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Advisor's Report

Jewish Men's Spiritual Growth by Eliott Perlstein

Dr. Kerry M. Olitzky

April 27, 1995

In this innovative and insightful Doctor of Ministry demonstration project, Rabbi Perlstein has accepted the challenge to make the liberal synagogue more meaningful to men in their personal lives. Ironically, Rabbi Perlstein senses that women have taken over the domain of the synagogue to the point where religion (read: synagogue life) has come to be perceived exclusively as a woman's issue. Over the course of several months, Rabbi Perlstein met with a group of men (defined in traditional terms as a minyan) in his congregation in order to "create an intimate, empathic community which provided a setting for meaningful self-discovery and disclosure." Using techniques evolving out of the growing literature of the "men's movement" and selected aspects of the theology of Arthur Green, Martin Buber, Mordecai Kaplan, and Eugene Borowitz, Rabbi Perlstein successfully developed a group which brought the men closer to God and closer to their spiritual core. In drawing out the personal relationship of the individual and the sacred text, Rabbi Perlstein drew on the techniques of Lawrence Kushner, Norman Cohen and Peter Pitzele. What remains to be seen is whether the synagogue can yet evolve to the point where these men can find their place--now that they are more comfortable with their Judaism and with one another. Nevertheless, I hope that colleagues will see this project as a model for their own congregations and communities.

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I recommend the acceptance of this demonstration project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Ministry.

JEWISH MEN'S SPIRITUAL GROWTH

ELIOTT N PERLSTEIN

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

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

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CHAPTER 1

I designed this Doctor of Ministry project in Jewish men's spiritual growth to enhance the spiritual life of Jewish men in my congregation. It involved a group of 12 men who met weekly in the synagogue for 11 sessions. This Jewish men's spiritual growth group set out to enhance the spiritual lives of Jewish men by creating an intimate, empathic community which provided a setting for meaningful self discovery and significant personal disclosure. Jewish sources and teachings inspired the self discovery and disclosure. A selection from the Torah introduced the theme and discussion for each session. The growth, resulting from this project was to be the impetus for ongoing Jewish growth. This project's goal was to engage Jewish men in a process of Jewish spiritual growth. While the end and ultimate goal could neither be determined or realized in 11 sessions, the project was designed to provide a beginning and involve men in a process of spiritual growth.

At the core of this project is the issue of men's spirituality. I use the word "spirituality" throughout this paper. The definition of spirituality in this project is

> an individual's quest for God within an intimate, empathic community which provides a setting for meaningful self discovery and significant personal disclosure. The self-discovery and disclosure within the group is inspired by Jewish sources and teaching.

This project addressed the challenge presented by men in my synagogue. They seemed to be little involved in its religious and spiritual life and Jewish religion and spirituality appear to play an insignificant role in their lives. While only an anecdote, the following conversation provides the reader with insight to the problem. Recently, I called a prospective member family who had contacted

the synagogue for information. A man answered the phone whom I presumed to be the head of the household. When I introduced myself, he said politely, "Oh, that's my wife's department. Let me get her for you." I realized that many male congregants may say the same thing. Over the years, mothers and not fathers have called me to discuss Bar and Bat Mitzvah plans. When I return phone calls and fathers answer, they invariably call their wives to the phone. Judaism and the synagogue have become the business of women. One other episode further illustrates the point. Recently, I spoke to nursery school parents in my congregation on the topic of talking with children about God. At previous programs for this population, both fathers and mothers attended. No fathers attended this program. Clearly, in the men's opinions, this was not a topic for them. If anyone was going to talk to their children about God, it was the mother.

These and similar experiences have convinced me of the need to provide an opportunity for Jewish spiritual growth for men. The need was for fathers and sons as well. Male children of these marginally Jewish men will, after a successful oedipal resolution, identify with their fathers. If the men are spiritually disconnected from Judaism, their sons will be disconnected also.

For most of Jewish history, the synagogue was the man's domain. The minyan comprised men only. In the traditional synagogue, women sat upstairs or behind a curtain. Today, women and men are equal in the religious rites and practices in the liberal synagogue. In my congregation, the result is that women are much more active in the religious and organizational life of the synagogue than men. Recently, a man came to my synagogue from a congregation where the women were not permitted on the pulpit. In a conversation regarding this, he

remarked: "In my former synagogue, though I didn't understand much of what was going on, I knew I was in charge. Here, I just sit back and watch the women do their thing."

This project, a group for Jewish men's spiritual growth, was a new and innovative experience for the men in my congregation. Throughout the 18 year history of my synagogue there has been an active and successful adult Bat Mitzvah program but no program or outreach geared specifically towards the men in the congregation. The adult Bat Mitzvah program has involved close to 80 women in 11different classes. Each of the classes met for two years to prepare the women for Bat Mitzvah. This program propelled the women into the forefront of religious involvement in the synagogue.

In my most recent work with one women's Bat Mitzvah group, I field tested a few of the methods used in this Doctor of Ministry project which involve personal exploration and sharing. The women expressed more appreciation for these spiritual exercises than for any other aspect of the program. They spoke about it as the most spiritually meaningful part of their two-year course. Based on this success, I readied myself to begin the work with men.

In general, the men have a subordinate role in our synagogue. Their secondary role in the religious life of the synagogue permeates the entire life of the congregation. The sisterhood is a much more important and productive organization than our men's club, which is small and ineffective. In a congregation of nearly 575 families, approximately 15 men come together for a breakfast each month. They rarely invite me to speak and never on a topic of religious or spiritual content. The board of directors is about 75% women and the role of men in the

synagogue continues to diminish. Previous attempts to respond to this situation have not been successful. For example, a few years ago, I attempted to establish a monthly lunch-time Talmud study program for men. There was such limited interest, it never took place. The men's secondary role to women in the congregation is long standing and apparent to the synagogue leadership. The few efforts to improve the position of men were not successful.

Adult education in the congregation, except for the Adult Bat Mitzvah Class is not separated into groups for men and women. The attendance, however, is almost entirely women. In a recent class on Jewish spirituality, there were 33 women and three men. I have come to expect that men will not be interested in what I am teaching. I have sometimes expressed my surprise and appreciation to the one or two men in the class. Since men in my congregation have not involved themselves in the standard areas of the synagogue, women have, more and more, taken their place. I felt that there was a need to create an opportunity for the men's involvement. This project in Jewish men's spiritual growth responded to this growing need.

My suburban, liberal synagogue is becoming more and more of a woman's place. It is a place for women to study, to pray, and to lead. The more the synagogue is a woman's place, the less it will be valued by men. Given the present circumstances, I foresee women becoming even more involved and men less involved. This can eventually reach a point where men will have no entree into the life of the synagogue.

For the past quarter of a century, there has been a great deal of activity in the non-Orthodox synagogue to afford women equal religious rights and to

integrate them into the ritual life of the synagogue.[1] While this has happened, there has been no effort in my congregation to support the place of men in the synagogue. We have viewed the men like boarders who are just always there. As it is turning out, they are not always there. Men are less and less to be found in the synagogue today.

The word "outreach" has become quite a popular word in Jewish circles of late. There is outreach to the intermarried. There is outreach to the single population. There is outreach to the unaffiliated. There is no particular outreach to men however. They are a neglected population. This project responded to the need to do outreach to men in our synagogue community.

An intervention directed exclusively to men is needed at this time. There are surely many types of possible interventions. One could offer a Talmud study group for men only. One could offer a course in Jewish business ethics that might appeal to men. Those who are sports minded might offer a bowling or softball league to bring men into the synagogue. This project utilized a clinical pastoral approach to respond to this problem.

These internal synagogue issues are not the only factors which account for men's diminished involvement in the synagogue. American middle class cultural factors play a significant role as well. The contemporary ethos of society does not support men's spiritual and religious activity. A review of the literature of the men's movement suggests that men live isolated lives, cut off, and alone from others. Men have grown up in a culture that does not value emotion for men. The contemporary culture does not value a male's awareness of himself and disclosure to other men. Sam Keen expresses this in his book Fire In The Belly: On Being A

Man.

> Men, in our culture, have carried a special burden of unconsciousness, of ignorance of the self. The unexamined life has been worth quite a lot in economic terms. It has enabled us to increase the gross national product yearly. It may not be necessary to be a compulsive extrovert to be financially successful, but it helps. Especially for men, ours is an outer-directed culture that rewards us for remaining strangers to ourselves, unacquainted with feeling, intuition, or the subtleties of sensation and dreams. [2]

Craig Nakken, in his Men's Issues in Recovery: the Ten Myths of Manhood explains men's lack of emotional vulnerability not as a result of economic causes, but rather as one of military roots. He writes:

> Socially, men are seen as the protectors of society. A protector is strong, immovable, and unflinching-not emotionally vulnerable. Society can't afford to have its men in combat think about the people they kill or the families who suffer, certainly, the men themselves cannot afford such emotions. Even in times of peace, we know whose role it is (in all likelihood) to die for our country. . . One of the greatest effects this role has on men is in the area of emotional vulnerability. Although we are now allowed to be vulnerable, steeling ourselves to emotions is still very much the norm. [3]

What has become normative for men in America and for Jewish men is a path that is not spiritual.

Jewish spirituality involves relationships with others. I will explain in the next chapter the importance of the minyan, the gather of ten adult Jews. Men, in our society however, have been socialized to live alone, isolated from other men. This is in addition to their emotional aloofness. Men tend to be loners. For most men, there is no one with whom to examine life issues and then disclose the results of the examination. While women value intimacy, men value independence.[4] It is unusual for a man to sit with another male or a group of men and discuss life issues. Deborah Tannen, professor of linguistics at Georgetown University, in her

book about the differences in male and female speech You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men In Conversation, explains that this is one of the basic differences between men and women. Much of this project deals with language: men's disclosure of themselves to other men. Dr. Tannen's insights into men's style of speaking and relating is valuable. She writes:

> For most women, the language of conversation is primarily a language of rapport: a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships. For most men, talk is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. This is done by exhibiting knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through verbal performance such as story-telling, joking, or imparting information.[5]

The environment in which Jewish men live and find meaning and value is antithetical to a religious, spiritual context. In his chapter "The Renewal of Jewish Spirituality," In Jewish Spirituality, Laurence Silberstein, a rabbi ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary and professor of Jewish thought at Lehigh University writes about the impact of contemporary culture on Jewish faith today. His primary work has dealt with the thought of Martin Buber. Regarding the impact of contemporary culture on faith and spirituality today, Silberstein writes:

> The loss of religious meaning has been accomplished by a growing sense of loneliness, isolation, and meaninglessness. . . . The processes of alienation and loss of meaning that characterize Western culture in general have also eroded the foundation of traditional Jewish religious faith.[6]

In chapter two, I use the idea and language of Lurianic Kabbalah of brokenness and *tikkun*, the repair of the brokenness. There is a spiritual, religious brokenness in the lives of Jewish men today. Their lives are lived in the competitiveness of the contemporary marketplace which is antithetical to spiritual

values. Robert Bly, a leader of the men's movement today writes:

> Contemporary business life allows competitive relationships only, in which the major emotions are anxiety, tension, loneliness, rivalry and fear. After work what do men do? Collect in a bar to hold light conversations over light beer, unities which are broken off whenever a young woman comes by or touches the brim of someone's cowboy hat. Having no soul union with other men can be the most damaging wound of all.[7]

We must attempt to repair this brokenness in order to involve Jewish men in a religious, spiritual life. This Doctor of Ministry project, a group for Jewish men's spiritual growth, was inspired by the need to respond to this brokenness, this loss of religious meaning caused by loneliness and isolation and competitiveness today and to provide a path of *tikkun*, of repairing and healing.

The project provided an opportunity for men to overcome the loneliness and isolation by a relationship with Torah text and other Jewish men in the synagogue and their rabbi as pastor of the group. Within that context, the men had the opportunity to regain a sense of religious meaning in their lives.

If there is any hope for men's spiritual growth, self-discovery and disclosure, it is necessary to create a context. That context in this project is a group experience. In his book Spiritual Renewal Through Personal Groups, John L. Casteel, a pioneer in group work in churches, writes:

> Critics of our culture warn us of the peril to our society that arises from this situation of the lonely individual surrounded by impersonal masses of human beings. If our society is to be restored to health, and to humane living, ways must be found to re-create the firsthand personal relations between men that we are rapidly losing.[8]

The personal group, Casteel suggests, can be the setting for men to overcome their loneliness and develop the firsthand personal relations that are necessary for

healthy living. Sam Keen also recommends the importance of men coming together to discuss life issues but his purpose is different. For Keen, the process of a man's self discovery is primary. That process is an individual one but at some point, according to Keen, one man would do best by sharing his discovery with other men. Sam Keen writes:

> In one sense the voyage of self-discovery is solitary, but that doesn't mean you have to take it all alone. A lot of men suffer silently when they are in creative chaos, and feel something is wrong with them because they don't realize other men are experiencing a similar disintegration of the old modes of masculinity. In matters of the psyche and spirit, taking the journey and telling the story go hand in glove and that is why we need a listening community in order to make our solitary pilgrimage. The most powerful resource we have for transforming ourselves is honest conversation between men and men, women and women, men and women. [9]

For Casteel, the group is primary and the work done in the group is secondary. Most important for Casteel is that men be in a group. For Keen, the work of self discovery is primary and discussing the discovery with other men in a community is secondary. Despite this difference in emphasis, they both endorse the establishment of a men's group for the purpose of personal spiritual growth.

This project responded to men's need for self discovery and relationship. The program invited men to engage in a process of self discovery. The group provided the setting for meaningful and significant relationships and the opportunity to share the self discovery with other men.

I was the clinical-pastor of the group. Utilizing clinical pastoral skills (which I will describe in the next two chapters), I set out to develop new relationships with men in the congregation. I planned to know the participants more intimately than I previously knew men in the synagogue. I intended for the

men to have different relationships with me than they had previously but I did not intend to disclose issues of my own life as a participant in the group. When I did disclose, on occasion, it was not for my own benefit. When I disclosed something personal in the group, it was only for the sake of the group and the participants that I did so. I anticipated that the men would have a different relationship with me for a number of reasons. I was their pastor for the 11 sessions. They saw me in a different light than they usually do on the pulpit leading services and speaking. In the group they saw me in a small group of 13 men providing an opportunity for them to explore and discuss their life stories and actively listening to them. As they realized that I knew more and more of their life stories, I imagined their relationship with me changed.

This project was initially designed for a group of ten men. It was actually comprised of 12. After the initial trial of this project, I can offer it for other groups of men in the future. This process can vitalize men and the congregation in a profound way. Members of this group are potential leaders of future group experiences as well. In this way men can benefit from this experience and then also become mentors to other men in the congregation.

This project is particularly relevant to ministry in a wider context. While I write about the situation in my own suburban synagogue, there is reason to believe that my congregation is similar to other American egalitarian synagogues. The needs which I see in my community are the same in many other non-Orthodox congregations. The societal factors which I described affect men in other synagogues as well as my own. The issues of men's loneliness and emotional aloofness applies to other men as well as my congregants. The factors which cause

the situation that I describe in my community are not unique to my community. The receding role of men in the synagogue community and the men's lack of spiritual and religious involvement is their response to the societal factors. It is reasonable to imagine that other men in other communities react similarly.

Many other non-Orthodox synagogues have granted women equal religious rights in the past 25 years. Other egalitarian synagogues have provided special programming for women. Unless other synagogues had the foresight to support the role of men, their situation should be similar to what I describe.

In this project, utilizing clinical-pastoral skills which I will describe in the next two chapters, I set out to begin to support men in my congregation by means of this group for men's spiritual growth. This group does not provide the total answer for all men in the synagogue. Neither is it the total answer even for the small group that it involves. This project does not point to an end. It offers a setting and a program for beginning a process of ongoing men's spiritual growth.

CHAPTER 2

There are many possible approaches to responding to the needs of men in the synagogue today. One could take a purely educational approach and develop a class that would interest men in particular topic or one could take a social approach and develop a stronger men's club. I took a clinical-pastoral approach. Underlying the program, which I describe in chapter three, are both theological and clinical principles. In this chapter, I present these theological and clinical principles which underlie this project.

I designed this group for Jewish men's spiritual growth for ten members. In a chapter on "Group Care and Counseling," Howard Clinebell advises: "An effective growth group must be small enough to permit frequent participation and face to face communication among all its members." [1]

While the literature on groups and church groups in particular suggests any number from six to 12 or 15, [2] the number ten has particular Jewish meaning for a group. The number ten constitutes a minyan. Moses sent 12 spies to reconnoiter the land and ten of these were considered an *edah*, a community. The minyan is a quorum of ten adult Jews which together constitute a community. Within the context of the community of ten, sacred public activities can take place.

In a traditional context, on an affective level, there is a sense in the Jewish psyche that what is important takes place within the context of a community of ten or more: in a minyan. Public prayer and the reading of the Torah, the seven marriage blessings and the Kaddish can only take place in the context of a minyan. They are all extremely important in the traditional Jewish

community's view. There is a feeling that when ten adult Jews pray, God's Presence is in their midst. The Talmud supplies the basis for this position. "And how do we know that if ten people pray, the Divine Presence is with them? For it is said: 'God standeth in the congregation of God'" (B.T. Berahot 6a).

This synagogue group formed an *edah*, a small community but nevertheless a community in itself. There is precedent for this concept of a small version of a larger institution as a place of holiness. The home and synagogue became known as a *mikdash miat*, the small sanctuary. Previously, the *mikdash* was the Temple in Jerusalem. The prophet Ezekiel first uses this phrase in describing the nascent synagogue in Babylonia:

> Therefore say, thus says the Lord God that I have driven them away amongst the nations and I have scattered them amongst the lands and I have been to them a *mikdash miat* a small sanctuary in the lands to which they came (Ezekiel 11:16).

The Talmud comments on this biblical verse with the following:

> Rabbi Yitzchak said that this (*mikdash miat)* refers to the synagogues and houses of study in Babylonia. Rabbi Eleazar said that it refers to the house of our teacher (B.T. Megillah 29a).

I intended this group to function as a small community. The minimal number necessary to constitute a community is ten. With ten, there was a sense that something more profound was taking place than a few men talking to each other about their life stories. The group of ten created the particularly Jewish context. It conveyed the message that there was a sacred context in which the discussions took place. As the synagogue and home were connected to the holiness of the Temple, the group was connected to the holiness of the synagogue by being a community in itself. The thought of Martin Buber and Arthur Green, which I will soon present, explain the sacredness of the substance of the group. The group

itself, composed of ten, a minyan, signifies a sacredness to the form.

To a great extent, this project's basis relied on the religious philosophy of Martin Buber and the contemporary theology of Arthur Green. Buber is a religious existentialist thinker. His religious concern begins with the individual and proceeds with how Judaism will touch the individual in his particularity. For Buber, the individual is central. It is not the task of the individual to fit into Judaism, but for Judaism to meet the individual in his/her life circumstances. In his "Judaism and the Jews" found in On Judaism, Buber writes:

> The question I put before you, as well as before myself is the question of meaning for the Jews. Why do we call ourselves Jews? I want to speak to you not out of an abstraction, but of our own life; and not of life's outer hustle and bustle, but of its authenticity and essence. [3]

Buber conveys his message on the importance of each human life:

> Every person born into this world represents something new, something that never existed before, something original and unique. It is the duty of every person in Israel to know and consider that he is unique in the world in his particular character and that there has never been anyone like him in the world. [4]

Buber's teaching provided the basis for this group of Jewish men's spiritual growth. The uniqueness and preciousness of each participant's life story was of prime importance.

Another foundation of Buber's religious thought is that personal disclosure within the context of a group is vital. The sanctity of what transpires between individuals is central to Buber's thought:

> The Divine may come to life in individual man, may reveal itself from within individual man; but it attains its earthly fullness only where, having awakened to an awareness of their universal being, individual beings open themselves to one another, help one another; where immediacy is established between one human being and another; where the sublime stronghold of the individual is unbolted, and man breaks

> free to meet other man. Where this takes place, where the eternal rises in the Between, the seemingly empty space: that true place of realization is community ; and true community is that relationship in which the Divine come to its realization between man and man. [5]

A path to experiencing God for Buber is in the relationship between individuals where individuals are open to each other and help one another. This thought underlies the goal of this project which was to create an opportunity for Jewish men to come closer to God through coming closer to themselves and other men in an intimate and empathic community. Buber notes that the presence of God is manifest and present in the "between." The "between" exists in the midst of an I-Thou relationship. In the I-Thou, each individual has no agenda of how he/she will utilize the other. One does not view the other as an instrument to be utilized, but is with the other. They share the common goal of wanting to relate to each other. The I-Thou echoes the relationship with the ultimate Thou, God as Buber states:

> In every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us, we look out toward the fringe of the eternal *Thou*; in each we are aware of a breath from the eternal *Thou*; in each *Thou* we address the eternal *Thou*. [6]

Like Buber, Arthur Green presents an approach to God which involves a searching into oneself and sharing the results of that search with others. Green's theology vividly defines the spiritual meaning of this project. Arthur Green was ordained as a rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. He recently served as president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College before accepting an appointment at Brandeis University as professor of Jewish thought.

For Green, the path to God is not to ascend the mountaintop but to plumb the depths of one's own being. The approach is that God, the world and humanity are not separate. Green rejects a dualism for a oneness. Green's concept which

underlies this project is found in his recent book Seek My Face, Speak My Name

> Let us think of the journey to God as a journey inward, where the goal is an ultimately deep level within the self rather than the top of the mountain or a ride in the clouds. The Torah tells us that our earliest ancestors were diggers of wells. Let us try to reach for the understanding that flowed as water from the depths of Abraham's well, rather, for the moment, than the one that came down carved in stone from the top of Moses' mountain. This journey inward would be one that peels off layer after layer of externals, striving ever for the inward truth, rather than one that consists of climbing rung after rung, reaching ever and ever higher. Spiritual growth, in this metaphor, is a matter of uncovering new *depths* rather than attaining new *heights*. [7]

Like Buber, Green finds God's presence in the context of relationship, intimacy and community. He writes:

> We find God by a turning in to ourselves, to be sure, but also in the inward experiences that we share with others. The insight that we develop in such moments then leads us to an ability to see the inwardness of all creatures, to come to know them as the many faces of the One. [8]

He continues with:

> But for us humans God is most to be discovered within the human community, in relationships with others, and in knowing ourselves. In fact, our search for God is fully bound up with our being human; our knowledge of Y-H-W-H is in no way separable from our own humanity. We come to know God through relationships with one another, opening ourselves to the divine presence as manifest in those whom we allow ourselves to love. [9]

Intimacy with oneself and with others through self-discovery and self-disclosure are the roots of this project. Green writes: "A Jewish path to oneness can only be one that leads through human intimacy." [10]

In the contemporary synagogue, the rabbi is seen as the one serious Jew who observes Judaism both on behalf of himself or herself and on behalf of the community. In the group, the rabbi served as pastor rather than teacher and

preacher and thus empowered the men to take more responsibility for their Jewish spiritual lives. This approach was based on a teaching of Eugene Borowitz, a rabbi, Jewish educator and theologian who is professor of Modern Jewish Thought at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Based on the Lurianic creation idea of God contracting to make room for the creation of the world, Borowitz discusses a leadership model of *Tzimzum*. Borowitz succinctly presents Luria's concept of *Tzimtzum*:

> Creation begins with an act of contraction, *tzimtzum*. God does not initiate the existence of other things by extending himself. There would be no place for them then to be, no area of non-being or partial being in which they might exist. Hence to create, He must first withdraw into Himself. God must, so to speak, make Himself less than He is so that other things can come into being. So great, says Luria, is God's will to create, so great is His love for creation.[11]

In promoting this model of creation as a model of leadership, Borowitz continues:

> This readily translates into contemporary human terms. We seek a leadership construed not primarily in terms of the accomplishment of plans but equally in terms of its humanizing effect on the people being led. Our ethics demand a leader who uses power to enable people to be persons while they work together. . . . I suggest that the ability to practice *tzimtzum* can sharply distinguish accomplishment-directed from person-fostering leadership.[12]

As pastor of this group I did just that; I retracted and made room for Jewish men to discuss their lives amongst themselves and with me.

In the opening chapter, I introduced the idea of brokenness and the repairing of the brokenness in these men's lives. These are also classical ideas taken from Lurianic Kabbalah. David Ariel, president of Cleveland College of Jewish Studies explains these concepts in his recent book The Mystic Quest. He writes:

> Luria describes this catastrophe as the breaking of the vessels *(shevirat ha-kelim)*. The light of *Eyn Sof* and the matter of the *Sefirot* were dispersed throughout the universe. On one hand the primordial scene of

> creation had turned into chaos and disaster. On the other hand the light of *Eyn Sof* was now diffused randomly throughout the hypersphere. The world contains within it deeply hidden and embedded shards of divine light. The very chaotic state of the universe also inherently contains the possibility of its own perfection. For Luria, the world contains the seeds for its own renewal. This is the possibility of restoration *(tikkun)*. [13]

As I mentioned in the opening chapter, there is a spiritual, religious brokenness in the lives of these men. The men's group provided an opportunity for the beginning of *Tikkun*, a repairing of the brokenness.

Before discussing the psychological principles of this project, there is a final theological note. The Torah is the central and holiest text of the Jewish people. Therefore, this project, designed to inspire spiritual growth through self discovery and personal disclosure, was based on selected biblical stories taken from the book of Genesis. The selected biblical texts follow the model suggested by Norman J. Cohen, rabbi, professor of Midrash, and dean of the New York School of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. In his book Self, Struggle & Change: Family Conflict Stories in Genesis and Their Healing Insights for Our Lives, Dr. Cohen delineates how to use the biblical text in a way which underlies the project. He writes:

> By confronting the biblical text, whether we see it as divinely given or the product of divinely inspired human beings, and immersing ourselves in these sacred stories, we can gain a better sense of the meaning of our own baffling dramas. This in turn, can affect the nature of our lives and our priorities. [14]

According to Cohen, there are two levels on which we Jews are accustomed to reading the biblical text. The first is that of the literal meaning of the text using "philological, literary, historical, archeological, sociological, theological -- we can approximate what the biblical writers meant in any given narrative." [15]

The second level involves confronting the great commentaries written over the centuries. The design of this project is what Cohen describes as a third level of reading the text

> Reading a sacred text forces self involvement and self-reflection, and it is through our own entry in to the text that meaning surfaces. Thus, with every story we study, we learn not only about what we are reading, but also about ourselves. In deciphering a text, we bring to the fore elements of our own being of which we may not always be conscious. We respond to our own questions and dilemmas. [16]

Of the 24 books of the Hebrew Bible, Cohen writes:

> The Genesis narratives in particular can serve as vehicles of insight into our own personalities as well as the dynamic tensions within our own families. They can help us see ourselves as brothers and sisters, and as parents and children. Since it is through a wrestling with the sacred stories of Torah and with the complex personages delineated in them that we can begin to take an honest look at ourselves, it is precisely upon our own reading of the biblical text that our search for wholeness and holiness is contingent. [17]

Norman Cohen is not alone in this approach of using the biblical text to better understand ourselves. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, a noted writer in contemporary Jewish spirituality, writes in a similar vein: "Jewish spirituality begins and finally ends with the words of scripture."[18] Kushner continues that for Jews, "the central religious act is . . . interpretation." Kushner refers to Michael Fishbane who "once suggested to me [to Kushner] that through interpreting the Bible, Jews create themselves over and over again." [19] Kushner presents his concept of a living, dynamic interpretation of Torah in the closing paragraphs of his book God was in this Place & I, i did not know. He writes:

> It is you who are reading these words. You are the sacred text itself. The holy text is not about you. You are not even 'in' it. . . . You are it. The words of sacred text reach out to us. The flower wants more than merely to be seen by the eye, it wants to dwell in the eye, to be the eye. The music is not content to be heard by the ear, it wants to live in it, to

> be the ear And the silence, that teeming pulsing noise of all creation, is not content to be beheld by the soul, it is your soul [20]

Many Biblical narratives lend themselves to this enterprise but as Norman Cohen suggests: "The Genesis narratives in particular can serve as vehicles of insight into our own personalities as well as the dynamic tensions within our families" [21] Based on Cohen's position, this project primarily utilized Genesis narratives to provide the biblical inspiration for the process of self discovery and disclosure, the creation of community and creating a path to God.

This group for Jewish men's spiritual growth is a clinical pastoral response to the spiritual brokenness of Jewish men's lives today. It is based on both theological and psychological principles. I will continue with the psychological principles that inform this project.

The first psychological principle of this project is that adults can and do continue to grow and change throughout the course of their lives. This growth and change continues for men in their thirties, forties, fifties and beyond. Daniel Levinson explains in The Seasons of A Man's Life that people grow through different life periods. Early adulthood ranges from ages 17 to 45 and middle adulthood from 40 to 65 [22] With Jung and Erikson, Levinson suggests that individuals continue to grow during their adult years. One's character is not completely fixed after childhood or adolescence. Adults continue to be affected by intrapsychic and external cultural factors. That is to say factors within one's psyche continue to affect an adult's ongoing growth and factors in the environment, external to the individual, continue to have importance in an adult's ongoing development. This project introduced spiritual, cultural and emotional factors that could have a profound affect on future individual growth. According to

Levinson, there was the potential for growth and change in the lives of the men who participated in this group process.

While there is the potential for growth and change in the lives of many contemporary Jewish men, there has been a severe interruption in their spiritual growth. Most Jewish men in my congregation attended Hebrew School during their elementary school years and celebrated becoming Bar Mitzvah at the age of 13. For most, however, Jewish education and synagogue involvement stopped at that point. From conversations with men, I have learned that throughout high school, college, graduate and professional school and early years of marriage, Jewish practice and learning were not the valued practices in their lives. These men returned to the synagogue when their children were ready to begin their Jewish education. Coming to the synagogue was admittedly for their children and not for themselves. Since the time of their Bar Mitzvah, Jewish men develop socially and educationally. They develop the skills to succeed in business or professional practices but they all but ignored their Jewish, spiritual selves. There has been a severe interruption in their spiritual growth. The spiritual realm has not been valued. This project set out to change this and introduce Jewish spiritual elements into their lives that have long been absent. The introduction of these new Jewish, spiritual elements provided the opportunity for change and new growth in their lives.

The work of this project took place within the context of a group setting. The usage of the group was not merely to be able to interact with a number of men simultaneously. The group itself, ten men sitting together, had spiritual value. There was the potential for spiritual growth within the group that would not be

possible if I worked with the men individually. Regarding the use of group work, Howard Clinebell writes, "Exciting developments are occurring in the use of small groups in some congregations. But most churches have only scratched the surface of the rich possibilities for small group ministries." [23] Under the heading of growth groups, Clinebell lists 20 types, including spiritual growth groups such as this project. Some of Clinebell's reasons in favor of group work are that it is better stewardship of a pastor's time; it provides a dynamic of interdependency where individuals are both helper and helped; the group responds to the loneliness and alienation that is the norm in society at large; and there are individuals who will come to a group in a church who would never come for counseling per se and who will benefit from it immeasurably. [24]

Of the reasons that Clinebell gives for the advisability of group work, Dr. Irving Yalom, professor of psychiatry at Stanford University School of Medicine, comments on the idea that the group responds to the loneliness and alienation in our society. Yalom writes that people, by nature, need to interact with other people. The opportunity for interaction is not naturally provided by our society. The group can provide the context for meaningful interaction that people so much need and that is naturally missing in our society. In his book The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy, Yalom writes:

> People need people-for initial and continued survival, for socialization, for the pursuit of satisfaction. No one transcends his need for human contact, neither the dying, the outcast, nor the mighty.[25]

In addition to the actual work of the group, the existence of the group is important. The men are not part of a class with a teacher. They are part of a group with a pastor. There is a world of difference. There is a difference in the way the

members communicate. In a class, the communication is to and from the teacher. In a group, the members communicate with each other and thus develop significant relationships with each other. The men have the opportunity to teach and learn from each other. The pastor is not the central focus in the group and in the communication that takes place. The members feel that they are the group and feel a dedication to the group that members of a class would never have. In the following paragraphs, I will present the psychological factors that explain this.

Groups take on a life of their own. According to Irving Yalom, one of the important factors of a group is its cohesiveness.[26] There was an anticipation that there would be a certain cohesiveness to the group and this cohesiveness would produce positive results. Cohesiveness is a necessary pre-condition for the other work of the group. Cohesiveness involves the members commitment to each other and to the group as a whole. It accounts for the participants' ongoing attendance. In feeling a commitment to the group and its work, the men would form a positive cathexis to the values of the group. The synagogue and the rabbi would be viewed as the context of relationship and intimacy. As a cathexis to the group forms, it was anticipated that the synagogue and the rabbi would take on a more valued role in the lives of the men.

This group provided an opportunity for Jewish and spiritual relationships that have been absent in the lives of many Jewish males. Relationship is the key word. Yalom points to research that shows that whatever the school or method of therapy used, a positive relationship is a key factor in a successful therapeutic experience.[27] This group provided an opportunity for relationships. There were new relationships with other Jewish men. There were new and deeper relationships

with the rabbi. There were new relationships with Jewish texts. I anticipated that these new relationships would have ongoing positive results.

One of the new experiences was, for most if not all men, the opportunity to relate to others in a more empathic way. Robert Katz, professor emeritus of Human Relations at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, in his Pastoral Care and The Jewish Tradition offers that the heart of what the rabbi has to offer in his work is empathy. Katz describes empathy as a basic Jewish tenet. He writes, " I regard it (referring to empathy) as a primary ingredient of spirituality." [28] Empathy involves being with another person, listening to them relate their story and feeling along with that person. It involves taking leave of one's own feelings and point of view and placing oneself into the other's experience.

I planned to model a practice of empathy to the other men in the group. This was to be the beginning of a new experience of interacting and the beginning of creating relationships that approach the I-Thou discussed above. Howard Clinebell writes: "Some of the most effective teaching a minister does (in counseling and elsewhere) is done by modeling constructive attitudes, beliefs, values, and behavior." [29]

We clergy speak, to a great extent, to an individual's superego. We present values, commandments and prohibitions to influence behavior. The part of the psyche that exerts moral control over an individual is the superego. There are different facets however of the superego. There is the immature, childish superego which controls the id and ego in a strict and even punitive way. There is also the mature superego which is the location for mature values and morality of the

individual. A clergy can speak to either aspect of the superego. The preacher who threatens the congregation with eternal punishment for infractions speaks to an undeveloped and even pathological superego. I intended to speak to the mature, healthy aspects of the superego in this project.

In the psychic structure of an individual, the superego is the location of values and morality. I intended to influence the values of the participants. My intention was that the members would come to value Judaism, Jewish learning, self discovery and disclosure and a sense of community more than they had in the past. This shift would take place within the superego. My approach to influencing the men's superegos was not by demand or admonition but by presenting material for thought, evaluation and hopefully integration into their own value system. This is the work of the superego and yet it is difficult to separate the work of the superego and ego. I was actually appealing to the superego and enlisting the work of the ego in the process. The ego does the work of analyzing and reflecting and if values are to change, the change is to be within the superego. [30]

While I intended for the men to listen carefully to my presentations and carefully consider and reflect on the material, I intended to do the same. A considerable part of my work as pastor of the group was active listening and responding to the ideas, feelings, reflections of the men. Howard Clinebell discusses this type of interaction under the category of Educative Counseling. Such counseling combines the skills of creative education and dynamic counseling. Clinebell writes:

> This type of help is called *educative counseling*, a helping process that integrates the insights and methods of two pastoral functions with the single objective of fostering the wholeness of persons. This approach involves the personalized communication of certain knowledge, beliefs,

> values, and coping skills as an essential part of the counseling process. Educative counseling goes far beyond merely imparting information. By utilizing counseling skills and sensitivities, it helps persons understand, evaluate and then apply the relevant information to coping with their particular life situations. [31]

I mentioned earlier that biblical material was the basis for the work of self discovery in this project. I presented above the theological rationale for the usage of this biblical material in the pursuit of men's spiritual growth. There is a clinical as well as a theological rationale for the biblical material which I will present now. According to Carl Jung, ancient myths and symbols continue to live on in modern man. Joseph L. Henderson writes in his essay entitled "Ancient Myths and Modern Man"

> We read the myths of the ancient Greeks or the folk stories of American Indians but we fail to see any connection between them and our attitudes to the heroes or dramatic events of today. Yet the connections are there. And the symbols that represent them have not lost their relevance for mankind. [32]

The biblical material, introduces the discussions and brings a religious component to the sessions. The stories are ancient myths which have real meaning in the lives of these contemporary men.

Much of the recent literature for the men's movement is based on ancient myths. Iron John by Robert Bly emerged as an important work in the men's movement. The men's movement began in the mid -1970's and to a great extent, was in response to the women's movement. Joe L. Dubbert writes in his book A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition:

> By the mid-1970's, men's conferences were being held and organizations formed to respond to a growing list of male concerns, ranging from divorce and alimony rights, parenting, and job situations to sexual fulfillment and, especially, gay rights which dominated the early movement. A men's liberation movement had been born. The basic focus was a recognition of the shortcoming of playing the

> traditional masculine role of always getting ahead and staying cool. Men were thinking about how they treated associates, competitors, and women and how they chose to spend their leisure time. [33]

Robert Bly began lecturing on men's issues in the early 80's. Keith Thomson, editor of an anthology entitled To Be A Man credits Bly as a major force in men's work. He writes "Specifically, Bly was addressing men's pain in relationship to women, grief between fathers and sons, peculiarly male modes of feeling, and rites of passage crucial to male 'soul-making'." [34]

Thompson, after following the work of men's groups around the country and reading the literature recommends that we speak in the plural of men's movements and different types of masculinities. He also recommends that it is too soon to evaluate the impact of the men's movements on society as a whole. In response to a prediction that the men's movement would have an impact similar to the civil rights movement, he writes:

> The jury is still out about the likely social impact of the still-emerging men's movement--or, rather, men's *movements*. In keeping with my earlier suggestion that the term masculinity should be understood as inherently plural, it seems wise to avoid trying to compress the depth and breadth of several nascent men's movements in to a single gray collective. [35]

Robert Bly is recognized as a key figure in the field of men's work today. His book came some ten years after lecturing and teaching in this field. The entire book is based on the myth of Iron John that was told by the Grimm Brothers and for thousands of years before them. A book for men of the previous generation by Robert A. Johnson, He Understanding Masculine Psychology is based on the story of Parsifal and the Holy Grail. Johnson acknowledges that his usage of myth is based on the work of Carl Jung. Johnson explains that, according to Jung, just as the dream expresses from and to the individual important psychological truths

about himself

> a myth shows an important psychological truth that applies to mankind as a whole. A person who grasps the inner meaning of a myth is in touch with the universal spiritual questions life asks of all of us. [36]

Johnson explains the importance of myth in psychological terms:

> To most modern men, however, the word *myth* is almost synonymous with false or illusion. This is because of the misguided idea that myths were the childish way ancient man had of explaining natural phenomena that science explains so much better but certain psychologists and anthropologists are now helping us see myth in another light, to understand that mythology reflects underlying psychological and spiritual processes taking place in the human psyche. [37]

Johnson summarizes Jung's concept of individuation in one sentence. This sentence is important and provides a psychological underpinning for the theological definition of spirituality of this project. "Individuation is the lifelong process in which a person increasingly becomes the whole and complete person God intended him to be." [38]

The use of Jewish ancient myth from the book of Genesis, helps the ego to explore the meaning of that myth in the life of the individual. Through the disclosure of that meaning to the other group members, the participants of this group could begin the journey towards wholeness and becoming what God intended them to be.

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter, I will present the actual program of the group for Jewish men's spiritual growth session by session. Periodically, I will elaborate on the meaning of the session by offering ideas and citations that inform the meaning and intent of the session. Following the presentation of the program, I will list my methods of assessment. I will also explain my role as pastor of the group.

There were 11 sessions in this group for Jewish men's spiritual growth. The number of sessions suggested by John L. Casteel is "not less than six weeks, and better, ten or twelve." [1] The meetings were each Monday evening from 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm. They were held in a classroom of the synagogue's school building. The men sat in chairs arranged in a circle.

Since the design of the project was to use the rich biblical narratives of Genesis, the group's beginning corresponded to the beginning of the reading of the first book of the Torah, the book of Genesis. Since the reading of the book of Genesis takes place over a period of twelve Sabbaths, the group was scheduled to meet each of those weeks. In addition, 11 meetings were to accommodate an array of relevant topics without imposing too burdensome a number of meetings.

Although the narratives of the book of Genesis was the basic text, I did not use the particular lexicon reading for a given Sabbath. I chose the text for a given session based on the themes that fit the overall goals of the project. Clinebell advises that in creating a group of this nature:

> Having a resource book, a topic, or a flexible outline of how the sessions will be used tends to reduce group (and leader) anxiety as well

> as provide a flow chart of the group's plan and topics. The less structure a group has the higher the anxiety level tends to be. [2]

The topics are from areas of importance to men today based on my readings as well as the existential topics found in the book of Genesis. In the opening session, the men were given the opportunity to reflect on their general life circumstances as well as their Judaic lives. Furthermore, the first session provided an opportunity for the men to introduce themselves to each other, begin to get to know each other and develop a sense of community. The Genesis narrative for this session was Genesis 3:1-9. The second session dealt with competitiveness and empathy. The narrative for this session was Genesis 4:1-16, the story of Cain and Abel. The discussion for session three was male mentors. The text for this session came from the Talmud rather than from Genesis. The text is found in the tractate Kiddushin 29a. The topic of the fourth session was a man's work, worth and the Sabbath. The Genesis narrative for this session was chapter 2:1-3. The topic for the fifth session was our wounds and the accompanying narrative was Genesis 32:23-33. Session six dealt with the issue of God and prayer. The Genesis narrative for this session was chapter 28:10-16, the story of Jacob's appreciation of God's presence. Session seven dealt with reclaiming our deep masculinity and was called reclaiming Esau. The narrative of this session was Genesis 32:1-12 and 33:1-4. In session eight, we shifted from Esau to Jacob and to the topic of Torah study in the life of Jewish men. The narrative for this session was Genesis 25:19-27. Sessions nine and ten dealt with a discussion of ethical wills composed by the men. The Genesis narrative inspiring this work was chapter 49:1-10.

The following is an outline of the 11 sessions of this project. I included the questions as much to indicate my thinking on the topic and what might possibly

arise as it is material to be actually used. It certainly should not be seen as a teacher's lesson plan. While I was prepared with these questions, I was even more prepared to follow the discussion in the direction the men found valuable. In the second year of the pastoral counseling program of the Post Graduate Center for Mental Health, my clinical supervisor counseled that I follow the client or participant's lead and help them explore their issues. I should not impose my own agenda. The pastor's imposition of an agenda may reduce the pastor's anxiety, but is not beneficial for the participants. The outline for the sessions and discussions served to facilitate and not dominate the flow.

Session One "Where Are You?"

In this opening session, I welcomed the men and explained the program. I stressed the importance of ongoing attendance, participation and personal disclosure. I distributed the topics of discussion and the recommended reading material.

I shared with the group the fact that this is a project for a Doctoral Program and solicited their cooperation and support. Since the group work is based on open, honest communication, I felt it was important that I disclose this information. I also discussed the reason for my choice of topic and my interest in working with a men's group. I explained that I could have chosen from an array of topics but I wanted to work with a group of men. I briefly discussed the needs (presented in chapter one) to which, I felt, the group responded; namely, the lack of involvement of men in the synagogue.

The theme of this session, was designed to introduce the men to the process of thinking about themselves and to begin disclosing their thoughts with

each other. The narrative of Genesis 3:1-9 was the source for discussion. At this session and all subsequent sessions, before the reading of the Torah text, the participants and I joined together in an opening blessing.

ברוך אתה יי אלהי ו מלך העולם אשר קדש ו במצותיו וציו ו לעסק בדברי תורה

Praised are You O Lord Our God, King of the Universe who has sanctified us by Your Commandments and has enjoined upon us to be engaged with teachings of Torah. Following this blessing I read the biblical text. At the conclusion of the reading of the narrative, I added:

> We are each Adam. Once we may have felt that we were living in a garden of Eden, in a paradise, but we probably don't feel that any more. There may be times in our lives when we too hear God or our own inner voice calling to us, and asking 'Where are you?' How do we respond? What can we say?

Following this, there was open discussion. This allowed the men who wished to respond talk about their lives. After a few minutes, I asked them to address some specific issues:

A) Where are you in how you feel connected to Judaism today? How important is Judaism in your life now?

B) Where are you in terms of communicative relations with other men in your life today. Do you talk openly about life issues with other men?

C) Where are you in terms of your feelings about and relationship with God today?

At the end of the session, I asked the men why they came to the group and what they expected to gain from it. As Clinebell writes: "At the outset, the leader should ask members to say what they each hope to get from the experience." 45

I took notes of the discussion during each session. My notes of this first

session served as a basis of my final assessment of outcomes. I repeated some of these questions at the final session. I used a subjective comparison of the two discussions to assess change resulting from the group experience.

I invited each participant to maintain a journal throughout the course of the group. Writing one's personal reflections is a spiritual enterprise. Additionally, a journal would provide helpful material to assess the development of the individual. I anticipated that a group of men not chosen for their interest in writing would not keep a journal or would find it burdensome. I thought it would be easier for the participants to complete a brief questionnaire after each session. This form, the "journal questionnaire" appears in the appendix.

Session Two: "Competitiveness vs. Empathy"

Central to the spirituality of this group is empathy. While I intended to model it throughout the course of the group, I explicitly introduced it in this session. Empathy can be seen as the antithesis to competitiveness which, according to so much of the literature, characterizes men's contemporary interaction. Robert Bly writes:

> Contemporary business life allows competitive relationships only, in which the major emotions are anxiety, tension, loneliness, rivalry and fear. After work what do men do? Collect in a bar to hold light conversations over light beer, unities which are broken off whenever a young woman comes by or touches the brim of someone's cowboy hat. Having no soul union with other men can be the most damaging wound of all. [3]

Open, honest sharing is what is missing. This session was intended to provide the participants an opportunity to begin to reflect on some areas of competitiveness in their lives.

This session employed the technique of bibliodrama. Regarding bibliodrama, Gerhard Marcel Martin writes:

> It is an open process of interaction between people and the biblical tradition. Bibliodrama is an experiential and text-oriented approach. The participants learn how to connect their own experiences with those that linger in biblical stories, contexts, and personae, as well as in prayers, meditations, and homiletic passages of the Bible. When struggling and empathizing with this material, people encounter themselves in a mediated and indirect way. Group process and self-encounter are legitimate topics of bibliodramatic processes. [4]

In brief, this form of psychodrama involves a reading of a biblical text, the assigning of individuals to act out the characters, spontaneous role playing, and then a deroling. During the deroling, the participants discuss what they have uncovered about themselves in the role playing. The playing of a role of a biblical personality brings a considerable amount of the individual's conscious and unconscious self to the drama. The deroling and sharing provides an opportunity to reflect upon the action and to learn about oneself.

The text for this bibliodrama was Genesis 4:1-16. Since the theme of the evening was competitiveness and empathy, we began the session by chanting together in Hebrew, the opening verse of Psalm 133 which is הִנֵּה מַה-טּוֹב וּמַה- עִים שֶׁבֶת אַחִים גַּם-יָחַד Behold how good and how pleasant it is that brothers dwell together in unity. Following the chanting, we recited the blessing listed above.

Members of the group volunteered to play God, Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel. After the initial role playing, roles were reassigned to provide an opportunity for others to participate. Everyone was able to "second" any of the roles and thus participate in the action of the drama. "Seconding" is a technique where a group member who is not, at that time, acting out a role can stand behind an actor and

contribute his/her own thoughts and feelings in the name of that role. This bibliodrama was employed to provide a real opportunity for the men to begin to deal with their issues of competitiveness.

After the role playing, the deroling and sharing, there was a general discussion of competitiveness in the men's lives. My questions were:

A) Would competitiveness describe how you interact with others in your life, your coworkers, your spouse, your children, your siblings?

B) Do you feel a sense of competitiveness with other men in the group?

After time for discussion, I introduced the concept of empathy and Buber's teaching of I-Thou and Buber's concept of God's presence dwelling in the between of an I-Thou relationship. This, I suggested, was the hope for our group. I explained that there was nothing we could hope to use each other for and that we were there to be with each other, disclose to each other, learn about each other and thus create an environment hospitable for God's presence.

Session Three "Our Wounds"

This session dealt with wounds. Robert Bly and others in the men's movement view this as an especially significant topic. Bly writes:

> The wound that hurts us so much we 'involuntarily' dip it in water, we have to regard as a gift. How would the boy in our story have found out about his genius if he had not been wounded? Those with no wounds are the unluckiest of all. (Of course one can't think that, because no such person has ever been found.) Men are taught over and over when they are boys that a wound that hurts is shameful. A wound that stops you from continuing to play is a girlish wound. He who is truly a man keeps walking, dragging his guts behind. [5]

The text was Genesis chapter 32: 23-33. Here, Jacob struggles with an angel who is attempting to overwhelm him. The angel does not defeat Jacob but manages to wound him in his thigh. Upon daybreak the angel tries to leave Jacob but Jacob

will not let him go until the angel blesses him. The blessing comes in the changing of Jacob's name to Israel.

Each member of the group is known as a son of Israel. Like Jacob/Israel, we have each been wounded in some way. From the wounder, Jacob asks for blessing. This harmonizes with the following thought of Robert Bly that out of the wound can come blessing:

> Initiation, then for young men amounts to helping them remember the wound, and by that we mean the soul wounds, or injuries to the emotional body. Not receiving any blessing from your father is an injury.[6]

Our culture leads us to believe that our wounds are a source of shame. Bly continues with:

> Our story gives a teaching diametrically opposite. It says that where a man's wound is, that is where his genius will be. Wherever the wound appears in our psyches, whether from alcoholic father, shaming mother, shaming father, abusing mother, whether it stems from isolation, disability, or disease, that is precisely the place from which we will give our major gift to the community.[7]

Following the opening blessing and the reading of the text, I posed the following questions:

A) Do you feel that you have been wounded in life and by whom?

B) Where do you feel that wound to be?

C) Do you have any hope of healing?

D) Do you feel that any good has come from that wound?

Session Four "A Man's Work, Worth and the Sabbath"

The fourth of the Ten Declarations involves the observance of the Sabbath so the fourth session was devoted to a discussion of the Sabbath as a potentially

special and spiritual day in men's lives. At the prior meeting, I distributed sections of Abraham Joshua Heschel's The Sabbath for them to read in advance. Our Genesis text for the Sabbath discussion was Chapter 2:1-3.

In the discussion of the Sabbath, the men were invited to relate it to the meaning of work in their lives and the spirituality of that work. For the discussion of work and the spirituality of work, after the opening blessing we read Genesis 2:4-15. I also read a rabbinic text which points to the spirituality of work.

> I am God's creature, and my fellow is God's creature. My work is in town, and his work is in the country. I rise early for my work, and he rises early for his work. Just as he does not presume to do my work, so I do not presume to do his work. Will you say I do much and he does little? We have learned: One may do much or one may do little; it is all one, provided he directs his heart to heaven. (B.T., Berachot 17a).

Underlying this session's discussion was the recent work of Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin in his book Being God's Partner: How to Find the Hidden Link Between Spirituality and Your Work. Salkin writes:

> God wants to be allowed into our lives. Not only that, but God *needs* to enter the many hours and the many thoughts and the many worries that we devote to our work. Our careers consume much of our strength and our time and our creativity., but they must never consume us.
> One way to wake us up to ourselves, to be truly alive, is to ask ourselves, as the Hasidic rebbe had the night watchman ask him, 'Who do you work for?' When the answer is clear, we will still work for that is our purpose in life. But we will do it with a pure heart and with a more playful (and a more prayerful) soul. [8]

The questions to stimulate discussion were as follows:

A) How do you feel about the work that you do? Do you feel that you are creating something, contributing something meaningful, worthwhile?

B) Is there a sense of spirituality in your work for you?

C) Is the Sabbath in any way a significant part of your life? Could you envision it

being?

Session Five "Male Mentors. Who were they? How well did they do?"

In Judaism, older men play a significant role in the transmission of the heritage to the younger generation. In contemporary literature, most notably, Robert Bly explains the importance of male mentors but he laments their absence from men's lives today. Their absence, Bly explains, causes considerable pain. He writes:

> The boys in our culture have a continuing need for initiation into male spirit, but old men in general don't offer it. The priest sometimes tries, but he is too much a part of the corporate village these days. . . . The ancient societies believed that a boy becomes a man only through ritual and effort-only through the 'active intervention of the older men.' It's becoming clear to us that manhood doesn't happen by itself; it doesn't happen just because we eat Wheaties. The active intervention of the older men means that older men welcome the younger man into the ancient, mythologized, instinctive male world. [9]

This session provided an opportunity to probe and discuss the male mentors in the men's lives. Following the opening blessing, the session began with the Talmudic teaching of a father's spiritual responsibility for their sons. The teaching is:

> Our Rabbis taught: The father is bound in respect of his son, to circumcise, to redeem, teach him Torah, take a wife for him and teach him a craft. Some say to teach him to swim too (B.T., Kiddushin 29a).

The discussion of this session was based on the following questions:

A) Do you feel satisfied or wanting from what you have received from older men in your life?

B) How do you feel that you were parented by your father? Do you look back and feel that you received what you feel you needed? Do you feel things were missing in what you did not receive?

C) Is there any male figure who was a Jewish mentor for you, who taught you about Judaism?

A closing exercise for this session was for the men to compose a contemporary "Talmud" teaching of a father's responsibilities to their sons/daughters. Their writing was based on what they wished they would have received from their fathers and what they now know they must give to their children.

Session Six "God and Prayer"

Since this session dealt with God and prayer, we began by chanting שמע ישראל יי אל-הינו יי אחד Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. We used a chant in which we repeated these words a number of times. I invited the men to reflect on these words and the presence of God in their lives. I asked them to especially reflect on moments when they felt God's presence in their lives.

We then offered the opening prayer thanking God for Torah study and then I read the selected text for the session which was Genesis chapter 28:10-16. In this narrative, Jacob confesses to not realizing the presence of God because so much distracted him. I commented that so too it is with many of us and men in general today. The crucial verse is the final one "Jacob awoke from his sleep and said 'Surely God is in this place, and I did not know it!'"

This session was to give the men an opportunity to discuss moments in their lives when, if ever, they have felt the presence of God. The participants also were invited to discuss those times when they felt God's absence. After I read the

biblical text, I asked. Can you repeat Jacob's statement and then tell your own story. Start your discussion with "Surely God is in this place and I did not know it" and then continue with your own words.

Other questions were:

A) When have you felt God's presence?

B) Are there times when you have been struck by God's absence?

C) Does a feeling of God's presence have an affect on your life in any way? Do you feel you have a relationship with God?

In this session, I shared some of my own personal theology and most notably the theology underlying this project. I discussed some of those times when I have myself felt God's presence and absence.

Session Seven "Reclaiming Esau"

The text was Genesis 32: 1,8,12; 33:1-4

After I introduced the personalities and explained their characters (Esau as a hunter and Jacob as a quiet student and their past rivalries) I read the text and then raised the following questions:

A) Whom do you feel more like, Jacob or Esau? How much of you is Jacob and how much is Esau?

B) Can you see yourself becoming more like Esau or taking Esau into yourself?

C) I then shared some of the teaching of Rami Shapiro's Embracing Esau and asked for their reactions. Rabbi Rami Shapiro has taken Robert Bly's work and shaped it in a Jewish way through the Esau story. He writes:

> The transformative power we seek arises from the rite's ability to recover and help us to reestablish a healthy relationship with the deep masculine.

> There may be many ways to accomplish this but the one with which I am most comfortable rests with the exploration of myth. The myth I find most powerful in this regard is the Torah's story of the relationship between Jacob and Esau, the twins of Isaac and Rebekah. By taking this myth to heart, I believe we can recover the path toward wholeness; we can embrace Esau, the inner Wild man, our psychic twin, and make peace with ourselves and our masculinity. [10]

Shapiro's work with Esau of the Bible is based on Bly's work with Iron John. Bly's purpose in retelling this myth is to help contemporary men contact their deep masculine, which resides within each man. This wild man represents power. It is not to be confused with the savage man who acts out of rage as a result of a lack of power. Bly writes about the need for contacting the deep masculine by describing the contemporary male as the soft male. He writes:

> The male in the past twenty years has become more thoughtful, more gentle. But by this process he has not become free. He's a nice boy who pleases not only his mother but also the young woman he is living with. In the seventies I began to see all over the country a phenomenon we might call the 'soft male' . . . When a contemporary man looks down into his psyche, he may, if conditions are right, find under the water of his soul, lying in an area no one has visited for a long time, an ancient hairy man. Making contact with this Wild Man is the step the Eighties male or the Nineties male has yet to take. Contact with Iron John requires a willingness to descend into the male psyche and accept what's dark down there including the *nourishing* dark. [11]

Underlying this session, in addition to Bly and Shapiro's thoughts is Jacob Neusner's theory that Jewish men live with a certain sense of their own weakness. They have developed their intellectual acumen while being and feeling insipid. Rabbi Jacob Neusner, professor and scholar of the rabbinic era and interpreter of rabbinic texts, writes that this Jewish male orientation is actually the product of our sages theology and teaching. In an article entitled "The Virtues of the Inner Life in Formative Judaism," Neusner writes:

> A simple catalogue of permissible feelings comprises humility, generosity, self-abnegation, love, a spirit of conciliation to the other,

> and eagerness to please. A list of impermissible emotions is made up of envy, ambition, jealousy, arrogance sticking to one's opinion, self-centeredness, a grudging spirit, vengefulness aiming at the cultivation of the humble and malleable person, one who accepts everything and resents nothing. Temper marks the ignorant person, restraint and serenity, the learned one. A mark of humility is the humble acceptance of suffering. The human condition of Israel therefore defined a different heroism one filled with patience, humiliation, self abnegation. To turn survival into endurance, pariah-status into an exercise in godly-living, the sages' affective program served full well Israel's hero saw power in submission. Ultimate degradation was made to stand for ultimate power. [12]

Session Eight "Reclaiming Jacob"

The focus of this session is the spirituality of Torah Study. While we need to reclaim the energy and the power of Esau, we need to reclaim the classical spirituality of Jewish learning.

The Genesis text was Chapter 25:19-27. Here we read of the birth and growth of Jacob and Esau and the statement that Jacob was a quiet man who dwells in tents. I added to this the *Midrash* that Jacob studied Torah with his father and grandfather in the Yeshivah of Shem and Ever (Midrash Tanhuma Vayeshev Bet).

This session involved one hour for actual Torah study. Since this session occurred during the week of Hanukkah, we studied a selection of rabbinic texts dealing with the holiday. I took the time for actual Torah study because I assumed the men would not otherwise be able to discuss their feelings regarding Jewish study. I assumed these men were not involved in any Jewish learning either individually or in a class. The session of learning was necessary to provide a basis for the discussion. With, and only with this session, would there be something to actually discuss.

Following the study session, I opened the discussion with the following.

A) What kind of feelings did you have during this study session?

B) Is this something that could become part of your life?

C) What memories, positive or negative do you have of Jewish learning in your past?

Sessions Nine and Ten "A Discussion of Ethical Wills"

The basis for these sessions was Genesis Chapter forty nine. The portion of the text is Genesis 49:1-33.

Here, Jacob is on his death bed and utters his final words to his sons.

> And Jacob called his sons and said "Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come. Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob; Hearken to Israel your father" (Genesis 49: 1-2).

It is these words which Jacob's sons will continue to hear echoing in their consciousness. We used this narrative to discuss ethical wills. We made use of the text by Jack Riemer and Nathaniel Stampfer, So that your values live on: Ethical Wills and how to prepare them. The members of the group were asked to read the introduction and part six "A Guide To writing your own Ethical Will." [13]

An ethical will is a document written by a parent to his/her child(ren) either before the parent's impending death or while the parent is still in good health. The ethical will is the parent's, in this case, the father's statement to the child what is most important in his life and what he hopes his child(ren) will remember and value in the next generation. This exercise is a highly spiritual exercise. It first requires the parent to reflect well on his life and determine what is most important to him. Further it involves a sincere communication to the next generation. The

father becomes a mentor in this exercise. He is asked to think about what aspects of his life he wants to bequeath to the next generation.

Since the Torah text in chapter 49 is at the closing of the book of Genesis, it provided a comparable closing to our group process. More important, it provided the men an opportunity to reflect upon the work of the group since its beginning and the work yet to be done in their lives. The ethical will could, in part, provide a blueprint for their ongoing Jewish, spiritual growth.

I first introduced the ethical wills in session six. I spent the last portion of that evening discussing ethical wills, teaching their position in Jewish tradition and explaining their importance in our group work. I explained that writing an ethical will would provide each member an opportunity to reflect on his life, what mattered most and what he most wanted to communicate to his children. I explained that writing the will would involve an exploration of personal values and concerns. I mentioned that not only would the men be communicating to their children in their writing but also with the other men in the group. I said that I hoped we had reached a sufficient level of trust that we could write openly while knowing the wills would be read by the other 11 members of the group. I distributed the reading materials to aid them in their compositions. I asked the men to take two weeks to compose their ethical wills and then bring them in for the eighth session with a copy for each of the other group members. I asked the men to read all of the others' ethical wills before coming to the ninth and tenth sessions. These two sessions were discussions of the content of the ethical wills and the men's hopes for their children.

The format for discussing each participant's composition was the format of

our doctoral seminars at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Fifteen minutes were devoted to each participant and his ethical will. The composer began with a two minute update. The group spent ten minutes discussing the will while the composer listened. Whatever comments I had, I offered during the ten minutes of the group's time. Then, the composer had three minutes to respond to the comments. I found this format in our seminar to be most beneficial. Though it may seem that the author of the material under discussion is omitted from the proceedings, in reality, I found a sense of appreciation that the group is focusing on your own work. This format also permits the composer to listen to valuable feedback rather than provide immediate responses. I have used this format with other groups in work with spiritual autobiographies. The members of the group found it to be extremely worthwhile.

Session Eleven "Wrap Up and Assessment"

Throughout the sessions, I was assessing outcomes and assessing the value of the group to the participants. I used a variety of assessment techniques.

The first measure was attendance. While I explicitly stated the importance of ongoing attendance, I knew if the program is not meaningful, interesting and worthwhile, the numbers will diminish. A drop off in the number of participants would indicate that the program was not speaking to their needs. Ongoing attendance would indicate that the men are finding value in this project.

Since the project deals with self discovery and disclosure, a successful group should involve greater and deeper introspection by the participants and more self disclosure. I took notes during each session. After each meeting, I maintained

a journal where I wrote about each participant's disclosure, the amount of disclosure relative to previous sessions and the content of the sharing. At the group's conclusion, I compared my weekly entries to determine a pattern of increased or diminished disclosure.

A goal for the men was to help them become and to feel more connected to Judaism, to Jewish sources and the sources of Jewish spirituality. At the last session we discussed these issues. I asked the following questions in this final session. First, I returned to my question of the first session. "Where are you today in terms of feelings of Jewish connections?" I added:

A) Do you feel that Judaism/Jewish sources has played a positive role in a process of self-discovery and disclosure during this group?

B) Do you feel any more connected to Judaism after this eleven session group, less connected or about the same?

C) Are there any particular Jewish behaviors that you have involved yourself in or would be interested in involving yourself in the coming months?

In as much as spirituality was central to the purpose of the group, I asked if they felt a greater sense of spirituality as a result of the group. I did not offer a specific definition of the word and knowing that it could be understood differently by the men, I realized that the responses to this and other questions were very subjective. I also asked the men if they felt a greater sense of God's presence as a result of the group.

Because I would not hear from each member at a given session, I composed a final "journal questionnaire" so that these final responses would be more comprehensive. I read their final journal questionnaires carefully along with the

journal questionnaires they gave me following each session. I thereby assessed ongoing and final gains and losses of the group

The following describes my pastoral role was in the group. I was the convener of this group. By inviting these men to participate in this spiritual journey with me, I conveyed the message that I was interested them. I also conveyed that I was interested in the quality of their Jewish, spiritual lives.

I brought to the project and each session a certain authority that made the work possible. While I was committed to the concept of *tzimtzum* which I mentioned above, my presence as rabbi of the congregation and pastor of the group made the work of the group possible. I invited the men to become engaged in activities that were not normal or easy for them. They did things they did not and would not do on their own.

A primary part of my pastoral work was active listening. I listened intently while each member spoke and I modeled this behavior for the others. Others in the group also listened well and responded empathically. While members learned new skills from each other, I contributed a dimension of learning to the members.

My periodic active intervention into the group contributed to some of the success that I report in the following chapters. I felt like a shepherd to a very active flock. I watched and listened carefully. I was aware of those who were more reticent and I worked to involve them more in the group. At times, I needed to guide the group to a level of personal discussion rather than a general discussion of the issue. At times, I would invite a member to think more deeply about an issue that he was disclosing.

I actively showed my interest in the group in an effort to keep the men

committed to the group. If I mentioned something at a session that I thought was of interest to the men, I mailed it to each member between sessions. When we had to change a date, I was careful to communicate in writing and by phone to remind the men of the new date. I cared a great deal for the group and the men. The men saw. I believe that the group was of great importance to me. When someone missed a session, I called them to inquire about their absence.

As pastor of the group and as the rabbi of these men, I was part of the group in a very different way from them. I anticipated my own spiritual growth from this project but my own disclosure were not on the same level as the participants. I shared to the extent that I believed it would be helpful to the members of the group and never with the intention that it would be helpful to me.

As I came to know these men in a more intimate way, they surely came to know me in a deeper way than they did before. I was no longer someone whom they saw on the pulpit officiating from a distance but someone whom they saw close up and to whom they revealed significant, personal aspects of their lives.

In the following chapters I will report on the results of this project and then present the implications of those results. I will also present the contributions of this project to my ongoing ministry and to ministry in a wider context.

CHAPTER 4

Here, I will report the results of what I set out to examine in this project. I will analyze and discuss the implications in chapter five. The results will indicate the many ways this project was a successful experience for the participants. Yet, there were limitations to the project that suggest a reworking for future use.

The first barometer of the group's success is attendance. In three of the sessions, all 12 men were present. Usually, ten or 11 attended. No one dropped although one member attended only 50 percent of the time. All 12 men were present when we discussed ethical wills. Eleven were present at the final session.

At the conclusion of chapter three, I wrote that a successful group would involve greater and deeper introspection and more personal disclosure. From the first to last session, I noticed an increase in the quantity and the depth of personal disclosure. I base this conclusion on my general sense of the group and from my written notes on each session. In the opening session, four men did not speak. As the sessions continued, three of these four participated more actively as did the others. As my records of the men's participation show, eight of the participants increased the quantity of their personal disclosure. One member was consistent in his level of personal disclosure. One member disclosed a great deal in the third session; then, in later sessions, he asked questions of the others but never again discussed his own issues. At the conclusion of the third session, he told me that he had talked too much and was concerned that he had dominated the

discussion. Despite my attempt to assure him that his disclosure was appropriate and meaningful for him as well as worthwhile for the group, he never discussed issues on such a personal level again. One member shared very little the entire time. Another, Mike, demanded much of the group's time, but disclosed very little about himself. I suspect he tried hard to avoid disclosing. Later, I will discuss him in more detail.

Throughout the project, at a given session, a few of the men would usually discuss something significant about their lives. The particular men who disclosed in depth changed from one session to another. A given participant's issue resurfaced in subsequent sessions.

At our last meeting and in the next to last meeting, when we discussed the ethical wills, the participants themselves noted that there had been much personal disclosure and that they had come to know each other in ways that they did not know most men. One member commented that even without looking at the name he could tell who wrote each ethical will. All agreed.

In a number of ways, the project accomplished its primary goal: to provide men with opportunities to become more connected to Judaism, Jewish sources and the sources of spirituality. The men spent 11 evenings in the synagogue with their rabbi and an exclusively Jewish group. In each session they recited a prayer and read a portion of a Torah text. Particular Jewish concerns were the focus of some sessions. Session four focused on the Sabbath, and session six on God and prayer. In session eight "Reclaiming Jacob," the men were involved in Torah learning. That session was during Hanukkah and the focus was the study of Midrashic and Talmudic material regarding the holiday. In session ten, we discussed their ethical

wills. As I explained in the last chapter, the writing of an ethical will is an ancient and traditional Jewish practice.

Ten men reported feeling a closer connection to Judaism. At the last session and in the final journal questionnaire, I asked if the men felt more connected or less connected to Judaism. While two felt no change, the great majority felt more connected. One member expressed how he was inspired by the Jewish fervor of other members of the group. He was inspired by their Jewish commitment and the ease with which they expressed their commitment. For most, their feelings of deeper connection to Judaism came from being with other Jewish men with whom they felt a great deal in common. Their greater connection to Judaism, they reported, came from their profound connection to each other. I will discuss this in greater detail in the following chapter.

Regarding a connection to Jewish sources, I saw a general appreciation for the biblical material that generated our discussions. For example, in the second session on competitiveness and empathy, one member commented that he never knew the Bible spoke so directly to life issues. This became the feeling of the group. The men actively used the biblical material in discussing their own life issues. They often referred to the biblical characters in their own personal disclosure. There was never any question why we were using the biblical material. There was no indication that it was extraneous to our discussions. Just the opposite; the men found it to be integral. I often found myself happy with what I saw as the enthusiasm with which the men recited the opening blessing with me thanking God for the gift of Torah study. I felt their enthusiastic recitation of the blessing reflected their feelings for the text itself. By the final sessions, the men

seemed to have the blessing memorized and their recitation of it seemed quite natural.

"Reclaiming Jacob," session eight was one of the most engaging. That evening was designed as the session for learning Torah together. We studied and discussed Talmudic and Midrashic material on Hanukkah, the current holiday and this generated an animated discussion. The men asked insightful questions and offered commentaries on the text. It was actually one of the best learning sessions I have had in the synagogue over the years. In the discussion that followed the learning, they indicated that they enjoyed and valued the learning and would like to have similar occasions in the future.

I did see the men attain a sense of spirituality as is understood by Buber and Green in this project. To review, Green teaches the spirituality of self-discovery. According to Green, God is not to be found by going up to a mountaintop but by searching deep with ourselves. When an individual works to peel away the superficial, external layers of the self and comes to know his/her deeper and true nature, that is where God's presence can be found. Green writes: "Spiritual growth, in this metaphor is a matter of uncovering new *depths* rather than attaining new *heights*." [1] Buber conveys the importance of community and the spirituality of personal disclosure in the context of community. God's presence can be found where personal disclosure takes place between two people or in a community. [2] Within the synagogue setting and with the inspiration of the Torah material, I saw the men disclose significant elements of their personal lives. At times, these elements were painful. One member disclosed how he could not reach out and have a relationship with his son and as much as his alcoholic mother wished, he

could not bring himself to tell her that he loves her. Another man, who is in the process of a divorce, discussed, a number of times, how he was attempting to re-establish relationships with his three estranged daughters. Another member discussed how he never had a relationship with his father except when his father ridiculed him and how he (the group member) was working to create good relationships with his daughters. One member discussed his memory of being treated like a "nerd" through school as a wound in his life. Another member discussed how he grew up in a family where the unwritten rule was to never discuss feelings. The activity of the group was new and welcome to him and he was grappling with the dilemma of whether he could tell his parents what he was doing on Monday evenings. I watched how these disclosures prompted others to relate similarly painful stories in their own lives. Within the context of Green and Buber's thought, there is no question that a significant level of spirituality was achieved.

The men's feelings about the group paralleled Buber's concept of I-Thou.[4] The participants appreciated being with other Jewish men without a sense of a hierarchical structure and without any expectations of gain. They appreciated being together merely to talk and listen to each other.

Jewish men's spiritual growth was a central goal of this project. In addition to my own sense of the group's spirituality, the majority of the men reported that they found the group to be a spiritual experience. They expressed this sentiment in our last session and in the final journal questionnaire. In writing about his concept of spirituality vis a vis the group, one member noted: "There has been a special quiet when one of the group speaks. That has given me a feeling unlike any other.

There is totally unselfish listening, caring and feeling for our fellow man exhibited within the group." Another noted that he is "more aware of the religious influence on me." A third participant explained: "I feel that because each session began with a religious text that we discussed in the context of our lives that we were entering areas of discussion uncommon to normal discussions of issues." Another member, who from time to time spoke about a profound sense of God's presence in his life, explained: "spiritual in the sense of a deep sharing of common experiences, difficulties with relationships with parents, love for our current families and appreciation for Judaism."

Part of my definition of spirituality involved empathy. I was aware of and moved by the ongoing displays of empathy within the group. Displays of empathy became more and more apparent in subsequent meetings. These displays of empathy invited more meaningful personal disclosure. Our last meeting had to take place at a time other than the regular schedule. The men worked to find a time during which each participant could attend. When we came to a time where only one person could not make it, (he happened to be the member who displayed the greatest amount of empathy during the group) the men dismissed that. They wanted to include each member. Each member became important to the group and to the other men in the group. Since the men knew that they were choosing a time for the last session, that meeting became important to all. There was a sense that the discussion would be important. The men wanted to hear from each other without exception. I had never seen a group display that much consideration for a single member.

I can report considerable success in evaluating the elements of Judaism,

Jewish sources and spirituality within the setting of the group. I cannot report, however, that this group was successful in providing a bridge for the practice of these elements back in the usual synagogue setting. Therefore, in this, the project failed to achieve what I hoped and requires change.

There was no significant increase in synagogue attendance of the men. Those who attended before continued to do so. Those who did not attend, did not begin to do so. Nor do I have any evidence that the men involved themselves in any other or new Jewish activities during the life of the group.

Though the men did not involve themselves in new Jewish behaviors, they did express an interest in more Jewish activities as a result of the group. Their interests included a desire to learn Hebrew, to read more in Jewish history, to reach a better understanding of the development of Judaism, to teach others, to study Bible more and to attend services more often. One participant said "I would probably like to attend services more often in the near future. It might be a New Year's resolution." It is quite interesting that the nature of the men's interest in their future Jewish life is more an intellectual rather than the spiritual nature sought by the project. They did not tell me that they wanted to find further opportunities for ongoing personal discovery and interpersonal disclosure. They did not report a desire for more discussions regarding God or prayer. But they did, almost without exception, express a desire to continue the group on a monthly basis. In those subsequent sessions, the men wanted to have more discussions on life issues and have more sessions similar to the one called "Reclaiming Jacob."

My interpretation is that the men did not or could not perceive the

particularly Jewish quality of this project though they found it to be a spiritual experience. They enjoyed and appreciated the program. They saw the group as having a number of components: prayer, reading and discussion of Torah text, some discussions of particularly Jewish themes and general discussion of life issues. I think that although the men felt the discussions were meaningful and even spiritual, they did not understand them as particularly Jewish. They had never done anything like this in their Jewish lives before. They had not learned to do this in their parents' Jewish homes or in Hebrew School. When I asked them if there were any Jewish behaviors they were now interested in, ten of the men said there were. In listing specific Jewish behaviors, they had to revert back to the more typical Jewish activities which I mentioned. The meaning of this should not be minimized however. In chapter two, in the discussion of superego, I indicated that I intended to influence the member's values. I believe this interest in future Jewish activities indicates the beginning of a shift in values. They expressed this shift in activities they had long understood to be Jewish.

As indicated that the group did not succeed in inspiring the men to become involved in the regular religious life of the synagogue, some adjustment to the design of the project may be necessary. I will present that adjustment in chapter five. But it may still be too soon to determine the project's success or failure in this regard. Although these busy men added a weekly commitment and actively attended for 11 weeks, it may be unfair to expect that they would immediately find a place in the synagogue service, in adult education or in the men's club. It may require more time for the project to fully impact upon them. They may seek and find their own way to integrate.

In general the projected proved quite successful. The major apparent failing is that there is no present evidence that the project propelled the participants' involvement into the organized religious life of the synagogue. Aside from that, there are no losses to report: no one reported feeling less connected to Judaism, Jewish sources and spirituality. One member, Mike was critical but even he felt that he had gained something worthwhile. In private, he told me that he felt the group was a gathering of dysfunctional men and that I was somewhat cagey. He did not find the group to be a spiritual experience but surprisingly he reported feeling closer to Judaism, closer to God and interested in "learning more about Judaism as to custom, laws and meanings for more authoritative understanding."

Mike proved to be one of the most unanticipated developments of the project. During the opening sessions, he took copious notes. He told long stories that related to the topic but never expressed his personal feelings. He offered comments that were not empathic but critical and insulting. After one member related, with tears, his painful relationship with his son and mother, Mike commented: "with the dysfunction in your family, it's a wonder you're not in jail or a nut house." His comment was minutes before the end of the session.

I was concerned how to respond to him. A local psychiatrist with an expertise in group work suggested that I let the group handle it. I was prepared to do that until I received a letter from Mike. He wrote that he looked forward to sharing his notes with me at lunch one day and offering his interpretation of all that he recorded. Since he corresponded with me outside the group, I decided it was appropriate and necessary to speak with him before the next session. We met. In response to my questions, he told me that he found the men to be "wimps and

complainers." They were not made of the tough stuff that he was. I asked if there was anything that brought him pain in his life. He said that there was nothing significant. Because he could recall or relate anything painful, I thought Mike had the potential to benefit from the group if he let himself become a participant and less of an observer. He still wanted to meet for lunch and show me the notes. I explained that I could not read his notes and I could not meet him for lunch. It was important, I explained, that I maintained an equal relationship with all members of the group and I could not meet with him to discuss the others. I suggested that he not take notes and instead try to become more a part of the group.

Outside of the group, a few members told me of their displeasure with Mike's behavior. I thought it would be more productive to have these feelings expressed in the group. Therefore, at the next session, I invited the men to share criticisms and negative feelings as well as positive feelings towards the other members. I extended this invitation at the beginning of the next three sessions. One evening, I referred to Leviticus 19: 17, "Reprove your kinsman." I explained that these words appear in the verse before the more well known exhortation to "love your neighbor as yourself." No one, however, accepted my invitation and no one confronted Mike or any other member of the group. I consider confrontation within a group to actually signify an important part of the work of the group. Irving Yalom describes constructive conflict as one of the agents of change within a group and that it will happen when there is a sufficiently trusting relationship between the group leader and the members and between the members themselves.[4] While there was surely group cohesiveness, there was apparently

not enough trust amongst the participants for the constructive conflict that I invited.

Were it not for Mike's presence, I believe the members of the group might have disclosed more to each other. Mike was an impediment to more significant disclosure. He constantly made analogies using war or sports stories. I saw, at times, how a member's poignant sharing would inspire others' disclosure. Mike's active avoidance inhibited others, not only in the atmosphere created, but also in the amount of time he consumed.

There were other unanticipated elements as well. As noted above, I did not anticipate the initial level of positive feelings for Judaism that were expressed in the first session. These men, by their own remarks, were not the marginal Jewish men to whom I intended to minister. Though this did not affect the shape of my execution, I believe it did affect the outcome. I think the men's interest in Judaism and initial feelings of connection contributed to the level of success that I reported above. Had the men been truly marginal, disinterested in Judaism and apathetic about being with other Jewish men in the synagogue, the results, I believe, would have been quite different. They might not have continued attending. They might have been less responsive to the biblical material. They might have been less engaged in the discussions.

Originally, I planned for a group of ten men. Because some men who expressed an interest were not able to make a commitment until the last minute, the group reached twelve members. I was concerned that the size of the group would undermine the work of the project and its potential for success. This is the maximum number recommended for a group of this nature. [5] Some men never

spoke during these initial sessions. After I introduced the topic, the first three sessions were open forums. Some tried, but because of a more reticent nature, did not get to speak. A few men expressed their concern in their journal questionnaire. One member wrote that the group was too large. Another complained that some men "hogged the floor." Another said that he felt that he was not important in the group. For the fourth session, I decided to use a different format. In that session, I said that we would be "going around the room" and give each member an opportunity to speak to the issue of their work and its spiritual meaning for them. I wanted each man to have an opportunity to hear himself speak and to be heard by the group. That session was the least spontaneous of all the sessions but I met the goal for that evening. I never again had the feeling that the group was too large. Those who had been quiet until then began to participate more actively. At times, I was quite impressed by the development of these men.

Another unforeseen outcome is the nature of the relationships that resulted from the group work. I saw the men bond with each other even outside the group meetings. An example illustrates this point. One Saturday morning, two members of the group happened to be on the pulpit at the same time. It is normal for people to shake hands on the pulpit when they finish their assigned honor. I noticed an added warmth and bond in the way these two men shook hands and exchanged greetings. I mentioned this at the next session. The men agreed that they enjoyed seeing each other in the synagogue and they surely did feel a special bond with each other.

I also felt that I developed a new and deeper bond with the members of the group. I felt a special warmth and camaraderie and connection when I saw the

group members in the synagogue. We were experiencing something personal and meaningful together. I appreciated their participation in the group and they expressed that they appreciated me in that I provided the experience. I came to know them in a new and deeper and more meaningful way.

In summary, I feel very positive about the results of this group for Jewish men's spirituality. When I advertised this project to my congregation, I did not anticipate the level of success that I report. I and the men felt the group to be highly successful. In the last session, one member commented that it was a unique group and a unique experience. He meant that there was something unique about the men who came together and that our successful experience could not be duplicated. I appreciated his positive endorsement and I'm sure that every group is somewhat unique but I believe that this program would serve other groups of men equally well. In retrospect, I also see the shortcomings which I mentioned in this chapter. In the final chapter, I will present modifications to the program as part of my analysis of the implications of the results.

CHAPTER 5

In chapter four, I reported the results of the demonstration project. This will analyze the meaning of the results and their implications to the wider ministry. As I reported, the project proved successful in many ways. Where it did not reach its desired goals, I will suggest alternatives in the actual program.

The attendance demonstrated a high regard for the group and a positive cathexis towards it. I compared the attendance of the members of this group to that at adult education classes over the years where attendance at classes of comparable duration decreases dramatically by the third or fourth session. There are a number of explanations for this phenomenon. Participants register for the class out of an initial interest in the topic. Often, the interest wanes as the class becomes involved in the details of the topic. Frequently, the classes are less interesting than the topic itself. Often, life's demands intrude on attendance. Once one or two meetings are missed, the class member ends the involvement. Ongoing attendance at adult education classes of this duration has been so unsuccessful that I now program a maximum of three or four sessions for a course. Therefore, the ongoing attendance of the members of this men's group was impressive and quite remarkable.

There are a number of factors which account for the strong ongoing attendance. I discussed in chapter two, the importance of the participants' positive cathexis to the group. The record of attendance as well as the men's discussion at

the concluding sessions attests to their investment of emotional significance in the group. The men felt a commitment to the group and to each other. In the adult education class, the student may form a cathexis to the material and, possibly, to the instructor. But, as stated above, that cathexis is often tenuous. In this group of Jewish men, the attachment was to the other group members as well as to the group itself. Over the course of the 11 sessions the "group" almost came to be, as it appeared, its own organism. It became the corporate body of the 12 members and myself as pastor. The men spoke affectionately and with commitment about the group. They reported how they looked forward to the Monday evening sessions. This was time devoted solely to themselves, not for their wives or children or clients or patients. Within the context of the program, the men together created a community from which they benefitted and to which they felt an allegiance.

As I reported in chapter four, the amount and depth of personal disclosure increased. This perceptible increase in self-disclosure can be most appreciated against the backdrop of the popular view of men's communication today, as well as a review of the literature which suggests that men do not share much if anything about their inner lives. As I described in the opening chapter, Deborah Tannen, in her book You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation, reports on research that indicates that men actually talk more than women, but that the nature of the talk reveals very little and even conceals the inner self. At meetings, at dinner parties, at seminars, at discussions following meetings, men invariably speak more than women. Tannen describes the nature of men's talk as "report talk" rather than" rapport talk" which is the domain of women. [1]

Men, according to Tannen's research, have few if any male friends with

whom they engage in "rapport talk." When asked who is the person they talk to and confide in most, men say it is their wives. She writes:

> When asked who their best friends are, most women name other women they talk to regularly. When asked the same question, most men will say it's their wives. After that, many men name other men with whom they do things such as play tennis or baseball (but never just sit and talk) or a chum from high school whom they haven't spoken to in a year. [2]

Many would argue that there is further reason to explain men's lack of communicativeness. Men disclose very little of their feelings because they are not aware of what their feelings are. Dick Brian Klaver, a minister in the Reform Church and a marriage and family therapist, has done extensive work with men in groups. He has conducted numerous groups for men dealing with rage and depression. In his book Men At Peace, Klaver addresses the issue of men's lack of personal disclosure due to the fact that they are socialized to not even be aware of feelings. He writes:

> Finding our hearts and minds does not come easily. We have been trained to control, deny, or squelch most of our inner longings. Consequently we build pride in being logical or rational, calling that *The Male Way*. Still the longings for inner peace keep tugging at us, until the moment arrives when we decide to uncover pulsations of inner joy, or we dare to admit we are lonely. Then, just when we are about to express our joy or emptiness, *The Male Way* kicks in and our defenses against primary inner feelings take control. Anxiety or awkwardness or embarrassment overwhelm us. Joy is overpowered by the fear of being seen as emotional. The embarrassment of being seen as weak causes us to ignore our loneliness. Re-exerting control we go back into hiding. After all, why be vulnerable? Why reveal anything about ourselves? [3]

In the opening chapter, I wrote that this group for Jewish men's spiritual growth was designed to respond to this societal reality that men are not aware of their own feelings and therefore do not and cannot disclose themselves to other men. This project introduced a different environment which was hospitable to

personal exploration and self disclosure. The results show that given such a conducive environment, men can begin to emerge from their isolation and well-guarded privacy and can begin to disclose elements about themselves to other men. As I mentioned earlier, this did not happen automatically or easily. The discussions often digressed into conversations about the topic rather than personal disclosures relating to the topic. The men often did exactly what Deborah Tannen describes as "report talk" rather than "rapport talk." One of my primary pastoral tasks in the group was to point out that the dialogue became a discussion about a topic rather than a disclosure about their own feelings. Always, I attempted to bring the discussion back to a personal aspect of feelings without sounding critical. There were times in each session when men did disclose, and, as the sessions continued, I noted that the amount of disclosure increased.

According to the literature, a strong sense of competitiveness is one of the primary elements that keeps men separated from other men. It diminishes communicativeness amongst men and inhibits any expression of vulnerability. If this project was to meet any success, and if any future project working with men is to be successful, we need to deal with this topic of competitiveness directly. Sam Keen makes the point of how men are socialized to be competitive with other men in writing:

> Boys are taught early that they are what they do. Later as men, when we meet as strangers on the plane or at a cocktail party we break the ice by asking "What do you do?" The games that make up what we call physical education-football, basketball, and baseball-are mini battles that teach boys to compete in the game of life. Pregame pep talks, like salesman's meetings, begin with the Vince Lombardi prayer: "Winning isn't the most important thing. It's the only thing." For many boys making the team, from Litlle League to college provides the ritual form of combat that is central to the male identity. [4]

I knew that in order for this group to be affective, the men needed to examine their issues of competitiveness. Furthermore, I needed to clearly explain the concept of empathy and Buber's concept of I-Thou early on to create an environment different from how men normally relate to each other. This was not only one of a number of topics for men to explore. It was a core topic for the work of the group to go forward. Placing the session on competitiveness and empathy as the second session was a wise choice. There is every reason to believe that the men understood and practiced the message throughout the remaining sessions.

The men reported in the last session that they felt no hierarchical system within the group. One member explicitly said that what he enjoyed about the group was that there was no status system. No one was better than anyone else. The relationships were not based on profession or salary or possessions. I saw that a recently retired 50 year old custom's agent and an out-of- work mental health worker were treated with the same respect as were the physicians and attorneys in the group. Their abilities to disclose and listen were the valued commodities. The men expressed their gratitude that there were no standards to meet or goals to achieve which is the case in their day to day lives. The goal was to come together and be together. There was nothing external to accomplish which would show one to be superior to the other. This was different from their everyday lives and the participants appreciated it. In this way, I saw the realization of Buber's I-Thou concept in the group.

In the last session, the men reported feeling a connection and closeness to the other men in the group as one highlight of the experience. The men valued being with other Jewish men for they do not have this opportunity usually. They

felt much in common and reported feeling a sense of belonging, as part of the spiritual experience for them. They reported feeling a special bond when they saw each other at services or some other synagogue event. There are two intertwined components to this reaction. Psychologically, they felt good bonding with other men. Theologically, that bonding was facilitated and made more meaningful by the group's being entirely Jewish and focusing on the Jewish themes and activities.

I do not describe the thought of Mordecai Kaplan as underlying this project in chapter two but Kaplan's thought does inform the sentiments expressed by the participants. Kaplan taught that Judaism begins with the Jewish people and our Judaic feelings begin with a sense of belonging to the Jewish people. That which Jews do together can be understood as Jewish. In his most important work, Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American Jewish Life, Kaplan writes:

> Social interaction with one's Jewish contemporaries must be made conducive to ethical and spiritual living. From the standpoint of the Religious-Cultural program, whatever helps to produce creative social interaction among Jews rightly belongs to the category of Jewish religion, because it contributes to the salvation of the Jew. The associated life of a Jewish community shouldn't be regarded as extraneous to Jewish religion. . . . It is the very substance out of which the Jew must strive to evolve religious values. [5]

For Kaplan, the Jew can not achieve spirituality outside of the community or outside of the Jewish group. He expresses this in writing: "It is evident that the individual Jew can experience the privilege of divine election only as he identifies himself with the whole of Israel." [6]

Kaplan, like Buber and Green, is concerned with the welfare of the individual. Kaplan expresses this concern in the concept of salvation. According to

Kaplan, in traditional Judaism, salvation is to take place in a world to come after death. Kaplan's focus on the idea of salvation is this worldly. He writes:

> What more comprehensive purpose can there be to human life than the complete and harmonious fulfillment of all the physical, mental and moral powers with which the human self as a social being is endowed? Self-fulfillment or self-realization is nothing more than the modern equivalent of what in general life is expressed by the term "salvation" and in traditional Jewish life by the phrase "having a share in the world to come." [7]

While concerned with the individual's welfare which he terms salvation, Kaplan maintains that the community is the only context for this salvation. Self-fulfillment and self-realization can not be achieved alone. He writes:

> We are therefore in keeping with the present-day realities when we treat the well-being of the individual in the most comprehensive and enduring sense of that term as the ultimate criterion of any plan of social or spiritual regeneration. When we study the quest for salvation and the conditions for its fulfillment, we note that salvation presupposes a community which treats the individual as so organic a part of itself that in promoting his life it is aware that it promotes its own. The chief aim of such a community is to help him attain those objectives which constitute for him his complete self-realization. [8]

In expressing their profound appreciation for the group and their bonds with each other, the men reflected, albeit unknowingly, Kaplan's ideas. For the participants, this group became a community just as I intended it to become. It was a community that existed not only for 90 minutes once a week for 11 weeks but that extended beyond the actual meetings. The men reported feeling good and connected to each other when they saw each other at services or just in the synagogue. During the week, they felt good when thinking about the group and each other.

The importance of establishing a Jewish men's group in the contemporary

suburban synagogue today is appreciated the most in the context of the communities in which these men live and within the context of the synagogue to which they belong. These men live and work with non-Jews. They live in communities where Jews are a minority. Being with an exclusively Jewish group is not the norm for them. They felt very comfortable with each other. They reported feeling a great deal in common. They expressed that they could talk to each other knowing that there was a common basis of understanding. They said that they understood each other in a way that non-Jews would not. The group provided an opportunity for these feelings and emotions that the men do not normally experience in their communities or in their work. The project provided a community in which, using Kaplan's words, "personal salvation" could, in part, be experienced.

The fact that this group of 13 men became a community is even more significant when understood within the context of the larger synagogue which is not truly a community. We may use the term synagogue community or synagogue family, but I have seen the synagogue function much more as retail establishment. We call our people members, but we might as well call them customers. People pay an amount of money for services rendered. Most people in the congregation do not know most others. At the time when most people come to services which is the High Holy Days, almost all those attending know very few others. Members of the congregation have told me this repeatedly. Most feel lost in a sea of unfamiliar faces. The large suburban synagogue today is like the society in which it exists. People are anonymous, unknown to others. There is no true community for the vast majority of the so called members. In addition to the High Holy Day

experience, there are many other examples to illustrate this point. One in particular is the Bar or Bat Mitzvah celebration. This rite of passage in the life of a young person ideally takes place within the context of the community. That means that the community knows the young person and the young person and the family feel that they are part of the community. In my synagogue, where we celebrate 60 or more *B'nai Mitzvah* (Bar and Bat Mitzvahs) annually, the regular attenders from the congregation do not know most of the young people. This is in spite of a requirement that the *B'nai Mitzvah* attend services at least three times a month for the year prior to the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The celebrant's family does not know the regular worshippers. Add to that the fact that the regular worshippers comprise approximately four percent of the adult membership of the synagogue, most members of what we would like to call the community are not even present. In effect, there is no community. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah becomes central at the Sabbath morning service and scattered around the sanctuary are 30 to 50 members of the congregation.

For most members of a synagogue, the community does not exist. People live privately, anonymously within the context of the synagogue. If we agree with Kaplan that the group or community is the necessary context of salvation for the Jew then we would have to conclude that there can be no salvation. Most Jews know no real community. This demonstration project responded to this vacuum in Jewish life today and provided a context, a group, a community for these men to pray together, examine their lives, disclose personal concerns with each other and study Torah.

In chapter four, I noted that the men came to feel a closer connection to

Judaism, to the synagogue, to me as their rabbi and to the biblical sources. This should be understood as a beginning and an opportunity for future growth and not as a completion. Nothing has been completed or resolved. We have rather opened a door through which these men can proceed in their Jewish lives. The members of the group have not yet reached a goal, they began a process.

The significant failing that I reported in chapter four is that there was no clearly delineated path on which these men would proceed in their ongoing Jewish growth. I cannot expect that they will come to synagogue services more often or to adult education classes, or that they will desire to read Torah or chant a Haftarah, or give charity or follow any other traditional Jewish practice. Any of these might happen but it is not a natural consequence of the program design. My intention of this project however was that the experience of this men's group would be the impetus for the participants' ongoing Jewish growth. I did not sufficiently conceptualize what I intended that ongoing growth to be nor did I design a path on which the men could proceed. In retrospect, I now see that this experience may have left the men incomplete, and unsure of what was next. I did not design a method intended to provide a bridge for this group and the normal synagogue world. In revising the methodology of this project for another trial, I would add additional sessions designed to facilitate the men's ongoing involvement in the continuing religious life of the synagogue. The additional sessions would include the following topics. One session, I would issue an invitation to the men to attend the Sabbath morning service in the synagogue, then the session would be devoted to a discussion of their reactions to the experience. I would raise these questions: Did you find the service a spiritual experience in any way and if so in

what ways? Could it become more of a spiritual experience for you? What work needs to be done to maximize the value of that service? Can you foresee the experience becoming an ongoing part of your life? Another session would involve the issue of the male's role in our synagogue today. In this session, I would pose such questions as: How do you feel about the increasing role of women in our synagogue? Should men have a more prominent role in the religious life of our congregation? In what ways can we and other men have more of a presence in the religious life of the synagogue? One of the final sessions should address the question of where do we go from here? It is now clear to me that the message conveyed by the design of this project was that the group was an end in itself, rather than a path to a larger goal. That goal would be an integration into the larger life of the synagogue and involvement in those religious activities that they could find spiritually fulfilling.

Yet, there is another path toward integrating these men into the religious life of the synagogue. Now, I have access to these men in a way that I did not in the past and that I do not have with other men in the synagogue. I know them more intimately and they know that they have let me come to know them more deeply. During the course of the project, I invited two of the members to deliver the *D'var Torah*, the explanation of the Torah portion at the Sabbath morning service. Both agreed. I invited two other men to visit a terminally ill member of the congregation. In coming to know these men in the group, I sensed that they would have the sensitivity and the willingness to perform such an act of loving kindness. Now, I am in a position of being a spiritual guide to these men. I have a sense with which areas of Jewish life they might connect. I have the access to them.

During the course of the project, I was hesitant to invite the men to become involved in activities other than those of the group. It was not part of the design of the group. In the future, in changing the design, I might formalize this process of the men's involvement in spiritual activities outside of the group and invite them to discuss the experience with the others.

In the last few sessions of the project, the men expressed a desire to continue meeting as a group on a monthly basis. Until the final session, I did not encourage or discourage this. With only one exception, the men wanted to continue and I decided to continue the work. At the outset, I had not anticipated that a possible result could be its continuation. The men came to feel that it was and I chose to follow that course to see where it would lead. At the time of this writing, there have been three meetings following the eleventh and final session of the project. At the most recent session, there were nine present. One member was in the hospital and another, an accountant, could not afford the time during tax season. The member who attended only 50 percent did not continue. This ongoing attendance is further testimony to the positive investment the men made in the group. Two of the group members applied to the nominating committee to serve on the congregation's board of directors. Before submitting their names, they both asked how I felt about their intentions. I believe this is an example of how the men will find their own ways towards Jewish involvement and integration into the synagogue community.

In writing this, I must note that despite design modifications which I propose earlier in this chapter, it may be impossible to create a bridge between this group and the regular religious life of the synagogue. Even with the additional

sessions proposed, it may be impossible to predetermine and program the direction and content of each member's ongoing Jewish growth. These men may have come to this group because the programming of the synagogue, Sabbath services with revolving door Bar/Bat Mitzvah congregations on Saturday morning and different large crowds on Friday evening responding to different programs and the usual adult educational fare apparently have not and may still not appeal to them. Much more work may need to be done to create religious experiences in the larger contemporary suburban synagogue to provide spiritually meaningful experiences to those seeking such. Some large suburban congregations, with an equally large number of *B'nai Mitzvah* celebrants during the year, have created an alternative Sabbath morning service that meets weekly or biweekly. Here, these highly motivated lay members of the congregation conduct their own services, read from the Torah and offer the *D'var Torah*, the explanation of the portion of the Torah read. This service does not have the distractions of the Bar and Bat Mitzvah guests who often appear disinterested and restless and the distractions of the attention given to the celebrant and his or her family.

The most unanticipated development of the group was the one difficult member, Mike, described above. In future groups, I would include a formal interview with each member to more fully explain the intent and content of the group. There is still no guarantee that a difficult member such as Mike will not be part of the group. Then, the challenge becomes being able to work with such a member and still try to accomplis the goals.

As I reflect more on Mike's participation in the group, I think that he was the candidate who could actually have benefitted most from the group. I think he

may have expended the greatest amount of energy resisting the work. While he claimed that he never knew what the group was about. there is every reason to believe he knew as much about it as the other participants. The other men were aware that the purpose of the group was to discuss their personal life issues. Mike claimed he thought it was an academic class. Even when it was clear to him, from the first couple of sessions what the content of the meetings was , he took copious notes until I asked him privately to stop. Mike epitomized the "report talk" rather than"rapport talk" style of communication. He wanted to participate, he wanted attention, and he went to great length to avoid an examination of his personal feelings. He would often refer to his days as a college wrestler and as a fullback on the college football team or his time in the army when, as he put it, he had to put people away.

As noted , the men in the group, despite my gentle invitation, never confronted Mike. He was the tallest, most muscular and physically most imposing member of the group. Perhaps I should not have expected them to confront him but I should have modeled a type of confrontative encounter. As such, I could have proposed that I suspect there was something Mike might like to discuss or my surprise that he had not shared any type of pain or disappointment with the group or that despite the fact we heard from him a great deal, I do not have the sense that I know much about him. I could have presented more invitations to Mike to become engaged in the real work of the project.

The theological principles which I discussed in chapter two remained guiding principles for me throughout the life of the group. I found the men's discussions of their personal issues highly spiritual experiences as I viewed them

through Martin Buber and Arthur Green's perspectives. After approximately half the sessions of the project were completed, I happened to have a discussion with a social worker who conducts bereavement groups for the local Jewish Family Service. I found myself telling her that in my almost 19 years with the congregation, my work with this men's group was one of the most spiritually significant experiences of my ministry. I expressed what I had been feeling. Being with men who were spending 90 minutes together once a week with no tangible goal to achieve other than being together and talking and listening to each other, in my eyes, was highly spiritual. It approached Buber's concept of I-Thou more than any other group or class that I have been with through the years. Buber expresses the idea that God's presence can be felt in the context of relationship in writing

> . . . where individual beings open themselves to one another, help one another; where immediacy is established between one human being and another; where the sublime stronghold of the individual is unbolted and man breaks free to meet other man, where this takes place, where the eternal rises in the Between, the seemingly empty space; that true place of realization is community, and true community is that relationship in which the Divine comes to its realization between man and man. [9]

Not only I but the men as well felt the spiritual significance of the group. The majority of the men reported feeling a greater sense of spirituality in the group. Six of the 12 member of the group reported feeling closer to God as a result of the group. While not a majority of the men, I think the number is remarkable. An 11 session experience that can move half of the participants towards feeling a greater sense of God is quite profound. It is especially profound when viewed in the context of the group work. In the opening session, only a couple of men spoke about a relationship with God. Most men did not respond to my question of where they were in their feelings about God. I realized in session six that most were not

used to feeling the presence of God in the every day. They associated God with the supernatural and the miraculous. I was impressed in that session with the "Sunday School" quality of their God feelings. In that session, we discussed moments in our lives when we felt God's presence. Without exception, those who spoke described almost miraculous episodes when they encountered God. One member spoke of a time when his son was drowning in turbulent waters in the Caribbean but was saved by some youths who happened to be in a nearby boat. Another spoke about falling off a raft in white water rapids and also being saved in a nearly fatal episode. One member described surviving an appendicitis attack as a youth. To my disappointment, there was no discussion of the presence of God in our everyday lives. The closest one member came was feeling the presence of God when the Ark is opened for the Torah service on the Sabbath. A majority of the discussion in that session actually focused on a feeling a God's absence resulting from the Holocaust.

I learned that it was not normal for these men to appreciate the presence of God and surely not in the everyday events of life. While a group of men discussing personal issues in the synagogue is not an everyday occurrence, it is also not as dramatic and biblical as being saved from turbulent waters.

Within this context, the fact that six of 12 men reported that they felt closer to God as a result of the group, again, is highly significant. I believe that with more discussion regarding God in particular and more time, other members of the group could come to feel a greater sense of God through this work.

To pastors who want to help congregants feel a sense of God's presence and a sense of spirituality, I would surely recommend the approach of this project. There are other paths towards feeling God's presence. This approach may, at first

glance, seem rather circuitous. How does one come to sense God by discussing one's own life issues or listening to another discuss their issues? Within the context of the theology of Green and Buber, which I presented in chapter two, and what I saw transpire for 11 sessions, I would recommend this as a worthy path towards helping a group experience God's presence amongst them.

Buber and Green offered not only a theology but also a methodology which, for the group, proved valuable. Buber proposes that the focus should be on the person in his/her individuality. Green proposes this methodology in explaining that we can come to discover God as we come to know ourselves in a deeper way. God is what is ultimately true within us. This project demonstrates the participants' appreciation of this approach and methodology. They appreciated the biblical material, the synagogue and the rabbi as all were used in the service of personal reflection and interpersonal sharing. The men were the center of attention. They knew it and they appreciated it.

The goals were very different from what we rabbis and synagogue leaders normally communicate to our congregational members. We ask them to give to the institution, to volunteer their time or resources. The institution is at the center and we ask them to serve. When invited to encounter a text, they are usually asked to discover what the text means or to know what classical commentators thought it meant. Actually, many adult Jews seldom find themselves reading our most sacred text, the Hebrew Bible. In his recently published Self, Struggle & Change: Family Conflict Stories in Genesis and Their Healing Insights for our Lives, Norman J. Cohen makes this point:

> This is because most of us do not take the Bible seriously. We see it as an antiquated remnant of the Ancient Near East or we view the study of

> and reflection upon the biblical text as a religious school exercise, relegated to the education of children. We who never have the opportunity to grapple actively with our sacred stories have a difficult time appreciating how they can speak directly to us and to our life situations. We do not see how they possibly can help us understand ourselves as spouses, parents, children, lovers, and friends or shape the direction of our lives. [10]

This project invited these men to do exactly what Dr. Cohen explains contemporary Jews have not done with the text, to explore what it means in the context of their own lives. When the Genesis story of Cain and Able was the basis of an exploration on the topic of competition, one member commented that he did not realize how contemporary and meaningful the biblical stories were. The other men agreed. In subsequent sessions, the men found the Genesis stories to be deeply meaningful. From these stories, men explored the important issues of their lives. It was not the synagogue, the rabbi, or the Bible that was central. These elements were serving the men as they explored and disclosed their life stories. They appreciated that.

The first clinical principle I presented in chapter two is that change and growth are still possible for adults. The type of change intended related to Jung's concept of individuation, the lifelong process in which a person increasingly becomes the whole and complete person God intended him to be. There was surely change even within the short time span of 11 weeks. The men felt a sense of their own growth. They reported learning to talk about themselves to others in ways that they had not previously done. They reported an increasing ability to listen to others better. Some reported that they found this happening outside the group as well. In a final journal questionnaire, 11 of the 12 men reported a sense of growth during the course of the sessions. In their words, this change and growth included "becoming more expressive with feelings, a greater spiritual commitment to

Judaism, an increased capability in listening to other people's experiences, an enhanced ability to relate more personal feelings to other men and more thinking about the Bible and the existence of God."

The most important implication of this project is that Jewish men can respond favorably to a spiritual growth group and feel a growing sense of their own spirituality. At the outset, I was told by a senior colleague "when you advertise Jewish and men and spirituality, no one will show up. These items mix like oil and water." In my opinion, that perception described the need for the project, but not the results. This project demonstrated that these elements do mix well and that Jewish men can come to feel a heightened sense of spirituality from a Jewish mens group.

This project demonstrated that the synagogue or any religious institution can be a catalyst for change and growth in the life of its members. Clergy may tend to concede the promotion of growth and change to the world of psychotherapy exclusively. This group affected growth and change in ways described. The religious institution working with a small group setting can indeed be an agent for growth and change in the lives of its members.

This project was built on the foundation of group work. In many ways, this project demonstrated the value of group work for spiritual growth in the synagogue. As indicated earlier, today many synagogues and churches are large institutions and are getting larger. New members are needed constantly to support growing costs yet there may be an inverse relationship between the size of the membership and the potential for spiritual impact. People walk into the synagogue and see a sea of faces, know few, feel anonymous and are spiritually disconnected.

As anticipated, this small group responded positively to the problem of the large synagogue of almost 600 families of which it is a part.

In this small group there was a definite sense of cohesiveness which is a primary factor in group work. The men felt connected to each other and to the group as a whole. I noticed that by the fifth meeting the men started to refer to the group by name as its own entity. As the sessions progressed, the references were more affectionate. The men came to have meaning for each other and the group as a whole came to have meaning to the men.

Based on the discussion of the psychological and spiritual elements of empathy, I intended to model and to teach the meaning and behavior of empathy to the group. I attempted to model an empathic stance in all of the sessions and, at the conclusion of session two which dealt with competitiveness and empathy, I taught a bit. As the sessions continued, I saw the men display more empathy in their interaction with each other. This was part of the design and hope of this project. Unintended, however, was the ongoing refrain of how little empathy the men have received in their lives. Many of the men expressed (sessions three and four), how distant they have felt from their fathers. A number of men reported how they could never express feelings in their families. They never told their parents or siblings what they were feeling because no one ever gave them permission to talk. There were no empathic listeners in their lives. A few men grappled with the issue of whether they could even tell their parents what they were doing in the group. Their parents might hear it as an act of disloyalty. The group provided an empathic community in which to speak. The group gave the men permission to examine their lives and to talk about their feelings. While I had

hoped the men would learn to be more empathic (they did) they benefited from the empathic community of which they were a part in a way I did not anticipate. The apparent empathy displayed by others and the group as a whole facilitated the men's ongoing personal disclosure. By this group, the synagogue became the place where 12 men could come and reveal personal, private elements of their lives. Men changed from feeling anonymous and isolated to connected and known. For a pastor who feels that the church or synagogue ought to provide this opportunity for members, a group of this nature would be valuable.

In further examining the implications of the project to ministry in a wider context, we are left with a significant question. How many people can ultimately be served by a process that involves 11 meetings for only 12 congregational members and offers results which really are only a beginning for ongoing Jewish, spiritual growth? Does this project consume too much for too few results? Is there a more economical method of producing the same or perhaps greater results? The responses to these questions are that the results show that the investment of time and program in this limited number of men is very worthwhile.

In reality, more than 12 men were affected by the work of this project. The members discussed how they were beginning to act and interact differently with members of their families. They were beginning to discuss feelings more. They were coming to listen more and more carefully and empathically. They were sharing the biblical texts with their families. Some said that they discussed the group with other men who may pursue their own involvement in a similar group. In a variety of ways, others have been affected by the work of this project.

Through this group, there is the potential to affect more and more men in

the congregation. I would need to train and commission members of this group to work with new groups and have a number of groups working simultaneously in the congregation.

A group of this nature held in a synagogue or a church provides a unique opportunity for men. The men reported that while they appreciated the sharing and camaraderie and feelings of connections within the group, they never would have entered a support group or a therapy group. Their comments confirmed the position of Howard Clinebell in his proposal that one of the advantages of a small church group "is that small groups can be used to help many who will not come for formal counseling" [11] The group held in their synagogue which combined religious, psychological and spiritual elements was much more inviting to the men involved.

The value of the clergy in the class or group setting is not based on how active, dynamic and brilliant he/she may be in the class or meeting. This fact may be difficult for clergy to assimilate because we are trained primarily to teach and preach. As clergy we may give a great gift by creating a space for others to be active in exploring, sharing, and learning from each other. The act of *tzimtzum* that I describe (chapter two) can be valuable in other areas of our ministry as well. To review, Dr. Borowitz proposes:

> . . . We seek a leadership construed not primarily in terms of the accomplishment of plans but equally in terms of its humanizing effect on the people being led. Our ethics demand a leader who uses power to enable people to be persons while they work together. . . . I suggest that the ability to practice *tzimtzum* can sharply distinguish accomplishment-directed from person-fostering leadership. [12]

In all classes, at liturgical services we may choose to make room for others to explore, share, and teach. Though I played a central role in the group, the men did

the majority of the talking. They were, however, greatly appreciative of my role in the group. Often they referred to what they called my wisdom and guidance. When they wanted to continue the group it would be only with my participation. We clergy should create more time in classes, in group meetings, in liturgical settings when we can listen to others. Spiritual growth is not a passive experience. It will not happen by sitting back and listening to the clergy preach and teach alone. There should be time for clergy to hear our congregants and parishioners and create opportunities for them to be active participants.

We have come to live more and more in a "unisex" world. This is especially the case in the liberal synagogue which has come to be more egalitarian. Men and women have the same religious rights and responsibilities. This group confirms the value of working with a group of one sex or at least working with all men. They expressed the fact that the group would not have been as beneficial had there been women in the group. Though men are considered competitive, the men stated that they did not feel that they had to impress the other men in the group as they feel they do women in general. In an all male setting, they could talk more freely about their wounds and weaknesses . Perhaps they were comparing the men with whom they came to feel comfortable with their fantasy of women in general. But there is value, I believe, in these comments. Surely not all groups, classes and programs should be divided by sexes and available for only males or females, but periodic opportunities for all male or all female programs would be valuable.

Conceptualizing and working with this group has caused a shift in my definition of success. In any class or program that I have offered, I have always equated success with large numbers. Large attendance affirms my popularity and

that of the material I have chosen to teach. While working on this project, I have come to see the value of working with a smaller group. Larger may not always be better. Smaller, at times, is much more valuable. There is much more to be done in the religious institution that may best be done in groups of limited size. If the goal for those in attendance is only to come to know, any size group can work. If the goal includes the members to come to know themselves, be known to others and to the clergy, then a smaller group is necessary.

A further implication of this project for my future ministry and for that of others is to carve out a time to work with spiritual growth groups on an ongoing basis. It could be one evening a week or a couple of hours on a weekend. Each group can be of a limited duration and then the clergy could move to a new group. Given that the group process has the potential for effecting spiritual growth, it would be wise to continue to make use of it. Clergy can arrange to have groups functioning in the church or synagogue that are not under their own direction. Groups for bereavement, divorce, unemployment, being single can have a beneficial impact for people in those life situations.

I wrote above that though the participants in this project did not reach the ultimate goal, a great deal was achieved in the process. That is an essential point of this project. Spirituality is not a goal. It is a process. For a period of 11 weeks the men participated in a process. There were many elements in the design that were of a spiritual nature. The men themselves felt many moments of spiritual significance. The major design flaw which I addressed in this chapter is that this project did not provide a sufficient impetus for ongoing spiritual growth and I recommended changes and additions. With those flaws and changes noted, 12 men

who were involved in a spiritual process for 11 weeks chose to continue on a monthly basis. Where this process will lead is still to be determined.

After conceiving, facilitating and reflecting a great deal on this project, I believe this program is sufficiently valuable to deserve repetition in my congregation and other congregations as well. While I would not proceed in exactly the same manner, the core of this project is solid. A majority of the men who participated in this project reported that they did experience spiritual growth as a result. That was the intent. It was realized to the extent that proves this project worthwhile, worthy of repetition and further refinement.

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