PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE PROFESSIONAL TRANSITION OF WOMEN RABBIS

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Dedication

The project is dedicated to the remarkable women who continue to share with me our mutual journey through the Rabbinate:

Rabbi Deborah Bravo
Rabbi Helaine Ettinger
Rabbi Ellen Greenspan
Rabbi Amy Joy Small
Rabbi Mary L. Zamore

And to the men in my life who fill the journey with meaning, purpose and love:
My husband, Rabbi Ronald W. Kaplan
and my sons, Jonah and Rafael Kaplan

Acknowledgements

The completion of this project has taken many more years than I ever thought possible. I had finished the combined Doctor of Ministry academic program at the Post-Graduate Center for Mental Health and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in 1998. The lessons learned and the insights gained from that program have been invaluable throughout my Rabbinate. I had every intention of executing and writing the D. Min. project in a timely manner. Life, however, had a way of interfering with my best intentions. There was personal and family illness to confront and overcome, there was professional transition in jobs and locations and most importantly, there was the raising of two teenage sons who needed and deserved my presence in their daily lives. Thus, this project remained incomplete until now.

My final motivation came from the announcement that the Doctor of Ministry Program would close its doors at the end of this academic year due to the current financial crisis. I am truly saddened by this turn of events. For with the demise of this program, goes the incredible opportunity for Rabbis and other clergy to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the pastoral care and counseling process which confronts us daily in our work. In truth, the experience and expertise which I gained through this educational process have been exceedingly worthwhile.

Therefore, I want to express first my gratitude to the many professors and teachers of the Post-Graduate Center and the College-Institute who enriched my capacity to understand myself better and gave me the tools necessary to counsel and support best those in need

of a non-anxious presence and an empathic listener. My deepest appreciation is extended to the two faculty members who supported me most in my quest to complete this project, my advisors: Rabbi Richard F. Address and Ann M. Akers. I am truly indebted to them for their confidence in my ability to execute and deliver a finished product. In addition, I am grateful to Rabbi Bennett Miller, who throughout the years has offered me his guidance and encouragement with sincere warmth and gentle prodding.

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Chapter 1: Statement of Issue

A. Historical Perspective and Timeline of Women in the Rabbinate

Historically, prior to the early 19th century, women did not fill leadership positions within the Jewish community. Before this time, a woman's role in Judaism was basically home based and private. Nevertheless, the Rabbis of old held a high opinion of women and frequently expressed their admiration for a woman's usefulness in religious life. There are many sayings and quotes cited from rabbinic literature in praise of women, her equality to man and in some respects, superiority to him. But with all of their appreciation of a woman's talents and noble qualities, the medieval Rabbis also recognized that man and woman have each been assigned special duties, activities and responsibilities in the *Torah.* The women's place was in the home as wife and mother. In order to permit her to fulfill these duties, she became exempt from many religious obligations that were time bound. This fact excluded her from the privilege of acting as the religious leader or representative of a congregation since according to rabbinic principle, "one who is not personally obligated to perform a certain duty, cannot perform that duty on behalf of others." (CCAR Responsa, Vol. 32, p. 156) Based upon this statement, it became taken for granted within the law that women could not be rabbis.

It was not until the arrival of the Enlightenment in Europe, the *haskalah*, that women slowly but steadily began to leave the home to attend synagogue, became knowledgeable and learned Jews and took on roles as professional Jewish teachers. Therefore, in the

greater community where women were becoming more visible, the natural progression of discussion led to the possibility of women becoming rabbis.

The word rabbi literally means teacher. Traditionally, a rabbi was an observant Jewish male who obeyed *mitzvot* (commandments), knew *halacha* (Jewish law and tradition), resolved *halachic* disputes and directed the community. Rabbis were perceived by their communities to be able to interpret religious teachings and instruct their students in *torah* and text.

The first known discussion concerning the title of "Rabbi" being bestowed upon a woman dates to the 17th century and concerns the role served by Asenath Barzani (1590-1670) within the Jewish community of Kurdistan. She was famous for her knowledge of *Torah, Talmud, kabbalah* and Jewish law. In addition, she was the first director of a men's *yeshiva* (rabbinical school). She was called *"tanna'it"*, the feminine form for a *Talmudic* scholar. In fact the title was coined especially for her. Yet, many scholars consider her the first woman rabbi due to the knowledge she attained and the work she did within her community. (Nadell, 2009)

The debate of the role of women in Judaism in general and the rabbinate in particular was not broached again until 1846 when Reform Judaism in Germany states that "women are equal to men in Judaism in terms of religious privileges and duties." (Schwartzman, 1966, p. 60) As a result there would be several historic changes within Reform Judaism: 1) women would be counted among the *minyan* or quorum needed for public worship; 2)

dropped is the daily prayer in which a man gives thanks to God for not having made him a woman; 3) women and girls were to be taught *Torah* and *Talmud*; and 4) women and men could sit together within the congregation. (Jacob, 2001)

The founding of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1875 by Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise brings about further discussion of the issue due to the fact that Rabbi Wise encourages women to attend the college, but makes clear that they cannot become rabbis. Yet, just 15 years later in 1890, Ray Frank (1861-1948), becomes the first Jewish woman to preach formally from a pulpit in the United States inaugurating her career, without formal ordination, as "the Girl Rabbi of the Golden West."(Jewish Women's Archives, 2009) She would help to blaze new paths for women in Judaism becoming a sensation in the Jewish world for more than a decade.

In 1921 the issue of officially ordaining a woman rabbi was raised by Martha Neumark, a student at the Hebrew Union College (HUC) and the daughter of a HUC professor. Martha sought her opportunity following the passage of the 19th amendment to the Constitution giving women the right to vote. The college faculty and the Reform rabbinical association, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), concluded that there was no reason not to ordain women. (CCAR Resolution, 1922) However, the lay members of the HUC Board of Governors maintained the policy of ordaining only men as rabbis for two specific reasons. The first concerned the position of women rabbis within traditional Judaism and the question of whether the Reform movement should follow tradition. Reform leaders considered ordaining women as violating *halacha* and

worried that granting women a place in the Reform rabbinate would "give the larger group of Jewry that follows traditional Judaism a good reason to question our authority…". (CCAR Resolution, 1922) Second, it was believed that admitting women to the rabbinate would be detrimental to family life since it would require women to choose between the full-time role of the rabbi and the task of mother and homemaker. (Jacob and Zemer, 2001) Thus this decision reinforced the belief that the most important role for American Jewish women in the mid-twentieth century was clearly articulated by society. A modern Jewish woman could perhaps be a student, a teacher, a principal and a volunteer, but her true calling was as wife and mother. (Jewish Women's Archive, 2009)

While 20th century American Jewry continued to grapple with these issues, Rabbi Max Dienemann, head of the Liberal Rabbis' Association in Offenbach, Germany, officially ordained Regina Jonas (1902-1944) as the first woman Rabbi in 1935. She found work in various Jewish social organizations and institutions as a chaplain and briefly served small communities as a synagogue rabbi. But like her fellow German Jews during WWII, she was forced into a labor camp where she continued to teach and preach until she was transferred to Auschwitz where she was murdered in 1944. (Jewish Women's Archive, 2009)

Regina Jonas and the history of her accomplishments remained hidden until 1991 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of a vast warehouse of secret archives. Regrettably, her pioneering spirit and story were lost to the women who may have soon

followed in her footsteps. It is only now in retrospect, that we can acknowledge and celebrate her most historical achievement as the first women rabbi. (Dayan, 2004)

It would take another 37 years for Sally Preisand to become the first women rabbi ordained in the United States by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in 1972. Riding the new wave of American feminism in the 1960's, Sally Priesand was poised to capture the momentum of democratic egalitarianism growing within the nation. Where in prior attempts throughout history the battle for women to attain the title "rabbi" was fought in isolation, one woman at a time, Sally harnessed the energy of men and women who propelled her to fulfill a communal, not just a personal dream. Most, important, she won the favor of Dr. Nelson Glueck, the college President in Cincinnati, who decided to act on what his predecessors had simply asserted, a woman's right to ordination. In perpetuating and expanding the modernization of Jewish tradition within the Reform movement, Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, the President of HUC-JIR who ordained Sally Preisand after the death of Nelson Glueck, called her ordination "one that breaks stereotypes and allows Jewish women to consider seeking the rabbinate and a testament to Reform Judaism's efforts at achieving equality of women in the congregation of the Lord." (Blau, 1972)

Sandy Eisenberg Sasso would follow Rabbi Preisand in 1974 with her ordination by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia. Reconstructionist philosophy, based on the teachings of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, like Reform, is founded on the basis that men and women have equal rights.

The Conservative movement, on the other hand, based on the theory that *halacha* is binding, yet evolving, took until 1985 to ordain its first woman, Amy Eilberg at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. (Hein, 2008) The decision was based upon a contentious eleven year discussion and study from 1972-1983, involving studies, commissions, hearings, motions and votes. Finally in 1983 a Joint Commission of the Rabbinical Assembly and Jewish Theological Seminary stated that "there is no direct *halachic* objection to the acts of training and ordaining a woman to be a rabbi, preacher and teacher." (JTS/RS Committee Responsa, Dec. 1977) The decision gave women access to the rabbinate but also caused a lasting rift among leaders and resulted in the founding of a new institution.

Today only Orthodox women are excluded from entering the rabbinate because the orthodox religious establishment harshly condemns women's efforts to enter established seminaries. The Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University in New York City simply argues that "women cannot receive *smicha* (ordination) because it originated with Moses and was passed down only to men." (Deut. 1:13) It is clear that if major changes are ever to take place within the Orthodox world, both women and men will need to advocate and agitate for revolution in a change of philosophy and ideology.

The debate whether to ordain women as rabbis opened centuries ago and closed with the ordination of the very first woman in 1972. Since 1972, HUC-JIR has ordained 552 women rabbis in the United States and 20 in Israel. The Reconstructionist Rabbinical

College has ordained 154 women and the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary has ordained 257 women. In the next decades, hundreds of women more are expected to enter the ranks of ordained rabbis. In fact, in each rabbinical school that accepts women, there are now more women students then men studying for the rabbinate.

B. Present Issues Faced by Women Rabbis

In 1889, the journalist Mary M. Cohen, the leading member of her traditional Philadelphia synagogue, broached the topic of women rabbis in an article for the *Jewish Exponent*, entitled "A Problem for Purim". In this front page parody crafted for the holiday, Cohen asked whether or not women could contribute to the development of American Judaism by becoming rabbis. The arguments she gave revealed a glimpse into the rising expectations for changing female roles in American Judaism. Yet, she also stunned audiences by introducing the very notion of women in the rabbinate. (Nadell, 1998) Similarly, the first generation of female rabbis jolted American Judaism.

Throughout our history, the role of rabbi has undergone a number of transformations. In the Talmudic period, rabbis were primarily teachers and interpreters of the *Torah.* They developed the calendar, liturgy and other aspects of post-Temple Judaism. During the Middle Ages, the position of rabbi became a professional one, with the additional responsibilities of supervising the religious life of the community. Considerable attention was given to pastoral and administrative duties as well as preaching. This is the "traditional" model of the male rabbinate that women rabbis inherited.

Pamela Nadell, author of Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination 1889-1985, points out that the first women rabbis were not content with simply replicating the traditional role of rabbi. Instead, they self-consciously perceived themselves as trailblazers. She writes: "they voiced, to some ears stridently, a critique of Judaism's status quo, arguing that it was largely created by men and that, for far too long, it had marginalized women." (Nadell, 1998) These early women wanted collectively to push American Judaism toward an egalitarian future, one which would fully incorporate the many different voices of women.

However, before the first female rabbis could begin to raise their concerns and views, they had to win the approval from a wide breadth of American Jewry. As Sally Priesand soon discovered, ordination was but the first hurdle. Those women ordained in the 1970's and early 1980's, before there were significant numbers, found themselves struggling for acceptance. Congregations refused to interview them for jobs, community organizations and male colleagues opposed their participation. The majority of the Jewish population felt that the rabbinate was not suitable for women.

Congregants worried that women were neither physically nor emotionally up to the job. There was concern that women rabbis could not handle the heavy *Torah* scrolls; that we would be too soft-spoken from the *bimah* or that our voices on feminism would be too loud; that we would become too emotional or hysterical when confronted with painful life-cycle events and unable physically to maintain a "rabbinic" schedule. Others

complained that women would displace male colleagues and drive men from the synagogue. Some believed women would enter the rabbinate as a temporary vocation and would leave to marry and raise a family, claiming that a woman could not do both well at the same time. There were those who doubted their competency as role models arguing that they could not wholeheartedly devote themselves to the exclusion of all other things and prove the determination to make it their life's work. For others, there were additional concerns as expressed through these anecdotal questions: Did they need to give maternity leave? Who would pay for coverage? What if the woman rabbi's child got sick during the High Holydays…how could we force her to leave the child at home and lead our worship? Would a women rabbi change all of the "he's" in the Bible to "she's"? Could a woman rabbi wear a *kippah* or *tallit?* In truth, it is reasonable to assume that every woman rabbi in the early years encountered anxiety, worry, apprehension and unease toward their professional role.

Thus, the first female rabbis organized to challenge these and other objections. They drew upon the strategies pioneered by the feminist movement that professional organization would equal strength in numbers and collegiality. The women of HUC-JIR created the Women's Rabbinic Network (WRN) and the CCAR founded the Task Force on Women in the Rabbinate. Both began to address these and many other issues which had never concerned the all-male rabbinate.

As more and more women entered the rabbinate, some of the initial difficulties subsided, but new ones would always surface. Would there be a glass ceiling for job opportunities?

Would women's compensation be equal to our male counterparts? Would women attain a voice at the highest echelons of the Jewish communal world where men dominate both the professional and lay leadership? Would women be treated equally and fairly in the job market?

Most importantly, women rabbis aspired to create a different model for the rabbinate. As opposed to a hierarchical system of leadership, women stressed partnership, team building and mutual involvement of professionals and lay-leadership. Women rabbis wanted to be more approachable and accessible to their congregants and/or constituents. They sought a horizontal chain of command as an alternative to the "top-down" pecking order.

For more than 36 years, women rabbis have been determined to bring their talents, intellect, perspectives and viewpoints to the American Jewish community. They have melded their desires together with hearts, souls and spirits in the pursuit of rectifying the historical marginalization of women's religious activities. They have sought to mark the major milestones of women's biological lives with creative life-cycle events; they have pushed for gender-neutral liturgy; they have written new interpretations for *Torah* and texts and they have raised up a generation of children who now know that the rabbinate is open to any girl (or boy) who dreams of being called Rabbi.

In truth, women rabbis, through their pioneering efforts, have successfully challenged both the institution of the rabbinate and the American Jewish community. But the

journey continues to be filled with obstacles and impediments. Today women rabbis still face issues of acceptance and the questioning of their authority. Employment opportunities are plentiful in some areas such as entry level positions in congregations, chaplaincy, college campuses and organizations yet scarce as you move up the ladder. When women do achieve positions beyond the entry level, as senior rabbis or executives, there is still significant disparity is pay and compensation and benefits as compared to their male counterparts.

Middle age women rabbis have other unprecedented concerns as well. As women rabbis age, family obligations no longer just refer to pregnancy and child rearing, but now extend to include care for aging parents. There is worry about ageism in the hiring process and the retention of rabbinic positions. There is apprehension as women face retirement and the unease of financial instability and medical coverage.

So while the lengthy battle for women's rabbinic ordination was won in 1972, the position and role of the woman rabbi is still very much a work in progress. Every women rabbi has stories to tell which include the joys of inclusion and triumph, and the pain of exclusion and failure. Each makes her mark, fulfills her calling and ultimately offers her voice to those who will listen.

C. The Purpose of this Project

This project was designed to identify, evaluate and explore the moments of growth and challenge experienced by women rabbis during the evolution of their rabbinic careers. The project examines the personal and professional journeys during a six month period of significant transition of six women rabbis in different stages of their rabbinate. The study includes representation from all three movements of major denominations of Judaism which ordain women in America: Reform, Reconstructionist and Conservative.

This project will give expression to the voices of these women as exemplars of endurance: their successes, frustrations and disappointments. From the data gathered, I hope that women contemplating, studying for or engaged in the rabbinate may find wisdom, counsel and guidance from those that came before them. This project will fulfill for me and others of my gender the Talmudic teaching: "*m'kol m'lumdai hiskalti"*, "from all my colleagues, I have learned."

Chapter 2: Principles that Guide and Inform

A. Religious Principles

There are several religious principles in Judaism that guide and inform my work on this project. I will highlight and define four specific examples which include: 1) *shalom bayit* (literally "peace at home"); 2) *ona'at mamon* and *ona'a guf* (interpreted as "actions which cause financial and emotional harm"); 3) *m'shaneh makom…m'shaneh mazal* (literally "changing of one's location can change your luck") and 4) *klal yisrael* (translated as "the community of Israel"). I intend to apply these four religious principles to the relationships women rabbis engender with the people they serve.

1) *Shalom bayit* is the Jewish religious concept of domestic harmony and good relations between husband and wife. Similarly, the relationship between Rabbi and congregation is seen as the equivalent of a marriage, it is referred to as a sacred *shidduch* or "match" between two committed entities bound together by love of *torah* and the promise to raise up another generation of Jews within the family community.

Throughout history Jews have held an ideal standard for Jewish family life that is manifested in the term *shalom bayit*. The term signifies completeness, wholeness, and fulfillment. Thus, the traditional Jewish marriage characterized by peace, nurturing, respect and kindness through which a married couple becomes complete, is viewed as the model upon which the Rabbi/congregational relationship is based.

In classical times, it was believed that God's presence dwelt in a pure and loving home. (*Sotah* 17a) Marriage is meant to be a relationship where both partners recognize each other as created in God's image and treat each other accordingly. In Jewish thought and law, domestic harmony is such an important goal that it may even warrant engaging in a 'white lie'. According to the *Talmud,* when God tells Sarah she will give birth to a son, she expresses disbelief saying: "After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my husband being so old?" But when God speaks to Abraham, God says: "Why did Sarah laugh and say 'will I really have a child, now that I am old?'" (Gen. 18:12-13) The Rabbis comment that God omitted Sarah's mention of Abraham's age out of concern for their *shalom bayit*. (*Genesis Rabbah* 65:2) From this episode the Rabbis derive that there are times when one can even alter the substance of a person's words in order to ensure peace in the home.

Shalom bayit may also be interpreted as "for the sake of peace, make peace in your home". It applies to how we talk to one another, how we treat one another, and to our overall sense of security within the family. It makes us ask is the place in which we live a healthy environment for everyone who lives there.

When we lose *shalom bayit*, what we experience is both a loss of self and a loss of other. With *shalom bayit* there exists a balance between the power we exert and the power we let others exert. We want to create an environment of mutual respect, trust, support, honesty and accountability. (Sermon: Rabbi Mona Alfi, 9/26/01)

Therefore, just as a couple would strive to attain *shalom bayit* in their home; Rabbis will attempt to set the same goal in their professional environments. It is for this reason that this Jewish religious principle guides and influences the rabbinic relationships which I shall describe within the next chapters.

2) *Ona'at mamon* and *ona'at guf*, (interpreted as "actions which cause monetary and emotional harm") derives from the portion of the *Torah* which enumerates the many laws between "man and man". The common denominator among them is that the strong person is accountable for his treatment of the weak. The person with the upper hand is to be mindful of those in a weaker position and treat them with the respect he would give his equals. This point is made in the very beginning of the portion named *Mishpatim* (Exodus 21:1-24:18) where the laws of treating one's servant benevolently are discussed.

In Exodus 22:20 we read: "You shall not oppress the stranger, for you were strangers in Egypt." The verb *toneh* does not literally mean "to oppress". Its meaning is more subtle than this. *Toneh* warns us to handle the stranger with care; so as not to take advantage of him, do not wrong him, and do not make him feel inferior. For the stranger is vulnerable. So important is this command that the *Torah* mentions 36 different times that we should be decent to those less fortunate, because we, too, suffered at the hands of the Egyptians.

While many of us may look at this command and question its relevancy in our own lives asking: "What strangers do I take advantage of? Whom do I hurt?", in reality this text

speaks to each of us. *Ger lo toneh*, "you shall not oppress the stranger", the stranger in this verse is a metaphor. In reality we are all "strangers" with weaknesses, insecurities and vulnerabilities. All of us have weak spots, all of us can be taken advantage of and all of us can be made to feel inferior. Therefore, we are commanded to be sensitive to the needs of others.

In their wisdom, the Talmudic sages recognized the human ability to hurt and be hurt because of *ona'ah*, "taking advantage". The rabbis devote an entire section of Talmud, *Baba Metzia* (65), to explaining that there are two types of *ona'ah*, two ways of taking advantage of people. The first is *ona'at mammon*, which means that your actions have monetary or material consequences. Within the context of this project these can include, but are not limited to the with-holding of wages which are not paid on time; lower compensation based upon gender; and using personal wealth to influence others with monetary superiority.

The second type of *ona'ah* is through *ona'at guf.* This form of "taking advantage" involves actual harm to a person through insulting speech or unrighteous deeds. It is that biting remark, that dig that embarrasses and humiliates. It is that public reprimand that diminishes a person's image. Whether we ourselves are guilty of this offense or are being abused by others, the Talmud reminds us that this concept is operative in all of our relationships. Thus, Rashi (medieval rabbinic commentator) in his commentary of Exodus 23:9 implores us to avoid a self-centered, take care of yourself attitude, and rather offer an empathic identification with the stranger's plight which will prompt us to treat

him fairly. Throughout this project both *ona'at mamon* and *ona'at guf* are functional in the personal and professional realms of the women rabbis which impair relationships and wound spirits and souls.

3) *M'shaneh makom…m'shaneh mazal*, literally means "one who changes his place changes his luck". The verse is found in the Talmud, section *Rosh Hashana* 16b. This teaching is derived from the story of Abram in Genesis 12:1-2, where we learn that God commands Abram to leave his ancestral home for his own benefit. With the change of location will come a bounty of new blessings including the birth of children and the establishment of a great nation. Thus, we Jews have long held that physical relocation either for home and/or work can indeed change our circumstances for the better. Whether we choose to move on our own accord or are forced out, this teaching offers a comforting coping mechanism which gives us hope for the future. For any rabbi whose contract has not been renewed or whose position has been terminated, a change of physical location can offer renewal and healing as will be demonstrated.

4) *Klal Yisrael* can be translated as "the community of Israel" or "the Jewish people as a whole". The phrase conveys the expectation that every individual must appreciate that he/she is far greater than his/her individual self. Each Jewish person contains the potential of becoming part of a greater whole. This concept is highlighted in the *Torah* portion *Vayakhel,* Exodus 35:1-38:20, which emphasizes the fusion of individuals into a spiritual collective bound together by a belief in God and the communal building of the sanctuary. How is the potential of the Israelites realized? It occurs when

a person develops his/her own abilities to the utmost, shouldering all of the responsibility that he/she has been given and when he/she joins together with others engaged in the same task, thus becoming part of a community.

One very important aspect of the role of rabbi is as the builder of *klal yisrael.* The job is two-fold. First, the rabbi is charged with creating a community united by core beliefs, values and actions held sacred by the institution he/she serves. Second, the rabbi is expected to be a vital part of a greater, larger community which serves the needs of the Jewish people as a whole. For the woman rabbi, this is often an impossible task given that the entire Jewish community neither accepts nor validates her professional role and thus excludes her from participation in *klal yisrael.*

In summary, my project will be informed and motivated by these central Jewish religious principles that I have described. They will reinforce the challenges faced by women rabbis and offer these women an opportunity to see themselves in light of these Jewish teachings in order to express and examine their feelings, concerns, frustrations and apprehensions.

B. Clinical Principles

I intend to incorporate four clinical principles into the working sessions. These will include: 1) neurotic conflict; 2) transference/counter transference; 3) coping mechanisms and 4) differentiation.

1) Neurotic Conflict: In the Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling, vol. 1, Drs. William Glasser and Abraham Maslow have shown that all human beings have basic needs for a sense of being lovable and worthwhile. (vol. 1, p.65) Thus, people do not want to be valued solely based upon what they can do, rather, they want personally to be loved and appreciated for being themselves. It is important to note, that this love is not an exercise in sentimentality, but is a holistic love that accepts the totality of a person. (vol. 1, p. 66) Throughout life people seek the love and approval of those closest to them, i.e. parents. In the ideal, every person receives from their parents' unconditional love. Yet, for many the love of parents needs to be earned through certain behaviors and achievements. The attempt of acknowledging, accommodating, and differentiating those whom we want to please and those to whom we respond to in search of love and acceptance is referred to as neurotic conflict.

This clinical principle is operative for rabbis and other clergy who often seek to find love and acceptance in other realms separate from their families of origin. Clergy is known to search for unconditional validation and support from those whom they serve, especially when unconditional love is not found in other areas. Therefore there is a built-in tension in clergy/lay relationships which often result in neurotic conflict. Questions arise including: "Who do we please? Who do we respond to? Where do our own needs fit in?". Within the women's rabbi group, this conflict will appear in multiple settings as the women grapple with the search for acceptance, appreciation and ultimately love.

2) Transference/counter-transference: Transference may be referred to as the process whereby emotions are passed on or displaced from one person to another. It is a universal tendency to experience present relationships under the sway of past relational experience and conflict. Modes of perceiving, conceiving and relating with a person are influenced by the effects of other, past significant relationships, particularly those in which unresolved conflict exists. As described in the Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling, Vol.2, "transference refers to the clinician's interpretations of certain features of the client's perception, understanding and experience of the clinician, which the clinician regards to be distorted, biased, inappropriate, having to do more with the client than with the clinician and having to do more with the reexperience/reenactment of patterns of perception, experience and relationship with past significant figures of which the client is not fully aware." (vol.2, p. 90)

To put it more simply, transference occurs when the therapist becomes alert to being required or enlisted to provide something for the client that he/she has in too short of supply and cannot provide for him/herself. (vol. 2, p. 92) For example, a woman comes to see her Rabbi because of a recent loss in her life. The woman is sad, hopeless and despairing. Due to transference issues, the Rabbi becomes drained and exhausted because the woman takes the energy and vitality from the Rabbi that she herself lacks. Thus, the therapist/rabbi always needs to be vigilant that transference is operative in every encounter and strive to maintain proper boundaries for self-protection.

Counter-transference occurs when the therapist begins to project his/her own unresolved conflicts on the client. It describes the surfacing of a therapist's own repressed feeling through identification, emotions, experiences or problems of the person undergoing treatment. For example, a Rabbi becomes protective toward a female client and realizes that the client reminds her of her sister, leading to counter-transference of those feelings. Therapists are encouraged to pay close attention to their feelings and seek peer review and guidance as needed to use such feelings productively rather than harmfully. (Fritcher, 2009)

3) Coping Mechanisms: There are several coping mechanisms which often come into play during the therapeutic process or human encounters in which rabbis find themselves. These include, but are not limited to resistance, denial and histrionics. Resistance is encountered when "defenses come into play as the client attempts to forestall the uncovering of conflicted, affectively charged, impulse-laden memories in which the negative self-image was established." (vol. 2, p. 116)

Denial is defined as the act of refusing or disowning; a negation of action. It is the refusal to admit the truth of a statement, charge or the untruth of a thing stated or maintained. Through denial, one can "deny" activity; "refuse" to acknowledge a known truth; or "contradict" an accepted norm.

Histrionics is described in the DSM as a personality disorder which is defined by the American Psychiatric Association as characterized by a pattern of excessive emotionality

and attention seeking, including the excessive need for approval. Associated features may include ego-centrism, self indulgence, continuous longing for appreciation, feelings that are easily hurt and persistent manipulative behavior to achieve their own needs. (DSM III, p. 348)

4) Differentiation: Edwin H. Friedman, in his book Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue relates that "differentiation means the capacity of a family member to define his or her own life's goals and values apart from surrounding togetherness pressures, to say "I" when others are demanding "you" and "we"." (Friedman, p.27) It also includes the capacity to maintain a relatively nonanxious presence in the midst of anxious systems. Differentiation means the capacity to be an "I" while still remaining connected to the system as a whole. A Rabbi as leader needs to take nonreactive, clearly conceived and clearly defined positions within the family of his/her working situation guarding against sabotage and isolation from the system as well as burn-out. (Friedman, p. 229)

The clinical principles described above represent my initial aims and approaches in conducting the demonstration project. It is my intention to apply these teachings to the sessions with the women rabbis in the hope that these principles will inform, enlighten and guide these women toward a healthier and more fulfilling rabbinic journey.

Chapter 3: Methodology

A. Approach and Procedure

It was my approach to convene a monthly study and social gathering of six women rabbis, ages 28-47, in order to engage in conversation and deliberation regarding common issues facing women rabbis in congregations, organizations and the institutional chaplaincy. My intent was to identify, evaluate and explore moments of growth and challenge experienced by women rabbis during the evolution of their rabbinic careers. This project was designed to examine the personal and professional journeys during a one year period of significant transition of six women rabbis in different stages of their rabbinate. However, within the context of this project I will include only an in-depth look at a six session, six month span of time. In this way I am able to set appropriate boundaries for assessment and final outcomes.

The study included representation from all three movements of major denominations which ordain women in America: Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist. The breakdown included four Reform rabbis, one Conservative rabbi and one Reconstructionist rabbi. It was my intention to give expression to the voices of these women as exemplars of endurance: their successes, frustrations and disappointments; their struggles to gain balance between work and family; their hopes and wishes to achieve personal fulfillment and enrich their Jewish communities by their presence. This demonstration project was designed to provide these women an environment to create

sorority and companionship in which they would feel safe to verbalize thoughts as well as acquire skills and tools to feel validated, relevant and productive.

I strived to provide a forum for free expression and inquiry where each member could be present and participate in a number of ways: to sit, listen, or verbally interact. These sessions were devised to give the women rabbis a uniquely, sacred space to convene for honest and transparent disclosure of deep feelings which often remained hidden from spouses, colleagues and lay leaders. Only here, I believed, could I facilitate trust, confidence and confidentiality among them.

I wanted to offer these women an opportunity to deal openly and constructively with their current and unresolved issues, utilizing both clinical and religious principles. In short, I wanted to assist them in utilizing their own psychological and spiritual means to come to terms with a variety of issues which included, but were not limited to: their dismissal by traditional Judaism; their perceptions of being underpaid and undervalued; the often impossible act of balancing family responsibilities and professional expectations; and the necessity for self-care.

My clinical role as a facilitator was to guide the discussions, listen empathically, provide those who engaged in conversation the ability to express their feelings and offer clinical observations and thoughtful responses to enhance the discussion. My ministerial role as a pastoral counselor was to bring spiritual resources to inform and increase understanding.

In both capacities, I endeavored to help these women help themselves by transforming their lives.

B. Focus and Format of Meetings

The sessions were timed to give us one hour and forty-five minutes together. Each session opened with the ritual of an informal "check-in." The women would go around the room in no particular order and each share for several minutes, a specific story or anecdote that had affected them during the past month. In this way, we could catch up on personal or professional news and glimpse the mood and/or emotions of each participant.

Then, in order to encourage a focus to our discussions, each monthly meeting was founded upon a specific topic with a thematic point of departure. In this way there could be structure, yet there could also be free form in our discussions. The topics were culled from informal conversations with the six women rabbis prior to our official start of this project. Each participant was excited by the prospect of devoting time and attention to the various topics. While it seemed at first impossible that the women could carve out such time from overburdened schedules to meet regularly, the group committed to preserving this precious time. In fact, they saw this group as a gift they were giving to themselves each month.

The following is a summary of the topics and my intended steps, approaches and actions during each session. In this chapter, I describe the sessions which will include:

1) defining women rabbi's issues; 2) setting boundaries; 3) gender roles; 4) employment issues; 5) the business of the rabbinate; and 6) the calling of the woman rabbi. The results, implications and contributions will be discussed in chapters four and five.

1) Defining Women Rabbi's Issues: This first session is devoted to voicing and defining the issues facing these women in the rabbinate today. It is my intention to allow each woman an opportunity to describe an issue or concern which they would like input or direction from the group. It is not for me to suggest issues, as that would serve only to impose my own biases which affect me in the rabbinate. If issues are described in generalizations, I will suggest that each woman share a personal anecdote which reflects the topic. For example, should a stated issue be: "Women rabbis need to be more vocal!" It would then be my clinical role to encourage a specific example by asking: "How might you be more vocal concerning a specific matter? With whom would you share your concerns?" Due to the age range of the participating women, I anticipate that some subjects will be universal, while others will be age or experience related.

In addition, it will be important to listen carefully to whether the statements are assumptions or facts. Are the women speaking from experience or from misconceptions and misunderstandings handed down by others? In attempting to learn from personal stories, it will be necessary to keep the women centered on the topic at hand rather than allow the flow of conversation to include "hearsay". Once again, in my clinical role, I will be responsible for steering the conversation and keeping it on track through my intervention with suggestive comments: "How does this topic pertain to your

experience?" "Have you experienced this issue directly in your rabbinate?" "Please elaborate for the group."

What I cannot anticipate is the diversity of emotion of these discussions. I assume there will hurt, anger, angst and frustration, but I do not know how these emotions will present themselves within the group. Will there be tears and/or laughter? Will the discussions be merely academic? How will our Jewish religious principles and traditions inform our discussions? This will remain to be seen.

2) Setting Boundaries: The second session will be dedicated to the issue of setting boundaries within the professional and personal arenas of the women's lives. I will propose a discussion on whether there is a necessity of setting clear limits regarding work obligations and personal and/or family duties. My intent is to open the session asking for reflections on the High Holyday time period that will have just concluded prior to this meeting. My hope is to learn how the women balanced their multiple obligations and at the same time participated spiritually and emotionally through the holyday season. This session is to inquire of the women whether boundaries are an issue. If so, we can then explore how they affect the women's spiritual, physical and emotional well-being.

I suspect that women rabbis, more than our male colleagues, struggle with the ability to balance work expectations and home responsibilities. This session is meant to gain facts, rather than rely on assumptions. It is my hope that through personal story, the women can articulate their issues. Once voiced, it will be my clinical role to help them

understand their needs for the possible building of boundaries. My intention is to define and defend the clinical principles of resistance and reframing in my attempt to aid the women to better understand how they may find themselves in such stressful predicaments. In addition, through my teaching of the religious principles of *klal ysrael* (the community of Israel) and *ona'at guf* (taking advantage), I can assist them in creating new coping mechanisms. Thus they will gain greater self-awareness of both their needs and their abilities to affect change.

3) Gender Roles: During this session the women will concentrate on the role of gender in the rabbinate. The women will explore some of the following questions: Is there a difference between being a female rabbi and a male rabbi? Do people treat female rabbis differently than they treat male colleagues? Do women bring different talents to the rabbinate and project different attitudes than men?

The women requested this third topic in response to the generally perceived notion that after more than 30 years of women in the rabbinate, since 1972, there are no longer differences in the role of rabbi held by men and women. I assume they want to discuss this topic because in their eyes there remain today many differences due to gender. However, it is important that the women of this group make such a statement, not me. Thus, in preparing for this session I will offer both clinical and religious principles to enhance and enlighten the discussion where necessary. I will plan to reframe conversations and introduce both *shalom bayit* (peace in the home) and *ona'at guf* (taking advantage) as further illumination and explanation of feelings revealed.

I anticipate a most heated session filled with more emotional reaction rather than an academic discussion. It will be important to allow everyone an opportunity to speak, rather than have the conversation dominated by one or two participants. This domination of conversation may take place due to those with extensive years in the rabbinate who may want to share multiple reflections. It will be my role to maintain the flow of discussion so that all who want to participate may do so.

4) Employment Issues: This session will be concerned with job related concerns including contract renewals, evaluations and placement. I perceive this session as a practical discussion that may elicit feedback on salary negotiations; equal pay for equal work; the part-time position; entering the placement process; reactions to reviews and evaluations, etc. Once again, I want to assist the women in delineating and organizing their thoughts on these issues for the purpose of raising their awareness and consciousness. While I may want the outcome of this conversation to infuse the women with greater confidence in confronting such issues, I realize that my clinical role can only provide guidance and illustration.

Thus, I believe I will need to be prepared to discuss the clinical principles of neurotic conflict and counter-transference. I assume these will be operative as the women will need to consider who they are trying to please in the work place and to whom they are answering. In addition, I foresee that counter-transference will arise in the women as they share their personal reactions to certain situations. As an example, perhaps a woman

in the position of assistant rabbi reacts to her male senior rabbi as her older brother rather than as a co-worker.

A theological teaching during this session may include the concept of *m'shaneh makom…m'shaneh mazel* (the changing of one's location can change your luck). It is possible that this rabbinic teaching can offer the religious motivation for someone to change positions, rather than to remain and be stagnant or unhappy in a present job.

While this session is based upon practical issues of the rabbinate, I do predict that emotions will infuse much of the discussion. I believe it is impossible to separate their need for validation and support from the actual duties these women fulfill. In other words, it is essential that the work in which these women engage offers them spiritual fulfillment and satisfaction. I assume that a job for a job's sake is not their quest!

5) <u>The Business of the Rabbinate:</u> I will base this session on the practicalities of financial compensation in the rabbinate. I will begin by opening the discussion with their perceptions: Are women compensated equal to men? Do women have equal access to the same jobs as men? Do women hold more part-time positions than our male colleagues? If yes, why? In order to help them determine whether their perceptions are based in reality, I will continue the conversation by requesting that the women share details of their compensation packages. In addition, I will inquire if the women are knowledgeable of any formal data that can inform their discussions.

In truth, this session can lead to any number of directions. I will be most curious to learn if the women feel comfortable sharing details of compensation packages. For in so doing this would indicate a profound comfort level of security within the group. If such information is shared, I suspect that there may arise anger, frustration and even jealousy. I will plan to introduce the religious principle of *ona'at mamon* (taking financial advantage) in order to encourage the women to empower themselves with facts and information that can enhance and increase their opportunities for fair and equitable compensation.

6) The Calling of the Woman Rabbi: In preparation for the conclusion of this project, I want to concentrate on a subject that will assist the group to end on a most positive note. I foresee that throughout the previous sessions, the discussions may be skewed toward the negative aspects of being a woman rabbi. I fear that there is much hurt, anger and frustration that will be voiced in prior sessions. In this session, I would like to capture the positive energy of these women rabbis. I want them to share their successes, achievements and accomplishments. I want them to celebrate their victories and presence in the rabbinate. Yet, I fully understand that I cannot be responsible for the outcome of this session. I will introduce the subject matter focusing on their motivation and call to enter the rabbinate. The session will begin after check-in with a request for each woman to share her journey into the rabbinate. If time permits, I want them to share their vision for the future for women rabbis.

My clinical role in this session will be as facilitator. I will encourage the story telling and at the same time seek to help them define their motivations into the rabbinate. I imagine that their drive into this profession will include role models, family systems and Jewish teachings. This session is meant to clarify assumptions and seek facts rather than postulate theories and conjecture.

C. Methods of Assessment

The purpose of this project is to identify, evaluate and explore the moments of growth and challenge experienced by women rabbis. The project is designed to give voice to the broad spectrum of issues faced by women rabbis in different movements of Judaism and in different stages of life. In addition, it is my hope to give these women both clinical and religious tools to ease and inform the trials of their professional journeys and help them to gain insight into their personal coping mechanisms and behaviors.

As I begin to evaluate the effects of these sessions for the women participants, it will be most advantageous for me first to compile a summary of the common issues shared. I assume that there will be a clear delineation of subject matters which affect women rabbis regardless of age or years in the rabbinate. I also assume that these same issues will be found regardless of the working environments, be it as a congregational rabbi, a chaplain or an organizational rabbi.

Thus, as I review the notes and verbatims of each session, I will look for shared experiences and then explore the behaviors used to deal with such situations.
It is my hope that the clinical and religious principles that I apply to these sessions will assist the women to gain greater confidence to become more vocal when they have opinions to share; to compromise from a position of strength in which they can articulate clearly feelings and opinions without fear of invalidation; to expand their support systems through shared experience with other colleagues; and to aide them in reinforcing their confidence that each has a sacred calling that can impact most positively the Jewish people.

Yet, whether my anticipated outcomes are actually confirmed through these sessions or not, I do believe that there will be sufficient knowledge gained to empower both current women rabbis and those who will choose the profession in the future. The discussions alone will yield a lens through which we can look into the hearts, minds and souls of women rabbis without the imposition of assumptions and conjecture. This project is not skewed in order to support a particular hypothesis of women in the rabbinate, nor is it designed to prove suppositions or offer best guesses about the issues facing women rabbis. Rather, this project is meant to offer actual and authentic stories that will reveal the means, by which women rabbis manage, cope and deal with their professional roles and their private lives.

Chapter 4: Results

The following is an account of the six individual sessions held containing a description of outcomes and developments. Each section is filled with quotes directly from the women participants that will offer substantial insights into the discussions which include 1) defining women rabbi's issues; 2) setting boundaries; 3) gender roles; 4) job issues; 5) the business of the rabbinate; and 6) the calling of the woman rabbi. The implications and contributions will be discussed in chapter five.

1) Defining Women Rabbi's Issues: This first session was devoted to voicing and defining issues women face in the rabbinate. An emotionally charged discussion ensued after I asked the question: "How would each of you define an issue faced by women rabbis?" The responses included: "We are the novelty where men are prevalent"; "When male rabbis are present we are invisible, we are the chopped liver!" Clarity was expressed with the statements: "Our movements are operating in a myth about who we are and they pretend it works." "They say our movements are egalitarian, but we still need to battle for everything we want and deserve." "The Conservative movement is in complete denial." "The people whom we serve are anti-woman, dismissive or patronizing." "To be strong is to be labeled a 'bitch'!"

   The women stressed that these discussions rarely take place because there is such "discomfort and pain in having to talk about 'the elephant in the room'." In other words, no matter how often we proclaim that our liberal movements treat us as equal

to our male counterparts, there is still tremendous imbalance and inequality which no movement is prepared to formally recognize. Thus, they pointed out that the discussion remains hidden, yet operative, in nearly every professional encounter.

Here is where I introduced the religious principle of *shalom bayit,* "peace in the home". There was recognition that our movements were operating within the confines of maintaining peace between rabbis, institutions and lay-leaders so as not to upset the accepted myth that women had attained full equality in the rabbinate. To expose the fallacy of the myth would possibly create havoc and acknowledge that there is still hard work to be done. The women decided it was far easier for the mainstream "to pretend equality works", but at a "deep emotional price" for women rabbis. These women, through their personal stories and experiences that day, shared the affecting cost of this communal blindness. One story in particular served as a demeaning example of embarrassment and belittlement: "My professor of *Talmud* at JTS (Jewish Theological Seminary) answered the *Talmudic* question of a male student with the response: 'the passage is like a woman's skirt, short enough to be interesting, long enough to cover the subject.'" As the only woman in this class, the rabbi was literally "dumbfounded" and silenced by the roar of laughter from her male colleagues. "This story", she stated, "is just one of so many that took place during my time in rabbinical school. I am still so angry!"

Building upon the principle of *shalom bayit,* another woman asked: "So whose responsibility is it to maintain peace in our community? Do we always need to be the

silent ones? Why can't we speak up and make a scene when we feel violated and embarrassed by people's insensitivity or sexist remarks?" Another added: "Are we being 'ladies' when we just ignore the slights or are we 'wimps'?" And another: "Are we keeping the peace or just perpetuating a wrong?"

The conversation then veered again as another woman noted: "How can I learn to speak up now, when I can't even do so in my own family? No one wants to hear what I have to say. My family is so dismissive of my religious life." This session then came to an end as each rabbi needed to make a quick exit.

2) Setting Boundaries: This second session took place prior to the High Holydays and check-in revealed a time of great anxiety particularly for the members of our group serving in congregations. The professional demands of beginning a new programmatic year coupled with the pressure of writing sermons was causing tremendous angst. At the same time, those with children were attempting to help them start a new school year and maintain a semblance of celebration for the holidays by preparing meals and inviting guests. As a result the universal call of this session was for "HELP"!

In my clinical role I offered a safe space for the expression of worry, concern and apprehension. I had begun to understand that the women were overwhelmed by daily life but reticent to ask for help because "it might show weakness or vulnerability." Even though summer had just ended, several women were desperate

for more vacation time. Already they were working too much. As stated: "I am 'the engine that can'. I take on too much just because I can. I am good at what I do, but when do I care for myself?" "I did so many things this summer and now I am exhausted! I need *Shabbat!* What am I doing to myself? I have a job, I am a wife and a mother and still I keep on trying to prove myself to others." "I can be a good rabbi or the good wife and mother, but I can't do both."

Another pointed out: "I am now viewed as the 'good rabbi', reassuring, nurturing, like everyone's mother, but no one ever wants me to be the top leader. Be the Mom, but don't be the Dad. Will I ever be asked to be a Senior Rabbi?" Yet another stated: "This time of year all of my insecurities and inadequacies are brought up. I am no poker player; I am so transparent, but horrified that my congregation is going to find out!" And another: "What do you do when the disrespect comes at you? I can't put up with it anymore. What do I do with the aggressive, disrespectful lay leader who pushes every button at a time of year when we are supposed to be introspective and forgiving of others?"

This session, then, was about expectations, both imposed by others, their faith and by themselves as well as setting boundaries to protect their physical, spiritual and emotional health. Through my clinical role they began to discuss the coping mechanisms that could influence practical solutions to several frustrations. I attempted to reframe the challenges of role expectations by addressing the resistance to asking for help and assistance rather than trying to do it all. As a result there was

constructive help offered to provide resources that could reduce stated burdens such as ordering a catered meal, asking friends and family to assist with child care, increased partnering with co-workers and lay leaders, etc.

The theological principles applied to this session included *ona'at guf* (taking advantage) and *klal yisrael* (the Jewish community). Within this session the women struggled first with the realization that *ona'at guf* was operative in some of their personal and professional relationships. Congregations and congregants "took advantage" of their time and expertise because the women had permitted them to do so. Children and/or spouses and extended family "took advantage" of their perceived roll as sole preserver of the Jewish holidays.

Second, *klal yisrael*, "for the sake of the Jewish community", strongly influenced the additional time commitments women made above and beyond work and family. The women felt responsible for filling perceived gaps in work that needed to be done in volunteer organizations. As the "consummate caregivers" they took on the burden of "saving" the Jewish community that would falter without their intervention.

3) Gender Roles: The third session was held immediately following the holiday season including the High Holydays, *Sukkot* and *Simchat Torah.* Check-in revealed that the holidays were a time of stress and aggravation. Sentiments included these random observations: "The holidays were so bad. For ten days I couldn't move due to strep throat, but the show had to go on." "I literally collapsed, we need to make some

different family decisions." "I need a '*rebbetzin*' (Yiddish word for wife of a rabbi) to give my family a sense of the holiday, I just can't do it." "My senior rabbi ruined the holiday for me, there is so much negativity around and when he is unprepared, I have to clean up."

After permitting the necessary venting, I used my clinical role to reframe the conversation. Thus the women moved to ask questions that could inform and alter behaviors in the future. "When do you know that you give enough that it merits your integrity, but it does not destroy you?" "How do we figure out how to make Judaism happen for others and for ourselves?" "Why are we still exposing people to Judaism rather than partaking ourselves?" "What is it about our attitudes that we just do not know how to be non-accommodating?" "Why do we always want to make nice?" "Why at rabbinic meetings are we the only ones cleaning up?"

These questions provoked a variety of responses: "I am tired of being perceived as the rabbi as "mother". "Our gender is both our strength and our weakness". "Our male colleagues do not seem to deal with the issues of being torn between our families and our work." "We are the working spouses. There is no one to help us." "At the end of the day, our gender diminishes us rather than elevates us." "Too many women bring down our status and our salaries." "Why shouldn't I want what my male colleagues have?" "Can men keep all the balls in the air? Will they be faulted for their deficiencies?" "Papa role equals authority. Do we have to buy into the gender

stuff?" "Our male colleagues have people to pick up the slack. Are we allowed to have others pick up our slack?"

Once again through revisiting the combination of theological principles *shalom bayit* and *ona'at guf*, the women concluded the session with a reorientation of the issues. Statements included: "In order for us to find balance we need to recognize that males and females function differently." "We need to develop a different awareness of ourselves." "We need to learn to say NO! and we need to be able to handle the repercussions." "We need to be proud of our gender in the rabbinate and not apologize for it."

4) Job Issues: With the arrival of late November came the concerns of contract renewals, job searches and evaluations. Several women questioned their role and authority as supervisor of staff. They shared the hurdles of working in a hierarchy with men always as their boss. They questioned: "How do we handle inappropriate comments by colleagues?" "How do we learn to speak up for ourselves?" "How can we 'toot our own horns' without sounding conceited if no one else does it for us?" "How do we balance humility and pride with our lay leaders who do not appreciate us?" "Do we fail to see ourselves as others view us?" "How much more can I take?" "Should I just be lucky I have a job or should I go for the big one?" "Why can I always get to second place, but never be the winner of the position?"

Such questions and statements emphasized for some the fact that while the number of women in the rabbinate continues to grow, our status is actually diminished as more

women enter the profession and take part-time work and fill lower level positions in pulpits and organizations. There was frustration that "we are never considered for the big job, but there is usually a token woman on staff." Another pointed out that some lay leaders now even complain there are too many women on staff! "Will people ever think we will get it right?"

This session lent itself well to the clinical principle of neurotic conflict, meaning who are the women trying to please and to whom do they need to be responsive? In addition, counter-transference was operative as one woman put it: "I feel like I am talking to my father when I speak to my President." In my clinical role I was able to help the group reflect upon other personal relationships and how they influence the dynamics of professional ones. In both, the principles of family systems apply in consistent and often complicated dimensions.

For those women in search of altering their professional direction, we looked to the rabbinic principle *m'shaneh makom…m'shaneh mazal,* literally "the changing of one's location can change your luck". We explored the plausibility of both physically changing locales and emotionally changing our attitudes. There was the realization that due to stagnant circumstances and toxic surroundings in one's current position, the only healthy option would be to seek new employment.

5) <u>The Business of the Rabbinate</u>: This session was based on gaining practical knowledge from each other about the business of the rabbinate including salaries,

pension, medical coverage, benefits, etc. as well as understanding the financial picture of their agency of employment and that of their families. This topic grew out of the conversation that women rabbis are under-compensated because they perceive their position as a calling rather than a profession. Fears were expressed that women rabbis were neither fiscally savvy in negotiations nor capable of commanding salaries deserved. In addition, women rabbis received no formal education on negotiation techniques beyond their first position. Also, the plethora of part-time positions held by women rabbis undermined their real worth because part-time work rarely includes benefits. There was the added concern that as women rabbis age, they will not be properly secured in a pension fund. Other issues included the stresses of being the sole 'bread winner' in the family; worry of paying for college; the cost of caring for aging parents; the lack of financial planning within the family and the continuation or availability of medical insurance.

Quotes from this session included: "I'm scared that I am not asking the right questions." "How can I argue with a negotiation team that is me against three businessmen?" "They tell me they have no money. How can I ask for more?" "I am so angry, I could bust. I just learned that my male counterpart is getting paid more than me!" "When will it be my time for my job to take precedence over my husband's? For now, I am stuck here. We can't move." "It's a part-time job, they can barely pay a salary let alone give me any benefits." "Our professional organizations are useless and our parent organizations don't know how to advocate for us nor do they care."

In my clinical role I raised the principles of resistance and differentiation. It was important for these women to understand that they need not just "take" what was handed to them, but they could reframe their responses to elicit greater respect and perhaps more compensation. In addition, I noted the concept that "knowledge is power". On a practical note, it would be most beneficial for these women rabbis to educate themselves about the finances and budgets of their employers. Engaging in due diligence could equate to both increased compensation and enhanced respect.

The religious principle of *ona'at mamon*, taking financial advantage, was most enlightening to the women. From this teaching they learned that they could tap their inner strength to prohibit employers from taking advantage of them financially due to their lack of knowledge or perceived weakness in financial discussions. The discussion continued: "We need to be better prepared when it comes to negotiations!" "Perhaps we shouldn't do it alone. If others are prone to take advantage of us, maybe we need an advocate." Another asked: "But if we get an advocate, will it be perceived that we are incapable?"

6) <u>The Calling of the Woman Rabbi:</u> This session focused on the motivation and call to enter the rabbinate. The topic was not the personal journey; rather it was the collective view of what these women bring to the rabbinate. They divided the discussion into three parts. The first part was their skills which included intellect, compassion, empathy and the ability to partner without a hierarchy. The women

shared these thoughts: “As women we want to change the culture.” “We don’t want the ‘old boy’s network’. We want to create new models in which leadership and responsibility is shared.” “This is not about ego. We don’t buy into the idea that ‘bigger is better’ and you gain prestige in the rabbinate by the size of your congregation or your title in the organization.” “Culture shifts will happen through the actions of each of us rather than by a collaborative effort.”

The second part was need. The women rabbis felt that the Jewish people needed their presence and input. “We need to tell our stories.” “We need to model for our sons and our daughters.” “I want to help one person at a time.” “We women don’t need to be concerned with the big picture. We are the ground troops ministering to individuals.” “Our lives, our bodies, our spirits all have lessons to teach which can add a divine spark to the world!”

The third part was passion. The women felt passionately that the conversations taking place during these sessions needed to be shared with others. “We cannot just internalize our thoughts, but use them in our dealings with others and pass them on to other women rabbis.” There was excitement and enthusiasm as they contemplated moving from the overwhelming issues of the past weeks toward effecting changes that they could handle. They expressed an eagerness to reach out to the women student rabbis and newly ordained rabbis. There was a desire to move from the issues of the first generation women rabbis such as maternity leave and child care in order to address the new set of issues faced by mid-career and end of career women rabbis.

"We need to move on and not get stuck in the past." "We are aging and as we do, we confront new concerns that need to be addressed such as caring for children and parents; struggling to make ends meet with part-time salaries; preparing for retirement and proving our worth as we age." "It is time for us to put ourselves at the top of the totem pole rather than be found on the bottom weighed down by issues that no one wants to address." "It's now up to us."

Within this session we tackled the clinical principle of differentiation. The women began to glimpse their ability to respond to their own needs rather than the needs of others and begin to please themselves. In addition, through the mutuality of purpose to help other women rabbis, the religious principle of *klal yisrael* was used as an affirmative action to help the "community of Israel" remain vital and vibrant.

Chapter 5: Evaluation and Analysis

A. Implications of Results: Contribution of Religious and Clinical Principles

Upon the completion of this project it became quite evident to me that there was an immediate validation of the intrinsic value of women rabbis coming together on a regular basis to build an atmosphere of safety and support. Together the women created a unique and nurturing environment of sorority, camaraderie and professional collegiality. In reality, this group opened an outlet of expression which no other gathering of its kind could offer. It afforded these women rabbis the opportunity to converse in a private and secure setting, enabling them to verbalize emotions and feelings that were hidden, unspoken and unrevealed among their Jewish communities and even other women colleagues.

Truthfully, I was surprised by the readiness with which the group began to communicate. I had anticipated that it would take several sessions for the women to build a comfort level with both me and each other. I intentionally began, therefore, with topics such as defining issues, setting boundaries and gender roles which were meant to be more academic and practical and less personal and sensitive. Yet, what evolved immediately were emotional revelations of hurt, frustration and anger. I was taken aback by the negative sentiments expressed and the force with which the women spoke. I did not expect the women to be in total agreement concerning the array of issues facing them, nor

did I foresee the shared observations across denominational lines. In addition, neither age nor years in the rabbinate tempered the responses. The opinions and attitudes concerning the issues of women in the rabbinate were unanimous.

I realized very quickly that this project would initiate a distinctive forum of shared wisdom, practice and understanding. There was a mutuality of purpose and a shared mission. These women wanted to create an atmosphere conducive to intimate conversation, empathetic listening and constructive action. It appeared to me as if the floodgates of experience had opened and the stories would begin to flow.

Like our first week, the second session confirmed my initial thoughts; these women wanted to talk, listen and learn. The topic of setting boundaries pushed many hot buttons and introduced two new issues: 1) the balancing act between family and work and 2) the necessity to be all things to all people. These women both embraced and rejected the need to be the consummate nurturer.

Their ability to juggle the dual worlds of family and work brought satisfaction and ego gratification, yet it also saddled these women with the expectation that they needed to do it all well. Thus, they could find little, to no time, to dedicate to their own self care. As a result they were contending with exhaustion and burn out at home and in the office. These burdens weighed heavily upon them, but the women saw little choice but to bear their tasks and quietly to push themselves forward.

It was gratifying to me to be able to offer them some insights to identify and be mindful of this behavior of accommodation. In the course of reframing the conversation, we addressed the challenge of role expectations by exploring their resistance to ask for help. On by one each woman shared her hesitation, embarrassment or fear of letting others know that they were often tired. To do so would be an admission that their skills and competency could be questioned by their employers and/or constituencies. In short, the inability to "do it all" was equal in their minds to a "weakness" that was not shared in their perceptions of their male counterparts who needed only to be successful in the work place.

During this latter session I was able to highlight two theological principles that could assist the women in altering their views. The women rallied around both *ona'at guf*, "taking advantage", and *klal yisrael*, "for the sake of the Jewish community". Rather than put the onus of weakness or limitation on themselves, the women came to understand that others were taking unfair advantage of their good nature and work ethic. They began to realize that as much as they would wish that family and co-workers could read their minds and thus offer appropriate help and aide, this could not happen without them verbally voicing their needs. Yet, speaking up for themselves could not be instantaneous. For years they had been literally trained, in both family systems and in general society, to "hold back opinions", "swallow hard" and do it all.

This attitude was reinforced in the second theological principle of *klal yisrael*. The women clearly felt responsible for fulfilling the traditional Jewish roles of wife and/or

mother together with the professional expectations they had attained in the title "Rabbi". They accepted both responsibilities at home and at work by attempting to fulfill all of their obligations "for the sake of the Jewish community".

Truthfully, I was not prepared for these subdued, almost embarrassing disclosures. In my mind, I thought that I would encounter far more self-confidence and bravado when discussing boundaries. I thought that I would be strengthened and enriched by these women's actions of self preservation. Instead, I found the discussion enervating and depleting. This session was particularly difficult for me because of my own counter transference issues. As conscious as I was, I could not keep myself neutral nor refrain from summoning my own thoughts and reactions to the presenting issues. I left the session filled with frustration that I simply could not help the women "fix" their issues or rescue them from their struggles.

The third session on gender roles offered a continuation of the previous session. While I was looking forward to seeing the women with renewed energy and spirit, the exact opposite took place. Once again the women began "check-in" with a litany of complaints and frustrations following the Fall Jewish holiday season. They were tired, irritable and cranky. I could have easily joined the mood of the pack, but I forced a reframing of the issues. Instead of permitting a rehash of past aggravations, I had the women ask questions that would motivate actions, rather than allow them only to be reactive within situations. In other words, I wanted the women to learn to take control of their fates rather than be controlled by outside forces alone. It occurred to me that the women

needed permission to take charge. They needed to learn how to say: “no!” and when to say: “yes” on their own terms. In my clinical role, I could advocate for this shift in thinking and it worked.

The grim conversation at the opening of this session later transformed into an enlightened exchange igniting many new thoughts and ideas regarding the role of women in the rabbinate. The women became animated and energized. They no longer slouched in their chairs, but sat upright. Most gratifying was the declaration offered with conviction and passion at the close of the session: “We need to be proud of our gender in the rabbinate and not apologize for it!” Perhaps, then, it was more than coincidental that this third session offered a marked shift in the vigor and force of attitudes and reflections. Halfway through this project, the women were now prepared to speak up, speak out and speak on behalf of their gender.

The fourth session on job issues was the perfect opportunity to reveal their new approaches toward the role of women in the rabbinate. The women seemed motivated for this discussion. This time their remarks were filled with enthusiasm. While the descriptions of job related issues were once again filled with pain and anger, I did not detect the same defeatism as I had in prior sessions. There was clearly resentment and rage shared about a variety of issues which included their placement process, their professional organizations, their movements, their congregations, etc. But in this discussion the women were empowered to discuss alternatives and consider actions that could alter, if not improve, their situations, rather than just accept the status quo.

In this session, I felt like a cheerleader. I wanted to shout, "go for it" and "that's the attitude!" But instead, I turned to the rabbinic principle *m'shaneh makom…m'shaneh mazal*, "the changing of one's location can change your luck." This verse served to reinforce the attitudes expressed that there exists the plausibility of both physically changing locales and emotionally changing outlooks in order to affect employment possibilities.

Additionally, this conversation lent itself well to the clinical principle of neurotic conflict. Each woman needed to clarify for herself whom she was trying to please and to whom she needed to be responsive. I emphasized the fact that if the women wanted to make healthier decisions for their rabbinates; they needed to be honest with themselves. Their opinions and perceptions needed to take priority over those imposed by others. The reaction to my statements once again raised consciousness and brought about increased self awareness.

The fifth session was actually a continuation of the previous one as the women concentrated on the business of the rabbinate. Here they shared their worries and anxieties due to their naiveté and lack of sophistication with regard to salaries, benefits and fiscal responsibility. They lamented the lack of formal support and guidance within their movements; the lack of which left them vulnerable to being taken advantage of in negotiations of compensation. Each felt disrespected by a system that locks them into "acceptable" positions as assistant or associate rabbis in large congregations, solo rabbis

in small congregations and part-time employees. Lateral movement is possible, but upward mobility into senior rabbi or executive posts is seen as nearly impossible. Such conclusions were illustrated by personal accounts of failed job searches and being overlooked for promotions.

Most interestingly, the women for the first time actually found fault within themselves for aiding in the perpetuation of this situation concerning employment and compensation. No longer could these states of affair be blamed on others alone. The introduction of the religious principle *ona'at mamon,* taking financial advantage, helped the group to understand that only they could be responsible for prohibiting others from taking advantage of them. Only they could ask for and demand the respect they deserved as demonstrated through compensation and work hours, rather than depend on others to be their advocates or wait for recognition that would never come. Whether in the interview or negotiation process, each woman had the capability to voice her needs and expectations. While the women realized that this tactic may not always work, it was clear that the thought process alone offered empowerment.

The final session was dedicated to the "calling" of the woman Rabbi. It was my intention to conclude this project with a retelling of the narratives that brought these women into the rabbinate. It was my hope that through their recollections they could recapture the initial zeal, fervor, enthusiasm and love of Judaism that found expression in their desire to become a Rabbi.

I truly felt that I hit the "bull's eye" with this discussion. After five weeks of get togethers that yielded in depth conversations filled with tremendous emotion, anguish and frustration, I very much wanted these women to leave this project with a sense of self-renewal and sacred purpose. In some way, I felt responsible for the opening of their emotional wounds through our exchanges and the imposition of in-depth reflections which caused them hurt and angst. Thus, I encouraged them to remind each other of the gifts, talents, intellects and spirits that they give in service to the Jewish people.

This session for me was the highlight of my project. In my clinical role, I assisted the women in finding their ego strength to describe their skills, declare their worth and envision their impact on potential women rabbis. To best describe my emotion at listening to their summation of purpose, I need to use the Yiddish word: *kvell*, "to feel a combination of pride and excitement". Thus, I literally "*kvelled"* as I witnessed these women verbalize their newly found insights in order to respond to their personal needs and at the same time help shape the rabbinate of the future for themselves and others.

B. Applications

Though this demonstration project is limited in scope, its applications can have far reaching effects in both the clinical and pastoral ministry. I am convinced through this study that there is still so much more work to be done regarding the role of women in the rabbinate. I heard clearly that there still exist many myths and deceptions about women rabbis. I learned that these are perpetuated year after year within the Jewish community

due to a lack of formal study of the issues, the comfort of denial by our movements and institutions and the deficient power of organization by the women rabbis themselves within which they loudly could voice their needs and concerns. Silence is not golden. The more women rabbis keep silent about the issues they confront, the more things will remain the same. In addition, I found out that time does not heal all wounds. It will take another generation or more to change the culture and attitudes that continue to inflict women rabbis in the work place.

Thus, I would propose that similar groups be replicated for other female rabbis in order to provide them with the sorority, camaraderie and professional collegiality that can offer a safe haven of empathy and understanding. This project reinforced for me the fact that there is a difference between male and female rabbis. One is neither less, nor more, than the other. They are just different. Therefore women rabbis need to be familiar with the clinical and religious principles that can inform, support and inspire their actions.

I witnessed the results of such knowledge gained throughout each session as I introduced either the religious principles of *shalom bayit,* "peace in the home"; *ona'at guf,* "putting others down"; *ona'at mamon,* "taking financial advantage"; *m'shaneh makom…m'shaneh mazal,* "changing of one's location can change your luck; and *klal yisrael,* "the community of Israel" or the clinical principles of neurotic conflict; transference/counter-transference; coping mechanisms and differentiation. These principles assisted the women is assessing their situations and informed them how to adjust their behaviors.

Yet, these discussions had their limitations. There was not sufficient time for the women to grasp fully either the meaning or potential of both the religious and clinical principles. In truth, I could have employed multiple principles in each session, but then their impact would have been far less potent as I spent more time teaching than listening and facilitating. Most importantly, these women wanted to be heard.

It became clear to me early on in this project that these women did not want their issues to be dismissed nor negated. They did not want others to pay them lip-service alone, nor offer them disingenuous support. Rather they wanted simply to be respected and valued for their distinctive gifts. The group setting offered them the space and opportunity to voice these needs.

Therefore, I would expand the conversations to include numerous other issues which were barely touched upon in these sessions. These women alluded to their family roles of wife, mother and daughter, but did not have sufficient time to delve into the physical and emotional effects. Family planning, pregnancy, adoption, child care, aging parents and personal illness are just a few of the additional topics which could have been explored. I can only imagine the impact of such discussions.

In addition, with the increasing number of women entering the rabbinate, there are now new issues and challenges to address. These could include dual rabbinic couples; the Rabbi/Cantor couple; the impact of all female rabbinic staffs; the perceived demotion of

the status of Rabbi with the influx of women; and the acceptance of women rabbis outside the liberal rabbinate and in the wider Jewish community.

Perhaps the most profound message I took from this study was articulated by one participant who stated; "Who would have thought that as more and more women entered the rabbinate, the harder we would now need to fight for our rights, stand up for our principles and find our voices!" This statement summarized for me the purpose of this project. At first, during the early sessions, I was surprised by the subdued and often unexpressed pain and frustration that long had been internalized. These women were silent sufferers. However, the convening of this group broke down the barrier of isolation, and over the course of six months, built a safety net in which the women could vent anger, express frustration, find consolation, mark success and impart and receive support. In short, this project became of venue to identify, evaluate and explore the moments of growth and challenge by these women rabbis. It gave expression to their voices as exemplars of endurance and hope.

C. Personal Reflections

For me personally, this project brought forth many difficulties and mixed emotions. In my clinical role, I struggled to maintain my separateness. Acting as the facilitator of this group was most challenging. As a woman rabbi, I was one of the group, yet I could not participate as an equal member of the group.

I often had to defend against myself in the face of strong personal feelings and reactions to the subject matter. Issues of transference/counter-transference were operative at nearly all times. My personal challenges included defining and defending boundaries and maintaining a neutral stance in the face of emotionally charged subject matter as well as with-holding my personal opinions and thoughts. At times I wished that I could relinquish my role as group leader and assume the role of participant since I, too, wanted to take part in the conversation. I wanted to be nurtured and cared for; I wanted to share my stories and I wanted their counsel and guidance.

Ultimately, however, within each session I was able to refocus my intentions and concentrate on my role as clinical and pastoral counselor. In so doing I have gathered the data necessary to fulfill the Talmudic teaching: "*m' kol m'lumdai hiskalti"*, "from all my colleagues, I have learned". Here I have offered to those who will listen the voices of women Rabbis who have stories to tell, lessons to teach and wisdom to share.

Addendum

The material for this project was gathered more than five years ago. Due to my own personal health struggles and professional transitions, I was unable to find the time or the motivation to complete this project. Ultimately, however, it was this extraordinary group of women rabbis, who both inspired and encouraged me to tell their stories.

I am now an active part of this group, rather than its facilitator. We continue to meet on a monthly basis in order to study, learn, vent, support, embrace, uplift and help each other through the trials and rewards of our rabbinates. Over these many years the group itself has faced several challenges that threatened its survival. Some members moved on when professional opportunities beckoned in other locales; some left the group due to conflicts of interest and others due to personal disagreements. Yet, an original core of six members remains.

We stay together for two important reasons. First, we know that we are human; we are vulnerable, fearful, tired and often overwhelmed. Our sorority offers us friendship, insights, strength and inspiration. We are energized by our collective experience and wisdom. Second, we recognize that we are each a blessing to the other. Ultimately, we are joyful, persistent, and hopeful. We are filled with gratitude for the sacred opportunity to serve as Rabbis.

The following words of one participant best sums up our mission and the purpose of this project: “We have to be the change we want to see. Our mutual support does empower us to venture outside the box, to let go of conventional structures. It is not a coincidence that three of us are working on books; that I may go back to school and that another is chairing our WRN (Women’s Rabbinic Network) convention and serves as President of our regional CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis). I think we all would have done these eventually, but I don’t know if we would have done them as comfortably or simultaneously. Thanks for helping all of us recognize what it is that we are living and helping find words to express……Here’s to many more years of transformation!”

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