, very good." "In a way, it got us to know people." "It verified things I felt

about people, people I like, I enjoy speaking to." "Group was pleasant. I don't interact with most people here."

Four residents had no response to question 7 ("Has this group made a difference in your life in Islandia?"). Other responses were: "Yes, interested in how others think and feel." "Yes, I learned to see that some people talk and don't mean what they say." "I have people to talk with now." "Yes. I enjoy being with people. The Rabbi is the greatest." "I'm more content. Feel safe with people I speak to. Rabbi Moss made me feel content with being Jewish." "Somewhat, can't explain."

Three residents did not respond to question 8 ("Did you do things differently or deal with other people differently because of the group?"). Other responses were: "I found the group very interesting." "The feeling of self-determination." "Thoughts were filled with stories I heard. No, I feel same about the people. I made no social contacts." "I waited to see what happens at the next meeting. No, I did not do things differently." "I felt a little differently." "I'm a little more understanding of the other people." "Yes, it was a very nice fulfilling week. No, I didn't do things differently or deal with other people differently."

Most participants did not respond to question 9 ("Are there any suggestions you have for the group and the group leader so that it would be more helpful and enjoyable for all the participants?"). Those who did, said: "I'm at a loss for words." "To allow the other members to break in and question the person talking about what they were saying." "The Rabbi did a wonderful job. A man you can talk to." "It's a good thing mainly because of the Rabbi. It should continue." "We should continue because it would continue to help. I guess you have something to look forward to."

In response to question 10 (If this group continued, would you want to participate?), all respondents answered in the affirmative.

Evaluation by Recreation Director

The following is the Recreation Director's assessment of the program and its impact on the participants.

During Rabbi Moss' group at the Islandia I observed a great change in the resident's personalities. The members of the group were extremely enthusiastic each week and looked forward to meeting every Monday morning with the Rabbi. This group gave our residents time to share with others and develop better relationships with each other feel that having this group enabled the residents to reflect back on their past and reminisce about different experiences they've had over the years.

In my own opinion, remembering and talking to the elderly about their past is very therapeutic for everyone involved. If this group were to continue, all of our residents would be more than happy to participate and I'm sure new residents would love to be involved in such an experience.

CHAPTER V

Evaluation and Discussion

The religious and clinical principles described in chapter two guided this project in meeting its goals. Through the formation of a reminiscing group, these principles enabled the participants to develop and sustain a connectedness in four ways. These four ways are: (1) within the self (intrapersonal), (2) with other persons (interpersonal), (3) with the greater community (extrapersonal), and (4) with God (transpersonal). The need for this connectedness, in these four ways, is important for the older person, and particularly for one who is institutionalized in an adult or nursing care facility. The residents in these facilities so often experience a dis-connectedness from life experiences, as he or she feels dehumanized, alone, and with pain, debilitation, and disease. In these settings:

Losses of mobility, sensory acuity, or mental capacity threaten the continuity of the self by producing the feeling that the identity formed through a life-time of diverse experiences has been nullified. A lack of contacts with family and friends erodes the sense of having meaningful social connections. Being confined indoors with few opportunities to see the 'outside world' and being separated from most or all of the possessions that once meaningfully supported a sense of selfhood distort the sense of connectedness to the world. Few opportunities may exist for worship, and private devotions may be curtailed due to sensory impairments and reduced stamina.⁹⁶

As stated above, the group formed for this project enabled its participants, who as older persons, are at Erik Erickson's "Eighth Stage of Life", to reconnect with self (intrapersonal) by developing and sustaining a sense of self-worth, identity, and dignity.

⁹⁶ Susan H. McFadden and Maryellen Hanusa, "Nourishing the Spirit in Long Term Care: Perspectives of Residents and Nursing Assistants on Sources of Meaning in Residents' Lives," *Journal of Religious Gerontology* vol. 10, no. 4 (1998): 10,11.

This group also enabled its participants to establish and sustain a "true" community, as defined by Martin Buber, by reconnecting with other persons in the group (intrapersonal), with the greater Jewish community (extrapersonal), and with God (transpersonal). This reminiscing group successfully met its goals, as evidenced by an analysis of the project and the assessments used to gauge its success.

The first connection, the interpersonal, was seen in many aspects of the group's experiences. The reminiscences themselves served to fulfill this function of reconnecting the individual with one's self, by reawakening, through the process of recalling and then sharing, the stories from the person's past. Each participant's self is a product of all the internalized persons from the past. Father, mother, grandparents, siblings, spouse, children, significant others, as well as the self as experienced in earlier stages of life, are all part of the person of today. When these people, from earlier stages of the person's life, were re-called, through the process of reminiscing, each participant experienced the syntonetic trait, in Erikson's terms, of the last stage, "integrity"⁹⁷, which enabled a sense of wholeness and balance to be achieved. The coherence and wholeness of this stage was reached when the past was reintegrated into the present. There was an integration of their loved ones, and their positive traits and qualities, into the participant's self in the present. This enabled these seniors to feel better about their futures, because of the feeling of wholeness that was achieved by the reminiscing process.

This connection with oneself through the remembrance of people from a person's past was heard most poignantly in the last session, when each participant was asked to

⁹⁷ Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 64.

tell about the most significant person in his or her Jewish life. Elaine mentioned her grandfather, who had given her a strong identity as a Jewish woman, as he showed appreciation for her as a Jewish girl. Belle spoke of her father who had been a role model in her Jewish life, because he had shared with her and had transferred to her his expectations about Jewish values. Anna mentioned her father, who had given to her his love of Jewish life, especially its rituals and traditions. For Danny, it was his mother who had given to him his artistic ability, as well as his strong Jewish identity. He also mentioned the significance of a Rabbi in the Bronx who would sit by his open window and wave to Danny. As a young man, Danny saw this waving as a way of showing him the care of the Jewish community for him as a person, despite the fact that his family was not associated with a congregation and he was not Bar Mitzvah. Pearl mentioned her family's Rabbi who had demonstrated concern for her family during its difficult moments. Morris spoke of his parents who had provided him with a Jewish education. Artie mentioned the impact his father and his Jewish environment had upon his life. Sarah told of the importance of her parents who had offered her a role model for involvement in the activities of the synagogue and the Jewish community.

As these significant persons were recalled through the stories that were shared, the narrators realized that their loved ones had contributed in making these participants who they had become. By speaking of them, there was a re-integration, and therefore re-connection of these persons from the past into the present, re-connecting the storyteller with his or her self.

The process of achieving intrapersonal connectedness was seen in Artie who, because of the group, was able to feel more hopeful concerning his future. As he told me during a verbal evaluation of the group, he now saw that his life in the home might be a stage to learn about himself, enabling him to move back into community with family and friends. Even if it was not, however, he said, "I am a better person now, and feel better about myself." Most of Artie's stories related to his adolescent years and his very warm and positive relationship with his father. He spoke about his own, as well as his family's, commitment to Judaism and a religiously observant way of life. He shared remembrances related to how he stood up against anti-Semitism during his teenage and college years. He admitted that he had moved away from his Jewish feelings and experiences as the years had gone by. He could see that by recalling them now, through his stories about the significant people and experiences in his life, that he was reawakening these positive Jewish feelings in himself. By once again having favorable feelings toward Judaism, he now felt whole. This reminiscing process has enabled him to face his future with a more positive integrated sense of self, as he has now reconnected with his Jewish past.

The group's positive effect upon a person's self-worth was seen in the anticipation by each group member of the forthcoming session. The members, as seen in their evaluation responses, enjoyed coming to the sessions and felt good during and after each session. The group's significant contribution to the self-worth and dignity of the individual participants was seen in the number of positive comments written in the evaluations, heard in the verbal evaluations from group members, and expressed by the unanimous desire by the participants for the continuation of the group.

I was able to observe the positive effect on the participants' self-worth, as I watched the residents interact with each other and with other residents in the home, outside of the group's sessions. They appeared to be more confident about themselves, and they constantly expressed a positive feeling of pride. The recreation director's comments in her evaluation bore witness to the beneficial effect of the group upon the daily lives of the group's members.

Quite often, the group was assembled even before I entered the building. There were very few absences, and many of the members re-arranged their doctor's appointments and other activities to attend the sessions. Each person was an active participant in the group's presentations. There was a positive investment of self in the telling of the stories, evidenced in the emotions, both tears and smiles, that accompanied the stories, and in the desire of each participant to share and to not be left out of the group's process. There was a sense of personal pride in self and in one's family members as their stories were told.

The two sessions when participants brought ritual objects and family pictures were especially inspiring. These objects were a concrete demonstration of the reality of the memories and of the feelings evoked through them and by them. The participants' identities as Jews, and as persons, were integrally related to these objects, as well as to the stories they shared with the group.

The second way of connectedness, the interpersonal, was established because, as the group developed, it established a Buberian sense of "true" community. The development of this community began with the interview process itself. I did not realize

at the time that, as I met with each person, I had already contributed to his or her sense of self-worth and sacredness as a person. As they received this attention from me, I was saying to each of them that you are a significant part of the whole.

The group was unique because the participants came from the two different sides of the facility. One side, which is considered to have residents of a "higher" physical and intellectual function, rarely interacts with residents from the other, or lower, functioning side. In this group, however, both sides had equal representation. Each side also has its own cliques. For this group, however, cliques disappeared once residents, who normally did not interact with each other on a daily basis, were now brought together. Therefore, the participants transcended a number of the categories which, in an institutionalized setting, tend to separate people. In this group of a "true" community, the side of the building, the level of function, and the clique to which one belonged were set aside, as each participant and his or her stories played an equally important part in the group.

The sense of community showed itself by the decision, made by the more ambulatory group of residents, to go to the "other" side for our sessions. Even though their meeting room was larger and more comfortable, they chose to relocate because of the difficulty transportation would impose on the others. Even at this early stage, there was evidence of a concern by the group for the individuals in the group. They were soon to become a community.

The feeling of connection to community was expressed in many ways. On occasion, if a participant was being left out of a discussion, others reminded me to include that person. There was a concern when someone was not in attendance or was late

in showing up. There was an affirmation of feelings, both positive and negative, by the group's members, as stories were shared with the group. When a positive feeling was expressed through a remembrance, the other group members affirmed this by positive expressions of their own or by sharing stories reflecting those feelings. When a negative feeling was expressed, such as the session when Artie questioned his Jewish commitment, the group affirmed the positive aspect of his Jewish life, in order to affirm his self-worth as a Jew.

There was a real sense of community in that the group understood and required the participation of every individual for that community to be sustained. Everything said and done by the group was inclusive of all its members. It was for this reason that the group members hoped that the group could continue. They felt, unlike in the other activities of the home, that here, in this group there was community in which each one, as an individual, was important and needed. The sacredness of the individual was integrated into the sacredness of the community through a true sense of connectedness with the whole community.

The formation of community was a process that grew, as the group became a safe place where participants could feel free to express themselves without fear of judgement or condemnation. The whole community accepted each person's feelings, both positive and negative, because ultimately each person saw himself or herself in the others. As each participant's story was potentially the story of the others in the group, there was a true sense of empathic sharing as the dialogue of the group progressed. Within this reminiscing group, Morris' criticism of me at the Chanukah party was remarkable because

it showed a sense of comfort and confidence in both the group, as well as in me. He trusted that he could state his feelings without fear of ostracism or recrimination.

The session when Anna and Florence shared their critical feelings about their family members demonstrated a confidence in the safety of this community with which, as a haven, they could share their innermost thoughts and feelings. This session seemed to me to be a true breakthrough for the group because, in all my previous group work, I had never heard seniors express critical comments about family members. As they remember loved ones from the past, seniors, more often than not, enhance the image of those loved ones, which therefore enhances their own self-image.

At this session, Anna spoke critically about her husband's family and their treatment of her husband and of her son, and as well as her son's impatience with her own difficulty in celebrating the holidays. Florence spoke critically of her father and his occupation. Her ability to recall her feelings of embarrassment toward her father, and to express these feelings, were extraordinary for a senior in any group, no less for someone who has been diagnosed as having Alzheimer's. In my assessment of this session, I attributed these comments by Anna and Florence as coming from their sense of assurance that this community was accepting of them as persons in community. They trusted that no harm would come to them, as they opened their inner selves to the group.

The third way of connectedness, the extrapersonal, reconnected the group's members with the greater community, and in this case, the Jewish community. This was reflected in the stories they told, that were filled with images of family holiday and life cycle celebrations, and experiences with the Jewish community of their growing up and

early adult years. When these stories were shared with the group, and as ritual items and photographs were shown and described, the greater Jewish community from the past and present was brought into the group experience. A connection was formed with Jewish heritage and tradition. Just the process of remembering, which as stated above is a process integral to the Jewish experience, connected these group members to the greater Jewish community.

This connection was continued and strengthened during the concluding ceremony of celebration and remembrance. The rituals from the Temple service, the presence of the Torah, the reading from the scroll, the wearing of Tallit, the recitation of blessings, along with the attendance of family members and members of my synagogue, all affirmed the connection of this community with the Jewish community-at-large. This connection was affirmed by the blessing I recited for each participant, which thanked God for the person's continued commitment to the Jewish heritage that had been given to each one by the prior generations. It was also strengthened by the recitation of the Kaddish prayer, connecting the participants with those from their pasts who had transmitted this greater Jewish heritage to each of them.

I was particularly pleased when the group said that they were interested in continuing, as a committee, to write a prayer book to use at Sabbath services in the home. There was an expression of real interest in this project, which will call upon the group's members to write their own prayers and study texts to be included in this book. While I understood that the desire to have this committee was an expression of resistance to terminating our reminiscing group, it was also an expression of a continued need to

connect with the larger Jewish community. This prayer book project will fulfill this need, as it will enable this group to connect with all the Jews who reside in the home.

The fourth way of connectedness was experienced by a reconnection with God (transpersonal). This was brought into each session with the opening prayers that were offered by individual group members, as well as by me. This connection was acknowledged in Belle's talk to the group during the concluding service. A "belief" in God was the first requirement Belle gave for being a "good" Jew. When I spoke to her about this she said, "A belief in God has been the basis of my life as a Jew, but I also felt this in our group and I wanted to tell them so."

Another goal of the concluding service was to affirm this connection with God, and to acknowledge God's Presence, not only in the life of the group, but also in the life of each individual. Following his or her Torah blessings, I placed my hands upon each participant's bowed head for the blessing by which they, as I was later told, felt a true sense of this spiritual connection. I also felt that this was a sacred moment when the presence of God was affirmed both for the participant and for me.

Through this connection between each of us as individuals, we experienced a sacredness of the moment, as we stood in God's Presence. For the service's conclusion, I asked all group members and their families to hold hands in a circle. This was a final connection to the center of this community, that is, to God. The participants were drawn together into a unity, seeking blessings for our community, not only for the present moment of this service, but also for the future of the group within the home.

After assessing the group's sessions, and the written and verbal evaluations by the group's members and the recreation direction, I believe that the needs, reflected in the four ways that connections were made (1) within self, (2) with others, (3) with the greater community, and (4) with God, were met.

In further reflection on this project, and on all the outcomes of the group process, I was most pleased by the level of community that was formed. There was a true sense of inclusion in which "the parts are equally embraced and cherished, linked in a commonality and a shared space that relieves each of the burden of being a fragment."⁹⁸ This allowed relationships to be formed which went far beyond the group's meetings. It allowed a level of trust to be developed which enabled participants to share their feelings without concern for the reaction of others. Each person knew that each of the other participants was there to affirm the others. The lives of the group's participants were affected in a positive way, which gave these seniors the self-worth, respect, and ability to face whatever they may need to face in the months and years that lie ahead. It was a privilege for me to form and facilitate this community. This was an inspiring experience for all of its participants, as well as for me.

I learned from this project about the value of reminiscing for the individual, as well as how reminiscing facilitates a group into forming a community. I have read, in the clinical literature, of the formation of reminiscing groups in nursing and adult homes, as well as in senior citizen programs. These groups have a powerful effect upon the lives of their participants. I believe, however, that the community created out of my reminiscing

⁹⁸ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), 30.

group, which had a specific cultural/religious group as its focus rather than just general reminiscing, was even more effective. The shared images and symbols, expressed through the reminiscences whose themes were significant ritual items, family and individual holiday and life-cycle experiences, and cultural/religious life experiences, brought the group members together into a "true" community, due to the commonality of these images and symbols from the Jewish tradition. These reminiscences transcended all the categories, which might separate the group members from each other, and created a communal bond. The value of this kind of reminiscing is significant for me, and for other professionals working with groups of older persons, as we strive to create a greater sense of community and meaning for this population we wish to help. The value of such reminiscing groups is also that, as it contributes to the self-worth of the participant, it contributes to the positive atmosphere of the entire facility. When individuals in an institutionalized setting can feel better about themselves, the entire facility benefits.

I learned from this project that the relationship between the facilitator-leader and the group's members, and between the group members themselves, begins to be formed during the earliest stages of a group. These relationships start to be formed during the interview process, the selection/deselection process, as well as in the pre-group decisions such as where and when to hold the group. This experience will help me in understanding how to more effectively form reminiscing groups in the future.

I also learned that I, as facilitator-leader, particularly in a group of older persons, need to take a direct and active approach to assist in the reminiscing process and in the dialogue among group members. I need to draw group members out, set realistic goals,

and ascertain and set the appropriate pace for each session. I also need, however, to allow the group to take its own direction, and to give it enough space to form its own agenda. In this group, I discovered that community was formed because I enabled the group to make its own decisions regarding such things as group process, the location of the meetings, the concluding service, and the themes to be discussed at each session. By stepping back from a directive and active role, I created a space, which allowed for the vital social interaction among the group members to take place and to develop.

I also now recognize the strong influence of the religious and clinical principles on a project such as this one. This recognition arises from a comparison of this group with another reminiscing group that I had formed a year ago. In that group, the religious principle was the individual's return to his or her Jewish traditions, a celebration of his or her Jewish life, and/or a resolution of his or her conflicts with loved ones, as shared with the group through the reminiscences. Each session was given to only one or two individuals to tell their stories. The religious principle of a return to one's Jewish heritage was a singular journey that happened to occur in a group setting. At the conclusion of the group's sessions, there was a service at which each individual enacted a ceremony or ritual, which reflected the major theme of his or her reminiscences. Because the focus had been more on the individual within the group, rather than on the group as a community, the concluding ceremony was a ceremony of individuals who happened to be members of the same reminiscing group.

In last year's reminiscing group, the process and the concluding rituals and ceremonies had a very powerful effect upon the group's participants as individuals. In this

year's group, however, something different happened. The Divine Presence was experienced in the community because this was the focus of the religious principle that had shaped the formation of the group and its process. As these different methodologies affected the group process from its beginning to conclusion, I learned the effect religious principles have upon methodology, which in turn affects group outcome.

Finally, I began this project with an awareness of the presence of counter-transference in the group process. I understood that as these group members reminded me of my own parents or grandparents, I had to be aware of how I was reacting to them. I needed to check myself to be sure that I was not doing or saying certain things in the group in such a way that was a reaction not to the moment, but rather to the internal objects these people represented in me. I also realized that for many of them, I represented their own child or grandchild. These insights aided me in hearing what the participants really meant to say. I understood that, as they interacted with me, it was not really to me but rather to the person I represented to each of them. This was in both positive and negative ways. This awareness of countertransference enabled me to be a more effective group facilitator-leader. An awareness of these personal feelings also helped me in facilitating the group, and in understanding my interactive role within the group.

I was surprised that as the sessions continued, I found myself feeling more and more like a member of the community itself. I looked forward to each session and enjoyed being in the session, not only because of the project and my interest in this work, but also because I enjoyed the community which had been formed and of which I was

now a part. I knew I would continue to see these residents at religious services each month, but that would not be the same as being with the group, now a community, which had been formed. Therefore, when the group decided to continue as a ritual committee, I was very pleased. I, just as the other group members, did not want to see the termination of community we had established.

I am also sure that I experienced a certain amount of projection vis a vis the group members. I know that some day I too will be facing the aging process. I realized in developing this group, which met so many very basic needs in each of them as an aging person and by helping form this "true" community, in which the sacredness of each individual participant was cherished, that I was fulfilling my own unconscious wish that someone will someday do the same for me.

I also understand that I identified with some of the group members more so than others. As the group process moved along, I tried to be aware of the internal psychological processes of identification, displacement, projection, transference and countertransference, in order that I could minimize the effect both positively, as well as negatively, these associations would have on my interaction with group members. In reflection, I see that Elaine reminded me so very much of my own paternal grandmother. I was drawn to Artie, Dan, and Joe, as I admired the strength of attitude they brought to the struggles and challenges in their lives. I saw Belle as the fulfillment of my own fantasies of being the senior citizen with a bright mind, an ability to express oneself verbally and in written form, and with the supportive structure of family and friends. I also tried to remain aware when negative feelings arose in me, to better understand what

personalities and statements awakened these reactions. The group was an experience from which I learned much about myself, as well as about others.

I look forward to forming other Jewish reminiscing groups in this facility and in others. It enabled me, as a clergyperson, to establish community for these people in a most meaningful and effective way. This type of focused reminiscing group has application for clergy, of any religious denomination, who serve people in institutionalized settings. I can also see using focused cultural/religious reminiscing groups as a way of forming community in other health care settings, such as hospice, as well as in *havurah* fellowship groups within a synagogue.

This project was special for me because I have gained many important insights for myself, personally and professionally, from the group and its members. I believe that it was also special for the group's participants as this group reached a level of "true" community, in the way envisioned by Martin Buber. It gave self-worth and integrity to the group members in a way I could not have thought possible.

At the conclusion of this project and paper, the following words of Robert N. Butler hold special meaning to me. As he wrote:

Because of the garrulity, repetitiveness, and reminiscence of the aged, it is not always easy for investigators or therapists to listen; but for those who will listen there are rewards.... Recognition of the occurrence of such a vital process as the life review may help one to listen, to tolerate and understand the aged, and not to treat reminiscence as devitalized and insignificant.⁹⁹

I have received many rewards from this group and this project. By listening to these older people, I learned how significant the past is in every human being, as I heard how each person carries the past with him or her throughout his or her life. I came to

⁹⁹ Butler, 72.

appreciate that the power of reminiscing is that it allows a person's past to become a recognized and vital part of the present moment. When these stories are shared with others, they become the ties that bind individuals together into a community, which achieves a level of sacredness. This is why "remembering" is so powerful in the Jewish community and why it is so vital in the human experience.

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Appendix A

**Doctor of Ministry Demonstration Project
Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion
Post-Graduate Center for Mental Health**

Group Participants' Questionnaire

Name: _____

Date of Birth: ____/____/____

Place of Birth: _____

Marital Status: _____

Spouse's Name: _____

Spouse's religious affiliation if not Jewish: _____

Religious Denomination: O () C () R () Other ()

Synagogue (s) during growing up years: _____

Marital Years:

Religious Education: _____

Anecdotal Family Jewish History: _____

Psychiatric Status: MMSE _____ GDS: _____

Appendix B

Rabbi Steven Moss "A Jewish Reminiscing Group" Evaluation Questionnaire

1) How did you feel about our Reminiscence Group?

Did you find it enjoyable _____
not enjoyable _____
no comment _____

2) How did you feel when you told your stories?

enjoyable _____
not enjoyable _____
no comment _____

3) Did you find telling your stories personally

helpful _____
not helpful _____
no comment _____

4) How did you feel when hearing the stories of the other participants?

enjoyable _____
not enjoyable _____
no comment _____

5) Did this group affect the way you see yourself? (Please explain)

6) Did this group affect the way you interact with other residents in the group and in Islandia? (Please explain)

7) Has this group made a difference in your life in Islandia? If so, how?

8) Did you do things differently, or deal with other people differently because of the group? If so, how?

9) Are there any suggestions you have for the group and the group leader so that it would be more helpful and enjoyable for all the participants?

10) If this group continued, would you want to participate?

yes _____

no _____