ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCED PARENTS: A THEOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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**We dedicate this project
to all those whom we love,
but we are especially grateful
for the unflagging support,
encouragement and faith that
Grace Blank and Donald A. Weber
have given us this year.**

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For reasons of confidentiality, this document does not include the official transcripts of the sessions. You may contact the authors to discuss any questions related directly to the transcripts.

Chapter 1:

Shir haShirim:14
Who is this approaching, up from the desert
In columns of smoke, fragrant with incense,
Rare spices and herbs of the wandering merchants?
Behold, it appears - the King's own procession
Attended by sixty of Israel's warriors ...
Go out and see, O Jerusalem's daughters.
Crowned by his mother, the king in his carriage
This day of rejoicing, this day of his marriage.

In today's complex world of changing mores coinciding with the upsurge of failed marriages, there is a particular population that has been ignored in the psychological literature: adult children of divorced parents (ACODP). It has been our experience that there are no forums for exploring the manifold issues for those whose parents divorced once they themselves were grown. There has been no mention of this subject within the religious literature, except within the context of modern exegesis attempting to explain the gaps in the text where children and parents in crisis are concerned. The intimate connection between parent and child and between God and humanity, sometimes collide, especially when the perceived or real bond with parents dealing with their own emotional trauma is strained to the limit.

We will look at early identity formation, and the dependent relationship the child has with its parents. As the child matures, so too does his/her ability to differentiate from the parent, so that the parent is viewed less as an extension of the child, and more as a important authority who also comforts and nourishes the child. This connection can easily be linked to a child's understanding of God: omniscient, omnipotent and often omnipresent. Charles Brenner writes that "as

one would expect, the relationship between the child and the believer to God bears the stamp of its origin, for it is psychologically similar in many respects to the relationship between child and parent (Brenner, 1973). When the relationship between a child and its parents changes dramatically, as it does through divorce, there are deep-seated emotional and spiritual repercussions. The child may experience feelings of abandonment by the parent who initiated the divorce, by anger, resentment and a deep sense of loss. S/he may feel uncertainty about the future of a relationship with either or both parents, since their shared history may have been dramatically different than the child had previously thought. On the other hand, the child may in fact feel that the opposite is true, if the divorce also means an end to the tension within the family.

What is our role as clergy in negotiating these difficult times for our congregants? Davidowitz and Handzo claim that, "important for our work as pastoral providers is appreciating that the extent to which the image of God is related to that of parents is also the extent to which the dynamics governing the development of both images should be similar." If one's parents are Godlike in the eyes of the child, and the idea of God as Parent is further reinforced in the liturgical texts, for example - *Avinu Malkeinu* - Our Father, Our King (Our Parent - Our Ruler) then what happens to one's God image once the integrity of the parental image is shattered? Does the relationship between God and child mirror the relationship between each parent and child? If the child bonds intensely with - or rejects - either parent completely, does this feeling have an impact on the child's theological perspective as well? Davidowitz and Handzo believe that "a

person's ability to relate to God, as well as the nature of that relationship, directly parallels the dynamics expressed in other relationships."

To strengthen the argument that both relationships are intimately connected, there is considerable biblical and post-biblical literature portraying the marriage relationship as an analogy for God's relationship with Israel as human beings. A number of prophets, including Hosea, Jeremiah, Malachi and Ezekiel, cite this comparison on many occasions (see chapter 2). The allegorical understanding of the biblical book, *Song of Songs*, tells the story as a classic love story between God and Israel. Whether we understand this work to be a "spiritual allegory" or series of love poems, its inclusion in the canonized books of the Bible warrants some mention in the context of Jewish relationships.

By mirroring the two primal relationships we have with our parents and with God, our project will determine whether there is any correlation between the two when chaos, frustration, and disappointment reign. There are many layers to this problem of how adult children react to their parents' divorce:

First, if there were no overt signs of discontent between the parents, then the announcement of an impending separation and/or divorce can come as a great shock to the child. One concern that arises is when the entire memory of one's childhood is compromised by one's parents' divorce. When one reviews one's personal history through the prism of divorce, does everything the child perceives as his or her past experiences change as well?

Second, ACODPs often find it difficult to articulate deep emotional distress because they are expected to have mature coping skills, or at least they

may think they ought to have such skills. There are support groups for those experiencing divorce, and for children who are experiencing their parents' divorce, but there is no such group for ACODPs.

Third, there are no safe venues in which to discuss a parental divorce for ACODPs; discussions of emotional trauma are suspect except in the protected environment of the therapist's office or the rabbi's office, so ACODPs often suppress feelings of sadness and anger, especially in the face of their own relationships and/or with their children.

Traditionally, Judaism has always supported the image of family, and families begin with sound marital relationships, in the ideal. We begin with the creation of humanity, when God creates humankind. In the first Creation story, God creates male and female beings (Genesis 1:27). In the second Creation story, God decides "it is not good for man to be alone," (Genesis 2:18) and fashions Eve out of Adam's rib. While some marriages are not idyllic, as evidenced by Leah and Jacob's relationship, renowned biblical couples were separated by death and not divorce. Couples who had children ensured the future of the tribe and especially of the nation.

Divorce carried a stigma that impacted not only the individuals but also the community. Severing a relationship between two people might also mean dividing the larger extended family and friends. Until the recent rise in the divorce rate in both the general and the Jewish community, the dissolution of a marriage with its public nature brought shame to the entire family and further emotional stress to the children. The impact of the divorce then follows the ACODP

throughout his/her own life, as evidenced by the complex choreography that ACODPs face at life cycle events. The rabbi often is challenged to be creative, understanding and supportive during these times with ACODPs and their blended family configurations.

We have opted to do our Demonstration Projects in groups because psychological research of specialized focus groups is filled with anecdotal evidence showing the benefits of the group process (Yalom). Group work is successful because participation in one reinforces one's sense of belonging to community, even if it is a community of strangers at the outset. Participation works directly to counteract feelings of isolation and uniqueness, especially when there is a commonality to the stories shared.

We will focus our project on two distinct populations: one will be comprised of lay people who are ACODPs and who belong to congregations; the second will bring together rabbis who are all ACODPs. Our initial premise is that rabbis, who may have a more sophisticated and well-articulated theology, would be less affected spiritually by their parents' divorce. Our rationale, therefore, is to include the rabbis as a means of illustrating that assumption. In addition, we chose to focus on the clergy to give rabbis a safe haven in which to discuss this subject while preserving their confidentiality. Within the counseling community, there is considerable emphasis on limiting self-disclosure, in order to focus on the patient/client rather than on the rabbi/therapist. Offering rabbis a chance to explore their feelings within the context of a like-peer group will most likely give them the chance to share their stories for the first time.

We chose to include lay people as a separate group 2 reasons: first, to determine what differences, if any, the impact of divorce has on those with perhaps a less-well articulated theology and second, to address the needs of ACODPs who have not yet been able to tell their stories.

The two groups will run concurrently but separately, and the findings compared and contrasted after each of the focus sessions.

While we understand that a Doctor of Ministry project does not have to be original, this project is new and needed. We have received a number of responses from people unable to join our groups, who saw our request for volunteers and needed to share their pain. Our plan is to help the participants of our focus groups formulate and articulate the issues surrounding their parents' divorce through personal stories which demonstrate the effect of the divorce on their own lives. We will set up a series of sessions during which we will offer both group discussions and opportunities for self-reflection in order to create a safe place in which to bond with the others, learn from each other's experiences and strengthen their personal religious connections. Finally, we hope to provide the participants with the mechanism for future self-reflection and support.

Our purpose is also to create a project that will bring an awareness of this issue to colleagues, who might use the project as a template for serving the needs of their own congregants.

> Another way to conceptualize our task is that we are trying to help people maximize their religious and spiritual resources in the service of healing. It does not matter whether the healing is physical, psychological or spiritual... (Davidowitz and Handzo.)

In Chapter 2, we will first articulate our religious principles, defining marriage and divorce in uniquely Jewish terms. We will review the biblical references to both marriage and divorce, and highlight the references to the allegorical dissolution of the marriage between God and Israel.

We will bring in biblical examples of child/parent relationships, specifically about the inter-family relationships of Abraham and his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Finally, we will map out our theology of care and divorce, using the work of Martin Buber and Judith Plaskow and the biblical Book of Job.

In our clinical principles section, we will review some of the statistics relating to divorce, and identify many of the factors that have an emotional, psychological, and spiritual impact on ACODPs.

We will summarize the work of Erik Erikson, and outline his view of the stages of life, the innate drives that shape us as human beings as we mature to adulthood. We will bring in the work of Richard Fulmer, as he understands developing relationships beyond one's immediate family, and then move to the work of Carter and McGoldrick. At this juncture, we will discuss the emotional impact of divorce on family systems.

No study of early development is complete without referencing the work of Sigmund Freud, as it relates to a person's religious perspective. We will discuss the studies that build and expand on Freud's premise that God is modeled after the father figure, which leads us to an examination of the parental projection hypothesis.

Finally, we will review the work of Anna Marie Rizzuto, as she brings to light the work of Erickson and Freud. Rizzuto focuses on the dyadic relationship between infant and mother, as well as the siblings, and posits how this eventually impacts the person's personalized representation of God.

In Chapter 3, we will define the parameters of each of our four group sessions, describing the genogram tool and the leader's use of spiritual assessment models to help evaluate the data we will collect during these sessions. We will create a series of questions that can be used to elicit responses from each participant, encouraging them to explore facets of their own histories they may not have yet considered. Each session will be framed in a Jewish as well as a psychological context, using the rabbinic paradigm of *PaRDeS* - a four part exegesis of the text: the simple understanding, the veiled allusion, the homiletic meaning and the mysterious meaning of each person's story, as we view each participant as a living, human document. The term, "living human document," used in Clinical Pastoral Education, refers to the sacred nature of each human being, and further reinforces the intimate connection between the Torah and humanity.

We will end Chapter 3 with a description of the evaluation techniques that will shape the fourth and the fifth chapters of the project, the presentation, and analysis of the material.

Chapter 2

Religious and Clinical Principles

> The familiar life horizon has been outgrown: the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand.
>
> Joseph Campbell *The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Anderson, Hopkins, 1991)*

> We cannot progress with a repetition of past words and ideas, associated with surface reality. Repeated use of past words burdened by past meaning and connotation prevents us from expanding our thought, has a limiting effect on our thought." (Monheit, 1995 p. 52)

Religious Principles

Kiddushin: "See how important a thing marriage is, for God has united [His] name with marriage, in the law, in the Prophets and in the Holy writings." (Gen.: 24, Judges .XIV, 4; Prov. XIX.14 from *Midrash* Ps. on LIX)

In Jewish tradition, the earthly marriage - called *kiddushin (*holy union) - between two people is used as an example of the metaphorical marriage between God and Israel. If we as children recognize that our early images of God correlate to our developing view of our parents, then what is the theological impact of our parents' divorce on our understanding of God? We will explore how the prophets in particular reacted to infidelity and how they viewed God's response to what can only be called rejection by the Israelites. Does rejection then sever the God/human covenant? Does it alter it so that the continuing relationship is so strained as to be unrecognizable? And does the disillusionment have a trickle-down effect on future generations?

The objective of marriage was twofold: companionship and reproduction. In creating woman, God explains that "it is not good for man to be alone; I will make a helpmate for him" (Gen. 2:18). The relationship was intended to be monogamous; between Israel and God, exclusively so on God's part, while Israel is often accused of infidelity. This too brings up a number of questions: first, if the divorce is viewed as a result of the infidelity of one parent, then is the rejection of that parent reinforced by its resonance with the biblical example of Israel being unfaithful? Second: does it matter which parent is aligned with God, and which with Israel? Third: is there a correlation of anger that mirrors the psychological identity (Oedipal or Electra) with the opposite/same gender parent?

In biblical and post biblical texts, the *Kiddushin* relationship is clear: God is part of human formula. To understand the premise of divine/human relationship being *kiddushin*, we need to explain it within its biblical context. Most important, even within the context of human relationships, God is a crucial component. A standard Jewish wedding text plays on the Hebrew words for man and woman – *ish (aleph-yud-shin)* and *isha (aleph-shin-heh)*, and underscores that the letters these two words do ***not*** have in common - *yud* and *hey* - together comprise one of the Hebrew names for God. The two letters they ***do*** have in common - *aleph* and *shin* - together spell "fire". If God is not present in the marital relationship, fire will devour the couple (*Sotah 17a)*. To follow the logic, if this fire can be seen as an allusion to divorce, then the implication is that God is no longer present to the couple, or by extension, to the family.

The first *mitzvah* - *p'ru u'revu* - to be fruitful and multiply, is not only a divine command but only possible when God is an integral part of the relationship, as we understand from the passages in *Talmud Niddah* 31b and in *B. Kiddushin* 30b, "There are three partners in the formation of a human being: God and the father and the mother." God's presence in a relationship furthers the potential for marital peace and wholeness, as we can see from the example in *Bemidbar Rabbah 3:4:*

> A Roman lady asked R. Yose bar Halafta: "Everyone agrees that God created the world in six days. From the sixth day on what has [God] been doing? ... R. Berkhyah said ... that He arranges marriages in this world.... The lady said she could make a thousand marriages in one day... so she made couples of 1000 male slaves and one thousand female slaves... However, when it was evening, fighting broke out among them.

From a human perspective, God is viewed as the very heart of Israel: "I sleep; nevertheless my heart waketh (Song 5:2). R. Hiyya bar Abba asked: where do we find the Holy One is actually identified as the heart of Israel? In the verse, God is my rock, my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:26 quote from *Yalkut, Shir haShirim* par. 988). From the Divine perspective, however, there can be no clearer or stronger image than the one that links God and Israel in a marital relationship:

> And it shall come to pass on that day, says *Adonai,* that you will call Me 'my husband' and you will no longer call Me 'my master'... and I will make a covenant (Brit) with them on that day ... and I will betroth you to Me forever, and I will betroth you to me with righteousness and with justice and with kindness and with compassion. And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness and you will know Adonai. (Hosea 2:18-21)

Mention of the covenant is significant because in Hebrew, the word *brit* is an ancient and familiar reference. The initial covenantal bond is made with Noah after the flood, and sealed by the appearance of the rainbow (Gen. 9:9ff). The next primal covenant was made with Abraham, this time in the flesh, to be a physical sign forever of Israel's allegiance to God. Not by coincidence, this symbol is also paired with the promise of progeny; immediately after Abraham's circumcision, he is visited by the three angels in *parashat Va'era* who inform him that he will be a father within a year's time with his wife, Sarah. The *brit milah* is the event - the surgical procedure - but the pledge is a much grander one: Abraham's descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens and the grains of sands in the sea. The pledge predicts an ongoing, long term and abiding relationship between God and Abraham's descendants.

> I greatly rejoice in Adonai,
> My whole being exults in my God.
> For He has clothed me with garments of triumph,
> Wrapped me in a robe of victory,
> Like a bridegroom adorned with a turban,
> Like a bride bedecked with her finery. (Isa. 61 :10)

> As a youth espouses a maiden
> He who rebuilds you - (trans. uncertain) shall espouse you
> And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
> So will your God rejoice over you. (Isa. 62:5)

In biblical and rabbinic times, the final act that seals the relationship between two people is *yichud* - the consummation of the promise of *kiddushin*. Without *yichud,* the marriage is not official. The image, therefore, of God as bridegroom is further reinforced by the following passage from Ezekiel. There

can be no question of intent: God and Israel are married and one in every respect.

> You were still naked and bare when I passed by you and saw that your time for love had arrived, so I spread My robe over you and covered your nakedness, and I entered into a covenant with you by oath - declares Adonai your God; thus you became mine. (Ezek. 16: 8ff)

This analogy of a marital relationship between humanity and God continues, even likening the break in the contract between God and humankind to infidelity, when the dissolution of the union is threatened. It is clear that among all the reasons for divorce, infidelity is a root cause. The root of the word means unfaithfulness, a fitting insight into God's wrath when, through the medium of the prophets, God chastises Israel.

Three entire chapters of Hosea are devoted to this topic, but the following passage from Hosea 2:1-4 encourages the individual (the child) to take action against the mother (Israel) because the husband (God) rejects her and her behavior. Does this passage have particular significance to a family in the process of dividing a house?

> Rebuke your mother, rebuke her -
> For she is not My wife
> And I am not her husband -
> And let her put away her harlotry from her face
> And her adultery from between her breasts.

The biblical view of divorce, called *gerushin* in Hebrew, and subsequent relationships are of great concern to the status of an individual in the community. Laws are enacted in response to reality, not possibility: the very fact that divorce

is mentioned specifically for humanity, as well as metaphorically when the world has caused an immoral rift, argues the point that it was an acceptable, while perhaps not desirable, practice within the culture. In Lev. 21:14 we learn that a priest may not marry a widow or a divorced woman:

[The word of God came to me] as follows: If a man divorces his wife, and she leaves him and marries another man, can he ever go back to her? Would not such a land be defiled? Now you have whored with many lovers: can you return to me? Says God. (Lev. 21:14)

Jer. 3:1 -8 addresses the issue of whether a man who had left his wife, could ever remarry her:

> Look up to the bare heights and see:
> Where have they not lain with you?
> You waited for them on the roadside
> Like a bandit in the wilderness.
> And you defiled the land
> With your whoring and your debauchery.
> And when the showers were withheld
> and the late rains did not come,
> You had the brazenness of a street woman,
> You refused to be ashamed.
> Just now you called to Me, Father!
> You are the Guide of my youth.
> Does one hate for all time? Does one rage forever?
> That is how you spoke;
> You did wrong and had your way. (Jer. 3:1 -8)

Sometimes, the biblical reference is metaphorical, as in the passage below where the mother is collective Israel, and the individuals are responsible for straying from God.

> Thus said Adonai:
> Where is the bill of divorce
> Of your mother whom I dismissed?
> And which of my creditors was it
> To whom I sold you off?

> You were only sold off for your sins
> And your mother dismissed for your crimes. (Isa. 50:1)

Nonetheless, the ritual of divorce was deemed necessary in order to protect the woman, within the context of primitive societies that used women as slaves when they had lost status through a dissolution of marriage. Israelites were instructed to send the wife away, if "[after taking a wife] should you no longer want her, you must release her outright. You must not sell her for money: since you had your will with her, you must not enslave her." (Deut. 21:14)

The law was careful to protect women who might be taken advantage of by an unscrupulous man who might want to have relations with her without the responsibility of being her husband:

> If a man lies and claims that the woman he married was not a virgin, then the elders must punish the man, and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give it to the girl's father; for the man has defamed a virgin in Israel. Moreover, she shall remain his wife; he shall never have the right to divorce her. (*Deut.* 22:19 and 29)

Despite these protective measures, divorce was seen as causing pain to all who would be affected:

> And this you do as well: you cover the altar of God with tears, weeping and moaning, so that He refuses to regard the oblation anymore and to accept what you offer. But you ask, "because of what?" Because God is a witness between you and the wife of your youth. (Malachi 2:13 -16)

Even God is viewed as saddened or angry about the experience:

> "for a detested one, divorce" (Mal. 2:16) means, said R. Judah, that when you detest your wife, you may divorce her. [reading the verse, "Detested, the one divorcing"] R. Yohanan said: The man who divorces his wife is to be detested. R. Eliezer said: If a man divorces his first wife, even the altar sheds tears, with weeping and

> with sighing, inasmuch as he regards not the offering anymore, neither receives it with good will at your hand. (*B. Git* 90b)

II. Biblical Context:

The biblical saga immediately following the prehistory segment, (Creation through Noah), is rich with human drama. The stage is set with a journey that begins with God challenging Abraham to leave both this native land as well as the way of life it represented. He is promised a substantial legacy in his children, but he is childless for a long time. Sarah, his wife, accompanies him on all his journeys, helping him as he travels with all the souls they have made (*v'et hanefesh asher asu b'Haran* (Gen.12:5).

There is an interesting interlude toward the end of chapter Genesis 12 as Abraham and Sarah travel to Egypt when there is a famine in Canaan. At the border, Abraham realizes that Sarah's beauty might in fact put both of them at risk, for a king might want her for himself and kill Abraham to get her. So he urges her to call herself his sister; the king Pharaoh takes her to the palace as his concubine, until terrible plagues wreak havoc in Pharaoh's court. Pharaoh, furious, returns Sarah to Abraham, chastising him for the lie which endangered all of them. This is the first marital union where infidelity is denounced by God. Abraham will repeat the experience in Gen.20:6-18. In this passage, Abraham meets with Abimelech, the king of Gerar. Again, Abraham lies by claiming Sarah as his sister, but in this case, God appears to the king in a dream, alerting him about Sarah's true marital status and tells him to give her back to her rightful husband. The following morning, the king presents the couple with gifts of

livestock, allows them to live on his land, and presents them with silver (Gen. 20:14-16). As a reward for averting the adulterous relationship, Abimelech is blessed once again with the ability to reproduce, along with all of his court. In the first, once the adultery had taken place, God punishes the perpetrator, and causes Abraham to be banished from Egypt. In the second instance, God *prevents* the consummation of adultery, rewards the king as well as Abraham and permits Abraham and Sarah to remain in Gerar during the famine in Canaan. The underlying message is clear: God does not condone adultery, and rewards those who prevent the situation from taking place.

By Genesis 16, Abraham is very concerned about who will follow him after he dies, as he is elderly. Sarah offers him her handmaid Hagar, who promptly conceives, causing Sarah heartache. The enmity between the two women is fierce. Thirteen years after Ishmael's birth, God asks Abraham and all the men in his camp to circumcise themselves, and shortly after, the angels appear to inform both Abraham and Sarah that they will be parents.

To protect her new son Isaac, Sarah demands Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away - *garesh ha-amah hazot* - divorce this handmaiden (Gen. 21:10) which grieved Abraham (v. 11) because he recognized that Ishmael too was his child. Embedded in this story are the stories of hundreds of thousands of newly formed families where children are estranged from parents when new half siblings are born. Although God promises Abraham that Ishmael too will be the father of many, there is no biblical textual proof that Abraham and Ishmael ever meet again while Abraham is alive.

God puts Abraham to the test and asks him to sacrifice his son Isaac. He is told to take two servants, his son, the materials for a proper sacrifice and a donkey. After three days, Abraham instructs the servants to remain behind, brings his son to the top of the mountain, and ties him down in preparation for killing him. At the critical moment, an angel appears to Abraham and stops him in the act. A ram gets stuck in a nearby bush, and the animal replaces the child as the sacrifice. The angel repeats God's promise of many descendants, and secures Abraham's position in the historical continuum: "All the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your descendants ..." (Gen. 22:18).

Biblical exegesis focuses on two aspects of the text: the literal meaning of the words that exist (*peshat)* and those that seem to be missing (*remez).* In the final sentence of the *Akkedah* narrative, Abraham returns alone to Beersheva with the two servants. And the next chapter, *Hayyei Sarah* - the life of Sarah, records the matriarch's death. Sarah had been kept in the dark about the nature of their trip to the mountain and of God's command to sacrifice their son; Abraham himself saddles the donkey and slips out very early the next morning (Gen. 22:3) possibly to avoid confronting his wife. Furthermore, there is no textual evidence that Isaac ever speaks with his father again, although he returns to mourn his mother in her tent and eventually, with his half brother Ishmael, buries Abraham once Abraham dies. Isaac then begins his new life with Rebecca. What can we glean from these facts?

- Abraham does not see his wife Sarah alive again.

- Abraham does not have a relationship with his son Isaac again, despite the fact that he finds a wife for Isaac.

- Abraham seeks a wife for Isaac from his native land once he, "was old, advanced in years and *Adonai* had blessed Abraham in all things." (Gen. 24:1) As this immediately follows the promise of many descendants, Abraham responds to the need to set his son up in a marital relationship that will ensure the Divine promise is played out, marriage being the goal of adulthood and the means to survival.

- Isaac needs time to fully mourn the loss of his mother.

- Isaac and Ishmael may have had the opportunity to bond because their father is now no longer physically present in their lives.

The interpersonal dynamics of the Abraham/Sarah/Isaac/Hagar/Ishmael extended family can be reflected in families experiencing divorce. There is estrangement between husband and concubine, to keep the family peace; there is estrangement between the father and both sons, the first one after being abandoned and the second after the emotional trauma at the sacrificial altar. There is complete separation, presumably by death, between husband and wife, once the breakdown of trust causes a fatal rift in their relationship. Each of these separate scenarios can be useful to use in the context of group processing the divorce experience.

Modern *midrash* - story telling to elucidate a text in order to better understand the underlying meaning of the tale - might provoke the following questions which the focus group on divorce might use as a discussion topic.

a. How must Abraham have felt, being asked to sacrifice his son of his old age which the text identifies as *yehidcha* – his only one - by God?

b. Once the three-day journey was complete, and Isaac was finally tied down to be slaughtered, what was going through Abraham's mind? And once Isaac was spared by the angel's voice, what did Abraham think when he realized Isaac had fled, knowing he would have to account for all of this to Sarah when he returned home?

Once God stops talking to Abraham, the silence is deafening for the reader, and Isaac disappears from the text.

Abraham and Sarah see the fragile promise of generations yet to be embodied in this child. His life, like his name, is filled with laughter. Years later, would his name still be *Yitzhak* - one who laughs – or *Yitz'ak* – the one who cries continuously in his mother's tent? Isaac should have known, should have seen it coming because this difficulty between father and son had happened before. He remembers his older brother, Ishmael, the first born son, sent away with Hagar the concubine at Sarah's bidding, left to die in the desert because the two had outlived their usefulness. One son, conceived and welcomed into the world with joy, was then cast aside by Abraham. After him came the second son, again prayed for, anticipated and loved, only to be brought to sacrifice at God's

command. Abraham, who would bargain with God for Sodom and Gomorrah, perfect strangers, did not do the same for his own flesh and blood.

There is, however, a reunion of the brothers after the death of Abraham. For the seventy-five years since Isaac's birth, there is no mention of contact either between the two brothers, or between either son and their father. What is fascinating is that once Abraham died, both his sons felt it their duty to bury him, although Abraham had sired six additional boys. The Hebrew reads: *va'yikberu oto Yitzhak v'Yishmael banav-* and they buried him, Isaac and Ishmael, his sons. Despite the fact that Isaac received the entire legacy, Ishmael was present for the ritual of burial.

> This was the total span of Abraham's life: one hundred and seventy-five years. And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah. (Gen.25:7)

The account of the younger son favored over the older one, the dissolution of the families and the heartbreak that caused Sarah to die, are all stories that we as clergy can use to counsel congregants in similar situations.

III. Theology of Pastoral Care and Divorce

There are many reasons for entering the rabbinate, the priesthood, or the ministry; motivating forces that thrive on satisfying the needs of others, psyches that respond to love and adoration, and a desire to bring God's word to others. All of these reasons propel individuals toward religious life. Once we are ordained, we function within the context of what we have learned and in

response to those we serve. We help others find the answers to their questions by having asked these questions of ourselves. But what happens if we ourselves are still infused with doubt and concerns? The purpose of bringing ACODPs together, both in a rabbinic group and in a lay group – is to determine whether any of the skills we learned in seminary while articulating our own theology, inform our ability to find healing answers for ourselves and ultimately enables us to counsel others. Furthermore, we will examine how the divorces experienced by these adults have, if at all, altered, strengthened or diminished their relationship with God. Theological reflection is not the sole domain of the clergy, but perhaps we have been given a viable medium in which we have felt safe enough to ask the important questions and find our own answers. We may find that the opposite is true: that lay people seek professional counseling help and therefore have found emotional and spiritual support, while often rabbis are more reticent to seek psychological help.

There are several aspects to a vision of pastoral care that determine how we serve God and those who call us rabbi. We live within relationship: In *I and Thou*, Buber articulates an understanding of the world through relationships; he claims that "we live in the currents of universal reciprocity." We never function on our own but always in relation to the world around us: to God, to nature and to each other. Relationship is crucial for survival: as infants, we rely totally on adults to care for us; as children, we seek adults as role models and as we age, we look to older generations for advice and counsel. We are multifaceted, so that our relationships reflect our different needs, but the primary relationships we

have, with our parents, our spouses and partners, and often with our children, consume the greater part of our focus. Buber reduces these myriad experiences into two kinds of relating: I- Thou and I-It. The "I" is not always the same, because the "I" of I-Thou is qualitatively different from the "I" of I-It or I-She or I-He.

> Basic words do not state something that might exist outside them; by being spoken they establish a mode of existence.
>
> Basic words are spoken with one's being.
> When one says Thou, the I of the word pair I-Thou is said, too.
> When one says It, the I of the word I-It is said, too.
> The basic word I-Thou can only be spoken with one's whole being.
> The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being.
> (Buber, p. 19)

The ultimate I-Thou relationship connects us to God and at the same time, connects us with each other. This means that the value of the experience comes from the way in which we relate, rather than with whom we relate. When we live our lives peripherally, existing without connection, we live in a world of I-Its. Much of the world experiences the I-It all the time. This happens when relationships lose their meaning, when estrangement from the ones we once loved, reduces the relationships to their shell. And when that happens, we feel no bond to our spouses, our children, or to our work. Our lives are all I-It. Perhaps we hope on some level that we *do* have some connection with God. Our role is to help them rediscover the connection they have lost, or never had, as spiritual electricians who restore the flow of the current whenever it is sought, thereby recharging all those who need it.

We began an understanding of that covenantal relationship with God through Noah, when the floodwaters had dissipated and God promised never to destroy the world again. We read about Abraham's physical connection with God which, in turn, allowed us to enter into an I -Thou bond with God. We, as clergy, can build on that sense of connectedness, so that the symbol is strengthened by knowledge and action, leading us to the third and final sign.

The third sign of the covenant is Torah at Sinai, a moment in history which dramatically changes our understanding of our own responsibility to the already established relationship through the performance of *mitzvot,* commandments. We realize, after further scrutiny, that they *[mitzvot]* also reduce themselves to: "I'm God, you're not." (Kushner, 1991 p. 44)

If God is God and we are not, then several questions follow in rapid succession:

1. Did God want/facilitate what happened to my family?

2. If the God/Israel relationship can find reconciliation after disagreement, can my parents do the same (a question that occurs to almost all children, regardless of age). The proof text for this natural emotion comes from *Pes. Rabbah* 184a:

> But God is not so [rejecting]. Even though Israel has deserted Him, and served others gods, He says, 'Return unto me, repent, and I will receive you.' So Jeremiah too applies the same contrast and says, 'though thou hast played the harlot, with many lovers, yet return again to me and I will receive you. (Jer. 3:1)

3. If God - read "sacred" - is removed from my parents' relationship, then is God removed from my life as well?

4. Where can I find God?

Each question requires its own answer for each individual; clergy responding to the needs of congregants provide the medium for finding them.

Judith Plaskow, a feminist theologian who has struggled with the text and the context to find meaning for all Jews, women and men, begins her theory of reshaping Jewish memory with Sinai:

> Entry into to the covenant of Sinai is the root experience of Judaism, the central event that established the Jewish people. Given the importance of this event, there can be no verse in the Torah more disturbing to the feminist than Moses' warning to his people in Exodus 19:15, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman." For here, at the very moment that the Jewish people stands at Sinai ready to receive the covenant – not now the covenant with individual patriarchs but with the people as a whole – at the very moment when Israel stands trembling waiting for God's presence to descend upon the mountain, Moses addresses the community only as men. The specific issue at stake is ritual impurity: an emission of semen renders both and man and his female partner temporarily unfit to approach the sacred (Lev. 15:16-18). But Moses did not say, "men and women do not go near each other." At the central moment of Jewish history, women are invisible. (Plaskow, 1990)

In the very same way, when radical change such as divorce affects a family, there are many who also are relegated to feeling invisible: the children, who have to restructure their relationship with each parent individually; the parent who moves into a different circle, separated by circumstance from the familiar life s/he led; possibly the child who was always responsible for maintaining the family equilibrium, because the divorce is his/her "failure" as well.

We are no stranger to the concept of "other." As Jews, we have struggled to survive when we have been torn from homelands and set to wander the earth; we have been "other" as clergy when we live in the same community in which we

work; as women, we have been "other" in what was once an entirely male world. So do we have a special affinity for understanding those who feel "other" too? And can we use the feeling of being separate, that once was (or still is) so isolating, to create a language that will help articulate this truth for others who have similar experiences?

Inclusion - gathering people in - is crucial to emotional and spiritual recovery. Inclusion means no longer being invisible; inclusion means no longer being ignored; inclusion means that we are part of the conversation again. Inclusion, ultimately, can mean returning to God.

This leads us to the last aspect of our articulated pastoral theology in the face of divorce: faith beyond the questions. So much of our pastoral work is centered around the drama of living: birth, marriage, and death, although the work is not limited to these rites of passage. More and more, clergy are confronted by congregants who want to live a life of faith, but cannot find their way back to a simple belief system that would hold up when faced with the deep questions. The problem is not that the answers are too simplistic and therefore dismissible, but that the questions are.

In the Book of Job, Job's friends attack him while they try to comfort him with statements suggesting great wisdom, but which are in truth veiled justifications for their own precarious existence. At the end of the last chapter, when Job finally realizes what God had said from within the whirlwind, he replies:

> I know that You can do everything,
> That no plan is impossible for You.
> Who is this who obscures counsel without knowledge?
> Of things beyond me, which I did not know.

Hear now, and I will speak;
I will ask, and You will inform me.
I had heard You with my ears,
But now I see You with my eyes;
Therefore, I recant and relent,
being but dust and ashes. (Job 42:1-6)

What does God then do? God admonishes Job's three friends, claiming intense anger at them, and for what reason? It is for their presuming to know all the answers. "You have not spoken the truth about me, as did my servant Job." (Job 42:7) What exactly did Job say? Job asked the questions. It is the questions that become the core of truth, the questions that reestablish Job as God's servant.

Can we, the clergy, offer more than hand-holding, more than Job's friends did, and draw on the person's inner resources? By doing so, can we effect change? Using a religious structure such as prayer, a member of the clergy can draw on the resources of symbol and religious language to create the framework for the asking and answering of the most difficult questions. Opening oneself to the possibilities of accessing divine rewards is the first step toward fully understanding how we can enhance our relationship to God. Petitionary prayers to heal the sick or to save one from danger are not to be regarded as infantile or useless; rather, they become the links that establish connection between humanity and God, and protect against what we experience as the rejection of God's love for us.

Issues of theodicy need to be broached in a supportive, loving and nurturing environment: it is often difficult to ask "why has this happened to me?"

especially when one is afraid of the answer. People in crisis are consumed with practical questions of how to deal with their day-to-day lives, but at the same time they often experience a spiritual void. To compound the problem, trauma produces psychological regression: we return to a time when we approached God as we viewed our parents. When we are children, we view the world as a justice system – learning the rules is critical to character formation. In a religious context, the rules are less clear; as rabbis, we can help our congregants explore the variety of religious responses that will help them move toward a higher spiritual plane, forming a deeper, more sophisticated spiritual identity.

CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

Since the 1980's, the divorce rate in the United States has risen to 50% for first marriages and to 61% for subsequent marriages (Glick, 1984). Given these statistics and the reality of the breakdown of the traditional family, today our society has millions of adult children who have lived through their parents' divorce. Mainstream researchers and clinicians recognize that divorce is a transitional crisis that interrupts developmental tasks (Carter, McGoldrick 1999). Depending on what stage of development one is in when one learns of his/ her parents' impeding divorce or separation, old unhealed wounds of early childhood may resurface as the child processes the news which confronts him/her and the child is forced to accept a new familial reality.

In examining how the ACODP processes his/her parents' divorce, many of the related issues that are raised are linked directly back to skills learned at different developmental stages and how one handles this may be based upon the ACODP's ego strength acquired in early childhood. If the child was lucky enough to have had "good enough parenting" (Winnicott,1986) this will have a profound effect on the person's coping mechanisms. When an infant's mother can adapt to the infant's needs because this is her primary maternal preoccupation, the infant is able to grow and develop in a healthy and positive environment. Whether or not a person had "good enough parenting" many of the coping skills acquired in early childhood and in adolescence are challenged when one experiences the loss, the grief, the breach of trust, abandonment and a panoply of other emotions associated with divorce. By examining Erik H. Erikson's schematic found in his seminal work, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, the reader will have a better understanding of the clinical principles that may surface with ACODPs and the skills that were acquired developmentally.

According to Erikson, the first component of a healthy personality is a basic sense of trust which is acquired when an infant in the first stage of life, the Trust versus Mistrust stage, has his/her needs met. In this stage, the infant does not differentiate him/herself from the mother. The mother, her breast and the infant are as one to the infant. The infant learns to receive what he/she needs as the mother learns to give according to the infant's needs. A healthy child will be fed, changed, rocked, held, talked to, smiled at and so forth (Erikson, 1980).

Erikson points out that the crisis that erupts during the Trust phase happens in the second six months of the infant's life as the infant adjusts to the physiological changes: teething, the drive to actively observe the mother, the infant's awareness of him/herself as a distinct person, and the mother's turning away from the baby to pursue things she gave up in late pregnancy and postnatal care. The first basic loss a child experiences is separating from the maternal matrix. Weaning must be done slowly so that the mother can provide the baby with a substitute that will be proper and reassuring so that the baby does not experience acute infantile depression. In this stage of life, the baby experiences a lost paradise. A healthy infant develops a sense of trust relying on outer providers to take care of his/her needs and not abandon him/her. The infant begins to learn to trust his/own organs to cope with his/her urges. If in fact, the infant's needs are met during the oral stage, then he/she will not experience infantile fears of "being left" "being left empty" "being starved of stimulation" and "being no good" (Erikson, 1980).

In the next stage of life, the Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt stage, the baby acquires control over the muscular system. The baby begins to exercise "holding on" and "letting go" in this still dependent stage. Controlling retention and elimination of the bladder and the bowels signify a battle for autonomy. As the baby begins to both separate from his/her mother while simultaneously he/she still clinging to her, the baby is first confronted with conflict resolution. If the outer control of the baby is too rigid or too early in introducing potty training, the baby will regress to the oral stage and often suck a thumb or

act willful or use his/her feces as ammunition against the offending world. If the baby is not supported in his/her efforts to become autonomous, then feelings of shame and mistrust will overcome the baby. Shame according to Erikson is expressed early in life as an impulse to bury one's face or sink into the ground. Shame exploits the child's sense of being small and damages self esteem.

In the stage of Initiative, the child of 4 or 5 who has solved the problem of autonomy, moves on to find out what kind of person he/she is going to be. The child identifies with his/her parents and wants to be like them. The child learns to move around more freely and it seems to the child that he/she has an unlimited radius of goals. At this stage, the child develops language skills to the point of understanding and he/she can ask questions and totally confuse the answers. Both through the acquired skills of movement and language, the child's imagination is expanded to the point that the child can frighten him/herself with what he/she dreams up. For healthy development, the child must emerge from this stage with a sense of ambition and independence.

In this phase, children play with other children in preschool. They learn about intrusions in personal space, in speech and physically through direct contact with other children. According to Erikson, this is also the stage for infantile sexual curiosity, genital excitability, and occasional preoccupation with sexual matters. The child is confronted with the Oedipal conflict. As the child develops a sense of self, he/she realizes not only that his/her sexual makeup is inferior to his/her parents, but he/she will never replace the same sex parent and be with the opposite sex parent in a sexual relationship. Children may develop a sense

of guilt over the things they wished they could do that are often physically impossible; a fact that they do not comprehend. During this stage, a child with younger siblings may experience anticipatory rivalry, which may come to a climax in a fatal contest for a favored position with one of the parents. A healthy parent will not allow this to happen. The failure to achieve this position can lead to both feelings of guilt and anxiety.

During the Initiative stage, the child develops a conscience and the super-ego plays a factor in guiding the child's actions. The child develops a sense of being ashamed when found out for doing something wrong or at being afraid of being discovered. The child develops a sense of responsibility that will enable him/her to function as an adult.

The next stage of development is Identity verses Identity Infusion, where childhood ends and youth begins. Adolescents are confronted with physiological changes as their social roles change. The child develops a sense of ego identity. Through the wholehearted and consistent recognition of real achievement by the adults in his/her life, the adolescent develops a sense of self-esteem.

According to Erikson, the three stages of adulthood include: Intimacy and Distantiation verses Self-Absorption, Generatively verses Stagnation and Integrity verses Despair and Disgust. In the earliest stage, one begins to study for a career and form social relationships. The young adult begins to separate and goes out on his/her own. This is the first experience of living away from home for an extended period of time. The young adult according to Erikson experiments with relationships and sexual intimacy as they define themselves. The healthy

individual is able to have a life that includes a healthy sexual relationship with mutuality for both partners, which in time may lead to marriage and having a family. If he/she is unable to develop intimate relationships, then Distantiation, the readiness to repudiate, to isolate, and, if necessary, to destroy those forces and people whose essence seems dangerous to one's own (Erikson, 1980) may occur. The task of a normal person according to Freud is "Lieben und arbeiten" love and work. According to Erikson, for Freud, love encompasses both genital love and the expansiveness of generosity, and work is being productive.

In the second stage of adulthood, generativity refers to producing offspring. The individual structures the life he/she is building for his/herself. This occurs in one's thirties. There are people who through misfortune, choice or because of their creative endeavors do not have children. According to Erikson, childless people do not experience the enrichment of a healthy personality and when this occurs, they tend to overindulge themselves as a means of compensating for their interpersonal impoverishment.

In the final stage, one with integrity accepts one's parents for who they are, no longer wishes that they would be different and accepts responsibility for one's own life. Despair arises if a person feels that time is too short to try a different path to integrity. It comes as a result of too many regrets. For Erikson, ego integrity is an emotional integration, which allows for one to be a leader and a follower in most aspects of life.

We cannot overlook the importance of development in the adult stages for the purpose of our study. As young adults struggle to leave their families of

origin, they rely heavily upon them for tangible and emotional support. Richard Fulmer coined the term "exporting relatedness" to refer to the task of developing the ability to become deeply attached to select others as one had been with members of one's family of origin. He postulates that young adults are influenced by the marital relationships they have observed and how they have been treated. If there is a divorce at this crucial point in young adult development, the impact on the young adult can be very significant. Fulmer states that young adults look to their parents for inexplicit permission to form new relationships outside of the family of origin (Fulmer, 1999). Parents, whose relationship remains intact, provide a setting for continued celebration of life cycle events and for holiday gatherings. They also continue to instill in their young adult children a desire for them to enact their values of the family in work, their choice of friends, religious practice, and cultural style. In exchange for their support, parents look to their children for loyalty. If parents stayed together "for the sake of the children" and then the marriage dissolved, young adults experience conflict over divided loyalties as the continuity of their family life is interrupted and they are left to fend for themselves (Fulmer, 1999).

When an adult's parents divorce, the circumstances surrounding it will determine the significance of the impact on the adult children. According to Carter and McGoldrick, the key that will determine whether a crisis in the family system is transitional or has a permanent crippling impact is how it is handled emotionally within the family system. The effect of divorce on a family system will be affected by the way it is approached during the separation and legal phase

and then during the post divorce phase. Research shows that it takes a minimum of two to three years for a family to adjust to its new structure. It is important to recognize that families who do not resolve the emotional issues of divorce can remain stuck emotionally for years, and perhaps for generations (Carter, McGoldrick, 1999). When a divorce occurs in the family life cycle, the family's developmental path and all of their present and future interactions are affected. Once divorce occurs, there is a complex restructuring and redefinition of relationships within the family. The family is reorganized into a binuclear family with maternal and paternal subsets (Ahrons, 1999).

One of life's most stressful events is divorce and the lack of adequate norms and positive role models for divorce has been detrimental to divorcing families (Ahrons, 1999). A healthy divorce requires that parents restructure their lives in ways that allow children to continue their relationships with both parents. Research shows that children of divorce who have their financial and psychological needs met, who are supported in maintaining extended familial relationships, and whose parents maintain a cooperative post divorce relationship have a healthier adjustment than those who do not (Ahrons, 1999).

When a couple with grown children divorces after a marriage of twenty-plus years, the patterns of interconnections are profoundly altered and it calls into question the roots of each member's self perception (Fintushel, Hillard, 1991). ACODPs often feel a sense of responsibility for their parents' emotional and practical well being, especially for the injured party, if the divorce is not mutual. As boundaries shift with divorce, the ACODP may find him/herself being

sought after by a parent as a confidante or as a go-between as the child carries on with his/her own life. Parents often become peers to the adult children, sharing with them inappropriate intimate details of their relationship with the other parent as the parent seeks to form a new alliance with his/her child. Often the adult child will learn of martial infidelities. Because of the shame of a perceived failed marriage, a parent will often want to share the humiliation of the experience with a child who knows the family dynamic well rather than going public by telling someone outside the family unit. Being placed in this role puts additional stress on the ACODP.

In research done by Fintushel and Hillard, ACODPs who perceived their families as troubled, experienced the divorce as anti-climatic where as ACODPs who came from what they termed as "happy families" could, in contrast, remember vividly the period when they were told of the impending divorce. Their counterparts only had hazy memories of the divorce, which did not stand out in such sharp detail. Children raised in unhappy families did not experience the divorce with the same degree of shock, disorientation and self-doubt as children in happy families did.

As there is not much research done on ACODPs, there is a common misconception that since the adult child is no longer in formation, he/she will not be severely affected by parental divorce. However, because the adult child's sense of self is grounded in a perception of his/her family and that perception lies at the core of one's being, it can be very devastating when that perception is shattered (Fintushel, Hillard, 1991).

ACODPs often feel a wide range of emotions as they experience their parents' divorce. Some of these emotions include shock at learning the news, grief and loss over the family configuration that will never again be as it was, disruption in one's own life, and the loss of both emotional and financial security; as research has shown that elderly divorced individuals contribute less than their counterparts to their adult children (Fintushel, Hillard, 1991). Often the ACODP also has to deal with the loss of the family home, which can diminish a sense of grounding in the family. Anger is commonly felt, especially if the ACODP learns that one of his/her parents is having an affair or is engaged in narcissistic indulging at the expense of the family unit. It is common to have to deal with feelings of abandonment and rejection as one parent is often leaving the family circle. One experiences these feelings especially if one parent relied on the other to keep in touch with the children and keep the family together. That parent must learn how to connect on his/her own in order to keep the relationship with their child/children intact. Some parents lose interest in their children following divorce and the children are left abandoned. Even though divorce is more widely accepted in society, feelings of guilt, shame, and embarrassment still are centered around divorce. Some ACODPs experience relief that the inevitable is finally happening. When parents force or encourage their adult children to take sides, it places their children in a very uncomfortable situation. Holidays and life cycle events, once seen a source of joy for family circles, become contentious, difficult and stressful for the entire family system.

Many ACODPs are troubled by the fact that they cannot handle the emotions that they experience in the process of their parents' divorce. If they are in fact grown and mature, they may question why the divorce is impacting them in such an emotional way. Often they feel like they are reverting back to childhood and are being seen as children and not adults by their parents. Many experience symptoms of depression and according to research, some develop substance abuse and alcohol problems (Stevenson, Black, 1995). Through their parents' divorce, children often are forced to re-examine their childhood experiences as they search for clues, contradictions and discrepancies in their family histories which led up to the divorce. They are forced to look at their childhood and their parents' relationship through adult eyes (Fintushel, Hillard, 1991).

If the divorce occurs in early adulthood, the ACODP may have trouble forming or staying in intimate relationships due to of fear of rejection and abandonment. They may become fearful of marriage for themselves. While being financially dependent, the issue of financial insecurity can also become real as a college student may find his/her funds cut off or significantly diminished. Often a young adult must deal with the dramatic changes in his/her life, at the same time he/she is trying to create his/her own life. For some people, the divorce is the first serious crisis that they encounter (Fintushel, Hillard, 1991) in their lives. Vacations, once a source of relief from the pressures of college or work, may become a source of stress and conflict as the ACODP returns home to face the family reality. For some young adults, at the time when they were

beginning to form adult relationships with their parents, having survived adolescence, they find themselves torn between loyalties to their parents.

Divorce can be very unsettling for married ACODPs who may have modeled their own marriages after their parents or modeled their own behavior after their same sex parent (Fintushel, Hillard, 1991). Research has shown that a significant number of ACODPs eventually divorce after having experienced their parents' divorce, recognizing behaviors and faults in their own marriages that were no longer tolerable. Issues become further complicated when there are grandchildren.

Significant stress is shifted to adult children regarding the health care, financial responsibilities and the general welfare of elderly, divorced, single parents. Homemakers who spent their adult years taking care of their husbands' and children's needs are often not supported adequately and lack the skills, education and training to re-enter the work force.

When remarriage is introduced, ACODPs have to make adjustments for new blended, expanded family circles. Biological children often are forced to compete with the new family for their parent's attention. ACODPs are sometimes caught in a bind when their parents are not present for their grandchildren. Both holiday and life cycle events become more complicated and are sometimes dreaded by the members of the family of origin.

For many, the path to healing is long, involved and not recognized or supported by society at large. Depending upon the ACODPs' religious

upbringing, their healing may include a spiritual dimension. Through our project, we hope to be able to provide a forum for continued healing.

Parental Projection Hypotheses

Among the different Freudian hypotheses regarding the sources and the function of religion, is the one suggesting a connection between one's father and one's idea of a divine Father. In Totem and Taboo (1913), Freud postulates that God in every case is modeled after the father figure and the relationship one has with God is modeled after the relationship one has with one's own father. Both of these relationships change over time. God for Freud is nothing but an exalted version of one's father. Since Freud's early writing, much research has been done to further explore what is regarded as the projective system (Kardiner & Linton, 1939) and the most general version of the parental projection hypothesis states that there is a connection between one's early socialization experiences and beliefs regarding supernatural beings (Spiro & D'Andrade, 1958). Later empirical research studies have tested the hypothesis of the similarity between parental and deity images and the results have progressed much further than Freud's initial theories.

One of the findings has shown that groups of American students have an equal number of people who have projected both maternal and paternal images onto their God concept, probably a notion that Freud would have never considered. (For a summary of the results of the studies, refer to the Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle article.) If the God concept is formed through a projection of early parental

qualities on a concept of a divine being, then one would expect parental images to be part of religious ideas both for individuals and for a culture (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1975). The cultural context within Judaism becomes evident when examining the God concepts fostered by non-gender sensitive Jewish liturgical references to God, as God is referred to as a Loving Father in Heaven, Our Father Our King, Ruler, Master, He, etc. These images reinforce a male God image. Most people today when referring to God will refer to God as "He" automatically as a result of their religious education and beliefs transmitted at home.

Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle's analysis of the various studies support the following conclusions which are important for our project, 1) the paternal image is carried by the culture and the emotional attitude toward God is derived from attitudes to parents, 2) the deity image rated by females was more benevolent, while males rated it as more punitive, 3) the evidence supports the psychoanalytic notions regarding the impact of family relationships on religious feeling and ideas and 4) the findings of a relationship between the image of the opposite sex or preferred parent and God, lend support to the notion that the deity is a projected love-object and that positive qualities are projected more than negative ones.

Rizzuto concludes from Winnicott (1971) that the earliest God representation can be traced back to the eye contact between a mother and child. Our relationship with God is directly related to our earliest experiences with those who had control over us from infancy through childhood. In her research, Rizzuto

has taken Erikson's schematic for development and worked into it the development of God representations for each stage. She parallels the development of God representation, which leads to belief, to the development of God representation, which leads to unbelief. The latter is the negative formulation of the positive reflected in the former. Her diagram represents the ongoing development, which allows for the continuous creation of God as the transitional object. It is her belief that the transitional object needs to be recreated in every stage of life in order to relevant for a lasting belief.

In her diagram, (pp. 206-207) Rizzuto relates the following. In the first stage, Trust (1979) verses Mistrust the infant parenthetically states, "I am held, fed nurtured. I see me on your face. (You make me in your image.) The positive development of a God representation, which allows belief, is predicated on a positive relationship with the caretaker and the notion of "good enough mothering." In the second stage, Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt, the child says, "I feel you are with me." The child feels supported not abandoned. In the Initiative versus Guilt stage, the child states, "You are wonderful, the Almighty." "You are love." "You love me." In the Industry versus Inferiority stage, the child states, "You are my God, my protector." In the Identity versus Identity Diffusion stage of adolescence the child states, "You are the maker of all things and You are the beloved and the loving." As the young adult moves into the Intimacy and Generativity versus Isolation and Self-absorption, we see a marked maturity as the young adult states, "You are, You let me be me." In the next stage of development, Integrity versus Despair, the adult states, "I accept you whatever you

are. Basic Trust." In the last stage of life, the elderly adult having resolved the conflicts of childhood and settled into the joys and responsibilities of adulthood states, "Whatever, whoever you are, I trust you." There is clear growth in every stage of development.

The capacity to develop object relations begins in the home with the dyadic relationship between the infant and mother, the triangular relationship between both parents and the infant and with siblings in the home. (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975) Transitional objects, often a blanket, for example, serve to help create a sense of the mother in her absence, by their texture, smell or by their warmth. The ability to evoke a mental image of the mother in her absence ushers in the period of object constancy, which enables the infant to manage the separation anxiety experienced, being alone. When the child masters the autonomy stage it gives him the sense of security he/she needs to develop relationships later in life (Heinrichs, 1982). The foundation of trust developed through a positive mother-child relationship or mistrust as the case may be will influence subsequent relationships with the child's "grown-up" image of God. According to Heinrichs, a child's experience with his/her parents is often reflected similarly in the adult image of God. If, for example, parents withdrew love or were too punitive, the child will view God as such. If the child separates well in development from his/her earthly father, then as the parents become less divine, the "Heavenly Father" will suffer from less parataxic distortions. Parataxic distortions related to God happen as the person projects a transference experience from figures of past experiences, one's parents, onto their image of God.

the ACODP's God concept? What issues are raised for the ACODP as he/she views the place of God in his/her life in the post divorce aftermath? We will look to see how the divorce changed the ACODP's relationship with God. What impact did the divorce have on the religious life of ACODPs coming from happy family versus those who came from unhappy families? Did the divorce bring them closer to God or further distant them from God? What role does Judaism play in their lives?

Chapter 3

In *Kabbalah*, the Jewish mystical tradition, the Hebrew word *PaRDeS* is a mnemonic acronym developed in the Middle Ages by Moses de Leon to describe the four levels of biblical exegesis employed in text study. Each level of *PaRDes* requires a different degree of insight and methodology in order to penetrate the text and discover deeper insights into the text. *Peshat* is the simplest level, which is the literal meaning of the text. *Remez* is a hint or veiled allusion to the text. *Drash* is the homiletic interpretation and *Sod* is the mystery hidden in the text. In the four sessions that we will conduct in this study, we will employ this methodology, as each session will be devoted to a self-analysis viewed through the prism of each of the four levels.

Letters will be sent out to our constituent groups inviting ACODPs to participate in a four-session program to examine the affects of divorce on the participants. Each participant will be given the edited God Questionnaire (see appendix B) to complete and bring with them to the first session. We will collect them and review them for use in the third session. Their answers will provide us with insight into each of the participants and will be a tool to help us facilitate the group discussion in the subsequent sessions.

In the first session, we will focus on the *Peshat,* the literal meaning and reasons that we have gathered. Sharing a person's family history is sacred. In our first session, we will discuss confidentiality issues and ask that the members hold the information that they will receive as sacred, not be shared without explicit permission from the individuals. We will also ask for permission to tape

the sessions for research purposes only to help us write up the final chapters of the thesis.

To frame divorce within a Jewish context, we will use the text showing the dissolution of the relationship between Abraham and Hagar to explore its impact on Abraham's two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, using the Biblical text as a spring-board for sharing the personal stories of the participants.

To facilitate the sharing of the personal stories from both a spiritual and an emotional vantage point, we will use the ACODP Questionnaire found in *Adult Children of Divorced Parents* (Rodgers, Rodgers, 1990) as a guide for group discussion. The questions are:

1. How old were you when your parents divorced?
2. Did you have any idea that this was going to happen?
3. Did they tell you that they were going to divorce?
4. If they told you, what did they say?
5. How did it feel when you first heard?
6. What about your life changed at that time?
7. How has their divorce affected your life?
8. Do you fear that your marriage will end in divorce?
9. Do you struggle with the following issues in your intimate relationships?
    a. Trust issues- Are you afraid that your marriage/relationship will not last or that your partner will be unfaithful?

b. Fear issues- Do you fear that bad things will happen when you least expect it? Do you have a fear of abandonment? Do you have a fear of failure?

c. Insecurity issues- Do you try to control every thing? Do you always have to be right? Do you have trouble taking blame or responsibility for the part you play in conflict? Are you too dependent and just want to be taken care of?

d. Communication issues- Do you have trouble expressing yourself? Do you have trouble being a good listener? Do you have trouble resolving conflict?

e. Life issues- Do you have mentors for marriage? Do you feel lost in your relationship? Do you have difficulties with your in-laws?

Additional questions will include:

1. How has the divorce affected:

a. Your relationship with God?

b. Your ability to participate in communal religious life: Services, Ceremonies and Ritual?

2. How has it affected the way you interpret liturgical passages where God is referred to as a parent?

3. How has the divorce affected your ability to explain theodicy? (for the rabbis) How has the divorce affected your ability to explain why evil things happen in the world? (for laypeople)

4. Do you struggle with your spiritual life?

By addressing these questions, we will be able to begin to examine the affects that divorce has on ACODPs' lives. Following this discussion, we will introduce the concept of a genogram and ask the participants to bring in a genogram of their family to the next session.

Douglas Clark (2000) claims that "differentiated behavior in any system has the capacity to influence other parts of the system toward different levels of functioning." Looking at the broader picture of how one event impacts on other relationships in a family's circle can be accomplished by the use of a genogram. A genogram is a tool used to map out a family tree, concentrating on the particular relationships between spouses/partners, siblings, parents and children and multi-generational connections by eliciting family narratives and cultural stories as a means of identifying and detoxifying family legacies (McGoldrick, 1999). The family dynamic that becomes the canvas enables the individual constructing the genogram to put family relationships in context. This will allow us to use intergenerational dimensions or extended family fields to provide a context for understanding the individual's story. Genograms teach people to think systemically as the individual's vision is expanded by seeing a pattern mapped out in his/her own family (McGoldrick, 1999). According to McGoldrick, "family interactions and relationships tend to be highly reciprocal, patterned and repetitive. The existence of these patterns allows us to make tentative predictions from the genogram." Bowen termed the repetition of family patterns as the "multigenerational transmission" of family patterns. While the hypothesis is that relationship patterns in

previous generations may provide implicit models for family functioning in the next generation (McGoldrick, 1999), if there is a repetitive pattern of divorce in one's family, the genogram can be a helpful tool for helping change a familial pattern. With regard to divorce and remarriage, the genogram helps define relational patterns and triangles inherent in this type of family situation. The genogram helps point out particular issues such as jealousy, favoritism, loyalty conflict, and stepparent and stepchildren problems (McGoldrick, 1999). Once the genogram plots the "what/who/when/" data of each individual, it is important for the individual to evaluate how they have reacted to both the answers they have graphed and the exercise itself.

We will provide each participant with a copy of the "Bell Jar" chart (see appendix C). In their paper entitled, *Eit Ratzon: Transition for Congregations and Rabbis,* authors Felix, Schoenberg and Stier (1995) posit that "the bell jar diagram is helpful in understanding the psychological phases of the neutral zone (reference to *Transition: Positive Change in your Life and Work,* by Barrie Hopson and Mike Scally, p. 20). The "neutral zone" refers to the numbness phase during which the person experiences a sense of limbo: shock and paralysis. This is then followed by the denial phase, when we find ourselves wanting to return to the past that is seen as good, regardless of the truth. We paint the past with a broad brush of rose-colored glasses. Then comes the self-doubt and our energy plummets, leading us to hit the bottom. "We are now in the midst of the neutral zone" (Felix et al). It is at this point that we begin to let go of the past, and precisely then the healing process can begin.

We have spent the better part of our lives transitioning from one stage to the next, sometimes seamlessly, sometimes with great difficulty. The transition is seamless when we look back and realize how quickly time has passed; it is more difficult when the world as we know it comes crashing down and we have to make every effort to put the pieces back together again. If, by consciously articulating our feelings of loss, rage, loss of identity and confusion by using this Bell Jar graph, we can reconstruct our present to change what we thought was going to be an empty future.

We will hand out a sample genogram (see appendix A) and the standard symbols chart (see appendix B) taken from McGoldrick's work. We will explain what the genogram is and ask them to make one of their family to bring in for the second session.

Our second session focuses on *Remez* the hint or veiled allusion to the text. The hinted meanings will be revealed through our discussions of the genograms as we examine the individuals' family systems. The genograms will allow us to see where the divorce fit into the family system. Was it an isolated life cycle event within the family system or was it part of an ongoing and perhaps multi-generational pattern within the family system? Following the presentation of the material garnered from the genograms, we will lead a discussion based on the findings to get the individual responses and reactions to the genogram material. We will look for patterns of functioning by asking whether there are things about the way their family functions that can be seen in previous generations. Patterns of relationships, closeness, distance and cutoffs and triangulating

may also be seen over the generations in the genogram. We will look for repeated patterns related to position in the family and imbalance in families (McGoldrick, 1999).

In the third session, we will focus on the *Drash*, the homiletic meaning of our stories. This can be achieved in two ways: first, a spiritual assessment form filled out by the pastoral care giver for later analysis, and second, by the participants who will review and discuss their answers during the session to Rizzuto's God Questionnaire. Creating a spiritual assessment is a tool that has proven useful, because it forces the pastoral care giver to listen for the spoken as well as the unspoken clues given by the person with whom he/she is speaking. Trying to chart the topography of a person's soul is akin to trying to create a material impression of God: if you aim to do it correctly, it is a nearly impossible task. God and the human capacity for connection to God are infinite. Every individual's assessment is personal and unique, so that each individual assessment form will demand serious thought as we answer the questions below. We will do this "intake" after reviewing the transcriptions of the first two sessions. We understand that "the details of what is being asked are less important than the fact that caregivers have a general methodology to help them organize and understand what they hear," (Davidowitz-Farkas) but the answers may be helpful as we analyze the results of all the focus sessions in Chapter 5.

Spiritual Assessment: A three-dimensional map of holy journeys

A. Presenting Status:

a. grief/loss

b. anger

c. anxiety

d. withdrawal

e. resistance to?

f. loneliness

g. gratitude

B. General Categories:

a. Meaning:

- what are the person's core values that provide him/her with value?
- what is most important in the person's life?
- how has trauma/stress/loss affected the person's understanding of his/her meaning in life?
- what is the person's sense of purpose?

b. Belief and faith:

- how does the person experience God in his/her own life?
- how does the person view him/herself in relationship to God?
- has God treated the person fairly/unfairly?
- how does hope fit into the picture?
- where does doubt fit into the picture?
- how does the person experience comfort?

c. Sin, Justice and Mercy:

- does the person see a corollary between perceived sin and its consequences: i.e. divorce of parents, dissolution of family integrity, severing/changing family relationships?
- how does forgiveness, both by and toward a person, factor into the person's view of self?
- how does guilt factor into the equation?

- what is the role of repentance in spiritual healing?
- how does the fear of divorce factor into the person's well-being?
- is there any value to suffering?

d. Support mechanisms:

- how does the person define community and is this crucial to the person's well-being?
- on whom does the person rely on for love?
- to whom does the person give love?
- has the divorce of his/her parents interfered with or strengthened sense of trust and therefore affected the ability to ask for and accept support?
- does the person feel alienated, abandoned or alone?
- how does the person experience family?

e. Praxis:

- how does the person view the power of spiritual support?
- is finding/relying on such support, either through prayer - fixed or spontaneous - or relying on a spiritual text/religious leader an integral part of the person's healing process?
- are there rituals/blessings/holidays important to person?

4. Pastoral Intervention:

- blessing
- crisis intervention
- family intervention
- reinforce strengths
- grief support
- life review
- empathetic listening
- ritual for group

We will examine Rizzuto's God Questionnaire (see appendix F) to understand whether there is any correlation between our participants' relationship to their parents and their God concepts. After we review the questionnaire, we will share with each group a brief overview of the material culled beginning with Freud on this topic. We ask the participants to share with us what their God concept is, how they view God, what role God plays in their life and ask them to describe their relationship with God. Based on our prior reading of their God questionnaires, we will then draw parallels between their view of their parents and God and ask how both of these relationships have changed after the divorce.

The fourth session focuses on *Sod*, the mystery in the meaning of the story. In this final session, we hope to bring together, the profound psychological and theological connection between one's parents and God and religion, the mystery of it all and the role of healing within a religious community. We will facilitate a discussion, encouraging the group to share what they have learned from the first three sessions and see if they can articulate their theology in light of what they have come to understand from their stories. We will examine how the answers discovered apply to what they have learned through their personal insights into their relationships with their parents and with God.

In the Torah, we are commanded to love God and honor one's father and mother. In the context of this session, we will examine how the commandments affect the participants' lives. Do they love God? Do the participants honor their parents? Have their parents made it possible for them to be honored by their

children? We will discuss what enables them to both love God and honor their parents and what blocks them from doing so. If the situation arises, we will discuss how one can heal if someone for cogent reasons cannot forgive, honor or love their parents as, for instance, after the *Akkedah*. There is no reference in the Torah of Isaac ever speaking to his father again.

We will look at our responsibilities to both God and our parents. We will explore ways that we can love God and honor our parents. We will ascertain whether there is a need or desire to either continue the group or set up individual meetings with the participants and the rabbi.

To conclude the session, together we will create a ritual in a manner similar to the High Holiday ritual of *Tashlikh*, which allows each participant to symbolically release whatever they choose to let go of metaphorically and to determine what insights they would like to hold on to representing any personal breakthroughs they may have had in the group process. We will give each person a piece of paper and a felt tip pen to write down whatever they would like to release and then have them drop the paper into a bowl of water and watch the ink dissolve. Each person will be given an index card to write down whatever they choose to keep with them from the experience. We will then give each participant an opportunity to share any insight with the group they have learned about themselves as we conclude the program.

METHODS FOR RECOGNIZING CHANGE

We will ask each participant to fill out an evaluation form (see appendix D) to determine whether he/she gained any personal insight from our sessions and

see if there was any change in the participants' understanding of their own relationship with God. We will know from their feedback and by the level of their participation in the group discussions, whether or not this project has had any significant impact on them. If their comments reflect a theological and/or a psychological understanding that perhaps was not present when they began this process by their own admission, we will know that we have been successful in reframing their stories. Our goal is to move beyond the *Peshat* to the level of *Sod* and gain deeper insights into an ongoing process and disruption of family life, once divorce proceedings take place.

Chapter 4A - Rabbi Janet B. Liss

I had five participants in my group. They included four congregants and a rabbi's wife from another congregation who learned about the study through Shira's emails to rabbinic list serves.

The first participant was a married fifty-year-old homemaker who is the mother of three. When she was four, her 2-year-old brother died. At eighteen and a college student, her parents separated and divorced when she was 22. Participant "A" felt that the death of her brother destroyed her parents' marriage. Her memories of her childhood start when she was ten. She grew up with the fear instilled by her grandmother that if she ever mentioned her deceased brother's name it would kill her parents. As a child, when she heard his name while they were watching television, she literally waited expecting to see them drop dead and fall off the couch. Her father was having an affair with her mother's best friend. When "A" was in high school, this woman would often eat dinner with "A's" family. When "A" was in college, her mother realized that her husband was having an affair, which everyone else knew about according to "A". Her mother confronted her best friend asking her if she knew who her husband was having an affair with, never expecting to find out that it was her. Her father then moved out and they divorced 4 years later. He remarried soon after the divorce and he and her mother's former best friend have been happily married for 25 years.

"A" bore the brunt of the divorce and her mother considered her a traitor whenever she saw her father. "A" is angry with her father for not leaving her mother prior to having an affair; for not admitting that he was not happy and moving on with his life. Her mother is still bitterly angry with her father and acts as if the divorce just occurred. For years "A" avoided having her parents over at the same time. "It took a long time for me to have a relationship with my father. And my mother, still, you would think that she just got divorced." "A" prefers her father and his wife's company as conversations are light and superficial. Her mother is bitter and suffers from depression; she is too unpleasant for "A" to be around.

"B" is a forty four year old woman. She is married and has two children. She has a half brother from her mother's first marriage that did not last very long. Her mother married the first time at seventeen, as Jewish girls did not have sex before they married. Her parents had a very violent relationship that began with an argument on their honeymoon. Her mother is an alcoholic and her father yelled and screamed. "Daily the kitchen table would fly, then the refrigerator, plates would break, every meal you would sit down and you would wonder what was going to happen, who was going to yell first." Her mother frequently chased her father with a knife. "B" spent her childhood trying to maintain a balance in the home so that no one would scream at each other. In order not to upset her father, she covered up evidence of her mother's drinking, would straighten her brother's room and tried to remain invisible to her parents. "B" also has years of her life that she cannot remember and told "A" that it made her feel good when

she heard that "A" did not have memories either. "B" was very close with her brother who fed her and took care of her and she attributes her survival to his care. When her mother turned on her, her mother told her that she had to be mean to "B" because her father was mean to her brother and her mother had to even it up.

"B's" parents came up for her graduation from graduate school and over the celebratory dinner:

> "So we are eating Chinese food, and Happy Graduation, we're getting divorced. That's how they did it. I was like, yeah, yeah dud. Like why couldn't you have done that 26 years ago? The whole time I was growing up I would say, 'why don't you just leave each other and get a divorce? And their reaction was, 'who would you live with?'"

When "B" would answer an aunt and uncle, her answer would send them into a rage because her father did not speak to them and her mother would be angry that "B" did not want to live with her.

Her mother's divorce attorney did not think she was capable of chasing her husband with a knife, and after the divorce, he married her. Within two or three years of marriage, while in an alcoholic rage her mother stabbed him. They remained married until his death several years later from colon cancer. Her mother was in rehab four or five times and will not admit that she is an alcoholic. She only drinks when she is married. According to "B," her mother has not had a drink since her third husband's death though she still has all of the alcoholic traits.

"B's" father is happily remarried and she is only able to have a relationship with him as long as she agrees with whatever he says and does not express her

own opinion. If she does express her own opinion, her father will cut her off and not speak with her for months. She is worried that her son is at an age where he is beginning to have his own opinions and "B" is aware that her father will probably sever his relationship with him soon because of it.

"B" did not speak to her mother for years and has gone through periods when she did not speak with her father. She describes both parents as being narcissistic and egocentric.

When "B" was asked if she had grandparents, her response was "grandparents who didn't like me because I was like my father. They were my mother's parents. Every time I did something wrong, they said (she hissed) 'you're just like your father.'" "B's" paternal grandparents died when her father was in his late teens and he was very close with his mother and had a lot of issues with her dying. Her father never saw his parents through adult eyes and when he became an adult, he did not know how to parent.

"C" is a thirty one year old married homemaker with one child. Her parents separated shortly after she married when she was 22 and continued to separate and get back together repeatedly until they divorced in the fall of 2003. "C" is the only participant who is actively dealing with the immediate fall out of the divorce. "C" is a middle child. When she was in middle school she found out that her father had been previously married for one or two years to a woman who claimed to be pregnant. She was not pregnant and their marriage did not last long. Her father moved out following 9/11. Her parents still got back together after her father moved out. "C" and her siblings out of frustration had the following

conversation with their mother after one of their numerous breakups, "'Mom, why are you such a doormat? Why don't you just say that it is not okay this time?' I think she wanted to be with my dad because she didn't want to be alone...'"

When "C's" younger sister was born her mother suffered post partum depression. Even though she worked full time, she would come home and just sleep. "C" felt that her parents had sexual problems over the years. Her father liked to spend a lot of time alone in the basement on the computer or building things and had been seeing a woman for at least 5 years prior to the divorce. He informed "C" pulling her aside at her son's birthday party in October that he had married that woman and asked her not tell anyone. When she asked if he was going to inform her mother, his response was "I'm not telling her, it's none of her business. I don't ask her what she is doing, so why should I tell her?" It appears that his wife emailed "C's" mother and told her, as "C's" mother's name was spelled wrong in the email, the name ends in an 'I' and the email spelled it with a "Y" not a mistake that her former husband would have made. Both of "C's" parents are now ill, her mother's undiagnosed illness is affecting her walking and her father has chronic leukemia. "C" attributes both of their illnesses to the stress of the repeated separations and divorce.

Participant "D" was the only one who himself was also divorced. He is married for the second time, has one daughter from his current marriage and a stepdaughter from his current wife's previous marriage. He is forty-eight and his parents separated the summer before he went to college and divorced when he was 22. "D" has a brother who is three years older than he whom he rarely

mentioned. His father is a Holocaust survivor and his mother's mother died from kidney failure after giving birth to their third child when "D's" mother was seven. She and her siblings were put in foster care because though her father was an extremely learned man Jewishly, "he was such a horrible person that no one could get along with him, so even his brothers and sisters wouldn't help take care of his kids, so off they went to foster care."

"D's" parents were disconnected from one and another throughout his childhood.

> "I didn't realize how dysfunctional the family was until I realized what family life is supposed to be. When I was about 9 years old, I asked my mom and dad, do you and dad ever fight? Do you and mom ever fight, because they never fought. At least not in front of the kids, I mean they did not do much communicating at all, but they definitely didn't fight. I didn't know or have a real basis for comparison for how poor their marriage was."

"D's" parents both worked and rarely saw each other. His mother was a teacher and went back to work when he was seven, which was the same age that she lost her mother. His father worked his way up from a used car sales to owning a car dealership. His mother would take 2-month trips all over the world during summer vacations and at 8 years old, "D" was the youngest child in the sleep away camp. His father would visit him on visiting day and according to "D" his womanizing began on those summer weekends to the Catskills, while his wife was off touring the world. While in high school, "D" remembered one fight when he heard dishes being smashed while he was upstairs with a friend, but they never spoke to him about it. According to him, "neither of my parents were very good parents. They were very wonderful people but they weren't very good

parents and they're not good grandparents either." One summer while "D" was at camp, his family moved to another apartment nearby.

> "In my mind there was a move and they would forget about me. I was dreading the end of the summer because I knew that when the busses came back, there would be all of these parents there and my parents weren't going to be there. I don't know where I got the idea from but I was convinced they were going to forget me. I remember the bus ride home and I had terrible knots in my stomach."

This latchkey child felt abandoned by his parents at an early age.

His father came up to camp the summer prior to his leaving for college and told him that they were getting a divorce.

> "This came completely from left field. In retrospect, they didn't really love each. Some people grow apart though I don't think that they were ever really that together. I think that they got married because they both had nothing and they saw in each other the ability to get together and make something work."

His parents divorced well. His mother was interested in making sure that his father would continue to send "D's" brother through medical school and that "D" would have college paid for and get his father's business. He gave her the house and what she wanted and they have remained close throughout the years. Both of them have remarried and the two couples have even traveled together. "D's" mother commented to him ten years ago, "If I knew there were going to be all these many things regarding weddings, grandchildren, I don't think I would have gotten divorced." "D" believed that had it not been for him and his brother, they would have gotten divorced at least ten years earlier.

"D" went to camp for over ten years. He met his first wife there. They were married for 8 years before divorcing. "D" admits that in his first marriage, he

made many of the same mistakes his parents did, as he had no model for communicating within a marriage. He married a second time six years later.

The final participant "E" is a 35-year-old mother of twins who is partnered with a woman who also has twins. She was in college when her parents separated and her father died two years after the separation. "E's" parents fought, her father yelled and screamed and her mother laughed back. He was an alcoholic and he stopped eating dinner with the family when "E" the youngest of three, was five. Dinner at their house prior to this ended up with someone running screaming from the table, usually her running into her room screaming at her brothers. "There was a lot of enjoyment in ganging up on me. My brothers were picking on me and he thought that it was kind of funny."

For years, "E" asked her mother why she did not leave her father. Even though she expected it and wished for it, it came as a shock to her when they did divorce. A drunk driver killed her eldest brother in a car accident when he was 17. This stress increased the distance in the family, despite the desperation and clinging. Her father was even more absent. "E" went for weeks not seeing her father when she was in high school, as she left before her parents got up in the morning and when he came home late drunk, she pretended to be asleep. When "E" was in college, her father began going in and out of rehabs, her brother went into his first rehab as an alcoholic and drug addict the day her father was released from his first rehab. "E" was also an addict. She and her brother went into recovery but her father was not able to do so.

One day her mother walked in their home and her husband said to her, "I called your brother today and told him that we were separating." This was unusual as according to "E" he never called her uncle, as he did not think very highly of him. Her mother was about to start into her normal:

> "'X, do you really want to do this, we're a few years away from grandkids, you know, you have more freedom than ten men do, do you really want'... and then something in her brain told her to shut up and count her blessings and back out. So she said, 'okay.'"

She called "E" and told her that her father asked her (mother) to move out. He told her, "We're separating, you move out."

Her father slowly cut himself off from all of his family members because of the alcoholism. He also had been having affairs for years. When "E" came back from college, she stayed with her mom and visited her father for "an obligatory hour and a half." "He got what he wanted, he was all alone." When he died, her mother moved back into the house.

In the first session after sharing their stories, the group realized that there was significant overlap in their stories. Two had parents who were adopted, two had a brother who had died, two had parents who had been previously married, six parents married after their divorce, alcoholism was a factor is three of their families and four of the fathers had affairs prior to the separation and divorce and one couple led separate lives even though they had not separated. Three of the participants experienced emotional abuse growing up and they all were triangulated in their parents' relationships both as adults and as children. The disconnect portrayed in the Biblical story of Abraham with his two sons Ishmael and Isaac also served as a source of comfort to them as three of the participants

went through a period of time when they did not speak with either one or both of their parents.

The Genograms

The genogram assignment was a very effective tool for the participants. Each of them commented on how much they learned and realized about their families by making the genogram. Putting the family history on paper enabled them to look at their families as a whole and see repeated patterns of behavior within their extended families.

"A" did not come with her genogram. She also had not turned in her God questionnaire and she claimed that she had begun the genogram but had not finished it. The following is what she shared anecdotally. Her maternal grandmother lost a lot of family in the Holocaust and was very bitter. She had conflictual lines between herself and her siblings and did not speak to them for years. She was a widow and then remarried and had children by both husbands. She was very narcissistic and demanded everyone's loyalty and attention. "A's" mother is one of four children and her mother also had many disconnect lines as she learned that pattern of behavior from her mother. "A's" father had one sister who had three children, one committed suicide as a result of a drug overdose, being a product of the sixties. Her mother over time alienated her father from his family. "A" has no contact with her extended family on either side. Her husband has one sister and they are disconnected. The pattern is continuing as "A's" children do not have any relationship with their first cousins. "A" realized in doing

the genogram that she has no family and she is very alone and in search of something.

"B's" mother, an only child found out when she was in her forties that she was adopted. "B" had long before figured out based on when her grandmother had a hysterectomy that she did not carry her mother. Her father severed relationships with his only brother years ago. One of her first cousins is divorced and has remarried. "B's" mother has been divorced twice; married three times and is now a widow. Her father is on his second marriage. There is minimal contact between her brother and her mother and no contact between her brother and his biological father or his stepfather. "B" limits her contact with her mother, which was severed completely for several years. "The most interesting thing that I got from all this is that everyone is disconnected from everyone except for me. I talk to everyone. Everyone asks about everyone else through me." "B's" husband's mother had him in her second marriage.

"C's" father had many conflictual lines between him, his parents, his sister and his son. "C" does not know her first cousins on her father's side because the families were kept apart even though her father was close to the cousins. Her father married young, divorced, married her mother, had three children, recently divorced and married a third time. His current wife's ex is an alcoholic and her son has a substance abuse problem. "C's" mother's brother has married and divorced the same woman twice each time having a child with her and they are estranged from "C's" family. Her uncle has been with his current partner for 20 years though they never married. "C's" parents married after a two-month

engagement and divorced in 2003. "C" married in 1994 had a stillborn child and now has a three-year-old son. Putting the genogram together for "C" was very painful. She felt very detached her family on paper and stated, "I don't feel like this is my family since they just got divorced. I don't like X (new wife) or her family and I don't feel close to my father. It is really upsetting."

As "B" listened to "C's" genogram, she pointed out to "C" that "C's" father always had a secret life. He hid his first marriage from his second family, he hid his relationship with her cousins and he hid the fact that he was having an affair.

"D's" maternal grandmother died in the 1930's and his grandfather never remarried. His mother is the only one in her immediate family who divorced and she remarried an alcoholic who is cut off from his children and close with "D."

"D's" paternal grandparents died in the Holocaust. His father had twin brothers. One lost a wife and children in the Holocaust and he remarried and had a daughter. She is twice divorced. "D" is divorced and remarried a divorcee. The discoveries that "D" made were that his family is larger than he thought, his parents both married into families that have substance abuse and there was more divorce than he realized.

"E's" family and her partner's family have a lot in common. Both families lost a son in an accident. Her partner's father is on his fourth marriage, all of the prior marriages ended in divorce. Substance abuse runs in both families. She and her partner are recovering alcoholics and have been clean for over 15 years. Each of them has a set of twins. "E's" father severed relationships with different people throughout his lifetime. Both of "E's" parents' siblings' first marriages

ended in divorce and they have remarried. What interested "E" were the parallels between her family and her partner's. It also surprised her to see how many of her family members have died.

The Bell Jar Diagram

In the third session, we began by going over the bell jar diagram that was handed out in the end of the prior session to see where the individuals were in their own transitions. "A" did not attend the third session. This did not surprise me since I never received any of her written work. She told me the following week that she forgot about the session, having just come back from a vacation.

When "B" processed the diagram it she did not have the same emotional response that she had experienced doing the genogram and the God questionnaire. The transition began with anger for "B." She was angry that her parents chose to ruin her graduation day by not holding off telling her until the following day. She was then required to move home, help her father pack their huge house and put her life on hold, which also evoked tremendous anger in her. "B" feels the same pulls and manipulation today from her parents.

> "Basically they are still doing it. I don't think that the transition is over. The divorce papers are in but I don't think they ever made it over their anger with each other, which didn't allow anyone else to get over it. They are still very angry with each other."

"B" continues to feel very angry with her parents. Since they will not be in the same state with each other "B" has double events where she invites each parent to one of them and is still expected to cut herself in two for holidays. "B" states that she has spent her life purposely making choices that would anger

them, including her career choice. She is conscious of how she interacts with her husband and is aware when she reverts to the survival mode she used growing up with her parents. She feels that she is trying to be what everyone wants her to be and she does not know who she is. She knows that she is not like either parent, that she is a good mother and a good spouse. She shared a break-through during the third session.

> "So even when I stopped twisting myself inside out to make Alex happy, like tonight as I left he said, ' I don't have dinner," and I said, you can make yourself dinner tonight. I don't think I would have done that 10 years ago. I would have panicked that I have to have dinner and everything has to be perfect and then I can get out. So I don't twist myself now, which is a healthier thing for me."

Two therapists in the past told her to stop speaking with her parents. She stopped speaking with her mother while she was drinking through the last marriage and has not spoken at times to her father. Her parents continue telling her inappropriate things about the other. She jokingly wished to trade parents with "D" parents as his parents refrained from speaking inappropriately with him throughout the years.

The transition started for "C" when her parents first separated ten years ago. Because she was 22 and a newly wed, her focus was not on her parents initially. When she did get upset, they got back together and this was the beginning of a ten-year emotional roller coaster. Her parents seemed like best friends but they were never affectionate. Now as they are divorced, they keep giving her martial advice which she does not want to hear from them. Her parents have a history of being indecisive, a quality that "C" clearly has inherited. Her parents both have told her that it is important for her to be able to support herself and

have her own bank account, which "C" feels is totally unnecessary. She too, rebelled against her parents and did not become a teacher because they wanted her to do so. She got her teacher's certification years later after being unhappy in a job. While she is still conflicted and angry with her father for having an affair for years and then leaving her mother, intellectually, she recognizes that he is happier with his new wife and that they share more interests than he did with her mother. He spills over too much with her and "C" resents hearing what he shares with her about her mother and his new wife. "C" claims:

> "I am still depressed on and off and it comes out in strange ways because I know that I am not myself right now. I feel like I am not my normal self. And I'm just stressed all the time and I feel like my son is having problems. ... It's so funny, I don't feel like I am so emotional about these things and then I get here and I feel like weepy or angry. So the transition is not over. I don't think that I realized that the change was inevitable because part of what made it so difficult was that my parents were so wishy washy and they would go back and forth so many times. At some point my siblings and I were like, 'so just get divorced' because we couldn't take it anymore. And even so I thought I was prepared for it, I was never really prepared for it, and they couldn't make up their minds so I think it made it harder for us to deal with the whole process."

She is still trying to accept the change. She is not inviting both parents over at the same time and she is conflicted about including her father's wife when she has him over. She is also dealing with her husband's anger toward her father. She claims that her father is very narcissistic. Her parents are still calling her to discuss financial settlement issues. Because she lives closest to both parents, she feels like they are both pulling her and making constant demands on her. She feels torn between them. Her father is better able to respect her when she asks him not to share inappropriate conversations with her than her mother is.

There was a very healthy group discussion about making the decision to inform both parents that an event is going to take place and giving them the choice as whether or not to come to it. This conversation was also directed at "B." It was pointed out to "C" that although she is in the midst of this transition, that she needs to be able to address her own needs and put her family's needs before her parents' needs.

"D's" parents' divorce was a shock for him because there was no warning that it was coming. The numbness he experienced at the time he attributed to being busy in college. His parents never discussed the reasons behind the divorce with him. He never spoke about it with his brother. Listening to the other stories, "D" stated:

> "I also thought that I had pretty good parents but now it is reinforced that they were even better... They really didn't have much of a life together, they were pretty much loners. And I think that I definitely inherited that and I am very happy being left alone and it's been quite a source of problems, it probably ruined my first marriage. I've tried real hard not to ruin my second marriage, but the truth is that I am very happy to be alone."

When "D" came back from college, he stayed with his mother because wherever she was, felt like home. For a short while, his parents tried to drag him into the settlement issues and that was very uncomfortable for him. He felt that he always protected and took care of his mother.

> "So it goes back a long way. I always felt bad for my mom and I also knew that my dad was a pretty good guy, it's not like he was an abuser. I didn't hate him or anything and I knew that he wasn't really at fault, so it was a really tough time because I was really torn."

When his parents were separated, he was more concerned about his mother as his father was financially set. He saw his father divorcing his mother and his

mother was divorced *to* his father as she was still financially dependent upon him. Once they settled, it was easier for all of them to move on with their lives. His parents have always been civil to each other and this has made it easy for all of them to be together.

In "D's" first marriage, he followed his father's pattern of never being home. He worked full time and went to law school at night. "Somehow, it never really occurred to me that I never really fully developed a concept of us, because I really never saw it. My dad did his thing and my mom did her thing." Therapy after "D's" divorce enabled him to see what was going on in his marriage. In his current marriage, he has worked out a balance of alone time coupled with equal family time.

The transition for "E" began early in her sobriety and she does not remember much of it. When she first learned of their separation, she went to many AA and ACOA (adult children of alcoholics) meetings and vented and she went to therapy. "E" was stunned by their separation even though she wanted it all of her life. She suffers from chronic depression and does not remember if the depression was worse when they separated. Her father suffered from chronic and clinical depression; he was drinking himself to death and he wanted everyone out of his life. "E" did not feel that she and her brothers were valued by her father, which at times made her furious. The transitional period ended for "E" when her father died two years later. She has a feeling of numbness looking back at the period and does not remember a lot of it. What she learned from it was "nothing lasts for ever and there is no forever. I think that that was the final reiteration of

that lesson, that nothing lasts forever. I don't think that I have ever entered a relationship expecting it to last forever." After having children, she realized that the maternal bond will last forever and her current relationship is the only relationship that she has wanted to last.

After the Bell Jar diagram was discussed, a whole discussion ensued on friendships and how most of them do not have long-term friendships and do not seem to be able to sustain long term friendships. They questioned whether this is because of the divorce or because of the way they were raised and did not come to any conclusions though they offered it to me as a future project thesis. Only "D" has friends that date back to his camp days. I wonder if they did not have friends because they lived in homes that would not have been welcoming to bringing outsiders in because of the chaos in the family units. They have serious questions about why they could not connect with others.

God Questionnaire

The God Questionnaire results were consistent with Rizutto's findings. Though our sample was small, the notion of one's God image being linked to one's parental image was found with the participants.

"B" claims her belief in God is tied to her rebellion against her parents. After her brother was Bar Mitzvah, they dropped out of the Temple, preferring to go skiing on the weekends. She went to Temple and became kosher to anger her parents. She believes in God but she claims a rabbi took her belief away

from her. When "B" was ten years old, she was seriously contemplating suicide because she could not handle the situation at home anymore. She told a beautiful story. She was crying walking her dog who led her down a path into the woods where she was not allowed to go. The 150-pound dog stopped, sat down and she sat with him. Through her tears, she saw a mud encrusted dollar bill. The only part that was uncovered and completely clean was where the words "in God we trust" were written. "B" took the dollar and felt that it was a sign that things would be okay and that she should not commit suicide. Later, she took the dollar to a friend's rabbi and told him the story. He told her it was meaningless, which "took away her belief in God." As I was reading her questionnaire, I was listening to a new CD of Jewish music. As I read the part about the rabbi, I was sitting there thinking about how someone would be so insensitive when dealing with a child while in the background the music was playing. The song that came on as I was pondering her story was very powerful and I brought it in as I saw a message in it for her. I do not believe in coincidences and I feel that everything happens for a reason. I played this song at our session and explained the context of it to her. She began to cry as she listened to the words. After hearing it, she told me that I had restored her believe in God. The following are the lyrics:

The Priestly Blessing, by Peri Smilow

May God bless you with all good.
May God keep all evil from you.
And may God fill your heart with wisdom
And brace thee with all true.
May God lift up God's merciful face
And shine on you for all times
And may God grant you eternal peace.

"B" sees God as in an energy, which she gets from being connected to the community. "B" wants that sense of belonging to a community and knowing where one belongs for her children. This is something she feels her parents took away from her as a child. God is a source of strength for her and it is something that she feels she has always needed, just as she needed good parenting.

"C's" conflicted indecisiveness that mirrors her parents also figures into her feelings toward God. She is unsure of her feelings about God and does not know if she believes in God.

> "There are also times in my life when it would be nice to believe in God. I'm wishy-washy. I feel like I don't really know what I want and it makes everything in life much more difficult... It's easier to please everybody than to figure out what I really want."

(This was also a statement made by "B.")

"C" was raised as a cultural Jew. When other children asked her as a child whether she believed in God, she said yes more as an automatic response than one that was thought out. Being Jewish for "C" is feeling connected with the Jewish people.

"D" picked up the questionnaire three times before filling it out. He had difficulty filling it out and finally told himself, "With all that Rabbi Liss does for us, the least I can do is fill this out for her." He admits that he is confused about his beliefs; he is Jewish and does not really think much about God. He was raised in a very Jewish environment. And though he stated that his parents were not religious they did belong to a Conservadox synagogue and sent him to an Orthodox summer camp for 10 years. His Bar Mitzvah Service which he led lasted 4 ½ hours and he felt closer to God at that point in his life. Looking at his parents'

childhood experiences, "D" questioned whether or not God exists. He is not convinced there is an external God but believes more in himself. "D" feels that he raised himself and he believes in himself. His parents were not there for him emotionally and he does not believe God was there either.

> "The organized religion thing doesn't work that well for me. Having said that, I come here on a Friday night Service and it is a really wonderful feeling that you walk out of the Service with. You feel at peace with yourself, with your family, it has changed, so there are lots of contradictions."

For though he feels more Jewish than God fearing, the absence of God in his life may reflect the absence of his parents in his life as a child.

The God Questionnaire took "E" four days to complete. She had never thought so intensively about God. God like her mother was always a part of her. As a young child, she knows she believed in God. She was very angry with God when her brother was killed. After her father's death, she felt herself connecting again with God. She sent her twins to a Jewish Day School so that they could get the grounding and would know they are Jewish.

During the discussion of the family part of the questionnaire, "D" asked the group if they felt they had raised themselves. "B," "D," and "A" felt they raised themselves and all felt their parents were emotionally absent. "E" also felt that her father was absent while her mother raised her. "C" said both parents raised her.

Love God, Honor your parents

At the beginning of the fourth session, one of the participants raised the theodicy question. While the question was originally presented in light of the Holocaust, there is no question that they were also dealing with it in personal terms. They answered it very maturely taking God out of the question and putting the onus on human involvement, human decisions and human responsibility.

In the discussion about whether or not the participants were able to follow the commandments to love God and honor their parents, it became clear that they took issue with honoring verses respecting their parents and that they were able to articulate much better than in the previous session what it meant to love God.

"A" gave a very mature explanation of the fact that her parents are human and therefore limited and even though they did the best they could, they did not give her what she needed growing up. She can honor them for who they are. "Since God is an ideal and can be whatever you need God to be it is easy to love God."

For "B" God is her strength and whom she turns to regularly. "So it is very easy for me to love God. Honoring my parents, if I am breaking a commandment, well I think that He is nonjudgmental and I think that He would forgive me for that one." "B" has difficulty with both the concept of honoring and respecting her parents whom she feels do not deserve either from her for their past and present behavior. When "B" turned 40, she was able to begin to make peace with herself regarding who she is in relation to her parents. Upon returning

from the third session, "B" was able to go back to writing, something that her mother had taken away from her because of her intrusiveness in her life. "B" would come home from school to find that her mother had found her journals and would continue to write in them for her.

For "C" honoring her parents is a natural act as she loves them. Respecting them for her is also a different issue. She does not respect her mother's inability to stand up for herself or respect her father because of his affair. For her, loving God is about trying to be a better person.

"D" could honor his parents but he did not respect them. He feels that his parents are entitled to "be cut some slack." He does point out the only reason he has contact with some of his family members is because they are related, otherwise he would never see them. With regard to loving God, "when I hear 'love God,' I hear 'love yourself.' If we didn't know it, we learned it in therapy to look out for yourself and be responsible for your own actions and that is more my concept of God."

"E" loved her family growing up but was conscious of the fact that she did not like them most of the time. She had a problem with not loving her father and he felt that as well. She loved and honored her mother who was always there for her. Her mother kept her away from her father beginning as an infant because she felt abandoned by him during her pregnancy and with their other children. Her mother did not want her father to have the unconditional love from a child that she felt he did not deserve. So her mother set "E" up not to love her father and created a horrible relationship for both of them, which punished both "E" and

her father. "E" feels it is just one of a number of commandments that she has broken. Her love for God has always been there. She went through periods of hating God but "no matter how much anger and hatred I felt, I knew I still loved God." She took "a time out" in her relationship with God between her brother's death and her father's death and then came back to God.

Prior to the closing ritual, I asked the group what this process stirred up for them. "A" was forced her to think about issues that she never took the time to confront. The genogram proved to be very disturbing as she realized that she has many first cousins who she does not know. The experience showed her that she is still searching for something though she is not sure what.

This experience had a big impact on "B". It brought back memories that she had blocked out. Especially now as a parent, she does not understand how her parents could be so cruel. She wants to be able to take charge of her life and her own destiny in a positive way that is not connected to rebelling against her parents. "The other thing that is interesting is the role that I played in my family, I still play. I looked at my husband the other day and said, 'I don't want to do it anymore. I just don't want to do it anymore.'" She had breakthrough with her mother earlier that day when her mother phoned to discuss her files. When her mother asked "B" how she was and launched into her agenda while not waiting for an answer, "B" said:

> "'You know what? I've really got to go. I have to go, I can't hear about your files right now. You know, my daughter needs me,' and I got off. Whereas before I would have listened and listened and I just would have felt like this emptiness and anger and you're still doing it to me after all of these years but I'm still allowing it."

The process of talking in this group allowed her to be able to stop her mother and get off the phone feeling good about herself. Having not taken the time in years to write, she is very happy that this experience has inspired her to write once again.

"C" was bothered by her inability to rank her family members in Rizzuto's questionnaire. The total experience showed her that she is not very far along in processing her parents' divorce and that she does not feel grounded when talking about her feelings about it. She is beginning to be angry with her father and understands that it is okay to feel anger toward him. It has been a positive experience for her to be able to share her experiences with others who have gone through this because she has no one else with whom she can share her thoughts and feelings. The group experience was very helpful for her.

"D" spoke of how powerful it was seeing his family's relationships concretized on paper in the genogram. He spoke of how interesting it is that dysfunction attracts dysfunction in his family. He brought up the God questionnaire and framed it again in a story he told earlier of how while thinking about the God questionnaire on the way to work, he almost had a serious car accident. He questioned whether he avoided the accident because God was watching over him, as perhaps God had watched over his father in the camps. Is being saved by God something that is happening in his family as God protected his father and now God is protecting him? At the same time, "D" is still wrestling with God's existence. He also spoke of how difficult it has been for him as a parent to overcome the role modeling he learned from his parents. The group experience

has enabled him to have more appreciation for his parents after listening to others' stories about their parents.

This was a very intense experience for "E." The assignments forced her to think about the group during the entire month. She enjoyed the group experience over individualized therapy and felt it was hard emotionally but found the group process to be a worthwhile experience.

The summary raised another question for the group regarding parenting. Given how they were raised, one of the biggest issues for all of them is what it means to be a good parent. There were clearly questions about whether or not they were "good enough" parents and their fear of not being "good enough." The awareness of being "good enough parents" was very significant as they reflected about their own parents' faults and flaws. They all wanted to give their children what they felt they had missed at home. There was a consciousness on their part of wanting to break the patterns they saw in their parents and still give themselves room to be human.

After the closing ritual, I gave them the opportunity to share either what they wanted to hold onto from the group experience or what they wanted to rid themselves of as a result of the group experience. Only three chose to speak. "A" wanted to release her anger toward her father. "B" spoke of her need to go back to work, which was raised in the context of what being a good parent is. "C" wanted to get rid of her depression and return to her normal self.

"E" then put an interesting question to the group. She asked if the group was glad that their parents waited until they did to divorce or if they would have preferred that they did it earlier.

"A" felt she would have never survived if she had been left alone with her mother at an early age. She acknowledged that she raised herself and she was okay and would have been much worse psychologically had they divorced when she was young.

"B" felt because of the violence and the yelling she would have preferred that they would have divorced sooner.

> "They were just not getting along. I mean there were no happy times, I thought about that after coming to these sessions. I'd go home and say, "they sound so horrible, they chase each other with knives, they throw tables, but you know, it was like that most of the time. The few times that they hugged, I remember crying. I was so overwhelmed that they actually hugged that I just wanted to cry. For me, it would have been better if they moved on."

"C" never knew anything was wrong with her parent's marriage. She believed that she would have been stronger had they divorced when she was younger. She also wished that they would have gotten divorced 10 years ago when they first separated because dragging it out made it much harder for her to cope with it.

"D" made a very insightful remark about his parents. "In retrospect it was a sham marriage really." "D" was glad they waited because the financial burden placed on having two households may have prevented him from enjoying the life he had, including going to camp for ten years.

"E" contradicted herself and answered both ways. On one hand she talked about how her father would have made a great part time dad in contrast to what he was while also saying it was okay that they waited as long as they did. The group called her on this immediately. She was confused and while she raised the question, she could not definitively answer it.

At the end of the fourth session, the group requested that we continue to meet on some basis. Given the intimacy of what was shared in the group, collectively they felt that it would be worthwhile to continue to meet as they had connected with one another and there is a lot more to talk about. We agreed to meet once a month and scheduled the next meeting. "D" decided not to continue.

The Evaluation Forms

In looking at the evaluation forms as our method for determining change and the effectiveness of the group, I culled the following. None of the participants ever had the opportunity to discuss their parents' divorce in a religious setting prior to this experience. Two dealt with the divorce in therapy, one in ACOA meetings and two had not discussed it anywhere.

All of the participants gained further insight into themselves by being a part of the group. "A" shared that she realized how pervasive her brother's death was and that she has spent most of her life in his shadow. "B" was challenged to be open about her feelings and it made her look at her relationship with her parents in a clear way. For "C" hearing others' stories helped her rethink and

re-evaluate how she is dealing with her parents' divorce. She was also surprised that her role as mediator in the family had not ceased even though the family unit had broken up. "D" realized the similarities between him and his parents and he has revisited the issue of a personal God and found a level of improved comfort. "E" wrote that "thinking, feeling, remembering and looking leads to further insight."

The next question dealt with insight gained into how the participant handled his/her parents' divorce. "A" has become more accepting of her father's behavior during the divorce. "B" remembered things that she had forgotten and was able to put them into a better perspective. She commented that she did not handle the divorce as much as she went along for the ride. "C" is still in the process of working through it. "D" shared insightfully that he handled it the same way they handled their relationship and parenting, by ignoring it. "E" did not gain much additional insight but acknowledged that each stage of life gives one a different perspective and it had been years since she thought about it.

The follow up question was whether this program had impacted their understanding of their parents. "A" realized how much damage her grandmother did to her own mother and how deeply it affected her mother's relationship with her. For "B" the answer was no. She felt that she has always understood them but it did impact and reinforce how she wanted to interact with them. There was no change for "C." It renewed "D's" faith in their goodness. For "E" it added a little to the pool of therapy.

It is clear that the God questionnaire put God back into their consciousnesses, raising many issues for them. This was the first time any one of them discussed God in a synagogue in a meaningful way. The first question asked if there are any changes in the way they viewed God. "A" and "E" indicated no change. "A" was absent during the session that we discussed God. For "B" God had been her companion and source of strength. After I played the song for her, she wrote that it did change her view of rabbis as she stated several times that I had restored her belief in God. "C" is not sure though she wrote that she is reevaluating her thoughts and feelings about God and thought about it much more in her solitary moments during this time. "D" felt that he reestablished his concept of a personal God.

When asked what questions this program raised for them all of the responses were personal and different. "A" questioned what her relationship with God is and what she would like it to be. "B" asked who does she want to be now and how is she going to find the answers. "C" questioned why there are not support groups of ACODPs. "D" questioned whether he is being as good a parent as he can be and "E" questioned the connection between her relationship with her parents and her relationship with God.

The aspects that they liked about the program spoke to the power of the group experience. "A" liked the realization that she was not alone. She was surprised at the similarities that many of them shared. "B" liked the interactions between the group members and the shared similarities and feelings. "C" was happy to be able to share her experience in a Jewish setting, and learned from

the others' stories. "D" also was interested in hearing the others' stories. "E" enjoyed all of it and specifically the writing assignments.

Four expressed a desire into continue in a group because they felt it would benefit them to become an ongoing support group and one specified this group. Two expressed interest in counseling with a rabbi and two with a therapist. "D" was the only participant who did not want to pursue this, yet when the group decided at the end to meet monthly, he was also willing to come. In the end when the group met again, he chose not to continue unless I needed further help or clarification for my thesis.

The next question asked whether this program would improve their relationship with a) God, b) their parents and c) with their significant other. "A" answered possibly to God and no to the others. "B" answered yes to God and that the program gave her back something that had been taken away from her and no to the others. "C" answered that it was possible with God because she was thinking about it more and that it may help her with her parents down the road, as it is too raw now. She also felt that it would help her communicate better with her spouse as she can now communicate with him through the "lens" of this experience. "D" answered very much so with God, yes with his parents and perhaps with his significant other. "E" answered the same for God and her mother, "it has made me re-examine it, but I don't think it needs improvement. I'm okay with what it is." It is a good possibility that it will help with her significant other.

The participants in different discussions kept coming back to the genogram experience, so much so that I was very interested in seeing what they would write to the question of whether the genogram was helpful in understanding the divorce in their family circle. For "A" it helped her see the fragmentation of her family. "B" saw there was one other divorce outside of her family. "C" found it very interesting. She forgot about her father's first divorce. "D" saw how the family was structured in the 30 years after the divorce. "E" said yes.

All of them felt that this program was worth replicating in other congregations.

When asked what they would change about the program, "A" wanted to extend the sessions. "B" would like to have had another ½ hour each session to process what they spoke about, freely together. The best session for her was the third when there was more cross talk dialogue. "C" would not have changed anything. "D" felt some participants got off topic at times. "E" liked the weekly meetings, as there was enough time to process what happened but not too much time to lose the focus. She would warn people in future groups not to wait to the last minute to do the God Questionnaire or the genogram, as they both require a lot of time. She felt that rushing through them is a disservice to the study and to the participant.

Chapter 4B - What happened? Rabbi Shira Stern

My first hurdle was gathering together rabbis who would both fit the qualifications and have the time and desire to devote themselves to the group process. The responses I received from my e-mail invitation to a variety of rabbinic lists was fascinating, and fell into the following categories: 1. Colleagues who told me they would be very interested in reading the final product, but would not participate in the project. 2. Colleagues who referred other colleagues to me. 3. Colleagues who themselves were struggling being an ACODP at this time. 4. Colleagues who were in the midst of divorce, wondering how the process of dissolving their marriages would impact their children/step-children. We clearly touched a sensitive area, which confirmed for us that such a project is both needed and currently unavailable, at least for clergy.

Originally, I had accepted six colleagues from the tri-state area: one ultra-orthodox *chassidishe* rabbi had to drop out before we began because scheduling changes made it impossible for him to attend all the sessions, and one colleague came to the first session, having assumed this project was a didactic/training session for rabbis, and left after assuring us that his parents were still married.

This left me with four participants, who ranged in age from 47 - 55, with two women and two men in attendance, with there was one Orthodox rabbi, one Conservative rabbi, one traditional, and one Reform rabbi. Both men were married with children; both women were single without children.

The first participant was a traditional 48-year-old married man, with three adult daughters, one of whom was married. He himself had been married for 27

years to the same woman. He had grown up in the Southwest, and shortly after college, he moved to the East Coast, as far away from his family of origin without actually leaving the country. He maintained that the tenuous relationship he has been able to have with his parents is directly attributable to this physical distancing, as his two siblings who have remained in the same town with his parents have had stormy or nonexistent relationships with them. TT is the oldest of the three children.

His parents divorced one year after his own marriage in 1977, after a very stormy relationship. He describes a rather large extended family, with a clear delineation between his father's more traditional immigrant family and his mother's less religious, financially more affluent, 4th generation American Jewish family.

His father remarried twice, and was divorced from the second wife after a year, and is currently estranged from his third wife. It is interesting to note that both of TT's father's parents were divorced as well, and TT's sister is also divorced, thus spanning three generations. On his mother's side, one sister was divorced. There was no infidelity on the part of his parents, mirroring the experience of the other three participants.

He is closer to his mother than he is to his father, whom he describes as "cantankerous and stubborn to a fault." Until he looked at his father's side on the genogram, he had not realized that he was not the only one to have had problems with the man. TT's father had a difficult relationship with his father and many of his 7 siblings. When seeing all the family relationships on the genogram,

TT realized that in part his own life has been a process of breaking the "family traditions of anger and severed relationships."

When his parents finally divorced, he described the event as a moment of celebration, rather than a disappointment:

> "... when we learned about our parents' divorce, it was almost like a *simcha*. We said, "What took you so long, you were miserable," so maybe the divorce is not a failure, it's part of a process. It means the marriage was a failure... [but] my parents, each portray themselves as a victim, having been victimized by the other person, which is why there is no acknowledgment of the responsibility."

To a degree, TT has been triangulated in his relationship with his siblings and their father and his siblings and their mother. He has also served the role as rabbi to his siblings, who have assumed that somehow he ought to have a more sophisticated and well thought out approach to dealing with their parents *because* he is a rabbi, a role he is learning to reject.

Although in the family section of the God questionnaire, TT places his father last of 10 in the list of those he loves, he also claims that he felt closest to his father because of his father's "unconditional love" for him, and at the same time most distant from his father, because of "his emotional abuse." TT was this father's favorite child, who would tell TT that he loved him even when TT was disappointing him. This dissonance was particularly difficult for TT's wife, who would witness the relationship between father and son and finally decided that she did not want to see her father-in-law anymore, and refused to allow him back in their house.

Both he and his wife have good relationships with their children, understanding that while raising children is never perfect, they have been lucky. TT has made a conscious effort to change the way he might have acted toward their eldest daughter, using similar language as his father has used with him, but with an important caveat:

> "He says ... even stupid things, "you're still my little boy." I mean, come on. The kind of thing you think you'll never say to your children." I'm 48 years old. Who knows if I won't say that to them. I've said it to my 23 year old, but I've said it with a qualification: "you'll always be my little girl because that's the way I picture you, but I know you're an adult. [I say that] because I don't want her to think that I'm infantilizing her. But my father never qualified his remarks."

The second participant, BB, is a 55-year-old woman, who entered the rabbinate after two careers as a teacher and a businesswoman. She is unmarried, has had several relationships and lived with one man for 9 years. After they broke up, they continued to have a good relationship. She has one brother, who spent several decades as a career military man, and he has been married for 33 years and has children of his own. BB is close with her niece, in particular. BB lives with her 83-year-old "vibrant and terrific" mother, and serves in an academic position in a specialized training facility for clergy. She holds national Board seats for several national groups and is active in her nondenominational seminary. She identifies herself as a Conservative Jew.

BB relates a stormy relationship between her parents; it took three tries for her mother to finally leave her father, which coincided with BB declaring herself as an emancipated minor at 16. She has several clear memories of her

father's emotional abuse toward all three family members, remembers at age 4 whispering to her older brother of 9, "don't worry, he'll die soon." While she does not remember consistent physical abuse of her mother and brother, she describes the seminal moment which propelled her toward severing any relationship with her father:

> "I wanted some security that I didn't have to go back ... [because] ... I didn't want to see him. We left shortly after one night when his rage got a little out of control and he started to hang me and it was a very surrealistic thing. I knew at the time that he was not really trying to hurt me, that he was just trying to hurt her and I was simply the vehicle. And I was able to get the rope off by screaming some things because it sort of shook him out of whatever trance he was in. I didn't want to see him in particular, and because I was in college at sixteen and a half we got me declared an emancipated minor because I was working part time so it wasn't that complicated to do. Subsequently I changed my name because when you look at the number of times one writes one's last name I didn't want to carry that with me; I wanted a divorce of my own."

Her decision not to marry was a conscious one, as she says she has no really good role models for marriage. She has spent a great deal of time in therapy dealing with issues stemming from her experiences growing up, and so this was not the first opportunity for her to address how the divorce affected her life. She was emphatic during the preliminary interview that our original premise about parental divorce was not accurate for everyone; we had assumed that the event would be detrimental to the children, and not a relief. We included her in the study to provide balance; I found that in the rabbinic group, however, everyone agreed with BB.

BB has also had serious medical issues, which has put her life into a different perspective. Her resources are now focused on regaining her health,

but she attributes her experiences as a child and a teenager to her tenacity in dealing with life-threatening illness:

> "It's very complicated with this neurological problem, much more complicated than before. I have to be constantly hyper vigilant about what I eat, and what I breathe, and what medications I take and what I haven't and it's my very vigilance that's keeping me alive. Anything less would lead me on a serious path toward disaster. So the world as I know it has changed over the last few years. Though I could also say that all that was preparation for this ... Learning how to stand on my own. Learning how to say no to doctors, learning how to get second and third opinions - learning how to ask for what I need. Not willing to be cowered by authority; there's no authority that absolutely intimidates me; I may be respectful but ...but all of that learning [how] to stand up to authority has served me well these last few years."

BB comes from a religious family: her maternal grandfather had been a traditional Jew in Russia, and his father had been a rabbi, but he did not like what he saw of Orthodoxy on American soil, so he moved toward Conservative Judaism. BB speaks, however, of the strong women in her family who ought to have been the rabbis. She describes her maternal grandmother and her mother as gifted healers, whose ability to nurture a person to health was as much physical as it was emotional. The only vulnerable woman in BB's family was her paternal grandmother, who, though she had left her husband several times because of abuse, always returned to him until she died at 50. The family "secret" promulgated by the family doctor was that BB's grandmother died to escape the horrors of her marriage.

My third participant is a 48-year-old woman, single and an administrative professional in the Jewish Community. She graduated from college at 18, attended rabbinic school and was ordained in 1979. She puts enormous value

on education and intellectual excellence, inculcated by her parents, who are both PhDs, her father in engineering, her mother in physics. JJ's maternal grandparents were divorced when her mother was 5 (separated when she was 3). Because her grandmother had been divorced, she lied about her age so that she could remarry. JJ's mother spent all her time reading while her grandmother ran a beauty shop.

JJ's mother was an only child as was JJ, so this was the beginning of a pattern in their family. While JJ stated that she would have gotten married but never thought truly about having children, she said that were she to have had the choice, she would have had only one.

Her maternal grandfather also had been divorced, and JJ's mother considers her stepfather to be her real father rather than her biological one, with whom she had little or no contact. Because both her grandparents had divorced, her parents, who were married in 1940, continued the pattern by divorcing after 26 years.

JJ officiated at some of the funerals of her grandparents, whom she "loved to death." She went to school locally so that she could care for both of her grandmothers, and after ordination, she moved to Washington to be close to her last remaining grandfather.

JJ's father was born in the United States - as were his parents - and her grandparents all met and married in America, all children of immigrants. After the divorce, JJ's father remarried twice more. The story of the divorce was a long one, as JJ's parents lived apart for a good deal of the time for work reasons, and

would be together only on weekends. JJ, as did the other three participants, claimed that she was upset over being told about her parents' divorce for a single day, and then moved on, realizing that the fighting could stop. She asserted that there was no residual damage to her as a result of the divorce, although since her parents had lived virtually apart for a number of years, she developed unique relationships with each of them. This factor may have contributed to her relatively easy adjustment to the divorce. Unlike the situation for the other three participants, though, JJ's parents never spoke about the divorce, nor about one another, once the documents were signed and sealed.

JJ's parents were not happy that she wanted to be a rabbi, because they wanted her to become an MD/PhD. Her mother wanted JJ to change the world. Her mother insisted:

> "[Law school and rabbinic school] is not a proper education: you're not doing original work. You're not going to do groundbreaking work in the world, you're not curing cancer, you're not creating new computer programs for the world, you're not doing anything that would leave a long legacy [after you died.]"

JJ did not get married because, as she said, nobody asked. But she was well treated as a child, despite the fact that her father did not treat her mother well. She can remember hearing them fighting over sex, because her room was next door. "I remember that one time when I was in High School, my mother got her period and my father was really mad at her, and I told my father the next day, "don't you dare do that again." JJ has had no trouble standing up to authority figures if there is a perceived injustice to be righted.

As for her parents, education was paramount; she had tremendous freedom as long as she did well in school. Her achievements were always within an academic context, and while they were not thrilled JJ became a rabbi, each time her name appeared in the press, her mother and grandmother were delighted. As with a number of women who were pioneers in the field, JJ's accomplishments in her professional life have led the way for future generations of Jewish women seeking to be rabbis; the significance of that fact largely overshadowed the emotional reaction to the divorce.

JJ's mother is now debilitated by a stroke and leg amputation; she is also aphasic and therefore needs round the clock care. JJ attends to her mother full time twice yearly, when her stepfather travels to visit with his own children.

Both of JJ's parents married quickly after the divorce - her mother married her physics professor - and both to non-Jews, a point of contention between her parents and JJ. JJ strongly feels that the Jewish people and Jewish continuity must be the primary responsibility of the Jewish community, and JJ spent considerably more time on this issue than the divorce itself.

My fourth and final participant was a 47-year-old male, Orthodox rabbi, married with one child. There are health-related issues and secondary infertility issues that are recurring situations in CY's immediate family and have overshadowed some of the less critical, though important, aspects of CY's life.

CY is more familiar with his father's family than he is about his mother's family. CY's paternal grandfather immigrated to this country from Minsk, his grandmother from the Ukraine. He returned to Russia, having fled the army, to

rescue his wife and her sister, and became active in the communist party. He was on the Politburo until he broke away from their ideology. His father was described as a very strict man and was reputed to have had at least three wives and stepbrothers, and family lore suggests that CY's grandfather joined the communist party as a rebellion against his upbringing, which might have been somewhat religious. CY only knew one of his four grandparents, and then, only peripherally.

His mother had a very stormy relationship with her mother, whom she almost cut off, having disliked her intensely. His mother's father died when she was 2 ½ and she blamed her grandmother for the poverty they grew up in, for neither getting a job nor getting married again. His aunt was born in 1915 and his father was not born until 8 years later in 1923, so there may have been an issue of secondary infertility. There may have been miscarriages. This pattern is replicated by CY and one of his sisters.

There are several instances where a relative has assumed the role of another when needed; CY's great-aunt played the role of grandmother to CY and his 2 sisters and his mother replicated a similar type of relationship with his cousin, who adopted a child from Peru, becoming the adoptive grandparent.

There are cases of mental illness that span several generations of his family: his sisters and he had a conflictual relationship with their father, who was mentally ill and his sister married someone who has a conflict with his mother, who is also mentally ill. Furthermore, CY's first cousin had a very conflictual relationship with his father, and subsequently got divorced after an abusive

relationship with his wife and kids. His cousin himself was mentally ill, which was revealed to the family after the divorce. Conflict on both sides of CY's family between the generations is a recurring theme and the physical separation between parents and child perhaps is a result. There was so much conflict in CY's nuclear family that both of his sisters emigrated to Israel.

Another pattern present in CY's life is that traumatic situations are catalysts for bringing family members together. CY has replicated this pattern with his wife during several life-threatening medical situations. There are several such events in CY's extended family's life: during times of illness, danger and death. The most life-changing traumatic event was the death of his first child, after a long period of infertility. Common to all four participants was the presence of some kind of verbal/emotional abuse. CY's father was a frightening man who managed to cower both his children and his wife into obeying him by shouting. This raging behavior was also present in CY's father's relationship with his own father, and his first cousin's relationship with his wife and with his father, CY's uncle. CY was able to see how pervasive this behavior was once he looked at his genogram, and articulated how he tries hard to break the cycle of anger in his own life. Despite the anger that had been leveled against her, CY's mother nonetheless followed her family's tradition of watching over the ill by being supportive to her ex-husband, allowing him to live with her when he needed shelter, and was present to identify the body of her ex at the time of his death.

Finally, rebellion is a recurring theme: CY's great-grandfather was a believer in the religion of Judaism; his son became a communist; his son

became a cynic rejecting everything and proclaims himself to be a moral relativist and CY once again embraced an observant life. To parallel CY's immediate family: CY's aunt also maintained the socialist ideology, and her children grew up *irreligious* - the same kind of rebellion, and *her* children have become orthodox and moved or will move to Israel.

The Bell Jar Diagram

The Bell Jar Diagram, (appendix C) which I provided for my group members at the first session could be considered both a complete failure and a conservative success at the same time. The "changes in self-esteem during transitions" presupposed that the divorce of their parents had a deleterious effect on the participants. As stated above, all four of my group members were gratified by their parents' divorce because the tension, anger, alienation and anxiety that preceded each announcement far outweighed any stigma or shame or depression felt by the actual divorce process itself. This will be further discussed in chapter 5, but while the original premise that was supported by the Bell Jar diagram was accurate for Janet and for me; it was important for us to realize that others might have a completely different perspective.

Every member looked at the diagram and disagreed with every stage listed: they did not feel numbness, or denial, or depression when faced with the news that their parents were no longer going to continue the charade of marriage: for some it provided, instead, intense relief that the negativity in which

they were living, which had become the elephant in the room, could finally be acknowledged and then released. None of the four felt the need to force themselves to accept the reality, because they long accepted the fact that their parents' marriage was not ideal. One member, TT, when asked whether the divorce had any effect on his own memories of childhood, redefining them so to speak, first claimed not, and then acknowledged that his memories and his parents' memories of the same time period were vastly different. When I asked if the divorce negated some of the good memories as well, or distorted or refashioned his past, TT replied:

> "I think I had a pretty good childhood, and I told my parents that, and they were a bit surprised to hear it. I even told them that there are specific values that are important in my life that I think I learned from them, as well as things neither I nor anyone else should repeat. Maybe in that sense, their marriage only lives in my mind. They pretend it never happened, or when they talk about it, they only have bad things to say. My father can't let go of anything and of course he dredges up things that happened years ago. I mean, my parents have been divorced for 25 years ... They still talk about the other, and still with a lot of anger and bitterness - a lot of bitterness. And one time I even challenged them, "Maybe you still have feelings for the other one" and that was absolutely the wrong thing to say. Both of them reacted very badly to that. Maybe I'm the only one who thought ... My mother said to me, "it wasn't all that great - get over it." So I said, "don't shatter my memories."

But the realization that his recollections were either a reconstruction of his past or a figment of his imagination happened right then in the room; it was not something he had thought about prior to this experience. It might be interesting to have the members of the group redo all three exercises (in the best of all possible worlds) now that they have developed a little more insight into their parents' lives.

JJ was stunned that TT's parents ever referred to the other parent, because hers never, *ever*, spoke about the other, for good or for bad. "My parents have never said a word about each other since the day the separation agreement was signed. Of course, my mother asked me to ask my father to give her a get, and that's probably the only time I've heard my mother utter my father's name in 21 years." She speaks about her own memory of childhood with fondness, but when she mentioned her parents' marriage, she wondered about how such a significant portion of their adult lives could be erased as if those years had never happened:

> "Now, it's like my parents were never married. They put so many years into that, and now it's like a blip on a screen... I have so many memories of my childhood with both my parents together but it's like ...a long time ago... Yeah, it happened but now I don't think about it as happening. And I had lots of experiences with each parent alone, so ... [maybe the times I remember of them together - happy - don't exist.]"

The Genograms

One of the four participants came in with a thoroughly detailed genogram, neatly written so that the information and the relationships between the generations could be understood. One brought in a simple diagram of four generations of her family tree, and two participants did the genograms just before the second session started. Three participants would have wanted the assignment for the genograms to be given prior to the first session, and one claimed to be "spatially challenged." I found the rabbis to be less open to the potential the genogram offered than I expected, and in retrospect, would have better prepared them by

walking them through the process, despite the fact that I provided them with a detailed model of Abraham and Sarah's genogram.

TT, who came with the genogram filled out, found patterns he had not previously noticed; i.e., the clear line of religious observance of the two sides of his family. When he suggested that the religious lines could be divided by folding the page in half, he was able to graphically show us how his father and his mother's families came from vastly different cultural and religious worlds, which may have contributed to the eventual dissolution of his parents' marriage.

BB gave us a detailed verbal relational charting of her family tree, including emotional and physical abuse between spouses, and between children, and between parents and children. Due to neurological impediments, the actual charting of the genogram became too difficult a task, for which BB then compensated by giving a very detailed recitation of what her genogram might look like. In her evaluation, she stated that she still did not understand the value of the genogram, because she still was not sure how to create one.

One participant saw patterns in his hastily constructed genogram that he had not seen before; at several points during his verbal description of the assignment, he used the words, "Another interesting thing ..." and "Oh, by the way," thereby signaling to us yet another personal insight. CY was able to discern several clear patterns in his family tree: abuse, infertility, being present in times of crisis and supportive between the generations. He spent considerable time looking over the overall work he had done, and felt a compelling need to share as much as possible with us of what he had learned.

JJ created a three page genogram - one almost impossible to read without companion notes which she supplied verbally. It is interesting to note that she supplied much more detail than I had originally asked, including Hebrew names (written in Hebrew) and occupations. In particular, she provided Hebrew names for extended family, a feat most Jews cannot accomplish. She also had an enormous body family information - many generations of cousins and extended family were included in her diagram and she reinforced her ties to these extended family members with anecdotes about each one.

Common elements presented themselves: emotional abuse existed in all four genograms; alienation, severing of relationships, uncontrolled rage and conflictual relationships were all included in the exercises. The genograms, in retrospect, provided the participants with the structure in which to place their stories, and while the results were not as I had anticipated they would be, they were useful nonetheless. A secondary benefit of the exercise was that it provided the participants with a tool they can use from now on, either in an introspective activity or in the professional capacity as pastoral care givers or pastoral counselors. In addition, each participant took advantage of the opportunity to tell his/her own story, which further underscored the need for clergy to find safe and receptive places to articulate what is true for them.

God Questionnaires:

By far, the biggest revelation was in the session devoted to the God questionnaires. The reason we had structured the project to cover two groups, one comprised of congregants and the other of clergy, was based on the assumption that the rabbis' group would have a more sophisticated, better articulated theology than the lay group. While the lay group results were consistent with Rizutto's data, i.e., that one God's image is linked with one's parental image, and the rabbis' did in fact differentiate between God and their parents, all but one of the rabbis had a personal view of God.

TT feels like God is inscrutable and what he loves the most about God is "His amorphousness because it challenges me to believe in the abstract." And while TT finds following *mitzvot* to be his most important duty to God, and prays regularly, he clearly stated both in his questionnaire and in the discussion that he does not expect any response from God. It is interesting to note that TT deflected my "God questions" twice, discussing only references to family bonds. When I questioned him about this he said:

> "(Laughter.) I don't know enough about God to be able to talk that much about God. I mean, I'm an observant Jew and I probably don't have as well developed a theology as my less observant but more introspective "sistern and brethren." It's not been something that's always been ... I mean I feel life has great meaning in the details, in ritual and being observant. I don't struggle with a lot of theological issues in my life. Maybe it's a form of denial; rather than try to struggle with them, I choose to say that God is inscrutable. I choose not to have to explain to myself certain issues and questions that I find to be difficult and troubling, when it comes to theology. But I'm still a *davvener* ...[but] I think I have an arm's length relationship with God."

TT feels that love of God is not important to him, "because I do not expect a direct return on my investment." And yet, when asked about the feeling he gets from his relationship with God, he said he receives "ambivalent comfort" because sometimes it is like parent and child and at other times like husband and wife." That was as close to paralleling the Jewish view of God as Parent (*avinu malkeinu)* and God as spouse (see references in Chapter 2, Religious Principles regarding God as Israel's husband) as we heard in the discussion.

Because TT does not expect miracles, neither does he blame God for things, but he does feel that God punishes human beings for "disobeying His commandments." In retrospect, that was similar to TT's ambivalence about his father, with whom he has a love/hate relationship.

> "Well, the family questionnaire was interesting. I said, 'the family member I like the most was my father because of his unconditional love.' So despite (laughter) all of this, I've talked about all the bad things about this man, about the issues and things I've had with him, but I haven't talked much about his good qualities... Then, there's question 2: 'who is the member of my family I feel more distant from, and it's my father, because of his emotional abuse.'"

TT was able to articulate that he needed his parents' approval, even if he didn't get it, which is diametrically opposed to his intent to obey God's commandments while not needing divine affirmation. "Even if I stop believing in God, I'll probably still get up and *davven* every day." The issue of approval is directly linked to TT's own behavior: he stated that he had never been a "bad Jew" – but that he wanted people to understand that he could be a "bad boy."

> "You want to know something funny? Three times a week I work out with a personal trainer, my mother gave me this T shirt. My mother's an artist,

> she went to this Andy Warhol museum and comes back with a T shirt that's black, with screaming silver lame, the word "bad." My mother says, "here, you need this shirt, sometimes you have to be a bad boy." So I put the shirt away and never thought about it, until one day, I ran out of clean workout clothes, so I put the shirt on. And they know I'm a rabbi at this gym. So I walk in, take out my jacket, and these 20-something trainers are standing around and they said, "You can't wear that shirt." S o I said, "why not?" "Because you're a rabbi - you can't be bad." "Well, this one is, get used to it." Sometimes, I'm a bad boy. When I come here, if I want to be a bad boy, I'll be a bad boy."

Can one be a "bad person" and still be a "good Jew?" Is there a correlation between our parents behaving badly – i.e., engaging in verbal, emotional or physical abuse – and our feelings about God behaving badly – i.e., being vengeful, or capricious or not preventing evil from entering the world?

TT spoke movingly about his spiritual experiences, most of which occurred in connection to fulfilling commandments: i.e., responding to *pru u'revu* – being fruitful and multiplying, or seeing a special place in Israel, or serving members of the Jewish community. He described a situation where some of his college students helped bury a man with no family, providing the deceased with the requisite number of a *minyan.* "This is the ultimate way one Jew treats another Jew. If there is any question about the presence of God someplace, it was the presence of those Jews in that cemetery that day."

CY felt that God has always taken fourth place in his understanding of what it is to be a Jew, with the Jewish people, the ethical expectations, God and ritual completing his conception of Judaism. He feels no closeness to God, and he struggles with whether he does or does not believe in a personal God. Some of the ambivalence stems from clear issues of theodicy: his fiancé's near-death

experience, their infertility problems, and the death of their first child – all these contributed to his feelings of anger and hurt:

> "And the feeling that if God wanted to do something - even not a big thing - we'd have children. We'd have our biological children. Then more medical problems with my wife. It felt like we were being picked on. No medical explanations of why this was happening; a bad reaction to a fertility drug cost my wife her uterus. And then, two years ago, losing our child. And three communities were praying. I can't tell you how many people were praying and then, she died."

CY felt the very question of his parents' divorce being as devastating as the losses in his life was ridiculous. He does not believe that God rewards or punishes in this world, yet he does believe in a world to come, when the notion of reward and punishment will occur. He still is angry at God, but is willing to say, "we can be friends for the moment." CY requires some response to his prayers, to his questions, to his wondering about God's presence. He has no real answers, but some important questions. He related a long story about being a 16 year old on a teen tour in Israel, camping in the desert under a blanket of stars. During their campfire discussion, the participants were asked whether they should devote themselves to humanity or to the Jewish people.

> "He was torn, but finally answered, "I know I can contribute a lot, and I think it's better that I give that to humanity." And just at that moment, a meteor streaks through the sky, and I thought, God was answering me. There are times in my life when I have felt "in sync" with God's plan for me and somewhere I got off line, off the rail and I'm wandering in this desert, no longer privy to what God wants me to do... When I was applying to rabbinic school, I talked about the incident with the meteor, and I wonder if way back then, God wasn't saying yes, God was saying no. Maybe I was supposed to devote myself to my people, which is why I'm a rabbi."

He finds some correlation, however, between the estrangement with his parents and his estrangement from God. When he speaks about his father in the

same context of broken relationships, he claimed that he had never severed his relationship with his dad for long despite the fact that his father would never apologize for anything ... Neither does God: not for the minor infractions or the larger ones, i.e., tragic deaths. "In some ways, having read some of Rizzuto, that's why I'm finding my way back to God. I don't expect the apology for having my daughter die. That I grew up ... Love was assumed but never really shown. So, I didn't get it from my parents, so I'm not getting it from God either." During this entire discussion, CY was twisting the God questionnaire as if he were wringing water out of it, clearly agitated by the subject. I suggested he consider adopting the name *Yisrael* – one who wrestles with God.

JJ was very matter fact about God: "Me? I'm not a big God person," and felt the God questionnaire to be irrelevant to her. But she felt an intense connection to Jewish people, and to doing Jewish rituals and following commandments. She did not struggle theologically – she would rather study Jewish texts. Despite this, she was quick to relate four religious experiences in her life. The first instance was when she was in the 6th grade, and saw a picture of Zechariah Frankel – an American Jewish Zionist who loved the Hebrew language:

> "I told my teacher that I wanted to be like Frankel because he was a proper intellect and he liked being very observant, but he wasn't a big believer. He wasn't a fundamentalist. I think being a fundamentalist is a bad thing and I think that people use God in that context."

The second instance was bringing together a group of young students to help watch over a body – the parent of a classmate – before burial, a ritual called *shmirah*. JJ is deeply committed to translating "God's work" into acts of

loving-kindness, working at a shelter once a month and being a part of a *hevreh kaddisha* – a burial society.

Her third experience was when she had an *aliyah* when she was admitted to her professional organization in 1985. "It was one of the most religious experiences of my life. It was wonderful."

Her fourth experience involved seeing actual fragments of discarded Jewish holy books (called *genizah*), and seeing the name of the 12th century Jewish scholar, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, fragments of parchment. She spoke about this in a voice hushed and filled with awe. "I sat all day and looked at these fragments and I could see these documents that were hundreds of years old. And I saw *birkat haMazon*, and this looked like the *Amidah*. I was in heaven. That touched me."

She, too, does not believe in a personal God; neither does she believe in miracles.

> "I was raised in a family where it's all about the Jewish people. Although I'm a deist. I really believe that God created the world and that's there's a force greater than human beings. I don't pray "to whom it may concern." I pray to Adonai."

BB was clear about distinguishing between spirituality -- and a profound belief in a personal God – and religious trappings, which she referred to as "man-made - I'm saying man-made deliberately, not person-made. And these denominations because they are person-made can be toxic. God is not toxic." She feels that the practice of Judaism in and of itself is less important to her than belief in God.

> "I think too much of it is person-centered as opposed to God-centered. I do have to believe in something I say, or I can't say it. I don't want to say it if I think it's hypocritical. I want to believe that my words have meaning, and so I won't say things by rote or because someone tells me I should do it. So I am less engaged by Judaism than I am by God."

BB has had a number of mystical experiences in her life, which she chose not to reveal, but said that she has experienced God from the time she was 4 years old. She felt that in very profound ways, she is a rabbi because she believes it is what God wants her to do.

> "When the idea of it came to me in way when I could not ignore it any longer, keep on pushing it away, I said to God, if You're talking to me, I need to know it in a way that I know you're talking to me. I need a sign, and I got a sign. And then because I didn't want to do it, much like Jonah, I said, well that could have been for me, but I don't really know that, it could have been for others. I need to know that this is what you want me to know, undisputedly for me, and I got a sign. And no, I won't say it out loud because it doesn't matter what it was."

Again, she spoke of her mother and grandmother as healers – perhaps, an attribute of God for her – but nonetheless, she felt that her skills as a teacher were given to her because that was in God's plan for her. She also introduced questions of theodicy in relation to her serious illnesses throughout her life, and she was willing to entertain the notion that there is a satanic force that struggles with God in control of the universe, referencing the beginning chapters of Job. However, she did not associate any connection between her abusive father and God. She has had questions about abandonment by God and could provide a basic answer, "I must have done something to deserve this ..." but at the same time she understood that this is what many people do when confronted with what happens when bad things happen to good people.

For BB, "God is everything ... I do believe God is more important than Judaism is." Neither ritual, nor formalized prayer, nor denominational practice supersedes that thought.

The Evaluations

I found a good deal of resistance to filling out these forms, because they felt they had already shared a great deal with the genograms, the stories and the God questionnaire. There was a common thread of feeling comfortable with other rabbis, and each expressed gratitude that they had a venue in which to share their stories with colleagues. TT made a point of mentioning that he wished everyone who thought rabbis knew all the answers and did not have clay feet could have listened to the discussions. Some would have wanted a better genogram explanation, and suggested that we start with them, rather than with the telling of the stories. JJ wanted more time to continue the discussions, but was not sure whether this program could be replicated in synagogues. "It would depend on how much energy it would take to run it – what would be the bang for the buck? Especially since we have some many other battles to fight like the survival of the Jewish People."

BB felt that this program would work in synagogues because she believed that most people have not invested the time or energy to work through these issues. She thinks that too many people go through life with great disconnects and need a place to work through those issues.

The Ritual

I spent some time at the end of session three trying to bring them to an understanding for themselves of what the overall process was to do: we had told them initially, and then reinforced this in the evaluation sheet, that in part, we were creating a vehicle that would be both cathartic and healing. BB and JJ were adamant that no healing was needed, because they had worked out the important issues vis-à-vis their parents' divorces and while they were eager to share among colleagues, they did not need or want a ritual for that purpose. So I tried to reframe the ritual:

> "There are times in my life that I've wanted to get rid of God. There are times when I wanted to write love letters to God and sometimes, it was one side of the envelope or the other. That letter would go to the Source, but each side had a different message to God. So what I'd like to suggest we do next week after you have filled out the evaluations, that you take a postcard in which you will write down whatever you think is important for you to keep from this discussion about God and family.
>
> Then I'm going to give you another, sheer piece of paper, you will discard, like during *tashlikh*, on which you will write whatever you've realized you want to throw away. Or what you've discovered was disturbing and that you want to cast away. Whatever you need to excise, we will then conclude with a short ritual at the end.
>
> The things you want to keep, you will place in this envelope; what you don't want to keep, you'll discard into this bowl of water, on thin paper with dissolving ink.
>
> And then we will find our way back to our own worlds."

CY felt that this whole process was cathartic for him, a safe place to share things he had not in a group setting, or among Jews. He said the following prior to throwing his paper out:

> "*Tashlikh*. (Beats his breast three times.) The familial sin or the possible familial sin of abuse, I want to let it go. For the familiar search for a plan, I want to let it go. (sighs heavily.) And to come to the feeling that it's more than just the intellectual understanding that I've already reached long ago, but that it's the emotional understanding that is still lingering that God is not my father and my father is not God."

TT felt that he learned from this process that he wanted to be a better parent, and that while this experience had not changed the way he felt about God or his parents, it may have helped him have a better relationship with his spouse.

> "It's been helpful and cathartic to do this. And your insights have been very helpful to me. For those of us who like to think we're introspective, these things are good even when they are difficult. There are times when even though it's been a brief time to share, when it's brought up a lot of feelings and things all of us have to confront. You know, for those who don't think rabbis are human, they should have been sitting here to listen to us talk, because we have the same issues that everyone else has.
>
> So the things I want to continue to destroy in my life are things like manipulation and guilt and anger and blame and most of all, disappointment, and not to feel that my parents' divorce ruined my life or had to result in some kind of disappointment of them as people or as parents. They are who they are, for better or for worse. You have to pick up the pieces and go on and learn from them."

JJ felt she had gained some insight into herself because she had the chance to reflect from other people's vantage points, and that it was wonderful to be able to discuss her parents' divorce in a Jewish religious setting. She even voiced the desire to continue with the sessions; despite the fact that she felt she had handled her parents' divorce "pretty well."

> "I really like hanging out with rabbis. I'm a big talker, but I don't talk about this stuff to ... Really, anybody. And I don't feel comfortable; the fact of my parents' divorce is not denied, but I don't talk about it with anyone at all. It's been very helpful and I couldn't have talked about it with anyone except my colleagues."

And finally, BB stated that she came away from the experience affirmed that she had arrived at a psychologically sound understanding about her family's dynamics, and how she understood God in her life.

> "It's so interesting. I was doing fine until you said *tashlikh*, Shira. So there a couple of things that I like about tashlikh, and that for the past 11 years, I've had the unparalleled privilege of doing tashlikh in Maui, so it immediately conjures up the beaches we gone to and that process. And one of the things I like about *Tashlikh*, is that it is a moment to say something to God in my own way, and to connect to God in that incredibly beautiful setting, where everyone just spreads out across the shore line and just does what's true for them. And I was going to let it go at that, until I realized that the three of you who said how connected you are to Jewish people are of course so willing to talk about what you are letting go, whereas I who said I was connected to God more profoundly than I am to Jewish people, am going to be silent. We remain who we are, as I throw my crumbs into the water."

I said a short prayer, and then ended the session:

> *"Barukh Ata Adonai, Eloheinu melekh haolam, shehecheyanu, vekiyemanu, vehigianu, lazman hazeh.*
>
> You are blessed, Adonai, and You give blessing. May each of us who has come to share our story and try to put together the pieces that don't quite fit and some of the pieces that fit more easily than we thought; for those of us who have come because we found bonds not only with those whom we love and cherish and know, but those we call colleagues and in whom we can entrust our stories; bless each of us with what we need, maybe not just with what we might articulate, but with what we might need, and surround us with your presence, even as we feel the presence of our colleagues."

Chapter 5

As anticipated, the feedback from both groups reinforced the need to provide a venue for ACODPs to articulate and process the feelings created by their parents' divorce. It was abundantly clear that the participants never had a place nor a chance to share this experience with others in a similar situation. While there were similarities between the lay group and the clergy group, there were also marked differences in the two groups. We found that the lay group struggled with connecting to a personal God, all the while articulating their belief in The One; three of four rabbis, on the other hand, felt kinship with the Jewish community and ritual, but were ambivalent about a personal God. None felt that doing *mitzvot* - as commandments - required a belief in a personal God.

Both groups felt they were able to tell their stories to one another and interact with the others by listening, validating and giving feedback to each other. The issue of triangulation was present in both groups. Through shared conversation, it was clear that some of the participants had worked hard over the years, some with the help of therapy, to break out of their role as mediator between their parents and siblings. Some are still struggling to break through the triangulation. All of the participants are now aware of triangulation patterns in their past, and for a few, in their present relationships as well. Some understand the extent to which they have been drawn into these patterns, often in many configurations. While both the lay people and the clergy understood the need to change the way they communicated with family members to break the patterns, two of the rabbis

found that their professional training perpetuated the behavior because they were expected to "fix" problems.

There was an urgency in the telling of the stories as none of the participants had ever had the opportunity to speak about the experience with others who had gone through it. Perhaps due to the uniqueness of the project and because we gave the participants an opportunity that they had not previously had, both groups opened up immediately and shared very personal and often painful stories. The clergy group, in particular, took a great deal of time to articulate the history of the divorce, but asked repeatedly about privacy issues vis-a-vis the project, despite the fact that we insisted on confidentiality from all participants about the information shared together. They did not, however, show much concern about trust issues within the group itself.

The lay group was eager to meet and participated willingly in the writing assignments. They all felt that though they were time consuming, the writing assignments enhanced the over all experience. The clergy group was more resistant, however: two of the participants did not fill out either the God questionnaire nor the genogram until they came in for sessions, one finished the work only after all the sessions were finished and one felt more comfortable relating the answers orally, especially in the genogram. In the end, three of four participants felt they had gained insight from the visual layout of their families' relational schema.

While this situation was not anticipated nor chosen, all of the participants in the lay group were married or with a partner and all of them had children, while

in the clergy group, the two men were married with children, the women were single. There was an overwhelming need by the participants of both groups to differentiate themselves from their parents and not repeat their parents' mistakes as they raised their own children or lived out their lives. Those who were parents were most concerned about being good ones, marking success and failure by the differences from their own parents' relationships.

Surprisingly, given the divorce statistics and the statistics for married children of divorced parents, only one of the participants from both groups was divorced and remarried. One rabbi's sister had divorced, but no one else in either group had failed marriages, nor did any other of their siblings divorce. This, too, could be attributed to the participants' conscious attempts to break the patterns of behavior they witnessed growing up.

Both of us were concerned about how our groups would respond to us as rabbis conducting the sessions. The concern for the lay group was whether the group could open up with their rabbi, or would act differently with the rabbi present. The lay group was very comfortable and the proof of it came immediately in the breakdown of language as they shared their stories using profanity, which ordinarily is not expressed out loud in presence of clergy. Their language reflected the anger, the disappointment many of them felt with their parents' behavior and their sordid family situations. The clergy group was more of a challenge for two reasons: first, it was more difficult to establish clear leadership in a room full of leaders, and second, it was necessary for each rabbi to determine for him or herself the extent to which sharing of self was safe, not

within the group, but because personal sharing is generally discouraged for clergy.

Initiating the first session by telling the Abraham story proved to be a very important and validating ice breaker, as it showed a biblical precedent for break-downs in communication and disconnects between family members. It also allowed the participants to admit that they, too, went through periods when they had no contact with a parent and that they still had not resolved all of their issues with their parents.

There was a marked difference between the groups' reactions to their parents' divorces. The clergy were all relieved that their parents divorced and were not surprised by the announcement, given the tension and the pervasive emotional abuse that was present in the household for a number of years. On the other hand, while all five of the lay people expressed shock upon learning of the divorce, only one was happy about it. The one who was happy was also the one who has had the most difficulty with her parents in the post-divorce time and who feels that one never gets over the divorce.

The success of the experience is measured by the level of participation, the changes that occurred over the four sessions and a keen desire on the part of the lay group to continue the sessions. The lay group is now meeting monthly, although without the only male in the group, who decided not to continue once he knew this project was completed. Two rabbis felt strongly about continuing the sessions, claiming they found it comforting to know that they were not the only ones to experience their parents' divorce and the multiple associated

responses such as anger, guilt, shame and hate. Another felt that he would like to have more opportunities to talk about divorce "in a religious, rather than in a psychodynamic context," having done the latter in some personal therapy. Having established a rapport with the four other rabbis in the room, he would have wanted to discuss how one's personal history influenced one's professional life. This common connection of peers, especially in a field in which living in a glass house is an expected, if undesirable, consequence, underscores the importance of providing a venue for clergy to speak freely as they look for insights into their own lives. This rabbi felt that he would benefit from continuing this discussion in a group setting such as this one. The fourth rabbi was clear that the issues surrounding the divorce had long been dealt with and that this project served to affirm the insights already gleaned.

Religious Principles

We had posited that there might be a correlation between the late parental divorce and the participants' view of God, as our God images were so closely tied to images of our parents in a developmental context. Nonetheless, the divorce, as a result of a difficult marriage, did not impact their relationship with God as much as did the events that preceded the divorce, i.e., the tensions they had experienced at home. They saw no connection between their views of God and the breakdown in relationships of and with their parents. Neither the divorce nor the processing of the divorce had any effect on the four rabbis' view of God.

On the other hand, all of the participants in the lay group saw some impact from the divorce on their own marital relationships. While four of the five lay people have trouble sustaining intimate friendships, four of them have been married for at least ten years and one has a partner of 8 years. The two married rabbis have been married for 21 and 27 years respectively, though each spoke about working hard to make their marriage work.

If marriage is a sacred bond in Judaism - *kiddushin* - then breaking the bond is considered an act that speaks against God's work, as, according to the Midrash, it is God who sits in heaven and makes marriages happen. If God makes the matches, it would follow that God would be distraught if the unions were severed. For this, we have proof text in the book of the Prophet Malachi 2:13-16, as God is saddened by the divorce and the altar sheds tears in a divorce (Gittin 90b). We believed we would find - *Al achat kama vechama* - all the more so - those who were immediately impacted by the divorce, would be unhappy when it happened. Again, we found that this was not universally true: all of the lay people experienced the pain of the divorce, a pain that continues to exist for three of them as they still have difficulty dealing with one or both of their parents. The rabbis, on the other hand, were certainly affected, but not necessarily saddened by the divorce.

We asked the participants about how they viewed their parents' divorce in religious terms, and neither the lay participants nor the rabbis felt that their parents had failed God; Rabbi TT felt that they had failed one another, and

Rabbi BB felt there was a failure of hope, a failure of dreams, but not a failure that was connected with God.

We did find a corollary in the image of the union of God and Israel through marriage. Infidelity was a common theme for the lay people, and almost nonexistent for the rabbis. Four of the five fathers in the lay group were unfaithful to their wives prior to the divorce, and one couple led separate lives while still living in the same home. In the paradigm of the relationship and marriage of God and Israel, the women were aligned with God and the men represented Israel who was punished repeated for her infidelity. Those for whom infidelity was recognized as an issue, all felt a sense of responsibility for their mothers during the separation and post-divorce.

Hosea encourages the individual to take action and rebuke the unfaithful partner. B begged her parents to get divorced as she was growing up because of the yelling, screaming and violence between them. E constantly asked her mother why she did not leave her father as he was an abusive alcoholic and was constantly having affairs. C and her siblings asked their mother several times why she kept taking her father back after 10 years of repeated separations. Rabbi BB did the same with her mother, who had left home several times; it was only after BB became an emancipated minor and the first to sever relationship with her father, that her mother left for the last time.

Was God present in their marriages and in their homes? According to *Sotah* 17a, if God is not present in the relationship between two people, a metaphorical fire will consume the couple. Following this example, the fire

consumed many of the parental relationships in the lay group. As a result of this, A felt abandoned by God at age four when her two year old brother died. B's parents chose skiing on the weekends over God and temple when she was six. God was never a part of C's upbringing, though Jewish culture and tradition were. D's story is very contradictory and confusing. It is hard to determine whether God was present in the marriage, but it is clear from D's perspective, neither parent was present in the marriage. On one hand, D spoke of situations when he and his father escaped disaster and wondered whether God had a hand in it. On the other hand, he also spoke of his parents being atheists because of the circumstances of their upbringing. God was part of E's mother's life and alcohol consumed her father's life.

The rabbis each characterized their parents' relationships as tempestuous, with considerable shouting, expressions of rage, and *ad hominem* attacks, to name a few. Clearly, the *Talmudic* midrash would be an apt description for these families.

The biblical references to difficult relationships, particularly the one between Abraham and Ishmael, where Ishmael is cast aside after Isaac is born, also came into play for two of the lay participants who felt ignored and diminished in their fathers' eyes after they married and created a new family. The displacement issue actually appeared for the clergy group in previous generations, twice removed from the participants, and indeed caused a tremendous antipathy between the two sets of children.

The Abraham/Isaac relationship provided ample fodder for discussion in the clergy group, primarily due to the cognitive dissonance between honoring one's parents - *kibbud av v'em* - and being true to self in an abusive relationship. TT says poignantly:

> My wife and my siblings have asked me, 'why do you do it? Why do you continue to have a relationship with this abusive person? Why don't you cut out the cancer?'... it's been a source of conflict [between us] over the years; when she sees a piece or mail from him or she hears his voice on the answering machine, and I keep telling her I can't do it. I can't repeat the pattern, I can't do to him what he did to his brother. And as minimal as the relationship has to be, to me, the taboo is not having a relationship with a dysfunctional person, the taboo is cutting someone off... There's another issue: *kibbud av v'em* - (honoring one's father and mother) - he's still my father and I can't, I still have that obligation.

Yet in BB's family, honoring her emotionally and physically abusive father meant honoring his choices; he chose to behave in this manner and she responded to her father, not to the person she would have wanted him to be, which she felt would be inauthentic. The fact that the *Torah* text is so vague about the father/son break allowed the rabbis to interpret the text in such a way as to be meaningful to them.

The Abraham story also was useful to the lay group: even though there is no indication that Abraham had any actual contact with Isaac after the *Akedah*, Abraham did fill his parental obligation by arranging for Eleazar to find a wife for him, which allowed D to acknowledge that his mother made sure in her settlement that her ex-husband would take care of their sons financially.

When comparing the interpersonal dynamics of Abraham's extended family with the groups, four lay people experienced estrangement from either

one or both of their parents. All four of the clergy participants had experienced similar separations from their families, some for a very short period of time and some completely.

In terms of the quality of relationships, only 2 of the group experienced I-Thou relationships with their parents, as described by Buber, who valued the *way* in which one related, rather than with whom. Buber refers to relating in a peripheral manner, existing without connection, and many of our participants had encountered this in their lives. We found instances in the clergy group where the participant had an "I-Thou" relationship with one parent, and a disconnected I-It relationship with the other parent. We found no correlation, however, in gender association between parents and children. Some women connected more with their mothers, and others with their fathers. The same was true for the men. Only one of the lay participant's parents were able to reconcile post divorce and this has made life much easier for him as the extended family is able to gather and celebrate together without tension and animosity.

We questioned if there was a correlation between God being removed from the parental relationship and God being removed from the children's life as well. The answer was positive for three lay people and negative for two. One of the two worked hard to bring God into her life and keep God present, in a way rebelling against her parents, who themselves had rejected organized religion. In many respects, the four clergy saw a correlation between their chosen professions - being a professional Jew - and the attitude toward religion/spirituality that prevailed in their homes of origin. Some took the essential message and

developed a more articulated theology and practice, while others departed from the atheistic model to establish a religiously observant life.

Were the group members developing their own lives distinct from their parents as a means to make themselves less invisible, as Plaskow points out? Were they relegated to the outside of the family circle because they responded one way or another to their parents' behavior? For some, the participants were invisible; for others, parents or children were invisible.

For the clergy, the issue of being invisible was self-defined. All the participants, at one point or another, absented themselves from the fray, either emotionally or physically. Being invisible also meant not being heard, to mix a metaphor, or being ignored when the pain of the moment was overwhelming. To offset these feelings, while acknowledging they existed, we tried to allow every participant to express what they chose to share, without judgment.

For the lay group, the group process brought God back into two of their lives and back into the consciousness of the third. For the rabbis, the sessions did not alter the way they viewed God - neither did the divorces - though for two, the discussion forced them to articulate their understanding of theodicy and operational theology more clearly than they had previously done. It is interesting that even those who saw God as hiding, inscrutable or not punitive, nonetheless were willing to admit that they, too, had, at times, wondered why they were being punished.

The concept of faith beyond questions - where doubt and faith can coexist - was more difficult for both the lay and the clergy group to accept, because on

one level or another, each person had experienced trauma: deaths of loved ones, severe or debilitating illness, violence, emotional or physical abuse. For some, the ambivalence toward God did have deeply embedded roots - where was God when a baby died, when relatives were cut off from family, when parents were abusive to their children? For others, the estrangement was a result of belief "lost in translation" - by clergy who, like Job's callous friends, could neither understand nor respond to the deep spiritual cry of a teenager. Trauma, however, is certainly not the only factor that shapes a person's view or relationship with God, which is a continual process. While Rizzuto, asserts that "throughout life, God remains a transitional object at the service of gaining leverage with oneself, with others and with life itself (*Rizzuto*, 1979, p.179), we assumed that those who are clergy know on some level that God is more than merely "an illusion" or a transitional object. Whether God is defined in personal terms or as a collective Higher Power, our understanding of God is a refraction of a number of components, not the least of which is what gives our life meaning: "One way to explore this is to look for what is at the center of the person's life. What would he or she be most devastated to lose? What is their true god? What is holy for them?" (Davidowitz-Handzo, p.331.) When we understand what is holy to those we serve, or with whom we share our lives, we can begin to reframe the questions people ordinarily ask when faced with adversity: why did God do this to me? Davidowitz-Handzo make the extraordinary point that in Psalm 23, neither the Psalmist nor God promises us that we will be free of pain, or hurt or death: "Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of death, I shall fear no

harm, for You are with me" (Psalm 23). In fact, we are guaranteed to walk that path, but we will not do so alone, we are told, because God will walk alongside us.

Faith beyond question does not mean that if we believe, if we pray, if we fulfill *mitzvot*, we will not experience pain/death/sadness. If we are human, it is inevitable. Faith beyond question can mean that we provide one another with the presence that reminds us of The Presence, and that when we do this, we walk in God's footsteps. We can repeat the petitionary prayers to heal the sick or safeguard people from danger not because we see God as a Parent who will "kiss it and make it better," but because when we say these with or on behalf of others, we become part of the link that reconnects us to God. When we bring people together in focus groups to support, listen and accompany one another, we do not have to answer the question of "how come God picks on me?" - rather, we can say, "even if God is hiding, or tarries, or didn't keep my child from dying," (CY) these words connect us, and through our relationship, connect to God as well. So when the primitive image of God the Parent becomes muddied by the images of our less than godlike parents, we as clergy can develop alternative religious responses that take us past that original place where God and identity formation once met in our early development

Clinical Principles

Three of the lay people did not have "good enough mothering." This led to feelings of abandonment, loss of self-esteem and few concrete memories of early childhood. All of the lay women must have had some difficulty in the "play stage" of the "Initiative Stage", as many of them have experienced some difficulty in sustaining friendships.

In the clergy group, three rabbis did not have "good-enough fathering," but felt compensated by strong relationships with their mothers; one had strong ties to both sets of grandparents. Abandonment was a non-issue for all of them.

All the male participants evidenced strong Oedipal conflicts, and were protective and close to their mothers, while one woman in the clergy group had some Electra-like behavior. One woman was physically kept away from her father because he was a drunk and, according to her mother, was not deserving of the unconditional love of a child. Not surprisingly, she grew up loathing her father. In our groups, we found that a number of participants had deep seeded animosities stemming from "unhealthy parenting" - i.e., when one child is favored over another.

In the earliest stage of adulthood, four of the five lay people first learned of their parents' impending divorces. They were all the youngest child, out of the house and in or just starting college. Those four had their worlds turned upside down at the crucial time in their development when they needed the adult

support of their parents the most. Several had problems with "exporting related-ness" and were not easily able to form attachments with others.

Three participants had or have conflicts over divided loyalty between the parents as the parents did not have a healthy divorce or post-divorce relationship. The effect of the divorce on the family system is determined by the couple's approach with regard to the separation and the post-divorce phase. Three of the participants are experiencing the permanent crippling impact because of the unresolved anger harbored by the parents against each other. Four of the families have been restructured through subsequent marriages with two binuclear families, as both parents remarried. Only one experienced a healthy divorce which allowed him to maintain healthy relationships with both parents.

The divorce forced three of the lay participants and one rabbi to re-examine their memories of childhood; this was not the case in the two families where the participants were eager for their parents to divorce. They were aware that their parents had problems and should not have been together. In the clergy group, one participant articulated that his perception of his childhood, including memories of growing up with his parents, was radically different from his parents' perspective. Two had clear memories of both rage and nurturing, and could distinguish between the two kinds of experiences.

There are a wide range of emotions that ACODPs experience with divorce. Three lay people felt grief and loss; all sensed a disruption in their lives. Four experienced a loss of security, two lost their family home. Four were angry,

three felt abandoned, four had parents who lost interest in them, one felt a sense of relief. Three were forced to take sides, three have conflicts around holidays and life cycle events. All of them have been forced to examine their parents' marriages through adult eyes and two have had trouble maintaining intimate relationships. As is often the case, the divorce was the first serious crisis in the lives of some participants which had long range repercussions. Three have complications now with their parents as grandparents who show little interest in their grandchildren; four have blended families.

Parental Projection Hypothesis

The parental projection hypothesis was evident in both groups. A who felt abandoned by her parents, was not sure how she feels about God; TT was ambivalent about his father, and cannot clearly articulate his own relationship with God. B held on to God at an early age as a source of strength to help save her and protect her from her parents - as did BB from her violent father. B also held her beliefs and practices over her parents as a way to separate herself from them and also to torment them as a rejection of their secular values. C, who is conflicted about her parents, and who, like them, is very indecisive about most things, does not know how she feels about God. God was not part of her family life. At times her mother was absent as she experienced post partum depression for years, and her father kept to himself and isolated himself from the family. D believes in a personal God that is inside of himself and felt abandoned by his

parents growing up. He wrestles with his belief and as he felt his parents absent as he grew up, God has been absent from his life for long periods of time. E had a strong loving attachment to her mother - as does BB - and has always believed in God. They both share a deep love for their mothers and the love for God. They are able to get angry with God, distance themselves and then come back to God. God, like their mother, is always there when they need God.

Using Rizzuto's adaptation of Erikson's development schematic in which she looks at the parallel development of the God representation, we saw how the breakdowns in different stages of development lead to a non-belief in God. A, B, D and TT had conflicted mother relationships and also experienced a disbelief in God. In the second stage of autonomy, B, D and TT felt abandoned by their mothers. Only one lay participant experienced the third stage of Initiative, where both the parent and God would be present the child's protectors. In the Identity stage of adolescence, the adolescent accepts that God is the Creator. B, D, E and BB were able, at that point of their lives, to accept that fact. In the early stage of adulthood, the Intimacy stage - two of the lay participants and three of the rabbis were able to be themselves with God. The last stage of Integrity, where the person accepts God for who God is, was achieved by three members of the lay group and two rabbis.

If, according to Rizutto, one's adult image of God is related to one's ability to have object constancy in early childhood development, this could explain why only one person in the lay group and two rabbis are so certain of God's existence. In the Autonomy stage, if the child feels a sense of security, the child

will be able to develop relationships later in life. All of the lay women have a reported inability to maintain friendships, which may be related to their insecurity in this stage of development. Rizzuto posits that if the mother withdraws love, then the child would experience that same alienation from God. This was confirmed by four of the lay group and three of the rabbis.

All of the lay participants felt that their childhood experiences influenced the way they felt about God; there was conflict and confusion in their lives as many of their parents were not available to them at crucial points in their childhood development. It is no surprise that the same people would doubt God's existence.

All of members of both groups are committed Jews who take their obligations to Judaism seriously. While God may not be central to all of their lives as Jews, Judaism is. Two lay participants felt that the experience brought God back into their lives and two are thinking about God much more than they did prior to the group experience.

We had intended to create a replicable tool within the context of a synagogue, and needed the input of both laity and clergy to determine whether such a program would be feasible, constructive and easily implemented. We discovered several important factors based on the combined experiences of both groups.

First, we found that the group structure, used within the limits of this tightly-focused project, was more effective than one-on-one treatment. While some of our participants had worked out familial issues in personal therapy,

almost all members felt that sharing their stories with others who had experienced similar emotional trauma was beneficial; they felt less alone and less stigmatized when others affirmed common reactions. In the lay group, since four out of five opted to continue the sessions, the supportive nature of the group process was confirmed. In the clergy group, three out of four felt that sharing with peers was important, because the isolation of the rabbinate that required nondisclosure had been difficult. In addition, there was some discussion about how rabbis are perceived by congregants, and that revealing personal pain might alter their image as competent, well-adjusted professionals.

Second, offering a focus group for ACODPs within the synagogue would encourage a discussion from a theological point of view as well as a clinical perspective. Bringing God into the picture and using examples from our traditional texts would be beneficial, because doing so would strengthen ties with a Divine Power and help participants reframe their own stories in a biblical context. Third, if the focus group were successful, it might evolve into a longer-term support group, much like the model created and refined by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or even more to the point, Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA). ACOA was created in 1977 by a group of Al-Anon/Al-teen graduates, who felt that the recurring themes caused by their parents' disease continued to impact on their own lives in a negative way. The very fact that these individuals needed to be with other adults whose problems were not solved because they had left home, reinforces the need for a program like ours.

Fourth, the demand for such a program exists already, more extensively than we thought at first. Both the lay group and the clergy group could have accommodated many more participants, but timing and geography kept our numbers lower than we had anticipated.

Fifth, the program as it now exists could be implemented in a college setting as well, as evidenced by one participant who felt that students facing their parents' divorce would benefit from a similar peer group discussion.

The aim of the program to serve as a model was successfully accomplished. Because the texts used were all biblical, this program could easily be adapted for a church community as well.

The ritual that ended the project for both groups was important because it provided closure, an opportunity to release negative emotions and a means to link the personal story with the group's collective learning process. Martin deVries writes: "As students of human behavior have long noted, rituals help individuals control their emotions, order their behavior, link the sufferers more intimately to the social group, and serve as symbols of continuity" (deVries, 1996). Each of us trained as clergy acknowledges the power of ritual, whether in our own lives or in the lives of those whom we serve.

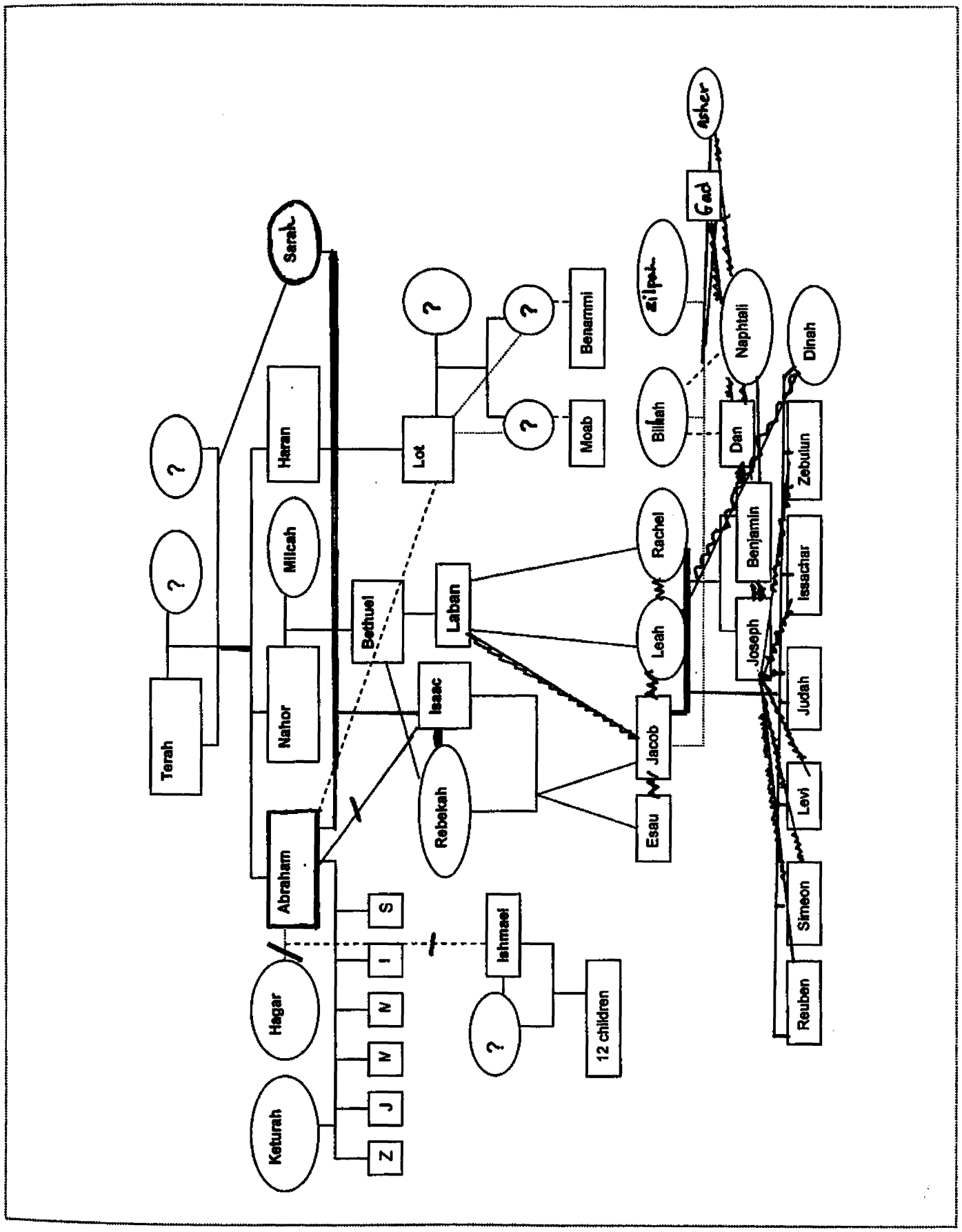
While the lay group readily participated in the closing ritual, the clergy group was more resistant doing so, because by and large they were uncomfortable with "touchy-feely" exercises. Each one found a way to participate, however, and in the end, the ritual provided meaning to the process of sharing history. It

also served to bring God into the room, separate from any discussion of theology or theodicy that had occurred during our time together.

For the lay people, the discussion about what they had learned and what they wanted to discard helped to concretize the experience. A colleague, Rabbi Donna Berman, once likened ritual to a photograph: you might not remember the moment the shutter clicks, but the picture, seen some time in the future, serves as a trigger that reminds you of all that occurred before and after the picture was taken. So too, this ending ceremony allowed the members of both groups to create their personal triggers that will bring back the lessons learned long after the groups themselves dissolve.

Ken yehi Ratzon - May it be God's Will.

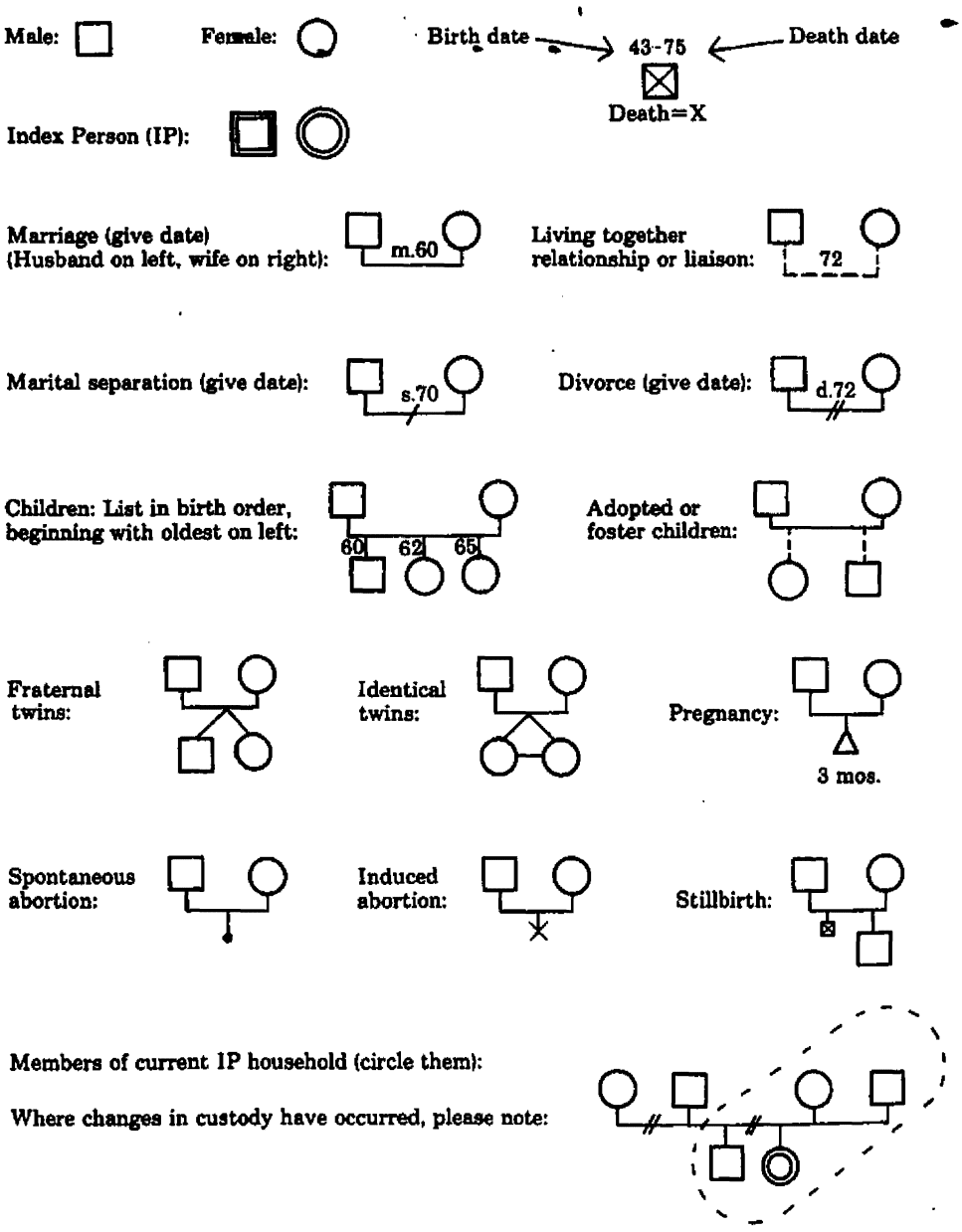
Appendix A
Abraham and Sarah



Appendix B
Genogram Critical Symbols (3 pages)

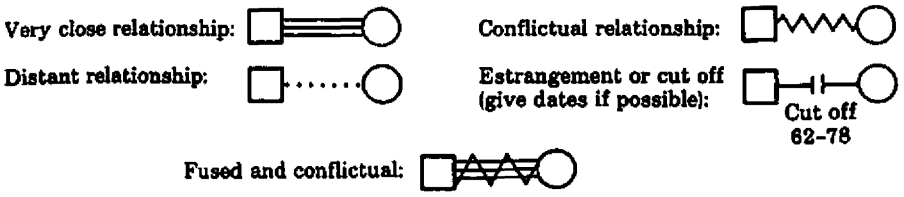
PART 1: GENOGRAM FORMAT

A. Symbols to describe basic family membership and structure (include on genogram significant others who lived with or cared for family members – place them on the right side of the genogram with a notation about who they are.)



Appendix

B. Family interaction patterns. The following symbols are optional. The clinician may prefer to note them on a separate sheet. They are among the least precise information on the genogram, but may be key indicators of relationship patterns the clinician wants to remember:



C. Medical history. Since the genogram is meant to be an orienting map of the family, there is room to indicate only the most important factors. Thus, list only major or chronic illnesses and problems. Include dates in parentheses where feasible or applicable. Use DSM-III categories or recognized abbreviations where available (e.g., cancer: CA; stroke: CVA).

D. Other family information of special importance may also be noted on the genogram:

1) Ethnic background and migration date
2) Religion or religious change
3) Education
4) Occupation or unemployment
5) Military service
6) Retirement
7) Trouble with law
8) Physical abuse or incest
9) Obesity
10) Smoking
11) Dates when family members left home: LH '74.
12) Current location of family members

It is useful to have a space at the bottom of the genogram for notes on *other key information*: This would include critical events, changes in the family structure since the genogram was made, hypotheses and other notations of major family issues or changes. These notations should always be dated, and should be kept to a minimum, since every extra piece of information on a genogram complicates it and therefore diminishes its readability.

Appendix

PART 3: OUTLINE FOR A BRIEF GENOGRAM INTERVIEW

Index Person, Children and Spouses

Name? Date of birth? Occupation? Are they *married?* If so, give *names of spouses*, and the *name* and *sex* of *children* with each spouse. Include all *miscarriages, stillbirths, adopted* and *foster children.* Include *dates* of *marriages, separations*, and *divorces.* Also include *birth* and *death dates, cause of death, occupations* and *education* of the above family members. Who lives in *the household now?*

Family of Origin

Mother's name? *Father's* name? They were which of how many children? Give *name* and *sex* of *each sibling.* Include all *miscarriages, stillbirths, adopted* and *foster siblings.* Include *dates* of the *parents' marriages, separations*, and *divorces.* Also, include *birth* and *death dates, cause of death, occupations* and *education* of the above family members. Who lived in *the household when they were growing up?*

Mother's Family

The names of the *mother's parents?* The mother was which of how many children? Give *name* and *sex* of *each of her siblings.* Include all *miscarriages, stillbirths, adopted* and *foster siblings.* Include *dates* of *grandparents' marriages, separations*, and *divorces.* Also include *birth* and *death dates, cause of death, occupations* and *education* of the above family members.

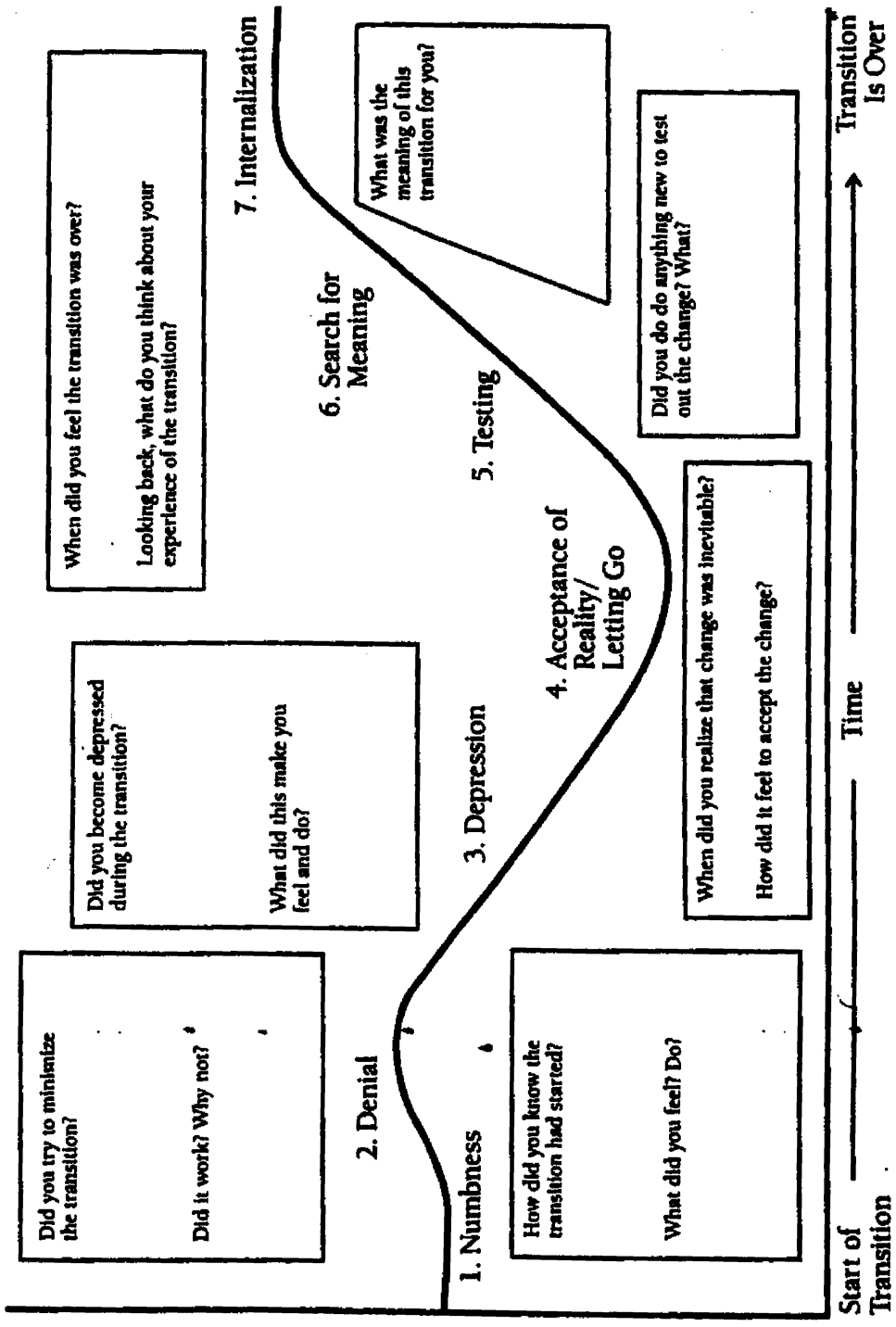
Father's Family

The names of the *father's parents?* The father was which of how many children? Give *name* and *sex* of *each of his siblings.* Include all *miscarriages, stillbirths, adopted* and *foster siblings.* Include *dates* of *grandparents' marriages, separations,* and *divorces.* Also include *birth* and *death dates, cause of death, occupations* and *education* of the above family members.

Appendix C
Bell Jar Form

THE BELL JAR DIAGRAM

Changes in Self-Esteem During Transitions



Appendix D
Evaluation Form

1. Have you had an opportunity to discuss your parents' divorce in a religious setting prior to this experience?
2. Is this the first venue for discussion of your parents' divorce?
3. Has this program helped you to gain further insight into yourself? If so, how?
4. Do you feel that you have gained any insight into how you have handled your parents' divorce?
5. Has this program impacted the way you understand your parents?
6. Are there any changes in the way you view God?
7. What questions did this program raise for you?
8. What aspects did you like about the program?
9. Do you feel that you would benefit from continuing this discussion in either
   a. a group setting
   b. in individual counseling with a rabbi?
   c. in individual counseling with a therapist?
10. Do you feel that this program will improve your relationship with
    a. God?
    b. Your parents?
    c. Your significant other?
11. Were the genograms helpful in understanding the divorce in your family circle?
12. Do you feel that this program is worth replicating in other synagogue settings?
13. What about this program would you change?

Appendix E

Consent Form for Taping Sessions

I _____ hereby give consent to Rabbi Janet Liss/Rabbi Shira Stern, to tape four group focus sessions on the subject of Adult Children of Divorced Parents.

I understand that confidentiality will be respected, and that my name will not appear anywhere in the final document without my expressed permission.

I understand that these focus sessions are part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry demonstration project, under the auspices of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion and the Post-Graduate Center for Mental Health. Neither of these institutions is liable for any of the material submitted by the rabbis.

Please print your name: _____

Signature: _____

date: _____

Appendix F

The God Questionnaire

based on Ana-Maria Rizzuto, M.D.

(Changes to her original document. We edited out saint from question 17, deleted questions 18-19 because they deal with a belief in the devil, in her question 42, our 40, we changed the male references to non-gender specific language, and we deleted questions 22-23 from the Family Questionnaire which dealt with drawings that our participants will not be asked to do.)

I

1. I feel/ do not feel close to God because
2. The time of my life when I felt the closest to God was when and I was years old because
3. I think that in general, as a person I have pleased/dissatisfied God because
4. I think that God wants/ does not want me to be good because
5. I believe/ do not believe in a personal God because

II

6. The time in my life that I felt the most distant from God was when I was because
7. My most important duties towards God are

III

8. For me, the love of God towards me is/ is not important because
9. For me, my love for God is /Is not important because
10. The feeling I get/ used to get from my relationship with God is one of because

IV

11. I feel that the fear of God is/is not important because
12. What I like the most about God is because

13. What I resent the most about God is because

14. What I dislike the most about religion is because

V

15. Emotionally, I would like to have the God has because

16. Among all the religious characters I know, I would like to be like because

VI

17. My favorite Bible character is because

VII

18. Sometimes I have/ have not felt that I hated God because

VIII

19. I feel that what God expects from me is because

20. I feel that to obey the Commandments is/ is not important because

21. I pray/ I do not pray because I feel that God will

IX

22. I feel that God punishes/ does not punish you if you

23. I think that God considers my sins as because

24. I think that the way God has to punish people is because

25. I believe that the way God rewards people is because

X

26. I think that God provides/does not provide for my needs because

27. The most important thing that I expect from God is because

XI

28. In my way of feeling, for me to fully please God I would have to because

29. If I could change my past, I would change my because

30. If I could change myself now, I would like to be because

to change my because

to improve my because

to increase my because

XII

31. If I am in distress, I resort/do not resort to God because

32. If I am happy, I thank/do not thank God because

33. Religion has/has not helped me to live because

34. If I receive absolute proof that God does not exist, I will because

35. Prayer is/ is not important to me because

36. I wish /don't wish to be with God after death because

XIII

37. I think that God is closest to those who because

XIV

38. I consider God as my because

39. I think that God sees me as because

XV

40. If I have to describe God according to my experiences with God, I would say that God is

XVI

41. The day I changed my thinking about God was because

XVII

42. Religion was always/never/at one time important to me (during the years to) because

43. For me, the world has/ has not an explanation without God because

The "Family" Questionnaire

Please read carefully the following questions and answer them, giving as long an explanation as you need for us to understand your real feelings. If the question does not need an explanation, just write the proper answer.

1. The member of my family whom I felt the closest to was my

2. The member of my family whom I felt the most distant from was my

because

3. The member of my family whom I loved the most was my

I love him/her this much because

4. The member of my family whom I disliked the most was my

because he/she

5. Physically I resemble my because

6. Emotionally I resemble my because

7. The favorite member of my family was my because

8. The member of my family whom I admired the most is my

because

9. Please write down the names of the members of your family in order of preference according to how much you like them.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

g.

h.

I.

j.

10. The member of my family I despised the most is

11. The boss in my family was my because

12. The disciplinarian in my family was because

13. The provider in my family was because

14. If I could change myself I would like to be like my because

15. In my family we were close/very close/not close at all because

16. My father was closest to me/to my because

17. My mother was closest to me/to my because

18. The most important person in my family was because

19. In my family children were considered as

20. My family was/was not divided into groups

21. The groups were my and my

my and my

my and my etc.

22. If I described myself as I feel I actually am, I would say I am

Appendix G

Letters

Janet's letter

Dear Congregant,

As you know, I have been actively working on my Doctorate of Ministry at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the Post Graduate Center for Mental Health in New York. In May I successfully completed my Doctorate Course work and received a certificate in Pastoral Counseling from the Post Graduate Center. The entire experience has been both rewarding and educational for me.

In order for me to finish the program and receive my Doctorate, I am required to do a project and a thesis on the project. I am doing a project in conjunction with another colleague, Rabbi Shira Stern. Our project involves dealing with both the psychological and theological impact of divorce on adult children whose parents have divorced once they have left home (post high school). I am looking for 5 to 8 people who meet the above qualification and who are willing to attend 4 Monday evening group sessions, November 10th, 17th, 24th and December 1st from 8:00 to 9:30 p.m.. I will run this group for congregants while Rabbi Stern runs the same group for rabbis.

If you are eligible to participate, would you please give a call in the office at 671-4760. I would love to speak with you and set up a brief appointment with you.

Thank you very much.

Shalom,

Rabbi Janet B. Liss

Shira's Letter:

Dear colleague:

I am currently working on a Doctor of Ministry project at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, in conjunction with another colleague, Janet Liss.

Our project involves dealing with both the psychological and theological impact of divorce on adult children whose parents have divorced once they have left home (post high school). I am looking for 5 to 8 people who meet the above qualification and who are willing and able to attend 4 afternoon group sessions, at a central location in NYC. I will reimburse you for all travel expenses. I will run this group for rabbis while Janet runs the same group for lay people in her congregation.

The purpose of this project is twofold: first, to give rabbis an opportunity to articulate their feelings about this subject in a protected, safe and supportive environment, and second, to create a model and a ritual that can be replicated for other clergy.

If you are eligible to participate, would you please give me call at 212 644-1111 ext. 261. I would love to speak with you.

L'Shalom,

Shira Stern

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