סדר תקדש הגוף
A SERVICE FOR THE HOLINESS OF THE BODY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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To my advisors, Rabbi Richard Address and Doctor Mark Kligman: Thank you for your unending guidance, patience and encouragement throughout the process of conceiving and writing this thesis. Your gifts of time and insight are much appreciated.

To my grandfather, Sidney Arnold z"l: For years, your comments pertaining to my weight and size were hurtful, cruel and unwarranted. Today, I grant you forgiveness. More so, I confess my utmost gratitude for your words, which have turned me into the strong, beautiful and self-aware woman I am today. Thank you for not only giving me the perfect thesis topic, but a new understanding of what self-love and acceptance really means.

To my interviewees: Thank you for your candor and brutal honesty, even when the questions I asked were extremely difficult to discuss. This thesis is for you and those like you, who long to see the beauty and perfection that lie within every inch of your bodies and souls. I pray that you will soon be able to look at yourselves and see the magnificence that shines so brightly and inspires so many.

INTRODUCTION

I have been a heavy woman all of my life. Heavy, fat, overweight, plus-size, voluptuous, pleasantly plump—whatever you want to call it—it's me. I was born weighing almost 9 pounds, on the larger side of normal. There have been points in my life where I have weighed over 300 pounds, far heavier than the average teenager or twenty-something woman. To some extent, I will always be this way. My body is not built to be conventionally thin, and my intellect is not structured to think the way a thin person's would. I have the word "fat" sketched so deeply into my brain that it will, in some ways, always be a defining part of my identity.

Since beginning the Cantorial program at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in June 2007, I have worked hard to shed over 140 pounds from my 5'7" frame. I am incredibly proud of my weight-loss and grateful for the improvement to my overall health and well-being. However, despite my amazing achievements, I am continuously stunned by the aforementioned defining words that have yet to be changed. My own self-perceptions are based around the morbidly obese person I can no longer claim to be. I am both intrigued and incredibly frustrated by the little memories that pop up over and over again in my head: the kids who called me names throughout my public school education; my grandparents who told me time and time again that I would never

be as pretty or as wonderful as my (thin) cousins—unless I became skinny; the men who've rejected me in the dating world simply because of my appearance; the doctor who made jokes about me to her nurses when she thought I couldn't hear. These things are with me everyday—they live within my brain and heart and force me to sometimes view myself as some kind of hideous monster instead of the lovely, talented person I am.

I know that I am not alone in the way I view myself. Through informal interviews and conversations with Jewish people of all ages, genders and sizes, I have learned that nearly everyone in my circle of friends, family, classmates and congregants has battled with some sort of body image issue. I have learned that several people have turned to drastic measures to change who they are on the outside, sometimes resorting to painful and even dangerous solutions to fix their own self-perceived flaws. I am saddened to know that I am surrounded by so many who feel the same way I do about myself and my body, especially when I look into the eyes of my loved ones and see only beauty and perfection shining back. It pains me to know that we live in a world of such anguish, and more so, that we are passing these negative ideas about ourselves and others onto future generations—who will only grow up to feel similarly about themselves.

Eventually, after hearing so many of these sad stories and feeling sorry for my own self, I knew I needed to do something. I wanted to change how people around me felt about themselves and show them that true beauty can be found every time a person views their own reflection in a mirror. I wanted to motivate people to love who they are on physical, spiritual and emotional levels. I also knew, however, that I could not serve this purpose without working to modify how I viewed myself and my own body. I knew it was time to become the beautiful, strong, intelligent and Godly woman that everyone

else could see when they looked at me. It was time to take ownership of the essential Tracy in her present-day form. How I would do that, I had yet to figure out.

Thus, this thesis project was born. I aimed to create a ritual that would emphasize the beauty and wonder of the human body and all of it's amazing abilities. I wanted to share the important teachings from Jewish tradition about how the body is created and sustained in the format of a worship service. It was my hope that sharing these teachings, including texts from Jewish liturgy and rabbinic literature, as well as beautiful music, would give strength and inspiration to the participants of this ritual. Knowing how isolating body-image issues can be to an individual, I also longed to create a ritual that would also enforce the idea of community support, to remind each participant that they are not alone. In creating this ritual, I, myself, have been working to quiet the voices of my past by sharing my stories with others and crying the tears that have been locked inside of me for a very long time. It is my hope that this ritual will allow all of the participants to have the space to do exactly the same thing; to allow for healing of the mind and soul, as well as an opening of the eyes to what is truly beautiful on the inside and outside of each participant.

The main goal of this thesis project is to produce a ritual that encourages healthy body image and self-esteem for and throughout the entire Jewish community. I want to show how the literature and music of the Jewish tradition can aid in the changing of one's self-perceptions, and encourage a connection between the body, the soul, and God. Chapter one looks at the varied reasons behind why such a ritual is needed in the Jewish community. Chapter two discusses the conception of this ritual, focusing mostly on who it was created for, and the decisions behind the liturgy that was chosen for the project.

Chapter three gives an insight into the various rabbinic texts that discuss both how the human body was perceived by men and women in the rabbinic age, as well as later texts that prove God's place within the human body. In addition, it talks about the music used in this ritual, and how it can be helpful in ways that the liturgy and rabbinic texts cannot.

Through my own issues with body image and self-esteem, I know firsthand how painful it is to not be able to fully love yourself for who you are. I have experienced the teasing, the bullying, the self-deprecation, and the many other side effects of being an overweight woman in society—as both a child and an adult. It is because of my history, and the healing process I have finally allowed myself to begin, that I so strongly desire to share this ritual with others. I am finally discovering the beauty and, more importantly, the sense of inner-peace and contentment that comes from learning how to love myself as a complete person. It is my goal and my strongest hope that this project will allow others to learn how to love and value themselves for who they are, both inside and out. I hope to help others to be able to say to God, and to themselves, "I will give thanks unto You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."[1]

1 Psalm 139: 14.

CHAPTER 1:

WHY IS THIS RITUAL NECESSARY?

In his book, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body*, psychologist Paul Schilder defines body image as, "the picture of our own body which we form in our mind...the way in which the body appears to ourselves."[2]. Schilder was among the first of psychologists to discuss the ideas involved in an individual's perception of his or her own body; before this time, the psychological factors behind the cultivation of one's body image were largely ignored or saved only for those who had experienced severe physical or mental injuries. Since 1950, researchers have revised this definition several times, claiming that body image is more than simply how a person sees his or her own body. The definition has been expanded to include a person's mental and emotional perceptions towards their body in addition to that which they see in the mirror. In 2008, Sarah Grogan wrote that body image is, "a person's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about his or her body."[3] In other words, a person's body image is based largely on how one feels about him/herself as a complete person—physically, intellectually, and emotionally.

As people in twenty-first century America, we are constantly surrounded by

2 Paul Schilder *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (New York: International Universities Press, 1950), 11.

3 Sarah Grogan *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children* (New York: Routlege, 2008), 3.

images that give us the ideas of what our bodies are—at least, according to the advertising industry—supposed to look like. In the latest edition of her powerful documentary project titled *Killing Us Softly*, Jean Kilbourne speaks about the negative effects of the media on American men, women and children. She claims that on average, Americans spend two years of their lives watching television commercials alone. The messages in these commercials, paired with the messages shared by print media and the internet, work together to shape the lives and attitudes of the American public every single day. Kilbourne says, "To a great extent, [advertisements] teach us who were are, and who we are supposed to be."[4]

Unfortunately, these advertisements do not generally promote images of healthy human beings; rather, they teach so many of us that in order to be accepted by the world around us, we must constantly work to sculpt, paint, starve or otherwise physically enhance our bodies to create the person we are "supposed" to be. Very few, if any, of these advertisements support messages of self-love, body acceptance, or positive self-esteem. With ideas of conforming to a social norm constantly running through our televisions, magazines and computer screens, it is not surprising that so many members of our society—particularly our young people—are falling prey to the many physical and emotional issues that stem from negative body image and a lack of self-esteem.

While the media and societal expectations are certainly central players in the destruction of the body image of our young people, so much of the problem also comes from years upon years of these messages being passed down from one generation to the next. As people, we learn about who we are and what we know about ourselves from the

4 Jean Kilbourne *Killing Us Softly 4*. YouTube, Flash Video File, Part one: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=1ujySz-_NFQ#! Part Two: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4-1xCf3I7U&feature=related (accessed 10 October 2011).

people who raise us. Parents in particular have a strong influence over their children as they share words of critique and judgment of others around them and, perhaps more detrimentally, of themselves. It is their own words of self-deprecation that teach children what they should hate about themselves; for if something is unsatisfactory in a parent's body image, it will most likely be unsatisfactory in a child's body image as well. This is particularly amongst mothers and daughters. In 2003, a study concluded that "the desire for thinness emerges in girls around age six."[5] As Stephanie Pierson and Phyllis Cohen write, [6]

> Mothers matter the most to a daughter's developing sense of her body and herself. A mother needs to take a good look at herself and her own ideas about body image because, as her daughter's primary female role model, everything she says and does is absorbed into her daughter's female DNA. Even if she has a different body type, if she's adopted or her parents are of different races, her mother is the main influence on her ability to develop a positive connection to her body. A mother needs to realize that when she is worrying about her three-year-old's chubby thighs, her daughter is hearing her and in ten short years those thighs will become her daughter's her main obsession.

The words, which specify on mothers and daughters, hold true for fathers and sons, as well. Though there is less evidence that body image issues affect young boys and men as much as they do girls and women, there is still a tremendous amount of societal and familial pressure on boys to look a certain way. Interestingly, boys tend to feel the pressure inflicted by their peers and older brothers, rather than their fathers. Upon the conclusion of a focus group of 16-17 year old males, Sarah Grogan writes, "Pressure [to look a certain way] came mainly from male peers. Competing with peers and fitting in with the group in terms of size were given as an explicit reason by some of the

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5 J. Lowes and Marika Tiggemann "Body dissatisfaction, dieting awareness, and the impact of parental influence on young children" in *British Journal of Health Psychology* 8 (2003), 135–147.

6 Stephanie Pierson and Phyllis Cohen CSW, "You Have to Say I'm Pretty, You're My Mother." http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/body/youhaveto.html (Accessed 20 December 2011).

interviewees, who wanted to be as [muscular] as their friends."[7] Men, too, fall victim to the pressures of maintaining a certain body image; while it is different than that of women, they have their own standards of body image they feel required to uphold.

Whatever the reasons behind them, it is clear that many of the men and women of our congregations feel the effects of negative body image and low self-esteem. I, myself, am a victim of many of the above causes for my own body dissatisfaction. I have noticed, through my conversations with Jewish friends, peers, teachers, and congregants, that I am not alone in the way I poorly view myself and my body. So much of how I and other people feel about our own self-worth is linked to how we feel about our bodies and physical appearance. For many, a negative body image creates insecurities and self-doubts that can bleed into their social, academic, professional and religious lives. In the worst (and far too common) instances, people of all ages turn to self-destructive behaviors, including eating disorders, cosmetic surgery, alcoholism and/or drug abuse, self-mutilation, and other dangerous activities in order to ease the pain that accompanies poor self-image. While these behaviors are problematic to American society at large, they are increasingly on the rise in all sects of the Jewish community. As Rabbi Ruth A. Zlotnik writes about eating disorders in the Reform Jewish community,[8]

> [E]ating disorders do manifest themselves in a unique way within the Jewish community. Jews, especially but not exclusively Jewish women, are particularly vulnerable to eating disorders. People who are high achieving, well educated, and middle class are more susceptible to eating disorders than other people are. And this is often an accurate description of many of our families in Reform congregations.

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7 Sarah Grogan *Body Image: Understanding Body Dissatisfaction in Men, Women and Children* (New York: Routlege, 2008), 90.

8 Rabbi Ruth A. Zlotnik. "A Jewish Response to Eating Disorders," in *Litapayich Tikvah: To Nourish Hope.* ed. Rabbi Richard F. Address and Rabbi Edythe Mencher (New York: UAHC Press, 2002), 4-6.

Eating disorders are also becoming increasingly more and more common in the Orthodox Jewish community. In this community, the pressure to be thin comes from outside influences, such as the media, but also from the influence of the matchmakers. Traditionally, Orthodox women are expected to marry partners chosen for them by matchmakers within their communities (though this custom is not followed within all Orthodox communities). As Roni Caryn Rabin noted in a New York Times article on April 11, 2011, "matchmakers feel no qualms in asking about a prospective bride's dress size — and her mother's — and the preferred answer is 0 to 4, extra small." Though not the case in all communities, many young Orthodox women are increasingly feeling the pressure to be thin by any means necessary, including eating disorders or other harmful healthy practices. This pressure comes not only from an innate desire to be thin, but a strong desire to be seen as acceptable candidates for marriage by the world around them. In addition, they often fit the description of many non-Orthodox Jews that also suffer from these issues; they are often high-achieving, well-educated, and middle class, and feel the need to always fulfill these expectations despite the harmful side effects they may include. In the documentary *Hungry to be Heard*, which focuses on eating disorders in the Orthodox community, an anonymous Orthodox woman says, "I felt it was more important to make my parents proud, or to have the facade of a successful, smart, good Jewish girl than to take care of myself."[9] As earlier stated, eating disorders are only one of the dangerous consequences of poor body image and self-esteem in the Jewish community as a whole. As Jews, we are not alien to any number of potentially destructive behaviors that stem from the societal and familial reasons behind maintaining a "perfect" bodily figure.

9 Orthodox Union. *Hungry to be Heard.* New York: Better World Productions, 2008.

Luckily, Jewish tradition has much to say about *kedushat haguf* [holiness of the body] and how we can learn to appreciate, respect and love our bodies for the unique creations they are. As clergy, we have the distinct honor and responsibility of teaching our congregants—male and female, young and old—that their bodies are formed, shaped, and eternally cared for by God. It is with this realization that I have created a ritual for accepting, honoring, and loving one's body exactly as it is in the present moment. My hope is that by sharing some of the canon of liturgy, rabbinic texts, and music from many sides of our Jewish tradition, I can help to foster a positive body image and self-esteem. By cultivating a sense of inner-strength within our congregants, gained by taking to heart the teachings of our Jewish ancestors, my congregants will one day have the confidence to steer away from self-destructive behaviors and live the healthiest lives they can.

In addition, I hope to help ease the pain and suffering inflicted by the hurtful remarks made by one's family, friends, and peers. These comments, often made in passing and/or in jest, do more than lower one's sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Over time, they work to form a person's identity, creating a sense of self that is based upon the words, thoughts and ideas of other people. The identity created from these words is often a false-construct of who the person really is. In other words, the comments of others are internalized from an early age, whether consciously or sub-consciously, forming a sense of self that is probably not entirely true. As author Geneen Roth writes, [10]

10 Geneen Roth *Women Food and God: An Unexpected Path to Almost Everything* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 177-178.

> Sometimes I ask my students to tell me about the person they are referring to in 'I-me-mine.' I ask them to tell me her needs, her wants, her beliefs. And every time—100 percent of the time—the person they describe is a construct, a mental fabrication, a fantasy image. It's based on inference, history and conditioning. It's based on who they took themselves to be because of what their parents told them, how they were treated, who did and didn't love them. Over time, a set of inferences coalesce into what psychologists call a 'self-representation,' or self-image, and it is that self-image we take to be ourselves. When we talk about 'feeling like ourselves' we are referring to this compilation of memories and other people's reactions to us—many of which took place before we knew our own names.

`I know from firsthand experience that the kind of identity described by Roth is painful, and can easily lead to destructive and unhealthy behaviors. With the ritual I am creating, I hope to bring people back to the idea that they are created *b'tzelem Elohim* - and, perhaps more than that, to realize that they carry a part of God's eternal presence inside of them at all times. Everyone was created as a perfect, beautiful creature of God, and still holds onto this essence of Godliness every single day. My hope is that this ritual will allow the Godliness to shine through stronger than one's perceived flaws or imperfections, helping to build and inner-strength that can push out the negative forces that surround all of us. It is with this sense of Godliness, as well as a knowledge of what Jewish tradition says about *kedushat haguf* and embracing one's own uniqueness, that we can create generations of healthier Jewish people.

CHAPTER 2:

SEDER KEDUSHAT HAGUF: PURPOSE AND LITURGY

Part One: Who is this ritual for?

This ritual was originally intended to be a family-friendly service that catered to the idea of passing a sense healthy body image from one generation onto the next. However, as I began crafting the ritual and researching both the liturgy and the people the practice would be created for, I realized that this service needed to be geared much more towards an older, adult-based congregation. I struggled with this, as I very much wanted to promote the beauty and honor of the human body to as many members of my congregation as possible. Ultimately, I decided to focus the ritual towards a congregation of adult men and women, while making an exception for mature teens and young adults in the community who expressed interest or concern about the subject.

The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, I feel that the adults in the congregation are perhaps the most effected by the impact of years and years of body image issues. After causal conversations with adult women at a midsize Reform congregation, I came to learn that many of them were raised hearing these negative messages about themselves and their bodies. Many of them are tired of succumbing to the comments, yet did not know how to make the messages stop. "I can't take it anymore," said one synagogue

member. "I want to change how I feel and think about myself, but the mean words are too strong. I still hear the teasing from my mother and the kids at my school, and my husband laughs at me even now. How can I change how I feel about myself when the words won't stop?"[11] Another congregant admitted that she occasionally makes the same hurtful remarks towards her own children, sometimes without realizing exactly how cruel her remarks can be. She says, "I will say something out of love and concern, because I care about the health and well being of my kids. But sometimes, the words are too harsh. I don't realize just how much I am hurting my children until I see it on their faces, and then I remember how mean my grandmother was to me about my weight issues. I usually apologize [to my children] after I say these things, since I never mean to be so hurtful, but I know the damage is already done. I don't want to make my kids feel the same way about themselves that I feel about myself." As noted in the previous chapter, parents' remarks about the size and choices of their children can have long-term effects on how the kids feel about themselves in the long run. The mother quoted above realizes this and wants to change, but, just as with the first congregant, does not know how to do so. In addition, children of all ages look to their parents are role models and informants; we can not teach healthy body image to our children if their parents do not feel—or even attempt to feel—positively about their own bodies and selves. It is for this reason that I wanted to focus primarily on adults, in order that they could—as they learn to love who they are in their own time—eventually teach their children how to love themselves.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, I wanted to create an environment where everyone in attendance would feel comfortable sharing their stories, thoughts, and

11 This quotation and others in this section are taken from in-person interviews with congregants at a Midwestern, mid-sized congregation on October 31-November 2, 2011. The inteviewees prefer to remain anonymous.

truths—whether or not they were appropriate to say in front of children. It is understandable that certain circumstances and personal life events relating to body-image issues are not comfortably shared in the presence of young children. For example, one congregant, who suffered from bulimia in her twenties, shared her fears about attending a ritual of this kind with her seven-year-old daughter. She says,

> "I have every intention of telling her [about the eating disorder] when I feel the time is right. I don't think she is ready to know about it yet, and I am nervous that the emotions would overtake me and she wouldn't understand why I was suddenly so upset. Once I've told her what happened, then I would consider bringing her, but I wouldn't want her or other kids to attend this kind of thing until that point."

While I certainly intend to encourage my congregants to share their stories with their children, I also understand that in many cases these stories need to come out in their own time.

Additionally, body image is a subject matter that many children find difficult to discuss, whether in front of their peers or in front of their parents. These kids, particularly those in the pubescent and pre-pubescent age groups, are undergoing major physical and emotional changes as they begin to approach adulthood. They often find themselves lost and/or confused with all of the simultaneous changes occurring in their lives. In *Resilience of the Soul*, adolescent children are compared with the Israelites as they wander through the desert, "The wilderness years are a time of confusion, growth and repeated stumbling as the Israelites move toward a time of full acceptance of responsibility and beginning of their rooted life on their own land in Israel, the much anticipated period of adulthood."[12] Because of this confusion, along with the significant

12 Rabbi Edythe Held Mencher, Yael Shmilovitz, Rabbi Michael Howald, "Wandering in the Wilderness: Why Adolescence is So Difficult," in *Resilience of the Soul*, ed. Rabbi Richard F. Address

developments in their physical and emotional selves, the topic of the human body causes much embarrassment, nervousness and discomfort. Their ever-changing bodies combined with newfound social pressures and a desire to fit in with their peers cause them to modify or silence how they truly feel about their bodies.

With all of the internal and external pressures placed upon them, one might think kids of this age group need to be included in ritual that celebrates the human body in the way I hope this one does. I certainly agree with this idea. However, due to the emotional pressures put upon these kids by their peers, and the confusion that so often occurs during puberty, I find it important to have a ritual that honors where they are as young adults, which is not the same place as their parents and other adults. I hope that upon completing this project, I can work to create a similar service for youth, based loosely upon the work found in *Resilience of the Soul*[13] and the ritual I have created for this project. As earlier stated, I will certainly try include those teenagers who express interest or need for this kind of work in my current ritual, providing they possess an appropriate maturity level and sense of compassion for others.

Part Two: The Liturgy—How was it chosen?

From its very genesis, I knew I wanted the ritual to emphasize one particular theological and liturgical idea over all others: that God and human beings work in partnership within the human body. I wanted the participants to understand, on a deeply personal level, that God is present in the body's creation, sustenance and functioning. More so, I desired for them to realize that God exists within their bodies and souls at all

(New York: URJ Press, 2007), 45.

13 *Ibid*, 155-156.

times, even in the darkest hours of one's struggles with body image. However, I also wanted to emphasize the idea that it is not God alone who is responsible for how we feel about our physical selves. While we do not bring negative circumstances upon ourselves (I would never make this claim, particularly in a congregation of people with various ailments, illnesses, and disabilities), we do have the power to change the way we feel about ourselves and the negative feelings that arise about ourselves. God is certainly present at all times, but it is up to us to realize this and understand God's place within our bodies and souls.

In an effort to find a summary of this idea stemming from Jewish tradition, I turned to many textual sources from Jewish tradition, including the Bible, rabbinic text, and the canon of Jewish liturgy (from both the traditional and liberal movements). I wanted to include a wide variety of texts in order to show how that words pertaining to the creation and sustenance of the human body were, indeed, a common subject of the centuries-old Jewish conversation. I began my search with the liturgy of the High Holy Days, where I came across the words of *Haneshama Lach* [The Soul is Yours]. This line is a small part of a Sephardic *piyut* [liturgical poem] found in the liturgy for *Selichot.* It states the following: "The soul belongs to Thee, The Body is Thy work, O spare Thy creation." [14] This particular line of liturgy speaks specifically to the idea of God's presence and ownership of the human body and soul, but can also be interpreted on a much more personal level. The body and soul belong to God, and we ask that God have mercy on our deeds and actions.

However, the body and soul also belong to the individual. Each person has the power to take ownership of their own body and have mercy upon her/himself in the form

14 Phillip Birnbaum, *High Holyday Prayerbook* (Hebrew Publishing Company, 1977), 527.

of self-love. Matters of body image and self-esteem are the responsibility of both God and every one of God's creations. In order to realize the Godliness and beauty within ourselves and others, we must allow ourselves to open our own eyes and see it, rather than focus solely what we perceive as ugly or broken. This idea is perhaps one of the most difficult for people with poor body image to comprehend. Geneen Roth, however, believes that people do have the ability to realize their own wholeness and Godliness. She writes,[15]

> The most difficult part of teaching people to respect and listen to their bodies is overcoming their conviction that there is nothing to respect. They can't find any place in them that is whole or intact. . . . The possibility that there is a place in them, in everyone, that is unbroken, that has never gained a pound, never been hungry, never been wounded, seems like a myth. . . But then I ask them about babies. I ask them to remember their own children and how they came into the world already gorgeous and utterly deserving of love. They nod their heads. They realize that brokenness is learned, not innate, and that their work is to find their way back to what is already whole.

It is with the idea that God and human beings work in partnership over the care and evolution of their truest bodies and self-perceptions, that I set to work finding the perfect liturgy for this ritual. I also began to think about other key ideas that I wanted the participants to take away upon the completion of this ritual. Among the first is the notion of how the liturgy of the Jewish tradition can evoke the many different feelings found within a person in relation to their body. It is clear that the liturgy states very certain ideas of the creation and sustenance of both the body and soul. These concepts can be beneficial to a person struggling with body image in any number of ways; they provide the basic source material for giving thanks for the body, while also allowing a person to

15 Geneen Roth, *Women Food and God* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 64-65.

question why his or her body does not necessarily fit within these liturgical descriptions. In addition, these pieces remind all of us to give thanks for the parts of our body that function as they should—even when other organs or limbs are in need of healing and/or repair. This small realization is huge in that it causes a person to understand that each part of their bodies is connected to God and can play an important role in the betterment of their own lives and the lives of others. Lastly, I wanted the liturgy to help the participants understand that their own bodies and souls—whatever they make look like or however they may function—are a part of the world that God created. The idea of taking to heart one's own purpose in the world can aid in the cultivation and sustenance of healthy body image and self-worth.

From these key ideas, I began to piece together the beginnings of the ritual. I knew that I wanted the order of the liturgy to be largely based upon the daily *shacharit* [morning] service found in *Mishkan Tefila,* the newest prayer book of the Reform movement. I chose to use essentially the same order as *Mishkan Tefila* due to its widespread use in Reform synagogues and its familiarity to congregants. The first part of the *shacharit* service (in both traditional and Reform *siddurim*), *Birchot Hashachar,* praises God repeatedly for the small, seemingly-mundane miracles that occur everyday—particularly those that have to do with the human body and it's functions. As Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman writes, "[T]he core of *Birchot Hashachar* was a set of blessings that accompanied each act of awakening. These are listed in the Talmud, and although there may once have existed more of them than we have now, the Talmudic ones about which we have evidence cover such ordinary acts as opening our eyes, getting dressed, and

using the bathroom."[16] It is through these small miracles that I would like my congregation to realize the wonder and amazement of their own bodies. I hope that once they open their eyes to the many functions of the human—which may or may not have to do with their physical appearance and/or the way their entire body operates (for people with physical handicaps)—the participants of this ritual will understand the value and importance of every part of themselves.

Part 3: The Liturgy of Seder K'dushat HaGuf

I chose to begin the service with a hand washing and blessing, to take place outside of the ritual space. According to Jewish tradition, it is necessary to wash one's hands before reciting any of the morning blessings. There are several reasons behind this action (customarily completed in the home after using the lavatory for the first time that day), mostly pertaining to the daily separation of sleep and awakening. Many rabbis, particularly those from the around the time of the *Zohar,* believed that the act sleeping was close to that of dying; according to Moshe Makiri in his kabbalistic-halakhic work *Seder Hayom* "sleep is one-sixtieth of death." The rabbis saw the act of waking up every morning to be a miraculous return to life and a chance to begin every day anew. As Daniel Landes writes, "Having gone through death, one arises triumphant in the morning and celebrates new life through the Morning Blessings."[17] The hand washing ritual is one that reminds us, through a means of physical and spiritual practice, that human beings have the incredible ability to return to life every single day.

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16 Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman "Blessings and Study: The Jewish Way to Begin a Day," in *My People's Prayer Book, Vol 5: Birkhot Hashachar* ed. Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 7.

17 Daniel Landes "The Halakhah of Waking Up," in *My People's Prayer Book, Vol 5: Birkhot Hashachar* ed. Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 36.

It is with this realization that I saw the necessity of including such a ritual within this ritual. It was important to me to have a physical reminder of the separation of sleeping from awakening—and of death from life. As each person prepares him/herself to enter the room, I wanted to provide them with an opportunity to leave their past self-perceptions—which, when struggling with body image issues, can sometimes feel like an emotional death—behind them. The act of hand washing serves as a small, yet powerful physical act of washing away all of the harsh words, cruel acts, and self-deprecating thoughts of one's past life. It is an act of physically cleansing oneself to prepare for new ways of thinking about one's body, soul and overall sense of emotional and spiritual well-being.

Rather than applying the traditional blessing for hand washing, which concludes with "*al n'tilat yada'im*" ["of washing the hands"], I wanted to find another blessing that spoke specifically to the holiness of the body. The hand washing ritual should serve as an act of touching a safe part of one's body and a reminder of the body's spiritual importance. The words "*al n'tilat yada'im*" did not feel significant enough to serve this purpose. Therefore, I turned to Marcia Falk's *The Book of Blessings* to find the blessing I would like to use for this part of the ritual. As Falk says, "The Hand washing Upon Awakening. . . call[s] to mind the *k'dushah*, 'holiness' of the unified body-spirit-self."[18] Her self-written blessing is succinct, yet powerful, as it reads (in its English translation)[19]: "Washing the hands, I call to mind the holiness of the body." This short and simple blessing is the perfect way to begin this ritual, as it is easily understandable by any congregant. The Hebrew line is simple and brief, as well, allowing for the participant

18 Marcia Falk, *The Book of Blessings* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), xix.
19 *Ibid*, 12.

to read in Hebrew with little to no assistance. Since this part of the ritual would be completed by oneself, without community or clergy guidance (unless requested), the length and meaning of both the English and the Hebrew of the prayer seem appropriate and necessary.

This beginning section is perhaps the most important part of the entire ritual, as it symbolizes a "death" of one's past and an "awakening" to a new beginning. Because of this, it is important to have a clearly defined set-up of space and a list of instructions for participants to follow so they know exactly how to proceed. I envision three small tables set up just outside of the ritual space, each with several small pitchers of water and a large basin, a hand washing cup, and paper towels with which to dry the hands after washing. There would also be a laminated set of instructions for the washing, based loosely off those found in *Halachah* (clearly listed in *My People's Prayerbook*[20]) which would also include the blessing in Hebrew, transliteration, and its English translation. Participants would individually follow the instructions—washing their hands and saying the blessing—before entering the room to begin the communal ritual.

Prior to the day of the ritual, participants would be asked to bring an old *tallit* to use during the service, preferably one that is well worn and/or has some sort of personal significance (additional *tallitot* would be available for those who do not have or did not bring their own). Jewish tradition claims that seeing the fringes of the *tallit* are meant to remind the Jewish people of the 613 commandments they are to follow each day. Rather than emphasizing this point in my ritual, I wanted the worn *tallitot* to represent the uniquenesses found in each person; the colors, the variations in fabric, the size and

20 Daniel Landes "The Halakhah of Waking Up," in *My People's Prayer Book, Vol 5: Birkhot Hashachar* ed. Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 41.

weight, the design, the textures of the embroidery, and the like—the different *tallitot* symbolize the beautiful differences found in every human being. Likewise, an older *tallit* can also contain rips or holes in the fabric, frayed fringes, perspiration stains around the neckline, and such. Each one of these flaws occurs after years of use within various holy spaces, and give the *tallit* meaning and importance within the owner's life.

So it is with the human body and spirit. All of a person's experiences create a body and soul that does not always appear as one might want it to. I wanted to create a moment within this ritual to allow each person to give honor to their imperfections; to give them a moment to be present with the pain and sorrow these scars have provided in their lives, without emphasizing this point too strongly. It is my hope that this moment will allow people to sit with their pain in order to understand it, feel it, and allow it to escape from their souls once and for all. As stated in *Litapayich Tikvah,* "In the darkest parts of our selves, we find the holiest sparks. When we allow them their voice, when we set them free, they begin to tell us their own story, the one we need to hear. Then those darkest voices can lead us back home, can lead us into the light."[21] When viewed in a different light, one can see that their flaws are more than scars and cellulite; they can see that their imperfections are the markers of the significant life experiences and moments that have brought them to this time and place. These blemishes can be seen in positive ways—if the participant agrees to view them as such. This openness to viewing oneself in this manner is one of the most important goals of this ritual.

In addition, I wanted the *tallit* to be a visual and tangible reminder of God's presence in each person's life. The fabric of the *tallit*, draped around one's neck and

21 Talia Campbell "From Darkness to Light" in *Litapayich Tikvah: To Nourish Hope* ed. Rabbi Richard F. Address and Rabbi Edythe Mensher (New York: UAHC Press, 2002), 52-53.

shoulders, symbolizes God's arms wrapped around each person in the room. This hearkens back to the ideas of *Haneshama Lach* discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The wrapping of a *tallit* around oneself is a symbol of the partnership between God and each person in cultivating and sustaining a healthy body image. God is with each of us, in each of our strengths and weaknesses, and in each of our perfections and imperfections. With the *tallit* wrapped around the body, it becomes slightly easier to accept the idea that God is present for every moment of the way we feel about ourselves, whether positive or negative. While I chose not to use Talia Campbell's poem as part of the *tallit* blessing (or anywhere within the ritual), I was inspired by these particular words that speak specifically to the idea of having God close by at all times:[22]

Quiet me enough
to feel your nearness.
You are so close—
Just an arm's reach away.

My steps are small,
But I am learning.
Teach me, God,
the way back to myself.

Guide me.
Let me feel
Your hand,
so gently on my back.

Soothe me
through my fear.
Cradle me.
Renew my strengh.

You see the light in me
even when I am blind.
Stay here with me now,
dear God.

22 *Ibid.*

In the ritual, I chose to combine these two ideas into one succinct yet striking section, led by both the leader and the congregation as a whole. After the leader introduces the ideas behind the *tallit* service, each person would be given a moment to stand with their *tallit*, noticing the intricacies and details that make the *tallit*—along with their own body—what it is. After a brief personal moment in silence, the leader would then guide the congregation through a brief reading, ending with the traditional blessing for the wearing of the *tallit*.

Upon completion of the *tallit* blessing, the ritual then moves on to *Modeh/ah Ani*—a prayer that gives thanks to God for returning the soul to the body upon waking up, and acknowledges God's faithfulness to each member of the Jewish people. I chose to begin with this prayer of gratitude in order to remind every congregant of the extraordinary ability to begin their lives anew every single day. For some of the attendees, overcoming body image issues is a type of rebirth; a chance to begin a new way of thinking, feeling, behaving, and appreciating oneself and the people around them. Reciting *Modeh/ah Ani* is a way to remind oneself of God's power to cleanse the soul—as well as the hurt and sorrow of past events—every single day. Reciting *Modeh/ah Ani* is a powerful means of acknowledging this second chance at life and the liberation from the bondage of negative self-perceptions and actions. As Reuven Hammer writes, "Whenever we have undergone an experience of salvation or wish to acknowledge the role God plays in our lives, we do so by this act of thankful recognition."[23]

Traditionally, this prayer is said privately in the home upon waking up (it is meant to be recited just after opening one's eyes every morning); however, I believe there is something powerful about chanting this particular blessing while surrounded by a

23 Reuven Hammer *Entering Jewish Prayer* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 25.

community of people. *Modeh/ah Ani* is—in this case—both a personal and public statement of starting one's life over again. To chant these words in a communal setting is to declare—in front of God and a congregation of people—that a person is ready to take this important step. This declaration serves as a means of building a community of people who can support and guide each other through the challenging yet incredibly beautiful process of learning how to love oneself.

After *Modeh/ah Ani*, the ritual progresses to two of the most important and well-known prayers of the *shacharit* service, that speak of the inner-workings of the body and soul: *Asher Yatzar* and *Elohai N'shamah.* These blessings are placed closely together in the traditional *siddur*, separated only by a brief blessing for Torah (in most Reform *siddurim*, the prayers are placed one immediately following the other, with no blessings in-between.) The first blessing, *Asher Yatzar*, praises God for "form[ing] the human body with skill creating the body's many pathways (lit. cavaties) and openings."[24] It is a blessing that reminds the pray-er about the body's most basic and natural functions; without the pathways and openings working as they should, the body would not be able to exist. As Kerry Olitzky writes, "in the prayer, we marvel at the mechanical functioning of our bodies, something we might previously have taken for granted."[25] The purpose of *Asher Yatzar* in this ritual is to remind us that despite a person's negative perceptions of her/his own body, it still functions in incredible ways. These functions—and the body as a whole—are evidence of God's creation of and residence within the human body. Elliot Dorff says, "...we are to see in our very bodies a wondrous sign of God's providence, which extends beyond our prayers; before we ever learned to pray, we

24 *Mishkan Tefilah: A Reform Siddur* ed. Rabbi Elyse D. Frishman (New York: CCAR Press, 2007), 32.
25 Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky *Jewish Paths toward Healing and Wholeness* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), 26.

were created with the miraculous ability to flourish."[26] Therefore, *Asher Yatzar* reminds us to treat the body and its many intricacies with the utmost care because they not only allow us to flourish as our own beings, but to also flourish on God's behalf, as creations of God.

Just as we express our gratitude for the fine-tunings of our bodies, we must also give thanks for our souls. *Elohai N'shamah*, which we find originally in *Brachot* 60a, allows us the opportunity to praise God for giving us a pure soul, protected by God's loving care. It is a gentle reminder that we are all fashioned with perfect souls, breathed into us by God at birth. The blessing brings us back to infancy, a time when our bodies were likely appreciated and adored by everyone around us; a time when we ourselves thought (whether consciously or unconsciously) that we were created exactly as we were meant to be. About *Elohai N'shamah,* Ellen Frankel writes,[27]

> Much has been written about our 'inner child', the primal root of our psyche from which our later selves emerge, our intrinsic nature, our uncorrupted essence. In Judaism, this inner child is called our *n'shamah,* usually translated as 'soul' but literally meaning 'breath.' This *n'shamah* is the image of God within us, uncorruptible, deriving its life force from the divine breath.

Frankel's idea that the *n'shamah* is our pure, "uncorrupted essence" is a powerful one, particularly for those struggling with body image issues. Through my own personal reflection, as well as interviews with several people, I have learned that many of us who struggle with poor self-esteem and body image often think that there is something innately wrong within us; as if it is not just the outsides of ourselves that are ugly or damaged, but the insides as well. It is difficult for us to view even our most positive

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26 Elliot Dorff "Preliminary Blessings," in *My People's Prayer Book, Vol 5: Birkhot Hashachar* ed. Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 111.

27 Ellen Frankel "Study and Blessings,"in *My People's Prayer Book, Vol 5: Birkhot Hashachar* ed. Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 135.

traits in the same way others do because we are convinced that our outside appearances—and other people's opinions of them—have made our entire selves impure. Therefore, the reminder that God both created the soul and purifies it daily, can help people to rid themselves of these negative ideas and see the Godliness inside of them. While *Elohai N'shamah* may not necessarily allow people to see the goodness that lies within them, it can help them to notice that these negative perceptions no longer need to exist within the innermost parts of their souls.

These two blessings, *Asher Yatzar* and *Elohai N'shamah,* have obvious parallels that enforce how the body and soul work together in the functioning and glorification of our bodies. Found closely together in both traditional and liberal prayer books, it is easy to see that rabbis and Jewish communities throughout the ages have also seen the commonalities between the subjects of these blessings. Most commentators and liturgists claim that the soul and body separate at the time of death, only to be reunited upon resurrection. However, I choose to believe that the soul and body are connected at all times, and both are essential to a person's life and well-being. The most intricate parts of the body and soul are all the creations of God, which require daily care and respect. It is impossible for us to separate the two and claim that one does not rely on the other. This idea harkens back once again to the ideas found in *Haneshama Lach*, "The soul belongs to Thee, The body is Your handiwork." As quoted by Rabbi Kerry Olitzky,[28]

> While some may want to separate our bodies from our souls to make a distinction between our mortal bodies and our immortal spirits, this is not the Jewish way. We are our bodies in a measure equal to our souls. Our entire self is created in God's image: *betzelem Elohim*...the daily recitation of these prayers helps pave a path toward healing. It offers a prism through which to view our entire day and forces us to assume a posture that might otherwise be overlooked in our quest for healing—the alliance between body and soul.

28 Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky *Jewish Paths toward Healing and Wholeness* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), 26-27.

It is with this thought that I find it necessary to include both of these blessings in this order and with this particular musical setting (to be explained later.) It is my hope that the participants of this ritual realize the interconnectedness of their own bodies and souls, and understand why these blessings are necessary to recite both in this ritual and every single morning.

Upon completion of *Asher Yatzar* and *Elohai N'shamah,* the ritual continues with an alternative set of blessings for *Nisim B'chol Yom*, or the blessings for daily miracles. These blessings, too, came into the liturgy from the Talmud in *Brachot* 60b. I knew from the beginning of this project that I wanted to compose my own set of blessings for *Nisim B'chol Yom* that would emphasize the small miracles of the human body from head to toe. In doing so, I wanted the participant to realize that every part of their body—even the body parts a person thinks is ugly or broken—is a miracle in and of itself for functioning just as it does. Every part of the body serves a purpose and is worthy of love, respect and appreciation; this was the main idea I wanted to present in this set of blessings.

As I was writing these blessings and sharing them with my advisors and student colleagues, I came to realize that these blessings could be extremely problematic to many of the participants of this ritual. Originally, the blessings did not take into consideration those members of my congregation who struggle with disabilities, amputations, or severe physical abnormalities. I realized quickly that people in these conditions may very well constitute a large portion of my ritual attendees, and may find these blessings to be offensive or hurtful. I found myself troubled by the idea that these blessings that seemed so integral to a ritual about positive body image and self esteem had the potential to cause more harm than good, and wrestled with the idea of how to best proceed. Ultimately, I

turned to the idea of Richard N. Levy, which states, "Those with disabilities teach us not only about courage, but about humor as well, and both sensitize us to the physical ability we make take for grated and encourage us to acknowledge our own disabilities from which we may have turned aside in denial or embarrassment."[29] These words ring particularly strongly when thinking about *Nisim B'chol Yom* in the context of this service, as I wanted to emphasize the notion of acknowledging, and eventually appreciating, one's uniquenesses—even when they come in the form of physical disabilities or flaws.

With Levy's words in mind, I was perfectly open to the idea of modifying both the blessings themselves and the leader's spoken introduction to them. I decided to keep the prayers in their original head-to-toe format, but bless each part of the body in a slightly more generalized way that would allow for maximized inclusion of attendees. For example, blessing number ten, which states, "Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, For my arms and hands, which allow me to lift, carry, create, and hold closely the people and belongings I love." Originally, this blessing spoke only of the physical actions the hands and arms can fulfill, "Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, For my arms and hands which allow me to lift, carry, and hold tightly onto those I love. Adding only a few small words does change the meaning of the blessing, giving room for metaphorical interpretations of the words 'create' and 'hold closely.' One can create without the physical use of one's hands, and one can hold closely without actually touching another person or object. In addition, I modified the introduction to these blessings, encouraging congregants think both literally and metaphorically about the blessings, as well as giving them the permission to omit any

29 Richard M. Levy *A Vision Of Holiness: The Future of Reform Judaism* (New York: URJ Press 2005), 211.

blessings they feel strongly against. I also included specific instructions for the leader of the ritual, specifying that they should handle the blessings in a way that would best serve the members of their congregation.

After *Nisim B'chol Yom*, the ritual continues with a chevruta-style text study (to be discussed later) and liturgically concludes with a *Mi Shebeirach* for the body. This is not the same as the *Mi Shebeirach* for the ill, which has become customary in many Reform synagogues thanks to Debbie Friedman's beautiful melody. Instead, I wanted to write a blessing that would incorporate all of the ideas from this service: thanking God for one's life and a chance to start anew, knowing the interconnectedness of body and soul, realizing and appreciating each body part for what it can do, and finding the smallest parts of oneself to love even in the darkest of times. This is, perhaps, the most important part of the entire ritual. Throughout the service, much of the liturgy and text has concentrated on the individual celebrating their own body and soul. In this moment, all of the people in the room come together as a community. The language is purposefully written in third-person plural, to emphasize the fact that they are not alone in how they are feeling about their bodies; each person in the room enters alone, with their own struggles, but has the ability to leave the room knowing they a part of a community of those who feel similarly. Speaking about the first performance of her *Mi Shebeirach* for healing, Debbie Friedman writes,[30]

> We climbed inside each word and in between each line looking to be enveloped and comforted. . . . We knew that we were alone and yet not alone; that we were in a community and however isolated we might have felt before this experience, we were now a part of something much greater. There were tears, there was hope. . .

I wanted the participants of this ritual to leave the room feeling hopeful and strong and

30 Debbie Friedman "Mi Shebeirach: Introduction" in *R'fua Shleima: Songs of Jewish Healing* ed. Merri Lovinger Arian (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications 2002), 53.

confident in their bodies and selves, but more so, I wanted them to know that they are a part of a larger group who could understand the effects of poor body image and self-esteem. Upon realizing they are not alone, the members of this group have the opportunity to turn to each other for guidance, uplift and support. It is my hope that this *Mi Shebeirach*, as well as the ritual as a whole, will not only be a blessing of the body, but will also be a blessing of a loving, supportive community.

The ritual ends with Rabbi Sheffa Gold's chant of "*Ozi V'Zimrat Yah.*" These words, which mean simply, "My strength, with the song of God, will be my salvation." These words, which come mostly from the book of Exodus, speak of the great courage needed for the Israelites to cross the Red Sea. The strength of every person, paired with the push of God's song, helped the Israelites to escape from their enemies. The same kind of strength, along with an allowance and openness to God's help, is necessary when learning how to love oneself. As Sheffa Gold writes,[31]

> We celebrate the miracle of this crossing with a song and dance that become the force of 'sending' *(beshallach)*. The power of the song and the magic of the dance propel us into the wilderness. The song lays out a formula for Salvation. My strength, '*Ozi*' and the Song of God, '*ve-zimrat Yah*' 'will be my salvation'. . . .*Ozi* is the force of will that I bring to this crossing—the place inside me that desires freedom and truth, and will do anything for its attainment. *Ve-zimrat Yah* is the part of me that knows how to surrender, that opens to the rhythm and melody of God's Song and gives itself unconditionally to 'what is.' The blessing comes in the balance of will and surrender. . .in the marriage of my strength of will and a surrender to the Godsong, the sea of confusion splits open and the dry land appears beneath my feet.

Just like the Israelites, so too can each participant of this ritual, and everyone who struggles with body image issues, free themselves from persecution and reclaim a positive sense of self.

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31 Rabbi Sheffa Gold *Torah Journeys: The Inner Path to the Promised Land* (Teaneck: Ben Yehuda Press 2006), 73-74.

CHAPTER 3:

THE USE OF TEXT AND MUSIC WITHIN KEDUSHAT HAGUF

As I began to think about and form this ritual, I knew that I somehow needed to implement more than liturgy alone in order to create a meaningful service for all participants. I wanted to find a creative way to give congregants the opportunity to talk to one another, to form lasting bonds over their shared experiences with body image difficulties and experiences. Unsure of exactly how to do that, I turned to the world of rabbinic literature to see if I could find a text that would help facilitate such discussions and group bonding. What I discovered was an incredibly rich world of thoughts about and perceptions of the human body from throughout the ages. While I knew I could not possibly use all of them within the ritual, they were incredibly helpful in my own learning about the Jewish understanding of body image and how Jews are meant to view themselves and other human beings.

When researching this project, my initial goal was to discover the various streams of rabbinic thought regarding the body and how it has been perceived throughout the ages. I was curious as to how the rabbis and past generations of Jews understood God's participation in the creation of the human body, as well as their thoughts on what was considered to be "beautiful". What I learned, somewhat astonishingly, is that rabbinic

ideas of body image and the perfect human form were not that different from how they are today; women were to be conventionally beautiful, with pale and unblemished complexions, long hair, and trim bodies, and men were to be built in form, with dark curly hair. The societal expectations for one's appearance—in Biblical times and later—were strikingly similar to those of modern day. The literature of the Song of Songs lists the traits that the ideal man and woman should each possess, stating as follows[32]:

> Of women: "She had a fair complexion (1:5, 5:9) by birth, and by the fact that she was not suntanned (1:6.) Her voice was sweet (2:14), as was her breath (4:11, 5:16, 7:10). She had long hair (4:1, 6:5) and her teeth were not only symmetrical (4:2), they were also clean (6:5). Her neck was long (4:4, 7:5) and her navel, round like her belly (7:3)
>
> Of men: He was to be strong (5:15) and of high stature (7:18). His hair was black

While the book of Song of Songs is an allegorical account, it is also the only place within the Jewish Bible that describes how the "ideal" human being should appear. It is interesting to note that, just as in modern research on perceptions of the human body, there is far less to be said for the male form than the female form. This was true of many of the texts I studied. In general, comments on the female form were much more common than those on the male form, probably due to the subservient nature of women to men in these times. Women, who needed to be physically attractive to their male counterparts in order to fulfill the commandment to "be fruitful and multipy",[33] were expected to present themselves in a certain way. Without these certain characteristics, women risked the possibility of not finding their potential partners, and a man had the ability to pick and choose carefully to find a wife that would best suit his needs. The

32 David A. Katz "What is Natural Beauty" in *The Rabbinic Conception of Human Beauty* (RAB Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1981), 17-18.

33 Genesis 1:28.

same holds true for men even after a marriage has taken place. According to *Ketuboth* 59b, a man also had the ability to divorce his wife if any of the following five physical conditions were found to be true of the woman upon consummation of the marriage:[34]

1.) If a woman perspires excessively
2.) If she has a large mole with hairs that is not easily seen in public
3.) If she has a scar
4.) If she has a harsh voice
5.) If her breasts are spread too far apart or are too big

Because of this, the use of cosmetics and the wearing of fine clothes and jewelry amongst women was both permitted and encouraged in rabbinic times.

When writing this ritual, I knew I wanted to include a text that would speak in a positive light to both men and women. The aforementioned texts, while relevant to the theme of body image, do not exactly spread the message of appreciating the appearance and functions of one's body—particularly to women. Luckily, I stumbled across several texts from early Chasidism, which pertain quite nicely to the ideas of loving oneself and cultivating healthy self-esteem. While they do not directly speak about the body itself, the texts do emphasize the notion of finding God within every aspect of a human being. Furthermore, the texts encourage the idea of acceptance of the self and others: physically, intellectually, and emotionally. When I found these texts, I knew immediately that they would serve a much better purpose in this ritual than the majority of the rabbinic quotations I'd found previously. While I also knew I could not select both of these texts to fit within the ritual I created, they both changed my own ideas of God's role in the human body so much that I can not choose only one to discuss here. These texts, paired with discussions with classmates and leaders of the Institute for Jewish Spirituality, strongly influenced both the gathering of materials for the ritual as a whole and the

34 Michelle Missagheih *The Woman's Body: Old and New* (RAB Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1996), page unknown.

author's own personal theology and relationship with God.

The first text (the one not selected for use in the ritual) comes from Rabbi Menachem Nachum Twersky and reads as follows[35]:

Me'or Eynaim V'etchanan:

Know therefore this day and return to your heart that YHVH is God *(YHWH hu ha-elohim)* **in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other** (Deut.4:39).

The sages taught (Berachot 34a): love YHVH your God with all your heart: with both of your inclinations, the *yetzer tov* and the *yetzer hara.* How is it possible to love God with the *yetzer hara*? The Holy One created the world with light and darkness, and a whole day is made up of both darkness and light, starting with night and then daylight; they are combined together (even though they are opposites) to constitute a full day. Note: first there is darkness and then there is light, and the Holy One makes peace between them, as it says, **Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace** [and creates woe] (Is.45:7).

And, indeed, people were created in the same manner. Dimness of awareness is the presence of the *yetzer hara*, and so is called darkness, while the appearance of the *yetzer tov* is like the break of day. In this way, we start out in darkness, before we are endowed with the light of understanding; we are constricted, our minds are small, and this darkness is the place of adversity. Good and evil are naturally part of us so that we will then have to make choices, experiencing the good and ill that flows from them. We are all part of the material world, and so must participate in the process of subjugating the ill to the good, making them one, so that they, too, can be called a whole day. Even though darkness may come first, night will eventually shine in the fullness of daylight. This comes about when we realize that darkness is merely the appearance of God (*Elohim*) in a constricted mode, which appears as adversity. This awareness will bring us to our root source, enabling us to serve God with even greater energy. The left side will be subjugated to the right, materiality to spirituality, making one full and complete day. All this takes place in through our inner work.

But, this is also true in our external life. Thus, when in the course of our daily endeavors,making a living or fulfilling other needs, we find that we feel constrained, limited in our accomplishment, we will be moved to then grasp tightly to God. We will begin to pray, bringing into ourselves the quality of compassion, which is the quality of *YHVH.* This will energize and move the divine realms.

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[35] Rabbi Menachem Nachum Twersky, Me'or Eynayim V'etchanan in *Mindful Jewish Spiritual Practice: Integrating Body, Heart, Mind and Soul in Our Jewish Lives*, compiled by Rabbi Jonathan Slater (HUC Class Materials, 2011), 17.

Me'or Eynaim V'etchanan, continued

> Just as we bring evil into good to form complete Oneness, in the same manner that darkness is combined with light to make one whole day, so this unity will appear in the divine realms, since this ultimate unity is in our hands to affect.
>
> This is the sense of **"Know therefore this day: "know"** signifies connection and unification. The two aspects, right and left, are combined to become **"this day"**, a full day which includes darkness. This comes about through **"returning to your heart"** (*l'vavcha*)" your two inclinations, such that **"*YHVH* is God"**, *YHVH* is truly made up of and includes *Elohim.*

This text deals mainly with the idea of finding the Godliness within every human being—even within those people or traits that could be deemed as "evil." The text gives a pseudonym for God to both the *yetzer tov*, the inclination for good, and the *yetzer hara*, the inclination to do evil. Because of this, the seemingly opposite traits are both elevated to a holy status. *YHVH* (יהוה), the holiest name for God in Jewish tradition, is attached to the *yetzer tov.* This makes sense, as it is easy to apply the highest name for God to one's best characteristics. It might be surprising to see that the name *Elohim* is chosen for one's negative attributes. *Elohim* is another widely-used name for God that stems from the Hebrew bible. From the text, we learn that by assigning a name and/or place for God, even in our most lowly traits, we can give honor to them. When we attach God's name to the parts of ourselves we dislike the most, we realize that there has to be something inherently good within them, simply because God is present. With this realization, we can begin to see even our worst-perceived flaws as something wholly unique, beautiful and worthy of our utmost love and respect. As we come to this realization, we can also slowly allow the *yetzer tov* to shine more brightly the *yetzer hara*, causing our perceptions to change. More importantly, we can learn to be gentle with ourselves and

others. The sense of acknowledging *Elohim* within ourselves can pave the way for learning compassion and a deeper understanding of the self. Sensing God's place within the body and the world, allowing it to crawl inside even our darkest places, can lead to acceptance and love of the body, the soul and the world around us. As much as I love the aforementioned text and the ideas within it, I ultimately decided upon a different text to utilize within the ritual. I came across this piece by coincidence and was brought to tears as follows[36]:

> *Likkutei Moharan 1: 282*
> **Find the good in others...**
> **KNOW** that you must judge all people favorably. This applies even to the worst of people. You must search until you find some little bit of good in them. In that good place inside them, they are not bad! If you can just find this little bit of good and judge them favorably, you really can elevate them and swing the scales of judgment in their favor. This way you can bring them back to God.
>
> This teaching is contained in the words of King David in the Psalms: "And in just a little bit (*ve-OD me-at*) there's no sinner; when you think about his place, he won't be there" (Psalm 37:10). King David is teaching us to judge everyone favorably. Even if you consider someone to be totally bad, you must still search until you find some little bit of good in him. There in the place of this tiny bit of good, that person isnot bad! This is the meaning of the words, "And in just a little bit there's no sinner..." In other words you must seek out the little bit of good that is still in him. For in that place he is not a sinner. Maybe he's a bad person. Even so, is it really possible that he is totally devoid of even the slightest modicum of good? How could it be that all his life he never once did anything good? By finding one tiny good point in which he is not bad and thereby judging him favorably, you really do raise him from being guilty to having merit. This will bring him back to God. "In just a little bit there's no sinner!"

36 Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlov "Empowerment Through Good Points," Azamra: Torah for Our Times, http://www.azamra.org/sing.shtml (Accessed 4 November 2011).

Likkutei Moharan 1:282, continued

> Earlier we saw that we have to judge other people favorably, even those who seem totally bad. We must search for their good points in order to swing the scales in their favor. The same applies to the way you look at yourself. You must judge yourself favorably and find the good points that still exist in you. This way you won't fall into despair. The good you find inside you will give you new life and bring joy to your soul...
>
> Finding your good points can give you new life. Even if you know you have done wrong and caused damage and that you are far from God, you must search until you find the good that is still inside you. This will give you new life and make you truly happy. You are certainly entitled to feel the greatest joy over every good point you find in yourself, because each good point comes from the Jewish soul in you. The new life and joy you will have from following this path will enable you to pray, sing and give thanks to God.
>
> *Azamra l'Elohai be-odee*, "I will sing to my God as long as I live". The phrase "as long as I live" is a loose translation of the Hebrew word *be-ODee*, which refers to the good that still (*OD*) remains in me. For as we saw earlier, "In just a little bit (*OD*) the sinner is not." In virtue of this good point I can sing and give thanks to God.

This text is meaningful for many reasons, especially because it gives people the opportunity to see themselves and their self-perceived flaws in a different light. By learning to see the *od* within themselves and others, they can learn how to respect themselves and their bodies in an entirely different way. They can realize the *yetzer tov* that resides within the *yetzer hara*, and learn to love their entire selves not only in spite of their imperfections, but because of them.

It is easy to give this teaching to a congregation of people and wish them to follow it exactly, hoping the words alone will prompt them to change their perceptions of who they are and how they feel about their bodies and souls. However, as someone who has struggled with my own body image issues for many years, I know this wish is far-fetched. Most people do not have the capacity for such quick and drastic change of mind and deed, especially when their minds are so conditioned to think one way or another. Thus, I realized that a study of this text—an opportunity for the participants of this ritual to go deeper than the words on the page—was necessary to this service. I wanted to ask

the types of questions that would force the service-goer to find the places of pain, dissatisfaction and discomfort in order to give them the brief opportunity to sit with their negative feelings without simply abandoning them. The difficult emotions that arise with the answers to these questions would later be soothed by other questions that shine a much more optimistic light. This methodology stems from the ideas in Geneen Roth's book, where she claims that one can not move on from the pain of one's past without acknowledging it and truly feeling the entirety of what the pain entails. After this happens, a person can begin to heal and start anew, finding the smallest bits of *od* within themselves and others. The questions are intended to aid discussions a two-person *chevruta* during the text study portion of the ritual. I have given ample time within the ritual to discuss the questions thoroughly. If desired and/or necessary, the leader can give additional time for discussion of these important and provocative questions. The study questions, based on the *Azamra* text, read as follows:

1. What does it mean to "find a little bit of yet"?
2. When are you most likely to discover your own flaws? What time of day, what activity, what people most help you to notice them?
3. Admit to three of your most devastating flaws. Sit with each of them for one minute; where do they come from? How did they get there? What stories do they tell about your life? Are they really as "flawed" as you think they are? Why or why not?
4. Now, think of the "little bits of yet" in each of your flaws. Say them out loud, to each other.
5. How can you continue to find the "little bits of yet" in yourself and others? How can they shine brighter than the flaws?
6. Is it possible to see your flaws as markers of uniqueness and individuality, rather than imperfections?

In addition, the leader should feel free to add his/her own questions as desired.

THE MUSIC OF THE KEDUSAHT HAGUF

Music is inherent within all human beings. We all have our own natural rhythms of life that stem from the heartbeat and breath at the very center of our bodies. We are drawn to the sounds of music that match the rhythm of our heartbeats and breathing as much as we are drawn in to the melodies and lyrics that correspond to our emotions. Music, in its very essence, connects us to our physical bodies and our emotional souls. In addition, music can tap into our emotions in ways that words alone can not. It allows us to emote that which feels impossible to express in written words or speech. In reference to music and it's effects on healing, Rabbi William Cutter writes,[37]

> [Music provides] so many ways to express our longing for health, for cure, for wholeness. So many different melodies, such a variety of musical genres. Music presents a rare opportunity for voices to join in communal support, and also to foster individual expressions of longing.
>
> Music responds to illness more naturally than speech—any speech, even the speech of prayer. Perhaps it requires non-cognitive expression to capture the infinities of sorrow and hope. Purely cognitive expression requires a kind of restrictive precision, focused enough to...describe what ails us. But in calling out to God, that narrow precision gives way to a thousand moods and ten thousand shapes, to an infinity of expression and to the expression of infinity. Music is the vehicle for that expression.

It is easy to understand how music is necessary to a ritual of this kind. Not only does it allow people to express that which is difficult to say aloud, but it also provides an opportunity for individuals to join in with others as a community. All of the music in this ritual is best sung communally in an attempt to promote the idea of coming together as one supportive group. The music helps to emphasize the idea that no one participant is truly alone in how they feel about him/her self. It is the vehicle for calling out to God, as Rabbi Cutter suggests above, and also for calling out to those who can best understand

37 Rabbi William Cutter, Ph.D. "General Introduction" in *R'fua Shleima: Songs of Jewish Healing* ed. Merri Lovinger Arian (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications 2002), 5.

and empathize with all that is involved with body image issues.

The first piece of music involved is a folk setting of *Modeh/ah Ani.*[38] This setting was chosen mostly for its various forms of performance; one could choose to sing the piece softly and contemplatively, sing it in an uptempo manner, or any combination of the two. For this ritual, I envision the piece starting very quietly, with a guitarist or pianist playing the chords of the song in a gentle, arpeggiated manner prior to singing the prayer. This would take place during the *tallit* blessing, easily preparing the participants to sing the blessing in its appropriate place. Upon conclusion of the *tallit* blessing, I begin the singing of the piece in *niggun* fashion, allowing those who are not familiar with this setting to learn the melody before adding in the Hebrew text. Once the Hebrew text is added, we would increase the tempo and dynamic of the song, encouraging all people to join in the singing and prayer.

This type of performance allows for not only an easy means of participation, but also sets the tone for the entire ritual. It offers a moment of peaceful contemplation and an opportunity for personal prayer and reflection, before providing encouraging congregational singing. This idea hearkens back to what was discussed previously about the liturgy for *Modeh/ah Ani*; the prayer is one of declaration, to the self and everyone in the room, that a person is ready to begin life anew. When this prayer is recited in such a way, with allowances for both a personal and public announcement of reclaiming one's life, it has a much more dynamic impact than it otherwise would. It utilizes both the power of the prayer itself with the aforementioned power of music to draw out hidden or ignored emotions, providing a deeper meaning and understanding of the liturgical text.

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38 Folk Tune "Modeh Ani" in *The Complete Shireinu* ed. Joel N. Eglash (New York: Transcontinental Music Publications 2001), 236.

After a brief introduction from the leader, the ritual continues with Debbie Friedman's renditions of *Asher Yatzar* and *Elohai N'shamah.*[39] This musical setting is written to be performed either as two individual composition or combined into one piece, layering the words and melodies of each blessing into a round. In this ritual, each prayer would be sung on its own before combining the two parts into one. This is done in order to acknowledge the meanings of each prayer while also emphasizing the idea that the body and soul are intertwined. Just as Friedman combined the melodies of the prayers for the body and the soul into one complex, beautiful and stirring musical arrangement, so too are our bodies and souls combined in the same remarkable ways. Cantor David Berger writes about this arrangement, discussing the connections between the body and the soul that Debbie was striving to emulate in her musical setting. He also talks about the idea of stretching the limits of the voice, much like stretching the limits of the body or the mind. He writes,[40]

> [The setting of Asher Yatzar] can, [Debbie Friedman] told me, be performed as a stand alone piece, but it was meant to be sung in combination with her Elohai N'shamah. The two melodies are intertwined, giving thanks for both body and spirit...The melody itself extends over a large range, as if to test out the limits of the vocal instrument. Most people's best vocal moments are not usually early in the morning – so in Birchot Hashachar (the morning blessings) this sort of testing takes on a special significance. We not only thank God in general for "n'kavim n'kavim chalulim chalulim;" ("systems of ducts and tubes") but we also work to reestablish connections with parts of the body through the singing itself.

According to Cantor Berger, Friedman's intention was not only to illustrate the interconnectedness of the body and soul in her melodies for these blessings, but also to provide a physical connection to both of these through her music. The wide vocal range,

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39 Debbie Friedman "Asher Yatzar/Elohai N'shamah" in *Renewal of Spirit* (San Diego: Sounds Write Productions, Inc., 1995), 5-7.

40 Cantor David Berger "Asher Yatzar" http://tmt.urj.net/archives/4jewishethics/071008.htm (Accessed 15 January 2012).

particularly in *Asher Yatzar*, gives the pray-er a kinesthetic experience of this body and soul connection, as well as a realization that changing one's self-perceptions involves a metaphorical stretching of the mind. This particular setting is one that I wanted to include from the inception of this project, as it reminds the participants that sometimes the body (and our perceptions of it) is put to the test, but our inner-most being (the soul)—despite what our minds may think—remains pure. The wide vocal range of the *Asher Yatzar* paired with the simple, soothing melody of *Elohai N'shamah* is a reminder that underneath the tension we may experience in relation to our bodies, the soul is eternally filled with the breath of God. Despite the cruel comments a person may hear or say about their appearance, his/her soul remains a beautiful and pure creation of God.

It should also be noted that Friedman chose to compose only the first few lines of the *Elohai N'shamah* text in her piece; I have chosen to include only that particular section of the text in the ritual, as it aids in creating a musical moment. If desired, the ritual could be adapted to include the entire text of this prayer, either chanted in simple nusach or read silently or aloud.

At this point, the musical section of the ritual stops for awhile in order to allow for the spoken *Nisim B'chol Yom* blessings. Originally, I had intended to for the self-composed words of each blessing to fit with the daily nusach for *Nisim B'chol Yom.* As I tried to do this, however, I realized that my adaptation of the text to this musical chant was both strange and unfitting to the entire section of the liturgy. The chanting of the words detracted from their meaning and purpose in this ritual, and was therefore omitted. I thought very seriously about finding a *niggun* or another tune to play softly underneath the blessings as they were read, but the idea seemed unnecessary and again, detracted

from the importance of the carefully-written text. The leader of this ritual could certainly work the congregation's preferred melody for *Nisim B'chol Yom* into the ritual if desired, particularly if these blessings are replaced by the participants' own personal miracles.

The next major moment comes out of the *chevruta* study of the text from *Likkutei Moharan* 282. The text study itself does not include a musical component, as it would distract from the important discussions I hope would be taking place. However, as a means of gathering the group back together to move on in the ritual, I found a piece of music based on the last section of the text: *Amamra*[41] composed by Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller and Jewish composer Craig Taubman. This piece is full of hope and inspiration; it beautifully captures the ultimate meaning of the text, which is to use all the smallest bits of good within you to praise God. The piece begins with a gentle, etherial arpeggiated piano introduction that easily transports the participant out of the realm of discussion and back into the realm of the ritual. This introduction could easily be expanded to allow for ample time to conclude *chevruta* study and bring the group back together. It could also be performed with a similar arpeggiated guitar riff, allowing congregations without access to a piano player the same opportunity to sing the piece.

From the beautiful piano introduction comes the phrase from Psalm 146:2, which Schiller and Taubman reconstruct for this piece. The original text of the psalm reads: *Ahal'lah Adonai b'cha'yai; Azamra l'Elohai b'odi.* In Schiller and Taubman's arrangement, they've placed emphasis on the final words of the verse, *Azamra l'Elohai b'odi* [I will sing to God with all of my *od*, "all the good that still remains in me"[42]]. The melody begins with a simple, chant like melody for these words, sitting in the lower to

41 Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller and Craig Taubman "Azamra" (Manuscript, 2011).
42 "Empowerment Through Good Points," Azamra: Torah for Our Times, http://www.azamra.org/sing.shtml (Accessed 4 November 2011).

middle range of the voice. The text repeats, melodically lifting a to a somewhat higher place in the voice. As the song continues into the English verses, the range of the melody line becomes higher and the dynamic of the entire piece—voice and piano alike—grows louder and more powerful. This drama continues through a section of the word *Hallelujah*, repeated several times to represent the highest form of praise to God. Upon completion of the *Hallelujah* section, the we return to the beginning *Azamrah l'Elohai b'odi*, at which point the piece begins to soften in anticipation of the song's—and the moment's—culmination. The repetitive melodic lines, easy Hebrew and English texts, and ear-catching tune will help the participants to catch onto this new composition.

This composition fits the *chevruta* study beautifully, as it represents the range of emotions I hope to flush out in the text portion of the ritual. Melodically, the piece starts gently and simply, growing into a much more complex and complicated—but nevertheless joyful and inspiring—vocal line. The melody perfectly illustrates a person's hesitancy to enter into this kind of deep reflection and letting go of the past, as well as the sense of triumph that can be achieved once that person begins the process of completing this important work. In addition, it is a musical reminder of the incredible beauty that can be achieved when a person realizes their bits of *od* and sees the true goodness—and Goldiness—that exists both externally and internally. *Azamrah* is the perfect piece of music to fit this highest point of the ritual, as it demonstrates the text, the ritual itself, and the beauty that already resides within each participant.

The last piece of music involved in the ritual is Sheffa Gold's chanted round for *Ozi V'zimrat Yah*[43]. This two-part round is beautiful in it's elegance, simplicity and

43 Rabbi Sheffa Gold "Ozi V'zimrat Yah" http://www.rabbishefagold.com/OziVZimratYah.html (accessed 11/4/11).

singability. Being a round, the chant has two musical sections, with the latter section in a higher vocal range than the former, which both utilize the same line of text. The melodies of both lines are not difficult, yet seem to tap into the hearts and souls of every person who sings it. The chant begins with the leader singing the first line, capturing the attention of the congregation and engaging them in the piece. The congregation can join in with the leader as they learn the simple tune, singing along with the leader and lifting their voices in song. As the volume builds with congregational participation, so too the energy increases. When this happens, the leader can begin singing part two, which sits in a higher place in the voice though is still easily accessible to any participant in the ritual. Once the congregation is familiar with both sections, the leader can facilitate singing both parts together in a round, increasing the sound and energy of the piece even more.

As simple as the melody lines of this piece are, there is a beautiful tension that is easily noticeable whenever the piece is sung. As stated in Chapter Two, Gold realizes the tension—and the partnership—between God and human beings in finding a sense of liberation. She says, "In this practice I find and express my strength, my will, my effort and desire when I chant '*Ozi*'. When I chant '*V'zimrat Yah*,' I open and surrender to the God-song and let it be sung through me. Then in the last phrase, '*Vayahi li lishuah*,' I balance those two aspects of my practice."[44] I love her ideas behind this piece, which, while musically simple, work nicely to express both the struggle to allow oneself to work with God, and the power that comes when one achieves this goal. Both of these concepts are clearly demonstrated in the music, particularly when chanted at the end of a prayer service or ritual such as this, which taps into the souls of those who participate.

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44 *Ibid.*

The use of text and music allows participants of this ritual to further understand how Jewish tradition provides tremendous resources to aid in the betterment of one's body image and self-esteem. Through the inclusion of rabbinic text in the ritual, we are better able to understand how the Jews of generations past appreciated and understood the very best (and worst) parts of themselves—and how they could work to improve their own sense of self-worth. We can look through the eyes of our Chasidic masters to understand God's role in the creation of both the brightest and darkest spots within ourselves. In addition, we can see that Godliness lies within even our worst perceived traits, and how we must develop a sense of compassion for ourselves and others. The music of this ritual utilizes melody and rhythm to further emphasize these important pieces of liturgy and text. In addition, the music allows for a release of emotions that are sometimes hard to express through spoken word. The melodic range and the tensions found in most of the pieces provide an artistic means of expressing the very nature of the liturgical words, while the arrangements of certain melodies help us to understand the commonalities between two pieces of prayerful text. Both of these mediums, along with the liturgy itself, provide various means of expression that will, hopefully, allow all participants to experience the ritual in their own very personal ways.

CONCLUSION

Towards the end of chapter two, I discussed Sheffa Gold's idea of personal liberation that stem from the words "*Ozi V'zimrat Yah.*" These words come from the book of Exodus, just after the Israelites cross the Red Sea and escape persecution under Pharaoh in Egypt. It tells the story of Israelite persecution, of the sorrow and agony of the slaves under Pharaoh's command. However, the story of the Exodus is not only one of pain and affliction; it is also one of hope and liberation. Upon crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites danced and sang with joy. Their celebration was one of deep realization, where they could finally open their eyes to all that came before them. They realized that every stone they lifted and tear they wept made them into stronger people, and understood that strength in new ways as they made the necessary preparations to journey out of their place of persecution. They were able to realize that the entire journey, despite the obstacles it entailed, led them to this beautiful new place of freedom. These people—so battered and torn and exhausted from their ordeals with Pharaoh in Egypt—could begin life anew, on their own terms.

As someone who has battled with the effects of negative body image and self-esteem throughout my entire life, I know exactly how it feels to live an enslaved and tortured life. The idea of enslavement is one that many people struggling with body

image can strongly relate to; just as the Hebrew slaves endured years of torture and tears while enslaved, so too do people with poor body image and self esteem endure their own personal sense of slavery. The pain of carrying around these negative thoughts for so many years can often be as burdensome and mentally and emotionally destructive as carrying the heavy stones in Egypt. It is difficult to break away from the effects of these thoughts and to live life any other way but enslaved.

However, I know from my own experiences that there is a way out of the pain and enslavement that comes from these issues. The freedom does not come from losing weight or changing one's personal appearance; it comes from learning how to appreciate one's journey and the learning, strength, and experiences that come along the way. Liberation happens when a person can look back on their past, allow themselves to truly feel the hurt that accompanies such negative experiences, and let go of the pain once and for all. Salvation comes when one can see how these struggles have made them into the unique, beautiful people they are today, with a strong sense of self, a functioning and miraculous body, and a soul that is purified every single day. The sense of empowerment that accompanies this salvation is incredibly meaningful and lasting, and allows people the opportunity to love their bodies, and more importantly, their entire selves, in new and wonderful ways.

Throughout the process of writing this thesis paper, I have come to realize the commonalities between the Exodus and the Israelites, but more so, I have come to see my own connection to the brave leader of the Exodus. Moses was a man of impeded speech, a man who questioned God's calling out to him to free the Hebrew slaves from Egypt. He doubted his ability to stand up to Pharaoh and guide the Jewish people into the land of

Israel and yet, did so with amazing leadership and command. My own impediments, the flaws and imperfections that I thought would hold me back from succeeding in life, are similar to those of Moses. I understand how he could feel unworthy of such a huge role in the freedom of the Jewish people. However, just like Moses, I have faced my flaws and impediments head-on and have turned them into something truly wonderful. Not only have I opened my eyes to the beauty and wonder found through and through within myself, but I have found the ability and desire to help others do exactly the same thing. I am sincerely grateful for this realization and deeply honored to take on the magnificent responsibility of helping others to discover the many gifts and "bright, shiny lights"[45] they hold within. Just like Moses, my life is profoundly changed in professional and especially personal ways by this newfound ability to lead the Jewish people into the land of loving who they are, and being a constant witness to their own celebrations of freedom, liberation and salvation.

[45] Dahlia Spinrad, age 4.

APPENDIX A:

SEDER KEDUSHAT HAGUF

סדר קדשת הגוף

A Service for the Holiness of the Body

Compiled by Cantorial Student Tracy Fishbein

Blessing for Handwashing (to take place outside the meeting space):

תִּזְכֹּר נַפְשֵׁנוּ אֶת קְדֻשַּׁת הַגּוּף בִּנְטִילַת יָדַיִם

Washing the hands, we call to mind the holiness of the body.*

Tallit Blessing

This morning, as I wrap myself in this tallit filled with memories, may I be reminded of the beautiful being it encases today and always. May my body and my soul be wrapped in God's loving presence, and may the flaws in the fabric remind me that all of my pieces, even the frayed, ripped, or broken ones, are a part of something wholly unique and incredible. May I give thanks to God that I am alive this morning to be myself, the human being that God created ~~out of~~ love.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהִתְעַטֵּף בַּצִּיצִת.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to wrap ourselves in the fringes.

Modeh/ah Ani

מוֹדֶה\דָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ, מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיָּם, שֶׁהֶחֱזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה, רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ.

I offer thanks to You, ever-living Sovereign, that You have restored my soul to me in mercy; How great is Your trust.

Asher Yatzar/Elohai N'shamah

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָה, וּבָרָא בוֹ נְקָבִים נְקָבִים, חֲלוּלִים חֲלוּלִים. גָּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ לִפְנֵי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדֶךָ, שֶׁאִם יִפָּתֵחַ אֶחָד מֵהֶם, אוֹ יִסָּתֵם אֶחָד מֵהֶם, אִי אֶפְשַׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּם וְלַעֲמוֹד לְפָנֶיךָ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, רוֹפֵא כָל בָּשָׂר וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת.

Praise to You, Adonai, our God, Sovereign of the universe, who formed the human body with skill, creating the body's many pathways and openings. It is well known before Your throne of glory that if one of them be wrongly opened or closed, it would be impossible to stand before You.

Blessed are You, Adonai, who heals all flesh, working wonderously.

אֱלֹהַי, נְשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא. אַתָּה בְרָאתָהּ, אַתָּה יְצַרְתָּהּ, אַתָּה נְפַחְתָּהּ בִּי, וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְּרָהּ בְּקִרְבִּי.

My God, the soul You have given me is pure. You created it, You shaped it, You breathed it into me and You protect it within me.

Nisim B'chol Yom: Blessings for Daily Miracles of the Body

1. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for giving the mind the ability to awaken me each day, distinguishing light from darkness.
2. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for bestowing upon me a pure soul, created and sustained in partnership with You.
3. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for reminding me daily to treat the myself and the people around me with love, gentleness and compassion
4. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for opening my eyes to the true inner and outer beauty that exists within everyone.
5. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for giving me a voice to speak words of truth, justice and compassion.
6. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for ears that allow me to hear the sounds of the world.
7. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for a nose that enables me to breathe in the breath and spirit of God.
8. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for providing me with a mouth to eat and be nourished, and more importantly, to taste and enjoy my food.
9. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for giving me lungs to fill the body with God's everlasting presence.
10. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for my arms and hands, which allow me to lift, carry, create, and hold closely the people and belongings I love so dearly.
11. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for providing me with a midsection that stabilizes and centers my entire body.
12. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for giving me a stomach and navel, a vessel of nourishment and a reminder of my link to generations past.
13. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for my legs and feet, which carry my body through it's journey.
14. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for allowing me to recognize and appreciate my body's unique traits and characteristics that make me who I am.
15. Praise to You, Adonai Our God, Sovereign of the universe, for blessing me with this incredible body, and the many gifts, talents and abilities it contains.

Chevrutah Text Study: *Likkutei Moharan* 282

Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav

Find the good in others...

KNOW that you must judge all people favorably. This applies even to the worst of people. You must search until you find some little bit of good in them. In that good place inside them, they are not bad! If you can just find this little bit of good and judge them favorably, you really can elevate them and swing the scales of judgment in their favor. This way you can bring them back to God.

This teaching is contained in the words of King David in the Psalms: "And in just a little bit (ve-OD me-at) there's no sinner; when you think about his place, he won't be there" (Psalm 37:10). King David is teaching us to judge everyone favorably. Even if you consider someone to be totally bad, you must still search until you find some little bit of good in him. There in the place of this tiny bit of good, that person is *not* bad! This is the meaning of the words, "And in just a *little bit* there's no sinner..." In other words you must seek out the *little bit* of good that is still in him. For in that place he is not a sinner. Maybe he's a bad person. Even so, is it really possible that he is totally devoid of even the slightest modicum of good? How could it be that all his life he never once did anything good? By finding one tiny good point in which he is not bad and thereby judging him favorably, you really do raise him from being guilty to having merit. This will bring him back to God. "In just a little bit there's no sinner!"

By finding this little bit of good in the bad person, this place inside him where he is not wicked, through this "...when you think about his place, he won't be there." When you examine his "place" and level, "he won't be there" in his original place. For by finding some little bit of good in him and judging him favorably, you genuinely raise him from guilt to merit. And "when you think about his place, he won't be there". Understand this well.

Find the good in yourself...

You must also find the good in yourself. A fundamental principle in life is that you should always try to keep happy and steer well away from depression. When you start looking deep inside yourself, you may think you have no good in you at all. You may feel you are full of evil, and the negative voice inside you tries to make you depressed. Don't let yourself fall into depression. Search until you find some little bit of good in you. How could it be that you never did anything good in your whole life?

When you start examining your good deed, you may see that it had many flaws. Maybe you did it for the wrong reasons and with the wrong attitude. Even so, how could it be that your mitzvah or good deed contains no good at all? It *must* contain some element of good.

You must search and search until you find some good point inside yourself to give you new life and make you happy. When you discover the good that is still in you, you genuinely move from being guilty to having merit. Through this you will be able to come back to God. "And in just a little bit there's no sinner; when you think about his place, he won't be there."

Earlier we saw that we have to judge *other people* favorably, even those who seem totally bad. We must search for their good points in order to swing the scales in their favor. The same applies to the way you look at yourself. You must judge yourself favorably and find the good points that still exist in you. This way you won't fall into despair. The good you find inside you will give you new life and bring joy to your soul...

Finding your good points can give you new life. Even if you know you have done wrong and caused damage and that you are far from God, you must search until you find the good that is still inside you. This will give you new life and make you truly happy. You are certainly entitled to feel the greatest joy over every good point you find in yourself, because each good point comes from the Jewish soul in you. The new life and joy you will have from following this path will enable you to pray, sing and give thanks to God.

Azamra l'Elohai be-odee, "I will sing to my God as long as I live". The phrase "as long as I live" is a loose translation of the Hebrew word *be-ODee*, which refers to the good that still *(OD)* remains in me. For as we saw earlier, "In just a *little bit (OD)* the sinner is not." In virtue of this good point I can sing and give thanks to God.

Chevruta Discussion Questions:
1. What does it mean to "find a little bit of yet"?
2. When are you most likely to discover your own flaws? What time of day, what activity, what people most help you to notice them?
3. Admit to three of your most devastating flaws. Sit with each of them for one minute; where do they come from? How did they get there? What stories do they tell about your life? Are they really as "flawed" as you think they are? Why or why not?
4. Now, think of the "little bits of yet" in each of your flaws. Say them out loud, to each other.
5. How can you continue to find the "little bits of yet" in yourself and others? How can they shine brighter than the flaws?
6. Is it possible to see your flaws as markers of uniqueness and individuality, rather than imperfections?

Re-gathering: Azamrah**

אֲזַמְּרָה לֵאלֹהַי בְּעוֹדִי אֶחְלְלָה יְהוָה בְּחַיָּי , זַמְּרָה לֵאלֹהַי בְּעוֹדִי אֶחְלְלָה יְהוָה בְּחַיָּי

All sing to You, All praise to You, O Source of all creation.
We call Your name, We sing Your praise, O Holy One of blessing.
Hallelujah!
(Psalm 146: 2)

Mi Sheibeirach for the Body

מִי שֶׁבֵּרַךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵנוּ,
אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב,
שָׂרָה, רִבְקָה, רָחֵל וְלֵאָה

Bless each of the beautiful beings present in this room today.
May the Holy Blessed One fill us with a new understanding and love of the self,
Opening our eyes to the beauty and vitality that resides all around, and especially within.
Help us to truly know and appreciate each part of our souls and bodies,
Providing us with opportunities to lift and run, to dance and sing, to hold and be held.
Even in our darkest hours, help us to find the small bits of "*od*" that make us wonderful and unique and our own beautiful selves.
Be with us, God, and remind us always that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" in Your image, body and soul.
Let us always know Your presence within us, and fill us with strength, joy, confidence and love.
Let us always know the amazing gifts we have in our bodies, our selves, and this supportive community.
And let us say: Amen.

Closing Song: Ozi V'zimrat Yah

עָזִּי וְזִמְרָת יָהּ וַיְהִי־לִי לִישׁוּעָה

Adonai is my strength and might; God will be my salvation. (Exodus 15: 2)

*The Hand Washing Blessing by Marcia Falk is excerpted from *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival* (Harper, 1996; Beacon, 1999). Copyright © 1996 by Marcia Lee Falk.

**English lyrics written by Benjie Ellen Schiller and Craig Taubman.

All other English translations of Hebrew prayers are excerpted from *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007).

APPENDIX B:

INSTRUCTIONS/LITURGICAL INTRODUCTIONS FOR THE LEADER

Talit application/blessing:
Leader: Lift up your tallit. Take a moment and feel the material on your fingers. Look at the colors, the intricacies or simplicities of the design, the pictures, symbols, or letters sketched upon it. Find on your tallit the markers of time--the stains, the rips in the fabric, the fraying fringes. Take a moment to be with your tallit before wrapping it around you, giving yourself the gift of memories, and the reminder that God has been with you throughout all of them. When you are ready, please read with me.

Asher Yatzar/Elohai N'shamah
Leader: If you think about it, it's not surprising that in our service, *Asher Yatzar* and *Elohai N'shamah* come one right after the other. *Asher Yatzar* "articulates our dependence for the intricate functionings of our body...[reminding us] to see in our bodies a wonderous sign of God's providence." *Elohai N'shamah* reminds us of our *n'shamah*, our soul, which is the "image of God within us, incorruptible, deriving its life force from the divine breath." As human beings, we can not help but to see the parallels between these 2 blessings, and how they can work together to remind us of God's presence within us, both physically and spiritually. As we sing these blessings, first separately and then as a round, let us be reminded of how we are created both as bodies with souls, and as souls with bodies.

Birchot Hashachar
Leader: To some of you, any or all of the following blessings may seem uncomfortable, or even offensive. As we read these blessings aloud this morning, I encourage you to think both literally and metaphorically as to how these small daily miracles--which stem from the very top of your body to the bottom--can apply to you. While I hope you will push yourself to discover how these blessings pertain to each part of your body and whole self, you can also feel free to omit any blessings you choose.

(Note to leader: The above is what I would say to my congregation. You can handle these blessings as you wish, by speaking them aloud as written, allowing time for personal and/or chevruta reflection, providing a moment for each member to name a body part they are grateful for, etc. Please adapt these blessings to best fit the various needs of your congregation.)

Text Study (Allow 15-20 minutes of the ritual time)
Leader: At this time, I invite you to take a few moments to read the text found below. After reading through it carefully, please turn to the people around you and engage in a few moments of study, guided by the questions that follow the text.

Mi Shebeirach for the Body

Leader: As we prepare to conclude today's service, we are reminded of the need to ask God's blessing upon our bodies and souls. Many of us think of a *Mi Shebeirach* prayer as one that asks God to heal the body; today, I invite you to open yourself up to the idea that we can also ask God to bless the body that is miraculous in its present state of being. We all need healing at certain times, even today--but we can also look to God to help us realize how incredible our bodies are for doing all that they can do every single day. We can ask God to continue to bless each of the body's organs and limbs--and their numerous functions and abilities--that allow us each to thrive in our our unique and miraculous ways. As I read this blessing aloud to you, I encourage you to immerse yourself in the words, and to believe in God's continued care and blessing of your body from this moment onwards.

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